

# DRIVING THROUGH HEAVEN

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO KNOWING GOD  
AND LIVING IN HIS KINGDOM ON EARTH

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*Driving Through Heaven*

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## PART 1

### YOU CAN LIVE IN HEAVEN ON EARTH

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ... And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”*

Ephesians 1:3, 2:6

*“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household....”*

Ephesians 2:19

## CHAPTER 1

# IF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN HAS COME, WHY DO MOST PEOPLE MISS GOD'S BLESSINGS?

**God wants us to live in heaven while on earth.** He wants us to receive most of the blessings we imagine we'll have in heaven after we die. Since God is supreme ruler, the high king, then "Heaven" is the name of God's kingdom--his country. Jesus brought God's kingdom to earth, claiming our planet for God. Therefore, his kingdom surrounds us, even if it is only, in part, the heaven of which we dream.

We do not have to wait for death to live in God's kingdom and experience life there. As the Ephesians quotation that opened Part 1 states, *God has already given us every spiritual blessing found in heaven.* Deep in God's heart, his greatest longing and desire is that we choose to have a relationship with him in which we enjoy the fullness of his blessings--the Abundant Life he promised through his Son, Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

### **ONLINE BONUS: NEW TESTAMENT PROOF THAT GOD'S KINGDOM IS HERE**

Here is your first free online bonus, a list of scriptures supporting the truth that Jesus brought his kingdom to earth. Find this bonus and others at the book's website:  
**[www.DrivingThroughHeaven.com](http://www.DrivingThroughHeaven.com)**. Look for the "Bonuses" tab.

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<sup>1</sup> John 10:7-10

## The Abundant Life

The life God offers us on earth is the same life that he enjoys, full of “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*”<sup>2</sup> The bible describes this list as the “fruit” of his Spirit--the harvest we reap from living according to God’s design. Each fruit of his Abundant Life is a gift from God, but we must choose to receive them and share them with God and others.

**Love** is God’s way of living. *He is love.*<sup>3</sup> We receive love from God, family, and friends. We move close to God and others in order to love them. God also expects us to love ourselves through self-care and being healthy in all five dimensions.<sup>4</sup> I shall share God’s definition of love in Chapter 8, *God is Love*, and we will look at the skills for loving in Part 5, *Relationships in Heaven*. Loving God and others produces the following fruit, and is a prerequisite for all of them.

**Joy** comes from delighting in God and his delighting in us, from the pleasure we receive from being with his family, and from enjoying creation. In Part 4, *God’s Gift of Emotions*, I shall teach in more detail how to have joy and peace.

**Peace** is inner serenity, and arises when we trust God. The more we trust him, the more peace we have. Unfortunately, it is impossible to have lasting peace with every other human on earth, because there are many people who are demanding, angry, or violent. I’ll teach you how to have more peace in Chapter 11, *Fewer Doubts, More Trust*.

**Patience** is waiting on the Lord to act in our lives or provide direction; it is allowing God and others to be who they are; and it is recognizing God’s and others’ patience with us. Patience is a component of loving.<sup>5</sup> We learn patience through changing our thinking to more fully acknowledge the reality of life, which I shall explain in Part 3, *Thinking Like God*.

**Kindness** is another element of loving. It is acting in the best interest of others, and begins with humility. God also expects us to be patient and kind with ourselves.

**Goodness** is the quality of everything being right in life. When God created the world, he saw “*it was very good,*”<sup>6</sup> meaning it turned out the way he intended. When we live life as God intended--what the bible calls righteousness--we experience goodness.

**Faithfulness** is loyalty to God, to our biological family, to our friends, and to God’s family; and recognizing and experiencing their loyalty to us. However, complete faithfulness is

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<sup>2</sup> Galatians 6:16-23

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 4:8, 16b

<sup>4</sup> God commands us to love others in the same way we love ourselves (the Great Commandment--Matthew 22:39). As we will see later, we cannot love others better than we care for ourselves. Self-care and well-being must come first.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:4

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 1:31

not always possible. When others act in unhealthy ways, it is difficult or impossible to remain true to them and maintain our wellbeing. In these cases, we may only be able to remain loyal in limited ways, such as asking God to help them.

**Gentleness** is the soft, easy manner with which we express kindness toward others and ourselves. When others are gentle with us, we feel love, joy, and peace.

**Self-Control** in all areas of life is living rationally and proactively according to God's biblical principles, and preventing our emotions from controlling behavior and decisions. It is choosing the above fruit, over other alternatives. Part 4, *God's Gift of Emotions* will teach you the valuable place emotions have in aiding our self-awareness and having healthy relationships, and it will help you have more healthy self-control.

**Rest for our souls** is a promise Jesus made to us that the apostle Paul omits from his list of God's fruit in his letter to the Galatians. Jesus said, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*" We receive this rest when we join our spirits with his, and learn from him his way of living, which he described as being easy and light.<sup>7</sup>

In Galatians, Paul concludes his list of God's fruit by saying, "*Who can argue against these experiences?*"<sup>8</sup> If you had an abundance of these attributes, wouldn't you be truly happy?

## **Five Reasons Most People Miss God's Best**

If an Abundant Life is God's desire, why do few people have the earthly blessings he offers? Here are five reasons why most people fail to have God's best:

1. Almost all people know little of God, including many who declare that they know much about him. Most misunderstand how much he loves them, believing it is far less than reality. Many ignore God through most of each day; he is not a priority. Most people are ignorant that God has already given us most of heaven's gifts.
2. Even if people know that Jesus tells them how wonderful earthly life can be, most people doubt the blessings he promises are available in this life; they hope for God's blessings, and are surprised when they appear.
3. For these reasons, or because growth and change are difficult, most people resign themselves to their present condition as the best that is available, never realizing that life can be better. The world's way of thinking overpowers God's truths in their hearts. As many folks say to me, "I think we have to wait for the next life for things to be better." We do not.
4. For some people, life has been so difficult they cannot imagine it being better, here.

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 11:28-30

<sup>8</sup> Galatians 5:23b

As one woman told me, “I know I’m going to heaven, because I’ve lived through hell on earth.”

5. The Church has generally failed in training its members to live in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Christ-followers want more of God’s love, joy, peace, and rest, but no one has taught them how to experience more of God’s fruit. Most pastors I personally know, want more of God and his life, because they yearn to teach that to their congregations. I wrote this book to teach you how to have God’s best.

## **The Keys to Abundant Living**

**In the bible, God reveals the keys to his kingdom and the life he promises.** Here are the first four I’ll share--four essential things we must *do* to live the Abundant Life:

- 1. Grow our relationship with God.**
- 2. Change our thinking to be like his.**
- 3. Relate with others as God does in his Trinity.** God exists as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Together, we call the three persons of God, “The Trinity,” or “The Holy Trinity.” How these three interact with each other is the basis for all healthy relationships.
- 4. Live well in this physical world.**

And here are three primary keys we must *know*:

- 1. God’s plan**--his purpose and goals for creating every human.
- 2. His blueprint**, or design for how he made us, which enables us to fulfill his plan. He provides us with much freedom for living within his blueprint; however, Abundant Living comes from doing life his way. The entitlement to make the rules belongs solely to God, because he made everything, including us. The more we understand his rules for Abundant Living, the more they make sense.
- 3. Based on God’s design, the principles and skills** we must employ to experience Abundant Living--how we are to live. We must learn these basics in all five dimensions of human life:
  - a. Spiritual
  - b. Intellectual
  - c. Emotional
  - d. Relational
  - e. Physical

The good news is there are a limited number of principles and skills to learn, and no deadline on how soon we need to know them. We find all of God’s principles in the New Testament. This book will teach you all seven of the above keys to the kingdom. However, it

takes a long time to become proficient. The more we use them, the more we become like Jesus, and the better life gets.

In the next chapter, I share my vision for life in heaven based on the bible's description of it. The better we understand life in heaven, the more we can live that way here, and experience heaven's benefits. In Chapter 3, we will look at God's plan for humanity, his design of us in Chapter 4, and how we receive his blessings in Chapter 5. Then in Part 2, we will begin to examine the basic principles and skills for Abundant Living.

### **Questions for Meditation or Discussion**

- Why is it difficult to see God's kingdom around us?
- Can you think of reasons in addition to mine why people miss God's blessings?
- How many of the fruit of the Holy Spirit do you experience?
- What is one belief or behavior you need to change to live more in his kingdom?
- What is one skill you need to learn to live more of God's Abundant Life?

### **For Further Study**

In each chapter, I suggest books in print (as of mid 2014) that provide the best, most biblically accurate treatment of each subject, regardless of their publication date; some are recent and some are older.

- See the **Online Bonus: New Testament Proof that God's Kingdom is Here**. Find this bonus and others at the book's website: **[www.DrivingThroughHeaven.com](http://www.DrivingThroughHeaven.com)**. Look for the "Bonuses" tab. Then, study those scriptural references to understand better God's earthly kingdom.
- George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1959; Reprint, 2000).



## PART 2

# HAVING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CREATOR

*“God is love.”*

1 John 4:16b

*“Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One;  
I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! ... Here I am!*

*I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and  
opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”*

Revelation 1:17c-18b; 3:20

## CHAPTER 6

# WE WERE MADE FOR A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

**The reason for our existence is to live with and serve God.** The bible says, “*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*”<sup>9</sup> God designed us to have a real, loving, practical friendship with him. Our biggest problem is that we do not know how to contact him, or how to relate to a spiritual being. We are spirits, too, but being immersed in our physical universe, we are largely ignorant of how to be spiritual. Unless God comes and reveals himself to us, it is impossible to meet him.

God understands that it is difficult for us to know him, so he provides several ways for us to learn about him and meet him:

- God comes to each person through his Holy Spirit, speaking silently to our minds and hearts in our own language. We can clearly understand him if we are listening for him. I explain how to hear his voice in Chapter 14.
- The bible tells us who God is, what he is like, and what his relationship was with humankind from creation until about A.D. 70 (when the last bible book was written). Through the person of Jesus Christ, God provided two aids to knowing him: 1) the best and clearest revelation of himself, and 2) the perfect model for being human and doing a relationship with God. Jesus’ story is told in the first four books of the New Testament (the gospels--“gospel” means “good news”).
- The church preserves the oral and written history of God and his continual relationship with people since bible times.

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<sup>9</sup> John 17:3

- Our heavenly Father has done everything necessary for us to be able to relate with him, including making us to be like him and to relate as he does within his Trinity.

Developing a real, loving, and practical relationship with our heavenly King begins with a desire to have such a relationship. Yet many who want such a relationship find it difficult or impossible to conceive of how that is possible. Let's look at a few ways that God made it easy for us to be friends with him.

## **God Reveals Himself to Those Who Seek Him**

**God wants to reveal himself to every person he made, and is gracious to show himself to all who seek him.** The keys to knowing God are to actively seek him, desire a relationship with him, and then pursue it. As Jesus explained:

*“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”<sup>10</sup>*

Years ago I had difficulty imagining how to know God. My prayers were one-way monologues: I talked to God, but never knew what he thought. Yet, I reasoned that Jesus was alive and all-powerful, and therefore, could reveal himself to me. So, I meditated and prayed about hearing him, and one day as I was talking to him, I heard a “voice” in my mind say, “I am Jesus. I am the God you have been praying to.” It was two and one half more years before someone taught me how to hear his voice regularly, but I knew it was possible.

## **God Best Revealed Himself in Jesus**

**Jesus said he is like our Father.**<sup>11</sup> When we read in the gospels about Jesus, we are reading about our heavenly Father. Jesus' words are the way God speaks and thinks. Jesus' actions are the way God acts. In fact, Jesus told us that his and the Father's words and behavior are the same.<sup>12</sup> The bible shows us that Jesus is forever loving, patient, kind, humble, respectful, slow to anger, and always forgiving. This is the same as God the Father. We can see in Jesus someone with whom we can have a relationship. Because God became human in Jesus, he knows exactly what it is like to be human.

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<sup>10</sup> John 14:21, 23-24

<sup>11</sup> John 14:6-9

<sup>12</sup> John 5:19; 14:10 & 24b

## **God Made Us to Relate as His Trinity Relates with Each Other**

**In order to make a relationship with him possible, God designed us to relate with him and each other the same way the members of his Trinity relate.** This includes the love and concern they have for one another, their mutual submission to serve each other, and their desire and joy of welcoming new people into their family. These are common characteristics of human relationships because God made us to relate as he relates. How we relate with each other is the same way we can relate with God. It is easy to relate with God because he is like us, we are like him, he understands us because he has lived as a human, and God made us to relate with him as we relate with other humans.

To summarize, it is easy to have a relationship with God because he made us to be like him (as we learned in Chapter 4), he comes to each of us and reveals himself, he tells us who he is in the bible, and he made us to relate with him as his three persons relate with one another in his Trinity. In the next three chapters, we'll see how God has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Questions for Meditation or Discussion**

- How close are you with God? What do you need to learn or do to grow closer?
- Do you experience God revealing himself to you in some way? How does that happen for you?
- What are the characteristics of doing human relationships, which can help us understand how to relate with God?

### **For Further Study**

- Equipping Ministries International skills course “Embracing God’s Grace.” Experience the power of God’s love and forgiveness while breaking the power of sin in your life. Learn more at [EquippingMinistries.org](http://EquippingMinistries.org).

## PART 3

### THINKING LIKE GOD

*“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,  
but be transformed by a renewing of your mind.  
Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is--  
his good, pleasing, and perfect will.”*

Romans 12:2

*“So, I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord,  
that you must no long live as the [non-Christians do] in the futility of their thinking.  
They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God  
because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.  
You, however, were taught with regard to your former way of life,  
to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;  
to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self,  
created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

Ephesians 4:17-18, 20-24

## CHAPTER 21

# THE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

### What Is Truth?

**In heaven, everyone looks at life as God does.** Although each person has individual thoughts, everybody shares a common belief system--God's. As the bible says, *there is one body of believers in God, one Spirit, "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."*<sup>13</sup> There are not different viewpoints about truth and reality. The only reality in the universe and heaven is God's. God defines what is true and false; what is real and imaginary. Truth is God's definition of all that is: physical, philosophical, emotional, relational, and spiritual. To live in heaven is to accept his reality about everything.

**God allows freedom of thought and opinion regarding non-essentials, such as preferences about what is beautiful or what music and food we enjoy.** He wants each of us to be special, with our personal, distinctive personality. However, by reason of being creator, God gets to tell us what is love, and how to love and receive love; what we must do to enter his eternal kingdom; and how to live in his kingdom to have the Abundant Life.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, God prohibits freedom regarding such essentials. I realize this makes many freedom-loving people uncomfortable, but the truth is that our liberty *is* limited.

**God limits our freedom for living by how he designed our universe and us.** A case in point is gravity. We cannot defy gravity. Eventually, someone may learn to harness that force and be able to levitate vehicles, but that will develop by respecting gravity's power, and not by bending God's immutable natural laws. He expects us to accept and use his definitions and design for living, his lordship, and his help.

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<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 4:4-6

<sup>14</sup> John 17:17 – For God, his word is also his idea or conceptualization of what is—his definition of the truth of anything.

**We can learn God's definitions for the physical universe, for human behavior, for spirituality, and for God.** All aspects of life have godly principles that describe reality. We could enumerate the physical universe's principles that scientists have proven or theorized to be true. Medical science has discovered thousands of true fundamentals in relation to the human body. An example of an emotional truth is that if I insult you, you will have an emotional reaction, most likely, hurt and anger. A relational truth is that love has a powerful impact on the recipient. Everything about life has these godly truths as part of God's design.

The easiest place to learn God's truth and principles for living is the bible, which God directly inspired.<sup>15</sup> The best person to teach us truth is God's Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth,<sup>16</sup> who reminds us of all Jesus taught,<sup>17</sup> and leads us into all truth.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, truth is a person. Jesus said, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*"<sup>19</sup> The only way to know all the truth is to know him well.

## Reality vs. Denial

**In the Kingdom of Heaven, everyone is dedicated to the truth about themselves, others, and life.** Everything important and valuable is known fully and everyone desires to know everything. No one hides false thinking or avoids truth, for such deception is part of other cultures and kingdoms, especially the earthly ones we live in. *Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ and lives by his truth comes into his light. But everyone who desires to live life their own way instead of Christ's way, loves the darkness and will not come into the light.*<sup>20</sup> Besides, nothing is hidden from God.

**Among the great tasks of living on earth are these three: ending our denial of God's truth, rejecting falsehoods we believe, and embracing God's reality.** This is not easy for most of us. We go to great lengths to convince ourselves that what we perceive and believe are God's truths, even as we live in some ways that are false. Deep inside our heads and hearts we prefer to believe we have the freedom to think and do as we please. We generally delude ourselves concerning this by saying that what we are doing is something we need, want, or without which we cannot live. After all, doesn't God want us to be happy? The fallacy of such thinking is proven daily by many tobacco users, homeowners who build on flood plains, persons who drive drunk, and people who think that cheating on their lovers doesn't affect their relationships.

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<sup>15</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17

<sup>16</sup> John 14:17

<sup>17</sup> John 14:24

<sup>18</sup> John 16:13

<sup>19</sup> John 14:6

<sup>20</sup> John 3:20-21

Sadly, too many of us live with unhealthy thinking. For of this discussion, here are my definitions of sanity and insanity, which I borrowed from another:

- **Sanity** is knowing we have problems and unhealthy behaviors and correcting them.
- **Insanity** is denial of problems and unhealthy behavior, or refusal to address them.

## **Intellectual Maturity**

**Dr. Scott Peck, the late psychiatrist and author of the best selling, *The Road Less Traveled*, called most people “immature,” rather than “insane.”** He wrote in *Further Along the Road Less Traveled*,

“We psychotherapists know that most people who look like adults are actually emotional children walking around in adult’s clothing. And we know this not because the people that come to us are more immature than most. On the contrary, those who come to psychotherapy with genuine intent to grow are those relatively few who are called out of immaturity, who are no longer willing to tolerate their own childishness, although they may not yet see the way out. The rest of the population never manages to fully grow up.”

**Commitment to God means we commit to living with his truth and reality.**<sup>21</sup> Living on earth, we have learned many fallacies, and many of us have parts of our lives that are lived in reality denial. For example, when I was a boy, my parents told me that clouds in the evening were called “night clouds,” because they only formed in the evening and would be gone by the next day. I thought this was a strange concept, and when I studied meteorology in college, I confirmed it was untrue. Another example: during past presidential elections, many of my friends made statements they thought were true about a candidate that quickly proved false.

Most people have learned, usually unwittingly, similar false beliefs, stereotypes, and opinions that have no basis in fact. Many beliefs, true and false, are passed down from generation to generation, becoming traditional thinking within families, and even whole cultures. Some false convictions are learned because the truth is unknown at the time, so we learn what makes the most sense. Regardless of how we learned anything, all that we know must conform to God’s truth.

**To live with God means we must identify and abandon everything that we believe that is untrue.** And we must be able to experience life as it is and not as we would have it.<sup>22</sup> It is probably not our fault that we learned something untrue, but it is our responsibility out of our

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<sup>21</sup> John 14:15 & 23-24

<sup>22</sup> Thanks to Reinhold Niebuhr’s “Serenity Prayer” for this concept.



love for God and ourselves to live only by his truths and reality. In the next chapter, we'll examine why it is so important that we remove all falsehood.

### **Questions for Meditation or Discussion**

- How difficult is it for you to accept God's opinion about anything, and to relinquish your opinion, if it differs?
- What can you do to increase your commitment to God's ways and the blessings they produce?
- What do you think of my definitions in this chapter of sanity and insanity?

### **For Further Study**

- Inventory your most important beliefs and with God's help compare them with God's biblical standard. This is a big project. Try listing essential beliefs in only one dimension at a time (e.g., beliefs about relationships). Expect to spend a few days or longer discovering and listing your beliefs, talking with God concerning them, and consulting scripture to ascertain the truthfulness of each thought.

## PART 4

### GOD'S GIFT OF EMOTIONS

*The results of following the direction of God's Spirit is  
"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,  
gentleness, and self control."*

Galatians 5:22-23

*Jesus says,*

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.  
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart,  
and you will find rest for your souls.*

*For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

Matthew 11:28-30

## CHAPTER 31

### WHY GOD GAVE US EMOTIONS

**God designed us to experience life as he does, full of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.**<sup>23</sup>

Driving through heaven, we would notice that everyone is happy and peaceful. We do not have to wait for the emotions of the Abundant Life. Jesus said, *I have come that my people may have life, and have it to the full.*<sup>24</sup>

The fruit of the Spirit comes and grows within us as we allow God to transform us into the people he made us to be. Such transformation requires that we live according to his design in all five dimensions: to grow in relationship with him, change our thinking to his, *do emotions his way*, relate with others as God does in his trinity, and live well in this physical world. As we do this, we experience more heavenly emotions. Plus, God wants to heal you and help you overcome depression, anxiety, guilt, and any other emotion or behavior that blocks you from his best.

#### **Emotions are a Gift from God**

**When God made us in his image he gave us the same emotions he experiences.**

Emotions are the internal, spiritual, mental, and physical sensations that are a response to life events. They include feeling mad, sad, glad, scared, lonely, guilty, compassionate, and infatuated. I use the words “feelings” and “emotions” synonymously.

Emotions are God’s gift:

1. They allow us to experience life as God does, which helps us understand him.

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<sup>23</sup> Galatians 5:22-23

<sup>24</sup> John 10:10

2. They provide a life that has breadth and depth of spiritual, intellectual, and physical sensations.
3. They help us find meaning to life.
4. Feelings are indicators to what we are thinking, especially unconsciously.
5. Emotions motivate us to take action to change.

Without emotions, life would feel flat. Imagine experiencing nothing when looking at a beautiful sunset or an attractive person. There would only be thoughts about it and no more. No one could be passionate about anything.

In our culture, we resist the experience of emotions, so, frequently, when we say we “feel” something, it is a thought rather than a true emotion, as in “I feel people should eat less animal fat.” Feelings and emotions are a result of what we think regarding the event that produces them. My beliefs about eating fat may include that we need to eat less saturated animal fats because of the damaging effects they may cause. However, my emotion about eating healthier might be happiness, and my emotion regarding eating animal fat might be disgust.

## **Emotions are Multi-Dimensional**

**As I shared in Part 3, *Thinking Like God*, all emotions and behavior start with thoughts.** That is why I prioritize our intellectual dimension before the emotional.

Understanding that your thoughts govern your feelings (emotions) gives you the ability to change your emotional and behavior reactions to life events. Don't like how you feel when your mother phones? Change your beliefs about that event and you can change those emotions. Have a problem with anger? Change your thinking and remove the anger. Much anxiety and depression can be relieved, if not eliminated, through changing how you think.

**We feel and express emotions across several dimensions.** Much of our emotional response to a thought is physical, through muscle tension or relaxation, and hormone secretions that affect our organs (like heart rate or stomach acid). Mentally, not only does our thinking produce emotions, but we frequently have a mental response to emotions. Thus, I may think, “I'm so tired of feeling stressful!” Thought responses to emotions can reinforce the original emotions or can produce new one. For example, feeling happy may result in feeling peaceful.

Spiritually, emotions affect our relationship with God, often leading us to either praise him or complain to him. Emotions like sadness and anger may make it more difficult for us to connect with God and worship him. Relationships with God and humans depend on emotions for effective communications, and are affected by feelings, which is why I rank our emotional dimension before our relational.

Understanding how each emotion is a gift from God and how God designed it to be used moves us closer to a healthy life. While there are probably 100 emotional words in English, most

emotions can be included in a few basic categories. We'll look at these next to understand why God gave each of them.

### **Questions for Meditation or Discussion**

- Why do you think people share thoughts but call them feelings, instead of plainly saying what emotions they feel?
- Do you share thoughts as feelings instead of stating your emotions?
- What is your response to my list of ways emotions are gifts?

### **For Further Study**

- Read Dr. Linda Solie. *Take Charge of Your Emotions: 7 Steps to Overcoming Depression, Anxiety, and Anger*. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2013. Christian psychologist Solie provides a detailed explanation of the cause of emotions and how to change them.

## PART 5

### RELATIONSHIPS IN HEAVEN

*Jesus was once asked, "Teacher, what is the greatest commandment of God?"  
Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all of whom you are--with all your heart, soul,  
mind, and strength. This is his most important commandment.  
God's second command is like the first: Love others in the same way you care for yourself.  
Everything in God's design for humanity hangs on these two commands."*

Mark 12:28-31

*Jesus also said, "Love each other as I have loved you."*

John 15:12

## CHAPTER 41

### LIVING AS PART OF GOD'S TRINITY

**In heaven, everyone is family; all are children of God, and brothers and sisters with Jesus, and each other.** Heaven is one big family reunion. If we could drive through heaven, everyone we encountered, even for the first time, would treat us with the same love God has, would call us by our first names, and would act as if we had always been good friends. We would see people meeting others' needs with smiles and hugs, affirmation and encouragement, companionship and conversation, and lots of laughter. There, Jesus and our Father are constantly available to each person through their Holy Spirit, as here on earth, but they are also in bodily form. In God's Kingdom of Heaven, everyone lives as a close-knit family.

#### **Family Life with God**

**The basis for all relationships in heaven and earth is God's Trinity and how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit relate with one another.** They are so close that they share the same spiritual nature, love, thoughts, and attitudes. They mutually submit to one another. The Son didn't consider himself when the Father asked him to give up his heavenly throne to become human.<sup>25</sup> The Holy Spirit obeyed when sent to join his Spirit with our spirits. The Father relinquished to the Son his right to create and to the Holy Spirit the responsibility of transforming humans into God's children.<sup>26</sup>

**Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share everything together, including the same spirit, they also share everything important with us--all that we need, and many things to enjoy.** This includes giving us characteristics that allow us to relate equally, person-to-

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<sup>25</sup> Philippians 2:5-8

<sup>26</sup> It was the Son who created our universe (John 1:3) and the Holy Spirit who gives spiritual birth to us (John 3:5-8).

person with our heavenly Dad, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. They have been a Trinity forever, but now they invite each of us into their family circle.

**How do we respond to God’s extraordinary love?** There is no way we can respond in kind. We have nothing to give God that is not already his, except to freely choose to give him ourselves. *We are* the gift that he wants from us. The bible says, *offer yourselves to God, for this is the real way of worshipping him.*<sup>27</sup> Even for this, we need God to teach us how. The bible, especially the New Testament, is where God tells how to become like him so we will be able to relate with our heavenly Dad, our brother Jesus, and the Spirit (and humans) as they do with each other. It is about learning how to love as they do. As the bible says, learn to imitate God.<sup>28</sup>

## Elements of Loving, Healthy Relationships

**What does a human relationship look like when lived as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live together?** Here are God’s major traits that we develop as we learn to live like him; each is explained more fully in subsequent chapters:

- God experiences his life and his relationships with “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*”<sup>29</sup> These form the basis for strong and healthy relationships for us, as well.
- The most important of God’s traits is love. Love has emotions associated with it, but is primarily action, not feelings.
- Love must have a person upon whom to focus its energy and action. Thus, love is humble and expresses itself in submissive service to others.<sup>30</sup>
- God designed clear priorities for whom to love first: God comes before everyone else, then we care for ourselves, and then we love others.<sup>31</sup> Loving ourselves ensures we are as healthy and happy as possible and have the abilities and resources to love others.
- Clear communications are necessary in every relationship. The oneness that the Trinity possesses facilitates conversation, and God wants us to have the same oneness and clear communications with him and one another.
- Healthy communications require truthfulness and openness—sharing with another what we think and emotionally feel.
- Openness, honesty, and confidentiality build trust and intimacy.

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<sup>27</sup> Romans. 12:1

<sup>28</sup> Ephesians 5:1

<sup>29</sup> Galatians 5:22-23

<sup>30</sup> See Ephesians 5

<sup>31</sup> Matthew 22:37-39



- Openness must be tempered with healthy relational boundaries--limits--to protect others and ourselves from evil and injury. For example, what we freely share from our hearts must be appropriate for the earned trust level in each relationship.
- Conflict arises in most close human relationships and with God, and he has shown how to resolve disagreements, and restore relationships using forgiveness and healing.

In the next chapter, we'll consider how to love like God and Jesus.

### **Questions for Meditation or Discussion**

- What are the ideal traits of family life? How can we live these in all of our relationships?
- What do you think and feel about being invited into God's family circle?
- How can we live more as family among fellow Christ followers? Put another way, how can we make our churches more like our real heavenly family?

### **For Further Study**

- Read William P. Young. *The Shack*. Newbury Park, CA: Windblown Media, 2007. While this is a novel, it offers a vivid picture of how members of God's Trinity may relate with each other.

## PART 6

### LIVING AS A SPIRIT IN A PHYSICAL UNIVERSE

*Don't you "know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought for a price. Therefore honor God with your body."*

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

*"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [For those who do not follow God] run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and [his way of living], and all these things will be given to you as well."*

Matthew 6:31-33

*"Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."*

Luke 14:33

## CHAPTER 49

### WHY DID GOD GIVE US BODIES?

**Do you ever wonder why God gave us bodies instead of only making us spirits like him?** He could have created us to live immediately with him in his heavenly realm; instead, he attached our spirits to physical bodies and placed us in a physical environment. Why? Though the bible lacks a definitive answer, we can infer some conclusions from what God does share.

#### **God Likes Physical Things**

**We know that God enjoys creating physical things based on the huge universe he made.** He seems to enjoy both large and small systems--think galaxies and atoms. He made things using an infinite color spectrum. On earth, he created a slew of sounds, multiple textures, and endless odors. Clearly, God revels in creating material objects that are immense, complex, beautiful, and grab our attention.

**God apparently enjoys living in the physical places that he makes.** In the bible's book, "Revelation," John the apostle is given a vision by Jesus, showing John where God lives in heaven. Although it is a scene too fantastic for John to describe adequately, God's palace has physical qualities, including a door, floor, thrones, and sounds.<sup>32</sup> John is able to see angels and creatures, humans who died on earth and are now in heaven, and earthly animals, including horses.<sup>33</sup> Further, John's description of existence after the destruction of our present universe includes the creation of a new, apparently physical universe and earth where God will establish

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<sup>32</sup> Revelations 4:1-6a

<sup>33</sup> Revelations 4:6b-11; 5:11; 6:2-8

his palace and live with us. God will once more walk with his children in gardens as he did with Adam and Eve.<sup>34</sup>

**We know that living with a physical body is part of God's plan, and therefore highly important to God, and the bible says that we will have physical bodies in heaven.**<sup>35</sup> God means for us to enjoy the bodies and world we have, as he does.<sup>36</sup>

### **Perhaps Life is Better with Bodies**

**One reason for having bodies may be that it is easier to learn to live God's way in a physical environment.** We don't know what it's like to live a pure spiritual life. Perhaps learning to live only spiritually would be more difficult. Here, we have the opportunity to experience physical pain, a real motivator for change and growth. Fortunately, we will be free of physical pain in heaven. Whatever the reasons God joined us with bodies, he intends for us to learn the principles for living together as physical creatures with physical needs, such as clean water, food, clothing, shelter, transportation, etc. And he has created money for negotiating earthly life more easily.

**Living in a material environment leads us to the erroneous conclusion that most of earthly life is physical.** The truth is that almost all of day-to-day life is fundamentally spiritual. Spiritual life consists of relationships with God and other humans, self-identity and self-worth, beliefs, thinking, attitudes, opinions, decision-making, and emotions. We know more about being spiritual than most of us realize. Though we appear to be living a physical, material life, 95% of our experience is spiritual.

In this part of the book, I shall first address what God has taught about healthy living with physical bodies. Thanks to God's gift of medical science, we know more on the subject of living physically than any other dimension of life, so I'm not going to repeat what is available in hundreds of books, magazines, and daily TV; I'll focus on what the bible says. As with the abundance of medical info, because there is more than enough information related to finances and maintaining or repairing things, I'm going to focus on managing possessions.

### **Questions for Meditation or Discussion**

- Why do *you* think God gave us bodies and placed us in this physical universe?

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<sup>34</sup> Revelations 21:1-22:5

<sup>35</sup> Philippians 3:21

<sup>36</sup> Genesis 1:31

- What do we learn about God based on his creation of our universe with its multitude of galaxies, planets, earthly life, land and seascapes, colors, sounds, odors, etc.?
- Does it surprise you that most of your life is spiritual and not physical?

### **For Further Study**

- Read the accounts of creation in Genesis 1-2, and consider why God created our world. He could have created it in an infinite number of ways. Why did he make it as he did? What are the purposes for our senses? Why create colors, sounds, tastes, odors, textures, different air temperatures? Why put us on this planet in such an environment?
- Read the description of God's heavenly throne room in Revelation 4. What does this tell us about heaven? What does this say about God's interest in material things?
- Read Revelation 21 and 22 for the account of God's creation of the new heaven and earth after he destroys our current universe. What does this tell us about God's interest in living in a physical environment? Why do you think it is important to God to spend eternity in a physical world?

## PART 7

### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

*“Father, protect them by the power of your name ... so that they may be one as we are one.”*

John 17:11b

*“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, [mutual affection]; and to [mutual affection], love.*

*For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ... Therefore, my brothers [and sisters], make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

2 Peter 1:5-11

## CHAPTER 55

### MAKING A WHOLE PERSON FROM THE PARTS

**God designed us to be healthy, whole beings who model our lives on him.**<sup>37</sup> God lacks nothing, being whole and complete within himself. Each member of the Trinity is the same, being so integrated in spirit and thought that we say they are of one spirit and one being. God's plan is that each human will become whole and complete, fully integrating all five life dimensions, and maintaining a balance among them.

#### **Integration and Balance**

**Integration is the process of bringing all dimensions together into a healthy whole, including using what we've learned in each dimension in all of the others.** For example, because God is most important in your spiritual life, then he also needs to be number one in the other dimensions. This may seem obvious, yet many Christ-followers don't submit themselves to God in every life area. Years ago, I insisted God heal my depression, and for years refused to take medication for it, then, God revealed to me I wasn't submitting to his plan to treat my physical brain disorder with medicine. I had failed to integrate God's Spirit and design into my intellectual and physical dimensions. I wasn't listening to what God was telling me through the bible and his Spirit about my physical life, which led me to resist him. Integration requires a conscious effort to meld together all that we have learned.

**Balance is a process of continually assessing our five dimensions and ensuring we're not neglecting or overemphasizing any of them.** Our bodies have a similar process for maintaining biological homeostasis. Internal mechanisms continuously assess our core temperature, blood oxygen level, brain chemistry, and every other essential variable, and then

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<sup>37</sup> Ephesians 5:1

adjust our bodies' systems to keep each variable at an optimum level. This process is automatic in our bodies. We also have an optimum state in each variable within our five dimensions. Such variables include our relationship with God, beliefs, emotions, using boundaries in relationships, and managing our possessions.

**Unlike our autonomic bodily processes, ensuring our being is in balance requires an ongoing, conscious effort.** We must become aware of the variables in all our dimensions (which I've shared in this book), and decide to seek to live in each life area as God intends. To do this, we must regularly assess our health in each dimension and make adjustments to promote balance through strengthening the weaker ones, and perhaps, de-emphasizing others. As an example of imbalance, I'm sure you have seen people who are active in church, though obese. They are out of balance because they are inattentive to their physical health. And, they probably haven't integrated spiritual wisdom into their physical dimension. To become balanced, they may need to decrease activities in one or more dimensions to make time for physical wellness. All of us have similar balance issues.

## **Integrating Our Lives**

**Most of us aren't well integrated.** We may live one dimension well, but never understand how to use that knowledge and skills in another dimension. For example, some people are physically fit, but not relationally fit. They eat healthy, work out daily, see their doctor for regular checkups, etc. They learned that health in the physical dimension requires godly thinking and attitudes about their physical well-being, developing healthy habits, setting boundaries on their time for exercise, and using resources available to them, such as modern medicine. However, they have failed to integrate these skills into their relationships, which also require healthy thinking and attitudes, helpful habits, safeguarding time to be with those we love, and using resources available to maintain and improve relational health. It amazes me that people who would not hesitate to see a doctor if ill, refuse to see a marriage counselor when needed. They haven't learned that they need to use what works in one dimension in the others. They are not integrated people.

We all have strengths and gifts in two or more dimensions and are weak in one or two. We can use what we know in our strong areas and transfer, or integrate those into our weaker dimensions to improve our overall maturity and well-being. We will then move closer to heaven's Abundant Life, and become happier in the process. For example, if a strength is that I submit to God in the spiritual realm by seeking to know him better and serving him through his church, I also must learn to submit to him with my emotions, and serve him by using my emotions to his honor and glory.



**Life problems occur when we aren't living according to God's design,**<sup>38</sup> which includes integrating what we know in one area into the rest of life, and continually working to keep life in balance. If God and his way of living isn't most important to us, nothing will make full sense and we will forever struggle in every life area. We will consistently feel empty and unfulfilled. The next two chapters will help you understand how to integrate and balance life.

### **Questions for Meditation or Discussion**

- What do you observe about people being imbalanced and non-integrated?
- What can your church do to help people integrate and balance their lives?

### **For Further Study**

- Use the **ONLINE BONUS: My Short-Term Life Plan**. Change your life in 12 months by creating a plan for success. This exercise will help you do a personal inventory to identify what you most need to work on. Find it at the "Bonuses" tab at **[www.DrivingThroughHeaven.com](http://www.DrivingThroughHeaven.com)**. You can download and print it.

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<sup>38</sup> Romans 8:5-6