



If you are a true Christian, you want to grow and become more like Christ. God Himself implants that desire into the heart of every one of His children born into His family through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, many Christians have remained spiritually immature. If you are reading this, that's a good indication that you want to grow. And let me tell you—that greatly pleases God. He is smiling down on you right now!

However, no matter where we are in our spiritual walk—young, immature, or maturing—we all need to continue to grow. We will always fall short of being perfect like Jesus.

But how do you do actually grow spiritually? One key to this growth process is allowing the Lord to show you *specifically* where you fall short.

We all fall short, but not necessarily in the *same* place.

We need the Lord to tell us *what* we need to change if we're going to change. That requires time alone with God where you allow Him to show you these areas that need rectifying—a time of self-evaluation and soul-searching.

Soul-searching is really a type of prayer. You're asking God to search your heart and help you improve.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.
(Ps 139:23-24 NLT)

The original word here for *search* means to dig deep. King David is asking God to bring his deep-lying parts—his inner-most being—to the surface so he can see where he isn't in line with God.

Proper self-evaluation takes a willing, open, humble and yielded heart—with the attitude: “Whatever You show me, Lord, I will address and change with Your help.” That's in essence what David means in the last part of verse 24. He's asking, “Don't just show me, Lord, but lead me onto the right path.”

The Lord doesn't reveal our sin and shortcomings to beat us up, but so that we would deal with the problem and change, thereby becoming more like His beautiful Son.

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (Jn 8:32)

The problem is most of us don't like to self-evaluate. We think it takes too much time and effort, or we may not know how. I am here to help. I want to pass onto you what the Lord has taught me about this extremely important practice for spiritual growth.

Aside from time and a lack of knowhow, there are a few more reasons why we don't put out the effort for deep introspection:

1. We don't like looking at ourselves.

We're afraid of what we might find. Deep down we know we are guilty and fall exceedingly short of God's holiness. We know we deserve judgement. None of us like feeling guilty or admitting that we may be, at least in part, the cause of our difficulties. We'd rather blame others, our circumstances or even God Himself for our distress. The good news is if you are a child of the King, you need not fear condemnation.

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

(1 Jn 4:18)

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

(Rom 8:1)

You don't have to fear punishment for any sin if Jesus is your Savior. God the Father punished Him, His own Son, for your sins. In His perfect love for you, He will be kind and gentle as you go through this self-examination process. So instead of letting guilt keep you in the dark, fall down in utter worship for His mercy!

2. It can be painful, as we remember hurts done to us or by us. Most of us avoid pain at all costs!
3. We don't think it's all that important or worth the effort.

I'm here to tell you that it is very important and worth the effort!

Why? Because soul-searching:

- Leads to a greater intimacy with your Savior
- Helps you discover the underlying cause of difficulties, repeated sin issues, insecurities and how to change and be proactive
- Leads to a greater understanding of yourself—strengths, weaknesses, talents, makeup, spiritual gifts, and your God-given purpose
- Helps you to sin less

- Leads to a greater understanding of God's character and ways
- Helps you accept and submit to God when you don't understand what He's doing
- Helps you determine God's *specific* will for your life (Ps 139:16)
- Renews your mind
The Holy Spirit will reveal wrong thought patterns and enable you to replace them with His truth.
- Leads to better relationships with others
- Equips you for better service
- Puts a smile on your Savior's face
- Produces a fruitful, meaningful, and joyous life

As you can see, the benefits far outweigh the effort!

Purpose of Self-Evaluation

The purpose of these extended times of reflection is to attain solutions and/or clarity about a situation, self, or God. They are times of deep thinking in order to live a life that is God-honoring and more fulfilling. Most of us are familiar with the Serenity Prayer:¹

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.

We need these periods of self-evaluation guided by the Holy Spirit if we want this wisdom that leads to serenity! We need to give deep and careful thought to the way we are living.

*Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways."
(Hag 1:5)*

Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD. (Lam 3:40)

I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes. (Ps 119:59)

The How

Do It Right

Since it's going to take some effort, we want to make sure we do this right. As mentioned above, to have a good productive time of self-evaluation you need a willing, humble, and open heart.

And you need an *open Bible*.

God can and does speak directly into our hearts, but He primarily speaks to us through His Word. And He never contradicts what He says in His Word!

Left to our own analysis, our feelings may lead us to erroneous conclusions. We'll wind up frustrated with ourselves, doubtful about God's faithfulness, and unchanged. That's why it's good to have someone else to talk and think it through with you. That's why many people turn to a friend or counselor for help. But why not turn *first* to the BEST Counselor who is residing within you? He, the Holy Spirit, will lead you into all truth (Jn 16:13).

Instead of confiding only in others, confide in God. And you know what? God will reciprocate and confide in you. He will tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know (Jer 33:3).

The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.
(Ps 25:14)

The Lord taught me a long time ago that I should go to Him *first* when issues arise—not a friend or counselor. If I still need help after consulting Him, I will confide in someone else—but always with the Lord and His truths in mind.

[Read an excerpt from my book, *Our Knowable God*, on this astounding fact that God wants to confide in us at the end of this document.]

Timing

Although typically prompted by difficulties, we can have these times of soul-searching anytime. A time of deep reflection can be planned or spontaneous. And it doesn't have to be only a single and long event. It may include that, but we should be thinking about the things God impressed upon us during our time with Him as we go about the rest of our day. In fact, without applying what you learned, nothing will change. You will not grow.

We need to develop the *habit* of thinking more deeply—especially about God. The Lord will train your mind if you let Him (Rom 12:2). Developing a consistent quiet time with the Lord will greatly help you in this endeavor.

A 10 Step Process

These steps are simply a guideline to get you into the habit of thinking deeply and going to God for answers—no matter what the question may be. As you go through this time of introspection, remember the reason why you are doing this: it's so that you can become more like Christ.

1. Solitude

Set aside at least 30 minutes to be alone with God.

2. Get your heart right before God

Spend time praising and acknowledging God so your focus will shift from you to God. Humble yourself before your most holy God, and ask Him to open your eyes and heart as you search for applicable truths and practical tips for your issue. Believe He will answer you. Ask Him to help you be honest with yourself.

3. Identify the problem

In order to overcome a problem, you have to root out the underlying cause with truths aimed at your specific problem. That's why you need to first identify it—in detail. Get as specific as you can.

Express what you are feeling (write it down if possible—see #5) to God. He already knows (Ps 139), but it's helpful to get it out. Ask penetrating questions like:

- What am I worried about, why am I depressed, discouraged, etc.
- What do I think might be the reason for my distress?
- Why do I always respond like this?
- Is my thinking based on fact or feeling? Are they based on the Bible or my own idea of what the Bible says?
- Has God been trying to get my attention?

Obviously, the type of questions you ask will depend upon your specific situation. The Holy Spirit will guide you. Trust Him in this. For an example of a specific list, see this blog: [How to Make the Most of Your Times in the Pit](#)

A word of caution: deal with only *one* issue at a time. Otherwise, you will become overwhelmed and quit. If there are multiple issues, pick the one that is most pressing to go deeper.

4. Get into God's word for yourself

See what God says on the matter. Search the Scriptures. It's ok to read a book on the issue, but if you dig into God's treasure chest yourself, you'll be amazed at the gems you will find! Try doing a topical word study. With all of the available free online tools today, it is easier than ever. Here are a few internet sources:

<http://biblegateway.com/>

<https://biblehub.com/>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/>

Use a dictionary and thesaurus to look up definitions, synonyms, and antonyms to help in your word study. For example, if you have financial concerns do a word search on money, treasure, and possessions.

When you look up the verses, be sure to read the context, i.e., read the entire paragraph or even the whole chapter. This will add greatly to your understanding and help prevent any misinterpretation of the verse's true meaning.

5. Use pen and paper

If using the internet, don't just copy and paste verses into a word document but write them down in a journal. I am not suggesting you write out every verse on the topic but the ones that impress upon you the most.

Also write down any thoughts or insights. The Holy Spirit will give them to you if you are open to receive. Don't worry about grammar or how good you are in expressing your inner thoughts. This process will be easier for some than others, but it *will become* easier for you the more you do it.

A cheap simple notebook works fine, you don't *need* a pretty journal.

It is vital to do this and not just think about the wonderful things you are discovering. There are at least 2 good reasons for writing it down:

- The very act of writing engages many parts of your brain, thereby embedding the facts more deeply into your mind.
- Gives you a record of your study and time with God. You don't want to forget what the Lord tells you. Even if it is very memorable, you will forget some of the important and emotional details of that "revelation."

At the very least, type out your thoughts and verses. I recommend you read this blog: [Write it Down: 5 Powerful Persuasions for Pen and Paper](#)

6. Meditate

Think deeply on the verses the Holy Spirit impresses upon you. Memorize key Scriptures, or at least write them down on index cards so you can review them throughout the day and/or before bed.

7. Review

After a few days or weeks, go back and reread what you wrote. This will enable you to see patterns and key truths for your specific issue more readily. One of my favorite things to do is to reread my journals.

8. Give it time

Don't expect God to reveal everything to you at once. Don't rush. It's a process, not a one-time event.

That being said, there have been many times when God has immediately revealed at least one piece of the puzzle to me. The more you self-evaluate and do this process, the more you'll be able to recognize when God is leading you into one of His freeing truths. I believe this is due to our willingness to let God dig deep into the innermost thoughts and attitudes of our minds and hearts. It's learning to be increasingly honest with God and yourself. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet 5:5).

(Free resource: [How to Know What Gd is Saying to You](#))

Even when you don't get answers right away, it is time well spent. View this time *as not just searching for answers but as searching for **Him***. God is pleased when you seek His truth, and He will often reward you with an incredible sense of His presence.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Heb 12:6)

Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD.... (Jer 29:12-14)

9. Apply

Whatever truth(s) God shows you, believe Him and act in faith by applying that truth(s) to your life. If you don't know how to do that, it's okay. The Holy Spirit will help you not only understand the truth, but to carry it out. He is an incredible Teacher and Enabler!

From my experience, this is how I believe God helps you and I to apply His Word in the nitty gritty of life:

- The Holy Spirit present you with opportunities to live out a revealed truth as you go about your day.
- In that very moment, He will bring that verse or principle to the forefront of your mind.
- Then you can choose to act on it or ignore it.
- If you are having difficulty in believing that truth for yourself, speak it to your soul in that very moment. Do so emphatically, with conviction, and out loud if possible. Keep repeating it. Cry out to God to give you the grace to believe and act in faith. You will not act in faith unless you believe it to be a fact. Like the father of a demon-possessed son said to Jesus...

“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mk 9:24)

Trust that God will bring the pertinent principles to the forefront of your mind when needed and the power to choose His way. However, the more you meditate on His truths, the quicker and more effectively you will be able to recognize and implement key truths in the situation at hand and not give into old patterns of thinking and behaving.

For example, if you have a tendency to be worried about finances, He may give you an unexpected bill to test you. At that moment, He may remind you of His truth in Philippians 4:6-8. Then it'll be your choice to believe, and act in faith or become frantic with fear. You can read how I did exactly that in my [egg story](#).

10. Praise and thank God

Praise God for every single victory along the way. Tell others what God is doing as well.

And when you fail—confess, repent, and thank God for His mercy. Refuse to let Satan keep you in a state of defeat. Instead, ask God to help you see *why* you failed, so you can have victory the next time.

Conclusion

I have used this Holy Spirit guided self-evaluation process for many years now, resulting in many victories over sinful tendencies and attitudes. You *too* can have victory because God's principles work for all who apply them. Yes, it takes time and effort and it may be painful at times. But the more you internalize God's principles into your being, the more they will become *part* of your thinking, feeling, and acting. Those truths will then have moved down from your head to your heart. You are being transformed by the renewing of your mind (Rom 12:2) into the likeness of your beautiful Savior! As a result, you will be living the abundant life that Jesus promised in John 10:10. It will be worth it! *He* promises!

Get started on your journey to this fuller life by doing some soul-searching. Begin by praying with King David's words...

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God.

Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.

No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame, but they will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse.

Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.

Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.

Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O Lord.

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.

All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant.

For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.

Who, then, is the man that fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him.

He will spend his days in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land.

The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.

My eyes are ever on the Lord, for only he will release my feet from the snare.

Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.

The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish. Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins.

See how my enemies have increased and how fiercely they hate me! Guard my life and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you.

(Ps 25, emphasis added)

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OUR KNOWABLE GOD

Learning How to Relate to Our Invisible Lord

by Rose Noland

(Excerpt)

Chapter 5

CONFIDING IN EACH OTHER

Two little girls whispering and giggling as they share secrets with each other—how cute! Two adult lady friends sharing confidences—how precious! Two male friends sharing difficulties—how rare! A married couple sharing their hearts—how very special!

What are these secrets? They are our innermost thoughts, our dreams and desires, our weaknesses and struggles—our true selves, difficult circumstances we are facing, things about us that we might not want the whole world to know.

Confiding is a deep level of communication. It entails total honesty and transparency with each other. It's where one person pours out her heart and soul on a matter, and the other one listens, cares, and feels free to speak words of truth, but always in a sensitive manner. Confiding in

someone only happens if you trust in that person and feel safe with him or her. You know that person will accept you and not betray a confidence. Nancy DeMoss explains, “One of the characteristics of an intimate friendship is the freedom to discuss any issue and to ask for the other’s opinion or input on matters that concern us.”ⁱ If you have such a friend, count yourself blessed!

Why would we want to confide in anyone? After all, there is a risk in opening up to someone. There is a chance of misunderstanding, judgment, rejection, or betrayal. I know I’m a deep thinker and too serious at times. On occasion, I have sensed people distancing themselves from me because of the deep discussions about God that I love to have. And how many of us have been betrayed and deeply wounded by those whom we thought could be trusted? But we were made for intimacy with God and others; we desire it and we need it. We are not complete until we are in a growing relationship with God and others. For that to happen there must be trust, honesty, openness, acceptance, and commitment to the relationship.

I’m sure many of us are aware that God wants us to confide in Him, but does He really want to *confide in us*? Let’s see what the Scriptures say:

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. (Jer 33:3)

The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them. (Ps 25:14)

If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you. (Pr 1:23)

For the LORD detests a perverse man but takes the upright into his confidence. (Pr 3:32)

So the answer is yes. Through the Holy Spirit, deep spiritual truths are given and discerned (1 Cor 2:10-14). Now, although God may reveal truths to us while we’re in sin (to restore the relationship), or even to those who are not in Christ (to bring them into a relationship with Him), He communicates on a deeper level when the following are true:

- We are one of His children.
- We call and seek after God’s wisdom.
It is not automatic. Proverbs 2:1-11 tells us that the knowledge of God must be diligently sought after, to “search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God” (vv 4-5 NKJV).
- We are walking uprightly with God, obeying Him, keeping short accounts (i.e. confess sin when convicted), and being yielded to Him.

GOD'S PART

Our Lord desires to be known by us in a deep and profound way. He wants us to increasingly understand truths about Him and to delight in discovering new or deeper things about Him. He also wants to share His heart with us—His cares, concerns, and desires for our lives, our loved ones, our ministries, our church, and our country. He wants to reveal His purposes for our lives, and He delights in us and takes pleasure in our relationship with Him. What an amazing thought! (More on this in chapter 6.)

Let's examine those five requirements needed for confiding in one another: trustworthiness, honesty, openness, acceptance, and commitment.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

Can God truly be trusted? Over and over again the Bible tells us to trust in the Lord. Why is it so hard to trust Him? Well, He's not visible for one thing, and many of us have been burned in the past. When I was a new believer I kept hearing that phrase, "Just trust in the Lord." But no one ever really explained it to me—I never learned the specifics of what, how, and why. So one day, early on in my devotional journey, I asked the Lord, "What does it really mean to trust You? I don't understand." My wonderful Lord has been showing me ever since.

The definition of trust is "reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, etc., of a person or thing; confidence."ⁱⁱ Trust in the Lord starts off small and moves to greater levels or degrees as He shows His trustworthiness over time. Repeatedly through various trials and circumstances, God has proven His faithfulness to me. He has always lived up to His promises. Give God time, and He will prove the same to you. When we know someone's character, we will know whether or not we can trust that person. We can trust God because His character is perfect, pure, and right. Take the time to find out who God is and you will discover He is faithful and loving; He knows what He is doing and has the power to carry it out. We will not be disappointed as it tells us in Psalm 22:5: "in you they trusted and were not disappointed."

There are many resources and Bible verses that talk about trusting God. I encourage you to read and study them. See Appendix 3 for some verses to get you started.

HONESTY

God is truth and cannot lie (Jn 14:6; Titus 1:2), but He is not brutally honest. In other words, He doesn't show us all our sin at one time. He is kind, tender, compassionate, and understanding. I have found this to be true in my life. When I was a new believer, God did not reveal all my sin blatantly before me. He showed me only what I could bear to see at the time. I confessed all the obvious sins, but it wasn't until later that God began to show me more and more of what wasn't pleasing to Him. I am very glad that, although God is honest, He is also tender and gentle.

OPENNESS

God is so far above us. His thoughts and ways are far beyond ours (Is 55:8-9). Yet as we have already seen, He does reveal Himself to us. He will “open” up more and more if we are willing and approach Him on His terms. As we saw earlier in Proverbs 3:32, “the Lord...takes the upright into His confidence.” We have a holy, pure, and perfect God. It makes sense that the more upright we are and the more we are like His Son, Jesus, then the purer we will be and the closer we can get to our Lord. Jesus furthers this idea in John 15:1-17 where He explains that He is the vine and we are the branches. If we abide in Him, obey Him, and love Him, then our joy will be complete. Verse 15 says, “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” (NKJV). Wow! What a promise!

How much God will reveal Himself depends largely on us. Psalm 103:7 says, “He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel” (NKJV), and in Exodus 33:11, “The LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (NKJV). Moses knew God and His ways intimately. The Israelites only saw His deeds. They were not willing to get closer to Mount Sinai where God was, but were content to let Moses communicate God’s desires to them (Ex 20:18-21). It sounds a lot like where many Christians are today, letting the pastors and teachers spoon feed the Word of God to them, but not willing to delve into the meat of Scriptures for themselves. Why? It is because they have not tasted and seen that the Lord is good (Ps 34:8), and mainly because it takes time and effort. Attitudes such as, “It’s too hard!” or “I don’t know how” permeate our churches. What a shame! And what they are missing! Yes, there’s a cost to getting close to God, as there is with all good relationships, but consider the cost Christ paid in order for us to be able to enter the Most Holy of Holies. Our price just doesn’t compare.

ACCEPTANCE

God accepts us for who we are. He knows all our weaknesses and failures, yet still loves us. We will talk at length about this in chapter 9.

COMMITMENT

God will always hold to His commitments because He is unchanging (Mal 3:6) and cannot go back on His Word.

“My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David.” (Ps 89:34-35 NKJV)

God’s demonstration of His love for us by dying on the cross while we were still sinners (Rom 5:8) is proof of His commitment to us as individuals and our relationship with Him. He is committed to our ultimate good. He also says that He will never leave us or forsake us (Heb 13:5). We will discuss God’s faithfulness at length in chapter 11.

OUR PART

So our God once again does His part perfectly in the relationship. How do we rate when it comes to these five requirements?

TRUSTWORTHINESS

We can learn to develop trust in God for He is trustworthy, but can we be trusted? Will we be faithful to use and apply what He has entrusted to us? Jesus uses the parable of the four soils (Mt 13:1-23; Mk 4:10-25; Lk 8:4-18) and the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30) to illustrate the principles of trustworthiness.

The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables:

"Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them."

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it." (Mt 13:10-17)

Jesus then goes on to clarify the parable itself; the seed is the Word of God. Look at the verses below:

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble ["honest" in NKJV] and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. (Lk 8:15)

But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. (Mt 13:23)

Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him. (Lk 8:18)

So we must listen carefully to what God tells us and then apply it diligently.

The parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30) has a similar message. If God reveals spiritual wisdom to us, and we do not respond by applying the truth to our lives, He will not reveal more. If we will not obey in the “little” things, why would He reveal the “bigger” things He wants us to do? It was like when I thought taking care of my mom was mundane and longed to do something big for Christ. I had to be obedient to that call first. Many Christians really do desire to do great things for our Lord, and that is pleasing to Him. But we need to prove ourselves trustworthy in the smaller, basic requests the Lord asks of us before we can move on to “bigger” things.

Regarding betraying a confidence, could there be times when the Lord tells us something He wants us to keep to ourselves? Yes, but since there aren’t any hidden sins or deep dark secrets with God, He will tell us to zip a lip for totally different reasons. For example, after Jesus’ transfiguration, He commanded, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead” (Mt 17:9 NKJV). Also the prophet was commanded to “seal up the words of this book” until it was time to reveal them (Dan 8:26).

I never would have thought that God would tell me something that He wouldn’t want me to share with others, but He did. Back sometime in 2008, before my husband’s cancer had metastasized, God gently and quietly told me that Ed would not be healed this side of heaven. I knew it was Him speaking to my heart because there was an uncanny sense of peace with it. If it had been my thought or something from Satan, I definitely would have been distraught! At first I wanted to deny it, but as time went on, the Lord confirmed it. I didn’t know when it would happen, only that it would. I also felt impressed to keep my mouth shut (a very hard thing for me to do!). I wanted so desperately to tell Ed, but I just knew it wasn’t the best thing for him. I believe God wanted me to keep quiet because it would have hurt Ed. That knowledge wouldn’t have helped him any in dealing with the cancer. What it did do was help me to prepare for being a widow. I look back and see this as a kindness from my Savior. Now that Ed’s in heaven, I’ve been given the freedom to speak about it.

So just as there are times when we receive news or information that may not be wise to disclose to other people, there may be times when God will tell us something that is for our ears only—at least for a time.

HONESTY AND OPENNESS

Lord, all my desire is before You; and my sighing is not hidden from You. (Ps 38:9 NKJV)

I cry out to the LORD with my voice.... I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble. (Ps 142:1-2 NKJV)

As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, we need to feel safe with someone in order to be honest and open with them. We can feel safe with God. Psalm 62:8 says, “Trust in the LORD at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.” A refuge is a place of

safety. We do not have to be afraid to cry out to our God. He accepts us. He will not cast out any who come to Him (Jn 6:37), nor will He betray our confidence as a human might do. He is kind and understanding, and He listens to our cries, complaints, anger, confusion, etc. with a sincere desire to help us. Therefore, we can be totally open with God. Look at the Psalms. They are full of open honesty. We can tell Him exactly how we feel about any given situation or problem—even if it's anger or despair—because He already knows all about us anyway (Ps 139:1-4). Although God doesn't need our opinion and input on a matter since He is all-knowing and all-wise, He allows us to express our ideas. It is helpful to us if we can express them, cry out to God, and vent them. Then, hopefully, we ask God to help us, strengthen us, forgive us, or change us: whatever it is we need. Half the time (or more) we don't even know what we really need or want. We're just hurting or unhappy with our present situation and need to verbalize it. Let me share with you one of the most precious moments of my entire life with the Lord. I can never recall this incident without getting choked up.

One day, I was on my knees praying and crying, leaning against the foot of the bed. I was hurting. I don't even remember the problem (probably something concerning my mom). Well, my precious, loving cat, Odie, jumped up on the bed and plopped down by my head, wanting to be petted. Then I heard God speak so clearly to my heart, "Just come to Me like this. Let Me love on you. You don't have to bring Me anything except yourself. Just let Me love on you like you love on Odie." My life has never been the same since. I needed to know that I was loved unconditionally. I didn't know that was my need, but my Savior did. If the Lord never revealed any more truth than that to me, it would have been sufficient for my undying devotion to Him for the rest of my life! The event is forever etched in my heart.

Looking back, I believe that from about that time on, my relationship with the Lord grew in leaps and bounds. I think it was because I finally knew I was safe with God and I could open up to Him. I used to be under the wrong impression that once I was saved I shouldn't ever be down or depressed. I thought that since I'm always supposed to have the joy of the Lord, it would be a sin to feel blue. That's not biblical thinking. As the Lord led me to read the Psalms, I saw over and over again the outpouring of the psalmists' heartaches, confusion, despairs, etc., as well as their praises of joy.

In many of the psalms we see the psalmist express not only his negative feelings to God, but also the truth he knew about God, and that lifted his spirits. The key point is that he didn't wallow in his negative emotions. I have been extra endowed with emotions, and I have made it my goal to learn how to control them and use them to honor my God rather than let them control me and lead me to sin against Him. Everyone can learn, along with the psalmist, not to be controlled by emotion, but to be guided by the Holy Spirit and His truths. Psalms 13, 31, 42, 73, and 77 are good examples. Let's look at one of them. Please read Psalm 73, and then follow below.

Verses 4-5 and 12 are not the truth, but they reflect the psalmist's perception.

Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. (vv 1-3)

They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man: they are not plagued by human ills. (vv 4-5)

This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth. (v 12)

His emotions continue to wrongly affect his thinking.

Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning. If I had said, “I will speak thus,” I would have betrayed your children. When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me. (vv 13-16)

He finally goes into God’s presence and sees the truth.

Till I entered the sanctuary of God: then I understood their final destiny. Surely you placed them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. (vv 17-18)

He admits that his feelings have been clouding his judgment and that he is sinning by harboring them.

When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. (vv 21-22)

Finally, he comes to the following conclusion:

Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds. (vv 23-28)

As you see, the psalmist is careful to state specifically what he knows.

- God is with him
- God will guide him
- God is his satisfaction and strength

- God's justice will be done

Notice how his spirits have changed to hope and praise and the desire to proclaim God's works.

By expressing his emotions to God, he is able to "get it off his chest" and then think more clearly. The same thing often happens when we talk or vent about a situation with a good friend. Emotions often cloud our thinking. They distort our perception of the truth or make us forget about it all together. Verbalizing and discussing them with a trusted confidant will help bring light into the situation. How much more so when we openly verbalize our thoughts and feelings to the God of light!

One word of caution, however: if you want to vent just for the sake of venting without the desire to find a solution to your problem or situation, then don't expect much. If you're going to God with just your complaints and not with a desire to improve, then you won't be listening to what He's trying to communicate to you. You will be "ever hearing, but never understanding" (Is 6:9).

Sometimes it is hard to open up to the Lord, for if we truly want to be helped the Lord will lead us to examine and evaluate why we are the way we are. Why do we feel _____? Why do we do _____ habitually? (You fill in the blanks.) We don't want to look at the ugliness of our sin. We don't want to expose the root of a habitual sin, a hurtful past, or an unforgiving and bitter heart under the revealing light of God's truths. It is painful. But if we are to be healed in the broken areas of our lives, we must allow God to do it! We must open up and lay ourselves bare before Him so He can show us how to fix it and "be transformed by the renewing" of our minds (Rom 12:2). Remember that He will be kind, gentle, and understanding as He reveals things to our willing and open hearts. As it tells us in Romans 2:4: "the kindness of God leads you to repentance;" and Proverbs 28:13: "He who covers up his transgressions will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes his sins shall obtain mercy" (Amplified). Look also at Psalm 139:

O LORD, you have searched me (thoroughly) and have known me. (v 1)

Search me [thoroughly], O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there is any wicked or hurtful way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (vv 23-24 Amplified)

In the first verse, David affirms that God already knows everything about him. In the last two verses, he asks God to show him his areas of sin and weakness and how to correct them. He humbles himself by wanting to change the areas in his life that are not pleasing to his Lord.

I know that I still have a lot of changing to do, but my Lord has drastically transformed me through this deep, soul-searching process. He has healed me in so many areas; I really am a new creature in Christ (2 Cor 5:17)! This way of life is *so* much better than the way I used to live:

- I no longer feel inadequate, but confident in Him.
- I no longer feel worthless, but have value in Him.

- I no longer feel anxious, but have peace and rest in Him.
- I no longer feel insignificant, but my life has meaning and purpose in Him.
- I no longer feel unloved, but I know the King of kings loves me!

Psalm 145:18 exhorts: “The LORD is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth” (NKJV). How about you? Will you open up to your loving, kind, and trustworthy Father and share with Him your deepest hurts, secrets, and desires? If you want healing and growth in your intimacy with your Savior— you’ll have to. Don’t be like the psalmist in Psalm 77:2 who refused to let his soul be comforted.

ACCEPTANCE

God accepts us just as we are, can we not just accept Him? Acceptance of someone means accepting that person for who he or she is. If we accept God’s character, then we will also accept His words—more on this in chapter 9.

COMMITMENT

If we want God to confide in us and reveal awesome truths about Himself, His ways, and His purposes, then we must be committed to living for Him, developing our relationship with Him, and doing whatever He tells us. One of my dearest pastors, in whom I confide when I need extra help, says that he will always make time for the people who will really listen and take his counsel. Let us really listen to what God tells us and apply it.

Being able to confide in one another in any type of relationship is truly satisfying. To know that you can be yourself, speak your deepest thoughts and desires, and discuss a troubling matter with no risk of rejection or betrayal gives you contentment, comfort, excitement, and feelings of love and belonging. If you have a human friend in whom you can confide, what a true treasure you have! But remember that in human relationships, none of these requirements of trust, honesty, openness, acceptance, and commitment will (or could) be met 100%. We are sinful creatures, living in a fallen world. Letdowns are inevitable. However, we have One who will never let us down, and His name is Jesus!

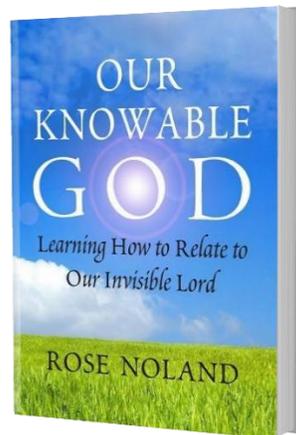
FOR FURTHER PONDERING

1. If you have a difficult time trusting God, read and meditate on the verses given in Appendix 3. What message does God give in these verses?
2. Has God revealed some truths to you that you haven’t yet applied? How will you apply them?

3. If you struggle with emotions controlling you, select one of the following psalms and describe the truths that helped the psalmist overcome his struggle. Psalm 13, 31, 42, 77. Can you do the same?
4. Are there any hurts, deep issues, or confusion that you have not “discussed” with God? Go to Him now with them. Allow sufficient time over the next few days, or even weeks, to deeply think, pray, and search the Scriptures about them. Allow your kind and tender God to search your heart and reveal hidden sins or wrong thinking. Record what the Lord shows you in a notebook or journal.
5. Do the same with any deep desires or needs.

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ⁱ Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *A Place of Quiet Rest* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2000), 73.

ⁱⁱ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/trust>, 10 Sept. 2010.