

## HOW DO YOU LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE?

How do you “walk in the Spirit”? How do you “let Christ live His life through you”? How do you become strong and mature now that you have become a Christian? These are questions that our staff has kept in mind as they put this booklet together. It is our prayer that it will give you a better understanding of what the Bible has to say about the greatest privilege in all the world—the privilege of living the Christian life.

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## NO ONE SAID IT WOULD BE EASY

“I give up! No matter how hard I try, I just can’t live the Christian life!” Do these words sound familiar? They were spoken in despair by a young Christian who just didn’t know what to do.

What about you? As a believer in Christ, are you sometimes overwhelmed by feelings of failure and frustration? Well, you’re not alone!

**Young Christian:** “I give up!”

**Mature Christian:** “The further I go, the more aware I become of my rebellious nature.”

**Paul:** “What I want to do, I don’t do; and what I don’t want to do, that’s what I end up doing.”

**Peter:** “The devil is after us.”

**Jesus:** “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

The Christian life doesn’t just happen. A father put it well when he said to his daughter:

Honey, if you would realize that life is hard, things would be so much easier for you.

But what does that mean? Are we to grit our teeth, clench our fists, and dig in with our feet in hopes of enduring the Christian life? Not at all! There is no greater privilege than to know Christ, to walk with Him, and to experience His power. There is no greater privilege than to do whatever is necessary to experience the most satisfying and rewarding life in all the world.

That’s why we need to get ready for conquest. We need a plan. And we need to work that plan.

## ARE YOU WASTING YOUR TIME?

There are a number of approaches to the Christian life that will not work. For instance:

1. Don’t try to live the Christian life if you haven’t personally accepted Christ as your Savior and Lord. That’s the first step. If you’re not sure whether you’ve done that, [click here for an explanation.](#)

2. Don't try to live the Christian life by merely relying on your ability to keep the rules. That's why the apostle Paul wrote to one group of "law keepers," and asked if they really thought they could finish by human effort what they had begun by trusting the Lord (Gal. 3:1-5).
3. Don't try to live the Christian life by just making a weekly pilgrimage to church. Meeting with the people of God is important (Heb. 10:25). But the Christian life is not a once-a-week happening, it is a day-to-day relationship with God.
4. Don't try to live the Christian life by simply doing good. That's too general. For a person with this approach, there aren't enough hours in the day to do everything he wants to do. He picks up hitchhikers, sends money to Ethiopia, gives to the March of Dimes, takes his old clothes to the Salvation Army, and marches in Right-To-Life parades. All of these things are commendable, but they are inadequate.

## WHO SHOULD TELL YOU HOW?

Is there someone who can tell you how to live the Christian life? A person with experience? A person with knowledge? A person with sympathy? A person sent from God? A person of few words? If so, then Peter is the kind of advisor and teacher you're looking for. In so many ways he had seen and done it all as a Christian.

Peter was one of Christ's original twelve. Peter was a member of the "inner circle." Peter had known the thrill of success. Peter had known the agony of defeat. Peter had walked on water. Peter had seen the power of Christ. Peter had seen the coming of the Spirit. Peter had performed miracles. Peter had led many to faith in Christ.

When Peter was about to die for his faith (2 Pet. 1:14), he wrote and circulated a letter that tells us what he had learned about living the Christian life. In just a few words, this veteran disciple, soldier, and friend of Christ (1) described God's part, (2) told us our part, including seven steps to spiritual maturity, and (3) promised success to all who would follow the plan.

Let's look at Peter's plan for spiritual growth.

## GOD'S PART: Power and Promise

In 2 Peter 1:1-4 we learn that the Lord doesn't expect us to live by our own strength or knowledge. He has given us His power, and He has promised to help us. If He wants us to walk on water, move a mountain, overcome temptation, forgive someone, show love, or lead a person to salvation, we can be sure He has already given us all we need to do it. He has given us:

- A spokesman to write in His behalf (v.1).
- A Savior to rescue us (v.1).
- An ability to trust God (v.1).
- An opportunity to know God (v.2).

- A Lord to lead us (v.2).
- A source of undeserved help and peace (v.2).
- A source of knowledge (v.3).
- A source of power (v.3).
- An invitation to excellence (v.3).
- A series of invaluable promises (v.4).
- A way to experience God (v.4).
- A rescue from corruption (v.4).

### OUR PART: Faith and Diligence

Peter, wise in the ways of heaven and this world, realized that a Christian can never be successful by just being a spectator. He knew that we can never enter into the joys of the Christian life by simply being admirers of Christ. For that reason, Peter went on to give us a plan for living the Christian life successfully.

But before we think our way through the seven steps of Peter's plan in verses 5-7, let's look at two prerequisites that are our responsibility in living the Christian life successfully:

Faith = trust, full reliance on God

Diligence = effort to do our part

**Trust + effort = success**

Keep in mind: Peter's seven steps are based on faith, or reliance on God. Yet that reliance is not enough by itself. It is activated only when combined with diligence. And diligence, also inadequate in and of itself, needs to be combined with reliance on God.

What this means is that diligence and faith are two sides of a mystery. We don't know how it all works out. But they both have to be present if we are going to have spiritual success.

This combination is often overlooked by those who emphasize the importance of living the "Christ-life." Too many Christians sit and wait for the Spirit to move them. They never do anything great for God because they never take up the challenge. Yet that personal effort is what Peter said is our part. In behalf of God he called for diligence, for effort, for zeal, for putting out and not putting off.

Peter wasn't the only one with this view. The apostle Paul called for the same thing when he said to those who had already trusted Christ:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

The issue here is not working *for* salvation but *because of* salvation. Because we have been saved by trusting Christ, how determined and diligent we should be to serve with gratitude the God who saved us!

In that light, then, let's look at 2 Peter 1:5-7 and move through the seven steps that progress from diligent faith.

## SEVEN STEPS Step 1: Diligent Faith Needs Virtue

Peter wrote, "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue." Other translations and commentaries translate the word *virtue* as "goodness" or "moral excellence." But the context shows that we need to see this goodness in a basic form. It has to be a form of goodness that precedes the following steps—knowledge, self-control and others—which Peter went on to add.

Peter reached into his pagan culture for a general, nontechnical, basic word for "goodness" and grabbed hold of the word *virtue*. Here in verse 5 it seems to take the form of good intentions. This meaning fits with the rest of Scripture, which shows us that true faith will result in a desire to do the will of God, to please Him, and to do what is right. And isn't that where moral excellence and real goodness begin? You have to want to do something before you can do it.

This is the kind of "virtue" or inclination toward goodness that every parent, teacher, and employer looks for. They look for a child, a student, an employee who wants to do the right thing.

Without that willingness of heart, there can be no further instruction, no deepening of relationship, no maturing of trust. Unless a person has a genuine desire to do the right thing, all progress will come to a stop.

Sounds very basic, doesn't it? But that's the point Peter wanted us to remember. The first step of diligent faith is to want to move in the direction of goodness. And if that's the case, how are you doing with this most basic issue? Are you pursuing virtue with a passion? Are you pressing for good intentions with all due diligence? Are you taking seriously the words of our Lord: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Mt. 5:6).

How about it?

- Do you want to do what is right?
- Do you want to please God?
- Do you want to walk with Christ?
- Do you want to be led by the Spirit?
- Do you want to overcome your habitual sins?
- Do you want to spend more time in the Bible?

- Do you want to spend more time in prayer?

Without good intentions like these, you will never get anywhere in the Christian life. At the same time, however, we know how incomplete good intentions are by themselves. If this is all we have, then all we have is a soft start. That's why Peter went on to give us the next step.

## SEVEN STEPS Step 2: Virtue Needs Knowledge

The second step in Peter's plan for Christian growth is to add knowledge to our good intentions. Notice the natural relationship between virtue and the need for knowledge. It makes sense. Once we have the desire to do the right thing, we need to know what the right thing is.

Furthermore, just as having a desire to do the right thing is a good test of our faith, so pursuing knowledge is a valid test of our good intentions.

Let's get right to the point. Do you really want to do what is right? Then how much time do you spend in the Scriptures? How much time do you spend reminding yourself of the words, thoughts, and desires of God?

Note that Psalm 1 deals with both virtue and knowledge. There the Hebrew songwriter wrote:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful [thus indicating virtue, the inclination toward good]; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.

Remember, the human heart is deceptive. If we don't want to do what is right, we will fool ourselves. We will convince ourselves that we have better things to do than to pursue knowledge, understanding, and discernment through the Word of God.

Or we might spend our time with debatable questions and ideas, using them to sidestep thoughtful meditation on the real issues of our relationship to both God and man. That's why so many of us are "experts" in such issues as God's sovereignty, His decrees, prophetic details, and legalistic tradition, while we remain crude in spirit and proud in heart.

Because of such dangers, let's make sure we have knowledge of the essentials. For example:

- Know what God is like (Ex. 34:4-7; Jn. 4:24).
- Know what God loves (Ps. 37:28; 146:8; Jn. 14:23; 15:9; 2 Cor. 9:7).
- Know what God hates (Ps. 5:5; Prov. 6:16-19; Isa. 61:8).
- Know who Christ is (Isa. 9:6; Jn. 1:1-14; 8:58; Rom. 1:3-4; Heb. 1:1-14; Rev. 1:5,17-18).
- Know what Christ did for you (Isa. 53:1-12; Mt. 20:28; Jn. 10:11; Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; 1 Pet. 1:17-21; 1 Jn. 2:2; Rev. 1:5-6).
- Know who you are in Christ (Eph. 1:3-14).

- Know your spiritual resources (2 Pet. 1:3-4).
- Know the importance of prayer (Phil. 4:6-7; Jas. 4:2-3; 5:16-18).
- Know the importance of fellowship in a church (Heb. 10:24-25).
- Know the importance of telling others about Christ (Mt. 28:19; Acts 1:8).

There is no substitute for knowledge and understanding. Solomon taught us to pursue it with all of our hearts when he wrote, “Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold” (Prov. 3:13-14).

But that raises another issue. Solomon’s lifestyle reminds us that knowledge isn’t enough. For even though Solomon was the wisest man of his day, he still ended up ruining his life by pursuing and marrying hundreds of women, and by multiplying his personal wealth in violation of the commandment of God. And that’s why Peter told us to take the next step.

**SEVEN STEPS**  
**Step 3: Knowledge Needs Self-Control**

Next Peter said that to knowledge we are to add self-control. Note again the relationship between the two ideas. Peter is methodically and deliberately building one idea on top of another. Here he shows that knowledge is incomplete without practice. He also shows that knowledge is a means to right behavior, not an end in itself.

**Paul agreed.** In the eighth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians, he wrote that knowledge by itself tends to give people a big head. “Knowledge puffs up,” he said (v.1).

**James agreed.** He wrote in his letter that faith without works is dead (2:17,20,26). He noted that anyone who has knowledge without practice deceives himself.

**Christ agreed.** He taught that the wise man doesn’t merely hear, he hears and does what God tells him to do (Mt. 7:24-27).

This means that we need to show all diligence in following through on what we know. Knowledge is not an end in itself. Like faith, diligence, and virtue, knowledge is a critical and strategic means to an end. It is one more step in the ladder of faith.

What is more pathetic than a Christian who knows all the answers, but whose life is all messed up! Yet it happens. People who know their doctrine and Bible history thoroughly are often overcome by pride, anger, lust, bitterness, envy, unfaithfulness, deception, gluttony, alcoholism, greed, or procrastination. Why? Because self-control is not merely a matter of personal effort. Self-control is a product of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). And only when a person is building on faith, goodness, and right knowledge can he expect to have his body and soul under control.

Solomon, who let his life be dominated by his sexual appetites, should have known better. In fact, he did, for at one point he wrote, “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city” (Prov. 16:32). But knowing what God wants us to do is not enough. Even thinking and meditating on it is not enough. We must do it.

Then again, doing a good thing is not the whole matter either. Most of us have heard the fable about the tortoise and the hare:

The rabbit started fast,  
The tortoise hurried slow  
But when the race was past,  
Endurance won the show.

## SEVEN STEPS

### Step 4: Self-Control Needs Endurance

After talking about a diligent faith that progresses through virtue, knowledge, and self-control, Peter told his Christian readers to add endurance to their self-control. Why endurance?

- It enables us to finish what we’ve started (Phil. 3:13-14).
- It enables us to follow Christ (Heb. 12:2).
- It enables us to love (1 Cor. 13:7).
- It enables us to prove our faith (Jas. 1:3).
- It develops character (Rom. 5:4).
- It results in maturity (Jas. 1:4).
- It results in God’s promise (Heb. 10:36).
- It results in happiness (Jas. 5:11).
- It results in God’s approval (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

At this point, let’s stop to remind ourselves of the progression Peter set up. Endurance is not more of an isolated virtue than any of the others. It is possible only where there is first a *self-control* that is the result of *right thinking*, that is the result of a *desire to do the right thing*, that is the result of *trusting Christ*. They stand or fall together in a tight bond of diligence.

But once again, why endurance? Because we will have trouble in this world. Jesus promised it (Jn. 16:33). We’ll have trouble because of the weakness of our bodies, which are destined for death. We’ll have trouble because of the mistakes of others. We’ll have trouble because people will hate our faith. We’ll have trouble because God will test and develop our relationship with Him.

But let's not feel sorry for ourselves. What successful, productive person in any discipline of life can make it without endurance?

- What athlete?
- What educator?
- What musician?
- What executive?
- What marriage partner?

Everyone goes through trouble to obtain and hold on to the things he values. Who should be more willing to endure than the person who has his eyes set on God? And that's why it's so fitting that Peter went on to give us the next step.

## SEVEN STEPS Step 5: Endurance Needs Godliness

The Christian doesn't endure trouble with a view toward material accomplishment. He does it "with a view toward God, and with an eye on the development of godliness."

That is our goal. We're not here merely to tough it out through life because that's a good thing to do. Nor are we called to perseverance just to save face, to avoid embarrassment, or to escape ridicule. We are called to endurance so that we can follow God, show trust in God, draw near to God, imitate God, please God, and reflect God to others. The Christian is by definition one who is called to a relationship with God; one who is called to be conformed to the character of God; one who is called to walk with God as Christ did; one who is called to live by the power of God.

Everything we do should grow out of a God-ward view. We should acknowledge the Lord in all things (Prov. 3:5-7). We should seek to please the Lord in all things (Col. 1:10). We should train ourselves with diligence so that we may develop the stamina necessary to become godly (1 Tim. 4:7).

- Since God is merciful, we should be merciful (Lk. 6:36).
- Since God is loving, we should be loving (1 Jn. 4:7-11).
- Since God is holy, we should be holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16).
- Since God is true, we should be true (Jn. 8:26; 1 Jn. 3:18).
- Since God is good, we should be good (Ps. 34:8,14).
- Since God is patient, we should be patient (Rom. 15:5; 1 Tim. 6:11).
- Since God is self-controlled, we should be self-controlled (Ex. 32:9-14; 1 Cor. 9:25).

But that raises some questions. Why did Peter make godliness the fifth step? Why wasn't it the first? Or, more important, why didn't he make this the seventh and last step of the Christian ladder?

The answer is found in the very nature of the God we've just described. He reaches out to us in love. In a similar way, we too are to reach out to others by living a godly life. Godly living is not an end in itself. That's why Peter was inspired to make godliness the fifth step. This in turn leads us to the next one.

## SEVEN STEPS

### Step 6: Godliness Needs Brotherly Kindness

In other words, Peter was saying that the godly person isn't a stuffed shirt, a tin man without a heart, or a holy cleric with his head in the clouds. The truly godly among us are those who care about their brothers and sisters. Those who really love the Father are those who learn to love the Father's children with a family kind of love.

A popular song repeats over and over, "We are fammm-i-leeeee." When the Pittsburgh Pirates baseball team took it as their theme song, many of us felt a warmth in our hearts. Something is very positive about a spirit of family love and brotherly kindness. And nowhere does it have more meaning than among the multi-ethnic, international family of God. Paul wrote:

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another, not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality (Rom. 12:9-13).

It's all there. Paul too realized that goodness, knowledge, self-control, patience, and godliness are part of a life and relationship with God that produces brotherly kindness.

"So why," someone asks, "isn't there more of this kind of awareness among Christians today? Why all the envy, pride, disputing, and fighting?"

Well, admit it. There have always been troubled families. There have always been families that have failed to realize how much they need one another. There have always been brothers and sisters who fight like cats and dogs—acting more like animals than like those who were made in the image of God.

We need to be realistic. In light of what we have said so far, *brotherly love* will be the rule only where there are *godly* persons. And they became godly, only because they were willing to *endure* less than ideal relationships and circumstances in order to walk with God. *Brotherly kindness* will occur only where there are men and women of *self-control*, where there are those who are *knowledgeable* in the Word of God, where there are those who *desire to do what is right* in order to demonstrate their *faith* in God.

If we lack brotherly kindness, it is because we are not working Peter's plan. We aren't following God's answer for what it takes to live the Christian life.

Now we are ready to consider the last and final step of Christian living.

## SEVEN STEPS Step 7: Brotherly Kindness Needs Love

This is the last strategic step that Peter gave us. Once more, please note that he was not talking about just any kind of love. Rather, he was talking about a love that depends on the six steps that precede it. It is the kind of love the Bible calls for. It is the kind of love that Christ asked of His disciples when He said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:34-35).

Christ raised the standard of love above the level of brotherly kindness. No longer can we think of love as just caring for those who care for us. Christ loved not only His friends and brothers but also His enemies. He sacrificed His own well being to go to the rescue of those who were hostile to Him (Rom. 5:8). That’s why He could say:

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil (Lk. 6:27-35).

It is also important for us to realize that this last step is not on the level of an extra credit assignment for the person who has already earned his “A” for the course. Paul made it clear in 1 Corinthians 13:1-2 that no matter how many good qualities we may have, if we do not have love the total is still zero. A mathematical formula of these verses might look like this:

(Eloquence of the highest kind) + (knowledge of all mysteries) + (enough faith to move mountains) + (selling all you have to give to the poor) + (giving your life as a martyr) – LOVE = no personal profit (13:1-2).

Noble Christian deeds have value to the individual only when love is added.

## THE RESULTS OF THE SEVEN STEPS

According to Peter, if we increasingly follow these seven steps, we will have much to look forward to (2 Pet. 1:8-11).

- We will not be unproductive in our knowledge of and relationship to Christ (v.8).
- We will not be shortsighted and blind, to the point of losing sight of how much God has done for us (v.9).
- By our diligence and action, we will prove our faith and carry it to maturity (v.10).
- We will not stumble and fall along the way, as far as our spiritual progress and journey are concerned (v.10).
- We can look forward to a great and triumphant entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (v.11).

As far as Peter was concerned, these results were worth living and dying for. They were the things he wanted to keep before those who had started the Christian life but had become distracted along the way.

## WHAT THE SEVEN STEPS ARE NOT

**1. The steps are not a time-line.** Working through the seven steps does not imply that you can work on only one at a time. It's not a matter of virtue in January, knowledge in February, and self-control in March. All of them are too closely interdependent to be separated like that. What the seven steps do is this: They show us the logic and progression of real faith. They show us that God is not just looking for love or faith or knowledge. He's looking for all these characteristics as they combine to provide a complete, balanced, progressive Christian experience.

**2. The steps are not exhaustive.** They don't spell out everything. Yet they are comprehensive. The rest of the biblical principles can be arranged under these seven steps. For example, the need for prayer is a point of "knowledge."

**3. The steps are not a shortcut to spiritual growth.** There is no easy way to breeze through any of the levels. That's why Peter emphasized the importance of giving all diligence. The Christian life requires as much effort as any other worthwhile pursuit.

**4. The steps are not to be kept to yourself.** Just as Peter received this insight from the Lord and passed it along to others, so it is important for us to be able to "teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:1-2). In that light, we hope that the graphic illustration and explanation of these pages will help you to help others understand what it takes to live the Christian life.

## BE CAREFUL! IT'S DANGEROUS OUT THERE

Now that we have worked through “The Peter Plan” for living the Christian life, we need to look at some of the reasons this plan is difficult to follow. According to the Bible, the Christian has three enemies. They are (1) the world, (2) the flesh, and (3) the devil. We need to understand what they are so that we can defend ourselves against them.

### **The World: The Enemy Around Us**

When the apostle John told Christians not to love the world (1 Jn. 2:15-17), he identified a real, though impersonal, enemy. When he used the term *the world*, he had in mind everything around us that competes with the Father in heaven. The world, in this sense, represents all material, physical, and social factors that compete with God for our attention and affection.

### **The Flesh: The Enemy Within Us**

The New Testament writers warn us about a second enemy, the flesh. (Rom. 7:18,25; 8:1; 13:14; Gal. 5:17-24; 6:8; Col. 2:23.) In many passages, the term *the flesh* refers to the self-centered, self-gratifying desires of our physical bodies. But there seems to be more to it than that. Other verses identify it as a hostile-to-God inclination within us, the “law of sin” (Rom. 7:23). It opposes the noble desires that come from the Holy Spirit and the new life He has placed within us through the new birth.

### **The Devil: The Enemy Above Us**

The third enemy, *the devil*, is a determined opponent of all spiritual growth. According to Peter, he goes around as a “roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). He is the father of lies (Jn. 8:44), and he has a great army of coworkers arrayed against us (Eph. 6:12). However, Satan cannot break our trust in God and love for Him unless we give him the opportunity (Jas. 4:7). Although he is a formidable foe, we do not have to be sent reeling in spiritual defeat by him. We have this promise: “He [the Holy Spirit] who is in you is greater than he [Satan] who is in the world” (1 Jn. 4:4). As we yield to the Holy Spirit, we can experience spiritual victory through His power. “Resist the devil,” James said, “and he will flee from you” (4:7).

## WHAT HISTORY HAS TAUGHT US

Simeon Stylites was a man people looked up to. For the last 36 years of his life he lived on a 3-foot-wide platform on top of a pillar. In his efforts to demonstrate his denial of self and devotion to God, Simeon Stylites (390-459) had tried several methods. He spent a few months buried up to his neck, he tried living in an enclosed cell for about 10 years, and he spent time in different monasteries. But nothing satisfied his desire to show devotion to God. Then Simeon came up with a new idea—he climbed on the top of a 9-foot-high pillar and called it home. After several additions, the pillar eventually grew to 60 feet. Though some people scoffed at him, Simeon didn't care. He was trying his best to live a devoted Christian life.

Throughout history, Christians have tried to understand and achieve the Christlikeness the Bible calls for. Here are some of the ways people in the past have chosen to live the Christian life.

**Lonely Living.** In the early days of Christianity, many people thought the best way to achieve communion with God was to get away from man. Simeon Stylites was one example. A group known as the Bosci lived in fields and ate grass like cattle. One hermit had a reputation (especially downwind) because he never bathed or changed his clothes. Still another man wandered naked in the desert near Mount Sinai for 50 years.

Some who chose to isolate themselves from the world decided they could best escape its temptations by living with others who shared their ideas. Monasteries were established and became an important source of teaching and missionary activity.

**Legal Living.** There have always been people who felt that true spirituality is found in rituals and rules. In New Testament times, for example, some believers taught that Christians were required to follow the demands of the Old Testament law (see Acts 15, Galatians, Colossians). Legalism extols external appearance and religious activity to the neglect of the inner qualities of the Christian life. Many in our world today think they are right with God because of what they do or do not do, not because of their personal relationship to Jesus Christ.

**Lawless Living.** When believers overemphasize God's grace and neglect His holiness, they fall into the trap of lawless living. Christians in the past have said that since Christ satisfied the demands of God's law, we no longer have to worry about measuring up to God's holy standards. "We can sin as much as we want," they said. The apostle Paul anticipated this kind of behavior in his letter to the Christians in Rome (Rom. 6).

**Perfect Living.** Pelagius (c.400) taught that man's basic nature was uncorrupted by the fall. On that basis he said that we are able to live free from sin when assisted by the grace of God. One present-day religious system emphasizes that as a person is baptized for the removal of original sin, and then receives additional grace through the other sacraments of the church, he then has the ability to act in perfect obedience to the laws of God.

John Wesley (1703-1791) took quite a different approach to perfect living. He spoke of a second work of God's grace (after salvation) in which the sinful root in man is removed and the motive and will are made perfect.

**Hardworking Living.** Augustine (354-430) taught that perfection eludes even the best of human efforts aided by God's grace. His solution was that God works to produce *in us* all that He requires *from us* ("God gives what God commands"). The Protestant Reformers built upon Augustine's root principles, and present-day teachers in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions continue this emphasis.

Hardworking holiness emphasizes that even though victory over sin can be expected along the way, we are always at war with Satan. The Christian life is to be a walk in which the believer totally and humbly depends on the Holy Spirit while actively pursuing the goal of Christlikeness through spiritual discipline and activity.

**Restful Living.** For the past century, a group has said that the secret to Christian living is to "let go and let God." Through the influence of the Keswick Convention held annually in Great Britain since 1875, this teaching gained a wide following. The Keswick groups maintain that

through a conscious reliance on the Holy Spirit, and through calling on His power in every temptation, the believer can rise above sin and overcome the sinful nature. Christians are encouraged to cease from striving to be holy and to trust Jesus to give them victory over sin. In effect, they promise victory over all known sin if the believer will consider himself dead to sin and alive to God (Rom. 6:11) and if he will rest on Jesus and the Spirit.

These historical approaches to living the Christian life reflect the struggle man has always had with sin. Some people today have given up the battle: others pretend that it no longer exists. Our prayer is that this booklet has helped you find the true answer from the Word of God.

## TROUBLESHOOTING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

How are you doing in your personal walk with God? Are you making good progress? Or have you stopped moving ahead? Here are some questions that will help you troubleshoot your own spiritual life.

- Do I constantly rely on God?
- Am I working hard at pleasing God?
- Do I really want to obey Christ?
- Am I learning from the Bible?
- Do I put into practice what I learn?
- Have I given up in some areas?
- Am I building aspects of God's character into my life?
- Do I have love for my fellow believers?
- Am I willing to love my enemies?
- Am I combating the flesh? The world-system?
- Am I resisting Satan in the Spirit's power?

## POWER FOR LIVING

Every Christian is to grow spiritually. The following POWER acrostic will help you to remember the essential elements to spiritual progress.

**Pray.** The Christian who wants to grow, communicates with God through prayer. He expresses his gratitude to Him, confesses his sins, and comes to Him with his requests for himself and for others. God promises to be near to all who come to Him in prayer (Ps. 145:18).

**ObeY.** In John 14, Jesus said that our obedience to His commands is an indicator of our love for Him (vv.15,21,23). We can't do it in our own strength, however. That's one of the reasons He gave us the Holy Spirit (vv.16-17). As we yield to Him, the Spirit provides the power to walk in obedience (Gal. 5:16-25).

**Worship.** A Christian's devotion to God is to be continuous. Privately, he should worship God in his thoughts and prayers (Ps. 34:1). Publicly, he should unite with fellow believers in a local assembly to bring praise to God (Ps. 111:1; Heb. 10:24-25).

**Evangelize.** The good news of the gospel is to be shared. As we tell others what Christ has done for us, we will find ourselves growing by spiritual leaps and bounds (Mt. 28:19-20).

**Read.** The most direct source of a Christian's spiritual growth is the Bible. It must be read regularly because it is his milk and strong meat (1 Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:12-14). It tells us how to live (Ps. 119:105). It is God's word to us today.

### **CAUTION: ONE WAY**

Keep in mind that Peter's seven steps do not make a person a Christian. All they can do is show how someone who is already a Christian can grow in his relationship to Christ.

If we miss that fact, we'll make the mistake of those Paul wrote about in Romans 10:1-3. Although they had a zeal for God, they thought they could work their way to Him.

In this light, remember that according to the New Testament we can become Christians only by relying entirely on what Christ did for us. He died for our sins on the cross, and then He rose from the dead to prove that His sacrifice was enough. Now in heaven, He offers to bring to His Father all those who trust in Him.

Don't try to live the Christian life until you have personally accepted Christ as your Savior and Lord. Consider the following verses:

Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:20-21).