

*Seven Spiritual
Conformities
Through Jesus Christ*

Book 1: Inspirations from God

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wife, Tiffany Pinnock, and son, Noel Pinnock, II, who dealt with me during my Godly commission to scribe this book in forty days. I also dedicate this book to my mother, Debbie Pinnock, and dad, Maple Pinnock, who provided the spiritual foundation that has prepared me for my spiritual journey through Christ Jesus but most of all God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We can definitely do all things through Christ who strengthens us. I love you, Father God, and with you, Father, you are everything, for without you in my life I am nothing. It is you, Father, who has known me before time began. God has predestined, called, justified and glorified me through Jesus Christ's triumphant, yet poignant crucifixion on the cross at Golgotha or Calvary Hill. I am nothing without you. My very breath that I exhale and inhale at this very moment is heavily ordered, contingent, and consummated by your sovereign will. I need you every moment of my life, every day, and every second of the day. Again, Lord Jesus Christ, it is all about you.

Thank you Tiffany, Mommy, Daddy, Richard Pinnock, Lowell Pinnock, Dietrich Pinnock, Derrell Pinnock, Kimberly Pinnock, Andrea Pinnock, Dyonna Pinnock, Clarence and Joan Batie, Margaret Garner, Grady Prestage, Senator Rodney Ellis, Adrian Collins, Jonita Wallace Solomon, Horace Grant, Dr. Kaye Stripling, Dr. Margaret Stroud, Mary Johnson, Brenda Adams, Ty Matthews, Ernest Sparks, Vickie & Reece Stewart, Ronald & Phyllis & Ronald Johnson, Grandma Robinson & Gray, the Mooring, Miles, and Cashaw families and all of you who have kept me in your thoughts and prayers. This one is definitely for the Lord Jesus Christ...Selah!

Author's Note

This book provides insights for all believers into the ever-present seven spiritual conformities that will, through practice, transform them into the image of Jesus Christ. Romans 8:29 states, “For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son that he might be the first born among many brethren.” Moses, in Deuteronomy, 5:32 told the people they must obey all the commandments of the LORD our God, following his direction in every detail, going the whole way he has laid out for us. Jesus not only demonstrated these conformities, but he also personified and exemplified them because he gave us a model for living Christ-like worth emulating. For the nonbelievers, I pray, earnestly, that this book will open your eyes and heart to the blessing of the life and living that is truly “Christ-like.” I challenge you to conformity!

Table of Contents

<i>Preface</i>	9
<i>Life</i>	12
Chapter 1: Patience	
<i>Examples of Christ's Patience</i>	17
<i>Patience Exemplified: He Inhaled Endurance and Exhaled Patience</i>	19
<i>My Testimony of Patience</i>	21
<i>Closed Doors</i>	26
<i>More Patience Scriptural References:</i>	27
<i>Patience Check-Up</i>	30
Chapter 2: Trust	
<i>Examples of Christ-Like Trust in God According to Genesis</i>	36
<i>Trust Exemplified</i>	40
<i>Question: How Was Abraham's Formidable Relationship with God Established and Nurtured?</i>	41
<i>From the Essay "The Art of Spiritual Conversation"</i>	43
<i>Metaphorical Connection</i>	45
<i>More Trust Scriptural References:</i>	46
<i>Trust Check-Up</i>	50
Chapter 3: Vision	
<i>More Vision Scriptural References</i>	60
<i>Vision Check-Up</i>	63
Chapter 4: Values	
<i>Minimizing the Consequence for Wrong Choices</i>	71
<i>"When You Change"</i>	75
<i>More Scriptural Profiles on Values</i>	76
<i>Values Check-Up</i>	80

Chapter 5: Wisdom

<i>Worldly Wisdom vs. Spiritual Wisdom</i>	85
<i>Spiritual Wisdom Exemplified</i>	87
<i>Worldly Wisdom Exemplified</i>	89
<i>The Most Powerful Email I Ever Got</i>	92
<i>More Wisdom Scriptural References</i>	95
<i>Wisdom Check-Up</i>	98

Chapter 6: Humility

<i>Jesus Exemplified Humility</i>	103
<i>Our Position in Christ Changes Our Condition Scriptural References</i>	114
<i>Humility Check-Up</i>	118

Chapter 7: Unselfishness

<i>Jesus Dealt with Difficult People</i>	125
<i>Dealing with Difficult People</i>	128
<i>Progressive Calvinism, May, 1958</i>	132
<i>More Unselfishness Scriptural References</i>	135
<i>Unselfishness Check-Up</i>	138
<i>Conclusion</i>	139
<i>We All Belong to God</i>	141

Preface

GOD WITH HIS DIVINE NATURE ALWAYS has a divine plan for his children. It is only through the acceptance of Jesus Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension that this path seemingly becomes transparent but yet limited. It is this walk, the walk of faith, which defines the path as one continues to remain on the straight and Godly. Romans 8:29-31 states the following:

For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brethren. Moreover whom he predestined, these he also called; whom he called, these he also justified; and whom he justified, and these he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (The New King James Version)

It is spiritually clear that God in his omniscience has known us before we were even in our mother's womb, before we were even a figment of our parents' imagination. God has also predestined our paths, which means God has predestined our fate. God has also called us to our positions today, whether we are teachers, doctors, lawyers, mechanics, musicians, etc. God

has also justified us by the imputation of Jesus Christ. God has declared us not guilty! Now the question that should be addressed is: what can we do as a believer to take part of the divine plan God has orchestrated in our life? Contrary to many secular proponents, as it relates to destiny, we are not the masters of our destiny; however, we should be dependent upon God to consummate our destiny. We must spiritually mature as believers to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Spiritual conformity may be defined as the behavioral changes that transform the believer into the image of Christ. This book is for the believer who is seeking wholeheartedly and spiritually to take their relationship with God to the next level. Understanding these seven conformities will empower you and strengthen your relationship with God by knowing who God truly is. Matthew 15:8-9 stated the following:

These people say they honor me, but their hearts are far away. Their worship is worthless, for they teach their man-made laws or false precepts instead of those from God (Life Application Bible of the KJV).

In the above scripture, Jesus was referring to the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders who arrived in Jerusalem to interview him. The Pharisees knew a lot about God, but they did not know God, paradoxical, right! It is not enough to study about religion or even to study the Bible. We must respond to God himself and the only way to get to the Father is through his son, Jesus Christ. As noted, we must grow in God by growing in Jesus Christ. Jesus exemplified the seven conformities in his life on earth. I challenge you to continue reading this book in order to determine your proper course of action...to become totally conformed into the image of Christ through the embodiment of patience, trust, vision, values, wisdom, humility, and unselfishness. But the wisdom that is from above

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. [James 3:17 (KJV)]

Life

*I walk in darkness
But yet there is light
I live in the space called time
But yet there is no space
What is life?
But snippets of light, space, and time!
What is life?
An aggregate of all choices and experiences
But when there is peace, love, and happiness
Aligned with the omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent will of God,
the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...I have LIFE and LIFE
Abundantly!*

CHAPTER 1: PATIENCE

“The Calm Endurance”

NO HUMAN BEING REACHES INSTANT MATURITY at birth or rebirth. The more we are growing spiritually the more we are able to be patient with another’s need for growth. This does not mean, however, that we should be tolerant of unprincipled or immoral behavior, or give in to unprincipled demands. Rather, it means holding steadfastly to divine Principle—and to the Ten Commandments, in particular—to guide and govern each of us in the conduct of responsible lives while we are maturing. The patience that is needed is not passive; it is full of spiritual activity. It involves prayerfully acknowledging the love and all-power of God; willingly conforming to the goodness and grace that express God’s love; and lovingly appreciating and cherishing the goodness in other individuals. This is principle-guided patience, and it is full of active, unselfish love. This kind of patience makes room for us to work together in harmony while we consider each other’s needs and make adjustments that foster each other’s best interests. It helps us see God’s hand in the blossoming of one another’s character and talents, as the relationship itself blossoms. In this, there is true joy. Hebrews 12:1 states, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witness, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin,

which doth so easily, beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” (NKJV) Patience is like the calm after the storm. Contrary to that cliché, patience is not only the calm after the storm it is also the calm before and during the storm, and patience is a quality that many possess but do not understand. In the secular, we teach our children how to be patient when they request something. When we were young, we learned that the key to getting what we want in a timely manner was to be patient. God, our Father, wants us to be the same way with him. He wants us to be patient for everything that we petition to him. Hebrews 10:36 tell us “For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” Being patient doesn’t mean stop doing what you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 1:3 reminds us, “Remembering, without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God our Father.” (KJV) Paul commends the faith of the Thessalonian believers because they stood firm when they were persecuted. “We are to wait patiently on the Lord and he will be inclined unto us, and hear our cries” Psalms 40:1. Paul writes in Romans 15:5 that “the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ; that you may with one mind and one mouth glorifying the God and father of our LORD Jesus.” Remember that God is at work in us, both to will and to work his pleasure. He tells us that we must do all things without grumbling or questioning that we may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom we shine as lights in the world holding fast to the word of life. Be patient!

Examples of Christ's Patience

TEST 1

Then, Jesus was led to the wilderness in preparation of his ministry by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by Satan. For forty days and forty nights he ate nothing and became very hungry. Then Satan tempted him to satisfy his hunger by converting stones into loaves of bread. Satan said, "It will prove you are the Son of God"(Matthew 4:1-11).

But Jesus told him, "No!" For the Scriptures tell us that the bread will not feed men's souls: obedience to every word of God is what we need (Matt. 4:1-11).

TEST 2

Then Satan took him to Jerusalem to the roof of the Temple. "Jump off," he said, and, "prove you are the Son of God; for Scriptures declare, 'God will send his angels to keep you from harm'...they will prevent you from smashing on the rocks below" (Matt. 4:1-11).

Jesus retorted, "It also says not to put the Lord your God to foolish test!" (Matt. 4:1-11)

TEST 3

Next Satan took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him the nations of the world and all their glory. “I’ll give it all to you,” he said, “if you will only kneel and worship me” (Matt. 4:1-11).

“Get out of here, Satan,” Jesus told him. “The Scriptures say, worship only the Lord our God. Obey only him.” Then Satan went away, and angels came and cared for Jesus (Matt. 4:1-11).

*Patience Exemplified:
He Inhaled Endurance and Exhaled Patience*

JESUS' CALM-ENDURANCE OR PATIENCE DID NOT lead him to defile himself or God. He endured the tests with the vigilance that comes from knowing, reciting, and obeying the word of God. He countered Satan's snares, tricks, and deceptions by standing on the orthodox, incorruptible word of God! In his weakened physical condition one could have easily abused God's power. It is noted in the Life Application Bible that we will be tested. Because we know that testing will come, we should be alert and ready for it. We must remember not to become bitter in the face of misfortune or temptation, but we should remember to allow God to turn what Satan meant for bad into good. Joseph told his brothers, years after they dumped him into a hole, that what they meant unto him for bad, God meant it unto him for good. According to 1 Peter 5:6-10 (Life Application Bible):

If you humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, in his good time he will lift you up. Let him have all your worries and cares, for he is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you. Be careful—watch out for attacks from Satan

your great enemy. He prowls around like a hungry, roaring lion, looking for some victim to tear apart. Stand firm when he attacks. Trust the Lord; and remember that other Christians all around the world are going through these sufferings too. After you have suffered a little while, our God, who is full of kindness through Christ, will give you his eternal glory. He personally will come and pick you up, and set you firmly in place, and make you stronger than ever.

Otherwise, as Matthew 26:41 says, “temptation will overpower you.” I further this interpretation by exclaiming that Jesus was not only obedient to God’s word but also patient in knowing that the word God would deliver him. I would be remiss if I fail to mention the calmness Jesus possessed when Satan was tempting him. He never once called Satan out his name...not one obscenity was proceeded out of his mouth. Can you imagine being tested by the same person over and over again? When pressured one can easily lose their patience and self-control. We Christians should not worry or fret when we are approached with tests, tribulations, or trials. We are able, through Christ, to resist the devil and he will flee from us. Remember this verse in need of patience: “*God is not slow about his promises, as some men count slowness. But God is patient toward us, wishing that no one would perish*” (2 Peter 3:9).

My Testimony of Patience

I WAS A NON-CERTIFIED TEACHER AFTER I graduated from college with two degrees, Bachelor of Science and a Master of Public Administration. I always believed that God called me to teach his children in public education because I enjoyed teaching immensely. It wasn't until I was in my fifth year that our state education agency amended the statues regarding teaching certification for critical shortage teachers. I was informed that teachers who were not certified in their concentration by the beginning of the year would no longer be eligible for a regular teacher salary. Essentially, I would receive a salary decrease of 55% and I would no longer be classified as a teacher but a substitute in a critical shortage area. My job, family, and livelihood were in jeopardy. I continued to pray and communicate with God about his direction for my family. I was devastated not only about the salary decrease but I was also saddened about the financial impact it would have on my newborn son and wife who had recently matriculated from college with a Bachelor of Science degree but was unemployed because she would be caring for our son. So, I continued to pray and wait patiently for God's intervention.

Two months passed and we were barely "making ends

meet” with my minimal salary. Here I was, with two blessed degrees and was making less than a high-school graduate, but I could not stop waiting on God for support and direction. So, I was spirit led to begin looking for a new job with a higher salary and a better chance to advance. I submitted a sundry of resumes and applications to prospective employers. I really thought they would be “wowed” at my impressive resume. I had two degrees before I was 26 years old. *Who would not want to hire a young determined young man?* I thought. This would be a ride in the park.

Another month passed and all I received from the prospective employers were letters indicating either I was overqualified or another candidate filled the position I was applying for. I was devastated, but I knew in my spirit that God would provide as long as I remained patient. It was still stressful and emotional because in the interim our expenses were outweighing the only income we had.

It was approximately three months, and we were barely surviving on our deflated salary. My wife paged me in the middle of instruction one day. I was sure she would have only paged me in case of an emergency or if I had landed an interview from one of the classified ads I responded to. When I returned her page, she informed me that the school district I was working for was under media scrutiny because a group of non-certified teachers in my same predicament had complained that we did not receive timely notification of the sudden salary changes. The media exposure prompted the administrators in the district to take corrective actions. Wow! *God truly answers prayers*, I thought. We were going to be backed paid for the few months we were deprived a regular teacher salary, but we were not out of the forest yet because they stipulated that we would receive the salary decrease the next school year. I wasn’t too happy with that, but I did not complain. I was able to reconcile my family’s bills and I praised God for securing my

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

income longer and allowing me more time to secure another job.

The clock started over then! I continued to pursue other employment options. I continued to submit applications. I even applied for my teacher certification through my district's Alternative Certification Program (ACP). ACP in many Texas school districts is a program designed to decrease teacher shortage by giving degreed professionals with a desire to teach an opportunity to obtain certification within a year. I was a tangled at the length of time I would have to commit if accepted into the program. Waiting patiently yet filled with anxiety, I continued my effortful search for other jobs.

Another month passed and I did not receive any communication from the ACP department. I was worried, so I called to check the status of my application and possible enrollment. No one in the office could tell me anything nonetheless find my application. The deadline for all applications had expired and I knew from the application that there was limited space. So, I decided to visit the department in person to expedite the process. Upon arriving at the ACP office, I ran into my old middle school coach. I always admired her and I had an established friendship with her. To my surprise, she was the director of the ACP department. I needed to take my issue to her. So, I did. She began to investigate my problem. It took her awhile but she finally came back to me with bad news. She had informed me that the state had recently passed a new law that prohibits non-certified teachers, like me, from participating in their program. Another dead end erected right before me. I was truly sad because now I could never get certified in K-12 teaching profession. I thought I was called to be a teacher. That was the last straw for teaching, but to make matters worse I still hadn't landed one interview. I continued to pray to God for strength and direction. I was so saddened that I cried every day. It was hard to see my career take a turn for the worse.

It was now a third of the way in the school year and I did not have job security. One Sunday morning after church, my wife perused the paper and discovered a classified ad needing consultants in the same school district I was working in. I thought it would be a great opportunity to secure a better job with more security and I would not have to start all over in another organization. I had been with the district for five years. I obtained an application and submitted all the documents required with a turnaround time of one day. I was God-determined.

It was near Christmas when my wife called me in class with exciting news. She told me that the department I had applied to wanted to interview me. "Thank God," I shouted in the office. I cried tears of joy. Out of a myriad of applications and resumes I submitted, I only landed one interview. I said to myself: "This is the place God wanted me to be and all the other prospective employers were places he did not want me." See, I thought I was called to teach children, but God had a different calling in store for me.

How many times do we find ourselves doing something that God did not ordain for our lives? I was interviewed, transferred, and hired. All praises are to God for giving me a great Christmas present that only he could deliver. According to Luke 11:9 (New King James Version) one should: "1. Ask and receive 2. Seek and find 3. Knock and the door will open unto you." I interpreted this verse to mean the three levels of patience consisting of asking and waiting to receive; seeking and proceeding forward into the wilderness to find; and knocking on the doors of your blessings so that God can release your blessings. God rewards those who diligently seek him.

See, I asked God to help me find a new job, not because I was dissatisfied with my job, but because my family needs me to make a steady income. God in his righteousness gave me the strength to go out in the wilderness amongst the lions and the

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

wolves to seek the job he had already prepared for me. I looked all over it but I waited patiently, and he presented me with the door to his calling and anointing power of patience. Glory be to God! This is a true “Test”imony! I challenge you to continue reading, because the remaining chapters will strengthen your spiritual walk by strengthening your trust, visions, values, wisdom, humility, and unselfishness. The seven conformities will give you a path that takes you directly in the presence of the LORD! Selah...pause or rest. (But please...keep reading.)

Closed Doors

“Cultivating & Nurturing Your Patience”

Realize why and praise him for closed doors. We need to learn to praise the LORD as much for a closed door as we do an open door. The reason God closes doors is because he has not prepared anything over there for us. If he did not close the wrong door, we would never find the right door. God directs our path through the closing and opening of doors. One door closes; it forces you to change your course. Another door closes; it forces you to change your course again. Then finally, you find the open door and you walk right into your blessing. The Lord directs our paths through the opening and closing of doors, but instead of praising Him for the closed door (which keeps us out of trouble) we get upset because we “judge by appearances.” You have an ever-present help in your time of need that is always standing guard. Because He walks ahead of you, He can spot trouble down the road and set up a roadblock or detour accordingly. But through our lack of wisdom, we try to tear down the roadblocks or push aside the detour sign. Then the minute we get into trouble we start crying, “Lord how could you have done this to me?” We have got to realize that the closed door can be a blessing. Did God not say, “That no good thing would He withhold from them that love Him”?

Author Unknown: <http://morningspiritlift2.homestead.com/0630.html>

More Patience Scriptural References

1. Matthew 18:26 – The servant therefore fell down, and worshiped him, saying, Lord, have *patience* with me, and I will pay thee all.
2. Luke 8:15 – But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with *patience*.
3. Romans 5:3 – And not only so, but we glory in tribulation also: knowing that tribulation worketh *patience*.
4. Romans 8:25 – But if we hope for that we see not, and then do we with *patience* wait for it.
5. Romans 15:5 – Now the God of *patience* and consolation grant to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus.
6. 2 Corinthians 6:4 – But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much *patience*, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses.

7. Colossians 1:11 – Strengthen with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all *patience* and longsuffering with joyfulness.
8. 1 Thessalonians 1:3 – Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and *patience* of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in sight of God and our Father.
9. 2 Thessalonians 1:4 – So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your *patience* and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure.
10. Titus 2:2 – That aged men is sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity in *patience*.
11. Hebrews 6:12 – That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and *patience* inherit the promises.
12. Hebrews 12:1 – Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great cloud of witness, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with *patience* the race that is set before us.
13. James 5:7 – Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the husband waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long *patience* for it, until he receives the early and latter rain.
14. James 5:10, 11 – Take my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience. Behold we count them happy which endure. Ye

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

have heard of the *patience* of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

15. Revelations 3:10 – Because though hast kept the word of my *patience*, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon the entire world, to try them, that dwell upon the earth.

CHAPTER 2: TRUST

“Total Confidence in God”
(Conversation + Faith + Patience = Trust)

EPHESIANS 4:15-16 STATES, “INSTEAD, WE WILL lovingly follow the truth at all times—speaking truly, living truly and so become more and more in every way like Christ who is the Head of his body, the Church.” How often do we hear: “I trust you will do the right thing or just trust me!”? I know that it is a good gesture to trust someone, but we know that the Bible says, “Do not put your trust in man.”

The final sections of Genesis 11 contain a genealogy, which traces the line of the promised Messiah from Shem, son of Noah, over almost 300 years to Abraham (originally Abram) son of Terah. The New Testament calls Abraham “the father of all who believe” (Romans 4:11). Scripture tells us that after God called Abram to leave his homeland of Ur, Abram, with his barren wife, and his father, Terah, traveled to Haran. After Terah died, God called Abram. Abram, 75, with Sarai, 65, and Abram’s nephew, Lot, moved on to Canaan. God’s calling of Abram is in Genesis 12. Following this account roughly the next quarter of the book of Genesis is dedicated to the story of this great patriarch.

Examples of Christ-Like Trust in God According to Genesis

ABRAM'S TRUST-CALLING IN GENESIS 12

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make you name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Abram left, as the LORD had told him. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan. Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh and Schebem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Fights broke out between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot, despite the danger they all faced from the tribes of Canaanites and Perizzites present in the Land. Abram decided to divide the land with Lot, where they both chose the section of the land they wanted. (If Lot wanted east, Abram would go west.) Abram remained in the land of Canaan.

God came to Abram and said; "Look as far as you can see in any direction, for I am going to give it to you and all your

SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

descendants. And I am going to give you so many descendants that like dust, they cannot be counted! Hike in all directions and explore the new possessions I am giving you.”

ABRAM’S TRUST-TRANSITION IN GENESIS 13

Abram moved his tent to the oaks of Mamre, near Hebron, and built an altar to Jehovah there (Genesis 13:14-17). Lot was captured and Abram called together the men born into his household, 318 total, and chased after the retiring army of Ched—or—laomer and his allies that captured Lot. He divided his men and attacked them during the night from several directions, and pursued the fleeing army to Hobab, north of Damascus, and recovered Lot and all of Lot’s possessions, including the women and other captives.

ABRAM’S TRUST-PROMISE IN GENESIS 15

Jehovah spoke to Abram in a vision, and this is what he told him: “Do not be fearful, Abram, for I will defend you and I will give you great blessings.”

Abram replied, “What good are all your blessings if I do not have a son?” For without a son, some other member of my household will inherit all my prosperity.

Then Jehovah told him, “No one else will be your heir, for you will have a son to inherit everything you own.” (God took Abram out in the night and showed him the stars and he told him his descendants will be like that—too many to count!) Abram trusted and believed God. Abram asked how he could be sure that God would give it to him. Jehovah told him to take a 3-year-old heifer, a 3-year-old female goat, a 3-year-old ram, a turtledove and a young pigeon and slay them and separate the halves, but not the birds. Abram saw a terrible foreboding, dark and horrible vision.

Jehovah told Abram, “Your descendants would be oppressed as slaves in a foreign land for 400 years. But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and at the end they will come away with great wealth.” But Abram will die in peace and of old age.

When Abram was 99 years old, God appeared to Abram and prepared a contract, guaranteeing to make Abram a mighty nation. God said not only a nation but also a multitude of nations. God changed his name from Abram (Exalted Father) to Abraham (Father of Nations). God also changed Sarai to Sarah (Princess)—only appropriate for the Father of Many Nations. God did not want the contract with Ishmael but with the prophesied son of Sarah named Isaac who would be born the next year. Abraham circumcised all the sons born in his household including himself just as God told him. God spares Lot’s life in the city of Sodom. Isaac was born just as Jehovah prophesied. God tested Abraham’s faith and obedience.

ABRAM’S FINAL TRUST-TEST IN GENESIS 22

Jehovah called to Abraham. “Yes, Lord!” Abraham replied. God instructed him to take his son to the land of Moriah and sacrifice him as a burnt offering upon a mountain he will point out.

The next morning Abraham got up early, chopped wood for a fire upon the altar, saddled his donkey, and took with him his son Isaac and two young servants. On the third day of the journey and worship, Abraham saw the place in the distance. Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering upon Isaac’s shoulders, while he himself carried the knife and the flint for striking a fire. Isaac asked his father, “We have the wood and the flint to make the fire, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?” Abraham told Isaac that God would see to it.

SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

When they arrived at the place, he built the altar and placed the wood in order, and was ready for the fire. He then tied Isaac and laid him on the altar over the wood. And Abraham took the knife and lifted up to plunge it into his son, to slay him. At that moment the Angel of God shouted to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham! Lay down the knife; do not hurt the lad in anyway," the Angel said, "for I know that God is first in your life—you have not withheld even your beloved son from me."

Then Abraham noticed a ram caught by its horns in a bush. So he took the ram and sacrificed it, instead of his son. He then named it the place called "Jehovah Provides." Then the Angel of God called again to Abraham from heaven. "I, the Lord, have sworn by myself that because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your beloved son from, I will bless you with incredible blessings and multiply your descendants into countless thousands, and millions, like the stars above you in the sky and like the sands along the seashore. They will conquer their enemies and your offspring will be a blessing to all the nations of the earth—all because you obeyed."

Trust Exemplified

MANY THEOLOGIANS EMPHASIZE THE OBEDIENCE AND faith Abraham demonstrated in the duration of his life. God has revealed yet another quality that he possessed which served as a prerequisite to his unsurpassed level of obedience and faith: “Trust!” Abraham had to first trust God in order for him to obey and have faith in God. Remember that there were very few like Abraham in the land. According to the Life Application Bible, despite God’s swift judgment of sin, many people ignored him and continued to sin. But a handful of people really tried to follow him. God established a unique, long-lasting relationship with Abraham. He is an example of trust we all must follow.

Question: How Was Abraham's Formidable Relationship with God Established and Nurtured?

IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE Heavens and the Earth. God is our world's greatest architect. He created and tailored this world with fine tapestries that were woven together by his word. He spoke everything into existence. It was by his word that the once darkened and desolate earth obtained illumination in the day and night.

According to Genesis 1 in the Life Application Bible, God said, "Let there be light," and light appeared. And God was pleased with it, and divided the light from the darkness. He called the light "daytime" and the darkness "nighttime." And God said, "Let the vapors separate to form the sky above and the oceans below." So God made the sky, dividing the vapor from the water below. Then God said, "Let the water beneath the sky be gathered into oceans so that the dry land will emerge." And so it was. Then God named the dry land. God continued to speak other earthly attributes into existence including man and woman. When all was done...he said, "It was good!"

Now, I took you to the beginning to accentuate man's greatest gift, the ability to speak. When God breathed into

man's nostrils, his soul, man became a living soul in his likeness, and unlike the animals and every other creeping and crawling creation was able to talk and fellowship with God. Very little is recorded about the relationship that was established between God, Adam, and Eve. But it is safe to make the assumption that they were in constant communication with one another.

The only conversation actually recorded in the KJV and in the Life Application Bible is when God called to Adam, "Why are you hiding?" And Adam replied, "I heard you coming and did not want you to see me naked. So, I hid." Adam's retort indicates to me that this wasn't the only conversation he had with God our Creator. Not to belabor the fall of man, although pivotal in the life of the Christian. I want to highlight that conversing with God breeds an intimate relationship with God. When a child is born, he knows nothing earthly and depends on the parents to teach and care for him, as we should be dependent upon the LORD. When the child matures to the level of communication, an extrinsic relationship is developed and nurtured. Abraham like Adam was able to communicate with God. He was able to trust God through his ability to transfer meaning with God. God would come to him to give him guidance and he would pray to God for guidance. They built a relationship of trust based on conversation.

Abraham trusted God would deliver his son, Isaac, when he was told to sacrifice his long-awaited son. Isaac asked Abraham, "Where is the lamb for sacrifice?"

Abraham knowing that the sacrifice was Isaac, yet retorted, "God will see to it." Oh, the trust he possessed was profound. As maturing and conforming Christians, we must be able to trust God.

But I pose this question, when was the last time you entered into dialogue with God?

From the Essay “The Art of Spiritual Conversation”

By: The Rev. Allen F. Robinson

Conversations with God are few and far between. Many of us struggle to find enough time to pray, and when we do, oftentimes, it’s while we are on the go. Though we may be able to incorporate prayer into our busy schedules—while in the car, at lunch, at the gym—a conversation with God requires that we become totally disconnected from the world, and enter into God’s holiness. This means that in order to have a conversation with God, we must “forsake” worldly dependence and trust in God’s holy independence. This is not easy to do, since we depend on basic conveniences to make our lives much easier—Palm Pilots (of which I am guilty) and day timers, beepers, pagers and cell phones. However, for each of us to enter into dialogue with God, our spirits must become the Palm Pilot and cell phone of life. We must make frequent calls to God if we wish to nurture the relationship we carry with the Creator. The next time we feel the urge to “beep” or page someone, we should each go into a vacant room, sit and page God. This one fact is true—God doesn’t use call waiting. Call God and talk.

It is not just our ability to talk to, but also to talk with. When you talk with someone you are able to gauge the person’s true intent. We build trust through communication whether it is

nonverbal or verbal. We communicate using picture, symbols (letter, numbers, etc), and actions. It is important that we trust God, but it just as important to communicate with God. When a man and a woman meet, there will always be conversation. The man wants to please the woman and the woman wants to please the man. Both are trying to build trust in one another. Examine a relationship where there is no communication, verbal or nonverbal. You will see that there is also little trust in existence too. On the bridge of conformity, we must converse with God daily. The Bible says in Romans 8:24-27 (Life Application Bible) that:

Trusting saves us. And trusting means looking forward to getting something we do not yet have—for a man who already has something doesn't need to hope and trust that he will get it. But if we must keep trusting God for something that hasn't happened yet, it teaches us to wait patiently (Chapter 1) and confidently. And in the same way—by our faith—the Holy Spirit helps us with our daily problems and in our praying. For we do not even know what we should pray for, nor how to pray as we should; but the Holy Spirit prays for us with such feelings that it cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows, of course, what the Spirit is saying as he pleads for us in harmony with God's own will.

We see in the above verses, that prayer is the methodology we Christians use to communicate with God. And even better than our prayers, through Jesus Christ we have an intercessor that lives with us and prays for us to God, our Father who knows the heart of all men. Fervent praying breeds trust. It establishes hope and faith for those who believe. Abraham believed and trusted God for the meeting of all his needs. Abraham trusted God by communicating with God. Remember, “God will see to it!”

Metaphorical Connection

Prayers, our form of communication or communion with God, build trust. So, praying to God is like the water on earth that is evaporated by the Light of God and then returns to replenish the earth. When we pray with God, he hears our petition and returns to us his provisions of comfort, deliverance, and exaltation. “What goes up must come down!”

More Trust Scriptural References

1. Ruth 2:12 – The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.
2. 2 Samuel 22:3 – The god of my rock; in him will I trust; he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence.
3. 2 Samuel 22:31 – As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trusts in him.
4. 2 Kings 19:10 – Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the land of the king of Assyria.
5. 1 Chronicles 5:20 – And they were helped against them, and the Hagarites were delivered into their hand, and all that were with them; for they cried to God in the battle, and he was intreated of them because they put their trust in him.

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

6. Job 13:15 – Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; but I will maintain mine own ways before him.
7. Job 15:31 – Let not him that is deceived trust in vanity: for vanity shall be his recompense.
8. Psalms 2:12 – Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.
9. Psalms 4:5 – Off the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD.
10. Psalms 5:11 – But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.
11. Psalms 7:1 – O LORD, my God, in thee do I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me.
12. Psalms 13:5 – But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.
13. Psalms 16:1 – Preserve me, O god: for in thee do I put my trust.
14. Psalms 17:7 – She thy marvelous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them.
15. Psalms 18:2 – The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation and my high tower.

16. Psalms 18:30 – As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust him.
17. Psalms 20:7 – Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.
18. Psalms 21:7 – For the king trusteth in the LORD, and through the mercy of the most High he shall not be moved.
19. Psalms 44:6 – For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.
20. Psalms 56:11 – In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid, what man can do unto me?
21. Proverbs 30:5 – Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.
22. Proverbs 31:11 – The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.
23. Isaiah 12:2 – Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.
24. Isaiah 26:4 – Trust the LORD forever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength...
25. Zephaniah 3:12 – I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD.

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

26. Mark 10:24 – And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!

27. 2 Corinthians 10:7 – Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's even so re we Christ's.

CHAPTER 3: VISION

“Spiritual Intelligence & Foresight”

“GOD WORKS IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS!” I beg to differ! God works in ways above man knowing. Although we are to trust and wait patiently on the LORD our God, we should also understand that our finite ability to discern is just that—finite. God’s knowledge is infinite, because he knows all because he is all. He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. He is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient, which is all-powerful, everywhere, and all-knowing. God has a place prepared for us. The discovery of that place is what is called vision. Until we make that discovery and walk in it, we cannot arrive at the glorious destiny God has reserved for us. Whatever God has assigned to us holds a future and will bring us utmost fulfillment. Whatever he has mapped out for our destiny is our high calling. Many have chosen to follow their own plans rather than God’s plan. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:26, “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight me, not as one that beateth the air...” (New King James Version) God teaches us visions by giving us the opportunity to see and go beyond the realm of familiar. What is familiar, but something you are used to observing, seeing, touching, smelling, tasting, etc. The familiar is everything that can be experienced in the flesh. God would like us to deny our bodies every day. The

tripartite of man consist of the spirit, soul, and flesh. Each is separate with different functions. The body of man is the sum total of flesh, blood and bones. The flesh accepts Jesus Christ but doesn't do anything to nurture a growing and viable relationship with him. According to Cecil L. Cockerham in the *Christian Counselor Manual*, the soul is that part of man's makeup that took charge after the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Since the fall, the human soul has become man's first source of knowledge, guidance, and problem solving. The soul was created by God and belongs to God; nevertheless, it became independent of God and enslaved by Satan at the fall. The Word of God in Genesis 2:7 states the following:

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (Authorized King James Version).

The soul is our ability to think, do, and feel. In other words the soul is a sum total of your mind, will, and emotions. The spirit is that part of a man that is able to communicate and fellowship with God. When Jesus died, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven we received the Holy Spirit. Man's spirit is sealed by the Holy Spirit of God, according to Ephesians 1:13. The Holy Spirit dwells with us to comfort and convict. This may sound like a possession to you, but it is true. We were regenerated, adopted, justified, imputed, sanctified, propitiated, reconciled, and redeemed when God's plan for our eternal salvation was consummated through Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. The word of God affirms this in Romans 6:5-7, Romans 7:4, and 1 Peter 3:18:

(Romans 6:5-7) If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we could no longer be slaves to sin-because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

(Romans 7:4) So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.

(1 Peter 3:18) For Christ died for sins once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.

The spirit of man has a conscience. The conscience aspect of man allows us the ability to discern between right and wrong. Also, the spirit possesses intuition, which is the power of knowledge, understanding someone or something with reasoning or training. Women seem to have this ability in much greater degree than men do. According to Cecil L. Cockerham, “at the point of regeneration, man is able to speak to God and God can return communication because of man’s regenerated spirit. The Christian is to set his mind on things above, not on earthly things. God’s word states it in this way in Colossians 3:1-4:

Since, then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, Who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in Glory.

Verse three validates that man’s spirit is perfect because it is hidden in Christ. We have been crucified with Christ. It has

to be perfect to be “in Christ” because Christ is perfect; without sin, “spot or blemish.” Our flesh and soul should yield to the spirit, which takes precedence and superiority over the flesh and soul. Adam and Eve succumbed to their fleshly and soulful desires when Satan tempted them in the garden. Satan tempted not their spirit, but their soul. He knew that if he manipulated Eve’s mind, man would fall. Being joined to our LORD Jesus Christ, we are filled with his life and his goodness. Memorizing and meditating upon God’s word gives thoughts and the vision of God’s will for us. As Christians we should continue to meditate on God’s truth, a rich inflow of the LORD’s vitality and nature will occur in our spirit and overflow into our souls for action. Now, no longer swayed by his emotions (soul); but rather controlled by the Holy Spirit, he is able to put under foot all that is soulish. He is also able to discern everything with his spirit; controlled by the Holy Spirit, to indeed walk in newness of life. When we transcend the familiar we enter into the realm of Christ and his Spirit. For God’s indwelling Holy presence teaches, guides, and communicates the reality of Christ in the human spirit. The human spirit is the container for the Holy Spirit. The human spirit controlled by the Holy Spirit of God functions in agreement with the word of God, which enables the Christian to be conformed in Christ’s image as well as confront all tests and temptations in victory. Romans 8-26 (Life Application Bible) affirms us that:

And in the same way—by our faith—the Holy Spirit helps us with our daily problems and in our praying. For we do not even know what we should pray for, nor how to pray as we should; but the Holy Spirit prays for us with such feelings that it cannot be expressed in words.

We learn in the above scripture, that it is not the mind’s ability to think and it is not the ability of the flesh that

SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

physically presents us holy before God, it is the spirit of man in conjunction with the Holy Spirit that enables us to understand the visions of God. Hebrews 4:12 (New King James Version) reminds us that:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Yielding to the Holy Spirit of the Lord empowers us to gain dominion over the soul and body. The complete man is now able to serve as a channel for understanding God's visions that will stretch us beyond the familiar and the carnal. Understanding God's vision is the true test of having faith in seeing the unseen that our God has promised to our forefathers and us since the beginning of time.

More Vision Scriptural References

1. Numbers 24:16 – He hath said, which heard the words of God and knew the knowledge of the most High, which say the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: I see the future of Israel.
2. Psalms 89:19 – Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is might; I have exalted one chosen out of the people.
3. Proverbs 29:18 – Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.
4. Isaiah 22:5 – For it is a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity by the LORD God of hosts I the valley of vision, breaking down the walls and of crying to the mountains.
5. Isaiah 28:7 – But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgement.

6. Jeremiah 14:14 – Then the LORD said unto me, the prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought and the deceit of their heart.
7. Jeremiah 23:16 – Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Harken not unto words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD.
8. Ezekiel 8:3 – And he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where the seat of the image of jealousy, which proveth to jealousy.
9. Ezekiel 8:4 – And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I say in the pain.
10. Ezekiel 11:24 – Afterwards the spirit took me up, and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God in Chaldea, to them of the captivity. So the vision that I had sent went up from me.
11. Ezekiel 12:23 – Tell them therefore, Thus saith the LORD God; I will make the proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, the days are at hand, and the effect of every vision.

12. Daniel 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 10 – Details the visions given to Daniel from the Spirit of God.
13. Joel 2:28 – And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.
14. Micah 3:6 – Therefore night shall be unto you that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them.

CHAPTER 4: VALUES

“A Worthwhile Quality”

IF IT WERE NOT FOR THE bad things in life, how could we recognize or be cognizant of the good things in life? As Christians, we struggle with our adversary every day. Remember in Chapter 2, we were apprised by the incorruptible word of GOD that Satan prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he can tear apart. Satan seeks to destroy the believer, with deceptions and temptations. The epic battle of good versus evil takes precedence every minute of our lives. It is in the minute life-or-death decisions are consummated. Benjamin E. Mays’ poem, “Just a Minute,” summarizes the importance of every minute this way:

*I have only just a minute
Only sixty seconds in it
Forced upon—Can not refuse it,
Didn’t seek it, didn’t choose it.
But it’s up to me to use it.
I must suffer if I lose it
Give account if I abuse it,
Just a tiny little minute—
But eternity is in it.*

Crossroads appear before our lives in any area we endeavor because the decision to go left or right hinges on our ability to make informed decisions. Resonating in every decision is the “free-will” of man. God will not make us do anything that we do not elect to do. In fact, the adversary cannot either; although, he can tempt us to fall short of our God’s glory. The Bible says that there is not any temptation that has overcome you that is not common to man. But God is merciful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength. But in the temptation, we must trust that he will always provide us a way of escape. So that we may be able to endure. God in his sovereignty will not make us worship him or pray to him. We must seek him diligently, because God rewards those who seek him diligently.

Romans 8:28 states that God causes all things to come together for the good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose. Man constantly makes poor decisions because we are fallible in nature. The Bible says we reap what we sow and what is done in the dark will come to light. Nothing is hidden from God because he knows all, sees all, and is everywhere. God is omnipresence and there is no escaping our consequences for reacting in the flesh. It is inevitable and inherent for man to react in the flesh instead of acting in the spirit.

May the God of Peace sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our LORD Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23-New King James Version).

There is a four-step process that seemingly is the backdrop to every decision to act or react. The first step involves your paradigm or belief system. A belief, as defined in Webster’s II New Collegiate Dictionary, as the mental act, condition, or

SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

habit of placing trust or confidence in a person or thing. Our beliefs are also an aggregate of what we have been taught or experienced through life, according to the author of *Counseling Basics*. The author explains further that our thoughts are heavily impacted by what we believe. Feelings we experience are our reaction to our thoughts. Our decision to act or react is the end result of the process. If you put your trust or confidence in man or in the world you will more likely react in the flesh. Romans 8:5-8 affirms (New King James Version):

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

2 Corinthian 10:5 states that we are to “cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

God knows that the mind or intellect of man works against his kingdom. We as maturing Christian will react in the flesh, but Jesus Christ resurrection sets us free from sin and makes us alive to God. It is through wrong choices that we mature in the spirit, but it is through facing the consequences for wrong choices that our values are established. A child who is never held accountable for any wrong choices will be spoiled.

The Bible says in Proverbs 22:6 that one should “train up a child the way he should go and when he grows old he will not depart from it.” God has revealed to me as a dad of one, that the “it” in the proverb represents the values of life. It is the values in life that will take you further than you could ever

imagine. Remember when your mother told you not to touch the hot stove and as soon as she left the area, you touched it and shouted out, “Ouch!” There was no need for further punishment or consequences because the burning sensation was all you needed to know not to touch a hot pot or anything that remotely resembles that hot pot again. Yes, that was probably the first value taught to everyone. We all will make mistakes in life, but the emphasis should not be on the error itself; however, the focus should be on the value that stems out of the consequences for making wrong choices. The carnal mind is at enmity against God and wants its own way. But a renewing mind is a comfort to God. We are to present ourselves as a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God, being not conformed to the ways of the world but being transformed by the renewing of our minds. We must renew our minds daily to be sure that we do not conform to the ways of this world. We must pray for the desire to be transformed through the renewing of our minds by meditating and memorizing God’s word, so that we will not compromise with the ways of the world, or yield to the enemy’s attacks that will eventually lead to wrong choices.

Minimizing the Consequence for Wrong Choices

PAUL WRITES IN EPHESIANS 6:

Finally, be strong in the LORD and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

God wants us to learn from the consequences associated with wrong choices but he also wants us to minimize our wrong choices by trusting him to guide us through everything. We must foster a dependency with God, where we are dependent upon God for help and direction in all areas of life.

The alternative is clear—we must put on the “Full Armor of God” daily to minimize the impact wrong choices have on our lives. Apostle Paul depicted the armor of God, while he was looking at a Roman soldier. Helmet of Salvation, protects your mind from being penetrated by Satan’s attacks which cause us to make wrong choices. It is the first portal he uses to deceive you. But the Helmet of Salvation empowers you with the renewed belief that you are God’s child and that you have all your needs met by God according to glory and riches in Christ Jesus. The Breastplate of Righteousness protects you from defiling God’s temple. Through Christ we have become the righteousness of God and made holy and without blame and free from accusation according to 2 Corinthians 5:21 (KJV). It is only through sin that we fall short and make wrong choices. The Breastplate of Righteousness provides us the moral purity to make Godly decisions from the many choices in life. Since Satan depends on deceit to maintain his power, our first defense is always the truth.

Jesus said to the disciples in John 8:32, (Life Application Bible) “you are truly my disciples if you live as I tell you to and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,” this is our Belt Truth. I implore you to wrap yourself with the belt of truth every day. Notice that Jesus not only referred to the truth that will set you free; he also stated that the knowledge of the truth shall see you free. Free from what? Free from the entanglements and snares of the adversary. Satan’s first level of attack is in your mind, which is the second level of the tripartite of man. Satan likes to inject a thought or idea in your mind to convolute what God has given you as truth. But when you are knowledgeable regarding God’s truths, you will be able to counter Satan’s attack with scripture. The Bible says in Psalms 1 that we are blessed or protected from the snares of Satan if we do not walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the pathway of sinners, or seat ourselves among scoffers. By

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

the authority of God's word he also recommends that we meditate in his law every day and every night. God promises that if we are obedient to his word, he would bless everything we do. God is truly an awesome God! We are to also arm ourselves with the Shield of Faith. I define faith as the hope for the things that are unseen. Hope is the key word in faith. Who gives us the hope? Jesus Christ because Christ in us is the hope and the glory, according to Colossians 1:27. In order for God to be totally effective in our lives we must trust and believe that God's word will stand and take precedence in every area of our lives. The Sword of Faith must accompany us every day. The sword represents the incorruptible, indestructible word of the ever-living God. We can only prevail in Christ.

In Chapter 1, we examined the three tests that Jesus underwent with Satan. Not only was Jesus patient in his attacks but he was also very knowledgeable about the word of God. Jesus did not shout empty rhetoric to Satan in order to quench Satan's fiery darts. No, Jesus merely spoke the word of God. When Satan instructed him to turn the stone into bread, Jesus retorted, "Man should not live by bread alone." In Jesus' second test, he was tempted to jump of the roof of the Temple. Jesus retorted, "Man should not test the Lord thy God." In the third test, Jesus was tempted to deny God and worship Satan, and he retorted that the Scriptures states that man should not worship and obey any other Gods except God who art in Heaven. That's right, no weapon the adversary tried to conjure up could break Jesus' stand. He stood on the knowledge of the word of God, and the Bible declares that Satan went away. Amen! Give God the glory and praises he deserves.

The last element in "Armor of God" is the Shoes of the Gospel of Peace. (No, not the Nike shoes or the Italian free-laced shoes.) The Bible refers to the Shoes of the Gospel of Peace as shoes that firmly plant our feet on the truth of God. Donnie McClurkin referred to this when he said, "after you

have done all you can... Just Stand!” (from Donnie McClurkin’s “Stand” website: <http://members.aol.com/jesusdegod/stand>.) This is a really good proverb for some believers, but I take a different spiritual perspective. It is my divine inclination that we should not wait until we have done all we can do. We should rest everything on the truth of God. Then and only then can we stand firmly believing that we walk in tandem with God our Father because he is on our side.

“When You Change”

By Cecil L. Cockerham Ph.D., DCCC

When you **CHANGE** your **THINKING**
You Change your Beliefs.

When you **CHANGE** your **BELIEFS**,
You Change your Expectations.

When you **CHANGE** your **EXPECTATIONS**,
You Change your Attitude.

When you **CHANGE** your **ATTITUDE**,
You Change your Behavior.

When you **CHANGE** your **BEHAVIOR**,
You Change your Performance.

When you **CHANGE** your **PERFORMANCE**,
YOU CHANGE YOUR LIFE!!!!!!

More Scriptural Profiles on Values

1. **NICODEMUS'** story is told in John 3:1-21; 7:50-52; and 19:39-40. (*Chose not to publicly expose himself as Jesus' follower.*)
2. **ESAU'S** story is told in Genesis 25-36. He is also mentioned in Malachi 1:2; Romans 9:13; Hebrews 12:16, 17. (*When faced with important decisions, tended to choose according to his immediate need rather than the long-range effect.*)
3. **EVE'S** story is told in Genesis 2:19, 4:26. Her death is not mentioned in the Scripture. (*Chose to let her contentment to be undermined by Satan.*)
4. **HAGAR'S** story is told in Genesis 16-21. She is also mentioned in Galatians 4:24, 25. (*Chose to run away in when faced with problems*)
5. **JAPHTHAH'S** story is told I Judges 11:1-12:7. He is also mentions in 1 Samuel 12:11 and Hebrews 11:32. (*Chose to offer his daughter to God as sacrifice if God would lead his army to victory.*)

SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

6. **JUDAS ISCARIOT'S** story is told in the Gospels. He is also mentioned in Acts 1:18-19. (*Chose to betray Jesus Christ because of his Greed.*)
7. **JEREMIAH'S** story is told in the book of Jeremiah. He is also mentioned in Ezra 1:1; Daniel 9:2; Matthew 2:17; 16:14; 27:9. See also 2 Chronicles 34, 35 for the story of the spiritual revival under Josiah. (*Chose to endure all the Jewish people persecution.*)
8. **NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S** story is told in 2 Kings 24, 25; 2 Chronicles 36; Jeremiah 21-52; Daniel 1-4. (*Chose to think of himself as a god and was persuaded to build a statue of himself that all were to worship.*)
9. **PAUL'S** story is told in Acts 7:58-28:31 and throughout the New Testament letters. (*Chose to set out and destroy Christianity by persecuting Christians.*)
10. **MARTHA'S** story is told in Luke 10:38-42 and John 11:17-45. (*Chose to do everything exactly right.*)
11. **SAMSON'S** story is told in Judges 13-16. He is also mentioned in Hebrews 11:32. (*Chose to violate God's law and use his gifts and abilities unwisely.*)
12. **ISAAC'S** story is told in Genesis 17:15-35-29. He is also mentioned in Romans 9:7, 8; Hebrews 11:17-20; James 2:21-24. (*Chose to play favorites between his sons and alienated his wife.*)

13. **SARAH'S** story is told in Genesis 11-25. She is also mentioned in Isaiah 51:2; Romans 4:19; 9:9; Hebrews 11:11; 1 Peter 3:6. *(Chose to work problems out on her own, without consulting God.)*
14. **JOB'S** story is told in the book of Job. He is also referred to in Ezekiel 14:14, 20 and James 5:11. *(Chose to allow his suffering to overwhelm him in addition to questioning God.)*
15. **TIMOTHY'S** story is told in Acts; starring in chapter 16. He is also mentioned in Romans 16:21; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10, 11:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1, 19; Philippians 1:1; 2:9-23; Colossians 1:1, 2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 2:3, 4; 4:3:2-6; 1 and 2 Timothy; Philemon 1:1; Hebrews 13:23. *(Chose to use youthfulness to impact his effectiveness.)*
16. **SILAS'** story is told in Acts 15:22-19:10. He is also mentioned in 2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Peter 5:12. *(Chose to obey God's will and became a leader in the Jerusalem church.)*
17. **BATH-SHEBA'S** story is told in 2 Samuel 11, 12 and 1 Kings 1, 2. A related passage is Psalm 51. *(Chose to commit adultery.)*
18. **GIDEON'S** story is told in Judges 6-8. He is also mentioned in Hebrews 11:32. *(Chose not to trust God because of his limitations and worshipped an object he collected. He also chose to commit adultery.)*

SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

19. **RUTH AND NAOMI'S** stories are told in the book of Ruth. Matthew 1:5 also mentioned Ruth. *(Chose to foster a healthy relationship with each other through God in faith.)*

20. **PILATE'S** story is told in the Gospels. He is also mentioned in Acts 3:13, 4:27; 13-28; 1 Timothy 6:13. *(Chose to have Jesus executed because of the majority of the public wanted to see him die; although, he knew Jesus was innocent.)*

CHAPTER 5: WISDOM

“Erudition”

MIKE FITZHUGH WRITES IN THE *OUR Daily Bread* publication: “when you’re in need of wisdom, be careful to whom you go; make certain they are godly, and that God’s Word they know.”

The book of Proverbs advocates that we obtain advice from the wise (1:2-7). Wisdom in the Bible is defined as the “skill for living.” The Hebrew word transposed “wisdom” is the exact word that is transposed “skill” in reference to the detailed work of Bezalel and Aholiab in the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-11). God provided them and others essential artistic, building, weaving, and caring skills. How would you define wisdom? Wisdom is defined in the Webster’s II College Dictionary as “learning or erudition.” Erudition is defined as “deep, extensive learning.” The word that is common in both definitions is “learning”! Learning is the fundamental element in wisdom. Learning is achieved by not only doing things right, but also by doing things wrong. Jesus teaches us wisdom by allowing us to fail and make mistakes. (No, not the mistakes or failures on worldly exams, quizzes, etc.) I am attempting to illustrate and accentuate that some of our spiritual mistakes and failures, which can and will lead to our failure, defeat, and, in some instances, death.. In order to

gain wisdom, you must learn through right and wrong decisions. The Bible says that we should seek the kingdom of God first and His righteousness first and ALL things shall be added unto to you (Matthew 6:33). James 1:5-8 states:

If you want to know what God wants you to do, ask him, and he will gladly tell you, for he is always ready to give a bountiful supply of wisdom to all who ask him; he will not resent it. But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to tell you, for a doubtful mind will be as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind; and every decision you then make will be uncertain, as you turn first this way, and then that. If you do not ask with faith, do not expect the Lord to give you any solid answer.

God allows us to make mistakes, to learn from the mistakes; and when we learn from the mistake, we internalize the wisdom that would prevent us from committing the same mistake again and again. Can you imagine living without making one mistake? Undoubtedly, we would submit that we are perfect. I declare, God doesn't want us to be perfect but he wants us to try to gear towards perfection by gaining his wisdom. God acknowledges that we need mistakes in our lives. He understands that from our mistakes come life's well-learned lessons or better-said—God's spiritual wisdom.

Worldly Wisdom vs. Spiritual Wisdom

I WANT TO TAKE THIS TIME to accentuate a major difference between worldly wisdom and spiritual wisdom. Worldly wisdom is the knowledge and/or skills that are acquired through secular education like the following: elementary schools, secondary schools, colleges, post-baccalaureate endeavors, etc. Spiritual wisdom is the knowledge and/or skills that are acquired spiritually. Remember we discussed the tripartite of man in Chapter 3, where the tripartite of man consists of the spirit, soul, and flesh. Each part is independent, incommensurate, and in constant competition. Each part wants to dominate the other part. The Bible recommends that the believer allow the spirit to reign because God only communicates what is spiritual to the spirit. The Bible says man does not receive anything, unless God gives it to him. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2: 11-15 (Life Application Bible):

No one can really know what anyone else is thinking, or what he is really like, except that person himself. And no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit. And God has actually given us his Spirit (not the world's spirit) to tell us about the wonderful free gifts of grace and blessings that God has given us by

the Holy Spirit, not words that we as men might choose. So, we use the Holy Spirit's words to explain the Holy Spirit's facts. But the man who is not a Christian cannot understand and cannot accept these thoughts from God, which the Holy Spirit teaches us. They sound foolish to him, because only those who have the Holy Spirit within them can understand what the Holy Spirit means. Others just cannot take it in. but the spiritual man has insight into everything, and that bothers and baffles the man of the world, who cannot understand him at all.

Worldly minds reap what is worldly; spiritual minds reap what is spiritual. Our spirit must overrule the mind and flesh daily. James 3:17-18 states (Life Application Bible):

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure and full of quiet gentleness. Then it is peace loving and courteous. It allows discussion and is willing to yield to others; it is full of mercy and good deeds. It is wholehearted and straightforward and sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seed of peace and reap a harvest of goodness.

The key words that accentuate wisdom from the two verses from James above are: mercy, love for others, peace, courtesy, yielding to others, sincerity, straightforwardness, quiet gentleness, and goodness. So, that is why I pray daily to God, and I verbally submit my spirit, soul, and flesh to his Lordship because I know that I am too weak to sustain on my own.

Spiritual Wisdom Exemplified

PAUL'S ATTAINMENT OF SPIRITUAL WISDOM IS recorded in 2 Corinthians 12:2-10 Paul states:

Fourteen years ago I was taken up into heaven for a visit. Do not ask me whether my body was there or just my spirit, for I do not know: only God can answer that. But anyway, there I was in paradise, and heard things so astounding that they are beyond a man's power to describe or put in words (and anyway I am not allowed to tell them to others). That experience is something worth bragging about, but I am not going to do it. I am going to boast only about how weak I am and how, great God is to use such weakness for his glory. I have plenty to boast about and would be not foolish in doing it, but I do not want anyone to think more highly of me than he should from what he can actually see in my life and my message. I will say this, because these experience I had were so tremendous, God was afraid I might be puffed up (filled with pride); so I was given a physical condition which has been a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to hurt and bother me, and prick my pride. Three different times I begged God to make me well again. Each time he said, no, but I am with you; that is all you need (God's grace is sufficient). My power shows up best in weak people (God's power is perfected in

weakness). Now I am glad to boast about how weak I am; I am glad to be a living demonstration of Christ's power, instead of showing off my own power and abilities. Since I know it is all for Christ's good. I am quite happy about the "thorn," and about insults and hardships, persecutions, and difficulties; for when I am weak, then I am strong—the less I have, the more I depend on him.

God can proactively intervene in our life to prevent us from making frivolous mistakes and failures. God wanted Paul to stay on point by allowing his thorn to resonate in his spirit. He knew that pride is a careless mistake that many of us make. God despises pride and did all he could to keep pride from contaminating Paul's spirit. Scripture says, God gives strength to the humble, but sets himself against the proud and haughty.

Worldly Wisdom Exemplified

JUDAS IS THE PORTRAIT OF WORLDLY wisdom exemplified. Judas' mistake led to his eternal death. Not a great amount is known of Judas before becoming one of The Twelve Apostles. Judas was the son of a man named Simon, who was also surnamed Iscariot. Judas is the Greek form of Judah. Iscariot is a derivative from the Hebrew *Ish Keriath*, which means something like "a man from Keriath." Keriath was a town located in the south of the land of Israel, not far from Hebron. Judas Iscariot knew Jesus Christ. He knew exactly what Jesus looked like, his height, his weight, the color of his hair, and the sound of his voice. He talked with Jesus, face to face, many times. He knew Jesus' favorite foods, the places that he liked to go to most often, his sense of humor, and all sorts of other personal traits because he was one of a very few who spent years actually working and traveling with Jesus. Judas witnessed at least some of Jesus' miracles firsthand, so to him, rock-solid faith should have been very easy. And yet, after all of his close experiences with The Savior, he betrayed him to death, for a few coins. Judas' greatest weakness seemed to be money or, rather, his lack of honesty with money.

Judas' eternal mistake occurred when he betrayed Jesus Christ in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus had already told

Judas that he would betray him at the Last Supper. According to Luke 22:3: “Then Satan entered into Judas Iscariot...” Matthew 26:14-17,

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve apostles went to the chief priests, and asked, “How much will you pay me to get Jesus into your hands?” And they gave him thirty silver coins. From that time on, Judas watched for an opportunity to betray Jesus to them.

The Bible tells us that if we resist the devil he will flee from us. Judas did not abide by the spiritual wisdom that he had at his grasp daily. Matthew 27:3 affirms

that when he saw that Jesus had been condemned to die, changed his mind and deeply regretted what he had done, and brought back the money to the chief priests and other Jewish leaders. “I have sinned,” he declared, “for I have betrayed an innocent man.”

“That is your problem,” they retorted.

They could not return money to the collection if it was used for murder. Was it too late for Judas to seek forgiveness? I declare Judas had a chance. The eternal mistake he committed against God could have been atoned. God knew what Judas was going to do before he had done it. Jesus, during the Last Supper, condemned the man that would betray Him. Then Jesus said that it would be “far better for that one if he had never been born” (Matthew 26:24). Wow! That is a terrifying statement.

My only interpretation is that Judas would meet a terrible fate. However, it is my strong conviction that Judas would have been spared from his mistake if he had gone to God for forgiveness. God doesn't hate the sinner, only the sin. His love and mercy is everlasting. He wants all to come to repentance but many will not. Many will fall like Judas, who thought his

SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

sin or mistake was too much for God to forgive. Nothing is greater than our God, because he is a just God. The lesson that we can take from Judas' story is that consequences of evil are so devastating that even small lies and little wrongdoings have detrimental results. The Life Application Bible profile of Judas (p. 1449) states the following:

In betraying Jesus, Judas made the greatest mistake in history. But just the fact that Jesus knew Judas would betray him doesn't mean that Judas was a puppet of God's will. Judas made the decisions. God knew what that choice would be and confirmed it. Judas did not lose his relationship with Jesus; rather, he had never found Jesus. He is called the "son of hell" (John 17:12).

God knows all and sees all. He will not tempt us to do anything that we do not elect to do. He has established "free-will" or "free choice" since the beginning. He watches us amidst our trials and tribulations and hopes that we will obey his word, but in case we fall short, he is there to pick us up and lead us to the path of righteousness. Through our mistakes the wisdom from God is consummated.

The Most Powerful Email I Ever Got

New sneaks on my feet.
I was there for class on time,
Went back and took my seat.
Yeah, I'm moving up,
I'm already grown.
Soon I'll be graduating,
And out on my own.
I talked to some of my friends,
We were all having fun.
Said some things I shouldn't have said,
Did stuff I shouldn't have done.
I knew I was different.
I felt God touch my heart,
I knew I should set a standard,
But then I would be set apart.
Walking to the bus,
I was not looking for strength.
I heard the car tires screeching,
But now it's too late.
I am standing in this room,
And I can see the heavenly gate.
Oh no! I never prayed.

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

I never thought I had time to get it straight.
 An Angel walked to me,
 He had a book in his hand.
I knew it was the Book of Life,
 When would this dream end?
 I told him my name,
 And he began to look.
Then he looked at me sadly and said,
 Your name is not in this book.
 Angel, this is a dream,
 No, I cannot be dead!
He closed the book and turned away,
He whispered—You cannot proceed ahead.
 No...no this cannot be real,
 Angel, you cannot turn me away.
 Let me talk to God,
 Maybe he will let me stay.
 He led me to the gate,
 Jesus came to me.
He did not let me in but said,
 Beloved, what is your need?
 Jesus, I cried, please,
 Do not cast me away from you.
Tears ran down his face as he said,
 You knew what you needed to do.
 Lord, please, I am young,
 I never thought I would die.
I thought I would have plenty of time,
 Death caught me by surprise.
 Lord, I went to church,
 Please Jesus, I believe.
He said you would not accept me,
 My love you would not receive.
Lord, there were too many hypocrites,
 They were not being true.

He took a step back and asked,
What does that have to do with you?
Lord, my family claimed to be saved,
They were not real. You know.
He said, I died for you.
Now I have to go.
I fell to my kneed crying to Him.
Lord, I planned to be real tomorrow.
I couldn't make Him understand,
I had never felt such sorrow.
Then it hit me hard, I said,
Lord, where will I go?
He looked into my eyes and said,
My child, you already know.
Please Jesus, I begged,
The place is hot.
It seemed to trouble and grieve Him,
He whispered, DEPART FROM ME, I KNOW YOU NOT.
Lord, you are supposed to be love.
How can you send me to condemnation?
He replied, With your mouth you said you loved me,
But each day you rejected your salvation.
With that in an instant,
Day turned into night.
I never knew such torture could be,
Now too late, I know the Bible is right.
If I can tell anything,
Hell has no age.
It is a place of torture,
Separated from God and full of rage.
You know, I thought it was a funny—a joke,
But this one thing is true.
If you never accepted Jesus Christ,
HELL IS WAITING FOR YOU!
So please, ask Him into your heart.

More Wisdom Scriptural References

1. 2 Chronicles 1:12 – And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king:
2. 2 Chronicles 1:12 – Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like.
3. Job 12:12 – With the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding.
4. Job 12:13 – With him is wisdom and strength: the deceived and the deceiver are his.
5. Job 13:5 – O that ye would altogether hold your peace! And it should be your wisdom.

6. Job 28:28 – And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.
7. Job 33:33 – if not hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I shall teach thee wisdom.
8. Psalms 37:30 – The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom and his tongue talketh of judgement.
9. Psalms 51:6 – Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.
10. Psalms 136:5 – To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth forever.
11. Proverbs 1:7 – The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.
12. Proverbs 14:6 – A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not: but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth.
13. Proverbs 24:3 – Through wisdom is a house builded; and by understanding it is established...
14. Proverbs 29:15 – The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.
15. Ecclesiastes 2:21 – For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

16. Ecclesiastes 7:25 – I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness...
17. Ezekiel 28:17 – Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground; I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee.
18. Luke 21-15 – For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.
19. 1 Corinthians 2:6 – Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, not of the princes of this world, that come to nought:
20. 1 Corinthians 2:7 – But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory.

CHAPTER 6: HUMILITY

“Spiritual Humbling”

ROGET’S II NEW THESAURUS DEFINES HUMILITY as “the lack of vanity or self-importance: humbleness, lowliness, meekness, and modesty.” Why would God want his children to sustain pain and affliction in our lives? Why is not being in Christ easy? Should not there be earthly serenity “peace-of-mind” on earth for all those who believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Why do I have to endure tests, trails, and tribulations? O God, why do not you have mercy on me? Yes, these are some sporadic persevering questions that perplex not only the “babe” believer but also the “mature” believer in the presence of life’s most pivotal situations.

It is vital that we experience pain and affliction for spiritual growth and development because it is innate in man to stray to a more self-supported relationship in Christ rather than a Christ-dependent relationship when we are journeying through life vicariously. Every morning, I verbally declare that Christ is the authority of my life and that without Christ in my life I am nothing but with Christ he is everything.

The Bible refers to this in Philippians 4:13 that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us because God causes all things to come together for the good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose (Romans

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

8:28). God wants us to be humble and dependent upon him for everything. He designed it like that from the very beginning, when God said, “Let us make man in OUR image,” (Genesis 1:26).

The book of Genesis reveals God’s master plan community for the progenitors, Adam and Eve. He created everything that was beautiful for man to enjoy. Everything was perfect, truly perfect in God’s eyes. God’s agape love and Shechinah glory was with man every day and every night until that day they transgressed the law of the forbidden fruit, the “Adamic Fall.” Satan deceived Adam and Eve. Satan tempted Eve by convincing her that God’s provisions in the Garden of Eden were not enough. Then Eve convinced Adam to eat the forbidden fruit too. Adam and Eve’s penalty for disobeying God’s law was spiritual death, total separation from God. Although God loved all what he created, his word would stand. Adam and Eve were destined for a life filled with pain and affliction by their desire to rebel against the righteousness of God’s word. Sounds confusing to the nonbeliever, but why would God create a world of perfection just to see it defiled or destroyed? God in His deity granted man a special gift of free will.

Free will prevented God from intervening in the test that beseeched them. Like Judas, God knew what was going to happen before the deadly sin was consummated. God already had a plan in motion to overcome the effects of the rebellion. Our small and large acts of rebellion prove that we are descendants of Adam. We endure tests because of our fleshly nature. That is why we must be dead to the flesh and alive in the spirit. The Bible says we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against spiritual wickedness in high and low places because the epic battle of good versus evil rages on. We are reminded that trouble may endure for the night but joys come in the morning. God has a wonderful way of converting

worldly battles, troubles, pain, and afflictions into spiritual victories and/or virtues. Victory is for all those who believe and depend on the incorruptible word of the omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

Jesus Exemplified Humility

And since we are his children, we will share his treasure-for all God gives to his Son Jesus is now ours too. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering (Romans 8:17).

JESUS' STORY OF PAIN AND AFFLICTION is told in the gospels. I want to emphasize the pain and suffering Jesus endured before the fatal blow on Golgotha, "Skull Hill." I believe it is essential to highlight the fact that Jesus, God incarnate, knew that he would endure poignant torture, mockery, and insults. So in this context, I would like for you to replace Jesus' name with God because they are one in the same. To affirm this fact without doubt or controversy, 1 Timothy 3:16 states that "God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen by angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and was received up into Glory."

In the above verse we understand that God is Jesus manifested in the flesh, this is the Christian's premise and our linchpin. The compelling story of our Father's crucifixion begins in Matthew 26 where Jesus is going to be handed over to the Jewish leaders betrayed by a kiss from Judas Iscariot. The story begins:

then Jesus brought them to a garden grove, Gethsemane, and told them to sit down and wait while he went on ahead to pray. He took Peter with him and the Zebedee's two sons James and John, and began to be filled with anguish and despair.

Then Jesus told his disciples that his soul is crushed with horror and sadness to the point of death. He told them to stay where they were but stay awake for Him. Jesus, God incarnate according to 1 Timothy 3:16, had become overwhelmed with images of death and the prolonged physical pain, compounded with thoughts of the Godly separation He would have to endure for you and me.

What if you were in Jesus' shoes? Could you bear the emotional and physiological stress of knowing you were going to die by the hands of people you loved? Jesus was in great anguish over his forthcoming physical pain and separation from our Father and death for the sins of the world. Jesus went forward a little in the Garden and fell face downward on the ground, and prayed, "My father! If it is possible, let this cup be taken away from me. But I want your will, to be done, not mine."

Although the divine act of humility was set, Jesus' human nature struggled with the preconceived notions of death and total separation from God. In His time of extreme emotional and physiological stress, Jesus denied his will to be done. In his weakest and darkest hour he relied on the will of God. It is because of his suffering, he can relate to our suffering. God knew what he was doing. Jesus returned to the three disciples and found them asleep. In Matthew 26:40, 41, Jesus asked Peter,

Could not you even stay awake with me one hour? Keep alert and pray (prayer is essential, because it strengthens us to defeat Satan's power). Otherwise temptation will overpower you. For the spirit indeed is willing but how weak the body is?

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

In Jesus' condition He knew that all the prayers offered by Peter, James, and John would provide him the additional spiritual support to sustain in his time of humility because the agony Jesus was experiencing was worse than death as he paid personally for all of the world's sins.

The "cup" Jesus asked to be taken away from Him was the cup filled with death and separation. When we experience pain and affliction, we assume that we are separated from God. We feel lost and alone. But it is through Jesus Christ that we can stand on God's word and sovereignty. It is through Jesus Christ that we are able to weather the storm of adversity and challenges because we know that victory is ours. Jesus did not have such comfort. He was the first and the last. Again, Jesus left them and prayed, "My Father! If this cup cannot go away until I drink it all, your will be done." He returned again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy, so he went back to prayer the third time, alone, saying the same things again...

How many times have we presented the same request to God during a trial? Jesus told Peter, John, and James to stay awake with him on three separate occasions, but they failed on three occasions. Here again, we see an example of how weak the flesh is. How many times have you requested a family member, friend or a church affiliated to pray for or with you in time of pain and affliction, but they were asleep? If it happened to Jesus, our LORD and savior, you should not fathom that it could not happen to you.

When Jesus returned from prayer, the third time, he told them to sleep and take rest. But as soon as he said that he shouted, "The time has come! I am betrayed into the hands of evil men! Up! Let's be going! Look! Here comes the man who is betraying me!" Oh, how that woes me. It is almost like the anticipation of the grim reaper. Death and separation pierced Jesus' skin and he said, "Let's go!" How courageous is that?

Even in his weakness he still maintained his humility. We as humans have a tendency to react to situations, perplexities, and challenges rather than acting to them. Jesus exemplified humility through his ministry, especially in the Garden of Gethsemane. He wasn't puffed with pride. He could have dispatched a million angels in his defense, but he would have been reacting in the flesh; however, he acted in the spirit, the Spirit of God, and was led to his crucifixion alone. The Son of God has been taken like a lamb to be slaughtered. Colossians 2:20-23 (Life Application Bible) states the following:

Since you died, as it were, with Christ and this has set you free from following the world's ideas of how to be saved—by doing good and obeying various rules—why do you keep right on following them anyway, still bound by such rules as not eating, tasting, or even touching certain foods? Such rules are mere human teachings, for food was made to be eaten and used up. These rules may seem good, for rules of this kind require strong devotion and are humiliation and hard on the body, but they have no effect when it comes to conquering a person's evil thoughts and desires. They only make him proud.

Jesus was never proud. He left with the evil men saying, "My friend, go ahead and do what you have come for." One of the men with Jesus, the infamous disciple Peter, pulled out a sword and slashed off the ear of the High Priest's servant. Jesus told him immediately to put the sword away because he who lives by the sword will also die by the sword. Jesus then paused and spoke to the crowd saying: "Am I some dangerous criminal that you had to arm yourselves with swords and clubs before you could arrest me? I was with you teaching daily in the Temple and you did not stop me then. But this is all happening to fulfill the words of the prophets as recorded in the Scriptures." At this point all the disciples deserted him and fled.

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

Crucifixion was first practiced by the Persians. Alexander generals brought it back to the Mediterranean world—to Egypt and to Carthage. The Romans apparently learned the practice from the Carthaginians and became very skilled at it. Many Roman authors like Livy, Cicer, and Tacitus commented on crucifixion, and several innovations and modifications are described in ancient literature.

After Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was taken before the Sanhedrin and Caiphus, the High Priest; it was there where he experienced poignant scourging. One of the Roman soldiers struck Jesus across the face because Jesus would not render a retort to their inquisition. The palace guard then blindfolded Him and mockingly taunted him to identify each one of them, as he was turn around and around. They taunted, spat, and struck him in the face.

The next morning, Jesus was battered and bruised, dehydrated, and exhausted from a sleepless night. Jesus was taken across the Praetorium of the Fortress Antonia, which is the seat of the Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate. Pilate attempted to pass responsibility to Heord Antipas, the Tetrarch of Judea, failed and he was inadvertently responsible for Jesus' fate. It was the response to the cries of the mob, that Pilate ordered Bar-Abbas (Bar: son | Abbas: Father) released, and condemned Jesus Christ to scourging and crucifixion (Matthew 27:23).

Bar-Abbas was the son of a well-known Rabbi. He was punished for leading a riot of insurrectionist along with the two thieves that were crucified with Christ. There is much disagreement among religious authorities regarding the unusual scourging as a prelude to crucifixion. Dr. C. Truman Davis writes in the article, "A Physicians Testifies about the Crucifixion," that many Roman writers from this period do not associate the scourging and crucifixion. Many scholars believe that Pilate originally ordered Jesus scourging as his full

punishment and that the death by crucifixion came only in response by the mob, that Pilate was not properly defending Caesar against Jesus who allegedly claimed to be the King of the Jews.

In preparation of the scourging, Jesus was stripped of His clothing and His hands were tied to a post above His head. It is doubtful that the Romans would have attempted to follow the Jewish law that prohibited more than forty lashes. The Roman legionnaire, one who administers the lashes, stepped forward with the flagrum or flagellum in his hand.

A flagellum is a short whip consisting of several heavy leather thongs with two small beads of lead attached near the ends of each thong. So if the flagellum had ten leather thongs then it also had ten balls of lead.

The heavy whip was brought down with full force again and again against Jesus' shoulders, back, and legs. At first the leather thongs and beads only cut through the top layer of skin. But when the blows continue, they cut deeper into the subcutaneous tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the broken capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles.

From a medical perspective, the whip sliced through the epidermis, mesoderm, and endodermis of Jesus Christ.

The small balls of lead first produce large, deep bruises, which are broken open by subsequent blows. This pains me emotionally to write, but for the sake of spreading knowledge of the pain and affliction our God endured for man's eternal salvation, I must continue.

Finally, the skin of Jesus' back was hanging in long ribbons and the entire area was an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue. When the Roman centurion in charge determined that Jesus has had enough then the lashing stopped. Jesus was then untied and allowed to slump to the stone pavement, wet with his own blood oozing from all his bodily

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

wounds. The soldiers were relentless in the pursuit to taunt Jesus even more. They threw a robe across His badly beaten shoulders and placed a scepter-like stick in his hand in attempts to mock him as a king. To satisfy His image as an imposter king, the Roman soldiers aggregated long flexible branches with long thorns and plaited the branches into the shape of a crown and placed it on His scalp. Due to the skull's extensive vascular areas, he begins bleeding copiously. They continue to mock Jesus. They even removed the scepter-like stick from his hand and struck him immediately in his head immediately causing the plaited-thorned branches to go deeper into Jesus' scalp. They became bored with their brutality and ripped off the robe that they placed on Jesus. Jesus was badly beaten and his back was bleeding causing him excruciating pain and additional bleeding.

Imagine gauze on an open wound that has been ripped of without care.

The Roman soldiers returned Jesus' clothes and tied a heavy patibulum (heavy wooden beam) of the cross across his shoulder. Jesus and the two thieves begin the slow journey along the Via Dolorosa (Matthew 27:27-31). In spite of Jesus' efforts to walk erect with the weight of the heavy wooden beam coupled with the shock produced by the copious blood loss, he stumbled and fell. The rough wood of the beam gouged into the lacerated skin and muscles of the shoulders. He tried to stand but he had reached his muscle endurance limitation. The centurion, anxious to get the crucifixion over, selected a stalwart North African onlooker, Simon of Cyrene, to carry the cross (Matthew 27:32-34). Jesus followed. Still bleeding and sweating the cold, clammy sweat of shock until he completed the 650-yard journey from the fortress of Antonia to Golgotha, "Skull Hill." Before he was thrown on the patibulum, Jesus was offered wine mixed with myrrh, a mild analgesic, but he refused.

I cannot imagine ever experiencing so much pain without taking some sort of medication to soothe me.

Once Jesus was lying on the cross, the legionnaire felt for the depression at the front of the wrist or metacarpals and drove a heavy, square, wrought iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly, he moved to the other side and repeated the action being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow flexion and movement. The soldiers lift and nail to the patibulum onto the stipes (upright portion of the cross) a titulus reading “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” The left foot was pressed backward against the right foot. With both feet extended and toes down, they nailed yet another nail into the arch of each foot, leaving the knees moderately flexed. Jesus was now being crucified, as he slowly sags down with more weight from the nails in the wrists. Excruciating pain shot along the fingers and up the arms to explode in His brain—the nails in the wrists putting pressure on the median nerves. As he pushed upward on the cross to avoid the stretching torment, he places his full weight on the nail through his feet. Again, there was the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet. At this point, his arms are fatigued, and great waves of cramps sweep over his muscles, knotting them in deep relentless, throbbing pain (much like a body-builder that continues to work out past human limitation). With such cramps, he was unable to push himself upward for air. His pectoral muscles were paralyzed due to the trauma and the intercostal muscles were unable to act. At this point, air can be inhaled into the lungs but not exhaled. Jesus fought to raise himself in order to get a short breath. Finally, the carbon dioxide builds up in his lungs and in the bloodstream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically, he was able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-given oxygen. It was undoubtedly during those periods that He uttered these seven short sentences recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, Luke, Mark, and John:

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

1. Looking down at the Roman soldiers throwing dice for his seamless garment, he said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Matthew 27:35; Luke 23:34).
2. To the penitent thieves he said, “Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23-43).
3. Looking down at the terrified, grief-stricken adolescent John—the beloved Apostle—he said, “Behold thy mother.” Then, looking to His mother Mary, “Woman behold thy son” (John 19:26, 27).
4. He cries, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” (My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?) Jesus was not questioning God; he was quoting the first line of Psalm 22—a deep expression of the anguish he felt when he took the sins of the world and thus was separated from his Father. This is what he dreaded when he prayed in the garden to take the cup from him (Matthew 27:46; 22nd Psalm; Mark 15:34).
5. Jesus gasps, “I thirst.” A sponge soaked in posca, the cheap, sour wine is the staple drink of the Roman legionnaires, is lifted to his lips. He refuses. He refused to drink the wine sponge soaked in posca because he knew he had to suffer fully conscious and with a clear mind (Matthew 27:48; John 19:28).
6. Jesus realizing that death is imminent, he whispers, “TETELASTHIA.” (It is finished.) His mission of atonement was completed and he was allowed to die (John 19:30).

7. With one last surge of strength, he once again pressed his torn feet against the nail, strengthens His legs, takes a deeper breath, and utters, “Father, Into thy hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46)

To make doubly sure of Jesus’ death, the legionnaire drove his lance through the fifth interspace between the ribs, upward through the pericardium and into the heart. The 34th verse of the 19th chapter of the Gospel according to St. John reports: “And immediately there came out blood and water.” There was an escape of water fluid from the sac surrounding the heart, giving postmortem evidence that our Lord died not the usual crucifixion death by suffocation, but rather heart failure due to shock and constriction of the heart by the fluid in the pericardium.

This has been a sadden look into the pain and affliction our LORD Jesus Christ endured for the atonement of all the world’s sins. The Bible refers to this as humility before honor. That is right; everyone on earth who believes in the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of our LORD Jesus Christ will have eternity with Christ. The Bible says anyone who enters through Jesus will be saved. Moreover, this horrific account documented for you should leave us all experiencing despondent and depressed feelings. Although humbling to know that we are not saved by works but through Jesus, we should be grateful we have the great sequel in the infinite mercy of God toward man—at once the miracle of atonement and the expectation of the triumphant Easter morning.

Yes, Easter morning proved to be the ends that justified the means. Jesus endured the pain of the world to take the sin of the world away forever. He did not boast on his position because he understood His mission. He clearly remains humble; in fact, I’d like to say, “In his physical weakness, Jesus, God incarnate, maintained his meekness!” Uttering only

SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

the words that would solidify man's eternal salvation, Jesus endured to the end and prevailed in God's new beginning. Glory be to God for his mercy endures forever and ever! Matthew 28:18 affirms Jesus' victory:

He told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and earth. Therefore go and make disciples in all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And then teach of these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you; and be sure of this—that I am with you always, even to end of the world."

Furthermore, it is stated in 1 Peter 2: 22-25 that Jesus

never sinned, never told a lie, never answered back when insulted; when he suffered he did not threaten to get even; he left his case in the hands of God who always judges fairly. He personally carried the load of our sins in his own body when he died on the cross, so that we can be finished with sin and live a good life from now on. For his wounds have healed ours! Like a sheep you wandered away from God, but now you returned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls who keeps you safe from all attacks.

Selah

Our Position in Christ Changes
Our Condition Scriptural References

1. 1 John 3:2 – Yes, dear friends we are already God’s children, right now, and we can not even imagine what it is going to be like later on. But we do know this, that when he comes we will be like him, as a result of seeing him as he really is. (God’s Child through Christ.)
2. 1 Peter 1:25 – Like sheep you answered away from God, but now you have returned to you Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls who keep you safe from all attacks. (Returned by Christ.)
3. Philippians 3:13 – No, dear brothers, I am still not all I should be but I am brining all my energies to bear on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the en of the race and receive the prize for which God is calling us up to heaven because of what Christ Jesus did for us. (Forget the past because of Christ.)

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

4. Ephesians 1:4 – Long ago even before he made the world, God chose us to be his very own through what Christ would do for us; he decided then to make us holy in his eyes without a single fault—we who stand before him covered with his love. (Sinless by Christ.)
5. Ephesians 1:5 – His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by sending Jesus Christ to die for us. And he did this because he wanted to! (Adopted by Christ.)
6. Colossians 1:13 – For he has rescued us out of the darkness and gloom of Satan’s kingdom and brought us in the Kingdom of his dear Son. (Christ delivers us from the power of Darkness.)
7. Colossians 2:10 – So you have everything when you have Christ, and you are filled with God through your union with Christ. He is the highest Ruler, with authority over every other power. (We are complete in Christ.)
8. 2 Corinthians 5:20 – We are Christ’s ambassadors. God is using us to speak to you: we beg you, as though Christ himself were here pleading with you, receive the love he offers you—be reconciled to God. (We are ambassadors for Christ.)
9. Jeremiah 31:3 – For long ago the Lord had said to Israel: I have loved you, O my people with an everlasting love; with loving—kindness. I have drawn you to me. (We are loved with an everlasting love.)

10. Romans 8:17 – And since we are his children, we will share his treasure—for all God gives to his Son Jesus is now ours too. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. (I am an heir of God and a joint heir of Christ.)
11. 1 Peter 1:4-6 – And God has reserved for his children the priceless gift of eternal life; it is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God, in his mighty power, will make sure that you get there safely to receive it, because you are trusting him. It will be yours in that coming last day for all to see. So be truly glad! (We are kept by God's power.)
12. Philippians 4:13 – For I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power. (We can do all things through Christ who strengthens.)
13. Philippians 4:19 – And it is he who will supply all your needs from his riches in glory, because of what Christ Jesus has done for us. (We have all our needs met by God through Christ Jesus.)
14. 1 Thessalonians 1:4 – We know that God has chosen you, dear brothers, much beloved of God. (We are chosen.)
15. 1 John 5:4 – For every child of God can obey him, defeating sin and evil pleasure by trusting Christ to help him. (We overcome the world.)
16. John 8:36-38 – So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free (Yes, I realize that you are descendants of Abraham!) And yet some of you

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

are trying to kill me because my message does not find a home within your hearts. I am telling you what I saw when I was with my Father. But you are following the advice of your Father. (We are set free.)

17. 2 Corinthian 2:14 – But thanks be to God! For through what Christ has done, he has triumphed over us so that now wherever we go he uses us to tell others about the Lord and to spread the Gospel like a sweet perfume. (We always triumph in Christ.)
18. Ephesians 2:19 – Now you are no longer strangers to God and foreigners to heaven, but you are members of God’s very own family, citizens of God’s country, and you belong in God’s households with every other Christians. (We are fellow citizens with the Saints.)
19. Colossians 1:22 – He has done this through the death on the cross of his own human body, and now as a result Christ has brought you in the very presence of God, and you are standing there before him with nothing left against you—nothing left that he could chide you for. (We are holy, without blemish, and free accusation.)
20. Colossians 1:27 – He has kept this secret for centuries and generation past, but now at last it has pleased him to tell it to those who love him and live for him, and the riches and glory of his plan are for you Gentiles too. And this is the secret: that Christ in your hearts is your only hope of glory. (Christ in me is the hope of glory.)

CHAPTER 7:
UNSELFISHNESS

“Grace”

THIS IS MY SHIRT, MY BOOK, my car, my house, my Bible, my world, etc. My, my, my, my, my—sounds like the chorus to Johnny Gill’s impressionable song in the early nineties. However, it is innate in all of us to be rather possessive towards everything we either own or come in contact with. We began our selfish endeavors as a child. We grew up with the paradigm that “it is all about me” and no one else. “I am going to do this and that” type attitude. How silly can we be?

Selfishness is caused by the instinct of self that goes along a wrong way, namely a way that leads to defilement instead of wisdom. Because of the environment, our children are apt to succumb to defilement all along from the time they are small. We have traditions that nurture babies with selfishness; we give them all the pleasant things: tasty foods, beautiful clothes, and cuddly toys, all of which cause attachment. So children become possessive and greed. They refer to everything with my attached to it; i.e. “my father,” “my mother” and their residence “my house”; (Lord’s Prayer begins with “our father”) whatever they want is always granted. There are no such parents that bring their children to a toy store with all those wonderful and expensive toys and say to them, “My dear children, they have

all these toys to make us foolish.” Instead most parents tell their children to choose any toy they want from a toy store, no matter how expensive it is. Or they tell their children to choose any tasty food they want from a restaurant, no matter how exotic and expensive it is. Sometimes too much food is ordered and too little is consumed, resulting in a lot of left over.

There are many other environments, which strengthen selfishness, more and more as children grow older, or at least while they are under their parents’ overflowing attention. Therefore, we should have a household cultural training that will instill children with unselfishness, starting from their birth and keeping at it until unselfishness becomes their habitual character as they grow up.

Cultural training in the past did not encourage children’s selfishness so much as does its present counterpart. It is easy to have peace among people who detest and fear selfishness. The sin of selfishness clouds our vision of important issues to the point where we can no longer see what is right or wrong or even have a desire to know the difference. Selfishness is the opposite of love, the filling up of the ego to the point where my own happiness and well-being takes on an importance that outweighs everything and everyone else in the world. I come to the place where I will do anything in order to achieve my own selfish aims—lie, cheat, and steal, even murder! Yes, murder.

The pages of history have been stained red with the blood of the innocent victims of selfishness. It matters not whether the perpetrator is after a kingdom or chewing gum, selfish covetousness stands at nothing in order to get what it desires. As Christians, we walk amongst the nonbelievers amidst of the spiritual warfare that persists daily. It is important that our focus is not on us. According to the theory of psychological egoism, each person is so constituted that he/she will look out only for his own interest, self-interest. Therefore, it is

SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

unreasonable to expect people to behave “altruistically.” Human nature being what it is, people will respond to the needs of others only when there is something in it for them. Jesus Christ emulated pure altruism. Roget’s II: The New Thesaurus defines unselfishness as “the quality or state of being generous: big-hearted, bounteousness, magnanimity, openhandedness.” Jesus had to deal with difficult people daily. The Jewish religious leaders and political groups desired to take cheap shots at Jesus’ credibility constantly confronted Him. God knows that we have to put up with people we do not like. He also knows that it is through these difficult people that we learn life’s most powerful lessons and virtues. Philippians 2:3-13 affirms that we should:

Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only for his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Where do we find difficult people? Well, we find difficult people practically everywhere; work, in another passenger vehicle, school, home, etc. We cannot avoid difficult people because they are everywhere. We, as Christians, must continue to fight the good fight of faith when dealing with difficult people. No, I am not a supporter of the WWJD (What Would Jesus Do); contrarily, I am a proponent of the WDJJ (What Did Jesus Do). We must stay focused on the fact that it is not by our will that anything gets accomplished but it is Jesus that is in us that is greater than he that is in the world, we are/should be totally reliant on Jesus to see us through.

I knew a young boy who played monopoly with his grandmother every holiday season. She was from Ohio. She was a really good player and she would win every time she played her grandson. She would always say that she was teaching her grandson a lesson or two. As the boy grew older and wiser, he became more proficient in playing monopoly. He always envisioned that one day he would defeat his grandmother. On his thirteenth birthday, grandma made an unexpected visit. He had been practicing all year and when he saw his grandma he challenged her to a game of monopoly. She obliged his request. The grandson truly improved his game, because he won every block and practically all the money. At the end of the game, his grandmother said, "You have learned your lesson well, but there is one more lesson yet to learn." The grandson looked in amazement. She told him in her experienced voice that although he won all the streets, hotels, houses, and money, everything that he had would still go back in the box.

We scurry through life thinking that everything that God blesses us with is ours. I like to believe that nothing that I have is meant for me, but someone else.

Jesus Dealt with Difficult People

JESUS WAS CHALLENGED AND PURSUED RESTLESSLY by many difficult people. The Pharisees, strict religious group who advocated miniscule obedience to the Jewish law and traditions, constantly challenge the authenticity of Jesus ministry. They were very hypocritical, following the letters of the law while ignoring its true intent. They rejected Jesus' claim as the Messiah because Jesus did not accept or permit their false traditions associated with notoriously wicked people. "Woe to these people," Jesus would say. They were also very influential in the synagogues (Matthew 5:20; 23:1-36; Luke 6:2; 7:36-47).

The Sadducees represented the wealthy, upper class Jewish priestly party. They rejected the authenticity and authority of the Ever-living Bible beyond the five books of Moses. They believed the Pentateuch alone (Genesis-Deuteronomy) to be God's word. They profited in biblical times from the business in the Temple. The Sadducees and the Pharisees made up the Jewish Supreme Court. That's why every time they saw Jesus talking, healing, eating, etc., they would try to bombard Him with carefully worded questions with the intent to prove Jesus was heretic. The Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead, namely Jesus. Thought the Temple could also be used to

transact business, that is why Jesus tumbled over all the “for profit” items in the Temple.

Now for the twist, both the Pharisees and Sadducees disliked each other, but they became allies in their common hatred and jealousy for Jesus. The Scribes, Herodians, Zealots, and Essences were the other group of people who Jesus had a difficult time with. What are difficult people who join other difficult people? I call them a larger group of difficult people. Jesus wasn't only faced with one difficult person; he was perplexed by a group of difficult people who wanted to kill him. Matthew 3:4-11 (Life Application Bible) provides us an example of the treachery performed by the Pharisees and Sadducees to John the Baptist:

John's clothing was woven from camel's hair and he wore a leather belt; his food was locusts and wild honey. People from Jerusalem and from all over the Jordan Valley, and in fact, from every section of Judea went out to the wilderness to hear him preach, and they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to be baptized, he denounced them. "You are sons of snakes!" he warned. "Who said that you could escape the coming of the wrath of God? Before being baptized, prove that you have turned from sin by doing worthy deeds. Do not try to get by as you are, thinking, 'We are safe for we are Jews—the descendants of Abraham.' That proves nothing. God can change these stones here into Jews! And even now the axe of God's judgement is poised to chop down every unproductive tree. They will be chopped and burned. With water I baptize those who repent of their sins; but someone else is coming, far greater than I am, so great that I am not worthy to carry his shoes! He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He will separate the chaff from the grain, burning the chaff with never-ending fire, and storing away the grain."

SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

John's reaction to the false teachers was very bitter and cold, but he was speaking the truth. The truth hurts because like the word of God, it cuts like a two-edged sword. We will expound on how individuals respond to truth in our next book called *The Five Steps to Spiritual Adoration*.

The Pharisees and Sadducees could not discern what John was professing because they were listening with carnal ears. It is my divine inclination that although John was bothered by their appearance, he was able to render a virtue from God to the myriad of onlookers present. Imagine for a moment if they hadn't shown up. God causes all things to come together for the good, for those that love God and are called according to his purpose. I am not implying that it is good to be as adamant with the difficult people in your life as John demonstrated when dealing with the Pharisees and Sadducees because God may want you to implement a different approach.

Dealing with Difficult People

JESUS, WHEN FACED WITH CRITICISM FROM the Pharisees and Sadducees, demonstrated several techniques to counter their attacks. Jesus confronted, talked, questioned, or merely listened to his offenders, the Pharisees and Sadducees. We have the same options available to us. We can pray for the option that best fits your specific situation. Personally, I have exercised these options especially when dealing with difficult people I encounter and it works. When dealing with difficult people first pray and try one or more of the following options:

- Be observant;
- Assess the true issue;
- Recognize the difficult person's defensiveness;
- Avoid religious debates;
- Establish rapport when necessary;
- Wait for responsiveness;
- Use spiritual tact; and
- Spiritual Discernment.

When confronted by the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus turned madness into sanity by turning what they meant for bad into good. Jesus used the pride of the Pharisees and Sadducees

SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

to deliver infinite wisdom to all those who were there. He knew their teachings were confusing God's children. Matthew 12:38-41 highlights some Jewish leaders and Pharisees who came to Jesus asking Him to show them a miracle to prove he was the true Son of God.

Jesus told them, "Only an evil faithless nation would ask for further proof; and none will be given except what happened to Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah was in the great fish for three days and three nights, so I, the Messiah, shall be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. The men of Nineveh, Capital of the Assyrian Empire, shall arise against this nation at the judgement and condemn you. For when Jonah preached to them, they repented and turned to God from all their evil ways. And now a greater than Jonah is here—and you refuse to believe him."

Which option did Jesus select when dealing with these difficult people in the above verse? That is right; he used all of them. The Pharisees had an unsuccessful way of trying to corner Jesus in a situation where he would contradict himself. They asked Jesus, "What was the most important Law of Moses?" Jesus rendered the two most compelling virtues that we Christians should consider in all situations. Through the Pharisees' questions, Jesus was able to employ His spiritual wisdom (Matthew 22:36):

Jesus responded, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. The second most important is similar: 'Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.' All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets stem from these two laws and are fulfilled if you obey them. Keep only these and you will find that you are obeying all the others."

Wow, what a retort! Jesus was asked a question designed to trick Him, but instead he presented to these difficult people a virtue that impacted their lives forever. When you give something to someone that they do not deserve in an applicable situation, you not only give them love, but you give them grace.

When dealing with difficult people, God wants us to express our unselfishness. I recommend that we let our supreme goal be to make others happy in order to gain happiness in our own lives. Never think that you are doing good things in other people's lives for your own pleasures or that there will be a reward awaiting you. Unselfishness is exemplified when we are able to do good for others despite personal reservations or discomfort. Are you an unselfish Christian? This is the question we must ask ourselves each day. Spirituality is a deliberate attempt to break from selfish strongholds so that we can realize our true nature.

M. Gandhi wrote a short article called "Unselfishness and Selfishness." He expressed that the world provides enough for every man's need, but not for every man's greed. We are selfish by human nature but when we are born again into the family of Jesus Christ we must become acclimated to Christ-like behavioral changes that transform and conform us into the image of Christ.

The whole idea of human life can be put into that one word, unselfishness. Unselfishness is derived from more practicing; only people have not the patience to practice it. Are you unselfish? That is the question. The goal of all nature is freedom, and freedom is to be attained only by perfect unselfishness; every thought, word, or deed that is unselfish takes us towards the goal, and, as such, is called moral. All ethics, all human action and all human thought, hangs on the one idea of unselfishness. The perfectly unselfish man is the most successful. Spirituality means to undertake this endeavor

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

willingly, voluntarily, and consciously. Spirituality is a deliberate attempt to break from selfish stranglehold of our genes so that we can realize our true nature: Divine, all-encompassing, universal personality. This all may appear too simple to talk about, theorize, or to discuss, but to put this concept of ‘potential divinity’ into the practice for its full realization is really a daunting task. The physiology, social customs, family bonds, idea of duty towards others, all try to prevent us from undertaking such a journey on the road to freedom.

Progressive Calvinism, May, 1958
The Three Attributes Determining Selfishness

WHEN MEN HEAR THE WORD *SELFISHNESS* used frequently and admonishingly, they should think of medieval scholasticism. There was in that age often a “playing with words.” The demand today for unselfishness is a similar “playing with a word.” There are three attributes, which should be included in the definition of the term *unselfishness*. They are:

1. **WHO** is the beneficiary of the action?
2. **AT WHOSE COST** is the action performed?
3. **WHO** decides on the action?

QUESTION 1: WHO IS THE BENEFICIARY OF AN UNSELFISH ACT?

There is always presumed to be a beneficiary of an unselfish act, namely, someone other than the actor.

It is, of course, possible that an act finally benefits neither the actor, nor his intended beneficiary, but a third person or a group of persons; in this situation, the act is usually not considered to be unselfish because it was not *intended* that way.

QUESTION 2: AT WHOSE COST IS THE ACTION PERFORMED?

In judging whether an act is selfish or unselfish, it is fairly common to ignore whether the actor is intending something for someone else (1) at the actor's own cost, (2) at the cost of the supposed beneficiary, or (3) at the cost of a third person or persons. This is an inexcusable indifference. If an act intended for the benefit of another is at the actor's own cost, it obviously qualifies as being unselfish in its cost aspects. If an act intended for the benefit of the beneficiary is at the beneficiary's cost, then the act is coercion. The wishes of an actor are imposed on another at the latter's cost, whether he likes it or not. Almost certainly he does not like it, or he would have done it at his own initiative. If an act intended for the benefit of another is at the cost of neither the actor nor the beneficiary but at the cost of a third person or a group of persons, then the act is not unselfish but a theft; Peter has been robbed to pay Paul. The world is full of "unselfish" people who wish to help someone or several *at the expense of a third party*. Such "unselfish" people should not be praised as unselfish, but should be condemned as thieves. There is a difference (of many) between naive ethics and the science of economics. The one to which we refer consists in ethics often *ignoring who pays for an act* and looking only at the intended result and the proposed beneficiary. But economics, until widely corrupted by Marxian attitudes, was rather careful in regularly considering *cost*. Economics systematically asks who is paying for this.

QUESTION 3: WHO DECIDES ON THE ACTION?

Finally, the third standard by which to judge whether an act is selfish or unselfish is *who decides on the action*? This is the commonly overlooked factor in the situation. The decision can be made by one of three—the beneficiary, the one who foots the bill for the unselfishness, or a third person or persons. If the beneficiary decides and demands that something is to be done for him, then the fact that another responds does not make the act unselfish. The man who pays is merely being robbed. The beneficiary is selfish; but the man who pays is neither selfish nor unselfish; he is a victim of coercion, the sin forbidden in the Sixth Commandment. If the man who foots the bill for the act makes the decision himself to do something for another, then the act must certainly be described as being intended unselfishly. If a third party or parties make the decision but do not pay the cost, they are not entitled to any credit. This is another case where the right word is not *unselfishness*, but *theft* and *coercion*.

More Unselfishness Scriptural References

1. Romans 12:10 – Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;
2. Romans 15: 1-3 – We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.
3. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 – For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men that I might

by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

4. 1 Corinthians 10:24 – Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.
5. 1 Corinthians 10:33 – Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.
6. 1 Corinthians 13:4 – Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;
7. 2 Corinthians 5:14 – For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.
8. 2 Corinthians 8:9 – For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.
9. Philippians 2:3 – Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.
10. James 2:8 – If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.

*SEVEN SPIRITUAL CONFORMITIES
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*

11. Hebrews 13:2-3 – Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so [doing] some have unwittingly entertained angels. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.
12. Galatians 6:2 – Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
13. Proverbs 19:17 – He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and he will pay back what he has given.
14. Proverbs 21:13 – Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be heard

Conclusion

Our Exploration

WE HAVE REACHED THE END OF our Seven Spiritual Conformities through Jesus Christ but in reality it has just begun. I pray that God blesses you with the essential spiritual will power to expand your spiritual maturity. I hope that this exploration has given you an opportunity to explore these seven conformities from a deeper perspective. I also would like to express how important it is that you commit these conformities to memory. Remember that to be in Christ you must possess patience, trust, visions, values, wisdom, humility, and unselfishness. Each of these qualities marks a characteristic that can be learned and grown. I encourage you to read and study your Bible every day, because blessed is he that meditates in the LORD.

God through Christ has accepted us. God wants for all of us to be conformed into the image of Christ because his trendsetting life provides us the template for salvation and life everlasting with God. When we embrace Jesus' example of how to live the perfect life, we open up the doors of heaven. God wants us to confess with our tongues and believe in our heart that Jesus Christ, the eternal son of God, lived,

ministered, died, was resurrected, and ascended into heaven for forgiveness of our sins, but he wants us to grow in him too.

As a child I thought like a child but when I became a man, I put away childish things. When we accepted Christ in our life, the regeneration of our spirit was consummated like a child that has just exited its mother's womb. The cute and cuddly infant adorned by its parents wasn't going to remain small and helpless; however, the child grew and matured, and eventually became independent of his/her parents and possessed its own identity. Unlike the child who becomes independent of his/her parents, Jesus wants us to remain dependent upon him for direction, knowledge, wisdom, comfort, and all of our needs.

When we accepted Christ, we became new cute and cuddly spiritual babes. Jesus rejoiced and the Heavens opened up. At this point, the Holy Spirit was now able to abide in you and you in Him. 1 John 4:4 states, "Little children, you are of God, and have overcome them; for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Jesus sees a great need for us to be spiritually mature in Him. He wants us to be transformed into his image, by living like him. He left us the examples of patience, trust, vision, values, wisdom, humility, and unselfishness for us to assimilate and implement in our daily walk of faith.

The next book in this series of inspirations from God is entitled *The Five Steps to Spiritual Adoration*. Please brethren; remember that our position in Jesus Christ changes our condition. May the grace of our LORD Jesus Christ be with us. May God's love and the Holy Spirit's friendship be with you.

Remember Romans 8:29-30 states the following:

For from the very beginning God decided that those who came to him—and all along he knew who would—should become like his Son, so that his Son would be the First, with many brothers. And having chosen us, he called us to come to him and when we came,

he declared us “not guilty,” filled with Christ’s goodness, gave us right standing with himself, and promised us glory.

We All Belong to God

I’m concerned today; I know God did not want me to feel this way. I try to live according to God’s will. But the people of the world give my heart a chill. They laugh one day and the next they run. They act as if God can’t see them but God created everything. It’s hard to lead the children of God to the light. For they run to the shadows in the darkness of night. In my concern Jesus spoke to me in church. Remember I’m the savior I died but I roam the earth. For we must keep our heart in perfect condition for all God’s children are on a mission. Leave the ways of mankind to me, for God’s smile alone is all that you and I need because we all belong to God...Selah!

—Debbie Pinnock (my mother)