



(Rightly used, this guide will transform your walk with the Lord. Please keep and use).

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO HELP SPIRITUAL GROWTH

“The One Who called you is Holy, therefore you also must be holy in all your conduct”. (1st Peter 1 v15).

The true story is told that in 1949, just before Christian revival broke out on the Scottish Isle of Lewis, a supernatural event occurred in a prayer group, an event so dramatic, those present never forgot it. The prayer group had been praying that the Lord would reveal Himself to those who cared little about spiritual matters, in order for them to see their great need to repent and take God seriously.

They had been praying for some time when one of them, called Kenneth MacDonald, opened his Bible and started to read *Psalm 24*. “Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? Only those who have clean hands and a pure heart.” He put the Bible down, paused for a moment and said “It seems that it is useless for us to gather here night after night pleading with the Lord as we are doing, if our own hands are not clean and our hearts are not pure.” Then after a few moments he cried out with a loud voice “O God, are my hands clean? Is my heart pure?”

Instantly, a sense of God’s absolute Holiness flooded the whole room. The manifestation of His Eternal Holiness was so overwhelming that several men briefly fainted. One man called John Smith said, it was at that moment we realised that the holiness of God and people taking God seriously were inextricably linked. God had shown Himself, and when He did, it was a revealing of His holiness.

Some months later a growing awareness of God’s holiness began to spread across many parts of the Island. It was this sobering awareness lasting from 1949 until 1952 that caused thousands of individuals to turn to the Lord in repentance and accept His pardon, which had been bought at the cross. As the awareness of His holiness grew, people became increasingly grateful for His free offer of salvation and in turn willingly repented and committed themselves to obeying Him from then on.

In Scripture, the holiness of God is clearly and very dramatically taught. (See Acts 5:1-11). It explains that God is both infinitely loving and infinitely holy, like two sides of the same coin. In His infinite love, God has freely offered forgiveness of sin by sending His Son to the cross, but such pardon is utterly conditional upon true repentance and a willingness to follow Christ from then on. This explains New Testament warnings like; “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (*Hebrews 2:3*), “Pursue holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.” (*Hebrews 12:14*) and “If the righteous

person is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and sinner.” (1Peter 4:18). Understanding the holiness of God leads to repentance and taking spiritual matters seriously.

The holiness of God will be dramatically revealed at the Second Coming of Christ when He returns to judge the world, so Scripture warns Christians not to neglect their walk with Him but rather grow and mature in their faith. With this in mind the Church has often produced “*practical helps and guides*” to encourage Christian maturity. These devotional aids encourage a depth of spirituality because all too often a clear conscience is simply a sign of a bad memory rather than the result of living a genuinely godly life.

Here are two devotional gems from long ago. Reading them one can see why previous generations were spiritually-minded. Clear and concise, they still have power today to make us really think.

1. This gem is incorporated into the 1922 “*Children’s Service Book*” published for use during children’s services throughout the (Anglican) Church of Ireland. Immediately after the Creed the congregation repeated these words;

“My duty towards God is;

***to believe in Him, to fear Him,
And to love Him with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul
and with all my strength;
to worship Him, to give Him thanks,
to put my whole trust in Him, to call upon Him,
to honour His Holy Name and His Word,
and to serve Him truly all the days of my life.***

My duty towards my neighbour is;

***to love him as myself, and to do to all men as I would that they should do unto me;
to love, honour and support my father and mother;
to honour and obey the King, and all that are put in authority under him;
to submit myself to all my teachers and spiritual pastors;
to hurt no body by word or deed;
to be true and just in all my dealing;
to bear no malice or hatred in my heart;
to keep my hands from stealing, and my tongue from evil speaking, lying and slandering;
to keep my body in temperance, soberness and chastity;
and not to covet other men’s goods, but learn and labour truly to get mine own living.***

The service then continued with prayers and hymns. If all this is thought provoking for children and teenagers, it is as nothing when compared with what has been written to help adults.

2. This is an extract from a book widely distributed to adults in the (Anglican) Church of England on the subject of “*Self examination*” before taking Holy Communion. (Printed 1897.)

“Before you come to Holy Communion, very carefully examine your heart and your life. If you are strict with yourself you may be shocked at the number of sins these questions will bring back to your mind. But it is better to have the pain of them now and know God’s forgiveness and peace than to have them laid to your charge before the Judgment Seat.

Since my last Communion has my love for my Saviour increased? Do I wish I loved Him more? Have I been thankful when God has sent me special mercies? Do I trust Him wholly? Am I bearing fruit in my character? Have I said my prayers each day? Have I said them meaningfully

and sincerely? Have I been a coward; afraid of what people might say to me and so left my Godly duties undone rather than be laughed at or ill-used?

Have I used an oath or bad words of any kind? Have I used the Name of God in common idle talk? Have I read my Bible regularly, and asked the Lord to help me understand it? Have I broken any promises? Have I gone to Church, or have I been satisfied with any excuse to stay away? Have I tried to keep watch over my thoughts when at a service?

Have I behaved as I ought to my father and mother and prayed for them? Have I been kind to my brothers and sisters? If a husband and father; have I loved and been thoughtful for my wife and my children, bringing home my wages instead of spending them on myself? If a wife and mother; have I loved and been thoughtful for my husband and children and tried to make a loving home for them? When provoked do I answer back? Have I tried to bring up my children in the ways of God and encouraged them in what is good and set them a good example? Have I been a kind neighbour?

Have I from my heart forgiven all who have done me wrong or have I repaid evil for evil? Do I acknowledge that two wrongs don't make a right? Am I too proud to ask forgiveness of anyone whom I have injured? Have I fought against my bad temper and tried hard to overcome it? Have I bravely resisted bad thoughts and prayed for help against them or have I encouraged them? Have I mixed with bad companions more than necessary? Have I kept as much as possible out of the way of temptation? Have I led others into sin? Have I been vain regarding my personal appearance or my cleverness and ability?

Have I stolen money or anything belonging to another? Have I cheated in anyway, by tricks of the trade, neglecting work which I have been paid to do or paying those I employ too little for their work? Have I wilfully run into debt? Am I trying to repay all I owe? Have I been a busybody and gossip in other people's matters? Have I spoken ill of others either truly or falsely? Have I told any lies? Have I been jealous when any kindness has been shown to a neighbour and grumbled because it was not done to me instead?"

The devotional check list then concludes with the following beautiful prayer; *"Oh Lord, deal not with me according to my sins neither punish me as my iniquities deserve. O Lord God, Who has graciously promised to forgive all sinners who turn to Thee in true sorrow for their sins, receive me I pray Thee, unworthy as I am. Pardon all my sins of thought and word and deed. Have mercy upon me most merciful Father, for Thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive me all that is past and grant that I may ever hereafter serve and please Thee in newness of life to the Honour and Glory of Thy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

In 2 Corinthians 13:5, St Paul calls upon Christians to regularly examine themselves spiritually. Devotional aids encourage spiritual growth by making us more grateful that the penalty for sin has been paid for on the Cross and also by showing that *"we still have much work to do"*. Life is a school and we all stumble in many ways. The correct response when we sin should be repentance and a commitment to try harder in the future. The only real failures in God's eyes are those who stop trying.

The reward for those who strive for righteousness will be to enjoy everlasting companionship with the Lord Himself. Real and uninterrupted contact with our Heavenly Father is the most wonderful thing in the world. Scripture states that there is no greater joy. However, in order to be fit for this special relationship we need to become like Him in character so that we *"may be partakers of His Holiness."* (Hebrews 12:10).

God's revealed will is plainly taught in the Bible so we should prayerfully question...

"Are we living our personal life in accordance with His will? Is our heart right before Him? Are we suffering spiritual self-deception? Do we need to deepen our relationship with Him? Are we growing

in our faith as we should be? Are we as motivated and enthusiastic as we should be about spiritual matters? Is indifference and worldly compromise stifling our faith? Are we persevering as we should or do we give up when the going gets tough? Am I open to, and listening out for, God's guidance in my life as revealed in Scripture? Am I becoming lukewarm and shallow in my walk with Him? Do I take Bible prophecy seriously? In 2 Peter 1:19 we are urged "to take heed of prophecy". How well do I take to heart the prophecies in Matthew 24 and Luke 21? Am I aware of the warning that deceptive teaching will abound in latter days and teachers will arise who will turn many away from believing the truth? (1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1-3; Jude 17-19). Am I able to give sound reasons for my faith when asked for evidence by non-believers? (1 Peter 3:15). Do I keep a careful watch out for practices or events which are occult in nature, lest I unwittingly get involved in them? Many old occult practices have been "repackaged" for today's generation in order to appear harmless and fun. They are anything but harmless. (Acts 16:16-19; Acts 19:19; Isaiah 8:19).

It is also helpful to reflect on specific commands and teaching in Scripture such as;

Luke 10:27. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself." Matthew 7:12 "However you want men to treat you, do also to them." (Do we always treat others the way we ourselves wish to be treated?) Matthew 18:35 "So My Heavenly Father will do to you if each of you, from his heart does not forgive his brother his trespasses." God wants our enemies to fully repent and be saved. See also Ch. 18:21-35.

In Romans 12:9-21, St Paul provides the template for Christian behaviour such as "Repay no one evil for evil" etc. (E.g. Do we remain courteous towards those with whom we disagree?) In Galatians 5:19-21 St Paul gives a list of behaviour forbidden by God, concluding with the statement, "Those who practise such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God." See also the list he gives in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 where he warns people not to be deceived by others. Note what he says about sexual relationships and how he states later in Ch. 14:37 that these are actually commands from the Lord and are not of his own making. In Ephesians 5:3-7 again he adds for emphasis, "Let no one deceive you with empty words." Note the mention of "coarse jokes". Another important passage is Colossians 3:5-11.

It is helpful to go through The Sermon on the Mount line by line in Matthew 5-7. For instance, do we hunger to be righteous? (Ch.5:6). Note the condemnation of pornography in Ch.5:28.

Luke 12:15-21 gives teaching regarding wealth, Luke 17:7-10 regarding humility, Luke 18:1-8 regarding persevering in faith and prayer, Luke 17:11-19 regarding gratitude and Matthew 10:37-39 regarding Who is deserving of the greatest love of our hearts.

Galatians 5:22-26. Are we growing in these virtues? Note the mention of "self-control" in v.23. Matthew 25:31-46. Do we really help those in trouble the way we should? Matthew 25:14-30. Do we adequately use the gifts and talents God has given us? We are but custodians and stewards of these things. Proverbs 3:5 and 6. Do we seek God's guidance "in all our ways"? Do we bring all our ideas and plans before Him for His approval and blessing? See too James 4:13-17.

Colossians 3:12-17. Note "if anyone has a complaint against another ...we must forgive." See also Ephesians 4:1-2, 19-32. Are we quick to take offence? Are we harsh in our words or over-critical of others? Someone once remarked that as people get older they either "turn into vinegar or a fine wine". Are we becoming more gracious and Christ-like as we get older or are we becoming bitter, stubborn and argumentative? When people look at us can they see Jesus in us? Remember, Jesus is to be the pattern of our life and the example we are to copy. It's always helpful to ask ourselves in any given situation "WWJD" or "WWJS" i.e. "What would Jesus do/say"?

2 Corinthians 9:15. Do we really appreciate what God the Father did for us in the sending of His Son? He endured a gruesome death for us. It was no small thing. Do we adequately reflect on this awesome sacrificial love? Do we think about it regularly and rejoice that we are loved so dearly?

Prayerfully using devotional aids really does change lives and transforms hearts. Their use leads to spiritual growth and the reward of having a real sense of God's abiding fellowship and presence. Yes, working through them takes time, concentration and energy, but when we stand before Him at His Second Coming, we want Him to say "*Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord,*" and not "*depart from Me you who practice wickedness.*" The Scottish minister Robert Murray Mc Cheyne often prayed "*Oh God, make me as holy as a saved sinner can be.*" May that be the prayer of us all.



Pastor John of Strengthen the Faithful

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