

Foundational Life Truths

In this chapter, I will share some fundamental truths that are foundational to how God designed life to function. My aim in sharing these truths is for you to understand how to connect with God in ways that will enable you to discern how God is “at work,” directing your life toward His amazing plans for you. Remember, God’s plans are always directed toward helping you grow into the “full life” (John 10:10) He has planned for you – a life rich in meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. Some of the truths I share will make perfect sense; some might seem counterintuitive, and some might even make you wonder if I am completely wrong! But remember, the proper understanding of these truths will come not from intellectual knowledge, but from your personal experiences with God.

For these truths to effectively guide your life, they must be personally validated through the life experiences that God guides you through. God will need to personally validate these truths for you as you wrestle with the challenges of understanding what it means to be a Christ-follower. These truths can guide you effectively when used as a basis for how you direct your life. Even the **awareness** of these truths can assist you on your journey to know and follow God.

The **most significant and essential lesson** you must discover – through examining your own life experiences – is that **the pathway to experiencing the most amazing life possible must be God-directed**. That is, the critical decisions you make in life need to be based on your best understanding of God’s will for you. Every step off that pathway will bring less than optimal (potentially disastrous) results. While we may come to accept this principle intellectually, our **natural inclination** will be to plan our own way rather than be guided by God. A significant part of the spiritual transformation process is to **develop the habit of turning to God for guidance**. While many scripture passages affirm the necessity of following God’s guidance, Proverbs 14:12 seems to be the most direct:

“There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.”

When we do what **we** think is best, we should expect less-than-optimal outcomes. However, because God desires that we experience a meaningful and fulfilling life, He will regularly intervene in ways that provide opportunities for us to discover our need for Him and the wisdom necessary to redirect our lives appropriately.

Proverbs 16: ⁹ “The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps” (NASB).

Many of the challenges we face in life are designed by God to redirect our attention to Him so that He can help us discover essential life truths and lead us

in ways that will optimally enrich our lives. “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.” (Psalm 32:8). Our most significant challenge (and greatest opportunity), then, is to discover how we can best learn the lessons that God desires to teach us.

God truly desires for you to experience a life of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. The Bible communicates that truth in many ways. As we saw earlier, the most direct statement of this truth was expressed by Jesus Himself:

John 10: ¹⁰ “The enemy comes only to kill, steal and destroy; I have come that [you] might have life, and have it to the full.”

Through this statement, Jesus is telling us that His very purpose for coming to earth was to make it possible for each person to experience a “full” life. But Jesus also points out that we have an adversary trying to block our progress. If we depend only on our own understanding and power, we will miss out on many blessings God desires for us. The answer to this problem that applies to us all is to follow Jesus – allowing Him to reveal life’s essential truths and guide our thinking and planning.

In John 8:31-32, Jesus reveals the basic principle of the process we must follow: “If you ***hold to my teaching***, you are really my disciples. ***Then*** you will ***know the truth***, and the truth will set you free.” In John 16:13, Jesus explains in more detail how these truths will be taught to us. “But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”

The Gospel message is simply this: Through the sacrifice of Jesus’ death and subsequent resurrection and ascension into Heaven, God has made it possible for you to enter into a genuine, personal relationship with Him. That relationship begins when you ask Jesus to forgive you of your rebellion against God and communicate your desire and intention to follow His leadership. At that point in time, your spirit is “born-again,” and the Holy Spirit takes up residence within your heart (John 3:5-8). The Holy Spirit’s presence within you establishes the communication channel between you and God.

From that point on (salvation), God desires you to connect with Him regularly. As you respond to His promptings to seek Him, engage in honest dialogue with Him about absolutely everything in your life, and follow through (to the best of your ability) with the ways He challenges you to think and act, you will grow closer to Him. As you deepen your relationship with God and follow His leadership, you will experience an ever-growing sense of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. It won’t always be fun or easy; there will be many challenges as you struggle to surrender to God’s leadership. But the long-term result will move you closer and closer to experiencing the “full” life Jesus desires for you.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, if there is one key to growing as a Christian, it is expressed in the Book of Romans.

Romans 12: ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

We “grow” as Christ-followers as we replace our current mental framework – our beliefs about life and truth – with a divinely inspired mental framework. God replaces what is false – our beliefs, which we developed on our own power (“patterns of this world”) – with genuine truths about who God is and how He designed life to be lived. ***God designed life to be a journey of discovery – a Great Adventure of learning experiences with the Holy Spirit as your personal guide.*** The primary requirement is that ***you need to become a seeker of truth.*** Your journey of discovering the truths God established for life – a biblically sound mental framework – will be accomplished in four ways.

1. Some things you currently believe to be true about life are correct. These truths must be reinforced, fully embraced, and used as the foundation for your plans and actions.
2. Some things you believe to be true about life are only partially correct. These truths need to be refined.
3. Some things you believe to be true about life are incorrect. These beliefs need to be abandoned and replaced with corresponding truths.
4. There are some understandings and beliefs that are true about life that you do not know at all. These truths must be discovered, clarified, and integrated into your mental framework.

You must approach your life journey as a student. You are responsible for discovering what is true about life and building your life upon these truths. The Holy Spirit will be your teacher and guide. As you seek God, He will teach you through all your life experiences – always attempting to direct your attention to truths in one or more of the abovementioned ways.

Romans 8: ²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

Based on this general overview, the following is a list of foundational truths, understandings, and practices that will enhance your journey of discovery. Over time, God will reinforce the validity of these truths for you.

Truths that undergird the journey to know and follow God

I. Life is primarily about relationships.

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He often spoke and acted in ways that contradicted the views of the religious leaders of His day. The truths He revealed by His words and actions were so profound that He captured people's hearts. In fact, Jesus became a celebrity among the ordinary people; they flocked around Him everywhere He went. This challenged the authority and influence of the religious leaders, prompting them to seek ways to discredit Jesus. On one particular occasion, the religious leaders attempted to embarrass Jesus by posing a question they thought He would be unable to answer, thereby weakening His stature before the people.

One account of this interaction between Jesus and the religious leaders is captured in Matthew, Chapter 22. In verse 36, one of the religious leaders challenged Jesus with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” It’s important to understand that the Pharisees had established 613 commandments and taught that all must be obeyed. In their mind, they were all equally important. Surely, they thought, Jesus could not answer this question. But Jesus surprised them. In verses 37-40, Jesus instructs them as follows. (This passage is called The Great Commandment.)

Matthew 22: ³⁷ Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’
⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Jesus not only identified the Greatest Commandment, but He also pointed out the second greatest commandment. He further showed them (verse 40) that all of the other 611 commandments flowed out of these two: their relationship with God and their relationships with others. Since following God’s leadership produces the “full” life and seeing that relationships are the most critical issues in life, establishing and maintaining healthy relationships is fundamental to experiencing a life of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment.

As you seek to understand what it means to be a Christ-follower, ***your relationships with God and others should always be a major priority***. However, establishing and maintaining healthy relationships will always be a struggle. Consequently, your key relationships will simultaneously be the source of your greatest enjoyment and your most significant conflicts and challenges. God designed this dual nature of relationships to bring us happiness and to challenge us to develop character.

You will grow in meaningful and fruitful ways as you allow God to use these relationships as a focal point for your interactions with Him. Therefore, it will always be

essential for you to give special attention to your relationships – starting with God and moving “outward” to family, friends, work associates, and others with whom you interact. ***The more significant a relationship is in your life, the greater its impact on the overall quality of life you experience.*** For example, strengthening relationships with your spouse and nuclear family will impact your life more significantly than improving your relationship with someone you occasionally interact with at work.

One of the primary applications of this first life principle is that as you connect with God, He will often bring issues related to significant relationships (including your relationship with Him) to mind. The issues God leads you to focus on often impede the “full life” He desires for you. As you allow God to give you insights and understanding into the key relationships in your life, He will reveal truths you need to embrace and act on. This process of reflection is an integral part of the spiritual transformation process. Life is primarily about relationships.

II. Your relationship (interactions) with God must become your foremost priority.

This is probably obvious, but it’s so important that I thought it worthwhile to point out. Because God is the source of everything good (James 1:17, Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.), the ways you connect and interact with God is of supreme importance. I understand, however, just the thought of approaching God can be very intimidating. How does one approach God? How can I even show my face before Him, let alone converse with Him? When you stop to think about how flawed you are compared to God’s holiness, majesty, and power, the thought of even approaching Him can be fraught with fear and intimidation. But that’s where Jesus’ sacrifice comes into play. When you are born-again (salvation), God sets you free from any fear of punishment for your rebellion against Him.

Jeremiah 31: ³⁴ “No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

Justification is the theological term that describes our “position” before God – we can stand before God knowing He accepts us for who we are without fear of judgment. So, we can approach God at any time and converse with Him openly. However, for our interactions with God to be optimally beneficial, ***the nature of our conversations must always be conducted with complete transparency and honesty.*** We must always be totally honest before God. Since He knows everything about us, there would appear to be no need for us to say anything. But ***we benefit*** from honestly owning up to our anger, fears, doubts, shortcomings, rebellion, and regrets when we come before God.

Our honest “confession” lays the foundation for God to interact with us and for us to be able to receive His grace and wisdom. The humble recognition and confession of our ongoing need for God opens our hearts to receive all He has for us. King David expressed this truth in Psalms 51:6 (NASB) – “Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.” As we interact honestly with God from the depths of our hearts, God gives us wisdom – the ability to understand the truths for living that He established at the very beginning of time. And as we spend time in His Presence, He transforms our hearts and empowers us to live our lives more fully aligned with His will. However, despite the amazing benefits we derive from spending time in God’s Presence, developing the pattern of regularly spending fruitful time with Him often becomes one of the most significant challenges for Christians.

Fruitful interactions with God will follow this simple pattern. First, we approach God with an open heart and mind, speaking honestly from the depths of our hearts. Second, God dispenses His grace to us in some way. (Grace is a HUGE topic, but for now, let’s say that grace is an outpouring of some “blessing” or benefit from God.) His grace might come in the form of a feeling of acceptance, or empowerment to move forward. God’s grace might appear as a feeling of being comforted or encouraged or as a word of correction where He gives you an insight into your behavior you were not previously aware of, or His grace might be a challenge to do something. Regardless of the **form** that God’s grace takes, our interactions with God will always result in some “**course correction**” to our mental or emotional framework. God will permanently implant some wisdom to help us better understand one or more truths He has established for life.

Following our interactions with God, we become responsible for incorporating the truths He reveals into our daily lives. And that’s step three: we begin to think, feel, and act differently. We respond to God’s interactions by allowing Him to change us. That’s the transformation that occurs by “the renewing of your mind,” expressed in the passage from the Book of Romans, Chapter 12. In condensed form, these three steps should define most of your interactions with God.

1. Come before God with an open heart and mind, speaking honestly from the depths of your heart.
2. Receive whatever God wants to give or reveal to you and clarify what you’re supposed to do about/with it.
3. Follow through to the best of your ability.

There is actually a fourth step: repeat this pattern as often as possible! This is the essence of prayer – connecting with God in a personal and meaningful way. The entirety of the Christian life is built on this practice of interacting with God. However, God will often direct you to interact with others. (Remember the second part of Jesus’ Great Commandment!) So, unless God gives you the particular calling to do so, your life doesn’t have to be that of a monk who spends their entire day apart from people and

the everyday rhythms of life. You still live a “normal” life; it’s just one that is increasingly God-directed rather than being self-directed. And our interactions (relationship) with God become the “fuel” that moves us forward healthily.

Understanding the importance of regular interaction with God does not automatically translate into practicing it. It is frequently a challenging thing for Christians to establish this spiritual discipline. Most believers I have known have struggled, often for years, with consistently connecting with God in meaningful and productive ways. The spiritual practice of regularly connecting with God will likely take many different forms over time, often requiring modification in some way. However, asking God to help you grow in the practice of connecting with Him and following His lead will ultimately lead to greater and greater success.

III. God’s goal for your relationship with Him is to help you grow in faith and trust.

Many people think that if God exists, He is concerned primarily with our adhering to a stringent set of rules and practices. That mindset reduces Christianity to a form of slavery, where God “imposes” His will on you, restricting your freedom rather than developing a relationship with God that leads to a life of liberty and freedom.

John 8: ³¹ To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

It is indeed true that the principles God designed for living – ones that produce the “full” life – are different than the principles for living that you would embrace left to your own designs. In this sense, we must surrender a significant degree of self-will to follow God. However, a genuine relationship, characterized and motivated by love, produces a desire to please Him. So, rather than feeling duty-bound to force ourselves to obey God, **Christianity is an invitation to be transformed by a loving God who creates a “new” heart within us so we are genuinely motivated to align our lives to the truths for living that God created at the beginning of time.**

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. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

But that kind of heart transformation only comes as we spend time in His Presence and grow in faith and trust.

By definition, faith is believing in something for which there is no absolute proof. As I wrote in the appendix titled “The God Thing,” we all hold many beliefs for which we

have no proof. (Like believing that getting married and having children will automatically result in a happy and fulfilling life.) There may be *evidence* that leads us to embrace our beliefs, but definitive proof is often absent. **From a biblical perspective, growing in faith means becoming increasingly confident that everything God says is true.** The more confidence we have in God's truths, the more our faith grows. And that faith comes directly from our interactions (relationship) with God – seeing how He faithfully delivers on His promises.

Trust is a similar but slightly different idea. While faith is a belief that some statements or ideas are true, trust in someone means that we have confidence they will reliably care for something of value we place in their possession. **Trust in God means we are confident He will take care of everything we surrender to Him.** God's desire for us to trust Him with our entire lives means that He intends for us to have confidence He will use everything that happens in our lives for our good.

Romans 8: ²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

But we need faith to believe this statement is true. One of the primary reasons our relationship with God is so important is that it is through this relationship that we grow in both faith and trust. The more we believe that biblical standards are trustworthy, the more our faith grows. And the more we follow God's directives and see that our lives are better for following His leadership, the more our trust in God grows. As our relationship with God deepens, so does our confidence in the validity of God's truths (faith), and we become increasingly convinced that obeying God will yield beneficial outcomes for us (trust). That is why God's goal for our relationship with Him is to help us grow in faith and trust. And that is how our lives grow in meaning, purpose, and fulfillment, precisely what God desires.

Hebrews 11: ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Proverbs 3: ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

IV. Solitude and Silence are essential processes for growth.

The premise of this book is that the "full" life – a life rich with meaning, purpose, and a deep sense of personal fulfillment – is one that God truly desires for us but is only experienced as we **follow Him**. Following God has two necessary components: first, we must adequately understand (discern) what God is asking us to do, and second, we

must follow through (to the best of our ability) with whatever God asks us to do. So, following God rests in our relationship with Him because that is how we understand what He asks us to do at any given time. But I have also argued that the Bible (in its original languages) is the only source of objective truth and God's divinely inspired communication with humanity.

2 Timothy 3: ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The existence of biblical truths can sometimes make it difficult for us to understand what God is asking of us. Many people take biblical statements as “rules” that ***must always be followed***. That viewpoint, I believe, frequently removes a genuine personal relationship with God from the picture because it causes us to think that we already know what we are supposed to do! But that is the same mistake made by the religious leaders of Jesus' day. They were teaching people that they must follow all of the 613 commandments. Instead, as Jesus communicated in the Great Commandment, the most essential thing in life is loving God (which speaks of relationship) rather than trying to “follow all the rules.” Our relationship with God and how we behave are closely related. However, I would argue that ***our relationship with God must precede obedience rather than obedience preceding our relationship***.

As we deepen our relationship with God, He transforms us in ways that enable us to live more closely aligned to biblical truths. ***We cannot fully align our lives with God's ways unless He empowers us***. And that empowerment comes directly from Him as we connect with Him – on a personal level – and experience His Presence. So, the question needs to be, “How can I best connect with God on a personal level so that I can receive both the wisdom concerning what He wants me to do and the power to follow through?”

There are many ways to personally “connect” with God. Prayer, worship, meditation, service, reading or memorizing scripture, and journaling are among the most common practices people utilize (spiritual disciplines) to connect with God. While I have practiced these activities myself, there are two potential problems with creating such a list. First, we can begin to think (erroneously) that practicing these activities will get God to “do” what we want, which is the opposite of the goal. (We need to follow God's plans rather than trying to get God to follow ours!) The second potential problem is that we can get the idea we are “earning” God's approval – rather than recognizing God fully loves and accepts us just as we are, regardless of how we behave. So, it's possible to practice spiritual disciplines in a way that *fails* to connect us with God in meaningful ways. But these same activities can be very productive and meaningful when practiced with the right attitude, motivation, and understanding – to connect with God on a deep, personal level and receive whatever He desires to impart to us.

The two practices that have become most meaningful and helpful to me are solitude and silence. Solitude is simply the act of entering a “space” alone, coupled with the primary motivation to connect with God on a deeply personal level. Silence means eliminating as many sounds and visual distractions as possible that might divert your attention from connecting with God. When I first discovered the benefit of these practices, my place of solitude was sitting alone in my car in a large, empty parking lot very early in the morning before most people were awake and going about their daily activities. My goal as I practiced solitude and silence was to quiet my mind and emotions and create a “space” where I could focus on seeking God’s Presence. I was **hungry** to connect with God and for Him to “speak” to me – to help me understand what He wanted to accomplish in and through my daily activities and plans.

Because I had come to understand that following God was the primary way God designed for us to live, my deepest desire was to understand what God specifically wanted me to do. While I knew that many issues in my life fell short of all God desired, I also knew I couldn’t change everything at once. So, there needed to be priorities for these changes, and I believed that God had a “plan” for me to follow. Whatever that plan might be, I needed to receive direction from Him. I also came to understand that I was incapable of making many of the changes God desired unless His power was released within me. In fact, some of the changes God desired to accomplish – especially changes of attitude and perspective – could only be done by God Himself. This realization of my deep need for connecting with God motivated me to make whatever changes were necessary to create this “space” in my life.

While I had long been **aware** of my need to connect with God more deeply, I lacked the motivation to make the necessary changes. It took many years before the motivation became strong enough to make the life changes required to create the “space” (time and location) necessary for connecting with Him deeply. I believe God used the many years of **trying** to connect with Him to change my heart and create the **hunger** to connect with Him on a deeper level.

I believe that’s part of the spiritual journey for each of us. As we attempt to connect with God and fail to find sufficient fulfillment, He directs us to and through other experiences. The totality of those experiences helps to develop a deeper hunger for Him and motivates us to search for additional ways to know and love Him more. My journey led me to create a “space” in my car early each morning; your journey might look different. God may lead you to the beach, a forest, a walk around the block, or some other place that will become your “holy space.” You need to allow God to guide you to a “space” where you can connect with God in a deep, personal way so you can receive what you need to know and follow Him more fully. We each need to discover the “way” that can help us effectively practice solitude and silence – and God will guide and empower you if you seek His assistance.

However, it's essential to understand that it's not the "act" of solitude and silence that is important – it's what happens during that time that is most significant. As we learn to quiet our hearts and minds, God "fills" that space with Himself. God engages in a "conversation" with you (usually just thoughts in your mind or emotions that arise), where He brings to your recollection (past or current) experiences of your life. And throughout the "conversation" – the honest, back-and-forth exchanges between you and God – He purposefully weaves your thoughts and emotions.

God's intention is to transform your understanding of Him and yourself, your thinking patterns, and your feelings in such a way as to modify your mental and emotional framework. His main goal is for your life to become more aligned with the truths He established at the time of creation (Romans 12:2). Practicing times of solitude and silence is an essential component of God's design for living.

Psalms 23: ² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³ he refreshes my soul.

Isaiah 30: ¹⁵ "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength."

Psalms 46: ¹⁰ He says, "Be still, and know that I am God".

Luke 5: ¹⁶ But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

I have introduced several significant ideas in this chapter. If you feel somewhat overwhelmed and there is much more you need to know about these ideas (as well as questions and concerns I didn't even address), that's okay. My purpose in writing this chapter is two-fold. First, I hope you've become aware that your current mental framework requires much attention – to weed out false beliefs and discover critical new truths. Second, I hope God has awakened a hope within you that there might be much more to this "God thing" than you previously imagined. You're probably eager to learn more if I have accomplished either of these objectives. I hope the following chapters will help answer many of your questions. However, seeking answers to essential questions *is precisely* the pattern of the spiritual journey God calls us to live.

Let me summarize the argument that I have been presenting thus far. At the beginning of time, God designed human life to be lived in partnership with Him. In much the same way as good parents desire to share their lives with their children, God, as our perfect Heavenly Father, desires to share His life with each of us. He is the source of all wisdom, power, and truth, and He wants to impart wisdom, understanding, courage, and strength to enable us to experience lives of deep meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. He genuinely desires that each of us would find joy and peace in all that we do. But for those amazing outcomes to be manifested, we must discover the secrets of how God

designed life to be lived. And that wisdom and understanding – as well as the courage and strength we need to live by those truths – can only come from God Himself.

I share these truths to help you understand that the most significant focus for our lives is to **follow God**. He is not only our Father but our counselor, protector, coach, comforter, friend, guide, and teacher. The Great Fall that occurred in the Garden of Eden severed the relationship between God and humankind. And because of that Fall, we are born cut off from our connection with God. During all the years we live separated from God, we develop many false beliefs about life. We each construct our own mental and emotional framework – a unique and personal set of beliefs and feelings about what is right, true, and good. Based on our framework, we endeavor to build a life that will be meaningful, purposeful, and fulfilling. But we can never achieve the “full” life on our own. And that’s because we will never experience a truly “full” life unless it conforms to the way God designed life to be lived. We can only discover all we need to know and do by discovering how to connect with God and how we can best follow Him.

To follow God means to both seek His input – His “instruction” and “directions” for living – and implement (to the best of our ability) what He directs us to do. While much of our lives on earth are characterized by our own efforts, we must discover how we can best “connect” with God to receive the guidance and support we so desperately need. This means we are responsible for our lives while simultaneously wholly dependent on God. This might seem to be a contradiction, but it’s one of the great paradoxes of life. ***We are entirely dependent on God and also fully responsible for ordering and directing our own lives.*** This is only one of the many truths God established for life that can only be learned and resolved with God’s assistance.

What I have discovered on my own journey to know and follow God is that as I came to understand truths in four specific domains – and sought to live by those truths – my life grew exponentially in meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. The purpose of the next chapter is to explain these four areas of truth in a way that can aid you in your journey to know and follow God. But before we move on, I would like to share the most essential ingredient of a life that “follows God” – establishing your “initial connection” with Him.

The Bible teaches that we are born separated from a personal relationship with God. That separation was initiated by the Fall in the Garden of Eden and extends to each of us as we are born with the “self-will” to act as our own gods – deciding for ourselves what is right, true, and good. This self-will is sometimes called a “sin nature.” On our own, we are all inclined to take charge of our own lives.

Romans 5: ¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all people, because all sinned.

The “death” that occurred was that of our **spirit** – the pathway through which God connects with us. And the “cure” for that condition – what reconnects us with God – is to be “born-again.”

John 3: ⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’”

To connect with God personally, we must be born again (have our spirit come to life). The Bible explains that we become born-again (saved) by following two steps. First, we need to believe that Jesus is the Son of God who came to earth to sacrifice His own life to pay the penalty for all sins for all time. Second, we must acknowledge our own sins, ask Jesus for His forgiveness, and express our desire to know and follow Him.

Romans 10: ⁹ If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

So, the first step in your ability to connect with God on a personal level is to be born-again (saved). If you have not already been born again, your journey must begin with addressing what separates you from completing the steps outlined above. If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God who came to forgive the sin that separates you from God, all you need to do is ask Him to forgive you and express your desire to know and follow Him. If you lack the faith necessary to make that commitment, your journey must begin by finding meaningful answers to the questions or concerns that prevent you from having faith in Jesus and surrendering to His leadership. (You might need to refer to “The God Thing” in Appendix A for assistance in that journey.)

If serious doubts persist, I hope these opening chapters have provided enough of a rational foundation to motivate you to resolve the questions or issues that prevent you from declaring faith in Jesus. But if you already believe God is real, that Jesus is God’s Son sent to pay the penalty for your sins, that the Bible is God’s Word sent to help you discover and understand truth, and you desire to know and follow God, then you are ready to proceed! The information presented in this next section (Part 2) is designed to provide a framework to find meaningful answers to the important questions about God, His ways, and how you can find greater meaning, purpose, and fulfillment.

If this discussion has been helpful, I'd like to let you know about a book I've written that explores this and other closely related topics in greater depth. The title of



the book is: “Finding Meaning, Purpose, and Fulfillment: Making Sense of God, Life, and Success.”

My goal in writing this book was to help people better understand how God designed life to be lived and what He expects from each of us. In its broadest sense, God designed life as a journey of discovery with Himself as our guide, counselor, and primary resource. You and I are called to be students of life with God as our teacher!

If you didn’t enjoy going to school, let me assure you that having God as your life teacher will be substantially better than any previous educational experiences. God is not angry with you, He is not disappointed in you, and He will never pressure or embarrass you. He is genuinely a kind, loving, and supportive teacher – more so than any teacher, coach, counselor, or parent you have ever known. A big part of your life as a student is discovering how truly awesome God is!

My book highlights the most important life principles God has established, guides readers in building and deepening their relationship with Him, and outlines ways to adjust their life practices to further God’s purposes in and through their lives. ***In short, my book addresses one central question: What is life really all about?***

Each of us recognizes that we are responsible for how we live our lives. We each must find answers to the most profound and important questions of life. But what are the most critical questions for which we must find answers?

As I reflected on my life experiences in the months leading up to my retirement from teaching and pastoring, the Holy Spirit helped me realize that everything of value I had ever learned was an answer to one or more of four questions. In my book, I refer to these as the “Four Essential Life Questions.”

1. Who Is God?
2. How Has God Designed Life to be Lived?
3. Who Am I?
4. What Is God Asking Me to Do?

What profoundly impacted me was the realization that as I have found answers to these Essential Questions over time, and followed God’s guidance to bring my life into alignment, meaning, purpose, and fulfillment have grown in my life. I believe that is how God wants to bring meaning, purpose, and fulfillment into your life as well.

Who Is God?

**How has God
Designed Life to
be Lived?**

Who Am I?

**What is God
Calling Me to
Do?**

The Essential Questions serve as containers. The more you fill these containers with answers and align your life accordingly, the more meaning, purpose, and fulfillment will grow. You will experience the “full life” Jesus died to secure for you as you allow God to reveal answers to the Essential Questions and then follow His guidance. The book also provides detailed guidance on how to incorporate the Essential Questions into your daily life.