SHORT STUDIES FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Growing Closer to God



Short Studies on Prayer, the Word and the Spirit
Nine studies in one volume

Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity
Enterprises

Growing Closer to God

Short Studies on Prayer, the Word and the Spirit

Short Studies for the Christian Life

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

Contents

Trusting the Word of God.....5
Knowing the Holy Spirit.....15
Making Room for Prayer.....23
Praying Every Day.....31
Ask, Seek, Knock.....39
Giving God My Whole Heart.....51
Guarding My Walk with God.....59
Walking in Purity and Freedom.....67
Living by God's Commands.....73
Acronym List.....81

Trusting the Word of God

Reading Scripture with care and confidence

Andrew Dominguez



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Contents

Introduction..... 7
1 Why Scripture matters..... 7
2 Context comes first..... 8
3 From manuscripts to a printed Bible..... 9
4 Understanding translation and textual notes..... 10
5 Using study helps wisely..... 11
6 Reading in order to respond..... 12

Introduction

I want to understand what God has said before I decide how to apply it. That sounds simple, but it takes care. It means reading beyond a favorite sentence, asking who is speaking, and allowing the passage to challenge what I already think. Confidence in Scripture should make me a more careful reader. My purpose here is to help us approach God's Word with faith, humility, and a willingness to learn.

Over years of leading Bible studies and serving as a lay pastor, I have met believers who love the Lord but feel intimidated by their own Bibles. Translating the Steadfast Literal Bible convinced me that God's Word is clear when we read it carefully and take it at face value. I wrote this book to give everyday Christians tools to read Scripture with confidence.

1 Why Scripture matters

> *Every Scripture **is** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which **is** in righteousness.*
> **2 Timothy 3:16 (SLB)**

> *so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work.*
> **2 Timothy 3:17 (SLB)**

Second Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB) describes Scripture as "God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which is in righteousness." Its purpose reaches into the life we actually live. God equips His people for good work

through His Word. I should expect that reading it will sometimes encourage me and sometimes correct me.

Second Peter 1:20-21 (SLB) also directs our attention to God's part in the giving of Scripture. Prophecy "was never borne by the will of man, but being borne by the Holy Spirit, holy men of God spoke." I therefore approach the Bible as more than a collection of interesting religious opinions.

That confidence does not mean every interpretation I have heard is correct. Scripture and my interpretation of Scripture are not the same thing. I can believe the Bible is true and still need to reconsider how I have understood a passage. Humility belongs beside conviction.

When a passage makes me uncomfortable, I want to resist the urge to explain it away. I also want to resist the urge to make it say more than it says. Both habits put my preferences ahead of the text. A faithful reading begins by listening, and it continues by accepting correction when the passage calls for it.

There were years I knew the right church answers and still drifted into bad choices, because I was not letting Scripture shape my daily life. When my life hit a wall in 2020, willpower was not enough. Going back to the plain truth of God's Word helped anchor my recovery and the rebuilding of my marriage.

2 Context comes first

> *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth.*
> **2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)**

Before I ask what a passage means for my life, I need to understand what it is saying. Who wrote it? Who first received it? What comes before and after it? Is the writer giving a command, describing an event, presenting poetry, or explaining a promise? Those questions keep a single sentence connected to the message around it.

Exegesis means drawing out what the text communicates. Eisegesis means reading my own ideas into it. I want the first approach. A verse should not become evidence for an idea simply because a few of its words sound useful for my argument.

I read Scripture in its ordinary sense unless the context gives a reason to recognize figurative language. A figure of speech still communicates truth. The task is to understand that truth from the passage, rather than assigning a hidden meaning to every detail. Scripture should help explain Scripture.

This is why I do not build doctrine from the placement of English words, an acrostic that depends on a particular translation, or arithmetic performed on chapter and verse numbers. Those tricks can make an illustration easy to remember, but they do not tell us what the Bible writer meant. God's Word deserves

better than an argument that disappears when the wording changes.

3 From manuscripts to a printed Bible

The history of the Bible raises several questions, and it helps to keep them apart. Inspiration concerns God's giving of Scripture. The canon concerns the books received as Scripture. Manuscript history concerns the copying and transmission of the text. Translation concerns its rendering into another language. Mixing them up leads to careless answers.

The Protestant Bible contains 66 books, with 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. Those are the books I follow. Telling how the church came to recognize these books takes more care than naming one meeting and saying it created the Bible. Recognition and inspiration are different matters.

The old manuscripts that survive show us how the text was copied and handed down. The Dead Sea Scrolls include ancient biblical manuscripts from the area near Qumran. According to the Smithsonian, the first seven scrolls, among them the great Isaiah scroll, were found between late 1946 and mid-1947. That discovery belongs to manuscript history; it should not be presented as the moment the biblical books were first written.

Printing later changed how books could be produced. The Library of Congress dates the Gutenberg Bible to 1454 or 1455 and describes it as the first large-format typographic Bible produced in Europe. That wording is more careful than calling it the first book

ever printed. Erasmus' first printed Greek New Testament was published in 1516. That places it in the sixteenth century, not the fifteenth.

Historical evidence can deepen appreciation for the text handed down to us. It should be checked with the same care I ask people to bring to interpretation. A nice story about the Bible does not become true just because it gets repeated in a lesson.

4 Understanding translation and textual notes

Translation means carrying a text's meaning into another language. Translations differ in how much weight they give the original wording, the grammar, and how today's reader will hear a sentence. Those differences require explanation. They do not mean that every unfamiliar wording is an attempt to hide the truth.

The Steadfast Literal Bible is a word-for-word English translation I prepared from the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I use it consistently here. A quotation from a different translation should not be given the SLB label simply because much of it sounds the same.

Textual notes also deserve attention. They may alert a reader to a difference among manuscripts, rather than a translator's personal objection to a teaching. Before accusing a translation of dishonesty, I need to examine the evidence and understand what the note actually reports. My preference for one edition is not a substitute for that work.

Careful reading pays attention to language, context, and sources. I want to understand both the words in front of me and the evidence behind any explanation of them.

For years I used the NASB 1995. Now I use the Steadfast Literal Bible, which I translated so readers can see a word-for-word rendering in plain English, and I use J.P. Green's Interlinear Bible to confirm the text. Seeing how translators handle hard Hebrew or Greek words has made me appreciate the precision of Scripture more, not less. Footnotes are a tool, not a threat.

5 Using study helps wisely

A study Bible can help with background, cross-references, and difficult words. Its notes are still the work of an interpreter. I should read the biblical passage first and then use the notes as help, rather than allowing the notes to replace the passage in my mind.

When choosing study helps, I want to know who wrote them and what approach they take. A commentary can provide useful historical information while reaching an interpretation I do not share. I need to distinguish the background information from the commentator's conclusion. A confident tone does not settle the issue.

Original-language work also requires care. A dictionary entry can show several possible meanings, but context helps determine which meaning belongs in a particular verse. I should not pack every possible

meaning into one English word, or use a Greek term to make a weak claim sound like it carries authority. When I cannot verify a point, it is better to leave it open than pretend it is settled.

6 Reading in order to respond

> *A lamp to my foot **is** Your word, and a light to my pathway.*
> **Psalm 119:105 (SLB)**

A manageable reading habit is more useful than a plan I abandon because it is unrealistic. I would rather read a passage with attention than rush through several chapters without understanding what I have read. A schedule should support faithful reading, not become another way to measure my worth.

I begin by reading the passage more than once. Then I look at its place in the chapter and book. I note what is clear, what needs further study, and what response the passage calls for. If I write down a question, I can return to it without forcing a quick answer.

At church camp and on youth trips to Baja, I saw how young people grow when they put Scripture into practice. In any Bible study, it is easy to fill a notebook and walk out unchanged. Be doers of the word and not hearers only (James 1:22).

Application should grow out of the meaning. A command to forgive calls for more than admiring forgiveness. A warning about pride calls for

examining the way I treat people. A promise about Christ's return should strengthen faithfulness while I wait. Understanding should lead to response.

I also need the help of other believers. A humble conversation can reveal an assumption I missed or a passage I overlooked. My aim is not to collect enough information to win every argument. I want to know the Lord more deeply and live more faithfully before Him. Careful reading and a willing heart belong together.

Knowing the Holy Spirit

The Helper Jesus promised

Andrew Dominguez



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Contents

Introduction.....17
1 Who the Holy Spirit is.....17
2 What He does in someone who is searching.....18
3 What He does in a believer.....18
4 Power and gifts.....19
5 Walking with the Spirit.....20
6 What your salvation depends on.....21

Introduction

Of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Spirit is the One many Christians know least. Some think of Him as a force or a feeling. Some are nervous about Him because of what they have seen. Jesus spoke of Him as a Person, a Helper, and He said it was to our advantage that He would come.

I have served as a lay pastor and led Bible studies, and many believers I have met feel confused about the Holy Spirit. When I went through my hardest season and had to rebuild my life and marriage, I learned how much I depend on His daily help. I wrote this book to give everyday Christians a plain, Bible-based look at the Helper Jesus promised (John 14:16).

This book looks at who the Holy Spirit is, what He does in someone who is searching, what He does in a believer, and how we can walk with Him day by day.

1 Who the Holy Spirit is

On the night before the cross, Jesus told His disciples He was leaving. They were troubled. Then He made them a promise.

> *And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may remain with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world is not able to receive, because it does not see Him nor know Him; but you know Him, because He remains with you and will be in you.*
> **John 14:16-17 (SLB)**

Notice the words Jesus uses. He, not it. The Spirit teaches, guides, speaks, and can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30, SLB). A force cannot be grieved. A Person can.

The Spirit is also God. When Ananias lied about his gift, Peter said he had lied to the Holy Spirit, and then said, "You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:3-4, SLB). Jesus told us to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19, SLB). One name, three Persons.

When I translated the SLB, paying close attention to every word changed how I saw the Holy Spirit. Scripture does not describe Him as a force or a feeling. He is God Himself, with a mind and a will, who teaches and comforts. Knowing who He is changes how you pray, read Scripture and face each day.

2 What He does in someone who is searching

If you are reading this and something in you is stirring, that may be the Holy Spirit at work. Jesus said that when the Helper has come, "He will convict the world concerning sin and concerning righteousness and concerning judgment" (John 16:8, SLB).

Conviction is not the same as condemnation. It is the Spirit showing you the truth about yourself so that you can come to the One who forgives. Paul wrote that "a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him" (1

Corinthians 2:14, SLB). We need the Spirit even to understand the gospel.

Salvation itself is His work. God saved us "not by works which we did in righteousness, but according to His mercy," and He did it "through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5, SLB). Jesus called it being born from above (John 3:3, SLB). Many Bibles say "born again." The Greek word can carry both ideas.

Looking back, I can see the Holy Spirit drawing me before I could explain it. God put Pastor Jimmy Carter down our street in Victorville, gave me a job mowing his lawn, and used him to take me to church. The Holy Spirit is at work in a searching heart long before a person understands the gospel.

3 What He does in a believer

The moment a person trusts Christ, the Spirit comes to live in him.

> *in whom you also, having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation—in whom also having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is **the** pledge of our inheritance, for **the** redemption of the acquired possession, to **the** praise of His glory.*
>
> **Ephesians 1:13-14 (SLB)**

A seal marks ownership and protects what is inside. A pledge is a down payment that guarantees the rest is coming. The Spirit is God's promise that He will finish what He started.

The Spirit also gives us assurance. "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16, SLB). When we do not know what we should pray, "the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with inexpressible groanings" (Romans 8:26, SLB). He will guide us "into all the truth" (John 16:13, SLB).

After May 29, 2020, God broke through my denial and began changing my habits from the inside out. Real change did not come from trying harder. It came from submitting to God's Word and the Spirit's steady correction. When the Holy Spirit lives in a believer, He produces change willpower never could (Galatians 5:22-23).

4 Power and gifts

Jesus told His followers to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit before they went out.

> *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be witnesses to Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to* ***the*** *uttermost part of the earth.*
>
> **Acts 1:8 (SLB)**

The power of the Spirit is power to be a witness. In the book of Acts, ordinary fishermen spoke with a boldness that amazed the religious leaders. The Spirit also gives gifts to every believer. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7, SLB).

Christians disagree about some of the gifts, especially tongues and prophecy, and about whether the baptism of the Spirit comes at salvation or later. I cover that more in my mini book Understanding Baptism. What we can all agree on is that the gifts are for serving others, not for showing off.

I have led small groups, volunteered at church camp and helped lead five years of youth mission trips to Baja, Mexico. God's power showed up most often in quiet faithfulness, clear teaching and serving people when we were tired. The Spirit gives every believer practical gifts to build up the church (1 Corinthians 12:7).

5 Walking with the Spirit

The best evidence of the Spirit is not a spectacular moment. It is a changed life.

> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such* ***things*** *there is no law.*
>
> **Galatians 5:22-23 (SLB)**

Fruit grows slowly. You do not manufacture it. You stay connected and it comes. Walking with the Spirit means listening when He nudges you, confessing quickly when you grieve Him, and obeying even when you feel inadequate.

I once heard about a woman who felt burdened for years to share the gospel with her elderly neighbors and kept putting it off because of fear. When she finally went, she felt she had made a mess of it. Both

neighbors trusted Christ. Weeks later their son, a preacher who had prayed for his father for years, knocked on her door to thank her. God takes the weak things and does mighty things when we obey the Spirit's urging.

6 What your salvation depends on

The Holy Spirit's whole work is to point you to Jesus. Jesus said of the Spirit, "He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and will declare it to you" (John 16:14, SLB). So the Spirit's message to you is the same as the gospel.

> *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this **is** not from yourselves; the gift **is** of God, not from works, so that no one may boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8-9 (SLB)**

Your salvation depends on Jesus Christ, who died for your sins and rose again. It does not depend on having a certain experience or a certain gift. Paul wrote, "if you confess with your mouth Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him out of the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9, SLB).

If the Spirit is stirring your heart right now, do not put it off. Tell God you know you have sinned. Ask Jesus to forgive you and be your Lord. The Spirit who is drawing you will come to live in you and stay with you forever.

Leading Bible studies, I often hear believers ask whether they can lose their salvation when they stumble. I know that fear. I drifted from God more than once. Scripture says the Holy Spirit seals every believer the moment they trust Christ (Ephesians 1:13-14). Your salvation depends on God's seal, not your grip.

Making Room for Prayer

Seeking God with trust and persistence

Andrew Dominguez



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Contents

Introduction....25
1 Ask, seek, and knock....25
2 When the answer is difficult....26
3 Quiet enough to listen....27
4 Praying with the church....28
5 Helping someone return to the truth....29

Introduction

Prayer brings us before the Father who knows us and cares for us. I want to come honestly, with requests that matter and a willingness to receive His answer. Scripture gives us reason to persist, reason to listen, and reason to trust God when we cannot see what He is doing. This is a relationship to grow in, rather than a technique to master.

My schedule fills up fast, and for long stretches I have let deadlines and noise crowd out quiet time with God. Prayer does not happen by accident when life gets busy. Making room for prayer starts when we stop treating God like an afterthought.

1 Ask, seek, and knock

> *Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*
> **Matthew 7:7 (SLB)**

In Matthew 7:7-11 (SLB), Jesus uses the language of asking, seeking, and knocking. He directs our attention to the goodness of the Father. The comparison with parents giving food to their children shows why we can approach God with confidence. Our confidence rests in His character.

Luke 11:5-13 (SLB) places similar instruction beside a story about a friend asking for bread at midnight. The passage encourages persistence. It does not give me permission to believe that enough pressure will force God to approve a request He knows is wrong.

Persistent prayer is dependence on the Father, not an attempt to wear Him down.

I want to bring specific requests because real needs deserve honest words. At the same time, the length or precision of my prayer does not earn His attention. A person who is exhausted, frightened, or unable to find many words can still call upon the Lord. Prayer should not become a performance measured against somebody else's vocabulary.

Asking also means admitting I need help. Seeking means I am willing to give attention to God rather than simply delivering a demand. Knocking pictures coming back to the door again and again. These are helpful pictures of prayer, as long as I keep the Father's goodness at the center and do not turn them into a ladder to climb.

When we met in 1988, my wife wanted one date. On that date I fell for her, and two years later we were married. Some things worth having take more than one try. Jesus tells us to keep asking, seeking and knocking in prayer (Matthew 7:7).

2 When the answer is difficult

> *Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*
>
> **Philippians 4:6 (SLB)**

> *and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.*
>
> **Philippians 4:7 (SLB)**

Luke 22:42 (SLB) shows Jesus praying in Gethsemane. He brings the cup before the Father and submits to the Father's will. Jesus' prayer did not fail, and His fellowship with the Father did not break down. His obedience was part of God's plan to save us.

That passage helps me be honest about difficult requests. I may desire relief deeply and still need to trust God with an answer I would not have chosen. Submission is not pretending the difficulty is pleasant. It is bringing my desire before the Lord without claiming I know everything He knows.

Philippians 4:6-7 (SLB) connects prayer with thanksgiving and God's peace. The promise concerns His guarding of our hearts and thoughts in Christ. It should not be turned into a guarantee that every problem will disappear as soon as I pray. Peace can sustain us while the circumstances still require endurance.

I also need to avoid judging another person's faith by how quickly a request is answered. I do not know every part of that person's life or every purpose God may be working out. The church should be a place where people can ask for prayer without being made to feel that ongoing pain proves they have failed spiritually.

At 16, I wanted to join the Air Force and work with computers, and I worked hard to qualify early. When they would not give me that job, I walked away. Looking back, God had a different path for my life

and my family. Sometimes a hard answer protects us from a path we were never meant to walk.

3 Quiet enough to listen

In 1 Kings 19 (SLB), Elijah is afraid and exhausted. God provides for him and later addresses him at Horeb. The passage describes a strong wind, an earthquake, and a fire, while specifically saying the Lord was not in those events. After the fire comes "a sound of a thin silence" (1 Kings 19:12, SLB). It is easy to tell this story as if God spoke in the earthquake, but the text says He was not in it.

The practical point is not that God can only meet us in silence. Scripture records Him working in many settings. But the story does show that the loudest event is not always the one that matters most to God. God does not need to match the noise around me to make His Word matter.

Quiet time gives me an opportunity to stop filling every moment. I can read a passage, pray about it, and give attention to what it actually says. I should test my impressions against Scripture. My private feeling does not have the same authority as God's Word.

A realistic habit is a good beginning. Choose a time and place that allow attention. Put aside a distraction that can wait. If the day is interrupted, return when possible without treating the interruption as a spiritual defeat. The aim is fellowship with God and a willing response to Him, rather than completing a routine merely to say it is done.

I have worked on guitars for more than 20 years. I do not play, but I have trained my ear to hear small differences in tone. You cannot hear what an instrument is doing if the room is loud. We have to quiet the noise in our lives if we want to hear God speak through His Word.

4 Praying with the church

> *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous **man**, being at work, prevails much.*
>
> **James 5:16 (SLB)**

James 5:13-20 (SLB) brings prayer into suffering, sickness, confession, and restoration. The person who suffers is called to pray. The sick person is told to call for the elders. Believers are directed to confess and pray for one another. Prayer belongs within a community that cares for its members.

I should take these instructions seriously without pretending I can control how God answers. The Lord is the One who raises up and restores. Calling for prayer is an expression of dependence on Him. It is not a reason to blame someone who remains ill or to reject appropriate medical care.

Confession takes maturity. Opening my life to another believer should happen with wisdom and care. A prayer request should never become material for gossip. When someone trusts me with a struggle, I have a responsibility to respond with humility, discretion, and a desire for restoration.

Serving as a lay pastor and leading Bible studies, I have seen what happens when believers stop carrying burdens alone. When a group brings a real need before God together, pride drops away. We were never meant to walk the Christian life solo.

Prayer and concern should move together. I can pray for someone and also make the call, offer help, or have the difficult conversation. As I learn to pray, I want my dependence on God to make me more attentive to the people He places around me.

5 Helping someone return to the truth

James 5:19-20 (SLB) closes with concern for a person who wanders from the truth and the importance of turning that person back. James is writing to believers here, and these verses are not a license to guess about anyone's eternal destiny. The passage calls for serious care when someone is moving away from the truth.

That care may require more than a general prayer request. A person may need a patient conversation, a clear reminder from Scripture, or help facing a pattern they have begun to excuse. I should approach them with humility, remembering my own need for grace. Concern can become pride when I am more interested in proving the person wrong than helping them return.

In my lowest season, I had made choices that hurt my marriage and the people closest to me. A pastor listened to me, did not excuse what I had done, and

pointed me back to God. Helping someone return to the truth takes grace, honesty and a willingness to walk beside them.

Prayer brings comfort and points our hope for restoration to the Lord. It also strengthens fellowship as we bring one another's needs before Him. Confession, forgiveness, and correction require trust that grows through faithful relationships.

The closing words should leave us attentive rather than suspicious of one another. I do not want a church where people hide every difficulty because they expect immediate condemnation. I want a community that takes truth seriously enough to correct and love seriously enough to help. Prayer is part of that shared life before the Lord.

Praying Every Day

The kinds of prayer and how to pray

Andrew Dominguez



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Contents

Introduction....33
1 Four kinds of prayer....33
2 Why I pray....34
3 How I pray....35
4 What can hinder prayer....35
5 Building a daily habit....36

Introduction

Prayer is talking with God. It is expressing my heart to Him and spending time in His presence. It is not a one-way activity. God listens to me, and I need to learn to listen to Him. Prayer can be exciting and powerful, but for many of us it is also the first thing that slips when life gets busy.

I have believed in God as long as I can remember, but there were seasons I drifted from Him. Leading Bible studies, serving as a lay pastor and translating the Steadfast Literal Bible taught me that my walk with God rises or falls on simple daily conversation with Him. I wrote this book for believers who want to pray every day without fancy words.

This book is a practical look at daily prayer. It covers the kinds of prayer we see in Scripture, why prayer matters, how to pray, what can hinder our prayers, and how to build a simple daily habit.

1 Four kinds of prayer

Thanksgiving is the first. First Thessalonians 5:18 (SLB) says, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus toward you." I can thank Him for His protection, His provision, His blessings, and most of all for His Son.

Petition is asking God for what I need. Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11, SLB). When Jabez asked God to bless him and keep him from harm, Scripture says "God brought what he had asked" (1 Chronicles 4:10, SLB). There is

nothing selfish about bringing real needs to a Father who cares.

Prevailing prayer keeps asking. Jesus told a parable about a widow who kept coming to an unjust judge to show that it is "necessary always to pray and not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1, SLB). Some breakthroughs come after a long season of asking.

Intercession is praying for others. When Nehemiah heard that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down, he wept, fasted, and prayed, and he confessed the sins of his people as his own (Nehemiah 1:3-6, SLB). Intercession is love on its knees.

For a long time my prayers sounded like a project manager's task list. I brought God my problems, asked Him to fix them and moved on. Reading Scripture closely showed me I was skipping praise, confession and thanks. Learning those four kinds of prayer made my time with God more honest.

2 Why I pray

Most people pray to change their circumstances. The greater benefit of prayer is that it changes me. It draws me closer to God and reminds me of things I easily forget.

When I was a boy in Victorville, Pastor Jimmy Carter lived down our street and paid me to mow his lawn. He took me to church and led me to Christ. The way he cared for a neighborhood kid showed me God was real and worth talking to. That seed stayed with me even in the years I drifted.

Prayer reminds me of my need for the Father. Jesus taught us to begin, "Our Father who is in the heavens" (Matthew 6:9, SLB). No matter how mature I become, I never outgrow my need for Him. Jesus said, "apart from Me you are not able to do anything" (John 15:5, SLB).

Prayer reminds me of my position in Christ. Jesus said, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:14, SLB). I come to God not on my own merit but because I belong to Jesus. "He made the One who did not know sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21, SLB).

Prayer also reminds me of the goal of obedience. "The prayer of a righteous man, being at work, prevails much" (James 5:16, SLB). A righteous life means walking with the Spirit and obeying Him. To pray in the Spirit is to pray while walking with Him.

3 How I pray

I start by asking the Holy Spirit for help. Romans 8:26 (SLB) says, "what we should pray as is necessary, we do not know, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us." I ask Him to help me pray and to help me stay focused. I begin with adoration, praising God for who He is.

> *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
> **1 John 1:9 (SLB)**

Then I confess. The word "confess" in 1 John 1:9 (SLB) carries the idea of agreeing with God. I am not telling Him anything new. I am agreeing with Him about my sin. If I need to make something right with another person, I do that too (Matthew 5:23-24, SLB). Then by faith I accept His forgiveness.

After confession comes thanksgiving, praising Him for what He has done. Psalm 100:4 (SLB) says, "Enter His gates with thanksgiving, His courts with praise." After that I bring my requests and the needs of others.

4 What can hinder prayer

> *Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.*
>
> **Philippians 4:6-7 (SLB)**

Philippians 4:6-7 (SLB) promises peace when I bring my requests to God. When the answer is not what I wanted, that peace can carry me through in a way others may not understand.

Scripture also warns that some things block prayer. Psalm 66:18 (SLB) says, "If I had regarded wickedness in my heart, the Lord would not listen." When I hold on to sin I have no intention of giving up, my fellowship with God is broken. Ask any teenager who has just been grounded how well his requests are received.

Relationships matter too. Peter told husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way and to show them honor, "so that your prayers may not be cut off" (1 Peter 3:7, SLB). How I treat the people closest to me affects my prayer life.

Ignoring God's Word is another hindrance. If I will not listen to Him, I have little reason to expect that He will act on my requests the way I want. Prayer and the Bible belong together.

There were seasons when I knew Scripture and still made choices that took me further from God, and I pretended everything was fine. Nothing changed until I stopped hiding and got honest with God and with the people who loved me. Hidden sin blocks our fellowship with God until we bring it into the light.

5 Building a daily habit

Prayer grows with practice. I find it helps to have a set time and a set place, even if it is only a few minutes at first. A quiet morning before the house wakes up works well for many people. Others pray on the drive to work.

A simple pattern can keep me from wandering. I can move from praise, to confession, to thanksgiving, to my own needs, and then to the needs of others. Some people keep a list of names and requests and note when God answers. Looking back over that list is a great faith builder.

I also want to remember to pray for others beyond my own circle: for church leaders (Romans 15:30, SLB),

for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2, SLB), for other believers (Ephesians 6:18, SLB), and for people who do not yet know Christ. Jesus prayed for those who would believe in Him through the disciples' word (John 17:20, SLB). That includes us.

Most of all, I want prayer to be a conversation with someone I love, not a chore I check off. God is not waiting for perfect words. He is waiting for me.

After May 29, 2020, I learned to take recovery one day at a time. That changed how I approached my time with God. I stopped waiting to feel inspired and treated prayer and Bible reading as a set daily appointment. Small steps repeated every day build a habit that holds when life gets hard.

Ask, Seek, Knock

A Study on Prayer | Matthew 7:7-11 and Luke 11:5-13

Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity Enterprises

Ask, Seek, Knock

A Study on Prayer | Matthew 7:7-11 and Luke 11:5-13

Passage	Matthew 7:7-11, with Luke 11:5-13
Big idea	God wants us to keep coming to Him in prayer, asking, seeking and knocking, because He is a good Father who gives good things.
Memory verse	Matthew 7:7
Session length	60-75 minutes
What to bring	Bible (SLB), this handout, pen, and one prayer request you have been carrying for a while.

Before You Meet (Leader Prep)

For the leader only. Read the passage at least twice during the week and pray for the group by name.

For a long time my prayers sounded more like a status report than a conversation. It took coming to the end of my own strength, with my drinking, to learn that God wants honest prayer from His children, not polished speeches. I wrote this study for believers who wonder whether God hears them when they keep asking. Jesus' promise in Matthew 7 and Luke 11 gives us a clear reason not to quit.

- Read Matthew 5-7 (the Sermon on the Mount) so you know where these verses sit.
- Read Luke 11:1-13. Luke puts this same teaching right after the Lord's Prayer and a story about a friend at midnight.

- Read the Leader Notes at the end so you are ready for the harder questions, especially "What about when God says no?"

Opening (5-10 minutes)

Most of us were taught as kids that if you want something, you ask for it. Somewhere along the way a lot of us quit asking God. Maybe we prayed hard once and the answer was no. Maybe we figured God is too busy for our small stuff. In this passage Jesus tells us to keep asking, keep seeking and keep knocking, and He tells us why: because of who our Father is.

I like to break it down with the first letters: **A**sk, **S**eek, **K**nock. That spells ASK, and it is a simple way to remember how Jesus told us to pray.

Icebreaker: When you were a kid, what is one thing you kept asking your parents for until they finally gave in (or finally said "no, and stop asking")?

The Passage (10 minutes)

Have one or two people read the passage aloud.

> **Matthew 7:7-11 (SLB)**
>
> [7] Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. [8] For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. [9] Or what man is there of you who, if his son asks him ***for*** bread, will give him a stone? [10] And if he asks ***for*** a fish, will he give him a serpent? [11] If you then, being evil, know ***how*** to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who ***is*** in the heavens give good things to those who ask Him?

Luke 11:5-13 (SLB)

[5] And He said to them, "Which of you will have a friend, and will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, [6] since a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing that I will set before him'; [7] and that one, answering from within, says, 'Do not cause me trouble; the door has already been shut, and my children are with me in the bed; I am not able, having risen, to give to you'? [8] I say to you, even if he will not give to him, having risen, because of his being his friend, yet because of his shamelessness, having risen, he will give him as many as he needs. [9] And I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. [10] For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. [11] Now which of you ***who is*** the father, ***if*** the son will ask for bread, will give him a stone? And if a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? [12] Or also if he asks for an egg, will he give him a scorpion? [13] If you then, being evil, know ***how*** to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father who ***is*** from heaven give ***the*** Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Setting the Scene (5 minutes)

Who wrote it	Matthew, also called Levi, the tax collector Jesus called to follow Him (Matthew 9:9). The Gospel does not name its author, but the early church linked it to Matthew from the second century on (Papias, quoted by Eusebius, Church History 3.39.16).
To whom	Mostly Jewish believers. Matthew quotes the Old Testament often and shows Jesus as the promised Messiah.

When and where	Jesus spoke these words on a hillside in Galilee early in His ministry (Matthew 5:1). Matthew wrote his Gospel in the second half of the first century; scholars differ on the exact date.
What comes before	Matthew 5-7 is the Sermon on the Mount. Just before this, Jesus taught how to pray (Matthew 6:5-15), warned against worry (Matthew 6:25-34), and warned against judging others (Matthew 7:1-6).
What comes after	Jesus sums up the Law and the Prophets in the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12), then talks about the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13-14). The same Father who gives good things to us wants us to treat others well.

What It Means (15 minutes)

Matthew 7:7-8: Keep on asking, seeking and knocking

Jesus gives three commands and three promises. In the Greek that Matthew wrote in, all three verbs are present imperatives. That tense points to something you keep doing, not a one-time thing. A fair way to read it is "keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking."

Then Jesus says "everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:8). That is a promise to the person who keeps coming to God, not a vending machine where you put in a prayer and pull out what you picked.

Asking: the two-sided coin

The first step in prayer is simply to ask. Sometimes that is all it takes. If the request fits God's will for your life, He grants it.

I think of asking like a two-sided coin. On one side, God says yes. On the other side, God says no or not yet, because the request does not fit His plan or His timing. Both sides are an answer. John put it this way: "This is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14). God always knows what is best for you, even when you cannot see it at the time you ask.

Asking also keeps us honest. James says "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2). Some of us worry about something for months and never once bring it to God.

Seeking: going after it with God

Seeking goes a step past asking. Notice the promise: if you seek, you will find. Sometimes God answers a prayer by leading you to find the answer, and you will only find it if you are willing to go looking. That usually means time alone with Him, reading His Word, talking to Him and, most of all, listening.

God said the same thing through Jeremiah: "You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). Seeking is not half-hearted. It is putting your heart and your time into it.

So the next time you have a big request, ask yourself whether God may want you to go into a seeking mode with Him first: reading, waiting, listening for what He is showing you.

Knocking: not giving up

Knocking is the next level of intensity. To knock is to rap on a door, and Jesus promises the door will be opened.

Next time you knock on someone's door, notice what you do. You knock two, three, four times. Knocking once feels strange. Knocking means you keep at it. Luke shows this with the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5-8). The man got what he needed "because of his shamelessness" (Luke 11:8). Jesus told another parable "about its being necessary always to pray and not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1).

The point is not that we wear God down. The friend in the story is grumpy and God is not. The point is that if a tired neighbor will get out of bed for someone who keeps knocking, how much more will a loving Father answer His children.

I hid my drinking for years. I denied it and pretended everything was fine, and from the outside it looked like it was. On May 29, 2020, my wife caught me, and the hurt on her face finally broke my pride. She took me to my first 12-step meeting that same day. Some doors stay shut for a long time and then open all at once. Keep knocking.

Matthew 7:9-11: How much more will your Father give

Jesus ends with fathers and sons. No decent father hands his hungry son a stone when he asks for bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish. If we, "being evil" (Matthew 7:11), know how to give good gifts, "how much more will your Father who is in the heavens give good things to those who ask Him" (Matthew 7:11).

Luke records Jesus saying the Father will "give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him" (Luke 11:13). Of all the good things God gives, the best one is Himself.

Raising two daughters taught me the difference between what a child asks for and what is actually good for her. Sometimes the loving answer was no, because I could see more than they could in the moment. If an imperfect earthly father wants good things for his kids, we can trust our Father in heaven completely.

What does it mean when God says no?

Look again at Matthew 7:11. God loves you perfectly, so when He holds something back, it is for your good. God never says no out of spite. He always has a reason. Here are some honest questions to ask yourself:

- **How is my relationship with the Lord?** "If I had regarded wickedness in my heart, the Lord would not listen" (Psalm 66:18). God does not shut off His blessing every time you

stumble, but sin you have not confessed gets in the way of your fellowship with Him. Deal with it and clear the line.

- **Is my prayer specific?** Vague prayers often mean we have not thought it through. Name what you are asking for, so you will know when God answers and He gets the credit.
- **Is the request in keeping with the character of Christ?** Would Jesus pray it? "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, so that you may spend it on your pleasures" (James 4:3). Why you pray matters as much as what you pray.
- **Do I really believe God will answer me?** James warns that the one who doubts is "a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8). Hebrews adds that "the one who draws near to God must believe that He is, and that He becomes a rewarder to those who earnestly seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Even Paul heard no. He asked three times for his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7) to be taken away, and God answered, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Jesus Himself prayed, "nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39).

God wants you to seek Him more than you seek answers. When He says no, it is easy to want the gift more than the Giver. His bigger goal is to make you more like His Son: "conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29).

At 16 I tried to join the Air Force. I aced the testing and passed the California High School Proficiency Exam early, but they would not give me the computer job they promised, so I walked away. It felt like a closed door. It led to about 40 years of utility and infrastructure work and a life I never would have planned. God had other plans for me.

Key Terms

Term	Plain meaning	Where it appears
Present imperative	A Greek command form that points to an action you keep doing, not a one-time act.	Matthew 7:7
Shamelessness	Boldness that will not be put off or embarrassed into quitting. The SLB uses it for the friend who kept knocking at midnight.	Luke 11:8
Sermon on the Mount	Jesus' longest recorded teaching, given on a hillside in Galilee.	Matthew 5-7
God's will	What God wants and has planned. Prayer that lines up with it has His promise behind it.	1 John 5:14

Where Christians Read This Differently

Christians agree that God hears and answers prayer. They differ on how far this promise reaches.

- **Within God's will:** Most churches, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, read Matthew 7:7 alongside 1 John 5:14 and Jesus' own prayer in Matthew 26:39. God always answers, but He answers as a wise Father, and sometimes that means no or wait.
- **Faith claims the answer:** Some teachers in the Word of Faith movement read these verses as a promise that whatever you

ask in faith, believing it, is yours. If it does not come, the problem is a lack of faith.

- **Asking for God Himself:** Many teachers, going back to the early church, point to Luke 11:13. The best gift we can ask for is the Holy Spirit, and our asking is shaped as we spend time with Him.

My view: God always hears, and He always answers, but He answers as a loving Father who knows better than I do. Asking, seeking and knocking keep me close to Him, and that closeness is the real gift. I do not believe a "no" means my faith failed.

Discussion Questions (20-25 minutes)

What does it say?

1. What three actions does Jesus command in Matthew 7:7, and what promise goes with each one?
2. In Luke 11:5-8, why does the friend finally get up and give the bread?

What does it mean?

3. Why do you think Jesus used the picture of a father and his son (Matthew 7:9-11)? What does that tell you about how God sees you?
4. How is seeking different from asking, and knocking different from seeking?
5. How do 1 John 5:14 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 help us understand a "no" from God?

How do I live it?

6. Which is hardest for you right now: asking, seeking or knocking? Why?
7. Think of the request you brought today. What would it look like to keep asking, seeking and knocking on it this week?

Takeaway (5 minutes)

> **This week:** Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking, and trust the Father who gives good things.
>
> **Memory verse:** "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7, SLB)

Prayer

Father, thank You that You hear us and that You are a good Father. Give us the faith to keep asking, the patience to keep seeking and the stubbornness to keep knocking. When You say no, help us trust You more than we trust our own wants. Most of all, give us more of Your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Going Deeper (Optional)

- Luke 11:1-4: The Lord's Prayer comes right before Luke's version of ask, seek, knock.
- Luke 18:1-8: The widow and the judge, another parable about not giving up in prayer.
- Jeremiah 29:11-13: God's promise to be found by those who search with all their heart.
- Philippians 4:6-7: Bring every request to God with thanksgiving, and His peace will guard you.
- Romans 8:26-28: When we do not know how to pray, the Spirit helps us.

Leader Notes

Question 4 (asking, seeking, knocking): Asking is bringing the request. Seeking adds effort: time in the Word, waiting and listening (Jeremiah 29:13). Knocking adds persistence: coming back

again and again (Luke 11:8; Luke 18:1). Each one moves closer to God.

Question 5 (when God says no): God promises to hear prayer that fits His will (1 John 5:14-15). Paul asked three times and got "My grace is sufficient" instead (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). A no is still an answer, and it comes from a Father who knows more than we do. Be gentle here. Someone in the room may be grieving a prayer that was not answered the way they hoped.

If someone asks "Do we have to beg God?": No. The friend at midnight is a contrast, not a picture of God. If a tired neighbor gives in, how much more will a loving Father give (Matthew 7:11). Jesus also said "your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8). We keep praying because it keeps us close to Him, not because He needs convincing.

Sources

Every outside fact in this study comes from one of these. Scripture is from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) throughout.

- The Greek present imperative in Matthew 7:7: summarized in "Matthew 7:7-8," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_7:7%E2%80%938.
- Matthew as author: Eusebius, Church History 3.39.16, quoting Papias (early second century).
- Word of Faith teaching is described here in summary only, as its own teachers state it; no outside text is quoted.

Giving God My Whole Heart

A sincere faith in everyday life

Andrew Dominguez



Trinfinity Enterprises

Contents

Introduction....53
1 When convenience takes over....53
2 The Lord sees the heart....54
3 The people Jesus calls blessed....55
4 Sincerity that becomes visible....57

Introduction

A relationship that only gets the leftover time will show it sooner or later. I want to take that seriously in my walk with God. It is easy to appreciate the comfort of faith while avoiding the changes faith calls for. Jesus addresses the heart. He calls us beyond appearances and toward a life shaped by love for God and care for other people.

I know how easy it is to keep faith in a Sunday box and run the rest of life on my own terms. For years I looked successful on the outside while my drinking said otherwise. I wrote this book for believers who want their Monday-to-Saturday choices to match what they say on Sunday. Sincere faith is giving God every room in the house.

1 When convenience takes over

Fast food appeals to us because it is available and requires little waiting. That desire for convenience can become the main expectation in a relationship. If I approach God only when I need something quickly, I should examine what I think that relationship is for.

God is not a service I visit only when life becomes difficult. He is Lord. Following Him affects how I use my time, how I treat people, and what I am willing to surrender. Some acts of obedience are inconvenient. Their inconvenience does not make them less important.

The problem is not a busy day or an interrupted routine. The concern is a settled habit of giving God

attention only when it suits me. I can attend church, know the songs, and still keep parts of my life carefully protected from His correction. Religious activity can hide that pattern if I never look beneath it.

I want to start with an honest response rather than an impressive promise. Where have I been offering empty words? What have I already understood but avoided doing? These are matters to bring before the Lord in prayer. A sincere response may begin with one ordinary act of obedience that I have postponed for too long.

Working a full-time job while building guitars and writing, I know how easy it is to let a schedule crowd out time in the Word and prayer. When life gets busy, I put God on the back burner and focus on my tasks instead of Him. When convenience drives our schedule, devotion is the first thing pushed aside. Putting God first means guarding that time before the day makes its demands.

2 The Lord sees the heart

> *And the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance and at the height of his stature, for I have rejected him; for **it is** not what man sees, for man sees according to the eyes, and the LORD sees according to the heart."*
>
> **1 Samuel 16:7 (SLB)**

In 1 Samuel 16 (SLB), God sends Samuel to anoint a king from the sons of Jesse. Samuel sees the oldest son and thinks he must be the one. God stops him. He

looks at the heart, not at what impresses people. That is a hard truth for anyone who wants to look spiritually successful.

God called David "a man according to My heart" (Acts 13:22, SLB), but that does not make his adultery with Bathsheba or the death of Uriah unimportant. Those events required judgment and repentance. A heart turned toward God does not make sin harmless. It makes honest repentance necessary when sin is exposed.

Outward actions still matter because they affect other people and often reveal what I value. The point is that appearance alone cannot tell the whole story. God sees the motives I can hide from an audience. He knows whether my generosity is driven by love or by the desire to be noticed.

That knowledge should move me toward honesty, not despair. I do not have to maintain an image with God. I can ask Him to expose what needs to change. When I stop spending so much energy defending the appearance of my life, I have more room to respond to the Lord who knows it completely.

When I was a boy in Victorville, Pastor Jimmy Carter lived down our street and paid me to mow his lawn. He did not see just a kid doing a chore. He saw a boy who needed Christ, and he took me to church. God looks past outward status and notices the people others walk past.

3 The people Jesus calls blessed

> *Blessed **are** those who hunger and thirst **for** righteousness, for they will be filled.*
> **Matthew 5:6 (SLB)**

> *Blessed **are** the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*
> **Matthew 5:9 (SLB)**

The Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12 (SLB) should not be reduced to a lesson about keeping a pleasant attitude. Jesus speaks about poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, righteousness, mercy, purity, peacemaking, and persecution. These descriptions reach much deeper than being cheerful or agreeable.

To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to recognize a need that casual interest cannot satisfy. Mercy, purity, and peacemaking reach just as deep, and they show up in the way we live with people.

Being merciful is more than feeling sorry for someone. Mercy responds to another person's need with care. It pushes back on the quiet pleasure we can feel when somebody gets the trouble we think they deserve.

Purity of heart goes below the surface. I can appear helpful while using kindness to gain influence. I can defend a correct position while enjoying the chance to embarrass an opponent. A heart directed toward God needs to be examined at the level of motive as well as action.

To make peace is to work toward what is right, not simply to avoid an uncomfortable conversation. Sometimes peace requires a truthful conversation, an apology, or a refusal to keep passing along a grievance. I cannot make every person respond well, but I can take responsibility for the words and actions that are mine. Peace that depends on hiding the truth will not last.

Jesus also calls persecuted people blessed. That keeps me from defining God's blessing by ease, acceptance, or material comfort. A believer may seek peace and still face hostility. The blessing does not mean everybody will approve. It gives reason to remain faithful when obedience is costly, and the promise of the kingdom gives hope that reaches beyond the present difficulty.

I want to read these blessings together. They describe a life lived before God, not a collection of techniques for getting what I want. They also show that strength does not always look forceful and success does not always win applause. Jesus teaches us to see people and circumstances in the light of His kingdom.

4 Sincerity that becomes visible

A sincere heart will affect the next decision. It may change the way I answer a family member, handle a responsibility at work, or respond when someone fails to appreciate what I have done. These moments are small enough to overlook and important enough to shape a pattern.

I do not need to wait for an emotional high before obeying what is clear. Feelings change. The call to love God and love my neighbor remains. A quiet act of faithfulness may say more about my priorities than a strong declaration made when obedience costs me little.

I also need to watch the temptation to measure everybody else's sincerity while overlooking my own habits. It is easier to recognize empty words in another person than to admit where my actions do not match my profession. The Lord's correction should begin close to home.

My desire is to give God my whole heart. That is a continuing response, not a claim that I have already arrived. When I fail, I need to repent. When He gives an opportunity to serve, I need to respond. When His Word corrects me, I need to listen. A wholehearted walk grows as those responses become the ordinary direction of my life.

Before May 29, 2020, I hid my drinking well enough to keep succeeding at work. Once I started recovery, my faith stopped being private theory and started showing in daily habits. Sincerity does not announce itself. When the inside changes, the outside eventually tells the truth.

Guarding My Walk with God

Learning from Abram and Lot

Andrew Dominguez



Trinfinity Enterprises

Contents

Introduction.....61
1 A practical problem and a choice.....61
2 Giving attention to God.....62
3 Recognizing the pull of desire.....63
4 Turning before the pattern hardens.....64

Introduction

Choices that take us away from the Lord can begin before the consequences become obvious. Genesis 13 (SLB) gives us a useful account to consider. Abram and Lot face a practical problem, and their separation places Lot near a deeply wicked city. The chapter does not tell us everything Lot was thinking, but it tells us enough to learn from.

I have believed in God as long as I can remember, but I drifted from Him more than once through my own bad choices. The drift never started with a crash. It started with small compromises and telling myself I could handle things alone. I wrote this book because steady faith needs daily attention, not just a strong start.

1 A practical problem and a choice

Abram and Lot have possessions and livestock, and the land cannot support them together. Their herdsmen quarrel. Abram proposes separation and allows Lot to choose where to go. The story starts with an ordinary problem that needs a decision.

Lot sees the well-watered plain of the Jordan and chooses it for himself. The narrator also tells us about the wickedness of Sodom. That information matters. The reader is being shown more than attractive land. A good-looking opportunity can put a person right next to trouble.

Genesis 13 (SLB) never shows Lot building an altar, but that does not prove he had no relationship with

God. Peter calls him "righteous Lot," a man who "tormented his righteous soul" over what he saw in Sodom (2 Peter 2:7-8, SLB). Lot was a believer who made a poor choice, and that is why his story is a warning for us.

Lot's story did not end in Genesis 13. Before long he was living in Sodom, and he was carried off when the city was raided (Genesis 14:12, SLB). When judgment came, he lingered, and the angels had to take him by the hand and lead him out of the city. He lost his home, and his wife looked back and became a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:16, 26, SLB). Lot never set out to end up there. He just kept moving toward what looked good.

For my own life, the question is how I weigh an opportunity. Money, comfort, and how things look can matter, but they should not be the only things I weigh. I need to consider what the choice will encourage, what it may expose others to, and whether I am overlooking a clear warning because I want the benefit.

For years I was a fully functioning alcoholic. I was successful at work and hid my drinking. Every day I chose between coming clean and managing appearances, and for a long time I chose the lie. That ended on May 29, 2020, when my wife caught me and took me to my first 12-step meeting that same day. Guarding our walk starts when we stop managing the problem in secret.

2 Giving attention to God

Abram returns to the place where he had previously made an altar and calls on the name of the Lord. Later in the chapter he builds an altar at Hebron. These are recorded actions, and they show worship as part of his life. Abram kept coming back to worship, and that is the pattern I want.

Regular attention to God's Word and prayer helps me examine my priorities. It gives me an opportunity to notice when I have begun defending something I once recognized as wrong. Missing a quiet time does not explain every bad decision, but neglect does leave me less alert.

The deeper issue is responsiveness. Am I willing to let the Lord correct what I want? Can I hear a warning without immediately searching for an exception? A person can keep a religious schedule while resisting correction. The habit and the heart need to remain connected.

I want to make room for that kind of honesty. Read a passage with attention. Pray about the decision that is actually in front of me. Ask for counsel from someone who will do more than agree. These are simple ways to make sure what I want is not the only voice I am listening to.

3 Recognizing the pull of desire

> *And do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God **is**, the good and well-pleasing and perfect **will**.*
>
> **Romans 12:2 (SLB)**

An opportunity can become so attractive that I begin explaining away everything that makes it questionable. The issue may be money, attention, influence, or simply the desire to have my own way. The object changes, but the need for a renewed mind remains.

Romans 12:1-2 (SLB) calls believers to a life offered to God and a mind being renewed. That reaches further than changing a few visible habits. It concerns the way I judge what is good and pleasing before the Lord. If my thinking is shaped entirely by the values around me, I should not be surprised when my choices follow them.

I can examine the reasons I give for a decision. Am I being honest about the cost? Have I considered the effect on my family and responsibilities? Am I using a spiritual phrase to make a personal desire sound like a command from God? These are useful questions to bring into prayer and wise counsel.

Desire itself is not proof of wrongdoing. God gives good things, and gratitude is appropriate. The concern is what happens when a desire becomes more important than obedience. I want to receive good things with thankfulness while remaining

willing to refuse an opportunity that would require me to compromise.

I always drank off and on, but it was not a problem I could not control. Then in 2014 I had a major hiking accident that took four major surgeries to partly repair. Over the next six years I used alcohol to deal with the pain, a little at first and a lot by the end. Masking the pain became a full-blown addiction. Desire pulls us step by step until a habit feels normal (James 1:14-15). Recognizing that pull early is the difference between stepping back and getting caught.

4 Turning before the pattern hardens

> *But be doers of **the** word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*
> **James 1:22 (SLB)**

> *And let us not lose heart in doing the good, for in **its** own time we will reap, not fainting.*
> **Galatians 6:9 (SLB)**

James 1:22 (SLB) calls for doing the Word rather than merely hearing it. Knowing that a choice is wrong does not protect me if I continue making it. Understanding becomes useful when I respond. Sometimes the next faithful step is simply to stop defending the pattern.

Repentance should be concrete. I may need to tell the truth to someone I misled, remove an opportunity I keep using to sin, or ask a mature believer to help me remain accountable. The action should fit the actual problem. A large promise without a practical

response can become another way to postpone change.

Galatians 6:7-9 (SLB) takes sowing and reaping seriously and encourages perseverance in doing good. I should not expect every consequence of a poor decision to disappear immediately. Forgiveness and the repair of damage are related, but they are not identical. Faithfulness may require patience while trust is rebuilt.

My hope rests in God's grace, which gives me reason to turn toward Him instead of hiding. The warning in this story is not an invitation to despair over every mistake. It is an invitation to pay attention, receive correction, and choose the direction of obedience. The next choice still matters.

Looking back, there were warning signs I drove right past because nothing had blown up yet. I was still doing well at work, so I told myself it was fine. Waiting until a pattern hardens makes the turn back much steeper. When God convicts us early, turning right away spares us and the people we love.

Walking in Purity and Freedom

Guarding the eyes, the mind, and the heart

Andrew Dominguez



Trinfinity Enterprises

Contents

Introduction....69
1 What Jesus said about the heart....69
2 Seeing people the way God does....70
3 Making a plan ahead of time....70
4 Walking in the light....71
5 Freedom that lasts....72

Introduction

Sexual temptation is one of the most common struggles people face, and one of the least talked about in church. Because it stays hidden, it grows. Many men and women carry it alone for years, convinced they are the only ones and that God must be finished with them.

I have spent time walking alongside others who were fighting for purity. This book is meant to be honest without being graphic. It looks at how God sees people, why a plan matters, what to do when you fall, and where real freedom comes from.

1 What Jesus said about the heart

Jesus did not limit purity to what we do with our bodies. He said, "everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28, SLB). The battle starts in the eyes and the mind long before it shows up in actions.

That can sound discouraging, but it is actually freeing. It tells me where to fight. If I only try to manage my behavior, I will keep losing ground. If I bring my thought life to God, He can change me from the inside.

It also means pornography is not a harmless private habit. It trains the mind to see people as objects. Over time it can make it harder to be satisfied with a real spouse, damage a spouse's sense of worth, and open the door to deeper sin. God's design for sexual

intimacy is a gift for husband and wife, and He wants to protect it.

Translating Matthew 5:28 for the Steadfast Literal Bible made me face the truth that sin starts in the heart long before anyone sees it. In my lowest season, I had made choices that hurt my marriage and the people closest to me. My real problem was not just bad habits. It was an unguarded heart. Jesus goes to the heart because that is where purity has to begin.

2 Seeing people the way God does

> *older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.*
> **1 Timothy 5:2 (SLB)**

Paul told Timothy to treat "older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity" (1 Timothy 5:2, SLB). When I see a woman as an object of fantasy, I strip away who she really is. God created her to be someone's daughter, sister, mother, wife, or friend. She is not here for my thought life.

One thing that helps me stop treating people as objects is to keep them in context. If I remember that the person in front of me is dear to a husband, children, parents, and friends, the temptation to lust loses much of its pull.

Another practical tool is learning to bounce the eyes. When my eyes land on something that feeds lust, I look away right away instead of taking a second look. Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker describe this in Every Man's Battle. It sounds small, but small

decisions made over and over change the way the mind works.

After 36 years of marriage, two daughters and now granddaughters, I see every person as someone's daughter, wife or mother, made in the image of God. That makes it much harder to treat anyone as an object. Paul says to treat women as mothers and sisters, in all purity (1 Timothy 5:1-2). Seeing people with the dignity God gave them is a strong defense.

3 Making a plan ahead of time

When there is no plan, I tend to follow whatever appeals to me at the moment. Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad the way that leads to destruction" (Matthew 7:13, SLB). Staying on the narrow road takes decisions made before the temptation arrives.

In the heat of temptation there is too much emotion to think clearly. That is why my decisions need to be made beforehand. I once heard about a man who ended up in a place full of temptation by mistake. What kept him faithful was a promise he had made to his wife before he ever left home.

> *Marriage **is to be** honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers.*
>
> **Hebrews 13:4 (SLB)**

A plan might include filters on devices, staying out of certain places, avoiding being alone online late at night, and having someone I report to. None of that is

legalism. It is wisdom from someone who knows his own weaknesses.

In utility work, you never wait until an emergency starts to decide your safety steps. You write the safety plan before you step onto the job. Purity works the same way. Decide ahead of time what you will watch, where you will go and when you will walk away. A plan made in daylight keeps you standing when the heat turns up.

4 Walking in the light

Sin grows in the dark. Secrets give it room to breathe. That is why confession matters so much. James 5:16 (SLB) says, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed."

When someone falls, the first temptation is to hide. Pride kicks in because we do not want anyone to know. The enemy then uses that shame to convince us to quit trying altogether. The better response is to resist his lies, confess the sin to God, and then tell a trusted mentor or accountability partner. Bringing it into the light takes away its power.

Honesty with that partner has to be complete. Leaving out the one area where I struggled defeats the purpose. I may fool another person, but God sees it all.

Isaiah 50:10 (SLB) speaks to the one who "has walked in darkness and has no brightness," and tells him to "trust in the name of the LORD and lean on his God."

Picture a little boy who is afraid to walk down a dark staircase until his father promises to stay at the top where he can hear his voice. Knowing the Father is near gives courage to face what we fear.

Secrecy kept me trapped in the worst seasons of my life, because I was terrified of what people would think. That changed on May 29, 2020, when my wife caught me and took me to my first 12-step meeting that same day. I went in drunk and wept the whole time. Telling the truth felt terrifying, and it was the moment healing began (1 John 1:7). Sin loses its grip when we bring it into the light.

5 Freedom that lasts

Real freedom does not come from willpower alone. It comes from a renewed mind. Romans 12:2 (SLB) says, "do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." God's Word is how my mind gets renewed.

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He answered each temptation with Scripture from Deuteronomy (Matthew 4:1-11, SLB). Memorizing Scripture gives me something to reach for when temptation comes. I find it helps to learn one verse a week, give it a theme, review it during the day, and look for a place to use it.

Second Timothy 2:22 (SLB) tells me to "flee youthful desires, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." Fleeing is not cowardice. It is wisdom. Pursuing is

just as important, because a heart filled with good things has less room for the old ones.

If you are fighting this battle, you are not alone, and God is not finished with you. Second Corinthians 5:17 (SLB) says, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." That is who you are. Keep walking toward the light.

Living by God's Commands

Obedience that grows out of love

Andrew Dominguez



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Contents

Introduction....75
1 Rules for a free people....75
2 One list, different numbers....76
3 The commands still speak today....76
4 The commands of the New Testament....77
5 Love is the heart of the law....78
6 Grace makes obedience possible....79

Introduction

Many people hear the word commandment and think of a list of rules that takes the fun out of life. Others think commands belonged to the Old Testament and no longer matter now that we live under grace. Both ideas miss what the Bible actually says.

God's commands are not suggestions, and they are not a burden. They show us His character and how He designed life to work. This book looks at the Ten Commandments, the commands of the New Testament, what Jesus said about the heart of the law, and how grace makes obedience possible.

1 Rules for a free people

Three months after leaving Egypt, Israel camped at Mount Sinai. These were people who had lived their whole lives under someone else's rules. Now they were free, and they had never functioned as a nation on their own. God gave them His law so they could live in harmony with Him and with one another.

> *I **am** the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from a house of slaves. There shall not be for you other gods before My face.*
>
> **Exodus 20:2-3 (SLB)**

Notice how the Ten Commandments begin. Before God tells His people what to do, He reminds them what He has done. He rescued them first. The commands came after the rescue, not as a way to earn it.

The first four commandments deal with our relationship with God: no other gods, no idols, honoring His name, and keeping the Sabbath holy. The last six deal with our relationships with each other: honoring parents, and not murdering, committing adultery, stealing, lying, or coveting.

In utility work, safety rules are strict. They do not exist to ruin a crew's day. They exist so everyone goes home alive. God gave Israel His commands after He rescued them from Egypt, not before (Exodus 20:2). God's rules are guardrails for a free people.

2 One list, different numbers

It may surprise you that Christians and Jews do not all number the Ten Commandments the same way. Most Protestant churches count "no other gods" and "no idols" as two separate commands (Lutherans count them the Catholic way). Catholic tradition combines those two and divides coveting into two commands, one about a neighbor's wife and one about a neighbor's goods. Jewish tradition counts God's opening statement, "I am the LORD your God," as the first word.

The content is the same in all three. The difference is in how the lines are drawn. The full text is found in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21 (SLB). When someone talks about the Ten Commandments, it is worth reading the passage itself rather than relying on a plaque or a summary.

My family attended the Catholic church when I was young, and I came to Christ later through a neighbor,

Pastor Jimmy Carter. So I know that Christians sometimes number and organize things differently. Looking at the text itself shows the heart of God's commands stays the same, however the list is counted.

3 The commands still speak today

We may not carve idols out of wood, but we have cars, homes, boats, careers, and bank accounts that can take first place in our hearts. God's name is misused casually on television and in conversation. The day of rest gets crowded out by work and play. Children dishonor parents, marriages are broken by unfaithfulness, and wanting what someone else has is treated as normal.

It looks discouraging, but God is good, and He can overcome the darkness around us. The church needs to take seriously its role in upholding His Word.

Before I point at the world, though, I have to look at myself. Jesus taught that anger and contempt toward a brother put us in danger of judgment (Matthew 5:21-22, SLB), and that looking with lust is adultery in the heart (Matthew 5:28, SLB). First John 3:15 (SLB) says, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer." By that standard, I have broken every one of these commands. That is exactly why I need a Savior.

4 The commands of the New Testament

Jewish teachers often speak of the 613 commands of the Torah. Jim Gerrish, who compiled the commands of the New Testament in a 2004 list titled The Commands of the New Testament, counted more than a thousand of them there, not including the many teachings that work the same way. Faith in Christ was never meant to be confession without obedience.

> *But be doers of **the** word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*
> **James 1:22 (SLB)**

Jesus asked a hard question: "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46, SLB). The Great Commission tells us to make disciples and to teach them to observe all that He commanded (Matthew 28:19-20, SLB). The church has often done the first part well and neglected the second.

There are real blessings in obedience. Jesus said, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:17, SLB). The one who keeps His commandments remains in His love (John 15:10, SLB) and bears fruit (John 15:5, SLB). And First John 2:3 (SLB) says, "by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments."

Translating the SLB, I paid close attention to every instruction Jesus and the apostles gave the church. The New Testament is full of practical commands

about how we speak, forgive and treat one another. Grace never gives us a pass on how we live.

5 Love is the heart of the law

When a lawyer asked Jesus which commandment was the greatest, He summed up the whole law in two commands.

> *And Jesus said to him, "'You shall love **the** Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is **the** first and great commandment. And **the** second **is** like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the Prophets."*
>
> **Matthew 22:37-40 (SLB)**

Jesus also said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the law or the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17, SLB). He did not lower the standard. He showed us its heart.

That includes the hardest command of all: love your enemies. Jesus said, "love your enemies," and "pray for those mistreating you and persecuting you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in the heavens; for He makes His sun rise on evil and good" (Matthew 5:44-45, SLB). Loving an enemy does not mean feeling warm affection. It means treating them well, praying for them, refusing to speak badly about them, and looking for ways to do them good. "A soft answer turns away rage" (Proverbs 15:1, SLB). "Do not be overcome by the evil, but overcome the evil with the good" (Romans 12:21, SLB).

My wife has been married to me for 36 years. When I needed help most, she did not cover for me. She took me to my first 12-step meeting that same day and waited until it was over. Love is action, not just words (Romans 13:10). Real love seeks the other person's good, even when it is hard.

6 Grace makes obedience possible

In my own strength I cannot keep God's commands. But I am not left to my own strength. God promised in the New Covenant, "putting My laws into their mind, I will also inscribe them on their hearts" (Hebrews 8:10, SLB).

> *for God is the **One** who is working in you both to will and to work for the sake of **His** good pleasure.*
> **Philippians 2:13 (SLB)**

Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15, SLB). Obedience grows out of love, not fear. First John 5:3 (SLB) says, "this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."

I will try every day to do what is right and holy. And when I fail, and I will, God is there to pick me up, dust me off, and set me back on a path that honors Him. That is grace. It does not cancel the commands. It gives me the power and the desire to keep them.

Before May 29, 2020, I tried to manage my drinking with willpower, and it never lasted. Real change came when I stopped relying on my own strength and leaned on God's grace along with a 12-step program. Grace makes obedience possible because God gives us the strength to do what He commands.

Acronym List

SLB: Steadfast Literal Bible