

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN IN THIS BOOK

(Introduction)

This is a handbook for living according to God's biblical design for life. It is designed to deepen your relationship with God, empower you to serve him better, and help you experience more of the Abundant Life that Jesus promised. *Driving Through Heaven* is a primer--not an exhaustive treatment. It is the basic training that Jesus provided his disciples, and will teach you nearly all of God's New Testament principles and skills. You can also use it to train other disciples.

Read only what you need or read it cover-to-cover. The book is divided into parts that explain God's design for living in the five dimensions he gave us: spiritual, intellectual (our thinking), emotional, relational, and physical (body-health and material and financial stewardship). Each dimension has its own part in the book, and the parts are arranged in order from imperative (spiritual life) to least important (physical life). Each part builds on the ones before, and consists of mostly short chapters that allow you to learn a little every day, if you prefer.

When I teach this material in live formats, people frequently ask, "This makes so much sense; why didn't someone teach me this before?" Somehow, churches forgot how to teach most New Testament principles and skills. Most churches provide only an overview. For example, we are told to love, but not offered training courses on how to do it: how to demonstrate care and respect, how to communicate effectively, how to set boundaries, the steps of forgiveness, how to resolve conflict, etc. This book fills in the details and teaches you how to apply scripture to life.

Next to the bible, *Driving Through Heaven* is designed to be a single handbook and reference to help you live as a Christ follower. Scores of excellent Christian books and resources provide in-depth study on most of these topics. This book provides the foundational principles and skills we need to better understand and use the more in-depth teaching.

Are You Living Half a Life?

Is your life less than what you would like it to be? Most people are missing God's best. George Barna, one of America's top researchers on the state of the U.S. church, reported in his book, *Maximum Faith*¹, that only one percent of American adults are experiencing the most fulfilling life God offers. One percent!

What if you could be twice as happy as you are right now? How about ten times happier? What if you could have ten times more love? Feel ten times more whole and fulfilled? Have total peace? Doesn't God want every person to have heaven's happiness? Of course he does!

The good news is that you can have that life. Jesus said, *I have come to seek and save those who are clueless about real life*² that they may have life and have it more abundantly.³ I want to teach you what God taught me concerning his Abundant Life. I want to see your life transformed by God until you experience the maximum of God's love, joy, and peace.

Why I Wrote This Book

Today, after living with God since age 24 in 1977, he is for me a real dad, brother, friend, and mentor. Throughout my life, God has taught me his basic biblical principles and skills for living. Using them, he has blessed me with an increasing abundance of his love, joy, peace, and rest. God has trained me to teach his principles and skills to others through 20 years as a full- and part-time pastor; 17 years as a Christian social worker, psychotherapist, and addictions counselor; and, since 2005, as a Christian life skills coach and disciplinemaker. These days, I help people solve whatever problems they have, and train individuals, couples, pastors, and churches how to use God's biblical principles and skills.

Having worked one-on-one with thousands of individuals, couples, and families, it is my observation that those who sincerely desire to experience the life God planned will receive that gift. My God-given passion and mission is showing people heaven's riches and teaching them how to apply God's biblical principles and skills. My reasons for writing this book are to be able to give my clients a means to learn quickly the basics, so they may save hours and money from having to learn them in coaching sessions, and to share these concepts with as many people as possible. I've written the book I wish I could have had during much of my growth as a Christ follower, and to teach my children how to have an Abundant Life. And, I want you and others to have it as well.

¹ George Barna, *Maximum Faith: Live Like Jesus* (Ventura, CA: Metaformation, Inc., 2011), 25.

² Luke 19:10

³ John 10:10

Free Online Bonuses

At the book website, www.DrivingThroughHeaven.com, find these free resources:

- **Quizzes** to help you recognize if you are sabotaging your thinking or undermining healthy communication with others.
- **Video** introductions and summaries for each of the book parts by the author, plus a video guide to hearing God's voice.
- **Printable worksheets and exercises** to help you apply what you learn.
- **Bonus chapters.**
- **New Testament Proof that God's Kingdom Exists on Earth.**
- **My Short-Term Life Plan.** Change your life in 12 months by creating a personal one-year growth plan using the process for applying the basic principles described in this book.
- **For Pastors and Churches.** Resources for using this book to enhance your disciple-making ministries.

More free stuff is at the author's website, www.GardnerCoaching.com:

- The author's blog on Christian living, life in God's church family, and making disciples of Jesus.
- Free articles and downloadable resources.
- How to create a disciplemaking ministry at your church.
- Sign-up for my free email newsletter on Abundant Living, and to learn when new resources will be available.

My Use of Scripture

I have attempted to cite the scriptural basis for every belief I mention. When I quote directly from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*, I use quotation marks, and I omit that punctuation when I am paraphrasing or translating from the original languages.

This work is not intended to be a systematic theology (a description of what I believe about everything). My intent is to explain clearly and simply how to apply most of the basic New Testament principles and skills to live according to God's design.

Driving Through Heaven focuses on the individual Christian life, with emphasis on how to love and do relationships with God and others. Therefore, the one area of New Testament principles and skills I cover only lightly is that related to life as God's family--the Church: how God designed it to serve him. My website offers information on this area, and I am working on a small e-book on this subject.

I use masculine pronouns for God because that is how I experience God, and to ease reading for most people. In the creation story, we see that God is neither male nor female (or perhaps is both, somehow), and I know that people experience God in a variety of ways. If use of

male pronouns for God is difficult for you, I beg your forgiveness for making the reading tedious for you.

Join Me on the Drive to Discover Abundant Living

I shall never tell you that learning to live the Abundant Life is easy. It requires effort and work and is a life-long process; it entails much practice--a lot of practice. Be patient. Anyone can learn to live according to God's design. He is ready to help you. Within a few months, most people come to understand the basics. As a result, life will become gradually better. Becoming proficient at living God's principles and skills usually takes a few years. Once we learn the basics, God will teach more advanced principles and skills. Most chapters include recommendations for more study. Learning never ends, because God and his blessings are infinite in scope and depth. Life with God keeps getting better. You can even grow to look forward to birthdays.

Following Christ does not mean we are immune from difficulties and pain, or that he guarantees we will become rich and famous. However, the better we live God's way, the quicker we recover and heal from difficult experiences; bad events have less negative effect, and we find ourselves receiving more of the fruit of God's Spirit in spite of whatever occurs. Moreover, we discover that happiness comes from experiences other than wealth and fame.

Based on my life and the lives of the hundreds of people whose transformation I have witnessed, I believe this truth: regardless of your circumstances, you *can* know God well, have conversations with him, change and grow to become the person he designed you to be, and experience his Abundant Life on earth. I shall tell you how to have this life, and God's Holy Spirit will help you with every stage of your journey with him. Allow me to drive you through heaven by reading this book.

Where the Title Comes From

If we could drive around heaven for a day to see how they live up there, we would have the opportunity to learn how God's children live in paradise. Then, when we returned, we could live that way on earth and experience, here, most of the same blessings they have there. Although we cannot reach heaven's "mainland" except through death, God revealed in the bible how to live a heavenly life on earth. He intends for us to receive every spiritual blessing of heaven while on earth,⁴ and for life to become forever easier, in spite of earthly adversity.

The title is both a metaphor for discovering how to live God's way for eternity, and a reminder that we presently live in the kingdom that Jesus brought to earth. He wants us to

⁴ Ephesians 1:3

experience much of heaven in our present lives. We really *can* dwell in heaven's earthly kingdom and learn to live as we will for eternity.