



Encouraging Young Adults,
Teens, and Adolescents to
Focus on What Matters.

Don't Give Up!
Don't Give In!
Give Life Your All!

By Arthur Jackson

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Why Read This Book?

Do you want a better understanding of some “why” questions? Why is this happening? Why does it feel like God has left me? Why should I continue to follow Christ? Most of my personal answers to you would probably be “I don’t know”. Let me tell you who else doesn’t know. The social media community don’t truly know. Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter are great avenues for conversation but they are populated by humans like me.

I promise I know who to point you to for answers to questions like these. Serving the Lord has been an awesome experience. I confessed my faith in Christ in the summer of 1980. I have had, a great adventure through this life. I hope to finish the race set before me.

Christians have challenges. I continue to have my share of challenges. I must admit, some of my challenges are self-started. However, some challenges were not due to my actions or inactions. Losing my mom and having a knee replacement

followed by open heart surgery within a few weeks after knee surgery was a combination of both outside and inside forces at work. The timing of these perplexing events became overwhelming to me.

Jesus was overwhelmed when He faced a gruesome death. He prayed to his Father and He was so overwhelmed he sweat blood. Have you ever sweated blood? None of my trials have come close to the struggles Jesus faced. Moreover, I created avenues for many of my challenges. Jesus never made any poor choices.

Have you ever had one of those days where you are afraid to ask what is going to happen next because you did not want to find out? Imagine having weeks, months, and years of trials. You keep thinking to yourself, “it’s gonna get better, it’s gonna get better”, and five years later, life’s challenges are not better yet. (In your opinion.) Low trust or lack of faith sometimes leads us to give up.

In this short writing, I want to share some tips I believe will help anyone who

wants to live a Christian life and walk with God each day. Pete Briscoe shared with his readers on his devotion site how a college professor once told him it was a sin to bore people with the Bible. So he took that to heart when he wrote or preached.

I also hope to heed Pete's professor's warning not to bore my readers. This book is a product of me wanting to encourage my readers to not give up. Please, don't give in. Give the Christian life your all! "Giving your all" does not imply you can overcome anything on your own. In fact, overcoming trials of life will only be truly successful with God's help. God's Holy Word is a huge help at providing comfort and answers during difficult times.

Chapter 1: Why Try?

Sometimes Christians fail, I don't mean he or she committed some terrible sin like adultery or murder! Failing to obey parents is a sin. Failing to obey God is a sin. For example, being led by God to share your testimony with a friend but failing share your testimony is a sin!

A simple definition of sin is “missing the mark”. I have missed the mark more times than I care to admit. Yet, God in His amazing love has not cast me aside. He will not cast anyone away who loves Him and believes in Him. What a hard concept to grasp! A young man once told his dad, since he was 18, he could come home when he wanted to come home. His dad replied, “Yes son, you are 18 and you can make your own choices but I no longer have to provide food and shelter for you.” Choices we make bring consequences. Consider the consequences when making decisions.

I have read a daily devotion featuring God's Grace for over three years and still have a difficult time grasping the Grace of

God. I can freely make my own choices and some of my decisions have led to hurtful consequences. Early in my life I had the attitude of the young man who turned 18. Now, most of the time my attitude is one of “Yea, I can do anything I want but what are the consequences of my decisions”? Sadly, I still have those young man moments.

Do you think once a person is saved, they cannot walk away from God? The Apostle Paul relates a comparison of Israel and the Gentiles (Us nonJews) to a olive tree and a wild olive tree (that’s us). He said in chapter 11 of Romans that some of the branches of the olive tree were broken off and branches from the wild olive tree were grafted in. (Hey, those grafted in branches represent us gentiles!)

Paul reminds readers in verse 20 of Romans chapter 11 that the original branches were removed from the tree because of **unbelief**. He goes on to warn the grafted in branches, if He spared not the original branches, be careful, **unbelief** will cause the wild grafted in branches to be removed also. Read all of chapter 11 in the

book of Romans. The whole chapter is devoted to how Paul wants to see the salvation of the unbelieving Israelites.

“Why not give up? It is just not possible to live a perfect life as a Christian. So, why try?” Have you ever been there? At the point of giving up, I mean. Are you there right now? I challenge you to read on if you want a healthy perspective on following Jesus and want to understand why I have not given up in the past 38 years.

I read nowhere in the Bible Christians are not going to be challenged in this life. In fact, all of us are going to be tested. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” The New King James version of this verse says “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”

Some people think they can follow Jesus and there will never be any problems they will always be victorious. That concept is true in eternity but not so in this fallen world. Only God’s Grace can help believers

face and overcome trials. I have a later chapter devoted to the Grace of God. God loves you unconditionally. God will help you when you call upon Him with a sincere and humble heart. Success in God's eyes is not the same as our definition of success.

In the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation, John describes the spiritual health of seven churches. I encourage you to read those two chapters looking for a picture of yourself as you read. Two churches out of the seven did not receive correction from the Lord. One should notice all seven churches faced external problems. These problems are a product of this fallen world.

This world is not how God planned for it to be in the beginning. Jesus gave each church a promise. Each promise came with a condition. Believers in the church had to “**Overcome**” to receive the promise.

“Wait a cotton pickin’ minute, salvation is free! You cannot earn salvation. “Overcoming” is a type of work.

Nobody can be saved by works.” I agree no human will be saved by their own works.

When we by faith rely on God’s help to overcome, is overcoming an act of works? Over the years, I have watched many young people and young Christians (this is old people who became Christians) give up their Christian journey. Why?

Could it be they tried to overcome the trials by their own means? Maybe, they didn’t expect challenges after deciding to follow Christ. Only God’s Grace can provide the avenue to enduring or overcoming tests. All Christians will be challenged in this life. Not what you want to hear is it.

There are people in our circle of life that may make it hard for us to endure or overcome situations. For example, there is a holier than you crowd that won’t let you join them because you do not measure up. This book isn’t about them. This book is about you.

Therefore, here is the secret to daily success for Christians. Get genuinely saved

and overcome the obstacles Satan and his crew throws at you with God's help not Facebook or Snap Chat. Understand you will always need God's help. Sounds so simple, doesn't it? Then, why do so few overcome? If you get this concept, please read on anyway.

Every believer needs Jesus to get saved. Nobody can be saved from eternal punishment without Jesus. Now, that truth alone makes lots of people furious. We must have Jesus to start this Christian journey. We also need Jesus to continue the Christian journey. His daily help continues to be the key to overcoming obstacles. ***I don't believe Jesus is the only way!*** If you feel this way, you have nailed the number one reason many quit the Christian walk. They don't believe.

There are road signs alerting and warning drivers of hazards, and relaying standards such as "Speed Limit" and "Yield" God has alerts, warnings, and standards for humanity. We call them commandments. The commandments given in the Old Testament of the Bible were **not**

given to save mankind. In fact, there are no built in tools within the laws of God to help any person on the planet keep the commandments of God. Could you imagine a stop sign running after you and trying to stop you because you failed to stop?

Laws set standards. Failing to meet standards is one definition of sin. For example, sometimes it is a challenge to love your neighbor as yourself. Who is your neighbor? You know the girl that always bring drama to you on a daily basis or that guy that knows and has done everything. Failing to love your neighbor as yourself is sin.

The law will not reach out and tackle you as soon as you fail to keep a commandment but there will be consequences. Jesus died on the cross to help us avoid consequences and help you love your neighbor as yourself. Since He had that strong a commitment, shouldn't we search for Him? God rewards those who are determined to look for Him.

What kind of challenges have you experienced? What leads you to want to give up? I have a couple of opinions as to why many young Christians (teens as well as those who have recently accepted Christ as their Savior) simply give up due to unbelief. They quit searching or looking. Here we go...

Chapter 2: Two helpful Concepts

Consider these two related and reliable concepts. The first concept involves eating. Many struggling Christians do not regularly feed their spirit. The second model suggests Christians do not spiritually exercise their spirit person on a regular basis. Since a person's spirit receives spiritual food and spiritual exercise only at church services, they have no spiritual strength or insight to overcome adversity. Let me explain these two ideas a bit further.

I love to eat. ***“Most who know me can see that I love to eat.”*** In fact, I eat too much and I often eat the wrong kinds of food affecting my body's health. Now this topic could lead to a complete book in and

of itself but I share my struggle with eating to let everyone know my body gets its share of food but my body needs a balance of the right kinds of food to be healthy.

To add to my health problem, I don't exercise like I should. Again, we could write another book on this area of my life. I want to exercise and I set up plans to exercise but I don't stick with my plan. Have you ever heard the statement, "The road to failure is paved with good intentions"?

So here I am at sixty something years of age, overweight and definitely not hungry. ***"Where am I going with this example?"*** In order for my spirit man to be healthy he needs to eat a healthy balance of food and my spirit man needs regular exercise. Otherwise, I am not going to be spiritually healthy enough to discern how to overcome all the tests that are going to come my way. I may try to take on a challenge on my own when I should be trusting God to get me through the challenge.

I have developed diabetes due to my poor choices in eating. Sometimes my daily

menu contains lots of sugar and greasy choices. In the same way, my spirit diet includes foods that are not healthy for my spirit. Songs I listen to, movies I watch, articles I read all feed my spirit. I totally believe the GIGO theory: “Garbage in, garbage out”.

How many of you read your Bible every day with the intent of learning more about God? How many of you pray every day sincerely until you feel like you have reached God? Every Christian can find healthy spiritual food in the Bible. Prayer provides great spiritual exercise.

How many of you go on a spiritual fast regularly? ***“So all I have to do is pray and read my Bible every day, and have an occasional fast, and I’ll be strong enough to pass every test?”*** NO! It’s not that simple, really! How you pray, how you read the Bible, and how you fast makes a world of difference.

Food and exercise must contain “value”. If you pray every day but don’t sincerely and earnestly reach the throne of

grace in your prayers what value comes from your prayer? If you read your Bible every day but do not gain any insight or understanding from your reading, what value comes from your reading?

Fasting one day a week without prayer while you are fasting does not give spiritual strength. What spiritual value comes from fasting with little or no prayer? Imagine walking on a treadmill that is not plugged in.

The trick to feeding your spirit and exercising your spirit lies in the quality of the food and the quality of the exercise. Consider this argument, when you reach a point in fasting where you have to have God to help you continue, you are on your way to a good fast. A good fast should increase your faith in God.

I know this person who does not eat vegetables. He is related to me so I can talk about him. He calls himself a vegetarian. Interesting! I suppose he uses the term vegetarian because he's not vegan. He does not eat meat but he does eat cheese. He will

argue with anyone that he does eat vegetables because he eats potatoes and cornbread. Isn't corn in cornbread? Yet you offer broccoli, fresh corn, a salad, or tomato to him and he will most likely turn the offer down.

It appears to me, my relative has substituted meat with cheese and soy products but his diet does not include some important nutrients needed for a healthy body. Before everyone thinks I am bashing my beloved vegetarian, I consider my diet to be much worse. While my personal diet contains meat, I also eat the wrong kinds of food even though I eat many veggies. My health suffers because of these poor choices.

The truth is our bodies need certain vitamins and minerals in order to be healthy. Otherwise, our bodies suffer when we deny our body crucial vitamins and minerals or we indulge in a diet that includes harmful content for our bodies. Could our spirit be affected the same way when we feed or do not feed our spirit? By the way, I am working on my physical diet along with my spiritual diet. How about you?

The Bible says faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. When we read the Bible with understanding we are providing spiritual vitamins and minerals that our spirit needs. Hold on, we will cover the Bible in more detail later on.

The Bible also warns that our adversary the devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking who he can devour. Yet the Bible also says if we turn away from sin and turn to God the devil has no power over us and will leave us for a time. Unfortunately, he will come back. Satan wasn't afraid to attack the one and only Son of God, so he is not afraid of us.

Ice cream and cookies are fabulous but not the best choice for a daily diet. We must avoid too much of these kinds of choices for our daily diet. Sometimes we have to make ourselves avoid the wrong kinds of spiritual food. ***So what are the wrong kinds of spiritual food? Reading the book of Revelation? or all those begats in Bible?*** No, some of those sections in the Bible offer interesting nuggets for Christians. We read books, watch movies,

surf the internet, play games, and we listen to music. Don't you think your spirit can be negatively affected by these choices if the message from them is ungodly? ***Sure if the book is boring or the movie is stupid, you may not like either of them. Some love to play games on the internet or on their game box. How is playing games or listening to music bad? Good music makes us happy or helps us relax.***

Do you like peanut butter? ***I do.*** What if I gave you a jar of peanut butter that has a small portion of salmonella bacteria in it. Only a trivial portion has the bacteria in it. The rest is good peanut butter. Who wants to take the first bite? Books, games, movies, and music are not evil unless there is poison in them.

The Bible provides necessary spiritual nutrients for your spirit. A good book or song may provide some good food for the spirit but a book, movie, song, or game that promotes curse words, sexual content, and violence will affect your spirit growth in a negative way. In fact, filling your mind with things containing sexual content and

violence will provide growth to your fleshly mind and weaken your spirit. Where does your choice for your spiritual food come from?

Chapter 3: Focus on Feeding the Inward Person First Thing Each Day

According to many scholars, breakfast is the most important meal of the day. In my opinion, the reason behind breakfast being important stems from the fact our body needs important nutrients to do our best. We want to start our day feeding our body what our body needs to start the day. Our inward person needs spiritual nutrients

Charles Spurgeon enlightens us with this statement, “We only progress in sound living as we progress in sound understanding.” How do we increase our understanding of Jesus? Spurgeon goes on to say, “No man indulges an error of judgment, without sooner or later tolerating an error in practice. Hold fast the truth, for by so holding the truth shall you be sanctified by the Spirit of God.”

For the past several years, I have followed a yearly Bible reading plan. There are several plans on the internet. The one I am reading this year is found at the website, One Year Bible Online <http://oneyearbibleonline.com> . This plan includes a daily reading from the both the old and new testaments along with readings from Psalms and Proverbs. The average reader can go through the reading in about 15 minutes or so.

Other one year Bible plans can be found at <https://www.christianity.com/bible/year/>.

Plans include:

Beginning (Starting a Genesis and continuing through to Revelation.)

Chronological (Reading through the Bible as real time events occurred. For example, Job lived before Abraham was born so the book of Job is placed within the book of Genesis at the chronological place.)

Historical (Reading through the Bible based on the dates the books were written.)

Old and New (Each day a passage from the Old testament and New testament is presented.)

New and Old (Each day a passage from the New testament and Old testament is presented.)

Please do not get the opinion I am some kind of super spiritual person. At the age of 17 I knew it all. When I reached my fifties, I realized I knew nothing. At the age of 60 something, I still know nothing. I have read through all these Bible reading plans except the New Old plan. I seldom missed a day but I can honestly say throughout each year I struggled to focus on gleaning God's daily nuggets from the Word on occasion.

Two years ago (January 2016) I was inspired to add to my daily Bible reading. I chose three daily devotions found at the Blue Letter Bible website. One devotion is written by the late contemporary pastor Bob Hoekstra and focuses on the Grace of God. The second devotion is written by the famous preacher Charles Spurgeon. The third devotion provides a daily promise from

the Bible with a brief commentary. Additionally I added four devotions from Christianity.com. My favorites are the late Pastor Adrian Rogers and Pastor Greg Laurie. In addition to these two devotions I add two more devotions each year. (I rotate these latter two each year.)

I start each morning with prayer and reading my daily Bible reading and devotions. So I should win every battle right? The short answer is “I do not win every battle.” I even have struggles with my daily reading and prayer. Some days, I read over what God wants me to get from my reading. For me, my daily reading is not just filling a square but I do have to battle with my reading becoming just filling a square on my daily list.

I struggle with fasting. I do fast but lately the fasting skirmish has been more intense. I share this with my readers to let each of you know struggles are a reality no matter how old you are or how long you have been serving Christ. Jesus disciples

asked Him why they could drive out an evil spirit and He was successful. Jesus told them the particular type of evil spirit could only be driven out by prayer and fasting.

I challenge you to find a daily Bible reading plan. Get up a few minutes early and start your day with nuggets from God's Word. Include prayer in your daily plan. Include fasting. Deny yourself of temporary things so God can reward you with eternal things.

Chapter 4: Life is full of choices. How do you make your daily choices?

Have you ever insisted someone else make a choice for you because the choices seemed too complicated or too hard? Maybe you were just tired of making decisions. How many choices have you made where you harbor regrets to this day? According to Richard Feenstra², educational psychologist, decision researcher, adult humans make about 35,000 remotely conscious decisions per day. "Makes ya tired just thinkin' about it, doesn't it?"

¹ <https://www.quora.com/How-many-decisions-does-a-person-make-in-an-average-day>

The truth is we all must make our own choices. Many choices appear complicated and difficult. According to my experiences, one must be full of the Holy Spirit and regularly consult God in prayer in order to make the best decisions. Unfortunately, making the wrong choices often comes natural to me. Here are two examples of choices from the Bible.

Judas Iscariot chose to betray Jesus. We learn from Luke's Gospel in chapter 6 that Judas became a traitor, he did not join the disciples as a traitor. What went through the mind of Judas in making this horrible choice to betray Jesus? First, consider the facts presented in the Bible.

Judas was a thief according to John 12:6. In John 13:2, we learn the devil prompted Judas to betray Jesus. Luke 22 gives us further insight by pointing out the devil entered Judas. The devil steered Judas toward thievery and then prompted Judas to go and negotiate his betrayal with the Jewish leaders. Judas eventually threw down the

money he had been paid and went out and hung himself.

Who was Shamua? Who was Sethur? Many of today's preachers could not instantly tell you what story from the Bible these two men played a key role. There are 10 other men in the timeless story but two of twelve capture the limelight of the event. It is not these two men I mentioned. Have you ever heard of Joshua and Caleb?

Numbers, chapter 13 tells us God ordered Moses to send 12 men to look over the land of Canaan, to bring back some of the fruit of the land, and bring a report of those who live in Canaan. These 12 men went to Canaan and they brought back some awesome fruit of the land. They testified the land was flowing with milk and honey.

However 10 of those 12 men reported it was not possible for Israel to take the land of Canaan from the Giants and other threatening inhabitants that filled the land of Canaan. Shamua and Sethur were two of the ten men opposed to inheriting the promised land. Joshua and Caleb on the other hand,

acknowledged the Giants, but strongly suggested with God all things are possible. Joshua and Caleb encouraged the nation of Israel to be obedient and go forth and inherit the land. Unfortunately, the community of Israel listened to the 10 men rather than the two.

As the conversation continued in Chapter 14 of Numbers, God told Moses he was going to destroy the nation of Israel and make a mighty nation out of Moses and his descendants. Moses interceded for the nation of Israel and he begged God in accordance with his great love to forgive the sin of unbelief of His people and their lack of obedience. God forgave the Israelites but there were consequences for their unbelief and disobedience. God told them not one man over the age of 20 would see the promise of inheriting the land of Canaan fulfilled except Joshua and Caleb. The 10 men who went to Canaan and came back and spread the bad report died of a plague before the Lord.

Life's final chapters for Judas and the ten men who surveyed the land of Canaan proved very costly to them and many others.

Chapter 5: The Internal Struggle

Adrian Rogers shared¹, “You were created to know three worlds—the spiritual, psychological, and material worlds. These can be considered the world above us, the world within us, and the world around us. These worlds are related to the three parts of our human nature—spirit, soul, and body. When you are rightly related to the material world with your body, you are healthy. When you are rightly related to the psychological world with your soul, you are happy. And when you are rightly related to the spiritual world in your spirit, you are holy.

The Apostle Paul talks about an internal struggle. In Galatians chapter 5 verse 17, Paul clearly mentions an internal struggle we all have. We have a fleshly or worldly side and a spiritual side. These two sides constantly battle one another.

I remember watching a cartoon where the main cartoon character had a little devilish character with a pitch fork on one shoulder and a heavenly character with wings on the other shoulder. Each one gave input to a decision the main character had to make. The devilish character appealed to the character's human side while the heavenly character appealed to his spiritual side. The writers made the decisions made by the main character comical but the example of the decision process has truth in reality.

How are you living? Read Romans chapter 7 and Galatians chapter 5. These chapters point out our internal struggle in detail. In another chapter, Paul sheds more light on this internal struggle. Romans chapter 8, verse 5 says "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those [who live] according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." Consider this paraphrase, "If you live according to worldly desires such as money, power, and fame, your mind will be set on things related to fleshly things. Those who live with a focus on Godly desires such

as humility, eternal life with Jesus, and love for the lost will be focused on Godly things.”

The eye opener comes in Romans chapter 8 verse 13 “For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” So, is what you are living for today, worth dying for? Some think living the Christian life leads to poverty and boredom.

God’s word does not teach us Christians can’t have wealth. Abraham was very rich and considered God’s friend. Abraham didn’t focus on money, he focused on God. His wealth came from God.

The Bible does not teach that Christians cannot have power or fame. Joseph became the second in command in the nation of Egypt. David became the King of Israel. God chose both of these men because of what they were living for in this life.

My family bought an exercise bike a few years ago. The bike is still like new! We

also have a treadmill. Neither of these machines get much work because none of us believe we have time to exercise. The Bible teaches us that **bodily exercise** does have some benefit but spiritual exercise is the best exercise you can get.

The truth is both bodily exercise and spiritual exercise are extremely difficult to continue on a regular basis. You heard the term no pain no gain? Yes, spiritual exercise can hurt physically. Pain from spiritual exercise is not always like pain related to physical exercise. Try going a day without eating. *Your stomach may cut your throat.*” Try getting up an hour before you are supposed to so you can be alone with God in prayer and devotion to Him. Your physical body may complain throughout the day but your spirit will benefit.

What I’m saying to everyone is, in the same way bodily exercise becomes harder to continue spiritual exercise is also not always easy to continue on a regular basis. I must make myself go for a walk or ride on a bike if I want to exercise. Sometimes we have to

make ourselves perform our spiritual exercise.

Here is another biblical example on spiritual diet and exercise. Daniel prayed three times a day. Now I don't know how long those prayers were but I know he prayed until he reached God. Daniel fasted often. In fact, he chose a very restrictive diet so that he would not defile himself with the food his captors wanted to feed him.

Daniel chose the right physical and spiritual food and made himself perform the necessary spiritual exercise. He continued to pray even when a law was made by his enemies to cease prayer. What were the results? If you don't know, read chapter six of the book of Daniel. He spent the night with a pack of hungry lions and lived to tell about it.

Some things we do in life requires practice. Imagine being on a sports team and you show up for the big game. Now, you haven't practiced or prepared since the last game. What are the chances the coach is going to let you play in the game? How well

do you think your performance will be with the team?

Here's another illustration. Your band is having a concert tonight and you are a member of the band. The band has been practicing for three weeks for this concert. You did not attend any of the practice sessions over the three-week period. You show up for the concert, instrument in hand. Should the band director let you play in the band just because you have an instrument and you are good at playing your instrument?

Now to a spiritual food and exercise model. You only pray at church and maybe before meals. Maybe you sprinkle a few more prayers when you get into trouble. You hardly ever read your Bible. The only time your spirit receives any spiritual food is when you attend church. Even during church services, you find your mind wandering and rather than participating in church you find yourself watching church. Should Jesus let you play in the game? Should Jesus let you play in the concert?

Don't just start this Christian journey, don't give in to evil desires, finish the journey in style! God is eager to help you. Why not be an overcomer with God's help? You must choose daily to serve God. Guess what? Only **you** can make this daily decision!

Why did you choose to become a Christian? I chose to become a Christian when I lost everything important to me. I realized I could not walk through this life and make successful life decisions on my own like I thought I could.

When I accepted Christ as my Savior, my life changed dramatically. I gained back many of the earthly things I lost. Get this, I have walked with Christ for over 38 years but not without loss and challenges. The major difference is having Jesus walk with me through the loss and challenges. As I said earlier, we live in a fallen world. This world is not what God created the world to be.

In order to be a strong Christian, you must feed your spirit person a healthy diet of

the word of God. Every Christian needs to perform daily spiritual exercise such as prayer and fasting. These important actions will not make you an overcomer but rather give you the wisdom and faith necessary to overcome. Only God's Grace can give you the boost you need to overcome.

I close this chapter with these thoughts. God will provide what you need every day of your life because He loves and cares for you. The apostle Paul said in his life he had to die to "self" every day. Are we better than Paul?

Chapter 6: Grow in Grace!

Just like Paul, you have to make a decision every day of your life to walk with Jesus. Do you want your choices to be easier? I can promise everyone sometimes the decision will be hard. So, make Jesus the very first thing you think of everyday. Start your day by reading the Bible and praying until you reach God. Pick days to fast with the intention of growing closer to God through your fast. No, you don't have to go all day without eating. However, a fast should not be easy and covered in prayer or the fast is not really a fast.

Nobody knows what each day holds for them. Be ready! Don't ever give up! Remember, endurance takes exercise and success stems from frequent practice. Grow strong in the Lord!

Here is helpful wisdom concerning grace to grow strong in the Lord. Grace occurs 170 times in 159 verses in the KJV¹

God allowed Bob Hoekstra to provide a host of devotions dedicated to God's Grace. He defines grace in one of his devotions in this way, "Grace has rightly been described as "unmerited favor." The acronym, "God's Riches At Christ's Expense" catches more of its majesty."

It's one thing to understand the term "Grace". It's quite another to grasp the fact you possess "God's Grace" personally! The Christian who understands he or she is covered in God's grace cannot help but Love God.

Mercy Me sings a song on their ninth album, "Lifer", titled "Grace Got You". I struggle with understanding God's Grace but I get that song and almost every time I hear it, I can't help but get excited. I am convinced, many Christians do not understand God's Amazing Grace. Lead vocalist Bart Millard says, "Our eternity is set! On your worst day, Christ is OK with you. He adores you. He's pleased with you. How is that possible? No clue, but it is. That's the most amazing news of all!"² At the age of 23, I concluded there is no way

for anyone, especially me, to follow all the rules put forth in the Bible. Why would the creator of the universe raise such a high bar and expect everyone to win? Why even try? The answer to successfully following the rules involves “Grace”. God’s Grace can provide the boost necessary to overcome adversity and win!

Wow! Using the grace God gives us helps us glorify God! You may not become a preacher, a missionary, or a worship leader but your ministry needs to glorify God each day of your life regardless of where you shine. Did you know teaching school is a ministry to the Christian teacher? Christian students, guess what your ministry is? You may be the only Jesus many of your peers see.

We need to fully get God’s grace. God is not ok with me because I deserve for Him to be ok with me. Here is a clip from the lyrics of Mercy Me’s “Grace Got You”, “Laugh, 'til your whole side's hurting, Smile like you just got away with something,

Why? 'Cause you just got away with something, Ever since, ever since grace got you”

Nineteenth-century preacher Charles Spurgeon said, “Some persons have the foolish notion that the only way in which they can live for God is by becoming ministers, missionaries, or Bible women. Alas! How many would be shut out from any opportunity of magnifying the Most High if this were the case. Beloved, it is not office, it is earnestness; it is not position, it is grace which will enable us to glorify God.”

According to the Bible, the Apostle Paul repeatedly wrote when we accept Jesus as our personal Savior, we are justified in God’s sight due to Grace.

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;” (King James Version, Ephesians 1.7)

“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:” (King James Version, Romans 3:24)

<http://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item107718.html>

You may be the fastest runner at your school or the best player at your sport. You may be one of the richest students in your school or among the best looking students in your class. Always remember, these things provide no advantage over other Christians. In fact, if you were lined up against the wall while God chose the leader of His team, you will probably not be His first choice. Without God's Grace you are nothing! Remember, nobody can earn God's Grace.

Some consider themselves rather ugly in their own eyes because of some flaw while others find the same person rather handsome or very gorgeous. Maybe they have a nose that is too long or too short in their eyes. Let me share a very important point. One's outward appearance does not define one's beauty in the eyes of God. Who cares what others think! I absolutely love the song "The God I know" by Love & The Outcome.

King David said in Psalms 34 verse 19 "The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all;". We understand from this verse

Christians will have challenges in this life but God will deliver them from how many troubles? All their troubles!

In closing this chapter, I am reminded by the Apostle Paul, “But by the grace of God I am what I am: ...” (1 Corinthians 15:10) God’s Grace is profound, awesome, and available to all!

Chapter 7: Don’t Drift

Have you ever went tubing down a winding river in an old tire tube? It’s so relaxing drifting with the current and knowing when you reach the end, there is a means to transport you back to where you started. There is another type of drifting that is not so fun and many young Christians seem to get caught up in a current that leads them far off course.

In my experience over the years, I have seen very few believers decide to walk away from God without first drifting in the wrong direction. Young Christians decide the Christian life is not for them and walk

away. Older Christians decide what they want in life clashes with what God wants in their life so they walk away. These examples do not represent all quitters. I know “quitters” sounds harsh. This term is not meant to be judgmental. Give me a few more chapters to explain.

What causes Christians to drift away? The simple answer is “Unbelief”. We will consider more details on unbelief and the Bible in later chapters. The Bible presents warnings on this topic. The faith chapter in Hebrews tells us without faith nobody can please God. In the Old Testament story of God delivering the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage, the Israelites could not go to the promised land because of unbelief. Finally, a Christian’s faith is tested to the point he or she has to decide if the Bible is true and their trust is in the right place. Many walk away deciding the Bible is not true.

Which is worse an atheist or an agnostic? I think agnostics are harder to reach. An atheist believes there is no God. An agnostic has no belief and does not argue for unbelief. God may exist but there is no

way to prove there is a God and no way to prove there is not a God. Charles Templeton walked away from the pulpit and became an agnostic in the 1940's.

If you don't know who Charles Templeton is maybe you have heard of Billy Graham. Charles and Billy became the best of friends and worked together in ministry for a while in the Youth for Christ ministry back in the 1940s. Both Templeton and Graham battled doubt. Both went different directions at the end of their battle.

Charles stated in one of his memoirs he never believed the Genesis account of creation or the flood that destroyed mankind. He did not believe in eternal punishment in an everlasting hell. He began to doubt all the major beliefs of the Christian faith until he just quit.

Charles tried his best to convince his friend Billy Graham to quit the ministry. Reverend Graham chose to go on with God and did not look back. One of Mr. Templeton's most famous books is "Farewell to God", published in 1996. As

far as we know, Mr. Templeton died an agnostic.

Dr. Simon Greenleaf was a leading atheist and a member of the Royall Professor of Law at Harvard University. Some referred to Dr. Greenleaf as an agnostic. His three volume work “A Treatise on the Law of Evidence” is still used today in courts of law. At the prompting of some of his students, Dr. Greenleaf used court rules of evidence relating to the resurrection of Christ and concluded if the evidence for the resurrection was submitted in a court of law. The evidence would prove the resurrection of Jesus did occur. Dr. Greenleaf searched for Jesus and found Him.

Chapter 8: Number One Reason for Quitting the Christian Walk, Unbelief!

How many of you believe the Bible is the factual, inerrant, Word of God? Do you believe Jesus is who the Bible says He is, the one and only Son of God, born of a virgin? Unbelief has plagued humanity for

centuries. The story of the Gospel of Jesus Christ has changed the world over the past 2000 plus years. Especially since the availability of God's word has become so saturated in many countries today particularly in the United States. Yet, so many Americans choose not to read the Bible even though they own one or more Bibles. Let's begin with the question of the authority of the Bible.

No book in the world has earned the massive popularity and heavy criticism the Bible has achieved. We Americans take the Bible for granted. The most popular English version of the Bible is the King James Bible. The King James was first published in 1611 under the blessings of King James of England. The translation took seven years to complete.

Elaborate rules were put into place to ensure the 47 scholars produced the most reliable translation from the Hebrew and Greek writings. Other texts such as the Latin Vulgate and Bishops Bible were resources used in the translation process.

These scholars were divided into six groups located at six different geographic locations. Each scholar reviewed each of the other scholar's completed work at each location and then sent the approved translated work to the other locations for review and approval by each of the scholars at each location.

Here is the amazing part. The church at Rome had made owning a Bible illegal for common Christians and many Christians had died trying to get an English Bible translated. In 1400, the Wycliffe's English translation became the first printed copy of an English Bible but the English Bible was illegal to own. At that time, all church services were conducted in Latin. The Latin Vulgate was the only accepted version of the Bible. The church leaders hated Wycliffe so much they dug up his bones 40 years after he died and burned them. In another instance, parents were burned at the stake for teaching their children to say the Lord's prayer. Fast forward to the 1600s and the King of England had sanctioned an English translation of the complete Bible.

In 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. These scrolls are around 2,000 years old. One of the scrolls contained the book of Isaiah and matched the King James Version almost word for word.

Today we have many other English translations but none of these English versions were translated using the guidelines put in place to translate the King James Bible.

In the King James Version (KJV) of Mark chapter one, verse forty-one, the verse says Jesus was filled with compassion when a leper asked Him for healing. In the New International Version (NIV) the same verse reads Jesus was “indignant” rather than filled with compassion. In other words, Jesus was filled with anger and disgust rather than filled with compassion. Considering all the English Bible translations of this verse, “moved with compassion” is the most accepted translation for the Greek phrase.

The point of this example is reliable translations are important. Don't just accept

https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/48472.Walter_Brueggemann

a translation of the Bible because the text is easy to read. Reliability of what you read is very important.

Critics have attacked the reliability of Bible content. Some arguments appeal to the intelligence of humanity while others stand on a lack of evidence to prove reliability. Still other arguments focus on apparent inconsistencies gathered from reading the Bible. Let me make a bold statement. None of these arguments attacking the reliability of God's Word can be proved true. Here is the neat part. I don't have to defend my statement. I serve the God that wrote the Bible and He is the one providing the defense. Yet many carry on these attacks hoping to gain an accepting audience.

In my opinion, the most successful attack on the Bible has been one of avoidance and complacency towards reading the Bible. How can one know for sure what the Bible says without reading the Bible? Do we accept opinions and conclusions given by scholars and others concerning Biblical topics? Since eternity lasts a long time and one's destiny depends on individual choice,

everyone needs to search out truth for themselves.

Chapter 9: Escape Daily Drama

Lots of drama exists around us. Let me explain what drama means in this context. Drama is a selfish way to manipulate others to accept a way of thinking. ***“Jenny doesn’t see things our way so we need to go on Facebook and make her look bad. We need to teach her a lesson.”*** Daily drama includes bullying and other selfish acts. Avoid the drama. Do not become a part of daily drama. So what do you do, throw away your cell phone and computer and go into your closet until Jesus comes for you? Now, that action is full of drama.

Joseph, the son of Israel, was tempted to enter into daily drama. His brothers created lots of drama. According to Genesis chapter 37, Joseph’s brothers sold him to a band of Midianites out of jealousy. We move over to Chapter 39 and read how his master’s wife tried to get him to commit

adultery with her. For many days, she tried to entice him. Joseph turned her down each time. Finally, she trapped Joseph and tried one last time. Joseph ran away. Running away from trouble is sometimes a good thing not a cowardly thing. You say, “Yea but Joseph went to prison so how did he escape the drama?”

As readers of the story we see Joseph went to prison but that move was just the next step in God’s plan for Joseph. He was blessed in prison and put in charge within the prison. Joseph went from being a slave to becoming the number two leader in all of Egypt. This rise in stature did not happen in just a few days. In fact, years passed by before Joseph reached his potential.

Jesus shows us how to deal with daily drama. The religious leaders created lots of daily drama for Jesus to encounter. Jesus had a goal given to Him by His Heavenly Father. When the leaders tried to kill him before the time Jesus avoided them. When the crowd came to make Him king by force, He avoided them. Jesus handled these two extremes in the same way, he got away from

the conflict and avoided the confrontation. Why? His goal was not to fight those who hated Him or to become an Earthly king over Israel. His goal was to save humanity.

What are your goals in life? I have goals within my career and within my ministry. One of my ministry goals is to write a book that helps Christians. In order to reach my goal, I have to spend time advancing towards completing the goal. I also have to avoid being sidetracked from reaching my goal.

Chapter 10: Making Decisions

I facilitated classes for the University of Phoenix for seven years. About five years was devoted to coaching students through economics courses. *Oh no! Here comes the boring part. I thought the best part of a book was at the end!* I promise not to be too boring. Maybe my presentation can shed light on how each of us can make better decisions. Let me share four decision principles presented by Gregory Mankiw. Gregory Mankiw is an honorable Professor of Economics at Harvard University and

served on the President's staff for President George H. W. Bush as the Chief Economic Advisor. Mankiw defines an economy as an act of managing one's household.

There are many theories related to how we make decisions. Mankiw presents the topic of how we make decisions from an economic viewpoint. Consider these four principles.

Principle Number One, People Face Trade-Offs. Most of us have heard of the old adage there's no such thing as a free lunch. In other words we pay something for that lunch even though it might not be cash. For example, we find ourselves continually trading one objective for another to get what we want. When we are at church we could be at home watching a football game or on the lake fishing.

One important point concerning trade-offs is it's important to understand the impact of our decisions to help us make a good decision. A man once told his wife, "I'm not going go to church today." His wife immediately replied "oh yes you are!" The

man firmly said "no, I have thought it over and I am not going to church today! I'm going to go play golf or something I enjoy." The wife pleaded "but dear, you are the pastor."

The truth is we all get to the point when we want to make a decision to make us happy and we often fail to consider the impact of that decision. The darkness of this world does not want us to consider the impact of our decisions. King Saul , first king of Israel, chose to listen to the people in his kingdom rather than the command of God. It cost him his kingdom. What are your decisions costing you?

Principle Number Two the Cost of Something Is What You Give up to Get It.

When we think of cost our minds immediately focus on money. Quite often there are other costs (something you give up to get something else) related to making a decision. These costs go far beyond monetary value. Consider the preacher who gave up a high-paying job to put more focus on his ministry. The obvious cost is a loss of

income. Other costs related to this decision include time focus, happiness, and contentment. The preacher lost income but gained more time to focus on his ministry. What would the cost of been had he chosen to take the lucrative job and give up the ministry or possibly try to do both? We plainly see the monetary costs. What is one's time, happiness and contentment worth?

Principle Number Three, Rational People Think at the Margin.

A famous quote has stuck with me for many years, “if one fails to plan their obviously planning to fail.” Principle number three considers those making decisions are rational people. Rational people consider the fact that rarely is a decision in life black and white. My Sunday and Wednesday schedule may be to be in church every time the doors are open. However I might have to make a small incremental adjustment to that plan should the need arise. Should a doctor refuse to perform an urgent life-saving surgery merely because it's Sunday and she has

scheduled to be at church? Should a factory manager refuse to stay late on Wednesday night because it's 7 PM and every Wednesday night he is in church at that time? There are two things to consider in thinking at the margin. These two things are marginal cost and marginal benefits.

What is the cost of the surgeon not performing the surgery because it is Sunday? The marginal cost is possible loss of the patient. What is the marginal benefit? The patient may live longer. What should the surgeon do?

The Bible says if children obey their parents, they will have a long life. What is the cost of not obeying parents? The obvious answer is not having a long life. Are you willing to accept the cost and benefits of your decision to walk with Christ? You will have trials but you will live forever with Christ.

Principle Number Four, People Respond to Incentives:

An incentive is something that causes a person to act. Children might obey their

parents in order to avoid punishment or to please their parents. Those participating in a sport may be motivated by the chance to win a trophy or earn bragging rights.

Higher prices at the gas station and supermarket cause many of us to adjust other areas in our life. High prices influence the type of car we own or the kinds of foods we eat. If we want a new Corvette, we may need a job that pays more than we currently make.

These four decision principles help us better understand how we make decisions and maybe we gained insight concerning how others make decisions. For more information related to Mankiw's economic principles follow this link:

<https://newworldeconomics.com/greg-mankiws-ten-principles/> What happens to our decision making when we slack off on our walk with God?

There are black and white decisions. Robbing a bank is bad (black). Helping someone in need is good (white). Is choosing not to pick up a stranger when

driving down the road good or bad? The latter question is a gray area.

A common argument when we make a decision in a gray area is "just because you can't do it doesn't mean I can't do it." Or "where does it say in the Bible I can't do what I want to do?"

Consider the four principles: What is the trade-off? What will you have to give up to get what you want? What are the consequences of your decision? What incentives are you responding to in making this decision?

Chapter 11: Parting Remarks: Stay Plugged In

Jesus said in the fifteenth chapter of the book of John, his Father is the planter, He is the vine and we are the branches. Jesus goes on to say Without Him, we can do nothing. Let me share an important truth based on Jesus' statement. We have to stay plugged in to the vine to exist in Christ. The

dark world's goal is to get all of us to unplug.

All believers are plugged into the vine by faith. What happens to a tomato branch when you remove the branch from the plant? The branch will wither and die. Why? The vine is no longer providing nutrients necessary for life.

Walter Brueggemann, author of the book "Prophetic Imagination" said, "Sabbath, in the first instance, is not about worship. It is about work stoppage. It is about withdrawal from the anxiety system of Pharaoh, the refusal to let one's life be defined by production and consumption and the endless pursuit of private well-being." We have to get rest in order to maintain the strength to go on. We have to unplug from the world to rest. Unplugging from the world to rest does not include unplugging from the vine. We must never unplug from the vine unless we want to die. We must rest. God made the Sabbath for us to rest.

Imagine with me a storm is coming up and the tomato branches weather the storm for a while then they get scared or tired of the struggle and all branches unplug from the vine and run for cover. ***“That is a stupid picture, branches don’t have legs.”*** They hopped! When the storm is over, the vine is still firmly planted but the branches did not have enough strength to return so they died. Catch this truth, the vine will grow new branches.

I hope you gleaned something from this short book. The fight for your eternal destiny is on. You can win with God helping you each day. Everyone must prepare for battle but realize, without God, the battle is already lost.

Seek God through Bible reading, prayer, and fasting. God is real and will find you before you find Him if you are actively looking for Him. Faith is the key not logic and human intelligence.

God loves you and I love you too.

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Giving Credit Where Credit is Due.

Every attempt has been made to give credit to the authors of thoughts and facts mentioned in this book. Most of the Bible verses are either King James (Public Domain) or New King James

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