

Spiritual Experience

Introduction

This study booklet has been prepared to give an understanding of what is involved in being a true Christian. The phrase **‘true Christian’** is very important, because there are many who describe themselves as Christians who are not true Christians at all. The purpose of this booklet, then, is to show clearly what God has said about true Christian experience in the Bible.

‘Spiritual Experience’ is a companion to the first series of *Sound Words* radio programmes, and the study material covers 26 programmes in all. The initial basis for this series was the book “The Experience That Counts!” by Jonathan Edwards, published by Grace Publications Trust, and I am indebted to them for that publication. Also it has been a privilege to work with Jack Jenner in this series. Jack is the pastor of Newtown Evangelical Baptist Church in Chesham, England, and has been involved in Bible teaching for over 20 years.

The testimonies selected for the appendix are a sample selection from those used in the programmes, and are included to show how the Bible’s teaching on spiritual experience is worked out in the lives of Christians today.

As you read this book and consider the passages in the Bible that it refers to, it is my prayer that God will help you to understand what it means to be a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you already are a true Christian, my

desire is that this booklet will strengthen you in your faith. If you are not yet a true Christian, I pray that God will work in your heart and life so that you will become a follower of Jesus and be a child of God.

Derek French

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(Since the first printing of this booklet, Philip Sheppey, whose testimony is found on page 53, has gone to be with the Lord. He was a lovely Christian gentleman and his love for the Lord Jesus Christ was evident to all who knew him. Psalm 116:15: *“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.”*)

Chapter 1, The Bible

Introduction

This booklet is based on the ‘Sound Words’ programme. ‘Sound Words’ looks at the teaching of the Bible and shows how it benefits all who believe it and put its teaching into practice. Because of this it is important for us to answer questions such as: Why do we need to look at the teaching of the Bible? Is the Bible a reliable book, one that we can trust? Is the Bible authoritative on all that it teaches, and if so why?

1) Why We Need To Consider The Bible

a) *Our problem.*

Before considering the Bible itself we need to understand something about ourselves. The first man and woman, Adam and Eve, knew God and enjoyed God. But when

they sinned by disobeying God, a great change took place. The result of sin entering the world is that men and women are out of touch with God (Genesis 3:8&24) and spiritually blind. (2 Corinthians 4:4) *“The god of this age (the devil) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”* So the human race was plunged into spiritual darkness (Colossians 1:13, 1 Peter 2:9).

This means that we are unable of ourselves to discover who God is, what he is like, what he requires of us, or the way back to God. Therefore if we are to know anything about God, he must make himself known to us.

b) The ways in which God has revealed himself

God makes himself known to us in two main ways. The first is called General Revelation, because this includes creation, the world and universe around us (Psalm 19:1, Psalm 8:3-4, Romans 1:20, Isaiah 40:12), man’s heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11, Romans 2:14-15), and history (Acts 17:26). But our spiritual blindness is so great we fail to recognise God in these ways (Romans 1:19-21&25).

The second main way God has made himself known is called Special Revelation. God has spoken through appearances, visions, dreams and miracles. For example, Jacob (Genesis 32:22-31). (See also Isaiah 6, Acts 10, John 2:11, Exodus 10:2.) The supreme way that God has revealed himself to us is through his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 14:9, *“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”* Jesus Christ perfectly reveals God to us. All of this Special Revelation is contained in the Bible. Here is collected all we need for our knowledge of God, Christ,

ourselves and salvation. Apart from the Bible we would never reliably know about God at all. The Bible is simple, clear, sufficient, and without error - it is the WORD of God. Consider some of these verses about the Bible: Psalm 19:7-11, Psalm 119:105, John 17:17, 2 Timothy 3:16.

Therefore the Bible is unique and above all other books. That’s why we need to consider its teaching to discover who and what God is like, how we can know him for ourselves and enjoy the salvation he gives in Christ.

2) The Reliability of the Bible

How can we be sure the Bible’s teaching is reliable? The answer to this is found in the origin of the Bible. Where did it come from?

When Paul wrote to Timothy he described the Bible as SCRIPTURE, and used a particular term - ‘God-breathed’ (2 Timothy 3:16), sometimes translated ‘inspiration’. Just as when we speak we need to breathe out before the sounds of the words can be heard, so it is with the Bible. It is God breathing out his word to us. The very words of the Bible come from God.

How did he do it? We have the answer for us in 2 Peter 1:20-21, *“...but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”* The phrase ‘carried along’ was used to describe a sailing boat as the wind filled its sails and caused it to move. Peter tells us that God the Holy Spirit filled the hearts and minds of the writers of the Bible and so carried them along that they expressed the message of God exactly as he intended. Each writer was prepared

by God (Galatians 1:11-12, Isaiah 49:1-2 & 5, Jeremiah 1:5). Each writer had his own style, gifts and character, and God used them so that they wrote exactly as he wanted. And because it was the Holy Spirit who carried them along, this meant that human sin and error did not spoil the work. This is why repeatedly throughout the Bible we find the expression '*this is what the Lord says*' or similar words.

Because all the words of the Bible originally came from God, they are accurate and without error, and therefore can be trusted completely.

3) The Authority of the Bible

Because the Bible is God's word to us, it has a unique authority. In fact, it is the only full and final authority we have to settle every issue of the Christian faith and life. This is why Christians realise that their lives are to be governed by its teaching and therefore seek to believe and behave as the Bible directs.

The writers of both the Old Testament and the New Testament knew that they were not bringing their own ideas, but God's message to us, in their writings. No true prophet ever spoke on his own authority, but spoke the words God had given him. Zechariah spoke for himself and all the prophets before him when he declared (Zechariah 7:12), "... *the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets.*" And David, who gave us many of the Psalms, said the same (2 Samuel 23:2). (See also Jeremiah 1:9, Isaiah 2:1, Amos 1:1, Micah 1:1, Habakkuk 1:1, Revelation 1:19, Amos 3:8, 1 Corinthians 2:13, 2 Peter 3:2, 1 Corinthians 14:37.)

Therefore, to rebel against the teaching of the Bible is to rebel against God himself! But to accept, believe and submit to the teaching of the Bible is to submit to God himself, to build on a firm foundation, and to please God.

The Bible is a very special and precious Book. It is God's Book, God's Word to us. Therefore, we should value it highly, study it earnestly, believe it wholeheartedly, and obey it willingly. Believers who do this please God and receive his special blessings in their lives.

Chapter 2, Why We Need To Know What A True Christian Is

In this chapter we shall answer the question, 'Why do we need to know what it means to be a Christian?'

To examine this properly we must begin with God and with what he has told us. The Bible explains clearly that there is only one God. He is the Creator of all things, both visible and invisible. Here are just a small selection of Bible passages. We read in both 2 Kings 19:15 and Isaiah 37:16, "... *you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.*" Also Psalm 86:10 tells us, "*For you are great and do marvellous deeds; you alone are God.*" The Bible begins with these words (Genesis 1:1), "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" And Isaiah 40:28 tells us, "*The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.*"

But the Bible goes further and teaches us that God is personal and alive, and wants men and women, girls and boys to have a relationship with him. When the people of

the city of Thessalonica became followers of Jesus, this was described by Paul in this way in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, “... *you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.*” Jesus, in his prayer to God the Father recorded in John 17, tells us in verse 3, “*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*”

The Bible also teaches us how we can come to know God in this intimate and personal way. The only way we can know God is through his Son Jesus Christ (John 14:6), “*Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.*” There is no other way to God. We must become followers of Jesus if we are to become the friends of God.

Many people think there are other ways to God, but the Bible makes it quite clear there is only one way, through faith in Jesus Christ. There are two main reasons why people think there are other ways to God. The first is because of God’s great enemy Satan, or the devil as he is sometimes called. Jesus described him in John 8:44 as “... *a liar, and the father of lies.*” He loves to deceive people and lead them astray. And secondly the Bible teaches us that our own hearts are deceitful. (Jeremiah 17:9) “*The heart is deceitful above all things...*” So even our own hearts will lead us astray and away from God. But God has told us clearly in the Bible that it is only through following and trusting Jesus Christ, only by becoming a Christian, that anyone can ever come to know God in this personal way.

God wants us to know him because he wants to bless us in this life by forgiving our sins (both the wrong things we do and the good things we fail to do). Without this forgiveness we cannot enjoy peace with God, because he is holy and must punish sin. Only Christians, that is believers, receive God’s forgiveness for their sins (Ephesians 1:7). God also wants us to become his children and to belong to his family. Paul expressed it like this in Gal 3:26, “*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*” (See also John 1:12.) Then we shall enjoy his love, his friendship and fellowship, daily communion with him in prayer, and have his help to reshape our lives and overcome our weaknesses and temptations. It is Christians alone who have God’s continual presence and special care and help with life’s trials and problems.

Finally, God wants us to become Christians so that we can know his blessings after this life. When Christians die, they go safely to heaven, which is a place of purity, free from sin, suffering and death, and, best of all, it is where the Lord is! (See John 14:1-3, 1 Peter 1:3-5, Philippians 1:23.)

So we must know God or we shall not enjoy any of these blessings, for it is knowing God like this that makes us true Christians. God has given us the Bible to teach us how we might know him. The Bible is where we find out what God is like and where he tells us how we can come to know him in the right and only way, through Jesus Christ; for Christians are followers of Jesus.

Chapter 3, True Christians And Their Relationship With Christ

We must now begin our investigation to find out exactly what is a true Christian. What has God said about this in the Bible?

A Bible verse that gives an excellent summary of what it means to be a Christian is 1 Peter 1:8. Peter was writing to some of the early Christians who never actually saw Jesus when he was on earth. This is what he wrote: *“Though you have not seen him (that is Jesus), you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy...”*

- i. A Christian is someone who believes in Jesus Christ. Christians trust in him, rely on him, and have a personal relationship with him by faith. Being a Christian means looking to Jesus Christ to bring you the forgiveness of your sins.
- ii. A Christian is also someone who loves Jesus Christ. Christians love him for what he has done in order to bring them this forgiveness, dying on the cross and rising again. They love him for what he is doing for them now, praying for them and sending his Holy Spirit into their hearts to strengthen them for this life. And they love him for what he will do for them in the future. When Christians die they will go to be with Jesus forever, in a heavenly place he has prepared for them.
- iii. A Christian also experiences the joy of the Lord, the joy of his forgiveness, of knowing God as Father and friend, of knowing the Lord Jesus as Saviour.

Love and joy are strong emotions, and true Christians will feel strongly about Jesus. He gives every Christian new life, spiritual life, abundant life, and abundant life is not displayed by half-heartedness. True Christians will be spiritually eager about their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. So true Christians will be fully committed to following Jesus and serving him. When this is not the case something is seriously wrong. The Bible makes it very clear that God loves wholeheartedness towards him. Consider these verses: Matthew 22:37, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”* And Jeremiah 29:13, *“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”* To be a Christian means to love Jesus with all your heart.

But what about someone who says he is a Christian but who is only half-hearted about following Jesus? Well, sadly even a true Christian can be weak, rather than being spiritually strong and healthy. For example, Peter’s denial of Jesus showed his weakness at a particular moment, but soon he was very sorry about it, and wept bitterly when he realised what he had done (Luke 22:61-62). His denial on this occasion indicated his weakness and not that he was not a Christian. A true Christian may sometimes fail to live as he ought, but he will not be able to stay in that condition for very long. Soon he will be very sorry and will seek to live as God has directed us in the Bible. Someone who is a false Christian will not be affected by listening to the Bible, but will go on sinning.

A danger we need to be aware of is that it is possible for someone to be enthusiastic about Christianity and still not

be a true Christian! For example, when Jesus was on earth crowds flocked to see him and shouted, *“Hosanna, praise to the Son of David”* on Palm Sunday, but few of them were his true disciples, because within a week they were shouting, *“Crucify Him!”* (see Matthew 21:1-11 and 27:20-25).

We can tell if someone truly loves and follows Jesus by their glad and eager obedience to him. In John 14:23 we read, *“Jesus replied, If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.”* God the Holy Spirit works in the Christian’s heart so that a true Christian will always want to please Jesus. A lovely example of this from the Bible is Saul of Tarsus, who hated anything to do with Jesus before he became a Christian; but when he was converted and became a follower of Jesus, he devoted the whole of his life to serving him. You can read about it in Acts chapter 9, and chapter 15 of this booklet.

Chapter 4, Godly Fear

1) The Fear Of The Lord

Something else that characterises the true Christian is that as well as love for God, the Christian also has a **godly fear**. Here are some Bible verses that state this for us. (Deuteronomy 6:13) *“Fear the Lord your God, and serve him only...”* Peter urges Christians in 1 Peter 1:17 to *“... live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.”* Throughout the Bible true godliness is often called *“the fear of the Lord.”*

Perhaps at first it appears strange that Christian believers are to love and fear the Lord, for they seem like opposites. But when the Bible uses this word ‘fear’ it does not mean a dread of God so as to be driven away from him. Rather it means to stand in awe and reverence of him. So to fear God means wanting to please him in all you think and say and do. It means not wanting to do anything that might displease and grieve him. It means to honour him and value him above all others. So those who love God will fear God, and those who fear him will love him. Their fear of God will act like fuel to their love and make it burn brighter.

2) Not Fearing God

Those who are not Christians are described in the opposite way in Romans 3:18, *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”* This can be detected when God is not served and obeyed, and when people do what God forbids. The Ten commandments that God has given in Exodus 20 are carelessly broken by millions; for example, when God’s name is ridiculed or blasphemed, or misrepresented, by those who are not Christians.

The true Christian is grieved when God is not feared or honoured by others. For example, Paul at Athens (Acts 17:16) was sad because the people were worshipping idols, instead of worshipping the only true God. The true Christian wants everyone to fear and love God.

3) Encouraging The Fear Of The Lord

We can encourage ourselves to fear the Lord by regularly reminding ourselves who God is and what he is like. He is

great in power and majesty. His holiness is awesome and yet full of love. He is steadfast and faithful, and much more. And we remind ourselves about God by carefully reading the Bible; God's Word to us, for it is here God has made himself known. It is good to think about God's character often. As we do this we shall encourage true godly fear.

Chapter 5, Christian Hope

Having seen that a true Christian is someone who believes in and loves Jesus Christ, and also has godly fear in his heart, we now turn to another great blessing the Lord gives to true believers, and that is hope. The Bible teaches that this hope is given by the Lord to every Christian. Indeed, believers in the Old Testament period and that of the New Testament shared this blessing. Consider these verses:

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:13 that hope one of the three great things of which Christianity consists - "*faith, hope and love*". And when writing in Romans 8:24 he says, "*For in this hope we are saved...*" The Psalmist likewise writes of it in Psalm 146:5, "*Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.*" And in Psalm 31:24, "*Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.*"

1) The Christian's Hope Described

But exactly what is this hope that the Christian has? The Bible speaks of the Christian's hope as being in God and the promises God has given him; in particular the promise of life after death. Death is not the end of the Christian

life. When the Christian believer dies he goes to be with Christ in heaven, and when Christ comes again he will raise our bodies from death. In fact, it is the resurrection of Jesus that gives the Christian this hope that he will be raised one day just as Jesus was (1 Peter 1:3): "*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*"

But someone might ask, 'Isn't the word hope something that's uncertain?' For example, you might hope that tomorrow it will rain, but it still remains sunny and hot! We need to remember that the Bible word for hope is not the same as the term we use today. The New Testament was originally written in Greek, and the Greek word for hope is not something that's uncertain or in doubt. Biblical hope is not what might happen, but what will happen. Christian hope is something that's guaranteed.

2) Christian Hope Is A Great Source Of Strength In This Life

This hope concerning the Christian's future is a wonderful help to the believer here and now. If you know you are going to be raised from the dead and you know you have a home in heaven, it strengthens you in this life in a number of ways. For example:-

- i. It is a great help when facing temptation. This is illustrated in some words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:8, "... *putting on ... the hope of salvation as a helmet.*" Here Paul is dealing with the fight against sin and temptation that every Christian is engaged in while living in this sinful world. The hope of the resurrection

and heaven to come, helps the Christian not to give in to temptation, for there are much better things in store for him which the Lord has promised to all who truly love and serve him.

- ii. It is a great help when facing difficulties in this life. The Christian is often troubled by trials and persecution, and will have to face death, unless Jesus returns first. It is the Christian's hope in the Lord, that he will bring him safely through all of these trials and safely to heaven, that helps the Christian to persevere. Here are some Bible passages which teach this. Hebrews 6:19 speaks of this hope being like a ship's anchor which holds the vessel securely when it is caught up in a severe storm: "*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.*" Paul could write about the Thessalonian Christians who were being sorely tried by persecution in this way in 1 Thessalonians 1:3: "*... your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

3) Doubts And Overcoming Them

We need to remember that it is still possible for true Christians to suffer from doubts about the Lord and become despondent. For example, Thomas the disciple doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead (John 20:24-31). Now we need to remember some important matters at this point. No Christian is perfect in this life, and because of that a number of things can happen.

- i. The Bible teaches us about God's greatness and faithfulness, and his promises to protect us. If we

neglect to read the Bible, true Christians can forget these, and doubts can arise.

- ii. If we compromise with sin in our lives, that brings a barrier between us and the Lord (Isaiah 59:1-2), and again doubts creep in.
- iii. Added to these things there is Satan, who often attacks Christians and sows doubts in our minds. He is described as a '*roaring lion*' who comes to frighten us (1 Peter 5:8), especially when we are going through trial. Satan, or the devil as he is called, often suggests that God does not love us any more, or else we would not be going through this trial. Satan does this to rob believers of the joy of our security.
- iv. The trials themselves can sometimes be overwhelming, and like Jesus' disciples in the boat during the storm, fear that the Lord has either forsaken us or does not care, can creep into our hearts and minds.

4) Overcoming Doubt and Encouraging Hope

So how can we overcome such doubts and encourage hope? Here are a number of steps we can take to help ourselves.

- i. By facing doubts honestly and telling God about them in prayer, asking for his help.
- ii. By remembering to read the Bible daily, and committing to memory some of its passages, particularly God's promises.

David described this in Psalm 119:11 as hiding God's Word in his heart.

- iii. By humble and thorough repentance when we have sinned (1 John 1:9).
- iv. Holding on to God's promises never to leave or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6 and Hebrews 13:5), which are true even though we may have to endure trials or attacks of Satan.

Chapter 6 The Christian's Attitude To Sin

1) Hatred Of Sin

We have seen that a true Christian loves God and loves Jesus Christ. Now we must consider something which it is right for Christians to hate. It is always right for the Christian to hate sin in all its forms. This is taught in the Bible in many places, and here are just two passages that give us this instruction. (Psalm 97:10) *"Let those who fear the Lord hate evil..."* and (Psalm 101:3) *"I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they shall not cling to me."*

Just as we turn to the Bible to show who and what we are to love, so we do the same with this hating of sin. It is through our reading and study of the Bible that we learn what things are wrong and are to be hated. David discovered this and tells about it in Psalm 119:104, *"I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path"*, and in Psalm 119:163, *"I hate and abhor falsehood but I love your law."* To hate sin means to dislike it, turn away from it, and stand against it. So, for example, we are not to give bribes, nor cheat, nor tell lies,

nor harm others, nor do many more things that the Bible teaches us to forsake.

Christians are to hate sin because it is opposed to God who is holy and whom they love. (1 John 3:4) *"Everyone who sins breaks the law, sin is lawlessness."* Sin grieves God and that's why Christians hate sin. So we read in Proverbs 8:13, *"To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behaviour and perverse speech."*

And in addition to this the Christian is someone Jesus has saved (Matthew 1:21) *"... from their sins..."* If the Lord Jesus Christ has saved us from sin we cannot be content to go on living a sinful life.

2) Sorrow For Sin

But even Christians sin sometimes, so how will that affect true believers? They will feel great sorrow and shame, and be humbled and heartbroken that they have not lived as they ought and have failed the Lord who loved them enough to die that their sins might be forgiven. (Matthew 5:4) *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."*

This sorrow leads to repentance. (2 Corinthians 7:10) *"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret..."* And the Bible tells us that God responds to this godly sorrow in a wonderfully merciful way. (Isaiah 57:15) *"For this is what the high and lofty One says - he who lives for ever, whose name is holy: I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite."*

3) Conviction Of Sin

The Bible teaches that God convicts sinners of their sin before they become Christians, to make them aware of their helplessness, and this causes them to cry out to him for mercy and forgiveness. For example, the crowds on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:37 tells us, “... *they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’*” About 3000 people repented of their sins and were baptised on that day trusting in Jesus for forgiveness.

4) A Danger To Be Careful About

Even though God does convict sinners of their sin before they become Christians, it is possible for people to feel their sins, and even be afraid of God’s judgment and hell, yet still not become a Christian! A clear example of this in the Bible is Pharaoh king of Egypt in the book of Exodus. If you look at the following verses in the book of Exodus you will see that Pharaoh asked for prayer because of his sins (Exodus 8:8), and he acknowledged that he had sinned (Exodus 9:27 and 10:16), yet he did not repent, but kept on sinning.

5) An Important Difference

The difference between a Christian who sins and a non-Christian who sins is simply this. The Christian will not keep on sinning. (1 John 3:6) “*No-one who lives in him (that is Jesus Christ) keeps on sinning. No-one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.*” The non-Christian or false Christian will keep on sinning, but true followers of Jesus will be sad that they have failed the Lord

who died for them. They love God, and so do not want to do anything that might offend this Holy One who has saved them. True Christians will repent of their sin and seek God’s forgiveness.

For further help read 1 John 1 in the New Testament, the second part of the Bible.

Chapter 7, Joy And Gratitude

In chapter 3 we noted briefly that Peter describes Christians in 1 Peter 1:8 as those who have an “... *inexpressible and glorious joy.*” We are going to look at this in a little more detail now.

1) Christian Joy Is Different From Normal Happiness

The joy that the Lord gives to Christians is quite different from common human happiness, because it lasts. This is because it is based upon God, the glorious beauty of his character, and the fact that God never changes. Look at these verses in your Bible which are about God: Isaiah 44:6, 45:6&21, 1 Chronicles 16:29, Psalm 29:2, and Malachi 3:6.

Indeed, the Bible commands believers to rejoice in God. (Psalm 97:12) “*Rejoice in the Lord.*” And similar words are found in Paul’s letter to the Philippians (Philippians 4:4), “*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*” Christian joy is the joy of knowing God and Jesus Christ his Son.

There are other reasons why this joy is lasting. It lasts because its source is God’s love, which is also unchanging. (Jeremiah 31:3) “*I have loved you with an everlasting*

love...” And this means that the blessings God gives to Christians are enduring: for example, the joy of his forgiveness, of peace with God, of fellowship with Christ, and the joy of heaven itself which will be enjoyed in its fullness in the life to come. And this joy is produced by God the Holy Spirit who lives in the Christian’s heart (Galatians 5:22).

2) Joy Even In Trials

This joy endures even in trials and difficulties which the Christian sometimes has to go through, because it is a joy in the Lord. Christians still have this joy when they are ill, or in pain, or are sad at losing a loved one, or even when being persecuted. For example, in Acts 16 when Paul and Silas were in prison for telling others about Jesus, they were able to sing God’s praise even though they had been severely beaten. And the Christian Peter wrote to in 1 Peter 1 had this joy even though they were going through very severe trials as verses 6 to 8 show. The joy of the Lord is in the Christian’s heart and it sustains him even in the most difficult of circumstances.

3) Gratitude

When this inward joy of the Lord is in the heart, Christians respond by giving thanks to God. They are thankful for who God is, for what he has done, for what he is doing, and what he will do for them. The true Christian will not be selfish and ungrateful.

This gratitude will be expressed in giving praise to God. (Psalm 103:1) *“Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.”* This praise will be

expressed in thankful prayer. (Philippians 4:6) *“... in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”* It will also be expressed in song, as many Psalms show. Indeed, the Bible teaches us that heaven is full of thankfulness to God, so it is not surprising to find the Christian is grateful to the Lord also for all his kindness and love.

4) A Danger To Avoid

We must be careful to realise that though a true Christian will praise God in prayer and song, it does not automatically follow that people who praise God with their mouths are therefore true Christians. There are a number of examples in the Bible which are recorded to warn us against making the same mistake. During Jesus’ earthly life many people uttered praise when they saw his miracles, yet how few of them actually became his followers. In the days of Ezekiel the prophet many showed an apparent love for God with their mouths, but really they loved money and possessions rather than God. (Ezekiel 33:31-32) *“My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain.”*

We can tell if people are truly praising God by their attitude. True gratitude comes from a heart that wants to honour and glorify God. Because of this it is linked with a desire to please God in every part of our lives by loving and obeying him.

5) Stimulating Gratitude

In order that we do not forget to praise God, or are tempted to do so only in a half-hearted way, we need to remind ourselves regularly of Calvary and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we are real Christians we know that God has been gracious to us for he sent his Son to die for our sins. And as we look at the cross of Calvary, there we see enough to know that God loves us, and that will help us both to continue to rejoice in his love and to praise God.

Chapter 8, Spiritual Desire

In the last chapter we looked at the joy Christians have in their hearts and saw that they are thankful for the blessings God gives. The blessings that God gives are so wonderful that they create something else in the hearts of true Christian believers, and that is desire for spiritual things.

1) Wrong Desires

We must be clear and careful at this point because not all desires are good. The Bible never approves sinful desires. All such desires are wrong. Sinful desires include desiring anything that is sinful in itself. For example, desiring to tell lies or wanting to steal or kill or commit adultery. Indeed, Jesus taught that simply to have such evil desires without actually putting them into practice, is sinful itself (Matthew 5:28).

But sinful desires also include desiring things which are not wrong in themselves, but which belong to someone else. This kind of evil desire is called covetousness, and means to desire something from an evil motive. The last of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 states this clearly

for us (Exodus 20:17), *“You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.”*

The Christian is not to give in to such desires.

2) Right Desires

The Bible teaches that the Christian will have good desires, desires for holy things. The Bible speaks of the desires believers have as ‘longings’, ‘thirstings’ and ‘hungerings’. And we can put these holy desires into two groups.

- i. Desire for more of God. The more true Christians love God, the more they will desire to love him, and the more they will be concerned at their lack of love for God. The more Christians know about God, the more they will want to know about him. (Isaiah 26:8-9) *“Yes, Lord ... your name and renown are the desires of our hearts. My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you.”* David loved God, and the more he did so the more he wanted to (Psalm 63:1), *“O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you: my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”* And another example is the apostle Paul. He had known the Lord Jesus Christ for many years, and yet he wanted to know him more, as he told the Philippian Christians (Philippians 3:10), *“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings...”*

- ii. The true Christian desires more personal holiness. The more Christians know God, the more they desire to be like him. The more they know Jesus the more they want to be like him. And this was one of the ways Jesus described true Christians in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:6), *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”* And this was the great longing of the apostle Paul, who was very aware of his own imperfections (Philippians 3:12-15), *“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.”*

And time does not diminish these desires in the true Christian, as is the case with a hypocrite who really only pretends to be a Christian.

Now the Bible teaches that true spiritual enjoyment brings satisfaction in this life (for example, Matthew 5:6 above), so why do Christians keep on longing for more? The answer to this is quite simple. Spiritual enjoyment does satisfy the soul in that true Christians never grow weary and tired of spiritual enjoyment. There is nothing like it in all the world. But that does not mean he will never want more of the same. The Christian’s capacity for spiritual enjoyment increases as spiritual growth takes place. And spiritual enjoyment can always satisfy that capacity. This

is all perfectly consistent with our desiring to have more, until our enjoyment becomes perfect in heaven.

3) An Important Distinction

It is here we see an important distinction between a true Christian and a false one. False Christians will not keep on longing to know God more, nor will they desire to grow in personal holiness. They will be self-satisfied, thinking that all is well with them. For them, desiring to know more of God ceases at their supposed conversion. And if there is any seeking after God it is totally self-centred and for self-interest, rather than for God’s glory - to show they are one of God’s favourites, or they are special because they have had some unusual experience. They want to have more of God’s love for themselves, rather than they have more love for God.

For true Christians the desire for God and holiness begins at conversion, but it does not stop there. Rather it carries on throughout their lives. Indeed, the Bible teaches that there is more of this desiring of holy things after conversion than before it. It is Christians who are spoken of as running, and wrestling, and pressing forward, and continuing in prayer, and crying to God day and night. True Christians keep on seeking these things.

The best sign of being a true Christian is a longing for a holier heart and a holier life.

Chapter 9, Forgiveness And Compassion

A Christian is someone who has received mercy; God’s forgiveness and compassion. And one of the wonderful

effects of this is that the Christian becomes a person who is merciful to others.

1) A Christian Is Forgiven And Forgiving

Every wrong word and thought or action that we have ever done, is forgiven by God when we become followers of Jesus. God's forgiveness comes to us because of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:7) *"In him (that is Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he has lavished upon us..."*

Having been treated so graciously by God, the Christian begins to treat others in the same way. (Ephesians 4:32) *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."* This is not always easy to do, but it is always right to do. The Christian is not someone who stores up malice in his heart and seeks the earliest opportunity to get revenge. (1 Peter 3:9) *"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing."* Christians will be quick to put matters right, and make the first move to bring reconciliation, even though they are the ones who have been wronged. This is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ did when he was crucified. We read in 1 Peter 2:23, *"When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."* Jesus even prayed for those who nailed him to the cross. (Luke 23:34) *"Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*

This willingness to forgive others is an indication that someone is a genuine Christian. And this gives Christians confidence in asking God to continue to forgive them for their own sins. We can then pray as Jesus taught us in Luke 11:4, *"Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us."* Indeed, the Bible goes further and says that if we ourselves are not willing to forgive, then we will not receive forgiveness from God! (Matthew 6:14-15) *"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."* And Jesus taught that Christians should always be willing to forgive those who sin against them (Matthew 18:21-34).

The Christian is able to forgive in this way because God gives the Christian a new heart. (Ezekiel 36:26) *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."* And the Holy Spirit is given to the Christian (Galatians 4:6, Romans 8:9), and he enables the believer to forgive. When we turn our thoughts to Calvary and the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are reminded of the greatness of his love for us, and of the greatness of our own sinfulness. We understand the complete unworthiness of our own hearts to have received any forgiveness at all from the Lord. Then we shall not find it quite so hard to forgive those who sin against us.

2) Compassion

By compassion the Bible means that attitude of heart and mind whereby the Christian pities **and** helps other people

when they are needy or suffering. Christians will be caring and concerned, and want to do all they can to help. This is the opposite of selfishness. Compassion is more than feeling pity for someone who is in need. It includes that, but also means to be moved to relieve their suffering, by doing something to help.

We often read that Jesus was moved with compassion when he saw the distress of people. And he acted to help them. (Matthew 14:14) *“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.”* When confronted by a leper who asked Jesus for help, we read (Mark 1:41), *“Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. I am willing, he said, Be clean!”* And how gentle Jesus was with those in distress - tender with the bereaved, gracious with the sick, kind to the fearful.

The true Christian is a follower of Jesus, and therefore will want to be com-compassionate like his Lord. The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 is a wonderful illustration of this. Also we read in Colossians 3:12 *“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”* To live like this will take our time - because we will have to get involved with needy people; it will take our resources - such as finance, skills and material possessions; it will cost much prayer for those in need. And if this is being done in the right way it will be done willingly, and not as if forced to do it. (Psalm 37:21) *“The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously.”* Doing so honours God.

(Proverbs 14:31) *“He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God.”*

An example of this is the collection of money amongst the Churches of the New Testament for the distressed Christians in Jerusalem who were very poor. The Churches in Macedonia excelled in this and are given as an example for us to follow (Romans 15:26, 1 Corinthians 16:1-3, 2 Corinthians 8).

Such merciful actions are the marks of true spiritual life, of true faith in Christ, as James 2:14-17 teaches.

Chapter 10, Spiritual Zeal

1) Spiritual Zeal Described

Spiritual zeal means delighting in, devotion to, diligent, enthusiastic and fervent concern for God and his service.

The best example of this in the Bible is Jesus himself, particularly his zeal in doing his Father’s will (John 4:34), *“My food, said Jesus, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.”* (John 6:38) *“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.”* (John 14:31) *“... but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.”* When he was arrested no one could accuse him of disobedience - his zeal for God was perfect. (John 17:4) *“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.”*

True zeal for God comes from a deep love for him and desire to see him honoured. Again we see this zeal in the

Lord Jesus. When he saw how the temple of God in Jerusalem had been turned into a market place, he overturned the market tables and drove the people out of the temple (John 2:14-16). The Lord Jesus was so determined to obey his Father and please him that he was obedient even unto death. We read as he began to enter that final stage of his earthly ministry which he knew would end in his crucifixion (Luke 9:51), *“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”* An amazing statement! Jesus’ zeal was a real zeal, a great zeal. We see that zeal for his Father’s will triumphing in Gethsemane, as just before the crucifixion Jesus prayed (Luke 22:42), *“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”*

This zeal is at times extremely costly, and only true zeal is willing to go to such lengths. True zeal is not a weak feeble thing, but strong and courageous. Jesus’ zeal puts our feeble excuses for not being zealous for God, to shame. How much he loved his Father, and how much he loved his people to go to such lengths for them!

2) The Christian Is To Be Zealous For God

The Christian is to be like Jesus in this matter; not that we shall ever be crucified for our sins. He has done that and no one else could do so, but we are called to serve God with all our hearts.

This applies to our obedience to all his commands (John 15:10), *“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”* True Christians are eager to obey the

Lord. They have a keen desire to obey God, and are glad when they do.

For example, it applies to our willingness to tell others about Jesus unashamedly, and to go wherever he sends. (Matthew 28:19) *“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”* Christians take Jesus’ words about this very seriously. (Mark 8:38) *“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”* A true Christian will have a strong desire for other people to become followers of Jesus.

This zeal will apply to our desire to give help to others. This is one of the reasons why Jesus died for us. (Titus 2:14) *“... Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people who are his very own, eager to do what is good.”*

3) The Christian Is To Keep On Being Zealous For God

We read in Romans 12:11, *“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.”* This verse implies that spiritual zeal can sometimes be much less than it ought to be in the Christian. This is why it was a great sadness that the Christians in Laodicea lacked this fervent zeal for the Lord. (See Revelation 3:15,16,19.) They were lukewarm, and were called to be earnest and repent.

A Christian’s spiritual zeal can sometimes weaken. This can happen especially when we allow unconfessed sin in our lives; or fail to maintain daily communion with God

through reading the Bible and prayer; or fail to meet with other Christians regularly for worship, fellowship and teaching. But true Christians will not be able to remain in such a condition for long. They will want to put matters right when they realise what they have done. And the reason for this is that God is at work in the Christian (Philippians 1:6), and God always completes his work.

4) False Zeal Described

This is something we need to know about and avoid. False zeal does not prove someone is a Christian, but it can deceive them into thinking they are, as we see in the Pharisees of Jesus' day. How often and readily they boasted about how much they knew about God and the Bible, yet it was to some of these that Jesus spoke his strongest words. (Matthew 23:27) *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."*

Zeal is not necessarily true if it makes us spend time in Christian worship. The hypocrites did this quite openly, even praying on street corners for all to see, but all this was worthless in God's sight (Matthew 6:5). And praising God with our mouths also does not necessarily indicate true Christian zeal. When the lame man who sat outside the temple was healed, we read in Acts 4:21, *"... all the people were praising God for what had happened"* - but so few of

them became followers of Jesus. It was the same during the time of Ezekiel the prophet. (Ezekiel 33:31-32) *"My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain."*

5) An Important Difference

The difference between true spiritual zeal and false zeal is that true zeal is humble, but false zeal is proud. We see this in Jesus' comments about the Pharisees. (Matthew 23:5) *"Everything they do is done for men to see..."*

True zeal makes much of Christ; false zeal makes much of self. True zeal can be summed up in the words of John the Baptist about Jesus (John 3:30) *"He must become greater; I must become less."*

Chapter 11, Love: A. For God; B. For Others

In our last chapter we saw that the true Christian is someone who is devoted to God. And this brings us back to something we considered briefly in Chapter 3 - **love**. We quoted this Bible verse in that chapter:

(1 Peter 1:8) *"Though you have not seen him (that is Jesus), you love him..."*

1) Love is the chief of all our spiritual emotions

Of all the virtues about which Jesus taught, love was at the top of the list. When answering the question, "Which is the first and greatest commandment?" he replied:-

(Matthew 22:37-40) *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”* Jesus was quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. In a similar way Paul taught that love is of first importance. At the end of 1 Corinthians 13 where he has been speaking about love, he closes by saying in verse 13, *“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”*

2) What it means to love God

We have already seen from Jesus’ words quoted above that true Christianity begins with love to God. He is to be at the very centre of our lives, and to be more precious to us than anyone or anything else.

The main reason why all true Christians love God is because of who and what he is in himself, and then secondly because of the things that God does for the Christian; they also show what God is like.

The deepest cause of true love for God is the supreme loveliness of his character. We rightly love God when we love him because of who and what he is. This is very important, because the Christian does not love God simply out of self interest.

Many non-Christians love only those who love them in return, but ignore others. (Luke 6:32) *“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.”* And false Christians only love God

for what they can get out of him, and not because of the loveliness of his person. They do not love God’s holiness and justice. Rather, genuine Christians love God because they are captivated by his holiness and glory and majesty and justice and righteousness and power and sovereignty and wisdom, and much more. In other words, they love God for his own sake.

But what about 1 John 4:19 where it says, *“We love because he first loved us”*? We are forgiven because he loved us when we had no love for him. But we need to ask why that makes Christians love God? Because it is in the forgiveness of their sins that Christians first see the beauty of God’s character. They see God’s perfect holiness and justice in punishing sin, his wisdom in providing Jesus as the Saviour, his grace in showing them such kindness when they know themselves to be unworthy sinners, his power that overcomes death, the wages of sin, his infinite goodness, and so on.

Christians love God because of the beauty of his holiness. Indeed, this is something which captivates the hearts and minds of Christians and angels. (Isaiah 6:3) *“... seraphs ... were calling to one another, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”* Revelation 4:8 tells us about the living creatures around the throne of God in heaven. *“Day and night they never stop saying: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.”* Revelation 5:4 tells us the song of God’s children in heaven is, *“Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you are holy.”* Psalm 99:5 instructs God’s people to *“exalt the Lord our*

God and worship at his footstool; he is holy.” The beauty of Christ, the Bible, the gospel, Christianity and heaven is their holiness. God is loved for this reason: he is holy. (Psalm 29:2) *“Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name; worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness.”*

But doesn't gratitude to God for his blessings really only come because of the gifts he gives? Is it not right to say that Christians only love God for what they get out of him for themselves? True spiritual gratitude does not mean that thankfulness to God is a selfish thing. Rather, true gratitude springs from true love for God. When someone does you a favour, it is easy to say thank you even to a complete stranger. But it is quite different when a friend we already love is kind to us; that kindness deepens the love that already exists. This is how it is with the love a Christian has for God. His blessings given to the Christian deepen the love that is already there - it is because we love him that we are grateful to him.

False love is self-centred; true love is God-centred, Christ-centred.

3) Love for others

Those who love God will also love others. (1 John 4:20) *“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his own brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.”* Indeed, this is how we can tell if someone is a true disciple of Jesus (John 13:35): *“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

This love for others is described like this: (Romans 13:10) *“Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.”* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”*

Christian love is a self-sacrificing love. It is a love that doesn't look for something in return. It is a love that seeks the very best for the person who is loved. True love is seen in the practical help it gives to others. The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates this perfectly (Luke 10:25-30). We see it also in the care of the Philippians for Paul (Philippians 4:10 and 14-16). And it is illustrated in the list in Matthew 25:35, *“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”*

- i. So the true Christian will love all other followers of Jesus. (Romans 12:10) *“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:9) *“Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.”* This will be seen in our praying for one another, caring for one another, doing good to one another, encouraging one another, and in many other ways.

- ii. Also the true Christian will love those who do not follow Jesus! For example, Paul's love for his fellow Jews (Romans 9:1-5 and 10:1).
- iii. And further, the true Christian will also love his enemies! As Jesus taught in Matthew 5:43-47, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you only greet brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." And this is reinforced by Paul in Romans 12:20-21, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." This love for our enemies shows clearly that the love the Christian has in his heart is supernatural love. Indeed, it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit who has poured the love of God into the Christian's heart (Romans 5:5 and Galatians 5:22).

4) Lack of love is described as hardness of heart

The Bible teaches us that, sadly, many people do not have this love in their hearts, either for God or for others. It describes this lack as hardness of heart, and this is a sin. For example, Zedekiah, the ungodly king of Judah who did

evil in the eyes of the Lord, is described like this in 2 Chronicles 36:13, "... *He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the Lord, the God of Israel.*" Then the people of God were urged by the Psalmist in Psalm 95:7-9, "*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested me and tried me though they had seen what I did.*" This refers to the wilderness wanderings of Israel when they quarrelled with Moses over their lack of water and tested the Lord (see Exodus 17:7 and Numbers 20:13). Then when Jesus healed the man with the withered hand, which took place on the Sabbath, he was deeply distressed by the lack of love in some of the people watching. (Mark 3:5) "*He looked round at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts...*"

Conversion is described as having a new heart to replace our natural, sinful, hard hearts. (Ezekiel 36:26f) "*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*" A hard heart, like stone, is cold, lifeless, insensitive, uncaring and unloving - and this both toward God and toward the needs of others. But a heart of flesh is warm, alive, and easily touched and moved. It is a heart that loves God and that cares for others.

5) Beware of imitation love!

Surprising as this may seem, love can be imitated. The better something is, the more likely it is to be copied. Jesus

described those who claim to be Christians, but are not, as those whose love will not continue. (Matthew 24:12-13) *“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”* Their love does not last because it is not true Christian love.

Paul knew about this also. (Ephesians 6:24) *“Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.”* True Christian love, because it comes from the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Christian’s heart, endures. Whereas false love, imitation love, may at first appear genuine and even produce an interest in the things of God and in being kind to others, but it does not last. Imitation love is really self-love, for example, when men think God is bound to love them because of their supposed worthiness. Imitation love does not love God because he is gloriously holy, and it only loves others so that it can be praised for what it has done.

The Lord Jesus spoke of such people as being hypocrites in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:1-18. He gave as examples of hypocrisy: i. their giving to the poor which they did only to be honoured by men, ii. their praying on street corners which was not an indication of their love for God but again was only to be seen by men, and iii. their fasting, which was not in order to spend more time alone with God, but to disfigure their faces in order to gain applause from men. Each of these acts was not done because of love for God but from love of self, and therefore is not Christian love, and is worthless.

6) Ensuring that our love for God and others is genuine

If Christian love is so important, we need to make sure we love in this way, and also that we maintain this love. The best way to do this is frequently to return in our hearts and minds to Calvary. It is there that we see the glory of God’s character displayed in its supreme form. Remembering what God was doing there, can only increase our love for him. How holy God must be, and how dreadful our sin must be, if God punished his Son for the sin that we committed, in order to forgive us. How merciful! How gracious!

Calvary will also help us with our love for others. If God has been so good to us when we did not deserve it, shouldn’t we try to be like him? Were we not God’s enemies when he loved us? Therefore, ought not we to love our enemies too, and view them with great compassion because they are still under the dominion and power of sin, as we once were but are no longer?

Chapter 12, Christian Assurance

1) God wants all true Christians to have and enjoy assurance of salvation

Christian assurance means having the certainty that our sins have been forgiven by the death of Christ, and that we are reconciled to God. Assurance means we know we are indeed God’s children and that Christ is our Saviour, and that there is a place in heaven reserved for us. Every Christian believer is secure because of the excellence of the work of Christ and the unbreakable promises of God. Assurance of salvation is the awareness of this security.

Clearly, any who have this assurance will be at peace with God and have joy in their hearts. And this is exactly what Jesus taught his disciples. (John 15:11) *“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”* (John 16:33) *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

Assurance is something God wants all Christians to enjoy. Some have thought it is impossible to have such an assurance, even presumptuous to say such a thing. Well, as in all things related to the Christian life, we need to look at what the Bible teaches us about this - because the Bible is God’s Word. In the Old Testament we have numerous examples of God’s children being assured of their relationship with God. How often in the Psalms David speaks of God as his shepherd, rock, fortress, salvation, refuge, hiding place, plus many more. And what comfort he gained from this! Job, in the midst of his trials, could none-the-less say with confidence (Job 19:25), *“I know that my Redeemer lives...”*

The apostle Paul wrote of his own assurance on many occasions. He rejoiced in knowing that Christ had died for him personally, to deal with his sins. (Galatians 2:20) *“Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* (2 Timothy 1:12) *“I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”* Because Christ had died for him, the Day of Judgment held no fears for Paul. And as his life drew near to its end, he was fully assured about

his future after death. (2 Timothy 4:7-8) *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”*

John in his first letter has given us a number of tests by which we can know we are truly forgiven by the Lord. (1 John 2:3-5) *“We know we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him...”* (1 John 3:14) *“We know we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers.”* (1 John 4:13) *“We know we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.”* And as he draws his first letter to a close he tells why he had written it. (1 John 5:13) *“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”*

So from these Bible verses we can clearly see that God wants all Christians to enjoy true assurance about their salvation.

2) False assurance that seems real!

However, we must beware of a great danger, and that is false assurance. False assurance is something that is a very boastful thing, and likes to display itself. False assurance is proud and trusts in human efforts for salvation rather than in Christ. Jesus told a parable in Luke 18, *“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked*

down on everybody else.” The parable is about two men, a Pharisee and a tax collector, who went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee prayed, *“God, I thank you that I am not like other men - robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”* The tax collector was quite different. *“He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’”* Jesus said plainly that it was the tax collector, NOT the Pharisee, who went home justified before God! The Pharisee had a false assurance.

False Christians have no sense of the seriousness of God’s greatness, but true Christians humbly feel it a solemn thing to stand before God, the holy Judge. False Christians are not aware how blind and deceitful their hearts are, but true Christians know and acknowledge their own weaknesses and sins. Satan doesn’t attack false assurance, but he does attack true assurance because such assurance produces holiness. False assurance blinds people to their own sinfulness, but true Christians know their own hearts are so sinful that they wonder if God could ever love such sinners. False Christians will often speak about what they have achieved and say much about their outward religion and how good they are. Some will even claim to have had marvellous religious experiences (which are not taught in the Bible!) and they will rely on those things rather than on Christ. All such assurance is false assurance.

3) Why some genuine Christians lack assurance

Having said this, it is also possible for true Christians to lack true assurance and to doubt whether they are children

of God. Two particular reasons can account for this. First, when they have strong views of their own unworthiness coupled with a small view of God’s power and mercy. And second, when they are going through dark and painful experiences coupled with a lack of dependence on God’s wisdom and sovereignty.

The answer to these doubts is to study the Bible in order to get a clearer understanding of the greatness of God’s power and love and mercy, and his wisdom and sovereignty.

4) Some lack assurance because they are unconverted

But some lack assurance because there is no reason for them to have it; they are unconverted and are not Christians at all. They feel their hearts to be dead and dark with sin. They know they lack love for God. In such cases assurance of salvation is impossible until they come to God through Christ to forgive them their sins.

5) How to encourage and strengthen assurance of salvation

i. By a firm faith in the clear statements of the Bible.

All the promises of mercy, of pardon and of grace which the gospel gives to broken and contrite hearts, are there as a solid foundation for the believer to build upon. (Romans 10:13) *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* That promise can be relied upon because it is God’s promise to all who call on the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy and forgiveness. It is impossible for God to lie; all his promises are true. And therefore the promises that the Bible gives are to encourage assurance in all believers.

ii. By the evidence of a godly life.

The Bible commands all Christians to make certain they are Christ's people. (2 Corinthians 13:5) *"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you..."* (2 Peter 1:10) *"Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fail, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."* It is quite reasonable at this point to ask what things Peter is asking us to do in order that we make sure of our salvation. Peter tells us in the verses before. (2 Peter 1:5-7) *"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, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love."* These are things that are both the evidence of true Christianity and the means God has directed for the encouragement and strengthening of Christian assurance.

We need to be careful not to make a mistake here. The Bible does not teach that a person becomes a Christian by doing good works. We become Christians by faith in Christ alone. BUT if we have true saving faith in Christ then the result of that will be that we will do good works. It is like this with a tree. We can tell what kind of a tree it is by examining its fruit. And if the fruit is a mango, then the tree is a mango tree. It was a mango tree before it produced mangos. The mangos proved that it was a mango tree. So with true Christianity, if people are godly in their

behaviour, this is an evidence they are godly in heart and are truly the Lord's. This is why we read in James 2:26, *"... faith without deeds is dead."* Assurance is one of the blessings that grow out of a godly life.

iii. The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart.

Again we need to be careful not to misunderstand what the Bible means by this, because the Holy Spirit is very much at work in Christians when they gain assurance from the promises of the Bible, and when they live godly lives. Neither of these can be the case without the Holy Spirit's enabling. But here we are thinking more of his immediate ministry in the Christian's heart. (Romans 8:16) *"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."* (Galatians 4:6) *"Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, Abba, Father."*

This, of course, is beyond our control, for no Christian is able to control the Spirit of God, but we can and should pray for his enabling in all matters of the Christian life, and that includes this subject of assurance. The wonderful thing is that God saves and assures his children, and the Holy Spirit has a particular ministry in this matter.

In John's gospel the Lord Jesus called the Holy Spirit 'another Comforter' or 'Counsellor', and the word Jesus used means 'one called alongside to help.' An instance of this gracious ministry of the Spirit is recorded in Acts 9:31 where we read that *"... the Church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit..."* This ministry was enjoyed by the Christians in Thessalonica as

we read in 1 The 1:5, “... *our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction...*” Right from the beginning these believers were assured by the Holy Spirit that they were indeed children of God.

7) The benefits of Christian assurance

Christian assurance is a great blessing because it brings peace and comfort to the believer’s heart. And because of this, the assured Christian has an inner confidence in the Lord, which strengthens him to serve Christ and tell others about him.

Chapter 13, Spiritual Humility

1) Spiritual humility explained

By spiritual humility we mean the sense the Christian has of inadequacy, weakness, and sinfulness, simply because of being a sinner. This shows itself in two ways.

- i. Christians are grieved and distressed because of their sin. Here are some examples of this from the Bible. Job in Job 42:6, “*I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.*” Peter, after the miraculous catch of fish, said to Jesus in Luke 5:8, “*Go away from me Lord; I am a sinful man.*” And Paul in Romans 7:18 and 24, “*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature... What a wretched man I am!*”
- ii. True Christians, because they recognise their weakness and sinfulness, realise how merciful and kind God has been to them and that they are dependant on him for everything. They readily acknowledge that he is much

greater and holier than they are. The result is they honour and exalt God. We see this in the song of Moses in Exodus 15:2, “*The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt Him.*” Then David in Psalm 34:3 says, “*Glorify the Lord with me: let us exalt his name together.*” (See Psalm 99:5&9, 118:28, 145:1, Isaiah 25:1.)

2) Spiritual humility is more than mere conviction of sin

God’s law, especially the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, may convict and convince an unconverted person how sinful and helpless he is. But he is not necessarily spiritually humble unless he hates and renounces that sin, and surrenders his heart to God and exalts him.

One of the saddest cases of this in the Bible is the Pharaoh who was king of Egypt during the days of Moses. It is astonishing that Pharaoh repeatedly asked Moses to pray to God for him, and actually acknowledged he had sinned. (Exodus 9:27) “*Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron, ‘This time I have sinned,’ he said to them. ‘The Lord is right, and I and my people are in the wrong. Pray to the Lord...’*” (See also Exodus 10:16.) Yet he never once forsook his sins nor did he submit his life to God and exalt him - the result was that Pharaoh and his army perished. Pharaoh stands as a solemn warning to us. So spiritual humility is more than being aware of your sinfulness; true humility includes forsaking that sin.

3) The effect of spiritual humility in the Christian believer

God's beauty, which is his holiness, is something Christians see and love. The result is that their eyes are open to the ugliness of their own sin. They see the need for the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. They feel their need of God's power to change their hearts. They recognise God's justice in punishing sin. They realise they cannot pay for their own sins. They see true happiness can only be found in holiness. And they see the indescribable beauty of heaven.

The result is that such believers cast themselves at God's feet, denying themselves and renouncing their sins, and pleading with God for mercy. This is spiritual humility in action.

4) Spiritual humility is essential to salvation

Whatever a person may claim to have experienced, without spiritual humility he cannot be a true Christian, as these verses clearly show. (Psalm 34:18) *"The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* (Psalm 51:17) *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."* (Isaiah 66:1-2) *"This is what the Lord says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool... This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.'" (Matthew 5:3) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* (Luke 18:14) *"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

Humility is what God looks for in men and women: (Micah 6:8) *"... what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."*

And in Matthew 18:3-4 Jesus said, *"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*

We cannot be genuine Christians without spiritual humility.

5) False humility

We must be careful to draw a distinction between true and false humility. By false humility we mean that some people pretend to be humble! They say they are humble - and are proud of what they say! They tell you a lot about it, how small and insignificant they feel themselves to be, and make a great show of it. But let anyone else tell them how small they are, and instead of heartily agreeing they are most offended!

Spiritual pride is very subtle. It makes people have a superior view of themselves, wanting positions of leadership, desiring that others look up to them.

Spiritual humility is exactly the opposite, and would rather be led than lead. (Philippians 2:3) *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves."* The proud man thinks himself to be very humble, but the humble man thinks himself to be very proud!

6) How to encourage true humility of spirit

Philippians 2:1-11 is most useful here. The Christian is taught to have the same attitude that was found in the Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was God, for our sakes

humbled himself to the point of death, the shameful death of the cross. If he who had no cause within himself to stoop so low (for he was without sin), did this for us, how can we ever let pride into our lives, we who have every cause to lie in the dust before God, because we are sinners? Whenever we feel pride invading our hearts, we need to go by faith to Calvary. There at Calvary pride must be put to death as we humbly cling to Jesus Christ our Saviour. This will strengthen and encourage true spiritual humility in our hearts.

Chapter 14, Testing True Christian Experience

How can we be sure that someone's claim to be a Christian is true? The best test, of true Christian experience, according to the Bible, is seen in Christian conduct or practice.

1) Christian Practice Described

We really need to consider three things.

i. True Christians will obey God's instructions in the Bible.

Consider the clear teaching of Jesus to his disciples in John 15:14, "*You are my friends if you do what I command you.*"

Added to this, we saw in chapter 5 that every true Christian has the hope, the assurance of one day seeing Jesus face-to-face, becoming like him and living with him forever. John in his first letter taught that this should have an effect on the Christian's behaviour now. He put it like this in 1 John 3:3&7, "*Everyone who has this hope in him purifies*

himself, just as he (that is, Christ) is pure... He who does what is right is righteous, just as he (that is, Christ) is righteous."

When Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth, he spelt out quite clearly the kind of people that cannot enter the kingdom of God. His list is specific. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10) "*Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*" Clearly that kind of conduct is not to be found among the people of God. But Paul went on to write: "*And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*" The Christians at Corinth were once like that, but now through Christ, all that had changed. They were different people because Christ was their Lord and Saviour, and now they lived new lives of holy obedience to God.

This is both a challenging and encouraging passage.

- a. Challenging because it makes us search our hearts to see if any of these things remain in our lives. And if they do, then we need to repent and forsake them. If we are true Christians then we will cease such sad and sinful behaviour.
- b. Encouraging because it means that those who have committed such sins can be forgiven and changed, and made into real Christians through the Lord Jesus Christ.

A similar passage is found in Paul's words to the Galatian Christians in Galatians 5:19-21, "*The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*"

ii. True Christians will make holy living the main concern of their lives.

This was one of the main reasons why the Lord Jesus Christ died for us. (Titus 2:14) "*Jesus Christ ... gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*"

This is not an easy task, and that is why the Bible uses military metaphors when it encourages us to resist sin and pursue holiness. (1 Timothy 6:12) "*Fight the good fight of the faith.*" (Ephesians 6:13-17) "*Therefore put on the whole armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*" The fact that Christians need to work hard at this comes out in Paul's own testimony as he uses terms from athletics to describe how he needed to keep on pursuing holiness. (Philippians 3:13-14) "*Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.*"

iii. The Christian will persevere in holy behaviour to the end of his life.

Jesus brings this out so powerfully in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:3-9 & 18-23. The different types of soil indicate the different responses of people to the message of the Bible. Some take no notice of it, while others do for a while, but then lose heart when testing comes and fall away. Only those who endure produce the harvest that proves they are genuine Christians.

True Christians keep on believing and obeying God despite various problems they meet. Problems test and strengthen true faith, while at the same time exposing false faith, as these verses show. (James 1:12) "*Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*" (Revelation 2:10) "*Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*"

True Christians can grow cold, give in to temptation and commit great sins, but they will never fall away totally, and get settled in a fixed dislike of Christianity.

2) Christian Practice Is A Proof To Others Of Genuine Conversion

The Bible teaches us that our light will shine, not by telling others about our feelings and experiences, but by our good works. (Matthew 5:16) "*... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father*

in heaven.” Also, Christians addressed in the book of Hebrews gave such evidence of their conversion. (Hebrews 6:10) *“God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.”* And James tells us that faith without practice is not saving faith. (James 2:14-17) *“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”*

True faith is seen by (i) what we believe, AND (ii) our behaviour. So there are two danger areas to be aware of:-

- i. Outward practice without inward faith in Christ is useless.
- ii. Claimed faith in Christ without Christian practice is useless.

Those who claim to be true followers of Jesus, yet after a short while return to being selfish and sinful, give no proof to others they are true Christians.

3) Christian Practice Is A Proof To Ourselves Of Our Genuine Conversion

Christian behaviour is the best ground for assurance because it reflects what governs our hearts. The first letter of John at the end of the New Testament is very helpful at this point. John is very clear that he wants his Christian readers to know with assurance that they are, indeed,

genuine Christians. So throughout this short letter he gives tests whereby we can know ourselves if we are truly the Lord’s. Consider these verses: (1 John 2:3) *“We know that we have come to know him (that is, Christ) if we obey his commands.”* (1 John 3:18-19) *“Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence.”*

The obedient actions of Christians reveal the inward motives behind them. This is also what God looks for and sees. Jeremiah makes this clear (Jeremiah 17:10) *“I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.”* And so does John in the book of Revelation (Revelation 2:23) *“...I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.”*

If God looks for inner motives in us then we ought also to look for the same and be rebuked or encouraged, depending on what we find! We should place very little importance on any spiritual experience that does not produce Christian practice.

It is important to note something else at this point. God sends problems to our lives to test the reality of our preference for serving him or not. Consider Deuteronomy 8:2, *“Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.”* Such tests are for our benefit (not God’s, as he knows our hearts). Christian

practice is the true test of our sincerity. (1 John 2:5) *“But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him.”*

We need to remember that God will examine our practice on the judgment day. (2 Corinthians 5:10) *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”* Therefore we ought to apply this test to ourselves now.

True Christian experience is loving God, and our love makes us choose him, and obey him, and be faithful to him in all difficult and testing situations. This is not to earn God’s favour and forgiveness. For our holy living is not the price of God’s favour but the result of it. Good works are signs that we are already joined to Christ by God’s grace alone, not the cause of our receiving that grace. Holy living is the sign of faith, just as activity and movements are the signs of life.

Chapter 15, Spiritual Life In Others

We are going to examine the spiritual life of some of the outstanding believers as recorded in the Bible. We shall look at David, the shepherd who became the King of Israel, and Saul of Tarsus who became Paul the apostle.

1) David, the King of Israel

We have a wonderful testimony of the spiritual life of David in the many Psalms that he wrote. Added to this, God described David as *“a man after his own heart”* in 1 Samuel 13:14 and in chapter 16. (See also Acts 13:22.)

This does not mean that David was perfect, but it does mean that the godly characteristics he displayed were what God desired from him. So we have much to learn from his godly example.

David’s godliness.

Like all true children of God, David had a fervent love for God, his Word, and his ways, as these Bible verses reveal. (Psalm 18:1) *“I love you, O Lord, my strength.”* (Psalm 119:97) *“Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.”* (Psalm 86:10) *“For you are great and do marvellous deeds; you alone are God.”* And this was coupled with a real love for the people of God. (Psalm 28:9) *“Save your people and bless your inheritance; be their shepherd and carry them for ever.”*

David had deep longings in his heart for God, wanting to know him better and to walk closer to him. (Psalm 42:1&2) *“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my souls pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”* (Psalm 63:1) *“O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”*

David found his greatest joy and delight in God. (Psalm 4:7) *“You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.”* (Compare Psalm 21:6.) He urged others to do the same. (Psalm 37:4) *“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.”*

David was deeply grateful for the Lord's goodness to him. (Psalm 34:1&4) *"I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips... I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears."*

He had great confidence in God's favour, and faithful care of him. (Psalm 28:7) *"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped."* (Psalm 36:5) *"Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies."*

His attitude to sin was one of great sorrow. First for his own sin. (Psalm 51:3-12) *"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge... Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me."* (Psalm 38:18) *"I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin."* And David was also distressed over the sins of others. (Psalm 119:136) *"Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed."*

He had a fervent zeal i. for God, and ii. against God's enemies. (Psalm 40:8) *"I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."* (Psalm 26:5) *"I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked."*

We need to remember that these expressions in the Psalms are the Holy Spirit's thoughts expressed by David and recorded for the direction of God's people in all ages.

Therefore these things will characterise those who are God's people today, the followers of Jesus.

2) The apostle Paul

Saul of Tarsus had a dramatic conversion experience on the road to Damascus, and this is reported in Acts chapter 9. He was journeying to Damascus in order to arrest and imprison the followers of Jesus. He hated them and he hated Christ, and he thought by acting in this way he was doing the will of God! However, he was to learn that the very opposite was the case. As he travelled, the risen Lord Jesus appeared to him and the result was that he became a Christian. In fact he became one of Christ's apostles, and became better known by his other name, Paul.

Not everybody is converted in such a dramatic way as Paul was, but every conversion is none-the-less a miracle of God's grace.

But we are concerned to see how this conversion experience worked out in Paul's life. And, as with David, we have a wealth of material both in the book of Acts and in the many letters Paul wrote which are recorded for us in the Bible. We get a glimpse of the heart of this early Christian who was greatly used by Jesus.

Paul's godliness.

One of the outstanding things that characterised Paul was his love for the Lord. The wonder of the fact that Christ loved him and gave himself for him seemed to set his whole life ablaze. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15) *"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that*

those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” This love drove him forward in his work for Christ through all kinds of difficulties and sufferings. Nothing was too much for him to do for the Lord.

Paul’s love for other Christians is something else that is obvious. He frequently calls them his “*dear friends*”, quite literally his “*beloved ones*” in 2 Corinthians 12:19, Philippians 4:1, and 2 Timothy 1:2. He speaks of affectionate longings and desires for them as these passages show. (Romans 1:11) “*I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong...*” (Philippians 1:8) “*God can testify how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.*” (1 Thessalonians 2:8) “*We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.*” (2 Timothy 1:4) “*Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy.*”

Paul’s joy in the Lord was something that he felt always. (Romans 5:2-3) “*And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*”

He was keenly aware of the glorious hope that Jesus Christ gives to all Christians including himself. (Ephesians 1:12) “*We, who were the first to hope in Christ...*” (Ephesians 1:18) “*I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the*

saints.” (Titus 1:2) “*A faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life...*” (Titus 2:13) “*... While we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ...*”

He was very aware of his own sin, which made him even more aware of the greatness of God’s grace. (1 Timothy 1:15&16) “*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.*”

Paul knew periods of feeling great sorrow over the sins of others, especially at the unbelief of his fellow Jews. (Romans 9:2f) “*I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.*”

He had a consuming desire to know more of the Lord in his life. (Philippians 3:10) “*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings...*”

He had great confidence and trust in God, writing of him as: (Ephesians 3:20) “*... him who is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us...*”

And he was a man full of zeal for the Lord as his life and ministry display. He was given to the service of Christ

wholeheartedly, and willing to endure much suffering in order to do the Lord's will.

Application

What we have considered in the lives of these godly men is just a glimpse of their walk with God, and you will discover much more as you read through the Psalms of David and the letters of Paul. It is clear from what we have looked at that the believers in both the Old Testament and those in the New shared these common experiences of God's grace which produced godly lives, and their example is a great help to us in these ways:-

- i. it instructs us as to how the Lord wants us to behave.
- ii. it challenges us to strengthen those areas where we are weak.
- iii. it searches us that we may examine our hearts to see if we are true Christians yet.
- iv. it encourages us when we see these things being produced in our lives, for this is indication that God is at work in our hearts, and that Christ is indeed our Saviour.

Conclusion

Becoming a true Christian is the most important thing in our lives. Only Christians, the true followers of Jesus Christ, know God in a personal way. Jesus made this very clear when he said in John 14:6, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.*" Only true Christians receive the blessings of God's forgiveness for their sins, of becoming children of

God, and of having the assurance that they will go to heaven when they die.

We may have many different experiences in our lifetime but true spiritual experience is the most essential. Throughout this booklet the intention has always been to show what God has said about the spiritual experience of true Christians. He has shown us in the Bible all that we need to know about being a Christian.

All who trust in Jesus and follow him in sincerity of heart are true Christians. The question is, Are you a true Christian? Becoming a true Christian begins when we come to God, repenting of our sins and trusting in all that Jesus accomplished in his life, death and resurrection to bring us God's forgiveness. That is where true spiritual experience begins, but that is only the start of a life that is full of the blessings of God that are enjoyed now on earth, and will go on forever in heaven.

APPENDIX - Some Testimonies Used In 'Sound Words'

These are extracts from interviews which Derek French had with each of the Christians named.

1) Trevis Halliday

Trevis was aged 17 when he became a Christian. Up until that time he never thought about God at all.

His interest in spiritual matters began when travelling home on the school bus one evening. A school friend was reading a book called '*God's Smuggler*', which was about smuggling the Bible into countries where it was banned.

He borrowed the book and as he read it, and learned of the zeal and commitment of those involved in this work for God, he came to the conclusion that this God they were trying to tell people about must be real. And so God began a work in his heart that eventually led Trevis to become a follower of Jesus.

When asked, “What made you actually become a Christian?” Trevis began like this:

“I think in the end it’s the realisation that you don’t know this God. And then there is the utter despair of the fact that not knowing this God means you are condemned forever to a life of misery.”

Indeed, Trevis became quite afraid of God at this point, and he went on to say, “It was a fear of the unknown at that time, because although I’d read about Christians, I didn’t really know anything personally about God, and because God is so great, I became fearful of his vastness, and his ability and his power. It was the consciousness of how great God is, and especially how great God is in his holiness as against one’s own sinfulness - that began to creep in, too, the awareness of sin.”

Knowing that God was so great, why didn’t this drive Trevis away from him?

Trevis replied, “The answer to that lies in God himself, because when he works in your life, when he begins to show you how great he is, how wonderful he is; it’s like a magnet. You cannot let it go once you’ve experienced something of it. I felt that God was putting his hand on my life. That God was pursuing me, as much as I wanted to

find him. And I remember in my bedroom, I knelt down and I told God that I couldn’t fight him any more, and I told him that I didn’t want to fight him any more, and that I accepted the fact that he was now going to be God of my life, and that I would believe that my sins were forgiven through the Lord Jesus Christ, and his death on the cross and his resurrection. And at that point, the greatest feeling of peace, of utter joy, and comfort, of wellbeing, just totally overwhelmed me, and the presence of God was so real in that bedroom that it was almost, as people say, that I could have reached out and touched him.”

Trevis went on to say, “From that point on I was not scared of God. The apprehension and the fear of the vastness of God turned to a feeling of security, because I was now one of his children, and the relationship was that of a parent to a child. He would care for me. I owed my life to God, and therefore I wanted to live my life for him. And as I read the Bible, and attended church and heard the Bible explained, I wanted to live my life according to the way God said.”

2) Philip Sheppey

Philip Sheppey is a retired accountant, having previously worked in the insurance industry dealing particularly with income tax matters. When asked how long he had been a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, Philip answered, “Sixty years!”

He answered with equal firmness when asked, “Have you ever been tempted to give up following the Lord during that time?”

He replied, “Never! Because there is no other hope in life. After all, this life will soon end, then what? For me, it will be the hope of seeing my Saviour and living with him for eternity.”

Philip went on to explain how he actually became a Christian. He said: “Well, I was brought up in a Christian family and knew the Gospel right from earliest days, and my mother used to talk to me about the need of salvation. And in a sense, I suppose, I grew into the Christian faith. But eventually I realised that it wasn’t good enough saying, well, I’ve grown into it. I must come to a point of definite acceptance of the Lord. And, of course, I’ve learned since that it was he who was working, not me accepting as such.”

But what was it that made Philip feel the need to accept the Lord Jesus Christ? He answered, “For one thing the penalty of the sin in my life which I knew had to be met. And I couldn’t face the penalty on my own, and so found comfort in the fact that the Lord Jesus had suffered the penalty for me.”

Philip said that he had been married, but sadly his wife had died a few years ago. He shared that he did not always find it easy to cope without her and that he frequently felt lonely. But the thing that helped him was the comfort of knowing she was a Christian too, and therefore he would meet her again in heaven. During those lonely days a particular promise of God, found in the Bible in Hebrews 13, had been a real source of strength to him: “*I will never*

leave you nor forsake you.” By frequently turning his thoughts to the Lord, the Lord helped him through the most difficult of days.

3) Rita James

Rita was born and brought up in India, and now lives there with her husband, Prem. She studied science and then became a teacher.

Rita was asked what it was that made her become a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. She replied: “I was working in a Christian school where our principal used to teach the Bible. One day he was teaching about prayer, and he said prayer is talking to God. That just struck my mind, and I thought, how can you talk to God? To me it sounded very foolish. But anyway, I heard it. After a few months there came a time in my life, where my heart-cry was, ‘I want peace of mind.’ One day our vice-principal, who was a very find Christian, called me and she asked me, ‘Rita, what’s wrong with you? You look very sad these days.’ And I shared with her, and she said, ‘I will pray for you.’ After a few days she asked me if I would like to attend a Christian meeting with her daughters. I asked my parents and they let me go with them. In that Christian meeting, the preacher said, ‘Christ can give you peace of mind.’ I felt very happy. That was my need. In my heart I said, ‘Let’s try this Jesus.’ But before the meeting was over, the preacher said, ‘If you accept Christ as your Saviour there must be some change in your life. You must experience it yourself.’ When I looked in my life my heart-cry was still there - ‘I want peace of mind.’ And that need was not met.

And I went to that preacher and said, 'Preacher, you said, after I accept Christ he will give me peace of mind, but I haven't got it.' So he told me, 'Child, I can't do anything for you. I can only pray for you.' And he told me, 'Child, go. Christ will give you peace.' He also taught me a very small salvation prayer. I went into my room and I prayed that prayer, confessing my sins. I opened the New Testament and the words were Galatians 1:3, which says, '*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*' When I read this, I was so happy. That's my need and here he's offering peace to me. Though I was an adult I ran out like a child and I told everybody that Christ had given me peace, Christ had given me peace. And from that day, my life changed."

This change affected Rita in a number of ways. She spoke of the relationship she now enjoys with God, who has become her heavenly Father. She spoke also about her hope of heaven, and that death no longer makes her afraid. But it was interesting to learn what she put as the chief change in her life. She described it like this:

"The main thing is the concept of sin because, in the beginning, when I was Hindu, I used to feel that if I had hidden something which I'd done wrong from other people, or from my parents, it's O.K. It never dawned on me that there is someone up in heaven who's watching me, no matter where I am. And I did many wrong things which are hidden from other people, and I was quite comfortable, but now I don't want to do that. Even a little anger makes me guilty that I have done something wrong, and I have to

apologise to God, and to the other person whom I have hurt."

4) Prem James

Rita and her husband, Prem, were in England at the time of this interview with Derek French, while Prem spent some time studying Theology and Communications.

Prem was asked how he became a Christian. He replied, "I was born and brought up in a Christian home, and it was in the year 1968 when I was a student in a college that I became a Christian in the real sense when the Lord Jesus came into my heart. I committed my life to him."

Prem was asked if this was something that happened suddenly. "Not really, because I was born and brought up in a Christian home. But personally I always thought Christianity could be practised when you are old, when you have done everything in life. So in my young days I always had - like many other young people - ambition in life, to study well, and get a good job. And it was when I was studying in college in 1968, through the work of the Union of Evangelical Students of India, I happened to attend a camp arranged for young people, and at one of the meetings I gave my heart to the Lord Jesus."

Derek asked Prem what difference becoming a Christian made to his life. Prem replied, "My whole approach to life changed. Earlier I used to think that the enjoyment of life should be when you are young and you do all that you want to do, but when I became a Christian every day became precious to me because I became accountable to God, and

his purposes. I was able to have that real fulfilment even without a job or without the ambitions that I had earlier. I felt that I was being satisfied knowing Christ and following his teachings.”

Derek went on to ask Prem how the Lord directed him after he finished his studies. Prem said, “After I finished college I always wanted to work in a bank, and I pursued that career. I did my Masters degree in commerce, and I had applied to the bank. Fortunately, I got a job, but I had a two-month waiting period before I was actually to join the bank. At that time somebody told me about a Christian organisation called FEBA which had been broadcasting the gospel and other programmes on radio. So, while I was sitting at home I thought it would be good to go and help this organisation. I just went there for a short period, but have now been with them for twenty years!”

Derek asked Prem what his work with FEBA is now. Prem replied, “I am the Associate Director. We have a staff of about 60, both in Bangalore and Delhi. We broadcast to India in 23 different languages, and FEBA-India’s main job is co-ordinating these programmes. We also produce some programmes in both our studios in Bangalore and Delhi, and also we are involved in listener follow-up work. We get hundreds of letters every month, and people write to us with different needs and we have correspondence and other follow-up work that we do.”

Prem was asked if there was any particular encouragement from the follow-up work over the years. He replied, “Yes. I remember a girl who was wanting to commit suicide. One day she happened to listen to one of our Tamil

programmes and she gave up ending her life. Instead, she sent the tablets in the post to the producer of the programme saying that she had wanted to kill herself, but that she was sending these tablets to him because that particular programme touched her life and now she had become a Christian.”

5) Percy Porter

Percy became a Christian at the age of 21 while he was a sailor in the Navy. He went through a number of frightening experiences during his years at sea, some of which were life threatening. But he spoke to Derek of the assurance he had at those times that if he had died, he knew he would go to heaven to be with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible was very helpful to Percy in all this, so Derek asked him how important the Bible was to him now.

Percy replied, “It’s most important really, because it contains the instructions that the Lord wants us to take along the way. And it gives you encouragement apart from anything else, and it gives you peace. And it leads and guides you and gives you strength, like food and water. And when in doubt, when troubles come, you can find an answer to your requirements in the Bible. And it does encourage you to put these things into the Lord’s hands, to cast your care upon the Lord, to cast your anxieties onto him. If you do that, it gives you that peace of mind to know that you’re safe in his hands, come what may.”

Percy is aged 83 now, so Derek asked him how his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ helps him to look forward to the

future. Percy replied, “Well, I put my future into his hands. And I’m trusting him. As time goes on I see that things are happening in the world which the Lord has told us about, and I know that he’s coming again. The thing is to be ready for him when he comes.”

Percy was asked what people need to do to be ready for the time when the Lord Jesus Christ will come again. He replied, “Well, they need to come to the Lord Jesus Christ and commit themselves to him by faith to save them from the sin which is inherent in all people. We were born in sin and unless we’re forgiven and cleansed with the precious blood of Christ, we shall perish. So by coming to Jesus, trusting him, believing in him, his blood washes and cleanses us from our sin, and cleanses us from all unrighteousness and makes us children of God. We are his children then and we can leave ourselves in his hands with perfect assurance.”

6) Anne Beard

Anne is a geography graduate, a mother of six children, and is married to the pastor of a Baptist church in a small English village. Interested to learn how she became a follower of Jesus, and if she was certain that she was going to heaven, Derek began by asking if her parents were Christians.

Anne replied that they were not, and went on to explain how she came to learn about the Christian faith. “Well, when I was a child, we had some Christians in the town whose daughter became friendly with my sister and they

used to take us to a children’s meeting. It was a group of Christians who have a Bible study on a Sunday afternoon. This was just for girls. So we used to go regularly, and when I was about 7, my sister asked me if I’d like to ask Jesus into my heart. I knelt with her and asked Jesus into my heart. Even though my knowledge was very poor in those days, I believe God had his hand upon me and has revealed himself more clearly as the years have gone on.”

Derek asked Anne how the Lord had helped her to understand what he was like. She replied, “Initially through Bible reading. I used to read the Scripture Union notes and I used to take it seriously in spite of my youth. And then as I grew into a teenager and went away to college, then I think it particularly meant a lot to learn to trust the Lord day by day.”

Derek then went on to ask Anne how she viewed the future. She said, “Well, I look forward to being with the Lord Jesus Christ, when I die. I must say I often fear the suffering because I’m not very good at taking pain, but I think it is a glorious hope that we have that when we leave this earth we can go to be with Christ. And we have a wonderful picture in the Scriptures of what that’s going to be like. And we have a taste of Christ’s goodness to us here on earth and that’s just a mere foretaste of all that’s to follow.

7) Debbie Charman

Debbie trained as a maths teacher, is married, and is actively involved in her local church. Derek began by

asking Debbie how she became a Christian. She replied, "It was nothing very dramatic. I went to church all the time and I was taught by my parents as well as at church about the Lord Jesus. I never had any doubts about the truth of the Bible. I realised I was a sinner. I realised I needed to be saved and I know for many years I prayed for forgiveness and genuinely meant it. When I was about twelve, I went on a young people's holiday, and there the speaker was talking about Jesus as our friend, and what he's done for us. I know on that holiday I made a real commitment to the Lord, and knew my sins were forgiven, and so that's the time I look back on as being when I was converted, but I know it was a gradual process."

Some people have the idea that to be a Christian a person must be better than others. So Derek asked Debbie if she thought she was better than other people. She said, "Certainly not. I know that I'm not better than anybody else. I see my sin, I know my thoughts, and the things I do perhaps that other people don't see, and I realise that often my motives are not very good, and my actions are not very good. I know that I am not better than everybody else, basically."

Derek asked Debbie if her awareness of sin was still real now that she's become a Christian? She said, "Yes, definitely. I think you become more sensitive sometimes to your sin, because you realise how holy God is, and realise what sin means to him, that when we sin we're actually sinning and hurting him. When we love him we obviously don't want to do that. And I'm often conscious of the wrong attitudes I have and it's one of my prayers

that I will know my sin, recognise my sin and be able to deal with it with the Lord's help. And I think when that's our prayer then the Lord shows us our sin and we become more aware of it."

Temptation is something that often troubles us, so Derek asked Debbie if she was troubled by temptation now that she was a follower of Jesus. This is how she answered him. "Yes, it's a daily battle. Often I have to turn to the Lord and ask him to help me to deal with it. In my own strength it would be easy to fall into temptation. Very often it involves making myself stop and think and realise that to do such a thing would be wrong and often it would be a bad witness to people around me, and not be a good reflection on God."

Derek asked Debbie how she recognises a wrong attitude in herself and what she does about it. She replied: "It comes from the teaching I've had over the years of what the Bible says is right and wrong. And the Bible's very clear on many things that are wrong and sinful. I suppose initially there's that feeling of failure and letting the Lord down yet again, and occasionally it can lead to me feeling quite depressed. But at the same time because I'm assured that the Bible says that if we confess our sins, if we're sorry for our sins, then God will forgive us, then I know that if I go to him, and express my repentance, my sorrow for my sin, then he will forgive me. And so really, that's what I do. I go to him and know that he will forgive because he's said he will."

Debbie has been a Christian for a long time, so how important is the Lord to her now? She said: "He's very

important to me and I think more important and more precious to me, because as a Christian I've gone through many different situations. Some have been good but there have been difficulties that I've had to go through. Recently my husband was made redundant, but also in my university days I was very homesick. I've also had difficulties in my jobs."

And how did the Lord help Debbie in those difficult times? "Very often through reading the Bible. Very often through other Christians too. They shared God's Word with me; they encouraged me, they prayed with me. They reminded me of God's promises and very often at the times when I was lowest the Lord would cause something to come that would be an encouragement to me in some way or another. Perhaps through another person. It was that way I was conscious that he really did care and that he knew how I was feeling. And that's how really I kept going in his strength."

Derek asked Debbie, "How important is it for you to go on serving the Lord?" She replied: "It's very important to me. I believe that one of the main reasons that he's made us, is to serve him and that pleases him if we do serve him. I believe that I can serve the Lord within my home, taking care of the home, and my husband. My husband and I are also responsible for the young people's work in the church, for 11 to 16 year olds, and we aim to open our home to them as well as provide weekly activities for them. Also I am responsible for the ladies' Bible study and helping in that. And there are many other more informal ways that I

believe we can serve the Lord, and I try to visit people, and offer service that way.

"I am aware that I need the Lord's help to do it. Sometimes it's true that perhaps I do feel confident in myself, but it only takes some small mishap usually to remind me that I'm dependent on him, and particularly with the ladies' work, I'm one of the youngest who goes along, and I do feel my inadequacy there. And also the responsibility of being with the young people is impressed on me greatly, and it helps me to acknowledge again that I need God's help to do that."

Derek then asked Debbie what areas of her spiritual life she thought needed developing. She replied: "I am aware that I don't pray as often as I should and that's something that I want to do, and I'm trying to come to grips with it and spend more time with the Lord in prayer, because I know that he enjoys me talking to him and I know that I'm dependent on him for all things. Also another big area that I'm conscious of is witnessing and sharing my faith with other people, and I know I've got a lot to learn, and a lot of progress to make in that area."

Next, Derek asked Debbie what she really wants to achieve in life. She replied: "I think it would be to be glorifying to God in whatever I do."

Last of all, Derek asked Debbie what she is most looking forward to. "Heaven, and being with the Lord." Is she sure that she will be there? "Yes. The Bible says that for those who believe we have eternal life, and eternal life is life with God, and I know that I'm forgiven and I know that the Lord Jesus is preparing a place for me in heaven."

8) Liisa Jordan

Liisa is married to Mark and they live in a small English village. She told Derek, first of all, about her upbringing.

“Well, I had quite a sheltered upbringing. I would say my parents brought me up very well and taught me to be polite and that sort of thing, but when I was about 14 my father went back to Nigeria with his work. My mother and I and my brother actually stayed in England. Then something happened between my parents and my mother decided that they were going to get a divorce. At the time, I was a bit confused about it. Looking back on it now, I think it did disturb me but perhaps I didn’t show my feelings. I just accepted that I was going to be brought up by my mother.”

Liisa said that she did not think of God as being involved in her life at that time but went on to talk about how she became a Christian. She said: “My sister-in-law is a Christian, and she was just talking to me one afternoon in the kitchen about the Lord Jesus, about him dying on the cross, that he loves sinners, and that he died for sinners. I had heard the gospel before; I had heard about the Lord Jesus, but I can honestly say I hadn’t really heard in the way I was hearing that particular afternoon. I was left speechless, that’s how I remember it. And what she was saying to me just went into me and challenged me and left me dumbfounded really. And what it made me think was, maybe I don’t really know the answers. I was living in a sort of arrogant way, a way where I was doing whatever pleased me, just living quite selfishly. Not concerned about my soul, not concerned about God. I was not

bothered about what God thought about the way I was living. I just listened to what she said and I had no resistance to what she was saying. She was just telling me simply about the Lord Jesus dying on the cross and that he loved me. And it seemed to really and profoundly affect me. And then it was that night, I just asked the Lord Jesus to forgive my sins. And I can say from that time on I really did feel different. I felt an immense joy. I wanted to tell everyone about the Lord Jesus.”

Derek went on to ask Liisa how she coped with the problem of temptation. She replied: “Well, it’s through prayer really. And I’ve found, the times I’ve become stubborn, or rebellious perhaps even to God, he shows me in the Bible where I’ve gone wrong. And it is just obeying the Bible, coming to the Bible and saying, ‘This is what it says’. I think particularly what’s challenged me especially is marriage, the husband and wife relationship. God has been so good to us and given us clear guidelines how we should be to one another, and the times when I’ve been rebellious I can just look in the Bible and see, ‘Well, Liisa, you’re not doing that, are you? You’re not being like that.’ And if only I would obey what God says it would be best for me. That is really how I’ve found the help. Then I’ve gone to the Lord to seek forgiveness.”

9) Mark Jordan

Liisa’s husband, Mark, works on a farm, as well as doing some gardening. He was brought up in a Christian family, but did not become a Christian while living with his

parents. He told Derek that before he became a follower of Jesus his life deteriorated and became quite a mess.

Mark said: “When I was about 18 years old I left home. And suddenly I had all this freedom. I came out from the Christian influence of my family, and I didn’t have the restraints of the family that I’d been used to (for example, having to be home at a certain time in the evening). It was a gradual downhill slope for me, because I started to take alcohol. To start off with it was just a casual drink, which I didn’t think was doing any harm at all, but it led on to more consumption of alcohol. And gradually it was a downhill slope. It was then from drinking to drugs, and that’s the way I started to go.

“There was a complete turning aside from all the teaching that I’d previously had in my family. I became very rebellious. I decided within myself that even some of the laws of the land were ridiculous, and so I started to do just whatever pleased me. Whatever I wanted to do I would do it; there was no restraint on me. And although I wasn’t utterly and completely lawless in that I was always in trouble or always in prison, that never really happened, but I was always on the fringe of law-breaking and of this kind of rebellion in my heart against God, and against the laws of the land, the country in which I live.

“After about ten years of being involved in all these ungodly pursuits, I used to read my Bible, and one day as I was reading the Bible I became more and more convicted in my heart. It was a very specific thing that happened to me because I started to think about the Lord Jesus Christ. There was something within me, something was prompting

me the whole time, and asking me about the Lord Jesus Christ. As I looked at the Bible I became more interested in this person, and it was as if a voice was saying to me, ‘Who is he? What significance is there in the fact that this man came to the earth? What did he do? Why did he come? Why was it necessary that he came?’ And then I started to think about the relationship that I had with him, because I realised that he wasn’t just claiming to be a prophet or a good man, but he was claiming that he was and is the Son of God. And this really made me start to think, why did he need to come to the earth? And then, of course, as I looked to Calvary, and I saw him there upon the cross, I thought, what is all this about? What does it mean for me? And this became a powerful conviction in my heart. I became very, very convicted of sin. I started to see my life as it really was, that I was utterly selfish, that I just lived my life for myself and I didn’t even really care for my wife Liisa. And all these things started to be plainly shown to me. And in the light of all this, things seemed to be pointing to Christ the whole time. Then in the end I realised that Christ came to die for sinners, and I saw myself as a sinner. I saw my utter need of Christ and so I turned to him with all my heart, and that’s how I became a Christian.”

Derek asked Mark what changes Christ made to his life from that time on.

Mark replied: “My life changed profoundly. At first it was an immediate turning aside from the things that I used to do previously. With regard to drugs, I immediately left off taking drugs. That was an immediate thing that happened,

but other things were more gradual. I started to see things in a completely different light. I started to see that I should live my life, the whole time with an eye to what God wanted for me, to seek to do his will, not just to do things that pleased me. So that's how my life really started to change."

Mark was asked if he has ever doubted that he was a Christian. He answered: "I've doubted at times when I've fallen into sin, and I've wondered whether I've really become a Christian, and I have been through very difficult times as a Christian. I think it's very important for people to know that when one becomes a Christian it's not just an easy life. I have never found it easy.

"I've found that the first thing that tends to happen is that one is pushed away from, say, reading the Bible, or praying, and I've found within myself that I have to be very disciplined; I have to actually almost make myself turn to the Word of God at times. Sometimes I feel that I can't really approach God, because I know that I've committed some sin, or something. Then I just come to the Lord in prayer. I go out of my way to really seek him again, and to ask him to help me in the situation that I'm in at that time. And when I turn to him with all my heart and really seek him diligently, he has always answered my prayers, and he has always come to me. Not always instantaneously, but he will eventually answer my prayer and I will again know his presence. So although I may feel as though his presence has gone from me, I know and I can be assured that in reality he hasn't left me. And because my salvation doesn't depend on what I do to save myself -

when I look to Christ, and see that he's done everything on my behalf, then I can have an assurance of salvation and I comfort myself in those things. I comfort myself in all that the Lord Jesus Christ has done on my behalf. It's not what Mark Jordan's done; it's what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for me."

Derek then asked Mark if he knew that he was going to heaven. Mark said: "I have this assurance of salvation because my salvation doesn't depend upon myself. I know that I'm a Christian and so I see that one day the time will come when I will have to leave this earth. And then I believe I will be with Christ, in heaven. Jesus said, 'I go away to prepare a place for you.'"

Mark said that he was utterly convinced that Christ would bring him to heaven. Derek asked Mark how that assurance affected his daily life. Mark replied: "Well, it helps me in every way, because I see life completely differently. So life to me is to be lived for God, knowing that one-day I will be with him. He has promised that in his Word, in the Bible. It affects my whole manner of life; it gives me a desire to speak to others about the Lord Jesus Christ, and it gives me a desire to worship God, and a desire and yearning to be with God's people. And it has given me a desire that the Lord, I pray, would use me to preach the Word to people."

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