

“A Biblical View of Human Worth”

The purpose of this document is to communicate the Christian view of the worth of all people. This document has three major sections. Section 1 discusses the worth of all people, including those who are not Christians and have had no opportunity to hear the gospel. Section 2 asks how one can find a common basis to uphold the value of human life with those who do not hold a Christian worldview. This section is particularly written for Christians who work together with non-religious organizations. Section 3 shares the Biblical teaching on the worth of the Christian. The following are the major headings of this document:

Section 1: A Christian view of the worth of all people

Section 2: Advocating the worth of all people with those who do not accept a Christian world view

Section 3: The worth of the Christian

Part A: Where does their worth come from?

Part B: Moving God’s truth from the mind to the spirit

Part C: But isn’t the self sinful, wicked, and worthless?

Section 1: A Christian view of the worth of all people

The Bible teaches the great value of all people, regardless of their relationship to God or their awareness of the gospel. God deems all people to be of great worth primarily because He has created them in His image.

Genesis 1:26-27 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

God repeatedly states how deeply He loves all people, regardless of their awareness of Him.

Jonah 4:11 But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?

Matthew 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

God expresses love for those who are in the midst of rebellion against him.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is...patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Luke 23:34 Jesus said of those who were crucifying him, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

All peoples of the world are so valuable to God the Father that he would allow His Son Jesus to die on their behalf.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

While God will execute judgment on all who do not know Christ, this judgment is not something that brings him joy.

Ezekiel 33:11 As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is...patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

God values all people regardless of their gender, age, wealth, race, talent, and exposure to His church and His Word. God loves children.

Matthew 18:10 See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

Matthew 19:14 Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.

God loves women as well as men.

John 11:5 Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

God equally loves people of all races.

Acts 10:34-35 God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

Revelation 5:9 You were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

God loves the poor as well as the rich.

Luke 6:20 Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Luke 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

What has been shared so far indicates the great worth God places on the life of each person. However, a holistic view of mankind requires that one also understands how deeply sin has touched each person. One must understand the judgment of God that resides upon all people because of sin.

Romans 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.

Romans 1:18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men.

This in no way keeps the Christian from acting in loving ways toward all men, even those who do not know God. God Himself acts in loving ways toward non-Christians and commands that Christians do the same.

Matthew 5:44-45 Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Section 2: Advocating the worth of all people with those who do not accept a Christian world view

Many Christians work in corporate, academic, and non-profit entities that do not hold to a Christian worldview. People at these organizations or in government may not have a belief in God, the Bible, or even the immortal souls of men. The Christian passionately says to everyone, "You are loved and valuable," based on a biblical worldview. How can a Christian advocate the worth of all people to those who do not accept Christian teaching as an authority?

There are ways a Christian can advocate the worth of all people and they have more to do with experience and emotion than with propositional logic. Everyone has an

innate sense that all people have significance. That innate sense is not equally strong in everyone. People are all conditioned by their cultures, families of origin, experiences, and sin. As a result, some people struggle to find worth with certain ethnic groups, children, women, the physically disabled, the poor, perceived enemies and so on. Yet there is a sense that, even for an ethnic group that is perceived as an enemy, their own families and countrymen will find value in them.

Christians can appeal to this innate sense of value by sharing their own love for those perceived to be of little worth. Pictures and videos are tools that can evoke positive emotional responses. Sometimes those who have little in the way of emotional attachment to people have developed a strong bond with a pet. They understand their animal has accomplished nothing in the way of education, work, or personal attainment; yet, they have developed a strong emotional bond with their pet. Love for God's creation at any level can become a springboard that leads to love for people.

Sometimes the goal of a Christian organization is to receive permission or funding to do a particular charitable work. Some parties involved may not see the value of human life, but there may be political or economic advantages for them to allow the charitable work to happen. Many governments and businesses realize that caring for the needy gives them a good public image. While this is not all that the Christian hopes for, such passive acknowledgment of human significance may be enough to allow them to accomplish their intended ministries.

One powerful way to proclaim the value of human life is charitable works by Christians. When Christian people voluntarily serve complete strangers that have nothing to offer them, they send a powerful message to non-Christians who are watching. Their generosity does not fit inside the mindset of anyone whose life values are materialism or power. That's why Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." The selfless love of Christians for undesirable people raises a huge question mark in the hearts of onlookers. They will naturally wonder the reason for the generosity, which then leaves the door open for the believer to share about the unconditional love of God.

Section 3: The worth of the Christian

The Bible speaks of the worth of all people, which was addressed in Section 1. Because of the Fall and the entrance of sin into the world, mankind has fallen under the judgment of God. The image of God is still a part of all people, but it has been marred by sin. All people have great worth in the eyes of God, but all people also are under the judgment of God because of sin.

This is not true for the Christian who has been forgiven and made new in Christ. The Bible has far more to say about the worth of the Christian than it has to say about the worth of mankind in general. There is abundant reason, based on biblical

truth, for every Christian to understand their worth before God and to have a healthy self-concept.

Because this section is longer, it is divided into three parts. **Part A** asks where one's sense of worth ought to come from. **Part B** discusses how one can transform these truths into personal experience. **Part C** asks, "Isn't the self evil and sinful? Shouldn't one put the self to death instead of discussing its worth?"

Part A: Where does one's worth come from?

Everyone searches for worth and meaning in life based on something. What they choose to value will determine whether they are able to attain a sense of worth. If they believe that human worth is determined by beauty, intelligence, wealth or status, they will believe they have worth to the extent they have those things. To the extent they do not have those things, they will feel worthless and insignificant.

The battleground for significance is in the *mind*. What one *believes* determines what they *value*, and what they *value* determines what they *feel* about themselves and others. The Bible stresses that a person's beliefs determine their values:

John 8:32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Romans 12:2-3 Do not conform any longer 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. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

To truly understand one's worth, a person must value the things God values. They must see themselves through his eyes.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 This is what the LORD says, "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

1 Samuel 16:7 The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

2 Corinthians 10:12 We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.

Having an understanding of one's significance in Christ does not result in pride. Rather, one learns that fellow Christians are as loved and valued by God as they are. God's goal is not that one becomes lifted up in pride or that one despises themselves. His goal is that one loves themselves the same as they love others.

Matthew 23:39 Love your neighbor as yourself.

Ephesians 5:28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

The Christian should not believe that they are more important than others or that others are more important than them. Jesus commands everyone to love others *as* they love themselves. Understanding one's significance in Christ helps one to understand the value of others' lives as well as their own.

Part B: Moving God's truth from the mind to the spirit

One does not need to be a Christian very long to know that God loves them. The Bible repeatedly confirms God's vast love for Christians. No Christian would dispute this love. Yet many Christians do not have a sense of feeling loved by God. Some Christians have hearts filled with guilt and shame because of their sins and failures. Others see God the Father as a great philanthropist who generously gives eternal life but may not particularly *like* them. One may be ready to acknowledge the love of God in their minds but may not have come to the point where it creates a sense of feeling loved in their hearts.

God *wants* the Christian to be deeply aware of his passionate emotional love for them. In Ephesians 3:16-19, Paul prayed:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Paul is writing to a group of people who are already believers. Paul wants the Ephesians—and all the saints—to grasp the love of Christ in a manner that surpasses head knowledge. God wants all Christians everywhere to experience God's love in their hearts. The Apostle John expresses the same thing:

1 John 4:18 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.

When many Christians think of entering into God's presence, they do not imagine joyfully coming before a loving Father. They have hearts full of fear, shame and inadequacy. Why? John says these Christians have not been made perfect in love. It has already been clarified that these Christians are completely forgiven, adopted into the family of God, and passionately loved by the Father. Yet their hearts are dominated by fear, not by joy and peace.

Why are many Christians full of fear and shame? Because they are more emotionally in touch with their own flaws than they are the truth of whom they are in Christ. God wants Christians to experience His love in a way that surpasses their experiences of pain and loss.

God tells Christians His intensely passionate love for them is not something they will experience once they improve themselves, but something they will experience just as they are today. God was speaking about the Prodigal Son, not the compliant brother, when He said in Luke 15:20 and 15:10:

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.... there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

This is how God and His angels feel about someone who has made a complete mess of his life. God's passionate love is not earned by the diligent work of the obedient Christian; it is the birthright of every child of God.

So how can one take the truths that are in their mind and move them 18 inches south into their heart? Jesus said in John 15:9, "Abide in My love." If one's Christian experience is only composed of hard work, they will only experience God's love on a rational level. Warmth and compassion in marriage is maintained by regular, consistent expression of affection for one another. Maintaining the warmth of that relationship requires time and affection from both persons. God extends his passionate love to Christians every day. Christians must make it a priority to abide in Christ's love. This means inviting the love of God to fill those areas of life where the deepest hurt and loss are felt. Experiencing God's love in one's heart is not a one-time event. Like a healthy marriage, it is something that is able to grow in stages over time.

Part C: But isn't the self sinful, wicked and worthless?

Some object to an emphasis on the worth of the Christian because of what the Bible teaches about the sinfulness of human nature. There are passages that can be mistaken to say that human beings are worthless because of their rebellion against God. Some have concluded that it is the duty of the Christian to eradicate the self, not to find the value of the self. The following are some passages that speak clearly about the wickedness of the human heart:

Romans 7:18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.

Romans 7:23-25 I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Mark 10:18 “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone.”

Mark 8:35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

Luke 14:26 If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.

Colossians 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.

Some Christians misunderstand passages like these to say that their self is by nature valueless and needs to be eradicated. They believe that somehow God and themselves (or possibly just God alone) work together to destroy “me” so that a new, Christ-centered being can come into existence.

It feels awkward to embrace the worth of the believer while at the same time comprehending the wickedness of human nature as taught by the verses above. It feels as if both cannot be true.

It is helpful to understand four chronological stages of human nature. First is the **innocent** self, the way God created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Second is the **fallen** self. This refers to the condition of mankind after the Fall and continues to describe all non-Christians today. Third is the **redeemed** self. This refers to all born-again Christians in this life. Christians have a reborn, transformed nature yet still struggle with that fallen side of themselves that still lives within. Fourth is the **glorified** self, the Christian in heaven who is perfected and no longer has any inclination toward sin. The following will look at each of these one by one:

1. The *innocent self*: This refers to the way Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world.

Genesis 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Despite the Fall, the image of God remains in all people. This leads Christians to affirm the value of all human life, as was discussed in Section One.

2. The *fallen self*: The sin of Adam and Eve brought corruption and death to all of their descendants. Mankind stands separated from God because of sin and its effects.

Ephesians 4:17-18 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

Romans 3:9-10 What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one."

Because of the Fall, all people have hearts that are inclined away from God. They are not able to please God. This fallen self is at war with God, and this self must be put to death to enter into a right relationship with God.

Romans 8:7-9 The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

3. The *redeemed self*: When a person comes to faith in Christ, he is reborn—born again. God gives birth to a new nature that did not exist prior to salvation. The qualities of a believer, listed below, are true of every redeemed person whether they have been believers for days or years, whether they are living in or out of fellowship with God.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Galatians 5:24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Romans 6:2-4 We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

The redeemed self is no longer controlled by sin, Satan and death. However, in this life the redeemed Christian still has the evil desires of the fallen self within. There is a lifelong battle against the sinful desires of the evil nature and the godly desires of the redeemed nature. This results in Christians being torn between two passions and two allegiances. It feels like an internal civil war.

Galatians 5:17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Romans 7:18-19 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

When one affirms the worth of the Christian, they are referring to the *redeemed* self. It is very correct to say that the *fallen* self is in rebellion against God and must be put to death. As a result, one must hold to two complementary views of the nature of the Christian. On the one hand, every Christian has a *redeemed* nature that is of great value. At the same time, every Christian also has a *fallen* nature that is in opposition to God and must be resisted, as was just seen.

Many hold to an imbalanced view of the believer that emphasizes one part of his nature over the other. Those who de-emphasize the *fallen* nature can hold to a view of Christianity that does not compel the Christian to righteous living. Those who de-emphasize the *redeemed* nature can have a self-loathing faith that sees Christian growth as a constant process of hating and eradicating one's self. A healthy, holistic view of the Christian is acutely aware of both sides of his nature.

Part 4: The glorified self: This will be the state of every Christian in heaven. Upon death, the fallen nature will be finally eradicated by God. Not only will one not sin any more, but they will not be capable of being tempted.

1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

1 John 2:16-17 For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from

the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Hebrews 12:23 You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect.

“Believer’s Identity in Christ”

Addressing the Issue of Self Worth From a Biblical Perspective

Many people think of themselves as inadequate, shameful and unworthy. It seems obvious to them that they are not pretty enough, smart enough, wealthy enough, connected enough or educated enough to be important. They perceive themselves as second-class persons. Their families and friends may point out all their shortcomings. They feel they are unwanted and of little worth.

What is God’s view of these people? How does He regard them? In these 6 lessons we will learn from the Bible about God’s great love for all people. All people are loved by God. In addition, Christians have a very special place. We will learn about the believer’s identity in Christ.

Lesson 1

We must change our beliefs and feelings about ourselves according to truth

Romans 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer 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.

John 8:32 you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Have others said things about you that made you feel inferior? Have they commented that you aren’t especially good-looking, or your clothes aren’t trendy, or you come from a poor family, or you aren’t able to attend a good school? These are the standards people often use to compare themselves to others. But what are God’s standards? How does God determine we have worth—by our looks, clothing or income? In these classes we will learn that God sees each person as having great worth. We must dismiss the critical comments people make about us when they judge us by human standards. These verses tell us we must learn God’s standards, and view ourselves by them.

We must see ourselves as God sees us, not as others see us

1 Samuel 16:7 Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

In mere seconds we can judge someone based upon his or her beauty, wealth or education. Many people compete with each other to be better in these areas. Many are born into poor families, with unattractive features. If they compare themselves

with others, there is no way for them to win. But God does not measure people's worth by their looks, wealth or education. God looks at the heart. We must learn to stop judging ourselves by external factors, and instead evaluate ourselves based on what is in our heart.

2 Corinthians 10:12 We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.

Here God says it is unwise to compare ourselves with others. Many of us would be content with our lives if we were not aware of someone else who has more than we do. In God's eyes, all His children are greatly valuable. There is no need to compare ourselves with others or compete with others. Christians don't need to compete with one another to be more acceptable to God. Every Christian is already completely accepted in the sight of God! What would it be like if others completely accepted you, giving you no rejection at all? How would you feel? God, the Creator of the universe, knows everything about you and completely accepts you. Our hearts can fully rest in the vast love of God!

God delights in us

Psalms 147:11 The Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.

What do you delight in? Do you have a favorite food, singer, or friend that brings you joy? God has something He greatly delights in: those who fear Him. God does not merely tolerate us or put up with us. He is not forced to allow us into heaven; he passionately wants us to enter heaven and be with Him forever. Can you see yourself as someone God delights in?

John 15:9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

Some people grew up without a father, and others were not loved by their fathers. It can be difficult to imagine God the Father as a loving person if our human father was not a loving person. In this verse John tells us how much God the Father loves us. He loves us as much as He loves Jesus. How much does the Father love Jesus?

Completely! That is how much God loves us! When we are tempted to think of ourselves as worthless and shameful, we must quote verses like these that remind us how much God loves us. Satan tells us we are worthless and undesirable; God says He deeply loves us.

Zephaniah 3:17 The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.

When you listen to popular music, do you hear a lot of love songs? Can you sing a few lines of a great song where a young man is telling how much he loves his

girlfriend? According to this verse, God sings songs over you. Has anyone ever sung about you, to tell you how much they value you? That is exactly what God does. What words do you think God uses when He sings over you?

God loved us before we were born

Psalm 139:13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, 16 your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Here David tells us God planned every detail of our lives before we were born. That includes our height, hair, eyes, IQ, family and hometown. None of these things are accidental. Is there one feature of yourself you don't like? If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be—your height, nose, skin, IQ, income, health or something else? When God formed you in your mother's womb, He could have changed the one thing you just mentioned. God could have made you taller or prettier or smarter or wealthier. But He did not. He likes you just the way you are. There is nothing you could change about yourself that would make God love you more than He does right now. God accepts you whether other people accept you or not. Some factories manufacture both top-quality goods and low-quality goods. Heaven does not. Every person created by God is top-quality in His sight. God does not manufacture garbage! You are extremely valuable in His sight.

We were created to glorify God (not to make Him ashamed, embarrassed or angry)

Isaiah 43:6 Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—
7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.

Some people have been told that they disappointed their families. Maybe it was because they were handicapped or a girl or were not able to test into a good school. These people can feel that they have dishonored their families. But God is not ashamed of any of His children. Isaiah says all of God's children are created to bring glory to Him. We are made in God's image. Christians are cleansed from all sin by the blood of Jesus Christ. When we get to heaven we will no longer sin or be tempted, and then we will fully glorify God.

1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

What things must we do to glorify God? Pray, study the Bible and share the gospel? God is glorified when we do these things. But in this verse Paul says we can glorify God when we eat and drink. Christians glorify God by simply *existing*, even when they are sound asleep. When God looks down upon us from heaven—even when

we are asleep—He sees someone made alive and holy in Christ. Some Christians have Alzheimer's or are in a coma. They are not able to think correctly, or maybe not at all. But this does not stop them from bringing glory to God. A mother loves her newborn baby, even though that baby cannot speak, walk or do anything else. She loves her baby, not because that baby can do something helpful to her, but simply because it is her child. God does not love us only when we work hard for Him. No matter what a Christian may be doing at any given moment, his very existence as a God's child brings glory to Him!

Lesson 2

All people are made in God's image

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

This passage tells us about the creation of the entire human race. It says that all people are made in the image of God. Humans are vastly different from animals, and the difference is the image of God. What is the image of God in man? It includes our intellect, emotions, communication skills, the ability to choose, the ability to form relationships, and an immortal soul. Every person of every race has these characteristics. Whether male or female, young or old, rich or poor, healthy or handicapped, brilliant or retarded, no matter what language they speak or the color of their skin, all the peoples of the earth have these characteristics. When God sees any person, He sees Himself reflected in them. If we revere the Lord, we must also respect people, because they are made to be like Him.

God compassionately loves even those who have never heard of Him

Jonah 4:11 Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?

Matthew 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Some Christians think we should love other Christians, but are not required to have great love for non-Christians. Across the world today are millions of people who do not have a Bible in their language or a church in their community. God still loves them—and so should we. All people are made in God's image and are worthy of love, whether they are Buddhist, Muslim, atheist or followers of some other religion. This does not mean they all get to enter heaven and have eternal life. It does mean that they are all of great worth in the eyes of God.

God loves those who sin against Him

Romans 5:8 God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Luke 23:34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Jesus does not wait for us to repent before He loves us. He prayed for the forgiveness of the Roman soldiers at the very moment they were driving the nails in His hands! Is there someone who is oppressing or criticizing you now? It is very difficult for us to love people like this. But God asks us to forgive and love them. Maybe you feel you are unworthy of God's love because you still sin, although you are a Christian. All Christians continue to struggle with sin until they get to heaven. God loves us nevertheless. That does not mean it is no problem for Christians to go on sinning. We must work hard to live holy lives. But on earth we will continue to struggle with sin. When we sin we must repent. But we must also remind us that this sin is already covered with the blood of Christ, and we are fully loved and accepted in the sight of God.

God loves little children as much as adults

Matthew 18:10 See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

Matthew 19:14 Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.

Some people see children as irritating distractions, others as a burdensome expense. Others deeply value their own descendants, but have little compassion for disadvantaged children. Jesus says specific angels are assigned to watch over children. If angels carefully look after children, so should we!

Jesus does not say that children need to have faith like adults. Jesus says adults need to have faith like children. Half of all people who come to faith in Christ believe before the age of 13. We must value children because they are made in the image of God, just like adults. We must share the good news of Christ with them while they are young.

God loves the handicapped as much as the healthy

Luke 14:13 when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

Millions of people have some form of handicap. Some are blind, deaf or are unable to walk. Some are mentally retarded and cannot think well. Some have a mental illness. Many people feel uncomfortable around handicapped people and avoid being around them. They do not know what to say to them. Some families are ashamed of handicapped family members and want to keep them out of sight, so they do not bring shame to their family.

Some religions based on karma teach that a person is handicapped because they or some other family member did a very bad deed. This makes them deeply ashamed of that handicapped person. The Bible does not teach this. Jesus befriended lepers, blind people, those unable to walk and others with various kinds of handicap. He did not regard them as inferior to those without a handicap, and He teaches us to love handicapped people the same way we love healthy people.

Who do you know who has some kind of handicap? Do you ever try to avoid being around them? What can you do to show love to them?

God loves women as much as men

John 4:27 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Some cultures value men more than women. They especially value boy babies over girl babies. Many young girls are sent to orphanages. Others grow up knowing their parents would have rather had a son.

God sees both men and women as equally valuable. He wants us to protect and care for little girls the same way we protect and care for little boys. The verse from John tells us that Jesus' followers were surprised that He would take time to talk to a woman. Sometimes other believers will not understand if we care for the needs of women. We need to care for them anyway.

God equally loves people of all races

Acts 10:34 God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

Revelation 5:9 with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.

When you grew up, was there an ethnic group everyone hated? No matter what that ethnic group is, God loves them as much as He loves your ethnic group. Jesus told a parable about a "Good Samaritan". The Samaritans were the group most hated by Jesus' people, the Jews. The Jews did not believe there could be such a person as a "Good Samaritan". Jesus told the story to help them realize that people of any race can follow him and be good people.

Some Asian peoples resent the Japanese, and are not ready to forgive them for past offenses. If Jesus walked on earth today, he might tell a parable about a "Good Japanese". We must be ready to forgive and love people from any ethnic group. If they are Christians, we should embrace them as our brothers and sisters in Christ. If they are not Christians, we should seek to send them the gospel.

What ethnic group have you been taught to hate or fear? Have you ever sat down and had a conversation with a person from this ethnic background? How might you reach out in love to people of this ethnic group?

God loves the poor as much as the rich

Luke 6:20 Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Luke 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Wealthy people of any society tend to look down upon poor people of their own race. They may treat housecleaners, restaurant staff or construction workers as second-class citizens. Jesus befriended many rich people, but He befriended the poor as well. When Jesus was born 2,000 years ago, He was born in a poor city in a poor country to a poor family. Jesus never owned a house or went to college. Throughout history, more poor people than rich people have become followers of Jesus.

The Bible repeatedly commands us to give generously to the poor. In many places the poor come to faith in Christ when they see the generous, loving deeds of Christians. How can you show love to the poor around you?

Christians must love all people, even their enemies

Matthew 5:44 Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

It's easy to love our friends. It's very difficult to love those who insult us or oppress us. If we only love our friends, nobody will think that is very special. But people will take notice if we act in loving ways to those who hurt us.

Who has insulted you, hurt you, or in any way been your “enemy”? How can you show love to them?

We love people by doing good works and sharing the gospel with them

Matt. 5:16 let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Mark 16:15-16 Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Every day God is loving to non-Christians. He sends them sunshine, rain, food, clothing, and family. He does this even if they do not believe He exists. God wants us to be loving toward non-Christians as well.

The greatest need of any non-Christian is to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must let them know of Jesus’ love for them. But we must also show them love in ways they can understand, often by help with their physical needs. Many non-believers have come to faith because Christians helped them with medical care, educational needs, orphanages, and many other ways. What are some practical ways you can show God’s love to non-Christians?

Lesson 3

We are children of God

1 John 3:1-2 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

If you work hard, you might be able to win a competition, pass an exam, get a high-paying job or purchase an expensive home. But you cannot work hard and as a result become someone else's son or daughter. Being someone's child is the result of being born into their biological family, and no amount of work or money can make that happen. If you were not born as a particular person's child, you will never become their child.

God's power is so miraculous that He is able to make us His sons and daughters. We are not merely permitted into heaven as citizens; we are born again as God's children. Because children have their parents' DNA, they often look and act like their parents. Because believers are children of God, they will naturally begin to behave like their Heavenly Father. Christians live holy lives not only because they are commanded to, but also because it is their very nature to do so. It is both an honor and a responsibility to be God's child. In what ways do you behave like your Heavenly Father? In what ways do you not?

Our bodies are God's possession

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

We may not take good care of a friend's bicycle or the seat of a publicly owned bus. But if something is our own possession, we take care of it. We lock up our homes to keep out thieves. We stay alert for pickpockets who might grab our purse or cell phone. Those things are ours, and we want to keep on owning and using them.

In the same way, our physical bodies are God's possession. He bought them at a very high price: the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. Imagine having a label printed on your forehead, hands and legs that says, "Property of Jehovah God". That is really what we are! Wealthy kings do not purchase second-hand goods at a small store. They purchase the best quality goods available. As we will see in our next point, God has purchased your body to become His holy temple.

Our bodies are God's temple

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

1 Peter 2:4-5 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Many countries have beautiful temples made with expensive stone and gold roofs. People know that temples are not places where you go to do everyday things like shopping or dining. Temples are places where you go to seek the favor of a god. Our bodies are God's temple. This means that our bodies are places where spiritual ministries are performed, such as the offering of prayers, the doing of good works, and the confession of sin. These things glorify God.

In the Old Testament, God was angry when sinful acts were performed in His temple. God destroyed the temple of Jerusalem because it was used to worship other gods. In the same way, our bodies are the sacred temples of God. We should not defile God's temple with sinful deeds. Instead, we live holy lives in the bodies God has given us.

Believers no longer own their bodies, but God owns them. How should we take care of our physical bodies? What kind of things should we do and not do with them?

We are declared not guilty of sin and made sinless in God's sight

Romans 8:1-2 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Every country has a Supreme Court. It is the highest court in the country. Once that court has declared someone guilty or not guilty, there is no way to appeal that decision. God himself is the Supreme Court of the universe. When He has rendered His verdict, no one can overturn that decision. Some people fear that in heaven God, Satan or other people will accuse them of sin. They can list all the bad things they've done, and feel ashamed because of them. They fear that God and others will continually remind them of their failures.

But the verses above tell us that God, the Supreme Judge of the universe, has already declared us not guilty. Thus God himself will not accuse us of sin, and

nobody else has the authority to accuse us. The passage from Corinthians says that Jesus who had no sin took upon his body our sins on the cross. The result is that believers have the righteousness of God. If you are a Christian, you do not have your own righteousness; you have the righteousness of God. God's righteousness is not 99%; it is 100%. The righteousness you now possess is not 50% or 99%. Just like God's, it is 100%. In the eyes of God the Father, you have already been given the righteousness of Jesus Christ that cannot be taken away, and that righteousness is 100%. You no longer need to feel guilt or shame. You are declared completely innocent in the sight of God!

Are there things you feel ashamed of? Imagine those things nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ. Those things are placed upon Him, and thus they are no longer upon you. Take time to meditate on this, and thank God He has taken away all your sin and shame.

We cannot be separated from God's love

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

People are separated from their loved ones for many reasons. Sometimes a loved one dies. Or perhaps they must move to another province or country. Maybe they must go to jail. Sometimes couples divorce. Sometimes people are angry, and make it clear they no longer love a particular family member. For any of these reasons we may not experience the love of a family member.

This cannot happen with God's love for us. God cannot die. There is no country, prison, office or farmland where He is not present. God will never renounce us in anger, deciding that He no longer loves us. All of God's anger towards us was taken out on His son Jesus as He hung on the cross. Family members may oppose Christianity, and we may experience persecution. But no person, not even Satan himself, can separate us from the love of God. This passage in Romans tells us that we may go through very painful experiences, even to the point of death, but we will always be surrounded by the love of God. You do not need to feel insecure. You are already immersed in the love of God, and you always will be. Although others may reject you, God never will.

When do you feel unloved? When do you feel unworthy of being loved? How can you change your thinking based on this passage in Romans?

Lesson 4

Each Christian has unique gifts and a unique role

1 Corinthians 12:14-18 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

What would happen if your lungs stopped working? Within a few minutes you would die. The same is true for your heart, brain, liver and many other organs. There are organs of our bodies most of us know little about, and yet we could not survive without them. You could live without your eyes, ears, hands and legs, but your life would be very limited.

Every Christian is a member of the body of Christ. You may not feel very significant, but in reality, your role is very important. If we could choose what part of the body we would like to be, most of us would choose to be something attractive like the eyes, mouth or hair. Probably none of us would choose to be the liver or lungs, but the body cannot survive without them.

Maybe you feel your work is unimportant. You might drive a bus, cook in a restaurant, or have a vegetable stand. If nobody did these jobs, everyone would be in trouble. These jobs have real significance. God made Adam a gardener, Moses a shepherd, and Jesus a carpenter. All roles in the church are important, too. The church needs people who can preach, clean, cook, lead worship, organize and encourage. Each person has the ability to do one or more of these things. You have a very special role to fill!

We can accomplish all of God's will through His power

Philippians 4:13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Many people feel powerless over their circumstances. They feel they cannot improve their economic status or lifestyle. Yet in this verse Paul tells us we can accomplish much through God's power. In the Bible God enabled people like us to walk on water, heal the sick, survive in a fiery furnace and defeat giants. God's power is the same today. Through God's power we can accomplish anything He wants us to do.

Paul is not saying that God will enable us to do anything we want to. Christians are not guaranteed they will be able to attend a famous college, get married, make a lot

of money or travel abroad. God graciously grants these things to some of His children, but not to all of them.

Paul's meaning is that Christians will be able to accomplish anything He has chosen for them. There are many things that are difficult for believers to do. Telling the truth, handling money honestly, and being morally pure are difficult. It is also difficult to be a Christian without the support of family members. We may feel that we do not have the strength to do these things. But we are never alone. God created the universe with His infinite power, and that same power dwells in us. Through God's power we can accomplish all of God's will for us!

The Father loves us just as He loves Jesus

John 17:23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

1 John 4:18 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.

How much does God love us? Many people feel He cannot love us very much. After all, we are sinners. We don't have much money, wisdom or anything else to offer Him. But the degree of God's love for us does not depend on anything we can give Him.

How much does God the Father love Jesus? There is no limit to the Father's love for His uniquely begotten Son. Here we read that the Father's love for us is as great as His love for Jesus. In Lesson 3 we learned that God has taken away our sins and given us the righteousness of Christ. When God the Father sees us, He sees the same holiness He sees in Jesus. He knows that in heaven we will completely obey Him, just as Jesus does. His love for us is complete and eternal, just like His love for Jesus. We do not need to be afraid of God, because His love for us casts out all our fears.

Jesus loves us as the Father loves Him

John 15:9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

If God the Father loves us as much as He loves Jesus, how much does Jesus love us? Here Jesus tells us that He loves us as He loves the Father.

Because God the Father did not take on a physical body, it can be hard for us to comprehend His love for us. But Jesus became flesh. During His years on earth we see how much He loved His followers. He chose disciples who were poor and uneducated. He spent most of His time with them and let them closely observe how He lived. He was patient with them when they did not understand Him. He did not reject them when they ran away during His crucifixion. Most importantly, He laid

down His own life so they could enter heaven. That is the kind of love Jesus has for us!

In what ways do you have weaknesses and failures like Jesus' disciples? Did those failures keep Jesus from completely loving them? His love for you is exactly the same. As we did before in Lesson 3, imagine all your failures nailed to Jesus' cross.

God treasures us as a nursing mother treasures her children

Isaiah 49:15-16 Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! 16 See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.

God's love for us is infinite. That can seem abstract and difficult to understand. Here we have a clear picture of God's love for us: the picture of a mother loving her newborn baby. That little baby offers his mother no practical help. He cannot feed himself, clothe himself or walk. He never says "thank you" when his mother does any of these things for him. Yet none of these things makes his mother disappointed. Every time she looks down and sees her young son, she is filled with love. The only thing that inspires this love in her is that this is her son. The reason God loves believers is not that they are perfect, but that they are His children.

God has carved our names on His hand. That's a tradition that doesn't exist anywhere on earth. Imagine a father tattooing the names of his children on his palm. Every time he sees his hand he would remember them. That's what God the Father has done with us. We are always on His mind and in His heart. We are treasured and loved in His sight!

Lesson 5

Problems that matter to believers, also matter to God

1 Peter 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

Sometimes when we tell others about our problems, they don't seem to care. Maybe they are busy doing something else. Maybe they tell us we shouldn't be upset by such little things. We may feel unimportant because they do not seem to care about our hurts. Maybe we believe that we must take care of ourselves, because nobody else will care about us. This may lead us to believe that God will not be concerned about our needs either. After all, if God has to manage the entire universe, we may believe He would have no time for the relatively small issues we bring to Him.

Peter says this thinking is incorrect. He says that our burdens are issues that matter to God. More than that, he says we can cast our burdens upon God. Have you ever carried a heavy backpack or suitcase, and felt relieved when you could finally set it

down? Many of our problems are like heavy emotional burdens. If we place those burdens on God's shoulders, we no longer have to carry those heavy weights ourselves. God is never too busy to listen to us. He is never distracted by other events. And God will not be angry at us for bringing our personal concerns to Him. The things that matter to us, matter to God.

Humility teaches us that other believers are beloved by God as much as we are

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

The Bible clearly tells us that every believer is fully loved and accepted by God. I am special; you are special; and every other Christian is also special. Pride tempts us to believe that because we are loved and accepted by God, we are superior to others. That is not true. God equally loves all of His children, without any favoritism. There is no need for us to compete with others to be more loved by God. All Christians are already completely loved. Just as God fully accepts all His children, He tells us to accept them as well.

Nobody has ever been more loved by God than Jesus. However, Jesus did not selfishly keep all of God's love to himself. Because he cared for us, he suffered and died to share God's love with us. He commands us to be like him in sacrificing ourselves so that others may know God's love. If we feel unloved and insecure, it will be difficult for us to accept others who offend us. But if our hearts are secure in God's love for us, we can love the most offensive people.

What person irritates you the most? Is there anyone you try to avoid being around? God says we must prefer them above ourselves. What practical things can you do to show love to them? How can you help them feel more accepted and secure?

Suffering teaches us to rely on God's power

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Some people mistakenly believe that if we are deeply loved by God, He will protect us from suffering. This is not true. No one was ever loved by God more than Jesus,

yet no one ever suffered more deeply than Jesus. Throughout history millions of Christians have died for their faith, and all Christians have faced suffering of one sort or another.

The difference between Christians and non-Christians is not that Christians face less suffering than non-Christians. The difference is that non-Christians must face their hardships relying on only their human strength, while Christians face hardships filled with the limitless power of God.

What difficulty are you facing right now? Have you prayed for God to take away this hardship? This is the first step for us, since God often resolves our hardships in answer to prayer. However, God often has a purpose to accomplish through our sufferings. In Paul's case it was to teach him humility. If God does not remove your hardship in answer to prayer, ask Him to give you His grace to endure this hardship. Additionally, ask Him to teach you to rejoice in suffering, so that His power can be seen more clearly in your life.

We can have peace in any circumstances

John 14:27 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 16:33 I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

As we said in the previous section, believers often experience great hardships. God's love does not mean He will always take away those hardships. But it does mean that we can have peace in the midst of those hardships. Jesus says the peace He gives to us is not like the peace the world gives us. What is the difference? The peace the world gives depends on our circumstances. If things are going well for us, we have peace. But if things do not go well for us, we have anxiety. The peace Christians experience is not based on their external circumstances, but their confidence that Jesus' power is greater than any circumstances they face.

What circumstances in your life are bringing you anxiety? Possibly you spend a lot of time thinking about those things. If so, memorize John 16:33. Whenever you are tempted to think about the things in life that bring you anxiety, recite this verse to yourself, reminding yourself that Jesus Christ has overcome the world. He has full control over your circumstances. Some of the time God will remove the difficulty you are facing. Whether He does that or not, He will still give you the peace that comes from knowing He rules over all things.

Lesson 6

God works all things together for our good

Romans 8:28 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.

When we first read this verse, we may feel there is no way it could possibly be true. There are so many things in the world that are evil: earthquakes, murder, war, divorce, cancer, poverty and many more. These things have caused deep pain for countless people. Maybe you can tell the story of something that hurt you very deeply. How could God possibly bring a good outcome from these things?

Please notice that God does not say these things ARE good; He says they PRODUCE good. Poverty is not in itself a good thing; but it can make us more dependent upon God. An earthquake is not in itself a good thing; but it can make everyone aware they could die at any moment, and thus may make them think about whether they will enter heaven. People who are wealthy and healthy tend to be arrogant. Poverty and illness may be God's gracious gifts to teach us humility.

This verse is a wonderful promise for us to claim. We do not need to fear that there are random elements in the universe that God does not control. God watches over every event of history—every traffic accident, every cancer cell, every violent crime and every dishonest businessman is under the watchful eye of God. We may experience things in life that are deeply painful. But we can be certain that God will bring a good result from all of these things. In heaven we will see the good results God has brought about through these painful things.

God will complete the work He began in us

Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Have you ever seen a building that someone began to build, but never finished? Has anyone ever made a promise to you, but did not do what they had promised? Often people do not finish a project they started because they get bored with it, run out of money, or become busy with other things. Even when people make firm promises to us, they may not keep those promises.

Paul says that God has already begun the work of salvation in our lives, and will complete that work when Jesus returns. Part of our salvation is already completed. Our sins are already forgiven, Jesus Christ lives in our hearts, and we have a home waiting for us in heaven. Other parts of our salvation have not yet been realized. We still sin, we sometimes become sick, and all of us will die. Those parts of our salvation will not be completed until Jesus Christ returns to earth. However, we have God's guarantee that He will definitely accomplish those things. Today we are all "works in progress". But we have God's guarantee that He will complete the good work He began in us when Jesus returns.

We have a future beyond imagination

1 Corinthians 2:9 No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

What do you think heaven is like? If you have a vivid imagination, you can try to guess what we will see in heaven. There are many people who have vivid imaginations—poets, authors, inventors, artists and scientists all have a strong sense of imagination. But Paul says that heaven is so far beyond our comprehension that no one on earth has even begun to guess what it is like. Whatever you are looking forward to in heaven, the reality will actually be much better than that!

We will reign with Christ forever

Genesis 1:28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Revelation 5:9-10 You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.

On earth people hold powerful offices because of their family of origin, their connections or their money. Maybe you believe you will never hold a high office. However, God promises that in heaven all His children will reign as kings. Jesus Christ will be Lord over all, and we will reign under His lordship. Genesis says that mankind was created to have dominion over the earth. Because of the Fall, we have lost much of that dominion. But when Jesus Christ returns to earth, He will remove all the negative results of the Fall. Earth and heaven will once again be perfect, and we will be perfect too.

If you had the chance to meet a country's king, chairman or president, how would you treat them? You would probably treat them with great respect. Since you will someday reign as a king with Christ, you are worthy of as much respect as any ruler on earth. Sometimes rulers on earth abuse their office to gain wealth or favor. In heaven everyone will be as righteous as Jesus, and will use their powers only for the benefit of those they rule. It will be a perfect system governed by perfect kings under righteous King Jesus.

Conclusion

The things you have studied in these six lessons are all based on truths in the Bible. Some of them are difficult for us to believe. There will be times when you will be tempted to believe you are unloved, unworthy and shameful. It will be helpful for you to memorize several of these verses. When you are tempted to believe Satan's lies about you, you can quote God's Word to show him where he is wrong. May God impress these truths on each of our hearts!