



God's
DIVINE
Plan

Eternal Walk Ministry

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Introduction

The Bible reveals God's divine plan and answers the following questions.

- Why does God exist as Father, Son, and Spirit?
- Why did God create the universe?
- Why did God throw Satan to earth?
- Why did God create humanity?
- Why did God create humanity in his image?

This book covers God's divine plan for living in this sinful, fallen world. The most critical aspect of God's plan is our part, reaping his blessings by living according to his plan. We know that God's blessings have no limit because he is faithful and he keeps his promises in order for his plan to succeed.

The final section of this book is about eternal life in heaven, which is our reward for living God's divine plan.

When we know the plan, we have understanding. For instance, when building a house, we look at the plan. Before we start laying the foundation, we already know what the finished product will be and what steps we need to take to produce it. The plan gives us direction and purpose for each step to reach

the finished design. It is the same with God's divine plan; every step through life has purpose and leads to our eternal home. God's plan is perfect and is meant for our good. In Romans 8:28, Paul reminds us of this: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Comfort and security come from knowing God's plan is unchangeable and perfect. He is with us every second, leading us through life toward our eternal home.

Why God Exists as Father, Son, and Spirit

God's divine plan begins by revealing himself in three persons: God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The following verses identify Christ as God and the Holy Spirit as God.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. (Col. 1:15–19)

Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "*Abba*, Father." (Gal. 4:6)

"Hear O' Israel the Lord our God, the Lord is one." (Deut. 6:4)

In this verse, God is referred to as one, yet God is represented by Father, Son, and Spirit. How can

God be three but also be one? This is one of the great mysteries of God. However, since we are creations with limitations, our finite minds may never fully understand this until we meet God face-to-face.

God is love, and his perfect love exists between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and has the power to make them perfectly like-minded. Unity is further enhanced because the Father has imparted all his deity to the Son and the Spirit. The Son is 100 percent God, and the Spirit is 100 percent God. When we reach our home in heaven, we will understand this perfect love and have perfect unity with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Love will make all relationships in heaven perfect.

Christ came to earth as a man, revealing the heart of God and showing us how God intended for people to live, and Christ was the perfect sacrifice for our sins, bridging the gap between God and humanity.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate (Holy Spirit) to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. (John 14:16–18)

Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice for our sins, rose from the grave three days later, and ascended into heaven forty days later. Jesus conquered death and asks the Father to send the Holy Spirit to live in us as believers. This is God's perfect plan for redeeming us and for molding us to be Christlike.

Throughout the Bible we learn about God's love from the love between the Father and the Son and the love the Father and Son show for us. God's love is evident when we read about Jesus praying the evening before his crucifixion.

“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (Luke 22:42–44)

Jesus becoming the Lamb of God was part of God's divine plan. God himself paid the ultimate price to save humankind.

I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. (John 17:4)

Jesus's love for the Father and for us was more powerful than his fear of going to the cross. The

love the Father has for us is evident because he sent his Son to the cross to pay the price for our sins, redeeming us to him.

We receive this love from the Holy Spirit, and we understand this agape, or sacrificial, love because it has been revealed through the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We model our relationships after the unconditional love between the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Why God Created the Universe

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The heavens show the glory of God, and the earth is home for humankind, where God’s glory is also revealed. The earth provides everything humankind needs to survive: air, water, food, and natural resources for building and creating. The beauty of God’s heart is unmistakably evident in the beauty of the heavens and the beauty of this world.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. (Ps. 19:1–4)

God is love, and all of creation operates on his law of love, receiving and giving. The oceans give water to the clouds, which bring rain to the land, and the water flows back to the oceans via rivers and lakes. Humans exhale carbon dioxide, which plants and trees need, and plants and trees give out oxygen that we breathe. Timothy Jennings writes in *The God-Shaped Brain*, “God’s law of love is the outward flow of his personhood in the constant dispersion of

himself to create, uphold, and sustain the universe. This giving, outward-moving, other-centered love is the design on which all creation was constructed to operate. Simply put, the law of love is the law of life! Harmony with this principle brings life, health, and happiness. All of creation operates on this principle of circular receiving and giving.”¹

God’s law of love is the principle that creation operates on, and it is the same for humankind. God fills us with his love through the Holy Spirit, and we reflect his love to others. We receive and we give; we are now in harmony with God and with all creation.

Whoever does not love does not know God,
because God is love. (1 John 4:8)

Why God Threw Satan to Earth

Before humankind's fall, life was perfect, and God walked with Adam in the garden. We were created to live with God in a sinless world like the Garden of Eden. We were not created to live in this fallen, sinful world. However, before humankind's fall, one fell before us, along with his followers. God cast out Satan for his sin of pride and jealousy of God.

Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. (Rev. 12:7–9)

Why did God throw Satan and his angels down to earth knowing Satan would deceive the whole world? God has a reason for everything he says and does; therefore, throwing Satan and his angels down to earth must have been part of his divine plan. The world today reveals the evil influence of Satan and his angels on humankind, and it all started in the Garden of Eden when Satan tempted Eve to disobey God.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Gen. 3:1–6)

Satan tempted Eve by twisting God’s truth: “Did God really say...?” “You will surely not die,” and “You will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Eve believed Satan’s lies, and seeing the fruit was good for food and for gaining wisdom, she ate it. Sin had now entered the world.

The sinful nature was carried from Adam and Eve to every human being who ever lived. We see the result of Satan in the world today as many hearts are changing to the sinful nature.

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. (2 Tim. 3:1-4)

Satan's goal is to hurt God by destroying his people. He has been doing this since the beginning of time, and he continues today by raining terror on all humanity, especially Israel and Christians. Satan knows the truth: that Christians are the family of God.

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (2 Cor. 11:3)

How does this evil world fit into God's divine plan? We will go back to Adam and Eve for the answer.

God did not fully explain why Adam and Eve should not eat fruit from the Tree of Good and Evil. God told Adam he could eat from any tree in the garden except the Tree of Good and Evil or else he would die.

And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” (Gen. 2:16–17)

Below is what God said to Adam and Eve after they had disobeyed God.

To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you

will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (Gen. 3:16–19)

So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. (Gen. 3:23)

Why didn't God explain these consequences before Adam and Eve sinned? It was because God wanted Adam and Eve to trust him and to realize that he had provided for all their needs. This is God's divine plan: that we have faith in him knowing he will provide. We obey God because we trust him regardless of life's circumstances. Whatever is happening in our lives, we continue to trust God knowing he will take care of us.

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. 11:6)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. (Eph. 2:8)

Our faith is born from God's love. The closer we are to God, the more love we have in our hearts and the more faith we have.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.
(1 Cor. 13:13)

How does God's plan correlate our faith with this sinful, troubled world? If life were trouble-free and worry-free, with no crime, no wars, no sickness, no hurt, and no pain, how much faith would we need? We show our love for God by trusting him to lead us through life. He enables us to overcome trials and tribulations.

For everyone born of God overcomes the world. (1 John 5:4)

The power of God's love calms our fear, the same fear that Satan uses in an attempt to destroy our faith in God. Fear tends to turn us inward and away from God.

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear. (1 John 4:18)

God loves us, and he rescues us from this fallen world through Christ and the Holy Spirit. This was God's plan from the beginning, because he

knew humans would yield to sin. We are given the choice: love God and follow him, or by default live for Satan. Eternal life is our choice.

Why God Created Humanity

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:27)

God created man and woman in his image, but why did God create humankind? The Word tells us we are to obey, glorify, serve, praise, worship, and love the Lord. This will give us a close, personal relationship with God, which is essential to fulfill his divine plan.

If you love me, keep my commands. (John 14:15)

If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. (John 12:26)

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. (Ps. 100:4)

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth. (John 4:24)

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your

strength and with all your mind. (Luke 10:27)

God commands us to do these things because it is for our benefit. These verses indicate that we worship the Lord because it brings us closer to him and we aspire to be like whomever we worship.

God is self-sufficient and needs nothing.

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. (Acts 17:24–25)

If God's commands are for our benefit, and God needs nothing, then why did he create humankind? David asks the same question:

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers...what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him. (Ps. 8:3–4)

The answer is in 1 John 4:8: "God is love." God is the source of love, and he wants to share his love. He loved us before we were created.

I have loved you with an everlasting love.
(Jer. 31:3)

1 Corinthians 13:5 states that love “is not self-seeking”; therefore, God does not keep his life or his love to himself. Instead, he shares this with us, because a heart of love desires to share it with others. We experience God’s love today through the indwelling Holy Spirit and through our brothers and sisters in God’s family. When we step into eternity, we can experience God’s perfect love.

Knowing God created us to share his life and his love gives us faith, security, and comfort. We trust God because he desires to share his infinite love with us. Just as a small child trusts his or her loving mother, we trust our perfect loving Father.

Why God Created Humanity in His Image

God created man and woman in his image (Gen. 1:27), but what does it mean to be created in his image? Understanding more about how we are designed will help us to understand God and understand how to live a more fulfilling life. Below are eight ways we are created in the image of God.

1. We are created with free will because without free will, love would not exist. God is love, and his love sustains our life and joins us to him and to our Christian family. Love is a choice, and we choose to accept Christ and his love or not to accept Christ.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants. (Deut. 30:19)

2. Just as God is spiritual, we are created as spiritual beings so we can live for eternity in a perfect spiritual body. God created us to live with him in heaven for all eternity.

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable,

through the living and enduring word of
God. (1 Pet. 1:23)

3. We are created with a mind capable of love and hope. God molds us to have the mind of Christ, a mind filled with love and hope. It has been scientifically proven that a mind filled with love promotes mental and physical health.² Our minds are not created for anger, fear, or unforgiveness, because they are toxic to our mental and physical health.

But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor.
2:16)

4. We are created with a mind that can be renewed by our thoughts. This enables us to remove or unwire toxic thoughts and replace them with godly, pleasing thoughts. This is a blessing because as God rewires the mind to the mind of Christ, the desires of our hearts change, and we are filled with his love, joy, and peace.

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

5. We are created to worship God because we aspire to be like whomever we worship. This is called modeling. Worship gives us peace, joy, and faith because we start to become more Christ-like.

Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
(Ps. 95:6)

6. We are created for relationships starting from the time we are born into this world. God's divine plan is about relationships, first with God and then with family and with the church, God's family. Our brothers and sisters in God's family are united in love through the Holy Spirit and are family for all eternity.

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.
(John 10:27–28)

7. We are created to work. This is evident because God is working, and he created us with a need to work. God also gave Adam the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” (John 5:17)

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Gen. 2:15)

Our work for the Lord is fulfilling because we are motivated by his love, and love is fulfilling when we help others in their worldly and spiritual needs.

For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:10)

8. We are created with eternity in our hearts.³ Most people live each day with little or no thought of physical death until they are either terminally ill or old in age. Then their thoughts are more about eternal life. Christians live every day with eternity in their hearts, knowing this present life is temporary and this world is not their home. Eternity in our hearts generates the desire to be with the Lord in this life through the Spirit and forever in heaven.

God's Divine Plan

He hath made everything beautiful in its time; also he hath set the eternity in their heart. (Eccles. 3:11)

We follow God's divine plan by fulfilling all the ways we are created, thereby receiving life to the fullest. He created everyone differently, and his plan is tailored for each of us individually.

We are created in the image of God so he can mold us to the mind of Christ. Only through the mind of Christ can we experience a close, personal relationship with God and follow his divine plan.

God's Plan for Living in a Fallen World

What is God's plan for living in this world, a world ruled by Satan and his demons creating evil in humankind and causing trouble and hardship in life? Satan and his lies are aimed at destroying our worldly life and eternal life, with the primary goal of separating us from God.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)

God's plan gives us his love and peace, thereby reducing the fear that Satan puts into our hearts. Christ has defeated Satan and promises to bring us life to the fullest. We will look at how we can live God's plan and reap life to the fullest in this troubling world.

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (Phil. 4:12)

Paul lived God's plan and learned the secret that enabled him to be content in any and every circumstance. Paul learned the secret of overcoming the world, overcoming the hardships he was enduring, and living with inner peace, confidence, and security in Christ. We will learn this secret, enabling us to overcome the world and live with peace, confidence, and security in this fearful world.

We will look at God's plan and our part in fulfilling God's plan. God cannot fulfill his plan unless we cooperate, following the Spirit as he leads us and molds us to be more like Christ. Fulfilling our part in God's plan will reveal the secret that changes our hearts to be content in any and all circumstances.

The following describes our part in God's plan: accepting Christ as our Savior, living the new life God has for us, and renewing our minds to the mind of Christ. Living God's plan is a lifelong process that gives us a more fulfilling life the longer we follow his plan.

Accept Christ as Your Savior

We cannot live God's plan unless we accept Christ as our Savior and receive the Holy Spirit.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23)

From God's Word we learn that only through Christ can we have forgiveness of our sins. Jesus paid for our sins, becoming the Lamb of God and sacrificing his life on the cross. He was the perfect sacrifice for all sins, and he imparts his righteousness into those who accept him as their Savior. When we accept Christ, our sins are forgiven, we receive the Holy Spirit, and we appear sinless before the Father.

To accept Christ as our Savior, we first believe and have a repentant heart, a heart willing to turn from our sinful nature to the godly nature. Achieving the godly nature is a lifelong process as God molds us to the mind of Christ. After we believe and repent, we follow with baptism.

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Rom. 10:9)

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

We now have the eternal Holy Spirit and forgiveness of our sins. We are born of the Spirit and are a new creation in Christ. We can now have

a relationship with our Lord through the Holy Spirit.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again." (John 3:6–7)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Cor. 5:17)

The Holy Spirit enables God to lead us through his divine plan. Without the Holy Spirit, we can never fulfill God's plan and never have eternal life.

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. (Rom. 8:9)

The fruit of the Holy Spirit renews our minds and the fruit of love changes the desires of our hearts. This change gives us the godly character that is noticeable by others and helps us in our relationships.

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience,

kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness,
and self-control. (Gal. 5:22–23)

The Holy Spirit is our connection to God and our deposit on eternal life. We are now living a new life by following God’s divine plan toward our eternal home.

Set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Cor. 1:22)

The New Life

When we accept Christ as our Savior, all things become new—our life becomes new. This new life starts by learning about our Lord and seeking a close, personal relationship with him through the indwelling Holy Spirit. This new life is depicted in the following figure.

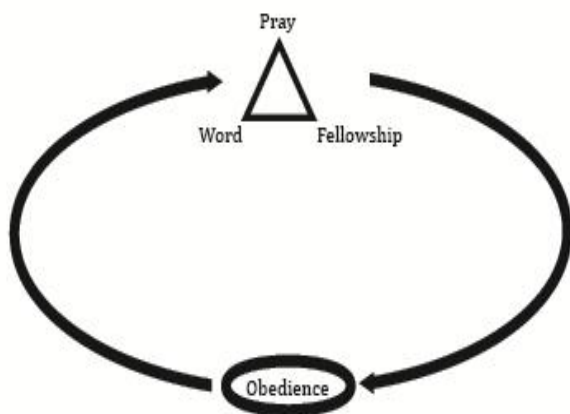


Figure 1. Circle of Spiritual Growth

Our new life consists of reading God's Word, praying, and having fellowship with our church family. Obedience is putting God's Word into action so we can experience God in our lives.

We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. (1 John 2:3)

Reading God's Word, praying, and experiencing Christian fellowship, followed by obedience to God's good, pleasing, and perfect will, continues through our lives. These things are essential for our spiritual growth and for following God's divine plan.

Early in our new life, we focus primarily on building a relationship with the Lord. This requires

being in the Word, prayer, and fellowship, and our obedience will emerge as the Lord changes our hearts. God is love, and love is the foundation of our Christian life because love changes the heart.

If we place our focus primarily on obedience instead of seeking a relationship with the Lord, it is like building a house starting with the roof. Building the roof first is the same as trying to obey God by our works; we will fail because we are trying to be obedient in our own strength. We must build a foundation by learning more about the Lord through his Word, prayer, and fellowship, and then our obedience will change our hearts to Christ-like behavior.

Through our obedience and ministering to others, we help people with their physical and spiritual needs. We develop a caring and compassionate heart that leads us to make sacrifices to help others. As this cycle continues, we grow in godly understanding, and his love and wisdom increase in our hearts.

When we minister to others, they either accept or reject God's gift of salvation through Jesus, and this can lead us to the same emotions that God experienced when dealing with the Israelites as they continually strayed away from him.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. (Matt. 23:37)

When we minister to others, it helps us to understand God's heart and brings us closer to him. This closeness to God changes our hearts, and we start to love people as God does; even those who reject God, we still treat with respect and love.

However, our love will never reach the infinite love that God has for us. The result is that our priority in life changes, and bringing people into the kingdom has now become the primary purpose of our life. This circle of spiritual growth brings us closer to the Lord, and we develop dependence on the Lord because we need his guidance to help bring people into the kingdom.

As we grow closer to the Lord, our hearts desire to live by the Spirit, seeking the Lord's will, because we have learned that his ways are always perfect and we cannot minister to others without the Spirit's guidance. This drives our dependence on God, and the more we depend on God, the more we will live by the Spirit.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

By living the new life as described by the circle of spiritual growth, we are always developing a closer relationship with our Lord. God is love (Rom. 5:8), and the closer we are to the Lord, the more love we have to reflect to others. Love is the foundation of our Christian life, and the power of God's love in our hearts motivates us to live for Christ and stay in the Spirit.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself. (Luke 10:27)

God's love changes our hearts and drives us to fulfill his divine plan for our lives. The more we love God, the more we seek to live by the Spirit.

If you love me, keep my commands. (John 14:15)

We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

God first loved us, and that is why we love,

reflecting his love to others. We will never truly understand God's love until we show his love to others. We receive God's love and give God's love, and the more love we give, the more our hearts are open to receive. Our love increases as we live in accordance with the circle of spiritual growth because we receive when we give. The following verse tells us that we cannot "out give" God.

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."
(Mal. 3:10)

Renewing the Mind

Now that the Holy Spirit lives in us, God can mold us to be like Christ by renewing our minds to the mind of Christ. This is scientifically called neuroplasticity, which means our minds can be rewired according to our thoughts. We can stop old toxic thoughts and replace them with new godly thoughts. As we continue living the Christian life as defined by the circle of spiritual growth, God renews our minds.

We change the wiring in the brain by our thoughts—what we think about the most takes up

the most real estate in our brains. Praise the Lord that our minds can be rewired, removing toxic wiring and replacing it with godly wiring. This essentially makes us our own brain surgeons by controlling our thoughts.

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (Col. 3:2)

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Phil. 4:8)

Figure 2 depicts spiritual growth, showing that the mind, through the Holy Spirit, is continually approaching unity with God. As the mind is being renewed, we are continually becoming more like Christ and developing more of God's love, strength, and power to follow the Spirit and overcome the world. We sometimes lean toward our own will over God's will; therefore, we can't have perfect unity with God on this side of eternity. This is why Christ took our sins to the cross and we live by his grace and forgiveness.

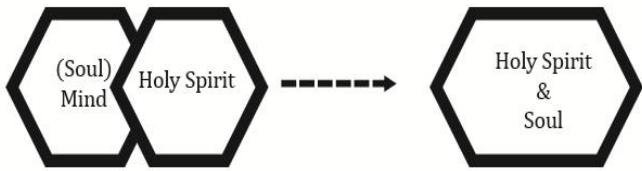


Figure 2. Spiritual Growth

As our thoughts lean more toward the spiritual, our minds are rewired toward the mind of Christ. We keep our thoughts in the spiritual by reading the Word, fellowshiping with other Christians, praying, and ministering to others.

The following is a quote from A. W. Tozer describing Christians whose mind is focused on the Lord: “Many have found the secret of which I speak and, without giving much thought to what is going on within them, constantly practice the habit of inwardly gazing upon God. They know that something inside their hearts sees God. Even when they are compelled to withdraw their conscious attention in order to engage in earthly affairs, there is within them a secret commune always going on. Let their attention be released for a moment from necessary business and it flies at once to God. This has been the testimony of many Christians, so many that even as I state it thus I have a feeling that I am quoting, though from whom or from how many I cannot possibly know.”⁴

This describes a person reaching unity with God and seeking to follow the Spirit by remaining connected to God.

Five Changes God Makes in Us

God is continually molding us to the mind of Christ, and that changes our thoughts, words, and actions from our old nature to the godly nature. We will discuss five ways God changes us and frees us. All are essential so we can live God's divine plan and so we can understand Paul's secret of being content in all circumstances.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.
Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves
be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.
(Gal. 5:1)

1. Live by Faith

Hebrews 11:6 tells us that without faith, we cannot please God. We are saved through grace by faith because faith reveals our relationship to the Lord. Our relationship with the Lord is through love, which comes from God's grace. We are saved by Jesus taking our sins to the cross, thereby redeeming us to God. This was a gift from God, and it reveals his love for us. When his love pierces our hearts, we will return that love through our faith.

We are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and we can only do this through our faith. Without faith, we can never live God's plan or show our love to God.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. (Eph. 2:8)

How can we have faith if we do not believe God's Word? If there is anything in the Word that we do not believe or that we doubt, it will destroy our faith. We can believe God's Word because we know all things are possible for God.

For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet. 1:21)

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 15:13)

Faith comes from reading the Word, which reveals that God's Word is true and he always keeps his promises. Christ promises that "Whoever believes in the Son will have eternal life" (John 3:36). If we don't believe God's promises, how can we ever have faith?

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. (Rom. 10:17)

Being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. (Rom. 4:21)

Read the Bible and learn God's promises; pray using God's promises. Believing God's promises brings glory to God, and Christ said our prayers will be answered when our prayers bring glory to God (John 14:13). Trust in the Lord because we endure by his perfect love and his promises.

God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul. (Heb. 6:18–19)

Knowing it is impossible for God to lie increases our faith and is an anchor to our souls. God will keep his promises according to his timing and his will, which may be different from our timing and our will. Believing God's promises is knowing that his timing and his will are perfect.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isa. 55:8–9)

Praise the Lord that his thoughts and ways are above our thoughts and ways. He understands us and our situations in life better than we do, and he has the perfect answer to our prayers. When we accept this truth, our faith increases tremendously.

“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. (James 2:23)

We are God’s friend when we believe his promises and have the faith to walk according to his will. God’s love is more than we can imagine, and to obey his will is to walk in his love.

Our love for the Lord is revealed when we trust him by following his ways no matter what life brings to us. We always trust God because he is God. We don’t have to fully understand his ways or his timing, and we continue walking in accordance with his will, showing our love to the Lord. Nothing pleases God more than for us to walk in obedience to his will, confidently trusting him in all things.

After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: “I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.” (Acts 13:22)

Our faith arises from God's love. The more we understand that God's love is perfect and we experience his love in our lives, the more we trust him. The more we trust God, the less fear we entertain from Satan and the more peace and joy we can experience.

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. (Isa. 26:3)

2. Guided by the Spirit

God wants us to live with love, joy, peace, confidence, and security. The only way we can do this is by listening to and obeying the Spirit, which connects us to God. We obey the Holy Spirit by listening to our godly conscience. The more we understand God's Word, the more sensitive our conscience, and the Holy Spirit will guide us in God's truth and will convict us when we go against his Word.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. (John 16:13)

And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. (John 16:8)

Ideally, we are to always obey the Lord as the Holy Spirit guides our conscience. However, we sometimes listen to our own desires over our godly conscience, and we become our own god. And sometimes we listen to our fleshly desires and respond out of our emotions with no godly thought.

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Gal. 5:25)

Christians are normally controlled by the Spirit, but sometimes they temporarily relinquish control to their own reasoning or to their emotions. How do we keep control through the Spirit and stop being pulled away by our own desires and emotions? We cannot do this perfectly, but our desire to give the Spirit control increases as we seek to be closer to God. God's power enables us to live by the Spirit, staying in his divine, loving will. As the desires of the heart change to the ways of God, our desire will listen to the Spirit and follow the Lord.

For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. (Phil. 2:13)

When we obey the Spirit, we are walking in obedience to the Lord's will and following his divine plan.

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."
(Luke 9:23)

When we follow the Spirit, we deny our will and obey God's will. The closer we are to God, the more we make godly choices, and life is choices. How would life be if we could always make godly choices?

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. (Prov. 3:5)

The Lord's will is always best, but Satan tries to pull us away from being obedient by tempting us to justify our own understanding.

Do not give the Devil a foothold. (Eph. 4:27)

Satan attacks through our emotions and sinful, euphoric memories and helps justify our will over God's will. Satan attacks us through lies, and we are in a fight with our sinful nature.

But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:14–15)

The goal is to think before we speak or act and to seek godly guidance through the Spirit.

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. (James 1:19)

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Cor. 10:5)

We overcome temptations by capturing the thought and changing it to a victorious, godly thought. It is important that we are victorious in Christ because we are created to be victorious. When we overcome a sinful temptation, the satisfaction from being victorious is more rewarding than the short-term pleasure of the sin.

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:57)

God created humankind with the ability to control each person's thoughts and emotions through the divine power of the Spirit. We can take our emotions, such as fear, impatience, worry, or anger,

and give them to the Lord and walk in peace and comfort. One of the greatest blessings is having control over our thoughts and emotions. This develops self-control and focus, which help us to remain in the Spirit.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6–7)

3. Freedom in Christ

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:36)

The only way to be free in Christ is to let him lead us through life via the Holy Spirit. This means we have the faith to follow Christ, giving our best to him and leaving the results in his hands.

Giving God control is frightening to many people because they don't understand that giving God control is a divine gift that greatly reduces our stress. We try to control things that only God can control, such as situations that include others and future events. We try to take control and responsibility, which often leads to disappointment because people and the world rarely respond to our

control. When we take control, it gives rise to stress, fear, anxiety, and anger. That is why God guides us through life, taking the responsibility of the outcome. God guides our thoughts, words, and actions through the Spirit; therefore, he takes responsibility if we follow the Spirit's guidance. We are his servants.

People believe that giving God control causes them to lose control; however, the opposite is true. In our walk with the Lord, we eventually learn that his ways are always best and most rewarding. The desires of our hearts change, causing us to seek God's will, and therefore, we are in control by giving our best in everything because we are doing it for the Lord.

When we take control independent from the Spirit, we become our own prideful god, trying to share God's throne. God will not share his throne with us.

Do not worship any other god, for the Lord,
whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.
(Exod. 34:14)

God opposes the proud but shows favor to
the humble. (James 4:6)

When we step off the throne and give God control, he becomes active in our lives. Let God lead you

through life because God knows you; he knows your situation in life, and he can control things you cannot control. Reap peace and rest for your soul by trusting God and letting him guide you through life. Giving God control assures us we are following his divine plan and brings rest to our souls.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matt. 11:29)

4. Divine Purpose

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matt. 28:19–20)

Our divine purpose is the reason we exist; it is our calling from God and is the most important and highest priority in our lives. To remain in the Spirit, it is necessary we know our divine purpose as much as we know we exist. This may sound impossible, but God tells us directly through his Word that he created us for this very purpose.

But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power

and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. (Exod. 9:16)

Our divine purpose is to proclaim Christ to the world through his power, which implies that everything we do in life we do for Christ. Being aware of our divine purpose changes our life and is essential for staying in the Spirit.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Col. 3:23–24)

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. (2 Cor. 5:20)

Knowing we are ambassadors for Christ defines our purpose in this foreign country. Pray every day that God helps you to remember you are his ambassador because it will drive every thought, word, and deed toward God. You will become accountable to God, and since God fills the heavens and the earth, you become accountable everywhere and to everyone.

“Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?” declares the Lord. “Do

not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the Lord. (Jer. 23:24)

5. Eternally Minded

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." (James 4:13–15)

We are a mist that appears for a little while and vanishes, reminding us that our earthly life is temporary. The above verses speak of someone who is living in this world and making his or her plans with no thoughts of eternity. Instead, we are told to make our plans according to the Lord's will. Our life is like a vapor, and therefore, it is important to be eternally focused and always seeking godly choices.

This life is a short journey through time, ending in physical death, and at our last breath, eternal life begins. We don't know when our life will end—today, tomorrow, or forty years from now. That is

why it is important to be eternally minded and always be ready to leave this earth. Procrastination has no place in the mind of someone who is eternally minded.

Below are three ways eternal thinking changes us. Living for eternity helps us to see life from God's perspective, with everything in life aiming toward eternity. Events in life have eternal meaning and affect our spiritual life. Being eternally minded helps us to understand God, his Word, and his commands.

Set your mind on things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Col. 3:2)

- With the attitude of living for eternity, we have God's strength, courage, and wisdom to endure whatever Satan throws in our path. Looking at life from the eternal picture, we view the troubles in this life as temporary, spiritually strengthening, and less worrisome. We give God control and trust him to guide us through everything.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. (Isa. 40:29)

- When we are eternally minded, we are always prepared to leave this earth. We realize the brevity of life, and this instills urgency to bring others to Christ. We spend more time in prayer, getting closer to God, because we need his help in ministering to others. Christ has conquered death, and Christians view death as a transition to their heavenly home.

Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure. Surely everyone goes around like a mere phantom; in vain they rush about, heaping up wealth without knowing whose it will finally be. But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you. (Ps. 39: 4–7)

- We can see ourselves as living temporarily in a foreign land, waiting patiently for our heavenly home. In Hebrews 11, the writer is talking about the people of faith and that they admitted they were foreigners and strangers on earth living for their heavenly home.

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. (Heb. 11:13)

They were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Heb. 11:16)

Being eternally minded brings us closer to God and helps us overcome the world, brings peace and rest for our souls in this foreign land, and brings a confidence from God in knowing that whatever happens in this life is temporary and heaven is waiting.

The Secret

Nor will they say, “Look, here it is!” or “There!” for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you. (Luke 17:21)

The secret Paul found that permitted him to be content in any and all circumstances is to live in the kingdom. The indwelling Holy Spirit lives in the heavenly dimension. When our souls become one with the Spirit, we are one with God, and we live in the kingdom. Our thoughts remain connected to God, which means we are closer to God than we are to the world.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. (John 17:16)

Christ said his apostles are not of this world and we are not of this world; our souls live in the kingdom while our flesh lives in the world. This means our souls have love, peace, joy, confidence, and comfort from God through the Spirit. We essentially escape the world because our souls live in the kingdom.

Living in the kingdom is a process that continues throughout life until we transition into the kingdom with our eternal body. The more we commune with God—keeping a constant connection to him, praising him, thanking him, asking him for guidance, and listening to him—the more we are in

the kingdom. The more we are in the Word and ministering to others, the more we will hear God when we commune with him. If we train ourselves to commune with God, it will become natural and desirable, and we will become uncomfortable when we are not communing with him. Train yourself to visualize your soul living in the kingdom because it will help your thoughts remain on things above.

Every change that God makes in us is designed to move us more into the kingdom and closer to him. The closer we are to the Lord, the more freedom we have in Christ.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.
Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves
be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.
(Gal. 5:1)

Fear from Satan can make us slaves to the world. Three hundred and sixty-five different times God tells us in his Word not to fear. When we keep our minds in the kingdom, we are close to God, and his presence in us takes away Satan's fear because we are sustained by God's love and there is no fear in his love.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.
I do not give to you as the world gives. Do

not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

Completion of God's Plan

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2:3-4)

The completion of God's divine plan is to live with him in heaven, and we are confident in his promise of eternal life; it is the anchor for our souls. How can we have peace if we are not confident of our eternal life?

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. (John 17:3)

Eternal life is with the Father and Jesus Christ, and we will know them. This word "know" implies we will have a perfect, loving relationship with God, unlike today, when we know him only in part. In eternity, we will fully know God and his ways.

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. (1 Cor. 13:12)

Eternal life starts when we accept Christ as our Savior and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. God has brought the heavenly kingdom to us through the

Holy Spirit. The more we live by the Spirit, the more we live in the kingdom, taking our thoughts to God, experiencing peace, joy, comfort, and confidence and less fear from Satan. There is no fear in the kingdom, but we will always fight fear because our flesh lives in this fearful world.

The Holy Spirit is our seal of ownership by God and our deposit on eternal life.

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Cor. 1:21–22)

When we receive the Holy Spirit and live by the Holy Spirit, we belong to God and we are children in his family, the church. We are heirs of God, we are priests, and we are a holy nation. The Holy Spirit changes us and fills us with the desire and confidence that we will live for eternity with God.

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. (Rom. 8:16)

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into

his wonderful light. (1 Pet. 2:9)

If the Holy Spirit is the kingdom within us, then the Spirit must relate to our heavenly life.

What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. (1 Cor. 2:9–10)

The things God has prepared for us are revealed by the Spirit, so let's look at the Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Gal. 5:22–23)

If we experience the fruit of the Spirit in part today, then in heaven we will experience the fruit in full. We will be in the presence of God, we will experience the fruit of the Spirit directly from God, and we will no longer have a sinful nature. We will experience perfect love, joy, and peace forever, and fear, boredom, sorrow, and pain will not exist. We will live in a new imperishable body, where we never age or experience pain or experience temptation to sin, and whatever we do in heaven, it

will be perfectly fulfilling.

The Bible talks about the New Jerusalem, our heavenly home where we will live with the Father and the Son, like Adam and Eve lived with God in the Garden of Eden, where life was perfect.

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Rev. 21:1–4)

Summary

The Father, Son, and Spirit were part of God's plan to reveal himself. The Son came to earth to show us God's heart and the way to live, and he redeemed us to God by taking our sins to the cross. When Christ ascended into heaven, he sent the person of the Holy Spirit to the believer.

God created us in his image with free will so that we can choose to love him through our faith. This enables a relationship with him, allows him to mold us to have the mind of Christ, and opens our hearts to live life to the fullest.

God cast Satan and his angels to earth so that through the trials and tribulations of life, we can show our love for God through faith.

God rescues us from this troubled world and guides us through life into eternity with him. Our souls live in the kingdom (Holy Spirit), while our flesh lives in the world. God lifts us up into the heavenly realms through the Spirit, which makes us holy and separate from this sinful world.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:6)

We live in the kingdom by fulfilling our divine purpose, ministering to lost souls, praying, living in the Word, and fellowshiping with people in God's family. As we walk in obedience to God's good, pleasing, and perfect will, our minds are renewed to the mind of Christ, and we become one with God. We are eternally minded and always connected to God.

Our souls live in the kingdom, meaning we are closer to our Lord than we are to the world. We are forever moving more into the kingdom, fully trusting God, and escaping the fears of this world. Living in the kingdom as Paul lived in the kingdom is the life that God planned for all his children. Can you achieve this? Yes, it is God's plan for you. Like Paul, you can learn and experience contentment in any and all circumstances.

Notes

1. Timothy Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain* (Chattanooga, TN: Lenox Publishing, 2012), 24.
2. Ibid, 27
3. Brian Thomas, “Evidence of Eternity in Our Hearts?” Institute for Creation Research, accessed on November 29, 2015, <http://www.icr.org/article/evidence-eternity-our-hearts/>.
4. A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, PA: Wing Spread Publishers, 1982), 8.