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GOD'S WORD: THE FOUNDATION OF OUR FAITH

There is one very important element in our Christian walk, one so essential that it determines the quality of our entire Christian experience. That is the Word of God. The level of maturity we grow into and the depths we are able to reach in God are determined by the place we give to His Word in our lives. Whether we walk in victory or not and the measure of blessing we actually experience is greatly influenced by the measure of God's Word that we are able to receive and consistently enforce in our daily living.

However, in a world that is given to 'phenomena,' where the spectacular is sought after, not many are ready to pay attention to the contents of an 'Ancient Book.' Why would someone spend time in deciphering mere words from a religious book, which some claim to be socially, culturally and morally irrelevant? And sadly, even among believers, apart from fulfilling an obligation of having a 'quiet time,' there are not many who have received an understanding of the depth of impact and influence the written Scriptures can have on one's life. It is true, that at first the Scriptures may seem lifeless, perhaps even boring for the casual reader. But to those who have received an understanding of its inherent power and the place that God Himself has assigned His Word to have in the life of His people, the Word is alive! To them, the Word is the source of strength, comfort, hope, faith, instruction and wisdom. They

have rested their entire present and future on what the Scriptures say. Amidst the storms of life, they know that the Word will sustain them and hold them up. In the midst of sickness, they know that the Word will bring healing and deliverance. In the midst of challenges and pressures, they stand confident on what the Word promises. They are able to laugh at impossibilities because of the possibilities they see in the Word. Even when they cannot see, touch, hear, smell or taste—they still know because the Word has produced in them a confident assurance, and a strong and unshakable conviction.

Our hearts' desire is that each one, to whom we have the privilege of reaching through the medium of this book, will be brought to this confident assurance in their walk with the Lord. If you have already attained some degree of understanding in the Word, we desire that you will be strengthened and encouraged even more.

Through the Foolishness of Preaching

"For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21).

God in His wisdom has assigned that the eternal destiny of a man's life is determined through the simple preaching of the Gospel message. Consider this! God did not choose some great supernatural vehicle to take the "Good news of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation" to all men. Instead, through the almost 'foolish' exercise of preaching, which He ordained to be done through mortal, fallible vessels, He has chosen to win the lost. This is why preaching or communicating the Gospel is so important. As Apostle Paul explained, some may consider both the message

and the preaching of it as foolishness. But to those who are called, the message and its preaching reveals Christ, who is the power and wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24). In a similar manner, God has ordained that the written Scriptures be a tool by which the power and wisdom of God is brought into a believer's life. It seems almost a mystery that through the words inscribed on the pages of the book we call the 'Bible,' there is divine power and wisdom transmitted into our lives. How could ordinary words, words we use in our everyday life, all of a sudden take on divine value just because they are printed in a Bible? While the words in themselves are ordinary, the truths they present are divine. While it was man who assembled the words, it was God who inspired the thoughts. And it is through understanding and accepting these thoughts or truths that are conveyed through the printed words, that one begins to enter into and experience the wisdom and power of God.

All Scripture Is 'God-Breathed'

"And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:15,16).

When the apostle referred to the "Holy Scriptures," he was talking about the written Scriptures. He ascribes divine authorship to all of the written Scripture when He says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." Even though man penned the words, God was the source and inspiration of the message. Apostle Peter brings this out in a slightly different manner when he states: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God

spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20,21). All Scripture is prophetic in the sense that they were birthed through the inspiration of the Spirit of God. It is this fundamental fact that makes the written Scriptures of divine value. Believing this fact in the very core of your being, can totally transform your view of the Scriptures. If you really believe, all Scripture is inspired by God then you will give high priority to the Word of God in your life. You will open your Bible knowing that the God of this universe is communicating His thoughts to you. Out of His infinite wisdom, He has chosen to distil that amount which He considered essential and sufficient for our life on earth, and has placed them in the pages of The Book. The Scriptures provide education (doctrine), conviction (reproof), correction and instruction.

The Scriptures—Our Window into God

"Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law"
(Psalm 119:18).

The Scriptures provide us with insight into the living God. They reveal the nature, the character, the attributes and the heart of God. In the pages of Scripture, we find insight into who God is, what He does, His feelings and His desires. Consequently, it is through the Scriptures that we get to know God and thereby build a personal relationship with Him. Any relationship is based on knowledge. Where there is no personal knowledge, there can be no relationship. Further, the depth of knowledge or intimacy attained determines the depth of the relationship. Therefore, to have a deep and close relationship with the living God, one would have to know Him intimately as He is revealed in the Scriptures. It is so exciting to open the pages of the Bible because they are our windows into God. When our eyes are opened to see 'behind' the lines that we

read, we gain an understanding of the splendour and majesty of our God. To base our understanding of God on anything else—be it our experiences, others' opinions and so on—may not always be accurate. It is true that God also reveals Himself in other places, for instance, in His creation. However, whatever information we may derive from other sources must first be examined in the light of the written Scriptures.

The Scriptures—Our Standard, Our Pattern

“Direct my steps by Your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me” (Psalm 119:133).

In a world where people do not have definite standards for what is right and wrong, we choose to make the Word of God our standard. We hold what the Scriptures say, concerning all matters of life, to be true. Whatever God's Word says is right and noble, we also consider right and noble. Whatever the Word says is wrong, we likewise consider wrong. We do not 'rationalise' (reason), 'liberalise' (attempting to be broad-minded), or 'contextualise' (make culturally or socially relevant) away the moral standards set forth by the Scriptures. We choose not to settle for anything less than what is set forth in the Scriptures.

God's Word is our guiding principle. We pattern our lives according to the descriptions given in Scripture. The Scriptures set forth patterns of behaviour for husbands, wives, parents, children, employers, employees, for ministers and for all believers in general. We do our utmost, with the strength of the Holy Spirit, to pattern our conduct, our lifestyles, our values, our beliefs, our goals and ambitions according to the principles in Scripture. We direct our entire lives by His Word.

The Scriptures—Our Authority

"I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep your word" (Psalm 119:101).

We submit to the Scriptures as the final authority in our lives. Even if no man-made structure or law corrects us, we submit to the correction of the Word. We do not wait for someone else to point out our errors, although this may be necessary at times. If we find ourselves doing things that the Word says is wrong, we are willing to make changes so that we may obey the Word. We choose to exercise discipline in our lives so that we can walk in harmony with the Word. Submitting to the Word of God is in fact submitting to God Himself. To rebel against the counsel of the Scriptures is rebellion against God. The Lord Jesus said: "He who rejects me, and does not receive my words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). The Word of God will be the law according to which all men will be judged.

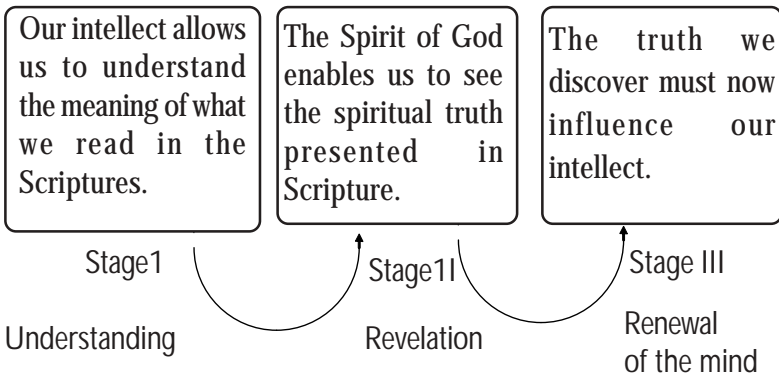
It is time for the people of God to develop a reverential fear of the written Word of God. We cannot be followers of God without submitting to the authority of His Word in our lives. We cannot be 'strong believers' while we continue to do what is contrary to the Scriptures, just because these things may be pleasurable to our body or acceptable to our reasoning. As believers, we must learn to bring our feelings and reasoning in subjection to the Word. We refrain from every evil and align ourselves to His Word because it IS the final authority.

The Scriptures and Human Intellect

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him the eyes of your understanding being enlightened ...” (Ephesians 1:17,18).

It is by the ability of our intellect that we read and understand the meaning of the words of Scripture. We are able to recognise the historical background and context in which the Scriptures were written. There is a definite place for the human intellect in the life of the believer.



However, the natural man with his natural mind is unable to recognise the divine truths that the Spirit of God is conveying through the Word. It takes spiritual discernment (or insight) to receive the things of the Spirit. This is where the ability of the human intellect ends and dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit begins. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of revelation. He enables us to see (or gain

insight into) the divine truths contained in Scripture. He takes us beyond the meaning of the words that were penned by the men of old (Stage 1), and into the original thoughts expressed by God (Stage 2). There is a vast difference between the thoughts of man and the thoughts of God. The Lord God said: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). Revelation is the process of moving from Stage 1 to Stage 2. It is the process of moving from intellectual understanding to spiritual understanding. It is through revelation that we are able to receive the thoughts of God. We are now able to understand spiritual truths. When a person does not receive a revelation of spiritual truth (that is, does not get a spiritual understanding of the Word), Jesus said, "then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart" (Matthew 13:19).

When, through the process of revelation you receive spiritual understanding, you are able to "give a defence to every one who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you ..." (1 Peter 3:15).

Moving from Revelation to Action

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:22,25).

The spiritual truths that are revealed to us must now affect our intellect. Our thought patterns, our reasoning and our persuasions must now be influenced and ordered by the spiritual understanding we have received. This process is called the renewing of the mind. When this happens, we are able to consistently live in accordance to the revelation we have received, from God's Word.

There are many believers who have received a revelation of many things in the Word. They have gone from Stage 1 to Stage 2. However, they have not allowed their intellect to be influenced by the Word of God, and consequently they do not live by the Word of God.

God's intent in giving us the Scriptures is that we may live continually by them. He has made His Spirit available to us to help us understand His Word. However, receiving a revelation of the Word, by itself, is insufficient to experience the full blessings of His promises. It is the person who translates revelation into consistent action, who is able to walk in the riches of what God has promised. Our challenge to you is that you will depend on the Holy Spirit to receive insight into the Scriptures. Then, allow your mind to be renewed by the revelation you receive. And then translate the revelation to disciplined action in your everyday living. You will then be a person who, as the Scripture says, is blessed in whatever you do.

Let the Word Dwell in You Richly

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16).

The Word of God is the foundation of our faith. It is the essential ingredient to spiritual growth and maturity. We are to abide in Christ and His Words are to abide in us (John 15:7). Our charge to you is to let the Word of Christ dwell in you in abundance. Spend much time searching, studying and meditating in the Scriptures. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you insight and revelation. Let a rich deposit of revelation knowledge be laid up in your heart. Keep your spiritual insights 'alive' by reviewing them often. Remind

yourself time and again of the spiritual truths that the Spirit of God has brought to your understanding. Use the Word to sing personal psalms, hymns and songs to the Lord. Teach and encourage other believers in the Word. Put into practice all the revelation knowledge that has been imparted to you. You will thus be establishing a solid foundation upon which you can build your Christian experience.

The person who both hears and practises the Word, according to the Lord, is like a wise man who built his house upon solid ground (Matthew 7:24,25). What kind of a foundation are you building your life upon?

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GOD'S WORD: ITS PURITY AND POWER

It was towards the end of four exciting years of college in Manipal, India. A number of wonderful things had happened. The most significant of all was that God had enabled some of us young people—just ordinary college students—to work together and lay the groundwork for what would eventually grow into a strong Christian fellowship among the student community. It was the end of the semester and many of my friends had left for home. Knowing that the dorms would be unusually quiet at this time, I had decided to stay on for a few days just to spend some time alone with the Lord. I specifically wanted to pray about my future and the things that lay ahead of me, even though so much remained unknown. It was during this season of prayer that Isaiah 45:1–3 was deeply impressed upon my spirit:

"Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut: 'I will go before you and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the LORD, who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel'" (Isaiah 45:1–3).

To me, these are 'cornerstone verses'—verses that occupy a special place in my heart. I understood their meaning and the way in which they would apply in my life.

As part of this promise, the Lord said that He would go before us and open for us doors, and that these doors would not be shut.

Since then, there have been numerous occasions when we have stood face-to-face with impossibilities and 'closed doors.' Whether it was in getting admission and financial assistantship at universities or visas into countries or rising up after a personal financial crisis in 1993, and in so many other situations, we have come back to these verses and stood before God, acknowledging that what He had promised, He will also do. We have taken these verses of Scripture and by the authority granted to us in Christ, have enforced them over circumstances and situations, and have seen them change. We have relied on the purity and power of these verses to an extent that may seem unreasonable to the rational mind, perhaps even foolishness. And we joyfully testify that God's Word has never failed! And like us, there are many all over the world who can share testimony after testimony of the challenges they had faced and how they put their trust solely on the infallible Word of God and how God by the power of His Word, brought them through triumphantly!

There is a place where we can come to, a place where we love and revere the precious Word of God; a place where our hearts are gripped with an unquestionable confidence in the integrity and power of God's Word; a place where we esteem His Word above anything else; a place where the Word transforms our character, influences our thinking and guides our actions; a place where our hearts yearn and hunger for spiritual understanding that comes through the Word; a place where we long to see more of His majesty as revealed in the Scriptures; a place of pure delight in God's Word. Our prayer is that each one of us will experience the joy of continually abiding in this place.

The Sovereign Hand of God

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33).

God's ways are “past finding out” or beyond human understanding. The sovereign hand of God has been and continues to make its way through the course of human history, often in ways that seem so insignificant and obscure. Often times, the workings of God appear very mundane, very ordinary, and yet they are no less the handiwork of God than the workings of spectacular miracles. The same God who brought forth water out of a rock in an instant when Moses struck it with His rod, also worked through Bezalel and his co-workers as they laboured day after day in the construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness (Exodus 31:1–11). To the human mind, it seems more difficult to accept that the hard laborious work of Bezalel and his team of artisans was actually the working of God Himself. Yet, it was the Spirit of God who filled these artisans with wisdom, understanding and knowledge to design artistic works in gold, silver and bronze for the Tabernacle.

By an extension of this simple illustration, we can say confidently that God has been working out His divine purposes through the lives of ordinary people. And so it is with the compilation of the 66 books of the Christian Bible. The Sovereign hand of God was at work even in the process of assembling together and the canonisation of the Scriptures. The human mind may question the validity of such a claim. But to those of us who understand that God carries out His work silently, even as man goes about his daily business, this is a settled fact!

Even Above His Name

"I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word above all Your name" (Psalm 138:2).

God has given His Word a place of greater prominence than His name. He has exalted His Word above His name. To God, His Word, which He had spoken, is of greater importance than His reputation. Because His name—His reputation—is only as good as His Word! We need to get an understanding of this. His reputation depends on His Word. His name derives its glory and honour from His Word. There are two important implications. First, on God's part, because He has exalted His Word above His name, He will uphold His Word with all that He is. God's Word is backed by the omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience of God Himself. He said, "I am alert and active, watching over My word to perform it" (Jeremiah 1:12, The Amplified Bible). Second, on our part, we need to realise the importance of not only knowing the name of the Lord, but also His Word. We have called upon His name and have been saved (Romans 10:13). Now we need to continue to know His Word because God Himself has given His Word a place of greater honour than His name.

God's Word Is as Strong as His Character

"And we desire that each of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to

the heirs of promise the immutability [unchangeableness] of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us” (Hebrews 6:11–18).

When God made a promise to Abraham, He backed His promise by swearing by Himself. He said, “I WILL bless you” and “I WILL multiply you.” God gave to Abraham “two immutable things”—His promise (Word) and His oath. Whenever God says, “I will ...” He is giving us two unchangeable things—His promise (His Word) and His oath (vow, pledge) to back up that promise. Every Word (promise) of God is a sworn statement and a word of honour, because it is both a promise and an oath. “He swore by Himself.” God’s oath of confirmation is based on His own Self. There is nothing else as “immutable” as His own Self, because He is a God whose character is unchangeable. He said, “For I am the LORD, I do not change” (Malachi 3:6). Therefore, every Word of God is backed up by God’s unchangeable character. And one vital aspect of God’s character is that it is impossible for God to lie.

He is the “God, who cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). Therefore, every word that He speaks is truth. As Jesus said “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19).

We need to come to a place where we rest on this aspect of God’s unchangeable character. We know that He can never lie and therefore every word that He has spoken is the absolute truth. When we are assured of this, then as the Scripture says, we have “strong

consolation” or as the Amplified Bible renders it, we have “mighty indwelling strength and strong encouragement” (Hebrews 6:18).

Pure Words

“The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6).

Our God is a God of truth. His words are true words, pure words. God’s Word is without error. “The entirety of Your Word is truth” (Psalm 119:160a). “There has not failed one Word of all His good promise ... (1 Kings 8:56b). They can be relied upon with strong confidence. His promises can be believed unreservedly, His instructions received wholeheartedly. God’s Word stands firm forever in heaven (Psalm 119:89). They will not be altered or changed, for He will never “break His covenant” or recant what He has spoken (Psalm 89:34). His Word endures forever (1 Peter 1:23). His Word is a place of strong security, because there is nothing else as pure, as sure and as enduring.

God’s Word Is a Carrier of God’s Power

“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Hebrews 11:3).

“Who [Jesus] being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3a).

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

As believers, we know and have acknowledged as a fact that God simply spoke this universe into existence. Believing this is much more reasonable than believing that things just fell together in place, over the passage of time, as proponents of the 'Big Bang' and other theories claim. We understand that "the worlds were framed by the Word of God." This universe was formed, constructed, shaped and fashioned by the words that God spoke. "Things which are seen were not made of things which are visible"—that is, the visible was made of things that are invisible (Hebrews 11:13). The natural came out of the spiritual. This is a powerful truth, which we need to grasp. The Word of God was the invisible, spiritual material that brought into existence the visible natural world. Not only were all things created by the spoken Word of God but according to Hebrews 1:3 all things are upheld by the Word. The entire universe is sustained, regulated and kept in order by the Word of God.

We are able to understand this truth, when we recognise that the Word of God is full of the power of God. In physics, one of the theories of the nature of light explains that light consists of 'photons.' Photons are 'energy-packets.' When these photons impinge on suitable targets, they are able to release their energy. In a similar way, we often like to picture in our mind, the words of God as energy-packets, carrying in them the omnipotent power of the almighty God. These words of God are able to release this 'divine-energy' and cause the creative works of God.

Consider this ...

- If God was able to bring into existence this entire universe by the power of His Word, then is He not able to bring into existence in our lives, things that do not exist at present? Where

there is sickness, God can bring healing and health into existence by the power of His Word. Where there is poverty, by the power of His Word, God can bring material wealth into existence. The creative power of God resides in His Word. Therefore, the Word of God can create (bring into existence) the things that God has promised, even though they may not exist in our lives at present.

- God used His Word to form, construct and shape this universe. Can't God by His Word form, construct and shape our present and future? There is power in the Word of God to change our present and shape our future.
- This entire universe is sustained, upheld and regulated by the Word of God. Can't the Word of God sustain, uphold and regulate our little lives also? God's Word carries enough and more power to sustain, regulate and keep in order, the things concerning our lives here on earth.

Standing on the Promises

"[For Abraham, human reason for] hope being gone, hoped in faith that he should become ... as he had been promised ..." (Romans 4:18, Amplified Bible).

Understanding the purity and power of the Word gives us strong confidence to rely on it. The Word of God is truth and so we can expect to have what we are promised in the Word. The Word of God is full of power and so we can be confident that His Word will produce in our lives. Even if it means that, like Abraham, we stand against all human reason when there seems to be no hope. When things seem hopeless, we still hope in faith that we will become all that God said we would become. We are able to do

this because we have understood the purity and power of God's Word. We know that His Word cannot fail.

Some of us may be facing tough times, financially. We wonder if things will ever change, when it comes to our material life. God has made His promise that all our material needs will be met. We know that He has promised to "supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). We know that as we "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," all things that we need for our life here on earth will be given to us (Matthew 6:33). We know that as we honour God with what we do have, He will cause us to increase (Proverbs 3:9,10; Malachi 3:9-11). Knowing that each of these promises is pure and full of divine power, we hold on to them in faith. We know that there is enough power in these Words (promises) to cause creative miracles of financial blessings to be released into our lives and change our circumstances. We continue to stand on His promises.

Some others may be looking to God for their future. Even when things seem unclear, unsure, perhaps even hopeless and bleak, the Word of God brings confidence and assurance into our lives. The Word says, all things work together for the good of those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). God knows the plans He has for us, plans of great prosperity and plans to bring about the future we are hoping for (Jeremiah 29:11). Our path is like the shining light that shines brighter and brighter (Proverbs 4:18). Therefore, we expect things to get clearer. We know that our steps are ordered by the Lord (Psalm 37:23,24). All of these and many other similar Scriptures fill us with undaunted courage and confidence. We continue standing on His promises.

In a similar way, for the many different areas of our lives, we can recognise the promises and commandments of the Lord. We acknowledge that all of His Word, concerning all areas of our lives, is pure and full of power.

- Having understood the unlimited power that is in the Word and the possibility of it being released in our lives, what must we do to experience the power of God's Word in our lives?
- What is it that releases the inherent power of God's Word in the life of a believer?

We will consider these in the following chapters.

3

GOD'S WORD: THE MIRACLE SEED

The Parable of the Sower

"And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in His teaching: "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred." And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred" (Mark 4:1–10; 13–20).

The parable of the sower is in itself simple and easy to understand, especially to those who are familiar, either through reading or experience, with the process of sowing seed and nurturing plants/crops. The Lord uses this simple parable to convey deep and powerful truths about the operation of God's Word in the life of a human being. We know that the Word of God is alive and active (Hebrews 4:12). This parable reveals to us how the Word becomes active, and also the things that hinder its operation, making it inactive.

Let us highlight/summarise the main thoughts presented to us in this parable. In presenting this summary, we draw from the parallel passages in Matthew 13:18–23 and Luke 8:11–15.

- God's Word is like seed (Mark 4:14).
- Our heart is the ground where the seed of God's Word is to be sown (Mark 4:15).
- The seed must be protected and nurtured, if it is to produce fruit.
- We must understand the Word (get an understanding of the spiritual truth) to keep satan from stealing the Word (Matthew 13:19).
- Regardless of what hardship or persecution we face—from the world or the devil—we must hold fast to the Word and allow it to take root in our hearts, so that it can produce (Mark 4:16,17).
- We must guard our hearts from the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the lust for other things. When we do so, we are providing a suitable 'environment' for the Word to produce (Mark 4:19).

- When we understand (Matthew 13:23), receive (Mark 4:20) and retain (Luke 8:15) the Word in our hearts, we will bring forth fruit in our lives.

The Seed Is the Word of God

"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11).

"Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (1 Peter 1:23).

The first and foremost understanding that we receive from this parable is that God's Word is like seed. When you hold a seed in your hand—whatever kind of seed it may be—it appears so insignificant and lifeless. We may never consider that the same little seed when sown into the ground would germinate, take root and eventually grow into a plant or even a huge tree. The little seed has within it the capacity to generate a whole new plant or tree. There is in a sense, 'creative' ability in a seed because it gives rise to something that never existed before. Further, as long as the seed remains by itself, say in a seed-bag or in the storeroom, it is unable to release its ability. The power resident in the seed is released only when it is sown and properly nurtured.

So is the Word of God. Each Word that God has spoken to us is a seed. There is creative power in these seeds, which God has given to us. We need to get this into our hearts and minds. The Bible can be considered to be a seed-bag or a storeroom full of seeds. When these seeds of God's Word are sown and nurtured in our hearts, they will release in our lives the divine power they contain.

Moving our thoughts away from the plant kingdom, we can consider an analogy from the human and animal kingdom. In 1 Peter 1:23, the Word of God is referred to as the “incorruptible seed.” The Greek word used for seed in this verse is ‘*sperma*,’ akin to the English word ‘sperm.’ God’s Word is the divine ‘sperm’—that divine seed. However, whether the word ‘seed’ is used in the agricultural/botanical sense (Greek *sporos*) or in the sense of it being the ‘*sperma*,’ the underlying principle is the same. God’s Word has within it the ability to produce. It has within it life-giving, creative, miracle-working power. Each word that God has spoken is a miracle seed with the ability to create.

As it says in 1 Peter 1:23, we were born again by the Word of God, which is the incorruptible ‘sperm.’ When the seed of God’s Word was impregnated into our hearts and when we believed it, it released its life-giving power into us. In an instant, in a moment of time, we were born again. We became new creatures. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). A creative work of God took place in our spirits (Ephesians 2:10). This creative work that was accomplished in us (and is being accomplished in the hearts of many who are being saved) is the greatest miracle that we experience. This is the miracle of the new birth—of becoming new creations in Christ. And this creative miracle was brought about by the power of the incorruptible seed that is the Word of God.

Just consider how mighty a work it was for us to be made new creations in Christ. All of the power of satan that was holding us, was broken off from our lives. We were translated out of satan’s power into the Kingdom of God’s own Son (Colossians 1:13). We

were adopted into God's family. We were born of God and made partakers of the divine nature. We were brought into Christ and all of the wonderful blessings of being in Christ became ours. All this and much more became ours in an instant when the seed of the Word of God released its miracle power into our lives.

Has the seed of God's Word lost any of its power or ability to work in us? Are the miracle seeds of the Word unable to cause any more miracles in our lives? No, not at all! For the Word is the incorruptible seed. The Word lives, abides and endures forever. Every Word that God has spoken to us has the potential to produce in our lives.

God's Word has Been Designed to Produce

"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10,11).

"For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

God said that the Word that goes forth out of His mouth will not return to him empty. Rather it will accomplish that which He pleases and purposes. There are four simple deductions we can make from the two verses quoted from Isaiah:

- God's Word has been designed to produce (or designed to accomplish).

- God's Word will accomplish that which God pleases, in and that which He has purposed.
- When God wants to accomplish His purpose and pleasure, He speaks forth His Word.
- (Although not part of this message, we can also make this deduction that—God's Word reveals God's purpose and pleasure.)

The words that God speaks (and the words that He has spoken) are not empty words. They are words full of the omnipotence of God Himself. They have been designed to produce. Like a seed, each and every Word that God has spoken is packed with supernatural ability to bring about its fulfilment.

God has designed His Word to produce that which He pleases and that which He has purposed here on earth. Because God has purposed to bless His people (Psalm 3:8), His Word will accomplish just that. God has purposed to heal people (Exodus 15:26; 23:25). Therefore, His Word will bring healing to the sick (Psalm 107:20). God has purposed that His people receive wisdom, understanding and direction for their lives (Isaiah 48:17; Psalm 32:8) and therefore, His Word will fulfil this purpose of His. His Word will accomplish all and everything that He has purposed, planned, intended and desired.

The Lord God is in heaven. And when He wants to carry out His purpose and pleasure here on earth, He just issues a word. He speaks forth a word out of His mouth. This spoken word now is like a heavenly seed. It will accomplish God's intent. We, His people are here on earth. Through the power of His incorruptible Word

(and the working of His Spirit), God accomplishes that which He pleases and purposes in our lives.

God has designed His Word to be a carrier of His power into human lives. As Apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, the Word of God releases its divine energy and works effectively in the lives of those who believe it. Every word of God contained in the Scriptures is a divine seed with the ability to produce the things of God, in the life of every believer. Since every seed produces according to its own kind (Genesis 1:11,12), each word from God will produce what it is designed to produce. God's Word concerning healing will produce healing. God's Word concerning blessing and prosperity will produce blessing and prosperity. God's Word concerning each area of life will produce in that very area of our lives.

[Please note: In stating this fact about the seed of the Word, we must remind you that there is also the principle of hearing and obeying the Word of God in its entirety—not just selected portions of Scripture. Life, health, blessing and total well-being are promised to those who listen and obey the whole counsel of God (Proverbs 3:1,2,7,8; 4:20–22)].

The Process of Germination

And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come" (Mark 4:26–29).

In this parable, the Lord Jesus revealed to us a general principle that operates in God's Kingdom. This 'seed-principle' is applicable

to many different aspects of our life in the Kingdom of God. Since we are presently studying about the Word of God, we will consider how this seed-principle of God's Kingdom applies to this subject. We can summarise the main concepts from this illustration:

- The seed must be sown.
- There is a passage of time before any signs of growth manifest.
- The seed will produce, even if we do not know how.
- When the harvest comes, we have to put in the sickle and gather it in (in other words, we have a part to play in gathering the harvest).

When I first began to understand these truths that we are now studying about God's Word—the miracle seed, I began to faithfully sow seeds of the Word of God into my heart. I developed a discipline convenient to myself that enabled me to sow seeds concerning different areas of the Christian life—faith, divine health, family, wisdom and understanding, success and prosperity, ministry and miracles, prayer and financial giving. Now, these seeds of God's Word that were sown (and are being sown) in my heart did not bring a bumper harvest overnight. There was a passage of time and then I began to see the effect and the results of the seeds that I had sown in my heart.

For instance, we can sow seeds of the miracles of Jesus, that we too may see such miracles in our life and ministry. Surely, we will not experience the powerful miracles that Jesus did of opening blind eyes, making the lame walk and so on, in the very first day of ministry. No! Initially we may only experience a “thirty-fold” harvest. But we know that there is a passage of time that is necessary for the

seed to germinate and grow up. We continue to sow the Word into our hearts knowing that harvest time will soon come. And then, as we keep sowing the seed of the Word we will enjoy many more rich and bountiful harvests of what the Word produces.

Now, we may not be able to fully explain how sowing the seed of God's Word into our hearts is going to cause that Word to produce in our lives. For instance, we cannot fully explain how, if a person sows the seed of the Word concerning success and prosperity, this Word will cause them to experience success and prosperity in all they do. Likewise, we cannot fully explain how, when someone sows the seed of God's Word for healing and health, they can experience God's power to heal any kind of sickness and disease and be in good health. We can only say, that the Word is like a seed, and the seed WILL produce, even when we do not know how. When the Word is sown on good ground and nurtured, it will produce that which it has been designed to produce.

You Are God's Garden

Our purpose in presenting this message to you is NOT just to inform or educate you about another interesting principle from the Word of God. Our desire is that you will fully understand and grasp both the value and importance of applying this truth in your life. God has revealed the principles of His Kingdom in His Word. We have examined one of them in this book. It is now our responsibility to apply these principles consistently in our lives.

You are God's garden. God has given you His seeds that He desires for you to sow in your own heart and life. There are seeds of blessing, prosperity, peace, love, holiness, purity, power and

much more that can produce these very things in your life. Will you develop the discipline of sowing the seed of the Word into your heart? Will you allow God to fulfil His purpose and pleasure in your life through the power of His Word?

How do we sow the seed of the Word into our hearts? How do we nurture the seed? How do we gather in the harvest? This is done through the process of meditating in God's Word that we consider in the following chapter.

4

MEDITATING IN GOD'S WORD

In the initial two chapters, we have emphasised that the Word of God is the source and foundation of our faith. We examined the purity and power of God's Word. We presented the fact that the Word of God is full of the power of God and that this power can be released into our lives. In the previous chapter, we discussed the fact that the Word of God is like a seed, which when sown and nurtured in our hearts, will release its transforming power into our lives. We now take a step further to explore the discipline of meditation in God's Word. Meditation is the process by which we sow and nurture the seed of God's Word in our hearts.

Usually, when we mention the word 'meditation,' people may consider it to be some mystical practice of gurus and yogis from the East. Perhaps, it is because of this the Church in general does not emphasise the practice of meditation. While it is true that many cultures, from around the world, have their own variations to the process of meditation, our goal is to present to you an understanding of the Scriptural approach to meditation. We also desire that you will understand its importance and be encouraged to develop this discipline in your walk of faith.

Meditation—A Scriptural Discipline

"And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening" (Genesis 24:63a).

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do

according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

The earliest mention of the word 'meditate' in the Bible is in connection with Abraham's son of promise, Isaac, in the book of Genesis. Although not very informative of how or what he was meditating on, it is interesting to note that meditation was practised in Scripture, way back in ancient times. Also, Isaac went out into the field to meditate, which tells us that normally one would like to cut out all distractions and interference, to create the right atmosphere for meditation.

A well-known verse concerning meditation is the one in Joshua 1. The Lord had given "The Law" through His servant Moses to His people Israel. Moses had reinforced to the people of Israel about how privileged they were to have the Laws of God given to them. For instance, consider these words that Moses spoke to Israel:

"Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?" (Deuteronomy 4:5-8).

In addition to this, the Lord constantly reminded His people that He desired for them to lay up His Word within their hearts and to continually obey them. Time and again, we read statements such as: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart" and "Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your

heart and in your soul” (Deuteronomy 6:6; 11:18). The same instruction was being repeated to Joshua, who was now in charge of the leadership of Israel. The Lord was commissioning Joshua, telling him to be strong and very courageous and to carefully observe all of the Law that was given through Moses (Joshua 1:7). The Lord then presented to Joshua a methodology or discipline that he could use to get the Word into his heart and carefully observe them. The Lord told Joshua, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it” (Joshua 1:8a).

It is interesting to note that it was God who was instructing Joshua to meditate in His Word, day and night. Meditation in the Word is therefore a discipline that is instructed and encouraged by God Himself. It is a discipline that God wants us to practise.

Notice the process:

- The words of the Book of the Law were to be a part of his speech (“This Book of the Law shall not depart out of your mouth”) and
- He was to continually meditate in the Word (“You shall meditate in it day and night”).

Meditation is a discipline given to us in Scripture that helps us lay up God’s Word in our hearts (spirit) and souls (mind). There are numerous other references to meditation, especially in the Psalms. Psalm 1 is a well-known passage of Scripture that teaches us about the disciplines of a righteous man. It tells us that such a man does not walk in ungodly counsel, does not follow the paths of sinners, and does not share in the activity of scorners. “But his delight is in

the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2). His disciplines of righteousness and constant meditation in the Word enable him to be fruitful, thriving and prosperous in all that he does (Psalm 1:3).

Scriptural meditation is not limited to meditating in God's Word. We find other subjects or themes upon which we may meditate. For instance, we could meditate on the Lord Himself. The Lord, His character and His attributes become the focus of our meditation. David, the sweet psalmist of Israel said: “When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches” (Psalm 63:6). Another psalmist wrote: “My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD” (Psalm 104:34, King James Version [KJV]).

We may also meditate on the wonderful things that the Lord has done in our lives. David said: “I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands” (Psalm 143:5). Asaph, another of Israel's psalmists wrote, “I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds” (Psalm 77:12). We may also ponder and meditate upon matters of wisdom and understanding. The Psalmist wrote, “Hear this, all ye people; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world: both low and high, rich and poor, together. My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding” (Psalm 49:1–3, KJV).

Meditation—The Biblical Approach

Having understood the fact that meditation is a Scriptural practice and is indeed encouraged by God Himself, and that this is the

method by which we are able to lay up God's Word in our hearts, our next objective is to learn how to meditate.

There are two main Hebrew words used for the word 'meditate' in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word '*hagah*' (pronounced *haw-gaw*', Strong's #1897) means "to reflect, imagine, ponder, moan, growl, mutter, murmur, to make a quiet sound such as sighing, to contemplate something as one repeats the words." The other Hebrew word '*siyach*' (pronounced *see'-akh*, Strong's #7878) used mainly in Psalm 119, once again means "to ponder, i.e., converse (with oneself, and hence aloud), utter, commune, complain, declare, muse, pray, speak, talk." The Spirit-Filled Life Bible carries the following comments on the first word. It says: "*Hagah* represents something quite unlike the English 'meditation,' which may be a mental exercise only. In Hebrew thought, to meditate upon the Scriptures is to quietly repeat them in a soft, droning sound, while utterly abandoning outside distractions. From this tradition comes a specialised type of Jewish prayer called 'davening,' that is, reciting texts, praying intense prayers, or getting lost in communion with God while bowing or rocking back and forth. Evidently this dynamic form of meditation-prayer goes back to David's time" (Pages 753–754, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991).

Meditation is essentially an activity of the human spirit that reaches the soul (the seat of thought, intellect, imagination, feeling and will) and affects the physical body. For the purposes of instruction, we would like to summarise the process of meditation by using three words—contemplation, visualisation and confession. At any given time, while meditating, one may be involved in any one or more of these three processes. One may be in deep contemplation about a particular theme, or may both contemplate

and visualise a specific subject, or be involved in confession. Let us consider each of these in detail.

Contemplation—Thinking Within Yourself

“I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands” (Psalm 143:5).

This aspect of meditation engages our thought and intellect. We muse, ponder and think deeply about a particular subject. For instance, if we are contemplating on a particular subject from the Word, say on divine healing, and we have chosen Isaiah 53:4 as the verse of Scripture, during contemplation we consider the meaning of this verse, its significance and its implications. We recognise that Jesus bore all our sicknesses and carried all our pains. He did it as our substitute and, therefore, we no longer need to bear them. We understand and reason within ourselves. We think through its application in our daily life. We examine wrong notions and ideas we may have had before and begin to disregard them.

We believe that the Spirit of God delights in us spending time in deep contemplation in the Word. Often, when we have set ourselves apart from all outside distractions and have put our minds' attention on the Word, in contemplation, the Spirit of the Lord gently bears us along in our thought processes. He inspires and directs our thoughts by planting fresh ideas and insights into our minds. In describing how the men of old were inspired to bring forth the Scriptures, Apostle Peter said: “For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). That word “moved” comes from the Greek word *phero* (pronounced *fer'-o*, Strong's #5342) that means “to bear along, to carry.” The Vine's Dictionary has the

following comments about these Old Testament prophets. It says, "They were 'borne along,' or impelled, by the Holy Spirit's power, not acting according to their own wills, or simply exercising their own thoughts, but expressing the mind of God in words provided and ministered by Him" (Page 420, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985).

The prophets spoke of things beyond their own understanding, so much so that they had to search "what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1 Peter 1:11). In a similar manner, the Holy Spirit bears us along in our thinking during our time of contemplation in the Word. The Holy Spirit is our Teacher. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will speak to us the things He hears Jesus speak (John 16:12–15). This often happens when we have set ourselves apart from all distractions to contemplate in the Word. Oh! This is such a tremendous experience, when the "hand of the Lord" who is the sweet Holy Spirit, gently descends on us and begins to bear us along in our thinking, as we are in deep contemplation in the Word. Often, the presence of the Lord becomes so strong, that tears of joy and thanksgiving begin to flow at the amazing revelation and understanding that He imparts.

Contemplation influences our thinking. It produces a mind that is renewed by the Word of God. The Scriptures teach us about the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2a). We are instructed to be renewed in the spirit (attitude) of our minds (Ephesians 4:23). A person with a mind that is renewed to the whole counsel of God (all of the Word of God) is able to "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2b). Through the

disciplined practice of meditation/contemplation in the Word of God, we have our “senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14b).

Visualisation—Seeing with Your ‘Mind’s Eye’

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” But Abram said, “Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!” And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” And he believed in the LORD and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:1–6).

A number of years had elapsed since the time God first promised to make Abram the father of a great nation. Sarah and Abram were still childless and this obviously was a matter of concern to them. During this time, the Lord spoke to Abram to reassure him of the original promise. We would like to bring your attention to what the Lord did. The Lord led Abram outside his house one night, instructed him to look up into the starry sky and asked if he was able to number the stars. He then told Abram, “So shall your descendants be.” In effect, God was giving Abram a ‘mental picture’ of His promise. Abram had a picture of the fulfilment of God’s promise. He was able to see with his mind’s eye what the fulfilment of God’s promise would look like. Later, the Lord also said to Abraham, “... I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore ...” (Genesis 22:17).

Visualisation is another important process that we practise in meditation. We 'see' with the power of our imagination, what the Word of God is conveying to us. For instance, if we are sick, we see ourselves up and well. We see ourselves being and doing all that the Word says about us. Visualisation is that part in the process of meditation that engages our imagination.

The Church, in general has neglected to harness the power of the imagination. The world on the other hand constantly influences our imagination through suggestive TV commercials, printed advertisements and so on. Imagination is an important part of our being. Our imagination influences our behaviour and the decisions we make. They influence our perspective of life and determine our self-esteem. Many people suffer from a poor self-image (or a poor self 'imagination') or a self-image that has bound them with fear of people, fear of the unknown, fear of taking risks, or a self-image that fills them with a sense of inferiority and so on. However, when we meditate in the Word of God and begin to visualise (or imagine) ourselves as who God says we are, our self-image begins to change. In fact, not only our self-image but our whole perspective of life and the circumstances around us begin to change.

There is a very familiar Old Testament incident found in Numbers 13 that serves as a good illustration here. With the promise of giving them the land of Canaan as an inheritance, the Lord had led His people out of bondage from Egypt. In preparation to enter the Promised Land, the Lord directed Moses to send 12 men, each one a leader from the 12 tribes, to spy the Land. The 12 men spent 40 days searching through the Land. They then returned and presented their report. All of them agreed that the Land was fruitful

and flourishing. However, 10 of them were afraid of the giants who lived in the Land. They said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we . . . the land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants . . . and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight" (Numbers 13:31–33). Only two of them brought a positive report and said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it" (Numbers 13:30). All of these 12 men must have seen the same giants, but the way each one reacted was different. Two of them were confident because they remembered that the Lord was with them (Numbers 14:6–9). The other 10 let their negative imagination get the better of them. It was what they saw with their mind's eye that weakened them. They pictured themselves to be like tiny grasshoppers before the giants. This filled them with fear and even robbed them of their confidence in God. Sad to say, many Christians go through circumstances of life like these 10 men. What they see with their mind's eye—their imagination—hinders them from living a life of faith and enjoying the rich blessings of the Lord. However, through the discipline of meditation, we are able to paint fresh pictures on the walls of our imagination.

It is interesting to note that in many places in Scripture, especially the Old Testament, God deals with what we see. He gave His covenant people an ordinance in the Old Testament saying, "Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes" (Deuteronomy 11:18; See also Deuteronomy 6:8; Exodus 13:9,16). At one point, the people actually

practised this by tying portions of Scripture to their left hand and around their foreheads. One of the meanings of the word 'sign' is 'visible illustration.' God wanted His people to have a visible reminder of His Word and what He had done for them. God wanted to influence what they saw, because what they saw would trigger their memories (memories = the door of our imagination that allows us to travel into the past) to recollect the works of the Lord. While we do not have such a practice in the New Testament, we personally feel that we should have the Word of God painted on the walls of our imaginations, so that we can constantly 'see' and be reminded of God's rich promises. In a familiar Old Testament passage, the Lord says, "My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes" (Proverbs 4:20,21a). Once again, we find an instruction that deals with the importance of constantly 'seeing' the Word. We believe that in one sense, this deals with what we imagine, visualise and picture in our minds.

Confession—Saying What God Has Said

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

Here, the Lord was instructing Joshua to meditate "day and night." Notice that He began by saying, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth." In other words, the Lord was telling Joshua that the words contained in the Book of the Law were to be a part of his speech continually. Therefore, as a part of the process of meditation, we are to let the words of Scripture be "in our mouth," that is, we are to speak/repeat/recite words of Scripture. As

explained in the first part of our study, this was the practice of the Hebrew people. During meditation, they quietly repeated Scripture texts in a soft, droning sound, while bowing or rocking back and forth, utterly abandoning outside distractions.

In the New Testament, we are introduced to the words 'confess' and 'confession.' These are very important words in the Christian faith. Salvation becomes real only when we confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus and believe in our hearts that God has raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9). Further, the New Testament teaches us about the confession of our sins (1 John 1:9) and about the confession of our faith (Hebrews 3:1). Of the two Greek words that are translated 'confess' or 'confession,' the word '*homologeō*' (pronounced *hom-ol-og-eh'-o*, Strong's #3670) is more commonly used and it literally means, "to speak the same thing, to assent, accord, agree with." We chose to use the word 'confession' to describe this third aspect of meditation because when the Lord instructs us to repeat/recite/speak His Word, in effect He is instructing us to 'confess' His Word. He is telling us to "speak the same thing," to say what His Word says, to have our words "agree with" His Word.

Let us say that we are meditating in the Word, specifically on the Scriptures found in Isaiah 53:4 and Matthew 8:17. These verses relate how Christ provided for our healing through His 'substitutionary' work on the Cross. We CONTEMPLATE on what these verses mean and how they apply to us. We VISUALISE these Scriptures as being true in our lives. We 'imagine' and see ourselves free from sickness, healed of all pain, whole and perfectly healthy. As a part of our meditation, we CONFESS these verses. We say in

a soft yet audible voice: "Surely He has borne my sicknesses and carried my pains. Jesus Himself took my infirmities and bore my sicknesses." We repeat this many times over. Or we may wish to "speak to ourselves" about what these Scriptures mean. In my own times of meditation, sometimes I may "preach" the Word to myself. At other times, I may confess the words of Scripture in prayer to God. For example, as we are meditating on these verses, we pray and say, "Father, I thank you for your Word. Thank you Father that according to these verses, Jesus surely bore my sicknesses and carried my pains. He took all my infirmities and bore my sicknesses. Thank you Father, that I therefore need not bear sickness and disease in my body."

Confessing the Word in this manner has a tremendous effect on our lives. It reinforces the Word of God in our inner man. Our faith is built up because faith comes through hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). When we confess the Word in this manner, we are in effect hearing the Word. The consistent practice of confessing the Word will surely change the way we speak. In fact, when the Lord instructs us to keep His Word in our mouth continually, it implies that anything that contradicts what His Word says should not be a part of our speech.

[Please note: There are many other aspects of confession as taught in the New Testament that we are not addressing here].

The Word Is Near You

"For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you

should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it" (Deuteronomy 30:11–14).

The Word is always “very near” us if we have endeavoured to lay up His Word in our hearts. The heart is like a big repository where we can store the Word of God. When we discipline ourselves to meditate in the Word and lay up His Word in our hearts, then we have ready access to His Word anywhere, at any time. We can draw out of the deposit of the Word in our hearts by the words of our mouth. We speak out what we have put in there. When the Word occupies our mouths and our hearts, it becomes “very near” to us. This enables us to meditate in the Word of God almost anywhere and at any time. Ideally, we would desire a quiet place away from disturbance where we can sit and meditate with the Bible open before us. However, if we have laid up His Word in our hearts, then we are also able to meditate in the Word while walking down a busy street or driving along the highway. On many occasions, whether I am lying down, or walking through a shopping mall, or driving to work, I meditate in the Word of God. I focus my attention on a particular Scripture or perhaps many Scriptures, or even a particular theme conveyed in Scripture. I may use any combination of the three aspects—contemplation, visualisation and confession— as I meditate at any given time.

The Biblical Purpose in Meditation

“O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see your power and Your glory. Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul shall be satisfied as with

marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips. When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches” (Psalm 63:1–6).

Scriptural meditation is primarily a time of close communion with the Lord. The Psalmist, in the passage quoted above, expresses his intense longing for God. His desire for God moved him to seek God in the sanctuary and prompted him to praise God with uplifted hands and joyful lips. It moved him to meditate in the Lord through the quietness of the night. Similarly, out of the intense longing of our hearts for intimacy with God, we allow our thoughts and speech to be focused entirely on the Lord. As we move into deep meditation in the Word, we move away from simply analysing the Word with our intellect to a time where we commune with God. The Word becomes “spirit and life,” active and energetic. It becomes the Word that God is speaking to us directly in the present time. It becomes a time where the Lord does a work deep within us, changing us in our inner being through His energised Word. During this time, we are able to respond to what the Lord speaks and does in our hearts. We are able to express repentance, faith, joy, praise and gratitude in and to the Lord, based on His Word. Either through deep inner prayers, or whispered words, or strongly affirmed confessions, we release our thoughts, feelings, desires and convictions to the Lord. It is a time of sweet communion.

The Effects of Meditation

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:3–5).

A good majority of the challenges that the Christian has to contend with are listed above. These are “strongholds,” “arguments,” “every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God” and “every thought.” While we will not attempt an explanation on each of these, we would like to comment here that all of these areas of conflict have to do with issues surrounding the Christian’s mind. The Christian’s mind is a battlefield. And God has given us weapons to wage a successful warfare, so that we can experience victory in each of these areas of conflict. The problem, however, is that many people who are born into the faith still continue on with strongholds, imaginations, reasoning and thoughts that are opposed to the knowledge of God (as given to us in the written Word of God). Consequently, many remain defeated and in bondage in many areas of their life.

Meditation in the Word, although not a cure-all for the different challenges that confront a Christian, is a very important discipline that helps us in dealing with all of the above areas of conflict in the Christian’s mind. Strongholds can be “pulled down” through the disciplined practice of meditation in the Word. A person who has been meditating in the Word of God will find it easier to bring imaginations, reasoning and thoughts, captive to the knowledge of God (the Word of God).

Consistent meditation in the Word results in a renewed mind, renewed speech and renewed faith. Our thought patterns, our self-image, our self-esteem, and other aspects of our personhood that depend on the condition of our minds, begin to change. We become positive, confident and hopeful about life and our future. We are lifted from being people without a vision to being bold and

aggressive dreamers. We begin to speak with a 'renewed' vocabulary. Instead of being bound in conversations of poverty, defeat and self-pity, we speak out of strong faith in God. The continued sowing and watering of the Word in our hearts through meditation, produces in us a vibrant faith in God.

The Fruits of Meditation

"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; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper" (Psalm 1:1–3).

God's Word is the miracle seed. It has the potential to produce. The seed of the Word when sown in our hearts will cause the good pleasure of God to be accomplished in our lives. It is through the process of meditation that we sow and nurture the seed of God's Word in our hearts. The seed will germinate and produce fruit in its due time. The consistent practice of meditation is, therefore, an important link in the process of making the promises of God a manifested reality.

Consider some of the fruits that the Word of God can produce in our lives. The Word is that incorruptible seed which along with the action of the Spirit causes the new birth in our lives (1 Peter 1:23). The Word is like medicine that can bring healing to every part of our body (Proverbs 4:20–22; Psalm 107:20). The entrance of God's Word brings insight, understanding and wisdom (Psalm 119:98–100,130). The Word causes prosperity and success (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:3). The Word causes spiritual growth and maturity (Acts 20:32). And then there are the many blessings of God that

He has given to us in His Word. All of these can be produced in our lives if we will sow and nurture these seeds through meditation in the Word.

A man who lives a godly life and consistently meditates in the Word of God is like a well-watered tree. His roots are connected to a continual supply of nourishment and refreshing. This is what happens when we consistently meditate in the Word. The 'roots' of our spirit are blessed with an endless supply of nourishment and refreshing. Our lives become fruitful and productive.

Developing the Discipline of Meditation

A daily discipline

"Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97).

We want to encourage you to develop a daily discipline of meditation in God's Word. Let this be a habit, even a godly 'addiction.' Meditating in the Word is a discipline, which implies that we do this even when we do not feel like it, or even if it may seem that we are too busy for it. On the other hand, we must do this out of pure delight in God's Word. We love the Lord and therefore we cherish His Word. This moves us into times where we give God's Word undivided attention through meditation.

In times of special need

"Princes also sit and speak against me, but Your servant meditates on Your statutes. Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors. Let the proud be ashamed, for they treated me wrongfully with falsehood; but I will meditate on your precepts" (Psalm 119:23,24,78).

There have been and continues to be many times, when I am confronted with different struggles, challenges, questions and concerns. In such times, in addition to praying in the Spirit, I attempt to meditate in Scriptures that address the particular matter. My mind may be confused, full of questions and unsure. But I go to the Scriptures that reveal God's thoughts on the subject. I meditate on them. These bring peace, quietness and assurance in my heart. Other times, I may be taking up a particular challenge and I know that I will have to draw additional strength and encouragement from the Lord. During such times, I once again turn to Scriptures that are relevant to the situation and meditate on them. The Scriptures become a source of confidence and strength. All of us can avail of such blessings.

A purposeful exercise

"My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your Word" (Psalm 119:148).

Meditation in the Word is not a meaningless exercise, neither is it only for the deeply spiritual. It is for all of us to practise. In a world (even the Christian world) that prefers quick fixes, and instant miracles and so on, the subject of a developing a spiritual discipline may not be a popular one. We are, however, encouraged to exercise ourselves in spiritual things (1 Timothy 4:7). Exercise is a discipline. And there may be times when discipline (self-discipline) may not be an easy thing. It may even require some sacrifice. However, the rewards of discipline are rich and enduring. May you be one of those who will enjoy meditating in the Word and reap the rich rewards of doing so!

Notes

Do You Know the GOD Who Loves You?

About 2000 years ago, God came into this world as a man. His name is Jesus. He lived a perfectly sinless life. Since Jesus was God in flesh, everything He said and did revealed God to us. The words He spoke were the very words of God. The things He did were the actions of God. Jesus performed many miracles on the earth. He healed the sick and suffering. He opened blind eyes, unstopped deaf ears, made the lame walk and healed every kind of sickness and disease. He fed the hungry by miraculously multiplying a few loaves of bread, calmed the storm and did many other wonderful things.

All of these actions reveal to us that God is a good God who wants people to be well, whole, healthy and happy. God wants to meet the needs of people.

So, why would God decide to become a man and step into our world? Why did Jesus come?

All of us have sinned and done things that are unacceptable before the God who created us. Sin has its consequences. Sin is like a great unsurpassable wall between God and us. Sin separates us from God. It prevents us from knowing and having a meaningful relationship with the One who created us. Therefore, many of us try to fill this void with other things.

Another consequence of our sins is eternal separation from God. In God's court, the penalty for sin is death. Death is eternal separation from God in hell.

But, the good news is that we can be free from sin and be restored to God. The Bible says, "For the wages [payment] of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Jesus paid for the sins of the whole world, when He died on the cross. Then three days later He rose again, showed Himself alive to many and then went back into heaven.

God is a God of love and mercy. He does not wish that any person be lost in hell. And so He came, to provide a way for the entire human race to be free from sin and its lasting consequences. He came to save sinners—to rescue people like you and me from sin and eternal death.

To receive this free forgiveness of sins, the Bible tells us that we have to do just one thing—accept what the Lord Jesus Christ did on the cross and believe in Him wholeheartedly.

"Through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43).

"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

You too can receive forgiveness and cleansing for your sins if you will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The following is a simple prayer to help you make a decision to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and what He has done for you on the cross. This prayer will help you express your acceptance of what Jesus has done for you and receive forgiveness and cleansing for your sins. This prayer is only a guideline. You can also pray in your own words.

Dear Lord Jesus, today, I have understood what You did for me on the cross. You died for me: You shed Your precious blood and paid the penalty for my sins, so that I could be forgiven. The Bible tells me that whoever believes in You will receive forgiveness for their sins.

Today, I make a decision to believe in You and to accept what You did for me, by dying for me on the cross and rising again from the dead. I know I cannot save myself by my own good works, neither can any other human save me.

I cannot earn forgiveness for my sins.

Today, I believe in my heart and say with my mouth that You died for me, You paid the penalty for my sins, You rose again from the dead, and by faith in You, I receive forgiveness and cleansing for my sins.

Thank You Jesus. Help me to love You, to know You more and to be faithful to You. Amen.

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All Peoples Church & World Outreach, Bangalore, India, has extended its ministry by launching its Bible College & Ministry Training Center (APC-BC&MTC) in August 2005. APC-BC&MTC equips, trains and releases faithful men and women to impact villages, towns and cities in India and other nations, for Jesus Christ.

APC-BC&MTC is a member institution of the Apostolic Council for Educational Accountability, Colorado Springs, USA, (www.acea-schools.org).

APC-BC&MTC offers 3 programs:

- The two-year **Bible College** program is for full-time students and provides spiritual and practical ministry training along with academic excellence. The program is designed to equip and empower students to successfully fulfil the call of God upon their lives. Students receive a **Diploma in Theology & Christian Ministry** upon successful completion.
- The two-year **School of Ministry** program is for working professionals. Students receive a **Diploma in Christian Ministry** upon successful completion.
- The **Practical Ministry Training** is for graduates from the Bible College who desire to undergo this training. Those completing one or more years receive a **Certificate in Practical Ministry** indicating the duration of involvement.

Classes are conducted in English. The faculty comprises of both trained and anointed teachers of the Word. All faculty and students have access to APC's Study Centre and Library (SC&L). The SC&L contains books, teaching tapes, videos, VCD's/DVD's and music CD's.

About All Peoples Church

At All Peoples Church, our vision is to be salt and light in the city of Bangalore and a voice to the nation of India and to the nations of the world.

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One very important element in our Christian walk that determines the quality of our entire Christian experience is the Word of God. Whether we walk in victory or not, and the measure of blessing we actually experience is greatly influenced by the measure of God's Word that we are able to receive and consistently enforce in our daily living.

It is true, that at first the Scriptures may seem lifeless, perhaps even boring for the casual reader. But to those who have received an understanding of its inherent power and the place that God Himself has assigned His Word to have in the life of His people, the Word is alive! They have rested their entire present and future on what the Scriptures say. Even when they cannot see, touch, hear, smell or taste—they still 'know' because the Word has produced in them a confident assurance, and a strong and unshakable conviction.

Our hearts' desire is that each one, to whom we have the privilege of reaching through the medium of this book, will be brought to this confident assurance in their walk with the Lord. If you have already attained some degree of understanding in the Word, we desire that you will be strengthened and encouraged even more.

Ashish Raichur

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COVER FRONT INNER

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