

THE COMPLETE **BOOK** OF



LIFE'S QUESTIONS

WITH ANSWERS FROM THE BIBLE



**RONALD A. BEERS
V. GILBERT BEERS**



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INTRODUCTION

This book was more than ten years in the making. It was born out of the frustration of being asked lots of questions about God, life, and the Bible and not having good answers and not knowing where to find the answers.

If the Bible is a blueprint for living, then it should have something to say about all of life. It should address any question you might have about why certain things happen to you, how life works, and God's role in it all. So, for the past ten years, we've been collecting questions—thousands of them—from Christians and non-Christians alike. And we've been searching the Bible for answers. In every case, we found that God, the creator of life, has already addressed every question one might ask about life. The answers aren't always what you might expect, and they aren't always neat and tidy. In some cases, they require more than an easy formula—they require a journey, because the Christian faith is often complex and mysterious. But it is amazing how clearly and thoughtfully God's Word answers any question one can devise.

After a decade of collecting questions and searching for answers in the Bible, we felt confident enough to offer this book to you, in hopes that you might better know the God who cares about *all* of your life and not just some of it.

In this book, you will find more than three hundred topics for daily living and more than 1300 questions—most of them questions you've probably asked at one time or another. Following each question you will find one or more Bible verses that directly address the question, followed by a short application note to stimulate further thinking. You can read through this book front to back devotionally, or use it again and again as a reference guide.

Perhaps nothing reveals the heart of human emotion more than questions. Questions reveal who you are, what you're thinking about, what you long to know, and what drives you. Questions come out of curiosity, a thirst for knowledge, a desire for relationship, frustration, anger. Not a day goes by that people don't ask questions, either of themselves, of another person, or of God. The human heart longs for answers to the “whys” of life.

Some people need answers to get them started on their faith journey. Some need answers to help confirm their faith. Some need answers to deepen their faith or help them through tough times. Some need answers to reconnect to a God they have begun to doubt or long to know more intimately. And some are just curious, thoughtful people who wonder if there is a God and just how involved he gets with humankind. All these kinds of questions are addressed in this book. There are questions for everyone—the seeker, the student, the pastor, the Bible-study leader, the layperson.

God has anticipated your questions and has responded to them. You just have to know where to find the answers. In this book, we've tried to make that process of discovery easier.

Though we could not cover every possible question someone might ask, there is probably no other book that answers as many questions as you'll find in these pages. Our prayer is that this book will encourage you to begin a journey of deliberately searching God's Word. May you find God's answers and allow him to be your daily guide in all matters of life.



*All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true
and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are
wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and
equip his people to do every good work.*

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17



*Your laws are my treasure; they are my heart's delight. . . . I rejoice in your
word like one who discovers a great treasure.*

PSALM 119:111, 162



Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.

PSALM 119:105

A

ABANDONMENT *See also* Loneliness, Neglect, Rejection

One of our greatest fears is the termination of a cherished relationship. Whether it is a result of abandonment, being forsaken, giving up, death, or divorce, our fear is of being left alone, of losing someone for whom we really care. Sometimes the hardest consequence of being abandoned is that it threatens our feelings of self-worth. How comforting it is to know that God will never abandon us! But the question is, have we abandoned him?

Has God abandoned me during my difficult times?

Even if my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will hold me close.

PSALM 27:10

God is always at hand. There will be times when even those closest to you will neglect or even desert you, but God never will. In fact, your difficulties can become the means to experience God's presence even more intimately.

Is there ever a circumstance where God will abandon me?

The Spirit of the LORD had left Saul. 1 SAMUEL 16:14

God doesn't abandon you; but he does move on to do his work through others when you make it clear that you do not want or need him in your life. If you walk away from him, he will make repeated attempts to bring you back. But there comes a time when he moves on because you have willfully and completely closed your heart to him. There is nothing more frightening than God leaving your life, because you lose the connection with the only one who can truly help and comfort you and secure your eternal future.

Does my suffering mean that God has abandoned me?

The LORD will not abandon his people. 1 SAMUEL 12:22

Suffering does not mean that God has left you. In fact, it is through suffering that you can experience God's comfort more than ever. To abandon you, God would have to stop loving you—and he cannot do that because he cannot act against his loving nature. Rather than abandoning you when you suffer, our compassionate God moves in closer to help, strengthen, and comfort you with his presence.

ABILITIES *See also* Gifts, Strength

Deep within the human spirit is a desire and a capability to do wonderful things. Because we are made in the image of God, we inherited from him the desire to create, to accomplish, to make things happen. But God wouldn't give us the desire without the means to carry it out, called abilities, or talents. They are the gifts God has given us to help us accomplish great things for him and to live fulfilling lives. How we use or misuse these abilities determines our quality of life—*quality* being defined not as comfort or the accumulation of things, but as character, joy, and lasting satisfaction. Our goal is to first discover our abilities, then develop them, and finally channel them toward what is good, helpful, productive, and God honoring.

How should I use my abilities?

Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. MATTHEW 25:21

For reasons we cannot explain, God seems to give more ability to some people than to others. To those with more ability, he provides more resources. But he also requires more responsibility from them. He expects you to maximize the effectiveness of your abilities in proportion to his gifting. While the most talented people may seem the most blessed, they must also be the most responsible.

How can my abilities become a danger?

Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the LORD your God and disobey his commands, regulations, and decrees that I am giving you today. For when you have become full and prosperous . . . be careful! Do not become proud at that time and forget the LORD your God. DEUTERONOMY 8:11-14

When your abilities bring you success and blessing, you are in danger of becoming complacent and forgetting that God gave you those abilities to serve him and others. Another danger of having great abilities is becoming proud and thinking you no longer need God's help or advice from others.

Do my limited abilities limit my ability to serve God?

He takes no pleasure in the strength of a horse or in human might. PSALM 147:10

It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

ZECHARIAH 4:6

God is more impressed by your faith than your ability. He uses your abilities only in proportion to your faith in him. If you want to delight God, say yes to him, step out in faith, and watch him accomplish great things through you. Abilities give you the potential to do good; faith gives you the power to do good. Neither potential nor power alone is sufficient. They must work in harmony. If God is asking you to do something, he will give you the ability and the extra resources to get the job done.

ABORTION *See also* Euthanasia

A great controversy rages today concerning abortion. For some, abortion is about personal convenience and rights. But the real issue is the sacredness of human life and the identity of the unborn child. Is this merely a fetus, or is this a person? Is there a specific time when the fetus becomes a viable human being, or is it a human being from conception? Another part of the controversy is whether there are justifiable reasons for abortion. Most Christians argue against abortion as a means of birth control. But some argue that abortion is acceptable if it will save the life of the mother, if the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest, or if the unborn child is known to be brain damaged or deformed. Ultimately the core questions are these: In the process of conception and birth, when does human life begin, and what value do we place on the developing unborn child? God's Word is surprisingly clear on this issue.

When does life begin?

I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me. PSALM 51:5

The Bible makes it clear that human life begins at conception.

What is the value of an unborn child?

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion. . . . You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book.

PSALM 139:13-16

God is present continuously during the nine months of pregnancy—forming, watching, creating, and even scheduling each day of the unborn baby's life. Before you were born, God knew you personally and intimately, and he had already established a purpose for you. The value of an unborn child is priceless because he or she is already a friend of God.

Don't I have the final say over what happens to my body?

Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-17

You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is good for you. And even though "I am allowed to do anything," I must not become a slave to anything. You say, "Food was made for the stomach, and the stomach for food." (This is true, though someday God will do away with both of them.) But you can't say that our bodies were made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-13

Your body was created by God and designed by him as a place where his Spirit can live. Even though you can choose what to do with your body, what you choose is not necessarily right in God's eyes or good for you. Abortion fails on both these counts. It is not right in God's eyes because it terminates a human life. And there is no medical evidence to suggest that abortion is good for you. In fact, medical evidence clearly indicates it is harmful—for your body, your mind, and your emotional state. The long-term consequences of terminating a pregnancy are far worse than carrying that child to birth.

Does the Bible say anything specifically about abortion?

Do not permit any of your children to be offered as a sacrifice to Molech, for you must not bring shame on the name of your God. LEVITICUS 18:21

The Bible doesn't specifically refer to the practice of abortion, but it does address child sacrifice, a big issue in Old Testament days. Ironically, child sacrifice actually continues today in a different form, in the flourishing industry called abortion. Things haven't changed much over the centuries: Parents still sacrifice their children to the gods of convenience and economy. Many believe that their own rights take precedence over

the rights of their unborn child. When personal preference becomes more highly valued than another human life, spiritual priorities are completely compromised.

Is abortion absolutely wrong?

Anyone who murders a fellow human must die. If anyone takes a human life, that person's life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings in his own image. GENESIS 9:5-6

You must not murder. EXODUS 20:13

The Bible makes it clear that life begins at conception, not birth. Therefore aborting an unborn child is terminating the life of that child and is absolutely wrong. If you are considering an abortion, you must clearly understand the Bible's position on this issue. If you have had an abortion or encouraged someone to have one, you must also clearly understand the wonder of God's grace and mercy and accept his forgiveness (see 1 John 1:9).

Can God forgive me for having an abortion?

I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night. . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God. . . . Restore to me the joy of your salvation. PSALM 51:3, 10, 12

[The LORD says,] "Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool." ISAIAH 1:18

Just as King David experienced the joy of total forgiveness after committing adultery and murder, so you can know God's forgiveness—for any sin—if you confess your sin to him.

No matter how great your sin, God's forgiveness is greater. God can cleanse and heal you from any and all sin, no matter how big or terrible it might be. No matter what you may have done in the past, let God restore you to wholeness through his amazing, boundless love.

The abortion issue has nothing to do with me. Why worry about it?

Rescue those who are unjustly sentenced to die; save them as they stagger to their death. Don't excuse yourself by saying, "Look, we didn't know." For God understands all hearts, and he sees you. He who guards your soul knows you knew. He will repay all people as their actions deserve. PROVERBS 24:11-12

Every child needs a champion, especially the unborn child. Perhaps God is calling you to be a voice for the unborn or to help support a cause that helps the unborn. Maybe he wants you to adopt a baby or help a new mother cope with her new child. Pray and ask God how he might want you to help the unborn.

ABSENCE *See also Loss*

We all experience absence in some way. Sometimes our friends or family members leave us for a period of time, or maybe they were always absent from our lives. Sometimes our own

absence causes us to miss important opportunities. And in difficult situations, we can feel as though God is absent or has moved away from us. Whatever the cause of an absence in your life, it is important to know that God is never absent. He sent his Holy Spirit to be present with us always.

Why do I sometimes feel that God is absent?

[Jesus said,] “Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:20

The greater your troubles, the farther away God sometimes seems. In your darkest hour, you may feel that God has left you. When it seems like God is absent, don't trust your feelings; trust God's promise that he will never leave you. Rely on what the Bible tells you is true, not on what your feelings tell you.

Listen! The LORD's arm is not too weak to save you, nor is his ear too deaf to hear you call. It's your sins that have cut you off from God. ISAIAH 59:1-2

When God seems far away, it may be because you have moved away from him, not because he has moved away from you. Sometimes it is your own persistent, willful sin that causes you to feel cut off from God and miss the joy of fellowship with him. If you want to feel God's presence again, you need to acknowledge your sin to God. Then through prayer and time with him, you will begin to sense his presence again, and you will see evidence of his work in your life.

Is God absent in my times of intense pain and loneliness?

Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me. PSALM 23:4

God never promised that following him would free your life from trouble, but he does promise to be with you at all times and to help you move through your problems with more wisdom and less fear. It is in your darkest moments, when you need him most, that he is ready and able to help when you ask him. Sometimes God takes away your problem immediately. But more often God allows you to struggle so you can learn and grow stronger because of it. Either way, he knows your trouble and walks beside you through it.

Why is it important for us not to be absent in our relationships (from our families, from our jobs, from the church, etc.)?

Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10

Your presence provides physical and emotional support to others. Two or more can form a team and accomplish much more together than separately. When someone needs a “lift” emotionally, an inanimate object doesn't do much; that person needs a smile, a kind word, a hug, or a touch from someone who cares.

Come, let us tell of the LORD's greatness; let us exalt his name together. PSALM 34:3

They all met together and were constantly united in prayer. ACTS 1:14

Your presence provides spiritual support to others. God's people should meet together in God's presence for worship, prayer, and to encourage each other.

When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. . . . Some time later, Reuben returned to get Joseph out of the cistern. When he discovered that Joseph was missing, he tore his clothes in grief. GENESIS 37:18, 29

When you are absent, you miss crucial opportunities to help others. Much good can be done by just being there.

Are there times when it is best for me to be absent?

Esau hated Jacob because their father had given Jacob the blessing. And Esau began to scheme: "I will soon be mourning my father's death. Then I will kill my brother, Jacob." But Rebekah . . . sent for Jacob and told him, "Listen, Esau is consoling himself by plotting to kill you. . . . Flee to my brother, Laban, in Haran." GENESIS 27:41-43

Sometimes it's better to leave a violent or inflammatory situation (see also 1 Samuel 19:11-12).

[David] told Uriah, "Go on home and relax." . . . But Uriah didn't go home. He . . . replied, "The Ark and the armies of Israel and Judah are living in tents, and Joab and my master's men are camping in the open fields. How could I go home to wine and dine and sleep with my wife? I swear that I would never do such a thing." 2 SAMUEL 11:8-11

There may be times when a higher duty calls for your absence from your family, but these times shouldn't become a way of life. The pattern for family success is personal presence.

ABSOLUTES *See also Truth*

In recent years, tolerance has become a virtue—you believe what you want and I'll believe what I want and everyone will be happy. But if everyone did what they wanted, it wouldn't take long for chaos and anarchy to reign. Thus, there must be some absolute truths, set in place from the beginning of time, that apply to all people in all times and places. When people live by these truths, the world functions well. Ironically, tolerance embraces every kind of religion, idea, and belief but denies the existence of absolutes: "The only absolute is that there are no absolutes!"

The Bible makes it clear that absolutes do exist and that absolute truth begins with God. God's Word reveals the truths that make the world work, that make relationships work, and that determine our future. By studying these truths and living by them, we discover the way life really works. God's truth sets us free from a meaningless and chaotic life to a certain and eternal future where life will always make sense and will always be fair, just, and full of joy.

What is absolute truth?

The very essence of your words is truth; all your just regulations will stand forever.

PSALM 119:160

Truthful words stand the test of time, but lies are soon exposed. PROVERBS 12:19

Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true. JOHN 3:33

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. 2 TIMOTHY 3:16

Absolute truth has been defined as “that which is true for all people, for all times, for all places; absolute truth is objective, universal, and constant.” Absolute truth originates from God, who didn’t just create truth but who *is* truth.

Why do we need absolutes? Can’t we just do our own thing?

Your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you. JAMES 4:11

We can see examples from the beginning of time of individuals who did what was right in their own eyes, which resulted in catastrophic consequences for themselves and others. Scripture teaches that you are born with the desire to sin; thus, doing your own thing will always lead you away from God, the source of absolute truth. Your job is not to pass judgment on God’s ways by devising your own way, but to follow God and all he says. If you buy something that needs assembling and you build it contrary to the instruction manual, what you assemble will not work properly. It’s the same with life. Follow God’s instruction manual, the Bible, and life will work much better.

There seem to be so many gray areas when it comes to right and wrong. How can I tell what is absolutely right?

If you love me, obey my commandments. JOHN 14:15

God has given us his Word, the Bible, which clearly tells us all things that are absolutely right or absolutely wrong.

What are some of the absolutes of the Christian faith?

God gave the people all these instructions: . . . “You must not have any other god but me.”

EXODUS 20:1, 3

God gave us the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:1-17). They are absolute truths that apply to all people in all cultures for all time. Obeying these commandments will point your life in the right direction, make your life more fulfilling and satisfying, save you from much harm, and keep your focus on the only one who can grant you eternal life.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. HEBREWS 13:8

God’s character is unchanging. He is consistently all-powerful, absolutely good, the originator of truth, all-wise, and consistently faithful, and he loves us unconditionally.

Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.” JOHN 14:6

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. ROMANS 6:23

There is absolutely only one way for a person to enjoy eternal life in heaven. Salvation is a gift from God, available to us through faith in Jesus Christ.

Through this man Jesus there is forgiveness for your sins. Everyone who believes in him is declared right with God. ACTS 13:38-39

God’s forgiveness is absolute. When he forgives you, it is forever. He never takes it back.

He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time. . . . He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:4-6, 20

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an absolute truth of the Christian faith. Because he was raised from the dead, he has conquered death; therefore, his promise of eternal life to all who have faith in him is certain.

You Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God’s guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people.

EPHESIANS 1:13-14

The presence of the Holy Spirit is an absolute guarantee to those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

ABSTINENCE *See also Fasting, Sacrifice*

Abstinence in a general sense means refraining from doing something you want to do because it’s not good for you. For a Christian, abstinence usually involves obeying God and refraining from doing things he has told us are harmful to us. But sometimes abstinence can also mean giving up something—even something good—for a period of time in order to more completely focus on God. These days, abstinence is a rare discipline. We hear people say that abstinence cramps their freedom. But that is a distortion of the truth. Avoiding harmful behaviors really results in freedom—freedom from fear, disease, addiction, and other painful consequences. Abstinence, therefore, is substituting short-term pleasure (and its long-term consequences) for long-term joy (with the consequence of giving up some short-term pleasure). Abstinence is the discipline of refraining from one thing in order to more fully and continuously experience something better.

Why should I abstain? What are the benefits?

Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. ROMANS 6:12-13

Abstaining from sin brings God's blessings.

Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. 2 TIMOTHY 2:4

Abstinence can be a way to show the Lord your thankfulness, devotion, and obedience to him.

It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else if it might cause another believer to stumble. ROMANS 14:21

Abstinence may be necessary to keep others from stumbling in their relationship with God. It is necessary at times to stay away from things that might cause those who look to you for guidance to go against their conscience.

Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage. God will surely judge people who are immoral and those who commit adultery. HEBREWS 13:4

Abstaining from sexual sin before marriage provides great blessings of trust and intimacy to you and your spouse after marriage.

From what should I abstain?

Keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts. 1 JOHN 5:21

Abstain from anyone or anything that takes God's place of first priority in your life. God desires a heart totally devoted to him.

Put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. . . . But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. COLOSSIANS 3:5, 8

Abstain from sin as much as humanly possible—from sinful thoughts as well as sinful actions. A heart that allows thoughts of evil, lust, anger, rage, or impurity to linger is a heart that will draw you into greater sin.

Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself. 1 CORINTHIANS 6:19

Since your body is the temple of the Spirit of God, be careful what you allow to enter it. You don't want to profane your temple with the misuse of food, alcohol, drugs, or foul thoughts.

How do we practice abstinence?

Clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires. ROMANS 13:14

Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit. EPHESIANS 5:18

Abstinence is possible through the power of the Holy Spirit, God's gift to every Christian. The more you make a place in your heart for the Holy Spirit, the less space you have for sinful, harmful influences.

Don't even think about it; don't go that way. Turn away and keep moving.

PROVERBS 4:15

There are times when the best way to practice abstinence is to physically remove yourself from a tempting situation.

What happens when we don't abstain?

Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11

A lifestyle of indulging in sin has eternal consequences. When you willfully go against what the Bible says is wrong, you are rebelling against God. It's that simple. When you try to abstain from sin, you are showing your desire to please God by showing your respect for his Word and his ways. God and sin cannot live side by side in the inner places of your heart. You must always try to abstain from sin so you can be devoted to God.

ABUSE *See also* Oppression, Violence

In our lifetime, we are given many gifts: people, talents, possessions, and opportunities. What we do with what we receive is a reflection of who we are and how worthy we are to be entrusted with more. We can maximize these gifts, we can ignore them, or we can abuse them. Abuse comes in many different forms. It can be violent, or it can be as subtle as neglect or abandonment of a trust. Abuse is harmful to both the abused and the abuser and, thus, creates two victims. Not only can God heal the abused, he can also change the heart of the abuser through forgiveness, and he can give both a new way to live.

How do I heal the wounds of abuse?

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. EPHESIANS 4:31-32

Recognize how bitterness and desire for revenge only poison your own soul. For those who have been a victim of abuse, the hurt is real and there are scars—physical and emotional. When justice doesn't happen as it should—when life doesn't seem fair—that's when bitterness can consume you. It's essential to recognize and deal with the bitterness before the bitterness overwhelms you. Otherwise you will not be able to find healing and move on.

Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! MATTHEW 5:44

If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you.

MATTHEW 6:14

This may be the hardest act in your Christian life: forgiving those who have wronged you terribly, without any expectation that they will change. Forgiveness is the only way to purge your soul of the toxins of bitterness and a vengeful spirit. The only way to forgive fully is to understand and accept that Jesus has forgiven your sins, even though you did not deserve it. Only when you seek forgiveness for your sins can you be filled with God's Spirit. And when you are filled with his Spirit, you are filled with his power. It is through his power that you can find the strength and the grace to forgive others. And when you forgive others, your heart is changed so you can move on. Forgiving does *not* mean that the hurt isn't real or that the event didn't matter or that you will put yourself in a position where you might be harmed again. Forgiving means that you refuse to let the abuser have any more control in your life. The act of forgiveness occurs between you and God. Leave your hurt with God, and allow his power to heal you from the inside so you can have a fresh start.

Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

As you fill your mind with good and pleasant thoughts, you have less room and less time to dwell on the past. Focus on the future and on God's promises to you.

Will God forgive a person who is guilty of abusing others?

Manasseh also sacrificed his own sons in the fire in the valley of Ben-Hinnom. . . .

When he prayed, the LORD listened to him and was moved by his request.

2 CHRONICLES 33:6, 13

Manasseh was one of the most wicked kings in Judah's history, abusive to the point of burning his own sons as human sacrifices. Later in life, however, he sought God's forgiveness. God did forgive him, and Manasseh became a man who did great things for his nation. No sinner is too wicked for God to save; no sin is too vile for God to forgive. His mercy is available to all who call on him, regardless of their past. If you are an abuser, you must still accept the consequences of your sins, but you are not out of reach of God's forgiveness if your heart is truly sincere in desiring change.

What is the best way to prevent abusing others?

Love does no wrong to others. ROMANS 13:10

Love restrains us from abusing others—physically or in any other way. This is not a roller-coaster love based on feelings but a rock-solid commitment to protect and nurture regardless of our feelings at a particular moment. Violence or abuse against a loved one is a sign that anger is stronger than love.

ACCEPTANCE *See also* Equality, Prejudice, Tolerance

The welcome mat is out, and the door is open. A guest walks across the threshold into your home or into your life. That person is accepted into your presence because you have invited him or her. A loved one is accepted because she is family. A stranger may be accepted because of the recommendation of a mutual friend. Acceptance is the essence of relationships. Without acceptance, we are condemned to rejection and loneliness. With acceptance, we can live joyfully together in a kaleidoscope of friendship, love, bonding, and family ties. We accept into our lives not only persons but their gifts, acts of kindness, and expressions of love. The Bible also calls us to accept those the world deems unacceptable—the poor, homeless, handicapped, elderly, prisoners, and addicts.

I feel so unworthy—does God really accept me? What makes me acceptable?

God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ROMANS 5:8

Nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. ROMANS 8:39

You are accepted by God because he made you and created you in his image. Nothing you do could cause God to love you more, because he already loves you completely. And nothing you do will cause God to love you less. In fact, God accepts and loves you so much that he sent his own Son to die for you, to accept the punishment that you deserve for sin. He died in your place so that you can be accepted into eternity with him.

Will God accept me into heaven?

God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. JOHN 3:16

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.

ROMANS 10:9-10

There is a big difference between being loved and accepted by God for who you are and being accepted into heaven. If you are convicted of a crime, you must pay the consequences, no matter how much someone loves you. In the same way, all people are guilty of

the crime of sin against God. Jesus actually paid the consequences for your crimes, but you must believe and accept what he did. Then you will be accepted into heaven to live with him forever. Your sin separates you from a holy and perfect God. But faith in Jesus removes your sin and makes you holy and acceptable in God's sight.

How can I accept others, especially people I dislike?

Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! MATTHEW 5:44

Pray for those you dislike. Through prayer, God can help you see them through his eyes. Then don't be so quick to make up your mind about who they really are and what they can or can't do. Judging others is better left to God because it is so easy for us to misjudge them. God sets the standard for accepting others.

What should I do when other people don't accept me?

Even if my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will hold me close. PSALM 27:10

Take comfort that God's love endures even when people are fickle and cruel. Demonstrate Christlike love to all people, even those who don't accept you. You will be surprised how many people accept you when you accept them first.

What if a person has committed a terrible sin? Should I still accept that person?

Accept each other just as Christ has accepted you. ROMANS 15:7

God has loved and accepted you, even though sin separated you from him. In the same way, you must love and accept others, no matter how great their sin. This does not mean you accept or condone their sinful actions or ignore the appropriate discipline, but you view and accept them as a unique and special creation of God. It is only through love that you bring a sinful person into fellowship with God and others.

What should I never accept?

[Josiah] destroyed the pagan altars and the Asherah poles, and he crushed the idols into dust. He cut down all the incense altars throughout the land of Israel. 2 CHRONICLES 34:7

Never accept or tolerate sin in your life. Never feel satisfied that you sin less than someone else. All people have a sinful nature, and they have certain sins to which they are particularly vulnerable. Left unchecked in their life, those sins, no matter how small, will begin to grow and spread like a malignant tumor, affecting all they think and do.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS *See also Productivity, Work*

To accomplish something is to complete a task, whether it is finishing the dishes or winning the Super Bowl. The Bible mentions many physical accomplishments, but it also highlights spiritual accomplishments, which we so often overlook—an active prayer life, Christian maturity, telling a neighbor about your faith, a moral victory over temptation, a tender word of encouragement to a child. These kinds of accomplishments need to take priority in our life.

What kind of attitude should I have toward my accomplishments? Is it wrong to be proud of them?

[Jesus said,] “I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!” JOHN 14:12-14

You have been created, called, and equipped to serve God in significant ways. Your achievements, however, are always to be understood as the result of God’s grace in you, not your own efforts. Your greatest accomplishment is allowing God to carry out his plans through you.

Can my accomplishments ever be dangerous? How?

As the people migrated to the east, they found a plain in the land of Babylonia and settled there. They began saying to each other, “Let’s make bricks and harden them with fire.” (In this region bricks were used instead of stone, and tar was used for mortar.) Then they said, “Come, let’s build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous.” GENESIS 11:2-4

Although it is good to be committed to significant achievements, the construction of the tower of Babel serves as a warning not to pursue accomplishments solely for your own glory. Achievements are to glorify God, not yourself.

How can I achieve my God-given potential?

Jesus told them, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and don’t doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, ‘May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen.” MATTHEW 21:21

[Jesus said,] “I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.” JOHN 15:5

Stay in a healthy love relationship with God. The product of such a relationship is a deepened faith in who he is and what he can do. Achieving God-given potential is accepting what God has given you to do and using his power to accomplish it.

What is the greatest thing that can be accomplished?

This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.” ROMANS 1:17

Salvation, the greatest of accomplishments, is not accomplished through your own work but through the work of God in your heart. It is simply by faith—believing that Jesus Christ died for your sins—that you can live forever with God.

ACCOUNTABILITY *See also* Boundaries, Self-Control, Stewardship

Accountability means answering to someone. It is literally giving an account of yourself—

where you've been, what you've been doing, what your motives were. Accountability also suggests that the one who is holding you accountable has the freedom to ask for an account. Most of us don't like to be accountable because it puts too many restrictions on us. It also forces us to open up dark corners of our lives we'd prefer to keep hidden. But real accountability keeps us honest, moral, and on the right path. It's not always comfortable, but it's necessary. On a deeper level, God holds us accountable. He sees all and knows all; nothing is hidden from him. On the day of final judgment, we will have to give an account to him of how we lived our life.

How do I become more accountable?

"Can anyone hide from me in a secret place? Am I not everywhere in all the heavens and earth?" says the LORD. JEREMIAH 23:24

If you're going to take accountability seriously, you have to begin with God. You will better understand what you are doing and why you are doing it when you understand for whom you are doing it. God knows all the secrets of your heart anyway, so why try to hide anything from him? Be honest with God, and tell him the struggles you have in following him.

How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word. . . . Now teach me good judgment and knowledge. PSALM 119:9, 66

To become more accountable, follow God's commands as outlined in his Word, the Bible.

Oh, why didn't I listen to my teachers? Why didn't I pay attention to my instructors? PROVERBS 5:13

Part of being accountable is being a good listener and observer. You can learn much about your own behavior by observing others and listening to wise friends you respect.

You must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9

Knowing God's Word and talking about it with others help keep you accountable. Writing down your spiritual journey and insights will also help keep you accountable and help you remember the fervor of your early faith.

Why is accountability so important?

Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. . . . A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12

A person standing alone against the world is vulnerable. You need support and companionship. Enlisting a Christian friend as an accountability partner will more than double your spiritual strength. Include the Lord in that relationship and you will become “triple-braided.”

What happens when there is no accountability?

All the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes. JUDGES 17:6

Left unaccountable, people will always lean toward sin. The consequences of sin eventually hurt you and others, and pull you away from God.

A Jew named Apollos, an eloquent speaker who knew the Scriptures well, had arrived in Ephesus from Alexandria in Egypt. He had been taught the way of the Lord, and he taught others about Jesus with an enthusiastic spirit and with accuracy. However, he knew only about John's baptism. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him preaching boldly in the synagogue, they took him aside and explained the way of God even more accurately. ACTS 18:24-26

Even those trying to do good need accountability. Sometimes your own good intentions can be sabotaged by wrong information or even your enthusiasm.

How can I effectively hold someone else accountable?

He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered. . . . He must live wisely and be just. He must live a devout and disciplined life. TITUS 1:7-8

Before you can help others be accountable, you must not only know God's commands but also consistently obey them and always work to develop good judgment. If you are going to minister to others by holding them accountable, you must be wise, honest, godly, trustworthy, and kind yourself.

The people of Israel followed all of the LORD's instructions to Moses. Then Moses inspected all their work. When he found it had been done just as the LORD had commanded him, he blessed them. EXODUS 39:42-43

When you are in leadership, you are accountable for the work of others. Inspection and evaluation are necessary accountability tools.

Think about it: Just as a parent disciplines a child, the LORD your God disciplines you for your own good. DEUTERONOMY 8:5

God uses loving discipline to hold you accountable, and you can follow his example when you are responsible for others.

Does God really hold me accountable for all my actions?

We don't live for ourselves or die for ourselves. If we live, it's to honor the Lord. And if we die, it's to honor the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. Christ died and rose again for this very purpose—to be Lord both of the living and of the dead. . . . Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God. ROMANS 14:7-9, 12

Live today as though you will be with God in eternity tomorrow. One day you will have to give an account to God for how you lived here on earth. So lead a life of obedience, pleasing to God.

What kinds of things am I accountable for?

Anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment.

JOHN 3:36

You are accountable for your own disobedience to God.

No accounting of this money was required from the construction supervisors, because they were honest and trustworthy men. 2 KINGS 12:15

You are accountable for your own character.

Oh, why didn't I listen to my teachers? Why didn't I pay attention to my instructors?

PROVERBS 5:13

You are accountable for your own spiritual growth.

You must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak.

MATTHEW 12:36

You are accountable for the words you speak.

When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required. LUKE 12:48

You are accountable for the work you are given to do.

If you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? LUKE 16:11

You are accountable for your resources: how you spend your money, time, energy, and talents.

ACCUSATIONS *See also Blame, Criticism*

We live in a world where our sinful nature urges us to look out for ourselves first. Rather than take responsibility for our own actions and faults, our instinct is to accuse someone or something else—anything to take the focus off ourselves and avoid the consequences of our mistakes. But accusations are often justified—when a crime is committed, a costly mistake is made, or a sin is committed that threatens a relationship. In these cases, it is important to accuse the one who did wrong so that justice can be served and restitution made. Before we accuse, we must be very careful to have all the facts and to make the accusation in a way that focuses on righting the wrong, not on destroying the accused. Accusations have the power to destroy another person, so we must be extremely careful before we assign blame. Remember that God knows all motives, and he will bring justice to the guilty in his time.

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