

Delighting in the Almighty

A Practical Guide to Primitive Godliness

Seminar Workbook: **How Can I Enjoy God?**



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The Great Cosmic Equation



The astonishing reality of this world in which we live is that the Almighty God does not always—or even often—get everything He wants. God longs for every man, woman, and child to have perfect peace, unshakeable joy, and eternal salvation. But that is not what God gets. Instead we live in a world that is ravaged by sin where suffering and sorrow are the norm. If God got His way, this world would be like heaven. But God does not always get His way...not yet.

Because of our power of choice, you and I can set up barriers that hinder God's goodness. Our loving Father will never force His way past those barriers. He will never bend us to His will, no matter how good it is. God's ability to bless mankind is defined by a Great Cosmic Equation. This invisible formula takes into consideration both man's collective decision to turn away from God, as well as our individual choices either for or against God. You and I cannot see this equation. We do not always understand why God acts—or does not act—the way that He does. But we can recognize the power of our choices in either hindering God or in allowing Him to have His way.

Jesus, in the parable of the Sower, tells of three main types of people. The first is the hardened-path person who actively resists God and puts their choices on the side of the devil and self. Because of the Great Cosmic Equation, God is very limited in how much good He can do for this type of person. God can still work miracles of transformation in their lives, He just can't do it as often as He would like.



The second type of person in Christ's parable is the half-hearted man or woman. They are represented by the shallow and thorny soils. The shallow soil person invites God joyfully into their lives, but does not let Him come in deeply enough to break up the hard, rocky layers of self. The thorny soil person also allows God joyfully into their lives, but they also allow thorns that eventually choke God out. God can do more for the half-hearted Christian than He can for the hardened-path type of person, even though His power is still severely limited because they hold themselves back from God and His will.

By far the most beautiful picture in the parable of the Sower is that of the man and woman represented by the good soil. These people open themselves up unreservedly to God and let Him keep their lives wholly consecrated to Him. In these wholly-surrendered Christians God is able to do "far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us" (Ephesians 3:20). By their power of choice, these followers of Christ let God remove every barrier to His goodness. In and through them God is able to have His good way.



Every good thing comes from God. Our power of choice is not strong enough to **do** good on our own. Instead our power, by God's grace, is to **let** God do His good in and through us. Whatever the good thing is, whether it be faith, repentance, joy, love, obedience, forgiveness, humility, or any other good thing, only God can do it, but only you and I can let Him. That is the power of choice—the power to influence the Great Cosmic Equation for the glory of God and the good of others.

The Great Controversy is coming to a close. When it is completed, the universe will again be wholly aligned with God's perfect will. Then, once again, God will be allowed to lavish His goodness upon all mankind without hindrance. One of the Lord's most powerful weapons in this great battle between good and evil is the surrendered Christian. By God's grace you and I can be one of those weapons for good. We can let God be Almighty God in and through us. Only God can do it, only you and I can let Him. It is our choice.

The Great Cosmic Equation

Key Phrase: Only God can do it...only you and I can let Him.

The Almighty God does not always, or even often, get His way. If God got His way we would be:

- overflowing with love, joy, and peace - Galatians 5:22
- filled with the Holy Spirit - Luke 11:13
- saved for eternity - 1 Timothy 2:4

If God got His way, earth would be like...well, like heaven.

“What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?” (Isaiah 5:4).

“The Lord has no reserve power with which to influence man” (RH, December 20, 1892 par. 4).

The Great Cosmic Equation: “What God GETS” equals “What God WANTS” minus “What our Free Will ALLOWS”



“I, the Lord, am your God, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. But My people did not listen to My voice, And Israel did not obey Me. So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, To walk in their own devices. Oh that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways! I would quickly subdue their enemies And turn My hand against their adversaries” (Psalms 81:10-14).

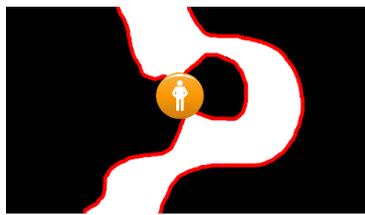
“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling” (Matthew 23:37).

“If only you had paid attention to My commandments! Then your well-being would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea” (Isaiah 48:18).

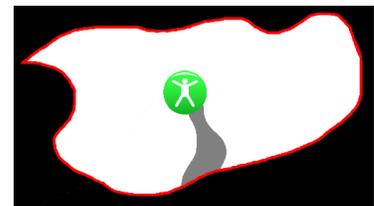
There are three major types of people in Christ’s parable of the sower:



The actively resisting person
(hard path)



The lukewarm person
(rocky soil and thorny soils)



The whole-hearted person
(good soil)

God’s goodness can get through to the actively resisting person, but only to a smaller extent. His grace can penetrate the barriers of the lukewarm person a little more. But to the whole-hearted, surrendered Christian, His goodness overflows to and through him with little hindrance.

The only difference between these three types of people is their choices. One chooses to resist God, another lets God in gladly, but limits His power, still another lets God in gladly but also allows thorns to come in that will eventually choke God out. The final type of person invites God in unreservedly, unresistingly, and unrelentingly. They let God be Almighty God in and through them.



Bad things still happen to good people, but “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

“Consider it all joy” when you “encounter various trials,” knowing that the testing of our faith “produces endurance” (James 1:2-3). God’s power turns the devils “bad” into our “good.”

“for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

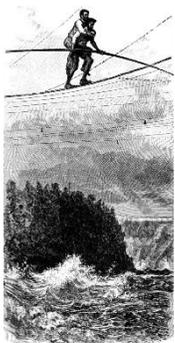
“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

The NEW Great Cosmic Equation: When the Great Controversy is finished, the Great Cosmic Equation will once again be: “What God Gets” equals “What God Wants” minus NOTHING.

Prayer: The power of prayer is in our choices. When we, by our petitions and praises, actively put our voice on record in the heavenly courts, we are putting our will on the side of God’s will in a very practical way. This use of our free will allows God to reshape and push back the boundaries that keep His blessings from reaching us.

No wonder that Jesus taught His people that “at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart” (Luke 18:1)

Naaman was a “hardened path” type of person. He worshipped idols and fought God’s people. But God had a way to reach His heart. He did it through a little servant girl, a mighty prophet, and Naaman’s own choices. When Naaman eventually chose to obey God and wash in the Jordan, he put his will to some extent on the side of God’s will. Each dip reinforced that choice until finally God was able to get through and heal Naaman physically and spiritually.



Blondin’s instructions to his manager, Harry Colcord, before carrying him across the Niagara Gorge.

“Look up, Harry.... you are no longer Colcord, you are Blondin. Until I clear this place be a part of me, mind, body, and soul. If I sway, sway with me. Do not attempt to do any balancing yourself. If you do we will both go to our death.”

The Christian life is like Harry Colcord’s actions. Like Him we look up, become one with God, and, in full submission to Him, let God carry us safely over the turbulent waters of this life into eternity.

“As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent” (Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 333).

Note

Delighting in the Almighty

Love for God is the first and great commandment. Such love transforms the Christian life into “get-to” joy, rather than “have-to” drudgery. But where does this love come from? It comes from God. It *can* only come from Him.

But if love for God, comes only from God, why did I fail to grow in love over the first four decades of my sincere Christian life? Why did I fail to enjoy prayer? Why did I find myself looking for excuses to shorten or skip my devotional time?

Prayer, Bible study, and witnessing are the keys to growing in love for God. They are like the sunshine, water, and nutrient-rich soil that a plant needs to grow. But the plant of love will fail to grow—even in a perfect growing environment—if the seed is missing.



The plant of love needs a seed. And that seed was missing for much of my Christian life. The Rich, Young Ruler had the same problem. According to Jesus, he “lacked one thing” (Mark 10:21). “Only one thing he lacked, but that was a vital principle. **He needed the love of God in the soul.** This lack, unless supplied, would prove fatal to him; his whole nature would become corrupted. By indulgence, selfishness would strengthen. That he might receive the love of God, his supreme love of **self must be surrendered**” (Desire of Ages, p. 519).

The seed of love is the surrender of self. If I desire to love God with all of my heart, all of my mind, all of my soul, and all of my strength, then I must give God all of my heart, all of my mind, all of my soul, and all of my strength.

When we throw our “gold in the dust, And the gold of Ophir among the stones of the brooks, Then the Almighty will be [our] gold And choice silver to [us]. For then [we] will delight in the Almighty And lift up [our] face to God” (Job. 22:23-26).

Jesus is a gift to mankind. He is a priceless gift. And He gives Himself to us freely. But He is a gift that costs everything to receive. “He is a gift, but only to those who give themselves, soul, body, and spirit, to Him without reserve...When we thus give ourselves wholly to Him, Christ, with all the treasures of heaven, gives Himself to us. We obtain the pearl of great price” (COL, p.116).

Love for Christ cannot grow in our hearts until we are ready to receive Him. That is why the seed of love is the surrender of self.



Key phrase: The key to love is the surrender of self. If I want to love God with all my heart, and all my mind, and all my soul, and all my strength, I must give God all my heart, all my mind, all my soul, and all my strength.

Jacob's love for Rachel made his 7 years of hard labor seem "to him but a few days because of his love for her" (Genesis 29:20).

"and you shall 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).

The first fruit of the Spirit is love and the second is joy. No wonder we should be asking ourselves the question, "How can I enjoy God?"

"If Christ be in us the hope of glory, we shall discover such matchless charms in him that the soul will be enamored...**But a profession without this deep love, is mere talk, dry formality, and heavy drudgery**" (Spiritual Gifts 2, p.263).

"If we love Jesus, we shall love to live for Him, to present our thank offerings to Him, to labor for Him. The very labor will be light. For His sake we shall covet pain and toil and sacrifice. We shall sympathize with His longing for the salvation of men. We shall feel the same tender craving for souls that He has felt. This is the religion of Christ" (Christ Object Lessons, p. 49-50).

But love for Jesus is not under our direct control. We cannot turn up the heat of our passion for the Lord like a burner on a stove.

Love FOR God comes only FROM God: "...for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).

Most of my Christian life my love for God has been tepid at best. This was especially evident in my prayer life. I did not enjoy it very much and often looked for excuses to skip or shorten my devotional time.

If we say that we love someone, but then find ourselves looking for excuses to avoid them, we may need to re-evaluate our love relationship. That was certainly the case in my life.

What was my problem? What should I have done during all those years of my life to increase my love for God?

The stock answer is: pray more, meditate on scripture, and get involved in outreach. But that did not work for me, and it did not work for the Pharisees. They were avid prayers, assiduous Bible students, and they travelled, "over land and sea to win a single convert." Prayer, Bible study, and outreach can be powerful blessings but they are not, in themselves, the answer.

Prayer, Bible study, and outreach are often compared to water, sunshine, and fertile soil. All of these ingredients are necessary for the plant to grow. But one other thing is also required: the seed.

What, then, is the key to a passionate love relationship with Jesus? It is found in the story of the Rich, Young Ruler.

"...Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, 'One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me'" (Mark 10:21).

“Christ read the ruler's heart. Only one thing he lacked, but that was a vital principle. **He needed the love of God in the soul.** This lack, unless supplied, would prove fatal to him; his whole nature would become corrupted. By indulgence, selfishness would strengthen. **That he might receive the love of God, his supreme love of self must be surrendered**” (Desire of Ages, p. 519).

“Supreme love for God and unselfish love for one another--this is the best gift that our heavenly Father can bestow. This love is not an impulse, but a divine principle, a permanent power. The unconsecrated heart cannot originate or produce it. **Only in the heart where Jesus reigns is it found**” (AA 551).

Jesus told the Rich, Young Ruler to go away. He did not say, “Go and love me more.” That would have been impossible. Instead Jesus said, in essence, “Go and get rid of everything that is keeping you from loving me only.”

“you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Mark 10:21). Like the Rich, Young Ruler, we need to transfer our gold from earth to heaven.



“If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored; if you remove unrighteousness far from your tent, And place your gold in the dust, And the gold of Ophir among the stones of the brooks, Then the **Almighty will be your gold** And choice silver to you. For then you will delight in the Almighty And lift up your face to God” (Job. 22:23-26).

If Jesus had allowed the Rich, Young Ruler to follow Him without making that all-important transfer of affections, He would have had another Judas on His hands.

Judas also “...loved the Great Teacher, and desired to be with Him. He felt a desire to be changed in character and life, and he hoped to experience this through connecting himself with Jesus. The Saviour did not repulse Judas. “He gave him a place among the twelve. He trusted him to do the work of an evangelist. He endowed him with power to heal the sick and to cast out devils. **But Judas did not come to the point of surrendering himself fully to Christ**” (Desire of Ages, p. 716).

The Rich, Young Ruler, “...wanted the heavenly treasure, but he wanted also the temporal advantages his riches would bring him. He was sorry that such conditions existed; he desired eternal life, but he was not willing to make the sacrifice. **The cost of eternal life** seemed too great, and he went away sorrowful; ‘for he had great possessions’” (DA, p. 520).

The cost of eternal life? I thought salvation was free. “For the wages of sin is death, but the **free gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

But “when he had found one pearl of great price, [he] went and **sold all that he had**, and bought it” (Matthew 13:46).

Jesus did not ask the Rich, Young Ruler to do anything that He is not asking each one of us to do. Everyone who would obtain the “pearl of great price” must pay the same price—everything.



“In the parable the pearl is not represented as a gift. The merchantman bought it at the price of all that he had. Many question the meaning of this, since Christ is represented in the Scriptures as a gift. **He is a gift, but only to those who give themselves, soul, body, and spirit, to Him without reserve...**We are to give ourselves to Christ, to live a life of willing obedience to all His requirements. All that we are, all the talents and capabilities we possess, are the Lord's, to be consecrated to His service. **When we thus give ourselves wholly to Him, Christ, with all the treasures of heaven, gives Himself to us.** We obtain the pearl of great price” (COL, p.116).

Jesus is an incredible gift. A love relationship with Him is a treasure above all other treasures. But not just anyone can receive that gift. He can only be given to those who are able to receive Him.

Reflect

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4. Summarize the chapter in your own words

5. What key concepts from the chapter do you want to apply to your life? How will you accomplish this?

Points to Ponder

6. Read through the Ponder section prayerfully. Pick one or two Bible verses or EGW statements to memorize, or review often. List the references here, and write the quotations on 3x5 cards.

1.

2.

Interact

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1. Rewrite Job 22:23-26 in your own words and in terms of your own life. What, if anything, needs to change in your life in order to enjoy the promise of this passage?

2. How would you explain to a friend how the **free** gift of eternal life costs us everything?



3. Why is it so wonderful (and important) to love Jesus with all of our heart, all of our mind, all of our soul, and all of our strength?
4. Ellen White tells us that “Self-surrender is the substance of the teachings of Christ” (DA p. 523). If that is true, then why do you suppose it took me over thirty years after my baptism to learn the truth about surrender? What can we do to teach this fundamental truth to others more effectively?

Note



“...you shall 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). According to Jesus, “This is the great and foremost commandment” (Matthew 22:38).

And rightly so. Such love transforms the Christian life. It gives us a relish for God—and for His ways. With this love, our relationship with Jesus becomes a “get-to” joy. But this commandment to love God with every bit of our being is impossible for us to obey directly. Only God can give us such love.

And the seed of that love is the surrender of self. Only when we give God all of our heart, all of our mind, all of our soul, and all of our strength, can we love Him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Only when we throw our “gold in the dust, And the gold of Ophir among the stones of the brooks,” will the Almighty be our “gold And choice silver” to us. For then we “will delight in the Almighty And lift up [our] face to God.” (Job. 22:23-26).

That sounds good, but how does it work in my day-to-day experience? How, in practical terms, can I leave my worldly gold in the dust, and store up treasure in heaven? The key is in my daily choices.

Choices are some of our greatest possessions. To many, they are the “gold of Ophir” that we find so difficult to relinquish. Letting God choose His choices over our own can be excruciatingly difficult. But His choices are good. Every one of His commands is a gift, wrapped in love and tied with a bow of grace. There is no downside to obeying Him.

Every one of God’s choices is good. It is good for us, and it is good for others. When we choose God’s good choices, blessings result. Although these blessings are not always easy or comfortable or pleasurable, they do always bring true joy, peace, and satisfaction.

But, it is important for every Christian to remember that our obedience does not purchase God’s blessings. We do not convince God to be good to us by obeying Him. Obedience is not WHY God blesses me, it is HOW He blesses me. There is a simple cause and effect relationship between going God’s way and reaping blessed results.

Those blessings include temporal physical, mental, social, and moral health. But even greater than these temporal blessings are the spiritual good things that come through obeying God. These include enhanced prayer, growing faith—and most wonderful of all—a flourishing love for Jesus. “If you keep My commandments,” Jesus proclaims, “you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10).

Enjoying God is like drinking orange juice. Depending on what we eat before it, the juice can be delightfully sweet, or it can be distastefully sour. In the same way, by our choices we get to choose how sweet Jesus is to us.

Key Phrase: Obedience is not **WHY** God blesses me. It is **HOW** He blesses me. By my choices I get to choose how sweet Jesus is to me.

“If salvation is a free gift of God, and does not come by works, then **why does God require obedience?**”



Some of the 1,050 New Testament commands

Love your enemies (Matthew 5:44)

Be glad in persecution (Matthew 5:12)

Be content with your wages (Luke 3:14)

Do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:13)

Endure hardship (2 Timothy 4:5)

Give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7)

Be patient toward all people (1 Thess. 5:14)

Keep yourself pure (1 Timothy 5:22)

Flee hurtful lusts (1 Timothy 6:9-11)

Deny yourself (Matthew 6:24)

Our obedience is clearly important to God. But why?

“We hear a great deal about faith, but we need to hear a great deal more about works” (1SM, p. 382).

When God loaded down ancient Israel with commandments and laws, He didn’t do it TO them. He did it FOR them.

“All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 28:2).

Read Deuteronomy 28:1-14. First half of the chapter contains the blessings of obedience. Last half of the chapter has the curses of disobedience.

“Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, **that it may be well** with them and with their sons forever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29).

“Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will **enjoy** the fruit of their deeds” (Isaiah 3:10).

“...he who finds me [wisdom] finds life and obtains favor from the Lord. But he who sins against me **injures himself...**” (Proverbs 8:35-36).

“If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (John 13:17).



“The human family is suffering because of transgression of the laws of God. The Lord desires that men shall be led to understand the cause of their suffering and the only way to find relief. He desires them to see that their well-being, physical, mental, and moral, depends upon their obedience to His law” (Councils on Health p. 206). We sometimes let the devil give obedience a bad name. Christmas analogy – “Aww, do I really have to go downstairs and open my presents?”

Obedience is not **WHY** God blesses me. It is **HOW** He blesses me.

Definition of disobedience: Disobedience is choosing choices that we know are not God’s choices. “Therefore, to one who **knows** the right thing to do and does not do it, **to him it is sin**” (James 4:17).

Can I say, "Thanks, but no thanks" to God? Can I refuse a blessing of obedience if I am willing to accept the consequences?

Ice cream sundae illustration – I want it. I accept the consequences. Is it okay to eat it?

Sometimes we are too nonchalant in our decision making. Why wouldn't we want to align ourselves as closely as possible to God's perfect will? Everything He wants for us is good. There is no downside to Spirit-inspired, love-motivated, careful obedience.

Sierra Leone illustration. Why do we eat something that has unwanted calories and fat and that we know is unhealthy? The answer should not be, "because it tastes good." God has given us many healthy things that taste good.

Obedience is God's gift to mankind. Every command is a good thing for us. Obedience is:

- a temporal blessing (healthy physically, socially, emotionally, and mentally)
- faith enhancing

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and **as a result of the works**, faith was perfected..." (James 2:21-22).

- prayer enhancing

"Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:21-22).

- **love enhancing**

"If you keep My commandments, you will **abide** in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10).

"To know God is...to be one with Him in heart and mind, having an experimental knowledge of Him, holding reverential communion with Him as the Redeemer. **Only through sincere obedience can this communion be obtained**" (R&H, June 30, 1910).

By my choices, I get to choose how sweet Jesus is to me.



Disobedience is love inhibiting

"Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull That it cannot hear. But **your iniquities have made a separation** between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear" (Isaiah 59:1-2).

God does not turn His back on us. We turn our backs on Him. When Adam and Eve sinned, who hid from Whom? And Who came running to help?

"If you keep My commandments, you will **abide in My Love**; ...These things I have spoken to you so that My **joy** may be in you, and that **your joy may be made full**" (John 15:10-11).

Interact

Enjoying God to the Fullest

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1. Do you think that we, as modern-day Christians, take our power of choice for granted? Can you think of any such choices in your own life? What can you do to start taking your power of choice more seriously?



2. In your own words, how would you respond to the question, "If salvation is a free gift of God, and does not come by works, then why does God require obedience?"
3. What does it mean that "by our choices we get to choose how sweet Jesus is to us?"
4. Why do you think we obey God so reluctantly? Why do we grudgingly receive God's magnificent gifts?

Note

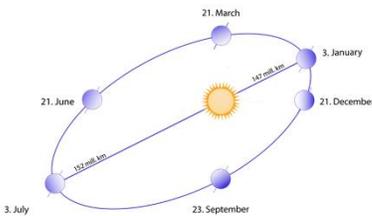
The only thing better than living the Christian life is enjoying it. God desires that we relish our life with Him here on earth. In good times and in bad, we rejoice in Him uninterruptedly. “If Christ be in us the hope of glory, we shall discover such matchless charms in Him that the soul will be enamored. It will cleave to Him, choose to love Him, and in admiration of Him, self will be forgotten. Jesus will be magnified and adored, and self abased and humbled. But a profession, without this deep love, is mere talk, dry formality, and heavy drudgery” (1T p. 162).

In order to love God whole-heartedly we must surrender to Him—unreservedly, unresistingly, and unrelentingly. That sounds good, but what does it mean in practical life? It means joyfully giving God our choices.

God’s choices are all good. Every one of His commands is a gift; an invitation to be blessed. Obedience is not WHY God blesses me, it is HOW He does it.

Why, then, would we ever choose anything but God’s good way? Why do we find it so difficult to obey Him and choose His choices? The answer is found in our human nature.

When God created Adam and Eve, they naturally obeyed God and enjoyed it. They loved obeying God. They relished pleasing Him and reaping the benefits of His good choices. But when Adam sinned, he single-handedly broke the human nature (Romans 5:14, 17).



You and I were born with a nature that fights God. We are hostile to Him.

Rather than naturally choosing His good way, we, by nature, crave the unhealthy path.

Our nature is bent and broken. It naturally tilts away from the Son of Righteousness.

And the result is a built-in spiritual winter.

This natural hostility to God, and craving for our own way is called “self.” And it is this “self” that is our greatest enemy. Ellen White tells us that “Under the general heading of selfishness came every other sin.” (ChS p. 87). “Self is the enemy we most need to fear...No other victory we can gain will be so precious as the victory gained over self” (Ministry of Healing, p. 485). “We have no enemy without [outside of ourselves] that we need to fear. Our great conflict is with unconsecrated self. When we conquer self, we are more than conquerors through Him who has loved us...” (R. & H., March 5, 1908).

Self fights God as He battles to bless us—and, if we let it, self wins. Self must go. Whatever it takes, self must be defeated. Are we willing to let God do whatever it takes to conquer self in us? Are we willing to be as radical as Aron Ralston when he cut away the flesh that pinned him to this earth?

We, too, can be free of self. But, because of our free will, we must choose this freedom. We must be willing to let God do whatever it takes to free us. The process will be difficult, and it will be painful. But God can get us through it. If we let Him.

Ponder

The Root of the Problem

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Key Phrase: My natural self fights God. Self is the enemy I most need to fear.

Humans weigh 180 pounds, and can run 20 m.p.h. for short distances. Bulls weigh 1,300 pounds and can run twice that speed. Bulls are faster, heavier, and more powerful. And yet, in a bullfight, they almost always lose. Why is that? Part of the answer is that they are distracted from the true enemy by the red cape. The bull wastes time and energy fighting an enemy that cannot be hurt.

“It is only labor in vain to pick leaves off a living tree...The ax must be laid at the root of the tree and then the leaves will fall off, never to return” (Evangelism p. 272).

The devil is an enemy, but he is too strong for us...and he is already a defeated foe

“our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

Jesus came and died so “that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

We are, by nature, enemies of God

“For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin” (Romans 7:14).

“...the mind set on the flesh is **hostile** toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:8).

“The Lord says, ‘I will put enmity between thee and the woman.’ The enmity does not exist as a natural fact. As soon as Adam sinned, he was in harmony with the first great apostate and **at war with God**” (Youth Instructor, October 11, 1894).

What is God’s battle with us?

“Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you, And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you...How blessed are all those who long for Him” (Isaiah 30:18).

God fights to bless us. By nature, we resist His blessings. Two reasons why:

1. Not all of God’s blessings are attractive to us (eg. tribulation, self-denial, self-sacrifice).
2. We are not always willing to pay the price—even for the naturally attractive blessings.

We are, by nature, unwilling to be blessed. We WANT to be blessed, but we are not always WILLING.

- McDonalds health survey illustration
- We want health, but are not always willing to eat healthfully
- We desire physical energy, but are not always willing to exercise
- We want healthy friendships, but may be unwilling to deny ourselves juicy gossip
- We value being debt-free, but may find it difficult to resist spending



This is very true in the Spiritual realm as well. We long for the Holy Spirit, for example, but may not be willing to pay the price. “If all were willing, all would be filled with the Spirit” (Acts of the Apostles, p. 50).

- Like the Rich, Young Ruler, we desire eternal life, but may be unwilling to make the radical sacrifice
- We may wish to spend more time devotionally each day, but be unwilling to go to bed earlier
- We may desire to enjoy Scripture, but be unwilling to deny ourselves the stimulating worldly entertainment that makes the Bible seem bland by comparison
- We may long to soar with God on the heights, but be unwilling to remove every worldly weight
- We may truly desire to be on fire for God, but be unwilling to let Him turn off the cold water faucet of worldliness in our lives.

“For thus the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, has said, ‘In repentance and rest you will be saved, In quietness and trust is your strength.’ But **you were not willing**,” (Isaiah 30:15). “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ... How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and **you were unwilling**” (Matthew 23:37).

Self is the enemy

“**Self is the enemy** we most need to fear...No other victory we can gain will be so precious as the victory gained over self” (Help in Daily Living, p. 25).



“We have no enemy without that we need to fear. Our **great conflict** is with unconsecrated self. When we conquer self, we are more than conquerors through Him who has loved us...” (R&H., Mar. 5, 1908).

“Another book was opened, wherein were recorded the sins of those **who profess the truth**. Under the general heading of selfishness came **every other sin...**” (The Faith I Live By, p. 214).

God is a gentle God, Who will not force His will upon the weakest human—even for their own good.

“What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?” (Isaiah 5:4).

“Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul is well-pleased; ...He will not quarrel, nor cry out;...A battered reed He will not break off, and a smoldering wick He will not put out, until He leads justice to victory” (Matthew 12:18-20).

“The tempted one needs to understand the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man-- the power of decision, of choice. **Everything depends on the right action of the will**. Desires for goodness and purity are right, as far as they go; but if we stop here, they avail nothing. Many will go down to ruin while hoping and desiring to overcome their evil propensities. They do not yield the will to God” (MH, p.176).

“I saw that many had so much rubbish piled up at the door of their heart that they could not get the door open. Some have difficulties between themselves and their brethren to remove. Others have evil tempers, selfish covetousness, to remove, before they can open the door. Others have rolled the world before the door of their heart, which bars the door. All this rubbish must be taken away from the door, and then can they open the door, and welcome the Saviour in” (Testimonies, vol. 1 p. 143).

“Selfishness is inwrought in our very being. It has come to us as an inheritance, and has been cherished by many as a precious treasure. No special work for God can be accomplished until self and selfishness are overcome” (HS, p.139).

Interact

The Root of the Problem

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1. Ellen White writes that “It is only labor in vain to pick leaves off a living tree...The ax must be laid at the root of the tree and then the leaves will fall off, never to return” (Evangelism p. 272). What does this statement mean in terms of your life today?

2. In what ways do you see yourself naturally fighting (tilted away from) God?

3. What is the difference between “wanting” to be blessed and “willing” to be blessed? Do you see this problem in your own life? What can you do about it?

4. What does it mean that we have a “knocking” God?



Note



“Self is the enemy we most need to fear...No other victory we can gain will be so precious as the victory gained over self” (Ministry of Healing, p. 485). Self fights God as He battles to bless us. It supplants God in our minds and hearts. Only as we are emptied of self, can we be filled with Him. Whatever it takes, whatever the cost, self must go.

The bad news is that self is too strong for us. We cannot empty ourselves of self. Self is a cancer that is intertwined around every fiber of our being. We enjoy self-ish choices. We crave self-ish ways. We are addicted to self—by nature.

The good news is that there is Someone Who can cure this cancer—supernaturally. He does it through a new birth—a spiritual birth. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). Only God can do this, but only you and I can let Him. Trying to free ourselves from self in our own power is like a caterpillar trying to fly by flapping its legs—it won’t happen. It can’t happen. But if the caterpillar dies and is born again, it becomes a butterfly, and then flying comes easily and naturally.

This self-defeating new birth is the outcome of surrender. Only when we die can we be reborn. Resurrection power is only available to those who die. Before surrender, the Holy Spirit merely works ON our hearts and minds. After surrender, He dwells IN us. The difference is transformational. Through whole-hearted surrender we have the privilege of getting out of God’s way, and allowing the Almighty Creator to dwell in us, working His will in every aspect of our lives.



We all know that we need the Holy Spirit. We pray for the Holy Spirit. But few receive Holy Spirit power. Why is that? What must I do in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit? In order to be filled with the Spirit we must let God empty us of self. Self is the problem, the Spirit is the solution, and surrender is the key.

Surrender can be difficult to understand. What, exactly is it? What does it look like in practical terms? How do we become surrendered, know that we are surrendered, and stay surrendered?



Surrender can be defined in many ways. It is getting whole-heartedly out of God’s way so that He can be Almighty God in us. It is drowning in the will of God—dying in the arms of Jesus. Perhaps one of the best, more formal, definitions is that surrender is a Spirit-inspired, Spirit-enabled, settled commitment to give God every choice, in every area of my life, all the time.

God is the power. He is the only real power. Whatever good is done in your life and mine will be done by His strength. Whatever “it” is, only God can do it—but only you and I can let Him.

Drowning in the Will of the Almighty

Key Phrase: Only God can do it. Only I can let Him. Self is the problem, the Holy Spirit is the solution, surrender is the key.

“Everyone who enters the pearly gates of the city of God will enter there as a conqueror, and his greatest conquest will have been the conquest of self” (God’s Amazing Grace, p. 31).

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6).

“An American told his English friend that the Niagara Falls was the greatest unused power in the world. His friend contradicted him, saying, ‘Not so, my friend, the greatest unused power in the world is the Holy Spirit of the living God’” (A.J. Gordon from Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations, #2232).



“The Father ‘giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him.’ So with the followers of Christ. We can receive of heaven’s light only as we are willing to be **emptied of self**. We cannot discern the character of God, or accept Christ by faith, unless we consent to the bringing into captivity of every thought to the obedience of Christ. *To all who do this the Holy Spirit is given **without measure***” (Desire of Ages, p. 181).

“If all were willing, all would be filled with the Spirit” (Acts of the Apostles, p. 50).

“The new birth is a rare experience in this age of the world. This is the reason why there are so many perplexities in the churches. Many, so many, who assume the name of Christ are unsanctified and unholy. They have been baptized, but they were **buried alive**. Self did not die, and therefore they did not rise to newness of life in Christ” (Manuscript Release 148, 1897).

“Many who speak to others of the need of a new heart do not themselves know what is meant by these words. The youth especially stumble over this phrase, ‘a new heart.’ They do not know what it means. They look for a special change to take place in their feelings. This they term conversion. Over this error thousands have stumbled to ruin, not understanding the expression, ‘Ye must be born again’” (MYP, p. 71).

“Satan leads people to think that because they have felt a rapture of feeling, they are converted. But their experience does not change. Their actions are the same as before. Their lives show no good fruit. They pray often and long and are constantly referring to the feelings they had at such a time. But they do not live the new life. They are deceived. Their experience goes no deeper than feeling. They build upon the sand, and when adverse winds come, their house is swept away” (Youth Instructor, Sept. 26, 1901).



Definitions of surrender

Getting out of God’s way so that He can be Almighty God in me

Drowning in the will of the Almighty

A Spirit-inspired, Spirit-enabled, settled commitment to give God every choice, in every area of my life, all the time.

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23)

“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. **Cease** to do evil, **Learn** to do good;...” (Isaiah 1:16-17).

“For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

“Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth?” (Psalms 73:25).

Surrender is both an event and a process (like a marriage)

Event of surrender (wedding ceremony) – hard-won decision to commit all our choices to God

This event is not best accomplished during an emotionally-charged spiritual high. Rather it should happen when we are stone-cold sober emotionally, and recognize the full consequences of this life-changing choice.

Process of surrender (learning to live and work together) – daily living that commitment and learning new areas to surrender

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).



Surrender, like marriage, is not a process of committing a little less and a little less. It is a 100% commitment from the start.

Someone once made the startlingly obvious statement, “Large canyons are not crossed by a series of small jumps”. Surrender is an all-or-nothing leap of faith.



“There are some who seem to be always seeking for the heavenly pearl. But they do not make an entire surrender of their wrong habits. They do not die to self that Christ may live in them. Therefore they do not find the precious pearl. They have not overcome unholy ambition and their love for worldly attractions. They do not take up the cross and follow Christ in the path of self-denial and sacrifice. Almost Christians, yet not fully Christians, they seem near the kingdom of heaven, but they cannot enter there. **Almost but not wholly saved, means to be not almost but wholly lost**” (COL 118).

Surrender includes caring about the “little” things



Space shuttle Columbia illustration. It was just a “little” hole in the wing that brought down Columbia and killed its entire crew. That hole exposed the internal structure of the wing, and the heat from reentry melted it.

“Normalization of deviance” by NASA brought down both the Columbia and Challenger space shuttles. Deviation from the best choices became “normal.” And this led to catastrophic failures that could have been avoided.

Lukewarm, Laodicean Christianity also has a “normalization of deviance” problem. We make choices lightly that we know are not our best choices. But we do them anyway, because it’s just a “little” thing, and besides, everyone else is doing it.

“We do not belong to Christ unless we are His wholly” (Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 50).

“Let none deceive themselves with the belief that they can become holy while willfully violating one of God’s requirements. The commission of **a known sin silences** the witnessing voice of the Spirit and **separates** the soul from God” (The Great Controversy, p. 472).

“One wrong trait of character, one sinful desire cherished, will eventually neutralize all the power of the gospel...” (Testimonies for the Church. Vol. 5, p. 53).

Interact

Drowning in the Will of the Almighty

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1. **“Only God can DO IT”** List some areas of your life that only God can do. Focus especially on the current challenges in your life.

Examples:

Only God can motivate me

Only God can help me use my time effectively

2. **“Only I can let Him”** Write a prayer of consecration to God inviting Him to have your life so that He can do IT. Then thank God for doing it.

3. Write a stop-claim deed for your own life. Include in it the major and minor aspects of your daily existence, especially the things you find most difficult to surrender.



4. God will not allow us to relinquish our power of choice. So how can we—in essence—give Him our power of choice each day?

Note

Drowning in the Will of the Almighty

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Review

My Story

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For most of my Christian life I misunderstood surrender. I thought it meant that I would give God my one or two worst problem areas, and when He had given me victory over those, we would move on to other bad choices. I believed that it was normal, and even expected, to make some known bad choices. “After all,” I would say, “it’s just a little thing. And besides God isn’t finished with me yet.”

And it was true, God was not finished with me yet. In fact, I had hardly let Him get started. I failed to understand the parable of the City Gates. If I leave even the smallest crack open to the devil, he will slither into my life and undo much of the good work that God is trying to accomplish in me.



For most of my Christian life I failed miserably to resist temptation. My resolutions were as “ropes of sand” (CH, p. 439). I would plead for God to give me victory, but the devil would laugh in my face, and keep pounding away until I gave in. I remember thinking, “Why do I even try?” The wonderful promise, “...resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7) did not work for me.

At the age of around 44, I suddenly realized that I had been sincerely serving an all-powerful God for over four decades, and yet I was worse off, in many ways, than when I started. Not only had I failed to receive victory over my old “big” sins, but I had picked up new sins along the way.

And so I gave up on God. I said, “God, if you exist, I have no proof of it. I have sincerely followed you all my life, and I have seen little of the promised victory. I don’t know what more that I can do. If there is a heaven, I won’t be there unless you perform a supernatural miracle in my life to prove yourself to me.”

God did perform that miracle. He taught me surrender. He showed me how I had been holding back “little” areas of my life—open gates—that had prevented Him from being Almighty God in me. He worked in me both to “will and to do” surrender—unreservedly, unresistingly, and unrelentingly.

By the grace and power of God He finally got me to the place where I was truly willing and able to commit my choices to Him—all of them, in every area of my existence, all the time. That miracle transformed my life. The wonderful promise in James 4:7 started working, because now I understood the whole verse: “submit therefore to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” I had tried the resisting, but it doesn’t work without the submitting. Only by giving the Almighty God my choices can He perform the miracle of victory in my life.



I can’t do it. Only He can. But I must let Him. And, because of the power of choice, that is something I can do. In the next chapter we will see how that works in practical terms.

Ponder

My Story

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Key Phrase: “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Parable of Rich, the Poor Man – His bucket was too full of worthless rocks to make room for gold.



The Good

I am a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist. I lived in a good, Christian home. I attended Seventh-day Adventist schools from first grade through graduate school. I served as a missionary overseas and an ordained elder in my church.

The Bad

I had addictions, bad habits, and known sin, over which I could not get victory. After four decades of serving the Almighty God, I had not only failed to get victory over my old sins, but I had picked up new ones along the way.

I claimed the promise “...resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7), but it never seemed to work. The devil would laugh in my face when I tried to resist him, and he would redouble his efforts. He kept pounding away at me until I gave in. I remember thinking, “Why do I even try?”

The Desert

There came a point in my life that I felt that God had failed me. Although I had sincerely tried to follow Him to the best of my ability, claiming His power for victory, I had failed of achieving it. I blamed God. I did not know what else to do. What more could I do than what I had done?



The Key

Visiting my mom at Wisconsin Campmeeting, I heard a sermon on surrender. I don’t remember much of the content of that sermon, but I do remember thinking, “I wonder if this is the key. Perhaps I never succeeded at surrendering my life unreservedly, unresistingly, and unrelentingly to God.”

I had often prayed the surrender prayer and sincerely sung, “All to Jesus I surrender,” but had I ever made the life-changing commitment?

The Search

I did not jump into this surrender thing right away. But I decided to learn more about surrender. What it was, how it worked, how to become surrendered, how to stay surrendered, and how to know if I had succeeded.

That’s when I discovered something that Ellen White already knew, “**Self-surrender is the substance of the teachings of Christ**” (Desire of Ages, p. 523).

Surrender is a prominent theme throughout scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

I had misunderstood that “Many...look for a special change to take place in their feelings. This they term conversion. Over this error thousands have stumbled to ruin, not understanding the expression, ‘Ye must be born again’” (Messages to Young People, p. 71).

The Costs

As I studied surrender, I found that counting the costs is a very important part of becoming surrendered. One of the major costs for me was movies. I loved to watch movies. And yet I had long known that they are not true or pure or lovely (Philippians 4:8). I knew that most movies promote worldly values and ideas. I knew that they played with my emotions. I knew that I found it difficult not to snack while watching movies and that they took up a lot of my free time. Most tragically, movies made the Bible seem bland by comparison. In terms of movies, I grew up normalizing deviance. “They’re just a little thing,” I said, “And besides, God isn’t finished with me yet.”

I often tried to give up movies, but my resolutions were as “ropes of sand” (2MCP p. 737).

One reason I found giving up movies so difficult was that I travelled quite a bit for work, and could not imagine sitting for 8-10 hours while crossing the Atlantic without watching a movie—or three.

The Miracle

In the middle of a heavy travel schedule God miraculously succeeded in getting me to the place where I was ready and willing to give Him every choice...in every area of my life...all the time.

I woke up one morning and realized that it was time. I wanted to do it. By God’s grace, I could do it. And, by God’s grace, I did it. I made the choice to give up my choices.

Almost immediately my love for prayer blossomed. Whereas before my surrender I found it difficult to enjoy prayer and to pray for any length of time, now I could pray for an hour and truly enjoy it. That, to me, has been one of the most visible and powerful miracles that I have ever experienced.

I also found that I could now “resist the devil” and he fled! That was a brand new experience for me. I could consistently get victory over sin. What I had just learned by experience is that the full text of James 4:7 says, “**Submit** therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” Without the “submit,” there is no “flee.” The order, here, is important; “submit” must come first. But once I made that all-or-nothing commitment to submit, the devil lost his power over me.

That does not mean that I was instantly perfect. I still made mistakes, lacked understanding of God’s will, and had serious character flaws. The difference was that now, by God’s incredible power, I gained victory over the known bad choices.

The Fear

For several weeks after my surrender, I had spiritual panic attacks. What had I done! Were movies and other “little” pleasures no longer an option for me—forever? Could I live such a life? Did I really want to live such a life? Would I fail like I always had in the past? During this time I had almost overwhelming bouts of dread. But God got me through them one day at a time, and they soon went away.

The Fortress

“When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a **new power** takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a **supernatural work**, bringing a supernatural element into human nature.” The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes **His own fortress**, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is **impregnable to the assaults of Satan**. *But unless we do yield ourselves to the control of Christ, we shall be dominated by the wicked one*” (Desire of Ages p. 324).

The Ticket



Like the woman who was kicked out of Coach Class, only to be given a Business Class seat, I have been clutching my Coach Class Christian experience. God has finally released my grip on worldliness and has replaced it with a First Class love relationship with Him. Now I am living the good life in First Class, and I never want to go back.

Reflect

My Story

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1. Summarize the chapter in your own words



2. What key concepts from the chapter do you want to apply to your life? How will you accomplish this?

Points to Ponder

3. Read through the Ponder section prayerfully. Pick one or two Bible verses or EGW statements to memorize, or review often. List the references here, and write the quotations on 3x5 cards.
 - 1.
 - 2.

Interact

My Story

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1. How would you summarize the Christian implications of the “Rich, the Poor Man” parable in one or two sentences?
2. We all have areas of our lives that seem especially difficult to surrender. For me it was movies and unhealthy food. Others may laugh at my difficulties and say, “I have no problem surrendering those areas to the Lord.” What areas of your life do you find difficult to surrender?
3. Why didn’t the promise in James 4:7 “...resist the devil, and he will flee from you” work for me?

LET GOD

4. Many sincere people feel that some movies are okay to watch. Why is Hollywood entertainment so dangerous?
5. Why do we so naturally clutch our coach-class Christian experience and make it so difficult for the Lord to move us into a first-class love relationship with Him?

Note

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