



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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Having a Relationship with God through Prayer

If you could ask Jesus to teach you how to do one thing, what would it be? It would be an exciting opportunity, since he knows everything. You could ask him how to pick the right stocks, or how to get the job you always wanted. You could ask him how to be a great athlete, or how to get so-and-so to fall in love with you. You could ask him to show you how to find the cure for cancer, or how to have the greatest marriage, or how to raise kids right. It would be a great opportunity to be able to ask the Lord to teach you one thing.

The disciples had this opportunity when they walked the earth with him. They saw him perform great miracles, but there's no record that they ever asked him how they could perform miracles. They heard him teach life-changing truths, but there's no record that they ever asked him the secret to being a great teacher. They saw him attract huge crowds, but there's no record that they ever asked him the key to building a big following.

What did they ask Jesus to teach them? In [Luke 11:1](#), they asked him, “**Lord, teach us to pray.**” Out of all the things they could have asked Jesus to teach them, they asked him to teach them to pray. Why? Because they had seen in his prayer life the most exciting thing in the world: a real relationship with God. In fact, their request to teach them to pray came right after hearing him pray:

Luke 11:1 (NASB)

¹“It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.”

They heard in his prayer life a real relationship with God, and there was nothing more exciting.

In his introduction to the Model Prayer, the verses preceding the actual prayer, Jesus taught that we can all have a real relationship with God through prayer:

Matthew 6:5-8 (NASB)

⁵“When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

⁶But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.

⁷And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

⁸So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”

In [verse 6](#) Jesus said, “**But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.**” This is one of the most remarkable statements in the Bible.

Jesus says that when we go to prayer, Almighty God himself responds:

- He “*sees what is done in secret*” (our act of going to prayer)
- He will “*reward you*” (for going to prayer)

This is amazing if we take it seriously (and remember, that’s the key to understanding the Model Prayer, realizing that Jesus would not have told us to engage in prayer that didn’t work). Almighty God, who has the whole universe to run, *responds* when you go to prayer. He *notices* what you’re doing, and he even *rewards* it. The point is, Almighty God is responding to you. There’s a real *relationship* happening here!

It’s exciting, isn’t it?

THREE REQUIREMENTS

In these verses introducing the Model Prayer, Jesus lists three requirements we must meet if we want to have a real relationship with God through prayer.

The first requirement is desire

We must desire a relationship with God more than we desire the approval of other people.

Matthew 6:5 (NASB)

⁵“When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”

Jesus said some people pray only to look good to others. In his day they did this in the “*synagogues*,” the first century version of the local church, and on “*street corners*.” He called them “*hypocrites*.” In the Greek, the language of the New Testament, the word is *hupokrites*, and in Jesus’ day it literally meant an actor. Greek and Roman actors wore large masks when they performed a play. The masks had built-in mechanical devices for magnifying the voice. Jesus was saying that people who prayed only to impress others were like actors wearing masks and using false voices. They wanted to look good to others, to seem spiritual, but they really didn’t have a prayer relationship with God. And looking good to others, Jesus said, would be their only reward. They would receive nothing from God.

There’s nothing wrong with praying in public. Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets all did it. It’s only wrong if our *motivation* is “*to be seen by men*,” or if praying in public is the only place we pray.

To have a relationship with God through prayer we must desire it—and we must desire it for its own sake, not to impress others. How would a husband feel if the only time his wife showed him affection and paid him attention was in public or at family gatherings, while at home she had nothing to do with him? He would feel that she didn’t really love him, that it was a show. I imagine God feels the same way if we don’t have time for him except in public.

The first requirement for a real relationship with God through prayer is desire.

The second requirement is a meeting place

Matthew 6:6 (NASB)

⁶“But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father

who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

We need to have a place we can meet privately—even secretly—with God. Jesus did. **“In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there” (Mark 1:35)**. He met privately with God first thing in the morning. This was his top priority.

After feeding the five thousand with the five loaves and two fish, he sent the crowd away and **“He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone” (Matthew 14:23)**. He sent the crowd away, and then he went and met with his Father. It was more important to him to be alone with God than with an adoring crowd.

Why does our meeting place with God need to be private? So we can be sure we’re praying for God’s eyes only, that our motivation is just to be with him. If we **“publicize”** our prayer life, our motivation might be to look spiritual to others. But if we’re praying for God’s eyes only, God knows.

And Jesus said that Almighty God will respond to this! He will **“reward”** us. Would you like to receive a **“reward”** from God today? Jesus has told you exactly what to do.

How will God reward us for meeting with him? One reward is some peace and quiet. People’s lives today are often too busy and crowded. You might say that they lack margin. Margin on a page, of course, is the empty space around the text. Margin in our lives is some space to breathe. We tend to run from one activity to another, one meeting to another, and are always connected—by cell phones and email and text messages and the Internet and laptops and every other gadget you can think of. Some private time in a meeting place with God will help build some margin in our life, help us remember what is really important.

Another reward for meeting with God—perhaps the main reward Jesus was referring to—is answered prayer. If we meet with God for his eyes only, he will gladly do things for us.

I used to get my hair cut in an old-fashioned barber-shop (that is when I use to have hair). A TV in the corner played daytime programs. Magazines were strewn here and there on empty chairs. Hair clippings gathered on the floor. The barber was a hard-working entrepreneur who had moved to the Los Angeles area from Chicago. He knew I was a pastor. One day, when no one else was in the shop, he opened up and told me why he believed in prayer.

His unit got caught in a rice paddy in Vietnam. For weeks they were hemmed in and couldn’t get out. They were in constant danger from enemy fire. They were eaten by leeches. Finally, a helicopter rescued them.

It was a miserable time, and the barber freely admitted that combat was not for him. So back in camp, while his friends were out “whoring and drinking,” as he put it, he went to chapel and prayed to be spared any more combat action. While his friends were out partying, he went and met with God about the desire of his heart.

Not long after offering his prayer, he found his path crossing an officer’s. Before he knew what he was saying, he found himself asking, “Sir, you need a barber?” He told me he didn’t know why he said it—he hadn’t thought of it the moment before.

The officer stopped in his tracks. “You a stateside barber?” he asked. “Licensed?”
“Yes, sir.”

The officer placed a call to a general, who had just lost his regular barber. The officer asked if he’d like a new one. And with that my barber became the general’s barber. He never had to return to combat. When he was leaving Vietnam, he inquired about his old unit and was told, “They were all killed.” The barber told me he wasn’t a religious man, and it wasn’t until years later that it dawned on him that God had answered that prayer in the chapel, and saved his life.

The main reward of a meeting place with God is **answered prayer**.

We’ve seen so far that the first requirement for a real relationship with God through prayer is desire, and the second requirement is a meeting place.

The third requirement is trust that he hears us

Matthew 6:7 (NASB)

7 “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.”

Jesus said we don't have to use “*many words*” (v.7) to be heard in prayer; we don't have to *earn* a hearing by how long we pray, how loud we pray, or how hard we pray. Jesus said our Heavenly Father knows what we need before we ask him. Jesus is telling us we can trust that God hears the prayers of our heart.

The third requirement for a real prayer relationship with God is **to trust that he hears us**. Trust is a necessity for every relationship. Do you draw close to people you don't trust? No, you stay away from them. Trust is a necessity for a relationship. To have a real relationship with God through prayer, **we must trust that he hears us**.

One thing that will help us trust that God hears us is to remember that he has more than one answer to prayer. Many have lost confidence in prayer because they asked for something and didn't get it. They've concluded that prayer must not work, at least for them. They have failed to understand that God, like any good parent, has more than one answer to a request. Usually when we talk about answers to prayer, we're talking about the “Yes” answer—when we get what we want. But that's just one answer, though admittedly the most popular one.

God has at least **four different answers to prayer:**

1) “No” is one answer to prayer.

Sometimes we're asking for something that is not God's will for us. What we want may be bad for us down the road, or it may deflect us from God's ultimate plan for us. As parents, don't we tell our children “**No**” sometimes? Don't we shake our heads at parents who don't seem to have this ability with their children, and end up spoiling them? Certainly our perfect Heavenly Father is sometimes go-

ing to say “**No**” to his children's requests.

2) “Slow,” as in “slow down,” is another answer to prayer.

Sometimes the *timing* is not right. It's God's will to give us what we're asking for, but not yet. He is going to answer the prayer, but on his timetable, not ours. We need to “**slow down**” and wait.

3) “Grow,” as in “grow up spiritually,” is another answer to prayer.

Sometimes the Lord has to wait for us to mature before he can give us what he wants to give us. We're not ready yet. We've all heard stories of lottery winners who end up broke and broken. They weren't ready to handle all that money.

God, on the other hand, likes for his children to *grow* into their blessings and responsibilities. He's generally a rather slow promoter. Joseph, though innocent, spent years in prison before God elevated him to his place of responsibility and authority in Egypt. Moses spent forty years in the desert before God deemed he was ready for his great calling. The apostles spent three years on the road with Jesus before being released into their ministry.

God wants us to grow into our blessings, so that we will have the ability to handle them well. Therefore, sometimes his answer to prayer is “**Grow.**”

4) “Go,” as in “Yes, it's a go!” is the fourth answer to prayer.*

When the *request* is right (it's God's will), the *timing* is right (it's God's time), and *we're* right (we've matured enough to handle what we're asking for), God says “**Yes**” to our prayer!

“**Yes**” is our favorite answer, but we need to remember that all the answers are good for us. He has heard us whatever the answer. We must trust this to have a real prayer relationship with God.

A REAL RELATIONSHIP

According to Jesus, each one of us has the incredible ability to *move* Almighty God. It doesn't take some superhuman effort. You don't have to be one of a few

select holy men. You don't have to be a theologian. All you have to do is take the simple step Jesus said to take: "...go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you" ([Matthew 6:6](#)). God himself will respond to you: he will notice, and he will reward!

Can you think of anything more exciting than that? Your Heavenly Father is waiting for you.

SUMMARY

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray because they saw in his prayer life the most exciting thing in the world: **a real relationship with God**. In the introduction to the Model Prayer, Jesus taught that we can all have such a relationship, that God himself *responds* when we take the time to meet with him in prayer—he *sees* us, he *rewards* us. Jesus listed three requirements necessary for such a relationship: **the desire for one, a meeting place, and trust that God hears us.**

DIGGING DEEPER....

Let's dig a little deeper now and see what some other Bible passages have to say about the reality of having a relationship with God through prayer. We'll look at what the Scriptures say, then consider how it applies to our personal lives.

BAD NEWS? (FROM [ISAIAH 38:1-22](#))

How do you react when you receive bad news? A wrong reaction, I'm sure you've noticed, can make matters worse.

Not too long ago I read an article in a magazine while flying from the west coast to the east coast. Mrs. Monroe of Darlington, Maryland, learned what can happen when we make the wrong move when confronted with bad news or difficult circumstances. This mother of eight came home from the grocery store one afternoon to find five of her children in the living room playing with skunks! These skunks had somehow found their way into her house—bad news indeed. Things might have turned out okay if Mrs. Monroe had kept her cool and calmly directed the children to lead the skunks back outdoors. Instead,

she panicked and screamed, and that was her mistake. She scared the kids and the skunks—and you know what skunks do when they're afraid! Our reaction to bad news and difficult circumstances can make all the difference.

How do you react when you receive bad news? King Hezekiah of Judah received some bad news. He was deathly ill when the prophet Isaiah came to him, and Isaiah's message was not what Hezekiah wanted to hear:

[Isaiah 38:1^b \(NASB\)](#)

¹“In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.’”

This was the height of bad news: being told he was going to die. And it wasn't news that came from a doctor or lab technician or any other human, but from God himself. It was very bad news.

Hezekiah's reaction to it saved his life. As the prophet left his room, the Bible says,

[Isaiah 38:2 \(NASB\)](#)

²“Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD.”

Here's what he prayed:

[Isaiah 38:3 \(NASB\)](#)

³“And said, ‘Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Your sight.’ And Hezekiah wept bitterly.”

What happened? God sent Isaiah to Hezekiah again, this time with a better message:

[Isaiah 38:5-6 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵“Go and say to Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, ‘I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.’

⁶‘I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city.’”

God promised Hezekiah more years, and he promised to protect Jerusalem from the enemies that threatened her.

God's word came true. Hezekiah was healed. Isaiah told the attendants to ***“Let them take a cake of figs and apply it to the boil, that he may recover.”*** ([Isaiah 38:21 \(NASB\)](#)), and this application of natural medicine brought about Hezekiah's healing (which, by the way, is evidence that doctors and the medical profession are God's partners in his healing work). And Jerusalem was spared invasion in Hezekiah's lifetime.

What brought about these wonderful answers to prayer? I believe the key is found in the words, ***“Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD”*** ([Isaiah 38:2 \(NASB\)](#)). By turning his face to the wall before he prayed, Hezekiah was indicating that he was looking to God for help. He was beyond the help of people. Being king was not going to help him out of this problem. It was God or no one. That wall became a ***meeting place*** with God for Hezekiah. God saw and responded.

When bad news strikes, how do you respond? Think about a recent occasion when bad news came to you—when tough times popped up. **How did you respond?**

The difficult circumstance:

Your response:

Based on what you've learned from Hezekiah's experience, how should you have responded?

(It's not wrong, of course, to turn to other people for help when problems occur, or to make use of the resources and blessings we have at our disposal. But we often make things worse—or at least not any better—because we forget our greatest resource when bad news strikes: our Heavenly Father. Turn to him and see what he does.)

ONE THING NEEDED (FROM [LUKE 10:38–42](#))

Once when Jesus was traveling, he was welcomed into the home of a couple of sisters named Martha and Mary. These sisters were exact oppo-

sites. Martha was a go-getter. As soon as Jesus entered her home, she got busy getting things ready. You can imagine how she felt. After all, the biggest celebrity in the nation was in her home, along with his entourage. There were refreshments to get, rooms to straighten, towels to put out—or whatever first century Holy Land hospitality required. The Bible says she ***“was distracted with all her preparations”*** ([Luke 10:40a \(NASB\)](#)).

Her sister Mary had a different response to Jesus' visit. She didn't help Martha get anything ready. She didn't worry about making the house respectable for the neighbors who were dropping in to check out this traveling miracle worker. She didn't offer to run next door to borrow some extra bread. What did Mary do? The Bible says she ***“was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word”*** ([Luke 10:39 \(NASB\)](#)). She just sat there in Jesus' presence while her sister Martha did all the work.

Well, you can imagine how Martha felt about the third or fourth time she brought in a plate from the kitchen—and there was Mary just sitting there like one of the guests. Finally, it was too much, and she said to Jesus, ***“Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.”*** ([Luke 10:40^b \(NASB\)](#)).

How do you think Jesus responded to Martha's complaint? Do you think he sympathized with her? Maybe said something like, “You're right. Mary, you should get up and help your sister do the work”? His answer might surprise you:

[Luke 10:41-42 \(NASB\)](#)

⁴¹ **“But the Lord answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things;
⁴² but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”**

Jesus did not rebuke Mary. Rather, he ***commended*** her for choosing to sit before him and listen to his teaching. He even said that her choice was the ***“one thing ... necessary”*** in life.

What can he mean here, because he's certainly aware of all the necessities of life pressing in on us—work, financial issues, health concerns, family and relationship responsibilities, and so on? What can he mean that, in spite of all these concerns, the one thing needed

is to spend time with him? He means that time with him is the key to handling all of the concerns of life successfully. He means that if we will spend time with him, God himself will see to it that everything else works out.

In other words, time with God is the most *practical* thing we can do:

It gives us peace, which leads to wise decisions.

It gives us direction—as we listen to Jesus’ words in the Bible.

It gives us real help from God.

And it’s help we need. **USA Today** newspaper several years ago asked experts from various fields to estimate how much time was needed for the daily necessities of life—how much time was needed per day to exercise properly, to brush our teeth, to play with the kids, to drive to work, to get a good night’s sleep, and so forth. When all the estimates from all the experts were added up, the time needed for the daily necessities of life came to forty-two hours! In other words, there literally are not enough hours in the day to do everything the experts want you to do.

You may feel that way about your own life: overwhelmed with all you face. That’s why meeting with God is the most practical step you can take. God can do more by moving his little finger than you and I can with a lifetime of effort. That’s why Jesus says the one thing needed is to come to him. It will give us real help from God. He will see to it that everything else falls into place.

What are some things that compete for the “one thing needed” spot in your life?

How might these areas of your life improve if you spent time with Jesus first?

***PATIENCE* (FROM DANIEL 10)**

Americans aren’t big on patience. We’ve grown used to getting things fast and easy. An article in my local paper chronicled how we’ve become used to getting things quicker and quicker.

For example:

We used to have to wait days to get our pic-

tures. Then there was One-Hour Photo. Now there’s instant digital.

We used to have to spend some time in the sun to get a tan. Then came tanning salons. Now there are spray-on tans.

The average news story is only four sentences.

In European history there was such a thing as the Hundred Years War. When the latest War in Iraq had gone longer than a week, TV pundits were already wondering what had gone wrong.

In 1893, Cream of Wheat took 15 minutes to prepare, and it was considered a fast breakfast for the time. By 1939, Cream of Wheat was down to 5 minutes to prepare. Today it’s down to 30 seconds.

Even the old-fashioned world of classical music has changed. In Beethoven’s time, a classical music concert could last 6 hours. Even 15 years ago, the standard concert was 2 hours long. Today’s music lovers get restless if a program exceeds 90 minutes.

We have grown accustomed to instant cash from ATMs, microwave ovens, overnight delivery from across the country, fast cars, fast planes, fast computers, broadband Internet, and drive-through everything—from restaurants to banks to drugstores to Starbucks. Patience is not our strong suit. We like things fast and easy. (And you wonder why we are in such a mess spiritually speaking today).

Yet there are going to be times when we need to have patience, even in our modern society. A Chicago Tribune article estimated that the amount of time spent sitting at stoplights in a lifetime was six months! And the Texas Transportation Institute said the average American will spend about 50 hours per year in gridlock—trapped in traffic, bumper to bumper. We still need patience in our modern world.

And then there are those life moments when nothing will do but a patient sigh. A first grade teacher had such a moment when she had finished helping the last of her students, 32 in all, put on their galoshes. The last little girl said, “You know what, teacher? These aren’t my galoshes.” The teacher paused a moment, then removed one galosh and then the other from the girl’s feet. The girl said, “They’re my sisters, and she lets me wear them.” The teacher paused another moment, breathed

deeply, and put the galoshes back on the girl's feet.

We may not be big on it, but there are times when patience is a necessity.

That is true when it comes to prayer, too. We have seen in this teaching that God promises to see and reward us when we come to a *meeting place* with him in prayer, and that one of those rewards is answered prayer. God promised the reward would come, but he didn't promise when it would appear. It may appear immediately, it may appear a few days or weeks later, or it may appear much later. When the answer is delayed, we have a need for patience.

One of the things that will help us wait patiently is to realize that though the answer may not have appeared yet, it's already been sent. We see this remarkable truth in a story from the Prophet Daniel's life. Daniel was one of the Israelites taken to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar when he attacked and eventually overthrew Judah and Jerusalem. After being in exile a long time, Daniel began to pray for the return of his people to Jerusalem and for the future of his fallen nation.

One day he had a vision and a heavenly messenger appeared to him and said:

Daniel 10:12 (NASB)

¹² **“Then he said to me, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words.’”**

Notice that the heavenly messenger (who seems to be the angel Gabriel) told Daniel that his words of prayer had been heard **“from the first day ... and I have come in response to your words.”** God had heard Daniel's prayer and sent the answer from the moment Daniel prayed, but the angel was only now arriving with the answer (and it was 23 days later, as we'll see in a moment).

Isn't that an encouraging truth? Perhaps you've presented a request to God, and nothing has happened. The truth is nothing you've *seen* has happened. An answer, perhaps in the person of an an-

gel, has been sent.

Why the delay then? One possible reason is spiritual warfare. Look at the reason Gabriel gave Daniel for his delay:

Daniel 10:13 (NASB)

¹³ **“But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia.”**

Gabriel wasn't delayed by a human prince. The prince he ran into was in the spiritual realm, some kind of evil spirit who was seeking to exert influence in the **“Persian kingdom”** to hinder the return of the Jews to their land. Gabriel, the messenger angel (remember, he was the one who came with the news of Jesus' birth to Mary), had to have help from **“Michael,”** the warrior angel, to get through this demonic force. There was no doubt that he would get through, for he had been sent by God, but it did take time for him to get through, and help from Michael. Spiritual warfare delayed the answer to Daniel.

You might wonder how demons could possibly put up a meaningful fight against the angels of Almighty God. It's not because demons are anywhere near as strong, but it's because God allows demons to work in a region or situation where people are in agreement with them, whether they know it or not. God gave the earth to men—as I'll discuss in detail in later—and he's never taken it back. Generally speaking, he requires our agreement to work in the world; **that's the purpose of prayer.**

Spiritual warfare may have delayed the answer to your prayer. If so, it's not that there's any doubt the answer will come. It's just that there's a spiritual process that has to be worked out first—things in the background, which perhaps you know nothing about, that have to be cleared up.

So if you've met with God, and feel certain that what you've asked for is according to his will, but you've yet to see any results—be patient. You were heard from the moment you prayed, and the answer was sent. It just hasn't appeared yet.

What request have you made to God that you're still waiting on?

Do you feel like this is a situation where the delay might be due to spiritual warfare?

If not spiritual warfare, what might be another reason for the delay?

THE FIRST QUESTION **(FROM [GENESIS 3:1–24](#))**

What question does God ask Adam in the following verses?

Genesis 3:8-9 (NASB)

⁸“They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

⁹Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?”

God asked Adam:
(“*Where are you?*”)

This is the first recorded question that God ever asked a human being: “*Where are you?*” God asked this question right after Adam and Eve’s sin. In shame, they were hiding from him behind the trees in the garden. What I want you to notice is that Adam and Eve recognized “*the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden*” that day. Why? Because they were used to hearing it. It was God’s custom to come and visit with them “*in the cool of the day.*”

God’s desire from the beginning has been for a relationship with us. We can have that relationship today through prayer. We can have a meeting place with God. The first recorded question God asked a human is the question he still asks us today: “*Where are you?*”



CORAM DEO (Before the face of God)

Integrity, *Coram Deo*

(Continuation from last edition)

A NEW LIFE

Centered on Christ

To believers who had fallen back into such degeneration Paul writes, “**But you did not learn Christ in this way**” ([Ephesians 4:20 \(NASB\)](#)). The phrase “**learn Christ**” is a direct reference to salvation. Anyone who makes a profession of faith in Christ ought to have nothing to do with the ways of the world, either by participation or association. [James 4:4](#) says, “**Friendship with the world is hostility toward God**”; the ways of God and the ways of the world are not compatible. Any participation with the world is in effect a compromise of your new life. The very purpose of receiving Christ is to “**be saved from this perverse generation**” ([Acts 2:40](#)), and no one is saved who does not repent and forsake sin. To hold on to sin is to refuse God, to scorn His grace, and to nullify faith.

One of the first things we have to learn as Christians is not to trust our own thinking or rely on our own instincts. We now have the mind of Christ ([1 Corinthians 2:16](#)), and His is the only mind we can rely on. When we are faithful and obedient to our Lord, we will think like Him, act like Him, love like Him, and in every possible way behave like Him, so that “**whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him**” ([1 Thessalonians 5:10 \(NASB\)](#)).

To demonstrate the transforming nature of regeneration, Paul describes and defines the inherent realities of our new life in Christ. These are not exhortations—they are reminders of what occurred at the moment of conversion.

Strip Off the Old Self

Paul writes, “**In reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit**” ([Ephesians 4:22](#)). In contrast to the unregenerate person who continually resists and rejects God, the Christian hears the call to “**lay aside the old self.**” The verb means “**to strip off,**” as you would take off dirty

clothes. The tense indicates that this is a once-and-forever action that occurs at salvation.

The **“old self”** refers to believers in their unconverted state, which Paul describes as **“being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit.”** The gospel invitation is to lay aside that old self in repentance from sin, which includes not just sorrow about sin but a turning from sin to God.

Put On the New Self

As we lay aside the old self, we exchange it for something new: **“Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth”** ([Ephesians 4:23–24](#)). [Colossians 3](#) and [Romans 6](#) characterize this exchange as a union with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection, which can also be described as the death of the **“old self”** and the resurrection of the **“new self,”** who now walks in **“newness of life.”** Our union with Christ and our new identity clearly demonstrate that salvation is transformation.

Our salvation also means we will think differently: **“be renewed in the spirit of your mind.”** The best rendering of this present passive infinitive is as a modifier of the main verb **“put on.”** That means the renewal of our minds is the consequence of laying aside the old self and is the context for putting on the new self.

When you became a Christian, God initially renewed your mind and gave you a completely new spiritual and moral capability. That renewal continues throughout your life as you obey God’s will and His Word (cf. [Romans 12:1–2](#)). This process is not a one-time accomplishment but a continual work of God’s Spirit in you ([Titus 3:5](#)). Your resources in this process are always God’s Word and prayer. Through them you gain the mind of Christ ([Colossians 3:16](#)).

Your new self has been made in **“the likeness of God [and] has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth”** ([Ephesians 4:24](#)). That which was once darkened is now enlightened, learned in the truth, sensitive to sin, pure, and generous. Once characterized by wickedness and sin, we

are now characterized by **“righteousness and holiness.”** According to Peter, we are **“partakers of the divine nature”** ([2 Peter 1:4](#)). Each of us now has a new self—a holy and righteous inner person fit for the presence of God. This is the believer’s truest self.

To compromise this new self—this new creation—is the greatest injustice we can do to God. He saved us, transformed us, gave us a new nature, and renewed our minds. Thus the capacity to live a life of integrity is inherent in our new nature. You must grasp this fundamental element of your salvation before you can ever hope to build a life without compromise.





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Hebrews 6 – Part 1

Author's Note: The overview study for each chapter of Hebrews is intended to simply provide a basic understanding of some of the various key elements of each chapter and is not written as an in-depth theological treatise. However, because of the critical importance of properly understanding Hebrews 6, additional time will be given to the overview of this chapter.

It is important to begin to look carefully once again at a very difficult and troubling passage for many Christians – [Hebrews 6:4-6](#). The effort in addressing this passage will take the better part of the next three issues in this series. No doubt many Christians have read this passage at some time and felt, especially because of v4, that they had lost their salvation. This passage has always been a theological battleground, and is considered by many theologians to be the most difficult passage in the entire Bible. Because of that this part of the study will be much more exegetical study, or verse by verse and in depth. Some commentators say that the people mentioned in these verses have the “appearance” of being saved, but that they are counterfeit and not authentic believers. Others say that all who have

been born again have been enlightened, but not all who have been enlightened have been born again. So the conclusion is that these people have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit regarding salvation, but they have not been born again. So in that position, it would be viewed that the passage is talking about non-Christians.

In these verses there is the term which speaks about the impossibility of renewed repentance, and that is a crucial issue and concept that will partially govern the exegesis of the passage. For this author the individuals spoken of in this passage were redeemed individuals and not counterfeit Christians. Are there counterfeit Christians? Absolutely, but that is not the case in this passage. These are genuine Christians who unfortunately because of their personal neglect had forfeited the ability to hear God speak. The description here is that of people who were truly saved, but who refused to be open, responsive, and obedient to the Word of God and to the Spirit of God, and as a consequence, they became spiritually deaf – a sadly permanent and irrevocable condition in their life.

Now, it is important to begin by revisiting some of the warnings again. The first warning was in [Hebrews 2:1-3](#),

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him,

This first warning is addressed to Christians. The Bible is not written to non-Christians, but to Christians. Obviously, Scripture has application to lost people, but it must be appreciated that it is not written to them. So the writer says “**Therefore, WE**”, “**How shall WE**”. The writer’s use of the first person plural pronoun “we” indicates that he is including himself in the discussion, and the clear observation is that his audience in the case of this warning is believers. Secondly, the warning is about someone neglecting something that they actually have, which in this case is salvation. An individual cannot neglect a salvation that they do not have. He does not say, “**How shall we escape if we reject such a great salvation**”. Rather he says in v3 “**how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation**”. We neglect something if we do have it, but do not want to use it or

invest the proper time into it. This passage is about the Christian who neglects their salvation. The word “**neglect**” denotes to be careless with, not to care about. It comes from the Greek word “*ameleo*”, which is two words “*a*” and “*meleo*”. “*Meleo*” means to care, and “*a*” is a negative prefix – not. Therefore, not to care. So, the problem these Christians had was that they did not really seem to care that much about their salvation. It is the old adage that people want the blessings of salvation, but not the associated cost and personal sacrifice required to be a genuine disciple of Christ.

The second warning is in [Hebrews 3:7 – 4:13](#) where the writer warns his readers not to be like the Israelites who were redeemed by the blood of the lamb, but apart from Joshua and Caleb never entered into that for which they were redeemed. They never entered into what God had abundantly provided for them. The Israelites never lost being their being delivered from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb that was killed on the night they left Egypt. **HOWEVER, THEY NEVER ENTERED INTO CANAAN.** It could be put this way. **They never went back to what they were saved from, but they lost what they were saved for.** There was a point in time when God took an oath and swore that they would never be able to enter Canaan. [Numbers 14:20-24](#) says,

²⁰**Then the LORD said: “I have pardoned, according to your word; ²¹but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD—²²because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, ²³they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it. ²⁴But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it.**

Before this point they could enter, after this point they could not enter. **The point where God took the oath was the critical point** – and it is an undefinable, yet sovereign point in time. Where the long-suffering of God ends and His discipline begins is not something that can always be clearly identified

ahead of the events. At that point they fell and could not be renewed to repentance by Moses or anyone else. They were forgiven (“**pardoned**”, v20), but what God wanted to give them was lost. What God had already given them could not be lost, but what God wanted to give them could be lost – and unfortunately for them it was!

In [Hebrews 5:12-13](#), once again the author reproves the Christians.

¹²**For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.**

What the author is saying is that these Hebrew Christians are not really moving on with the Lord in such a way that they will be able to receive what God is articulating and imparting to them. I.e., for whatever reason they have become spiritually deaf. They have been Christians for a sufficient period of time and should be helping cultivate others to grow and move forward in their Christian life, but they just appear stuck at a very elementary place. Even the very simple things of God seem difficult for them to receive, and so they always need spiritual milk rather than solid food.

Please appreciate that at this point in the letter, the writer is preparing these Christians for the strong teaching that he is about to give to them. We might be able to call this a “spiritual wake-up call” for Christians who have become very spiritually sluggish. So the question for many Christians is whether or not they fear that some scandalous sin in their life means that they are in [Hebrews 6:4-6](#), and completely useless to God. In that case a word of encouragement is needed. What matters the most is not someone’s past, but their present openness to the Word of God and to the Spirit of God. It is not always how someone responded in the past, but rather how they are responding in the present. Obviously Christians, just like anyone else, can develop very poor habits, lifestyles, and directions for their life that will have a significant impact on their future. God’s spiritual law is that men, Christian and non-Christian, reap what they sow. So, this is not trying to give false encouragement, but rather a positive encouragement that a Christian’s openness and responsiveness to the Word of God and to the Holy Spirit’s working in their life proves

beyond any doubt that they are **NOT** in a [Hebrews 6:4-6](#) situation. To the contrary, they qualify for the lasting fruit that accompanies salvation as mentioned in [Hebrews 6:9](#).

⁹But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

Now, before entering into [Hebrews 6](#), it is important to spend some additional time in [Hebrews 5:11-12](#) again which says,

¹¹of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹²For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

It is critical to understand that the writer of Hebrews really fears for his readers. Please remember that this is a very pastoral letter. The author knows that something has happened to them spiritually, and so what he says is that they need someone to “**teach you again**” the ABCs of the Christian faith. The writer does not want these readers to become like those Israelites who died in the wilderness and never entered the Promise Land. So it is their current spiritual state that is really troubling the writer because they had all the appearances that they had stopped short of a fruitful Christian life. **WHAT A PERSON DOES WITH THE LIGHT THAT GOD GIVES TO THEM WILL GREATLY AFFECT THEIR ABILITY TO GRASP, UNDERSTAND, AND APPRECIATE THE TRUTH.** Look at how Peter states this in [II Peter 1:5-7](#),

⁵But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

This is not God taking the believer from A to Z, but from A to B, and from B to C, and from C to D. This is Peter’s way of saying “**Walk in the light**”. Then in v8, he says,

⁸For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What happens on the negative side is that if a person does not “**walk in the light**” ([1 John 1:7](#)) that God gives to them, then something happens to their spiritual faculties and abilities to both understand and respond to that light. Clearly this is not talking about someone’s intelligence. It is simply that they begin to slowly forfeit their spiritual ability to grasp and respond to God’s word. In fact, this is why much of what the writer talks about in [Hebrews 9-10](#) is in reference to judgment. It is because all believers are going to one day stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. If there is anything the devil wants, it is to get Christians to think that all that matters is being saved. However, that is not all there is to this simply because each believer will have to give an account to Christ relative to their spiritual walk and the integrity of their life lived not before the world, but before God Himself. There will be rewards given or rewards lost.

So, it appears from the language of these portions of [Hebrews 5 and 6](#), as well as the other warnings, that the writer really seems to fear for his readers and for their potential temporal and eternal loss. What [Hebrews 6:4-6](#) says is that it is apparently too late for some of them. Something has happened, and it is more than difficult to quantify what, how, and when – but something happened. Much of what happens negatively in a Christian’s life is often something that slowly happens over an extended period of time – just an ongoing unresponsiveness to the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. They are not going to have anything, and the ones to whom the author is talking he describes in [Hebrews 5:11](#) as being “**dull of hearing**”. No matter how hard he tries, no matter how much teaching they hear, no matter what is said – they simply have become “**dull of hearing**” and correspondingly unable to move forward in their Christian walk.

By this time these Christians should have been mature and able to teach others (v12) or the writer would not have corrected and admonished them as he did. Apparently, they had been saved for a sufficient period of time to have developed some kind of meaningful outworking of their salvation in their personal life. This state of spiritual inactivity, of having “**become dull of hearing**”, and of needing “**milk**” after such a sufficient time of having been a Christian is deeply rooted in the inability of these Christians to return to repentance in [Hebrews 6:6](#). To place this in a more sober way, what the writer is warning here is very serious. He is saying that

if these believers continue to let this sluggish spiritual mentality continue and not deal with it that they may very well reach a place where it will be impossible for them to change or to “**renew them (selves) again to repentance**”. That is a very serious phenomenon that can happen to a Christian, but it can and does happen. What the author is talking about in the phrase “**dull of hearing**” is an inability to hear God speak. That is why the writer said in [Hebrews 3:7-8](#),

⁷Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you will hear His voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness,

He repeats it again in [Hebrews 3:15](#),

¹⁵while it is said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

Again in [Hebrews 4:7](#) – the third time,

⁷...“Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”

Apparently the author is really concerned that his readers have lost their ability to hear God speak because they have progressively and increasingly hardened their hearts to the amazingly simple and basic truths of God. What the author is addressing here is very serious.

The ability to genuinely hear God is not something that primarily comes from book learning, but rather it comes through honoring God, through obeying God, and through taking His Word seriously. Obviously there are many professing Christians who are comfortable with their cultural salvation and in their mind they are perfectly satisfied with just being “saved” – and that is all. If that describes someone you know then they could very well be the spiritual state described in [Hebrews 6:4-6](#). The verses in [Hebrews 5:11-12](#) are what could be called a spiritually pre-malignant state. The [Hebrews 5](#) state is not something that is irreversible, but it is a warning sign similar to “drifting” in Hebrews 2. Men consistently have bloodwork done and have their PSA level checked. Why? It is because it is a pre-cursor and warning sign that something in their body may be in a pre-malignant state. At a personal level, I have had prostate cancer twice and so I regularly have to have my PSA levels checked to help

ensure that the cancer has not returned. The PSA is my physical pre-cursor to knowing my condition. In the same way, becoming “dull of hearing” is a pre-cursor to a much worse spiritual condition that will eventually develop in a person’s life.

When a person that has been saved for a while is not really developing spiritually, it indicates that there is cause for concern. If a Christian does not “**walk in the light**”, they go backwards. And obviously these Christians in [Hebrews 5](#) had gone backwards. They were now back at what we might call “square one”. They had “**become dull of hearing**”. This was not just a one-time event of not listening, but rather a more enduring habit that was now manifesting itself in much more obvious ways. So how did this happen? It happened through “**neglect**” – “*ameleo*”, not to care, to ignore, to be so busy that they had no time for God.

So for the author’s audience, what they have forfeited was the ability to hear God speak. These are people who were truly saved, but people who for whatever reason became spiritually deaf to the Word of God and to the Spirit of God. It bears repeating what was stated earlier: **WHAT A PERSON DOES WITH THE LIGHT THAT GOD GIVES THEM WILL GREATLY AFFECT THEIR ABILITY TO GRASP THE TRUTH**. The principle is really very simple. The more that a believer practices and obeys the truth, the more they will develop the faculties of spiritual perception. [John 14:21](#) amplifies this truth,

²¹He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

The writer really seems to fear for his readers and for their spiritual loss, and [Hebrews 6:4-6](#) says that it is apparently too late for some. Something has happened. They are not going to have anything. Someone is immediately going to ask the question that “*With God is not there always the opportunity to grow and to be restored?*” Maybe, maybe not. For the ones that the author is describing in [Hebrews 5:11](#) as being “**dull of hearing**”, it appears that no matter how hard the author tries, no matter how much teaching they hear, no matter what is said – they simply have become “**dull of hearing**”. They are in a spiritual state of sluggishness and slothfulness. The Greek word for “**dull**” means sluggish and slothful. It is the Greek word “*nothros*”. “*No*”

means no, and “*thros*” means to push. I.e., there is no push, no resolve, no determination, and no staying power. Here is the critical issue. When a person becomes “**dull of hearing**” what it means is that **they have lost their ability to hear God speak to them**, and eventually it leads them into **a spirit of unbelief**. We have all known people who were losing their physical ability to hear, and even when you talked to them they simply did not hear what you may have said. They were losing their ability to hear. [Hebrews 3:12](#) says,

¹²Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;

[Hebrews 3:19](#) says,

¹⁹So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

[Romans 11:8](#) describes EXACTLY what happens. This is a very sober warning, speaking of Israel.

⁸Just as it is written: “God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.”

[Matthew 13:14-15](#),

¹⁴And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; ¹⁵For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.’

What a dangerous condition – seeing, but not seeing and hearing, but not hearing. What the writer is warning here is very serious. He is saying that if these believers continue to let this sluggish spiritual mentality continue and not deal with it that they very well may reach a place where it will be impossible to change them. That is a very serious thing to happen to a Christian, but it can and does happen.

The author is really concerned that his readers have lost their ability to hear God speak. They have hardened their hearts to God through simple spiritual neglect. [Hebrews 5:13-14](#) says,

¹³For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he

is a babe. ¹⁴But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The word for “babe” is not the same Greek word for a baby or for a young child. It is a different word and means immature. It literally means “without the power of speech”. They cannot talk about spiritual things and they cannot explain spiritual things because they are “**unskilled in the word of righteousness**”. They have heard it and they have been taught it, but they are just “**dull of hearing**”. So, the question is really very simple “*What happens to Christians who do not grow?*” Paul partially addresses this in [I Corinthians 3:1-3](#) using the same words as was just read in [Hebrews 5:13-14](#),

¹And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. ²I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; ³for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

What these words describe is someone who is “**carnal**”. Vine’s dictionary says that the word “**carnal**” means sensual, controlled by fleshly appetites instead of by the Spirit of God. The person who is carnal simply does not know how to be led by the Spirit of God, so their fleshly appetites take over, dominate, and control their life. They have no spiritual discipline in their life. God speaks and leads, but they do not follow. In fact, they can hardly even hear when He does speak. They have become “**dull of hearing**” and “**not able**” to receive solid food – NOT ABLE. Do we understand what those two words mean – “**not able**”? Paul says that they are “**not able**” twice.

Unfortunately, there are Christians who never seem to mature. They casually and often unknowingly develop a habit of utter carelessness and indifference in their life. They become spiritually careless which in turn leads to spiritual ignorance. That condition is what characterizes these Hebrew Christians. **They have been careless and neglectful of their walk with God** and eventually have become very ignorant of either God or His ways.

SOLID FOOD IS FOR THE MATURE. So what is the “solid food” spoken of in [Hebrews 5:14](#)? The NIV translates it “strong meat”. Vines dictionary says this,

“A fuller knowledge of Christ requires the exercise of spiritual intelligence which is derived from the practical appropriation of what has already been received.”

Now, please understand something very important. The Christian faith is not head knowledge, but rather is something that is revealed to the believer by the Holy Spirit. Unless the Holy Spirit teaches the believer, he will not learn. Many Christians have little to no experience of the Spirit of God revealing and guiding them into His truth. They are just in a closed circuit, and they never know or learn what it means for the Holy Spirit to show them something. If a believer grieves the Holy Spirit, then most likely He will not reveal Himself to them. It may be bitterness, forgiveness, selfishness, disobedience, moral impurity, or simple indifference to His leading. Whatever it is, it grieves Him and it short circuits His work in a believer’s life. Nothing happens, nothing connects, and they do not grow. For young people, it could be something very basic like not honoring their father and mother. They argue and debate and complain. They fail to respect them, and so nothing happens spiritually. It could be that someone does not honor those that God has placed over them at work, or at school. They complain and gripe and always seem discontent and so nothing happens! It may be hanging around the wrong people. [I Corinthians 15:33](#) says that “**Evil company corrupts good morals**”. Christians need to be careful about letting Jonah get into their boat. He had a rebellious, stubborn spirit and it cost those people on the boat everything. Listen to [Jonah 1:5](#),

⁵Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.

[I Samuel 15:23](#) says,

²³For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king.”

That is how it works. Nothing happens spiritually, nothing connects spiritually – and these people do not grow. It just does not seem to bother people if they hold a grudge, or if they have a very critical spirit, or if they cannot speak to certain people. These are the areas of Christian’s lives that seriously grieve the Holy Spirit so that they are “not able” to grow. They can come to church week after week, month after month, year after year, and never grow. The Christian life is not like math or physics. I.e., it is not something intellectual that a believer learns. It is spiritual, and it has to be learned through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He has to reveal things to the believer. [I Corinthians 2:10-12](#) says,

¹⁰But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

If someone is in a spiritual stalemate in their life and they are not growing, the following are some practical things to help them.

First, when something difficult comes into a believer’s life, encourage them not to murmur about it, but rather to respond positively to it. Let God use it to make necessary changes in their life. Do not complain, let it run its full course. [James 1:2-4](#) says,

²My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Just wait, because it will end and when it ends, the believer can have the joy of knowing that they waited on God and let Him have His way in their life. If someone will do this one thing alone, they will start understanding the Bible in a way that they never have before.

Secondly, every believer should forgive people when they have been wronged. It is so vital to learn to love people that may hurt you, and let them know that you love them. This seems so hard for Christians, so difficult, and so trying. With forgiveness comes a spiritual

experience of warmth and peace and joy in the believer's heart.

Thirdly, just be willing to become nothing and to let other people have the spotlight and receive the credit. The believer should give their life away and allow other people to be first. The believer who does this will become a servant and will understand things that they never understood before. [Matthew 20:26](#) says,

²⁶...but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

What the writer says in [Hebrews 5:14](#) is simple – “solid food belongs to those who are of full age”, to those who are mature because they understand what is right and what is wrong, and they exercise themselves to do what is right. A new Christian needs milk, but if someone has been a Christian for many years, they should be mature. There comes a time in every believer's life when they penetrate another dimension of their spiritual life. God becomes very real to them and the Bible becomes alive. So in [Hebrews 6:1](#) the writer says,

¹Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection (maturity), not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

For many Christians, maturity seems to be an optional element. If they have it – great. If they do not have it - no big deal. It is almost as if they can take it or leave it. However, if a believer never weans themselves off of spiritual milk, in the end they will not be able to handle anything but milk. It is important to appreciate that the references in [Hebrews 5](#) to “solid food” are not references to theology. They are references to the believer's capacity to hear from God. Look at [Hebrews 5:14](#) again,

¹⁴But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

It is a habit. The term “reason of use” means a habit. That is why the NIV translates it “constant use”. A habit is when someone does something without having to think about it. When I am driving and see

a red light, I just stop. It is a habit. What the writer is saying is that maturity is something that becomes a habit. For instance, what may be an ordeal for a new Christian or an immature Christian is something a mature believer just abides in with dignity. It is just a habit. When Job's wife came to him and said “**Why don't you just curse God and die?**”, Job said, : “**You speak like a foolish woman.**” It never entered Job's mind to complain to God. These verses in [Hebrews 5:13-14](#) are not talking about studying the Bible and memorizing Scripture and going to church and praying and all of those kinds of activities. Those are great things to do and every believer should be doing them as a habit. However, that is not what the writer is talking about. **THE AUTHOR IS TALKING ABOUT A PERSON WHO BECAUSE OF CONSTANT USE (REASON OF USE, A HABIT) HAS DEVELOPED AN INSTINCTIVE AND INTUITIVE ABILITY TO RECEIVE THINGS FROM GOD.**

It is a habit to do what is right. When a believer forgives someone they do not at the same time think that they have really done something great. That is not a habit. It is just a lifestyle, and when wronged, they forgive simply because Jesus told them to and it has just become a way of life. Coming to church is a way of life, a habit, a lifestyle. Studying the Word is a way of life, a habit. Doing what God wants the believer to do has just become a part of their life. That is what it means by “constant use”, by “reason of use”.

So the idea in [Hebrews 6:1](#) of going on to perfection simply means developing spiritual habits so that the result is a sixth sense by which the believer is able to distinguish between good and evil. They have become what [Romans 12:2](#) explains as being “transformed by the renewing of your mind”, and the corresponding result is that the believer can now “prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”. They have reached a place in their life where they can hear God speak. I am amazed when I read the story of Abraham and his offering of Isaac. It is an unbelievable story. However, what is so amazing is that it never occurred to Abraham to do anything other than what God had told him to do. Why? It was because doing what God told him to do was a way of life. God had proved Himself faithful over and over and over. He never thought twice about

it. He just obeyed. It was a habit, an acquired habit. The same was true of Daniel's three friends. **THEY NEVER FLINCHED.** Throw us in the fire. They knew what they were going to do and were willing to obey God no matter what the cost might be to them personally.

Continued in next edition...

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