

The unabridged writings of Fred Morris, Manna Publications

Living for Jesus

FREE TO CHOOSE?

To the reader: Keep your Bible beside you. Always read your Bible first, then read these notes. Check the references and read them also. Invite a friend to study with you. You will be blessed.

God is sovereign. He does as He pleases. He created everything, knows everything and controls everything by His mighty power (Col 1:16-19). God created man a perfect being – “in His own likeness” (Gen 1:27).

Adam chose to disobey God and his sin nature passed down to all mankind (Rom 7:20). Yet Almighty God offers men and women a way out of their bondage to sin. He gives them the freedom to choose life over death. Moses told the people of Israel to “choose life, so that you and your children may live” (Deut 30:19). He spoke of choosing to obey God who is able to give us eternal life, life that will go on forever in heaven after we die.

The amount of political and religious freedom is not the same for all. Governments may restrict our freedoms, but our spirits are still free to relate to God. We have no choice in the matter of which country we are born in, who our parents are, or how we look. But we can thank God that He knows all about us. He knew us before we were born. The writer said, “When I was woven together...Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book” (Psalm 139:16).

God gave all men and women a remarkable ability to choose between right and wrong. He gave every person a conscience. He wanted our ancestors to choose to obey His commands and to love Him freely. He wanted them to love Him with all their hearts and to love each other in the same way (Deut 6:5). God did not create us as robots – machines He can operate by pushing a switch!

Every person must take responsibility for his or her actions. No matter how bad a mess you are in, you cannot blame your parents, your school or your friends. You can only blame yourself. God has given you a conscience and enough freedom to reject the wrong way. Don't live in a way that gets you into trouble.

Some will argue, “That man had a bad start,” or “She was abused and neglected. What could you expect?” It is true! Some people have to overcome great handicaps. Remember, God is able and willing to help you. He speaks to the some of the worst men and women in the most unlikely places. When His voice calls, it is up to us to answer “Yes, Lord.”

TALK ABOUT 1. What wonderful gift did God give to mankind? **2.** Can men and women have a personal relationship with God? **3.** Can we know right from wrong? How is this possible? **4.** Can men be held responsible for the things they do? **5.** How much should we love God (Deut 6:5)?

CHOOSING HOW YOU WILL LIVE

God did not make men and women robots. He did not want an automatic response from Adam and Eve. He wanted them to freely choose a love-relationship with Him, their Creator. God wanted to “walk and talk” with them every day. That is what He did until they disobeyed Him (Gen 3:8).

Jesus brought the good news of God's love. He came to tell us about our Father in heaven (Mark 1:15). He wanted us to know the truth. He said to the Pharisees, "If you hold to My teaching....Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). The truth sets us free to love God with all our hearts (Deut 6:5).

Sin makes us slaves, but Christ sets us free! Receive God's truth and God will give you the power to overcome the sin in your life and be truly free.

Under the law, men obeyed or they were 'cut off' from God (Num 15:30). No man could keep the whole law for "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10).

In Christ God offers all men and women "the royal law of love." He writes this law on their hearts by His Spirit. Under the Law of Moses, men had to obey like a cow chained to a cart. Under this new law, we love and follow Jesus Christ freely. We are like a dog which comes when the master calls and will not go anywhere with him.

BE WISE - CHOOSE JESUS CHRIST

John said, "He (Jesus) came to that which was his own (the Jews), but His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). The Jews had first choice. They were free to choose Jesus Christ and proclaim Him as their Lord and Saviour, but they did not.

God so loved lost men and women that He sent Jesus to die for them. Jesus said to His own people, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Matt 23:37). "I tell you the truth," He said, "whoever hears My word and believes on Him who sent Me has eternal life..." (John 5:24).

Jesus made it quite plain that men and women must choose the truth. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). When men and women know the truth, they must walk in it.

TALK ABOUT 1. Why did God create man and woman? **2.** What is the truth (John 14:6)? **3.** Did God promise that we could know the truth? **4.** What happens when we obey the truth (John 8:32)?

IMPORTANT CHOICES IN LIFE

Most Christians remember the time in their lives when they received Jesus Christ as their Saviour. However, there are others who grow to know the truth. Then they believe the "good news" of the gospel (Mark 1:15).

God gives the Holy Spirit to everyone who believes (Eph 1:13). The Holy Spirit confirms to each one that he or she is a child of God. God's Spirit within them cries "Abba," Father! (Rom 8:16). They belong to God's family!

If you have not 'believed' on Jesus, the Son of God, invite Him to be your Lord and Saviour. Confess your sins to Him and turn away from them.

Just say this prayer: "Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. You died for me and rose again. I repent of my sins and accept You as my Saviour. Thank you for saving me. Amen"

Make this choice now. You will never be sorry you did. God will give you His peace and a new outlook on life. Jesus said, "My peace I give you...Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

CHOOSING A LIFE PARTNER

When I look at my beautiful wife,
I am glad God and the society in which I live gave me the freedom to choose my life partner. I am sure my wife feels the same way! She also believes she made the right choice. We have a loving, working relationship.

We love each other completely. We share God's own love which He gives freely and without measure. His Spirit fills our hearts and imparts His great love to us. He asks us to love Him with that same love (Deut 6:5).

We both love the Lord Jesus and have God's Spirit to help us. Jesus said this was the first and greatest commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). True love and harmony can only fill the home if both husband and wife are Christians. Even then, they will need all the grace God will give them to serve each other in love.

Paul told the Christians at Corinth to choose believing partners. He wrote, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For...what fellowship can light have with darkness" (2 Cor 6:14)? This is so very important!

TALK ABOUT 1. Can you remember the time in your life when you were 'born again' into the family of God (John 3:5,8)? **2.** Should Christians marry non-Christians? Why not? **3.** Should Christians be business partners with unbelievers?

THE FIRST RELATIONSHIP

Everything God created was for His own pleasure and for man's good. In the beginning Adam and Eve lived in a perfect world and had a perfect relationship with God and with each other. They walked and talked with God in the cool of the evening (Gen 3:8).

Two beautiful trees grew in the garden in Eden (Gen 2:8). God put them there. He called them "the Tree of Life" and "the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil." These names refer to the nature or meaning of the trees. The 'trees' themselves were symbols of God's provision and protection.

God gave Adam and Eve one command, "Don't eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil" (Gen 2:17). All the other fruits in the garden were good to eat. All but one! God gave them this command to test their love-relationship to Him. He warned them, "When you eat, you will surely die." If they disobeyed God their bodies would die and return to dust (Gen 2:17; 3:19).

Adam and Eve must have understood death or God's warning would have had no meaning for them. But 'death' had a wider meaning. If they did not obey, their relationship with God would be broken. God wanted the man and woman to obey Him, to learn His ways and to build on the relationship they had with Him from the beginning. He wanted their full and total commitment.

THE RELATIONSHIP BROKEN

Satan was always opposed to God. He was once an angel of light in heaven, but he rebelled against God. Satan and the angels who followed him were cast out of heaven. God has not revealed how or when this happened. Some of the spirits that followed Satan were cast out of heaven with him are called demons or evil spirits. They are very active in our world.

Satan came to the garden in Eden. He tempted Eve to doubt God's word. Her trust in God was not strong. Perhaps she doubted God's goodness!

Eve obeyed Satan and took some of the fruit God told them not to eat. She also gave some to Adam and he ate it (Gen 3:6). The man and woman rebelled against God, just as Satan had done. Their act of rebellion broke the relationship they had with their Creator.

Adam's spirit, which is the innermost part of his being, the part of him that related to God, died. He was cut off from his Creator and from the immortal life of God. A broken trust brought about a dead relationship.

The same is true of marriage relationships. Trust must be built slowly and trust must be reinforced. If one partner rebels and commits adultery, the relationship of trust is broken. It can only be restored if the rebellious partner repents and seeks forgiveness. Even then, there are no guarantees! The relationship may never be restored to what it was before!

That is why a wise man wrote, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring (or source) of your life” (Prov 4:23).

TALK ABOUT 1. Who is the great enemy of God? **2.** What command did God give Adam and Eve (Gen 2:17)? **3.** Satan come to the garden in Eden? Why? **4.** Did Eve listen to Satan’s voice tempting her to disobey God? **5.** What did Eve do?

HIDING FROM GOD

God came to the garden to find Adam and Eve. He came in the cool of the evening probably at a time the man and woman were expecting Him. But they were hiding in the bushes (Gen 3:10). Because they felt guilty, they were afraid of God! They could not walk and talk with God as they had done before. Their relationship had been broken. Their sin cut them off from God (Isa 59:2).

Paul wrote to Timothy, “God did not give us a spirit of timidity (fear), but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (2 Tim 1:7).

Their dependence on God had been destroyed by their disobedience to God. They had broken off a loving relationship and taken on a harmful one, so God put them out of the garden.

Outside the garden, Adam and Eve stood alone in a harsh world. Satan was not going to help them. Sin had broken their trust for each other, love left and passion and lust took control of their lives.

The curse which God pronounced on their world became the stage for a life-long struggle, without any victory. An aging process took control of their bodies which led to physical pain and ultimately death.

THE CURSE OF SIN

To disobey God is sin. The word ‘sin’ is not used in Genesis 3. But Adam’s sin passed down to all men and women so that God said, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

Adam lost the wonderful relationship he had with the Creator-God, but he did not lose his freedom to choose. Adam had a conscience. He knew right from wrong. He could have repented and confessed his sin. He could have asked God to forgive him, but we are not told that he did this.

Satan stands between all men and women and God. He hates God. Anything that Satan tempts you to do is sinful and wicked. Yet in all his craftiness Satan cannot destroy a person’s conscience. God gave men and women the freedom to choose from right or wrong thoughts and actions. Men and women are free to choose to love God. God did not make us robots!

TALK ABOUT 1. Where was Adam when God came to the garden to talk with him? **2.** What separates man from God (Isa 59:2)? **3.** Are men and women free to love God if they choose to? **4.** Have you believed in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31)? **5.** What was the punishment for not obeying God (Gen 2:17)?

GOD CREATED MALE AND FEMALE

God created male and female sexes for relationships and to produce families. He laid out His plan in simple words which everyone can understand. God said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). God said one man would marry one woman!

God says to all men who are ready for a relationship with the opposite sex, “leave your father and mother” and be joined to a wife. It is clear that same-sex partners are not allowed

in God's command. A father and a mother will give their son or daughter in marriage and bless them. They will give the bride and groom their support in their new relationship of marriage.

Adam had Eve and no other. One man and one woman is a satisfying relationship. As husband and wife worship and serve God, He blesses them.

The Bible condemns all other sexual relationships. Sexual relations outside of marriage are "an abomination" to God and to society (Rom 1:26-32). God said so. And man's conscience tells him so. Such behaviour destroys the body and damages the human spirit. Homosexual partnerships wreck lives.

God's word forbids adultery, prostitution and homosexual acts. To indulge in such sins makes the conscience dull and destroys life's highest values. Paul said "Flee from sexual immorality" (1 Cor 6:18).

Immoral, detestable sexual practices were not tolerated in the churches. And God warned His people not to associate with those who practiced perverse sexual behaviour (2 Cor 6:14).

Our Creator committed us, men and women, to this marriage relationship. And He used it as a picture of His own relationship with those who repent of their sin and receive His forgiveness. As a body of believing Christians, God calls them His 'bride' (Rev 21:9). As individuals God calls them 'sons and daughters' (2 Cor 6:18).

SIN SPOILS RELATIONSHIPS

Adam and Eve had a perfect husband-wife relationship of love and trust. But when they sinned, their relationship to each other was spoiled. They were ashamed of their own naked bodies. Eve hurried to make aprons of leaves to cover them (Gen 3:7).

God did not accept their leaf-aprons, so he killed an innocent animal and made clothes for them (Gen 3:21). Then He put Adam and Eve out of the garden and closed the way back, so that they could not eat of the Tree of Life and live forever in sin and separation from Him. God wanted them to repent of their sin and come back to Him. From what we know, they did not do this.

Adam had to work the ground to grow food for his family and Eve worked alongside him. Each blamed the other for what had happened, and Eve blamed the serpent which deceived her (Gen 3:12-13).

From that day, Adam ruled over his wife rather than acting as an equal partner. And Eve's desire for her mate kept her close to him. She served her husband rather than helping him as an equal. Adam and Eve were free to choose and they made the wrong choice. Because of their sin, all mankind has had to suffer hardships and disappointments to this day.

TALK ABOUT 1. God chose to make us male and female so that the sexes complemented and help each other __ True __ false? **2.** What spoiled the relationship Eve had with Adam? **3.** What did God say about choosing partners (2 Cor 6:14-18)?

A DETESTABLE THING

God commanded the men of Israel not to take 'strangers' to be their wives from the heathen peoples living around them. When they disobeyed, God called it "a detestable thing" and "breaking faith" (Mal 2:11). The foreign wives did not worship God and could raise their children to know God.

Many men of Israel did marry foreign wives and broke their covenant with God. He refused to own these men and their foreign wives as His sons and daughters. Not only did they break their covenant with God, but they also treated their wives badly (Mal 2:13). The men of Israel broke their marriage covenant by taking other women in addition to their

wives, so that the wives “covered the altar of the Lord with their tears” because they wept and cried out.

Christian men must be careful who they choose to marry. Your wife will be “a wife of the covenant,” a sacred contract which you make with the Lord God on the day of your wedding.

God will make you “one flesh” if you chose a believing man or woman to be your spouse.

God will bless you and your spouse will be your trusted companion through the years.

Young people should take notice of what the Scriptures say about marriage.

If they obey God and seek a Christian man or woman as a life-long partner, God has promised to bless their union. He said, “I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters.”

A PERMANENT RELATIONSHIP

When men and women meet the opposite sex, they may fall in love with that person. A friendship begins, but it takes time for them to get to know the other person. They will have different ideas of life and goals they want.. The prophet asked, “Can two walked together unless they be agreed?”

Every time the two meet they talk and enjoy each other’s company. They explore their likes and dislikes. They build an understanding and trust. These are very important to a life-long commitment.

You must ask God to show you your life partner. Because His word instructs us not to be unequally yoked with a person who does not have faith in God. Paul asked, “What fellowship can light have with darkness” (2 Cor 6:14)?

Relationships grow and thrive on commitment and trust, not on sex. Sex before marriage hurts the other person and takes away our respect for him or her. Young people think they can have sex with another person before marriage and not be hurt, but they are wrong. Our young people suffer because they break God’s marriage law. We may tell ourselves, “No one is hurt,” but you cannot break God’s law and not suffer (Gal 6:7-8).

In marriage a man and a woman pledge their commitment to each other, “to love and to comfort, to honour and keep in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, to keep to him or her, as long as both shall live.”

They commit to be intimate with one person only. No other person will be allowed to come between them. Privacy will keep a space between them and the world at large. Close the door to all others. Let no one take the place you reserve for your life partner.

God asks for the same commitment in our relationship with Him. He told His people, “You shall have no other gods before Me...Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Ex 20:3; Deut 6:5).

He said, “I will remove from them (Israel) their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow My decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be My people, and I will be their God” (Ezek 11:19-20). This speaks of a single-minded commitment to follow the Lord and to do His will.

Paul wrote to believers, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her...” (Eph 5:25). He was not talking only of Christ’s death on the cross, but His whole life of serving His followers. He gave up “riches in glory” to come to earth. He loved His disciples and those who believed in Him and He gave Himself up for His Church. Men are commanded to show the same love and sacrificial service for their wives.

TALK ABOUT 1. What did God call “a detestable thing?” **2.** Are wedding vows the same as a covenant between a man and God? **3.** How are men to love their wives (Eph 5:25)?

THE MARRIAGE COVENANT

The Bible calls marriage a covenant. It is made between a man and a woman and God. God said that the men of Israel who separated from their wives, broke their covenant with Him, not with their wives (Mal 2:10-16).

God has ordained marriage for the benefit of the family and society.

He ordained marriage "so that He might have godly offspring." He would have children born into a godly home, raised by two parents, so that they might grow up to love and serve Him.

"Marriage is not simply an individual matter, or even a social institution; rather, it is a divine ordinance: the Lord Himself is the chief 'witness' at a wedding ceremony" (Ezek 16:8; Mark 10:9).

God said, "I hate divorce" (Mal 2:10). God calls divorce "violence" (Mal 2:16). The prophet likens a man divorcing his wife to cutting a body of flesh into two parts. "Divorce is compared to a great injustice which, like the blood of a murdered victim, leaves its mark for all to see" (The International Bible Commentary).

When a man breaks the marriage covenant he injures his own spirit. "So guard your spirit, and do not break faith" with your wife or husband (Mal 2:16).

BE FAITHFUL TO GOD

God commands us to be faithful in our relationship with Him and to each other. He is jealous of His relationship with His people. He guards those who love Him and are committed to Him. He said, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex 20:3).

He commands husbands and wives to be faithful to each other. Paul wrote to the Christians in the wicked city of Corinth, "Each man should have his own wife, each woman her own husband" (1 Cor 7:2-3).

Every strong marriage relationship is built on trust and respect. Without respect no relationship can survive for long. Sin destroys respect. If a man cheats on his wife, her respect for him is broken. Once trust and respect are broken, it is very difficult for them to grow in our hearts again. Because doubt will come in and replace the trust and respect we once had.

A DISCIPLINE OF LIFE

When men and women make their marriage vows, they agree to the boundaries marriage sets for them. Marriage is a discipline, just as the Christian life is a life of discipline. We commit to certain responsibilities, for life!

We are fearful of living a careless Christian life. Those who know Christ have His Spirit dwelling in them (Eph 1:13). If we yield our wills to Him, the Holy Spirit will control our thoughts and actions. A Spirit-controlled life is a disciplined life.

It is the same in marriage. If it is lived according to God's command, married life is a disciplined life. The writer asked, "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so" (Amos 3:3)?

Walking together is a picture of fellowship and of relationship. We keep in step with our partner by adjusting our stride. We share 'talk.'

I have long legs, my wife has short legs. I had to learn to adjust my stride to keep in step with her. I had to slow down and not walk so fast. Now that I am old, I am the slow one!

ENJOY YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Despite all his failings, God used Solomon to express the idea of full physical and emotional satisfaction in marriage (Prov 5:15-20). The Bible speaks against adultery and fornication. We must not to commit adultery or fornication; we are to marry.

Sex is a God-given appetite, just like our appetite for food. And God wants wives and husbands to enjoy sexual activity with their husband or wife. We should not feel the need to look for sexual satisfaction in forbidden places.

Solomon wrote, "Drink water from your own cistern..." This means enjoy the wife of your youth and do not seek any other woman. Be very fond of your wife. You chose her and you should be pleased with your choice. She is "the wife of your youth," the one God provided for you.

Pray with her every day and pray for her. Every evening, listen to the burdens of her day. Hold hands and pray together before you go to bed.

When you are overcome with love, may your wife satisfy your appetite for sex. "May her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love" (Prov 5:19 NIV).

Men and women have a natural desire for sexual pleasure. God has provided for the regular gratification of the sex appetite in marriage. No other person will love a man like a godly wife and the same is true of a godly husband. God made us that way and we should give praise to Him.

Jesus said, "Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself" (Eph 5:28).

PROTECT YOUR WIFE

The writer asks, "Should your springs overflow in the streets...?" Should your wife be exclusively yours, or should you let her become public property (Prov 5:17)? Of course the answer to the writer's question is "Yes! She should be exclusively yours." She should not be exposed to others.

You do not need to keep your wife locked in the house to protect her. However, many men forget that their wives are open to the temptations of the world.

There are physical dangers to be avoided. In most places, wives are safe to go out on the street alone during the day. However, it is not always safe at night.

I knew a missionary who accompanied his wife to the outside toilet every time she needed to go there. It was only a few yards from the house, but he stood outside and waited for her.

"Never share your wife with strangers." Do you do this? Men some times take their wives to a dance, then let them dance with strangers. Don't!

A wife may wear clothes that show off her body. She might not think of this as tempting others. Tell her that the eyes of an evil world are watching her!

AFFECTION IN OLD AGE

Nothing is more pitiful than an old man or woman who has no one to care for him or her. No one can feel more lonely than a person with -out any care. And memories of what might have been live on to haunt them.

The affection of a godly wife or husband is a great strength to a man or a woman as he or she grows older. The same is true of godly children who care for their aged parents. This is one way to honour your father and mother, which is the first commandment to which God attached a promise (Ex 20:12).

God planned that husbands and wives grow old together. As their faculties slow down, they are able to comfort and help each other. This is a great blessing as well as a great responsibility. Husbands and wives both need to think of ways they can be more helpful to each other.

"A man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and He (the Lord) examines all his paths" (5:21). Men, take notice! God weighs your actions. He sees how you treat your wife, carelessly or with love and respect. Give your partner the trust and confidence she deserves. Share your hopes and fears and let her carry your burdens with you.

Peter has a word for husbands: “Husbands...be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers” (1 Peter 3:7).

Wives are equal partners and have the same right to life and to God’s blessings as men do. A man who fails to give his wife due respect cannot claim God’s attention when he prays. His conduct toward his wife offends God.

TALK ABOUT 1. What can men do to protect their wives? **2.** More than one pair of eyes are watching what you do (Heb 4:12). **3.** Does God bless everything you do? **4.** What might you do to be more helpful to your spouse?

GOD CAN HEAL BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

We can weep and be angry, but that will not bring back a wife or husband who has left you for another lover.

Let God restore peace your soul! If you are grieving today, God sorrows with you. He knows about your broken heart and He wants to comfort you. He cares for you more than you can ever know.

All your tears cannot change the past. Accept what you cannot change. Put the past into God's hands and ask Him to give you comfort and peace. He will give you the Holy Spirit - the Comforter - in special measure for this time of sorrow.

Think about what you have in Christ, not on what you have lost. You will feel the pain of loss, but let God continue His work in you. Trust Him for what is still to come. He will give 'beauty for ashes' and 'the oil of gladness for mourning...' (Is 61:3).

Strength comes from forgiving the other person. Ask God to help you forgive the hurts. Joy comes from receiving God’s forgiveness. God's river of grace flows into our lives by His Spirit and it is only quenched by bitterness and an unforgiving spirit.

THE RELATIONSHIP RESTORED

Adam and Eve sinned against God. Immediately the relationship they had with their Creator was broken. Sin separated them from God and it spoiled their relationship with each other.

All men and women inherited Adam’s sin. God said, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). We are all born with a broken relationship toward God because of sin.

Praise God, He made a way for men and women to have a new relationship with their Creator. God sent His Son to redeem sinful man and restore a right relationship. “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

All of us suffer stress, hard times, sickness, loss, loneliness, and to be in need. No one is free from the sins that make problems for us. In times of hardship or sickness or death of a loved one, we are tempted to ask “Why?” God does not answer our questions, but He does give us comfort as we seek Him.

TALK ABOUT 1. When we sorrow, God often sends someone to comfort our hearts? **2.** How else does God send comfort (Psa 119:52)? **3.** When we are broken in spirit, God has promised to 'restore our soul' (Psa 23)? **4.** What is the key to God’s blessing in a marriage? **5.** What can heal a relationship that have been damaged or broken? **6.** Should we forgive others (Rom 12:17-21)?

JESUS KNOWS OUR WEAKNESSES

Jesus knows every step we take. He calls us to follow in His steps. He was “humble and familiar with grief.” We walk where He has walked. We follow His pathway when He lived among men. He has been there before us, even through the valley of the shadow of death (Psa 23:4).

Because our Risen Lord Jesus Christ knows all our weaknesses, we can trust Him. He said, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20).

God uses the hard times in our lives to make us strong. A strong wind blowing on a tree, makes its roots go deeper into the soil. God wants to make us into whole persons. He is testing our faith because He wants to make it strong and able to stand against the ‘winds’ of temptation.

During the time of the people of the Bible, the refiner of precious metals heated the ore in a furnace until it melted. When the impurities floated to the surface, he skimmed them off. He kept on doing this until he could see his face in the metal. All that was impure was burned away. So the metal was refined and made pure.

God is like the refiner (Mal 3:3). He wants to see His own image in His sons and daughters (2 Cor 3:18). He is looking for holiness and purity in our lives.

GOD HAS THE ANSWER TO YOUR LONLINESS

A young man thinks, 'If only I had a wife. She would take care of my loneliness!' But when he marries a wife he finds himself facing not just his problems, but her problems, too! Another young man thinks a new car will satisfy him, but will it? Very soon he has to spend most of his money and his time to maintain the vehicle. He feels as if he is 'married' to his car.

A young woman wishes for a strong husband, a beautiful home and a baby. She thinks this will take away her empty feeling! When she marries, her baby cries a lot and keeps her awake most of the night! As the child grows, even when she bathes, little hands start to pound on the door. And the child is expensive, very expensive to keep in school!

Remember, in all the stresses and trials of life Jesus met them just as we do! He is able to care about us because He was tempted and tried in every way, just as we are (Heb 4:15). He calls to the lonely and hurting, to all men and women, “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28).

TALK ABOUT 1. Are you walking in God’s way? **2.** Do God’s promises help you in the hard times (Matt 28:20)? **3.** How does God refine us (Mal 3:3)? **4.** If you have one wish, what would it be?

NO REST FOR THE SINNER

We can be sure there is **NO** rest for the selfish person who lives only for himself or herself and the things of this world. A “friend of the world” is an enemy of God and of little help to his neighbour (Jas 4:4). Such a person works against God’s plan for his life. He does not cooperate with God.

Satan may say, “It doesn’t matter. Everyone has a few secret sins.” But it does matter that our hearts are not clean. Only clean hearts ‘rest’ and bear ‘fruit’ unto God. And God offers the remedy for our sin. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

TALK ABOUT 1. How can we rest in Christ’s finished work and do good deeds at the same time? **2.** Why is it important that we do good deeds (James 2:14-17)? **5.** What might these “good deeds” be?

DON’T USE YOUR FREEDOM CARELESSLY

Paul set men thinking when he said, "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Romans 5:20). "Then why not go on sinning," some might ask. In Christ, the believer has a new-found freedom:

Freedom from the clutches of sin (Rom 6:6).

Freedom from the condemnation of the law (Rom 7:25).

Freedom from the fear of death (Rom 8:21; Heb 2:14-15).

Christians may use their freedom to choose in the wrong way. Freedom from guilt does not mean freedom to choose to do wrong.

Paul answered this wrong idea, "What shall we say, then?" he asked. "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase" (Rom 6:1)?

The wrong idea came from Jews who held to the law, and from others who were against the law. They taught that believers are free to do as they wished because God would forgive them anyway.

Paul said, "Of course not! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" Sin's power over us was broken when we became Christians and were baptized into Christ to become a part of His body (Rom 6:2-3; 1 Cor 12:13).

But how did we "die to sin?" Baptism is a witness to non-Christians. It is also a means of grace; it makes the believer a partner with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. Baptism is not some magical rite that saves us from sin. It is a witness to men and to angels that a believer has been saved by the blood of Christ and will live only for Him.

"If we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection" (Rom 6:5). Christ's resurrection gained for us righteousness; it also enables us to live a life pleasing to God.

ALIVE IN CHRIST - DEAD TO SIN

Paul thought of the believer being joined to Jesus Christ in this way:

a) Christ's death becomes our death to our old ways (Rom 6:1-6).

b) His resurrection brings us new life in the Spirit (Rom 6:7-10).

c) We serve Christ instead of serving sin and Satan (Rom 6:6).

d) We turn from sin and yield ourselves to God to live holy lives.

In God's sight, all this happens when we believe. In one act of believing, a Christian gains a personal share in Christ's death (1 Cor 12:13). We are baptized by the Holy Spirit to become members of God's family. We die to our old ways and become "alive to God" (Rom 6:11; 2 Cor 5:17).

"We know that our old self was crucified with Him..." (Rom 6:6). Our faith in Christ must mean the death blow to our sinful past - our old-Adam way of life. This work of God's Spirit in the life of the believer, is pictured for us in water baptism and our oneness with our Saviour.

TALK ABOUT 1. What are some of the 'freedoms' the Christian enjoys? **2.** Which of the three freedoms listed at the beginning of this section do you think is the most important (Heb 2:14-15)? **3.** Why do people fear death?

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