

New Treasure!

Precious Promises

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."
—Matthew 6:19-21

"What Is My Treasure?"

Have you ever consciously asked yourself this question?

Jesus knows that every one of us is seeking something that is a treasure to us, and he wasted no time in getting to the point. His first public teaching was what we call "The Sermon on the Mount," where he was very bold in his effort to persuade us to rethink the foundations upon which we build our lives, as in the verse above. "When he had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matthew 7:28-29). Are you open to being challenged and changed both now and forever by what he said?

Proverbs 2:1-6 promises, "My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding."

This knowledge is only possible through revelation, and Jesus came to fully reveal God to mankind. The apostle Paul worked tirelessly to help as many as possible understand and appreciate the treasure Jesus came to give, as Colossians 2:2-3 says: "My purpose is...that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Jesus challenges us to choose consciously what we seek as our treasure in life. Most of his effort in his public ministry was spent on trying to help us realize what God intends for us to focus on. He invites us to come on a spiritual treasure hunt!

"Pursuit of Happiness"

Our constitution states that in America, we have inalienable rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." So we pursue happiness. Happiness is the treasure that all of us are seeking, whether consciously or not.

We're pretty much all alike in what we naturally want and what we think will make us happy, aren't we? Who doesn't want—beyond the obvious basic physical needs to be met—money, nice things, to have fun, to be loved, to be in control of our circumstances, safe and secure, healthy, and to never have any problems that are beyond our ability to cope with easily? The specifics of what we want that we believe will make us happy vary, but happiness is the assumed goal that we grow up more or less consciously aiming for. So we need to become more conscious of what we are aiming for and ask the basic question of whether achieving or receiving or experiencing any particular thing will really give us the happiness that we are seeking.

Let's go back even farther than the question of how to find happiness, and ask ourselves if happiness is really the right goal in the first place! Certainly unhappiness is not what we want. But we have to decide first what is really precious in this life and what is worthy of our pursuit—what is the treasure that we are trying our best to find? We are all following some kind of map—some guidelines or mindset—that we hope will lead us to someday attain this treasure, this state of life that we assume is the right goal, whatever it may be for each of us.

We need to see the spiritual perspective that Jesus amazed his hearers with. God does have very clear and wise instructions for us about how he designed us to function, and he went to great lengths to make them available for us to know about them. He became a human being in order to show us and teach us about life as he intended for us to experience it, and then he even paid the price of our failure so we could start over and succeed in finding his treasure after all.

God does want us to enjoy happiness. But his means to that end is exactly opposite of what this world's culture tells us. 1 Timothy 6:17-19 explains this: "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life." He gives happiness and enjoyment of things he provides when we put our hope in him and not in the things.

But even more than happiness, God wants us to experience joy. Happiness is an emotional response to good things that happen to us. Joy is even better than that, because it does not depend on circumstances being right but rather on our perspective being right about our circumstances. We don't have much control over our circumstances, but we do have control over how we choose to view them. God has revealed to us the right perspective, as he tells us in James 1:2-3: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." "Consider" means we are able to choose joy by choosing this perspective, even in hard times! It will never come naturally so it will always require a conscious choice.

When we think of "not lacking anything," our default is to think of the material possessions or pleasures we want, things that make us happy for a little while. In Hebrews 11:24-27 Moses is used as an example for us of consciously choosing the treasure that is most precious: "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible." We need to set our focus on "him who is invisible" also! Only Jesus Christ offers us the real treasure for a "life that is truly life."

Precious Promises

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Peter 1:3-4).

These promises reveal the real treasure we need to seek, find, and live by. Yes, Jesus has given us everything we need in order to live as God intended and designed for us to! He gives us the way to escape from the destructive pull of the world's definitions of treasure. And he amazes us by offering to share his "divine nature" with us so that we can live on a higher plane of existence than our weak and sinful human nature allows.

God knows we are weak—he created us to be weak and to need his help! And then he offers us his help and wants us to turn to him, to seek him. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, "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...for when I am weak, then I am strong." He understood that it brings glory and praise and credit to God when it is obvious that he is working in our lives. In 2 Corinthians 4:7, Paul made it clear that he had to rely on God as he carried out his ministry: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."

God has created us with what we call "free will." That means that he does not force us to love him or to obey him. We can choose to follow our own ideas and totally ignore him. However, having freedom of

choice doesn't mean that there are no consequences for choosing that path. Proverbs 16:25 points this out: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." Jesus said it another way in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:12-14: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

We choose which road we take as we go through this life. Of course no one would choose the wide gate and broad road if they knew it was going to end in destruction, would they? But most people don't take the time to think through where they are headed; they don't consciously choose which map to follow or which road to be on. That is why Jesus described the one as having a wide gate and being a broad road, because one can easily end up on it without consciously choosing it or being aware of it. Most people don't follow Paul's advice in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?"

Jesus tried very hard to make us aware of the big picture, the heaven and hell, life and death, God vs. Satan perspective that we all will understand eventually on the day of judgment. He wants us to be conscious now of what our choices are so we can experience the joy of making the right choices, beginning with choosing to believe him and believe in him. He makes it clear in John 12:47-48 that his goal and hope is for us to choose to believe him, but that choosing to reject the words he spoke will have consequences: "As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."

If God has told us what is right—and he has—then what excuse can we give when we stand before him? 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10 is blunt about it: "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed." He puts the responsibility on each of us to choose to learn what he has made available so we can know and obey him.

Why doesn't everyone choose to learn the good news (which is what the word "gospel" means) that Jesus came to tell us? The fleeting and unfulfilling nature of worldly treasure is so obvious once we are willing to see it that we don't need to belabor it. Any movie or TV show is an object lesson in what doesn't work, unless it is a fairy tale with a "happily ever after" ending. But even then we know as we watch it that it is unrealistic. Unfortunately, we tend to be stubborn and we cling to the fantasy that "someday my prince will come"—that when this or that happens, then we'll be happy.

We don't like to face the disillusionment of real life when we don't know that there is a better way. We see others who live in terrible circumstances or dysfunctional relationships and who endure it rather than try to escape it because they have no hope of finding anything better. The classic example is the battered wife syndrome, where the husband promises he'll do better so she stays, only to be beaten over and over again. We are amazed when we hear stories like that, but aren't we all doing the same thing if we are not actively seeking God's wisdom and his way of escape from the corruption and destructiveness of this world? We let Satan scheme and attack and lie to us over and over before we consider turning to God for rescue.

Jesus said most never do learn the lesson and turn to him. That is the sad tragedy of the many who are on the wide road, who miss out on the treasures of God's precious promises because they don't take the time to find out about them. Are you proactively and regularly reading God's word to be sure you know what his promises are?

God Seeks Us First

Isaiah 55:8-9 entices us: "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'" He says this not to scare us off but to draw us into wanting to understand his ways. He pleads in Isaiah 1:10: "'Come now, let us reason together,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they

shall be like wool.” The Bible is God’s urgent message and appeal to us. Are you really listening to what he’s trying to tell you?

It is clear that God is the initiator of the relationship he wants to have with us. Jesus tells us in Luke 19:10, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” Most people have heard John 3:16-17, “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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” And Jesus says in John 10:10, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

God is like the father of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24), providing what we need for “life...to the full” but letting us choose to leave him and see for ourselves that what we chose is as pig slop compared to what we had in his household. He watches and hopes for us to come back home to him as he waits with open arms and a warm welcome, ready to prepare a feast.

Though God won’t force us to choose to love and obey him, he not only hopes we will, but he works in many ways to try to make us aware of our need for him and to draw us to him. His goal throughout the Old Testament was to make it obvious how much we need him. He let his people prove over and over that they couldn’t live up to his will on their own. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God has “set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” I’ve heard this described as if we are created with a God-size hole in our souls that can only be filled with the Spirit of God to make us complete and able to function as he intended.

God is eager to help anyone who is seeking him. 2 Chronicles 16:9 says, “The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.” In Jeremiah 29:10-14, he hoped that allowing his people to be taken into captivity would convince them to believe that, “I have...plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” He hoped they would be convinced to turn to him: “Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

Paul explains the big picture of God’s plan for mankind to some curious Greeks in Acts 17:24-28: “From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.” He wants us to seek him!

God has done all he can to give us the opportunity to find him. At the most basic level, his nature can be seen through his creation, which ought to draw us to believe and obey him. But as Romans 1:18-20 says, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” It requires choosing to overlook the obvious in order to not believe in God and to misunderstand his nature. No one will be able to claim ignorance.

But God doesn’t stop there. He wants us to know him and to be in a relationship with him so badly that he became one of us in sending Jesus to reveal his nature and his will fully to us, as John 1:18 says: “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”

And even more than revealing God to us, his ultimate goal was to “redeem”—pay the price for—us. 1 Peter 1:18-19 says, “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” Again we see the contrast between what the world thinks is precious and what is truly valuable in God’s spiritual economy. God gave up his most precious treasure for us! Just think how precious we must be to him, to pay such a price for us!

Hebrews 2:14-18 describes the great lengths God went to in order to relate to and empathize with us: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held

in slavery by their fear of death...he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” God wants to draw us to himself. He’s done everything possible to convince us of his love, his kindness, and the wisdom of his will.

Jesus tells us in John 4:23-24 that “true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and truth.” God is seeking each of us. Has he found in you a longing for truth and a focus on spiritual reality? Will his seeking of you meet up with your seeking of him? He promises that we can find him, that he is “not far from each one of us”!

Asking, Seeking, Knocking

There are many Scriptures that urge us to seek God, his truth, and his righteousness. Jesus promised in Matthew 7:7-8, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” He had already said earlier in the Sermon on the Mount that we don’t need to worry about physical needs: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). So he tells us what to seek and promises that we can find it.

Matthew 13:44-45 tells of two types of treasure-finders: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

The first person had the good fortune to find a treasure he wasn’t actively looking for, but when he discovered it, he had the good sense to realize its value and give up everything else in order to obtain it. Many of us who have grown up in a Christian environment and been exposed regularly to the teachings of the Bible are like this man. We’ve had the opportunity to stumble upon spiritual treasure through no effort of our own. The lesson for us is to be sure we appreciate its value, to realize the treasure it is and choose to make it our own.

The second person was actually aware of what was valuable and went looking for it. When he found it, he also gave up everything to obtain it. Some of us haven’t had the advantage of exposure to the word of God as we were growing up, but we follow our innate hunger for spiritual life and seek God on our own initiative. The great news for either kind of person is that God’s treasure is valuable and he wants everyone to find it and appreciate the value of it!

Seeking God’s valuable treasure revealed in his precious promises requires us to consciously weigh out the choices. Jesus spoke in Luke 9:23-26 of the paradox of spiritual life versus physical life: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.” We get so easily distracted by the tangible, physical focus of life that we don’t naturally grasp that in doing so, we are in danger of giving away our opportunity to experience what God knows is really life from a spiritual perspective. What seems in human thinking to be giving up a lot for God in order to follow Jesus’ teachings and example is really the opposite; we are actually gaining, not losing. It takes a leap of faith to go ahead and trust God, deny ourselves, and obey his words. But he promises that we will find out what life is really meant to be like when we do.

Jesus said in John 7:17, “If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” He gave us the truth that will set us free (John 8:31-32)—free from our sin, from the lies of our worldly culture, and even from the confusion in the divided religious world. And he dares us to prove that what he says is true by putting it into practice.

In Matthew 10:37-39 Jesus is even more bold about what the choice to follow him will involve, especially when people we love don't share our longing to be close to God: "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Who are we willing to offend, if necessary, in order to choose what is right and what pleases our Father in heaven?

"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). This promise is so wonderful! If God is seeking me and promises that he rewards anyone who earnestly seeks him, then there really is no excuse for not finding him, is there?! But the word, "earnestly," needs to be paid attention to. What does it look like in real life to seek God earnestly?

First, it will be obvious in our attitudes. Psalm 42:1-2 describes the longing that will be there: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" Do you crave time to "meet with God," to talk to him through prayer and to listen to him through reading his word? Time spent alone with God is a real gauge of whether we are really seeking him, isn't it? It is true that we make time for what is important to us. If knowing God's precious promises is our real treasure, then it will show, just as it does when someone is seeking material treasure and devotes time and effort to attaining it.

Paul was such a great example for us of constantly seeking. In Philippians 3:4-17, his heart and attitude challenges us to examine ourselves: "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more...But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you."

What longing and dedication to seeking the spiritual goal—the "prize" or treasure God offers to us—is exuded by Paul! He understood how worthless are the things that most people seek and cling to in this world. That's why he's such a great example for us to follow. He had achieved what most people are aiming for in this life, and he could say from experience that knowing Christ is so much better that everything else seems like garbage in comparison!

Second, seeking earnestly will be obvious in our actions. The Bereans were commended in Acts 17:11 for their response to God's message preached by Paul: "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." They exemplify the balance between openness to learning new spiritual truth and yet taking personal responsibility for their beliefs. They weren't skeptical and wanted to believe Paul's great news about Jesus, but they rightly needed to verify what he said from their own study of the Scriptures so their convictions would be their own. Their "3-E" approach—Eagerly Examining Every day—is a good guide to use as we ponder the state of our own values. In other words: How eager am I to read and study the Bible, and how often do I get past good intentions? How open am I to changing what I believe if needed, if it is proven wrong according to Scripture? And how regular and consistent is my effort to seek truth and understanding?

To get to the heart of the matter, in Mark 12:28-34 we read of a conversation between a Jewish teacher of the law and Jesus, “‘Of all the commandments, which is the most important?’ ‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” Oh, is that all?!

It’s so easy to get all caught up in peripheral issues and miss the point spiritually. It’s easy to be religious about going to church and to be busy with many church activities and programs but miss the heart of God’s will and wisdom—and miss out on experiencing the loving relationship with him that he wants and seeks.

This “greatest commandment” is so because, as Jesus added in a Matthew 22:40 parallel passage, “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” In other words, every other command flows from these. If we were to live up to these, we’d not need any further elaboration because we would already be doing what is right. Real love will always produce from within what rules and commands can only impose from without. If everyone obeyed these two commandments, we wouldn’t need any others!

In my own relationship with God, it’s helpful to ask the questions implied by Scriptures. For instance, what does it look like to love God with all my heart...all my soul...all my mind...all my strength? What would be different if I were to decide to take this more seriously? Would God say that I love him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength? Would people who know me say that I love them as I love myself? Is my focus every day on loving God and loving others, so that everything I do and say is shaped by that love? Because this does not come naturally and never will, it won’t happen without conscious choice and constant seeking of the “small gate and narrow road” that leads to life. It will take asking... seeking...knocking...every day.

The Wide Road

Why do so few find the small gate and narrow road that leads to life? Few find it because few seek it. Jesus also explained why so few seek it, in John 3:19-20: “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.” The real issue we all have about God is that we are guilty of sin. We are corrupted by giving in to the temptations we are bombarded with in this life.

There are two opposite but equally wrong attitudes about sin that can prevent us from seeking God: The first is the attitude that we are so sinful that God could never and would never want us to have a relationship with him. That attitude makes a waste of the great sacrifice that Jesus made to make it possible for everyone to be accepted and seen as perfect by God. Those who choose not to believe the good news that they *can* know God and be known by him will be so regretful when they realize on the judgment day what they missed.

The second wrong attitude is demonstrated by those who think they are pretty good people and who think God will accept them because of their good deeds or their lack of “big” sins. This is religious pride, a presumption that God will tolerate some sin—our own—or that he will forgive even without repentance.

By the time John received the Revelation from Jesus, many Christians had become merely religious, self-righteous, and lukewarm toward him. Revelation 3:14-21 is aimed at a congregation of believers that had drifted dangerously close to crossing over to the wide road: “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”

Here he is speaking of the “gold” of God’s economy, what his precious promises offer. And here he is

also reminding us that the choice is ours whether we will enjoy the close relationship with him that sharing a meal intimates. He knocks, but he always waits for us to decide whether to open the door and let him in!

James 4:4-10 is a prescription for overcoming this pride: “You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”

God is looking for humble hearts and undivided minds. If we have them, then we *will* seek him, submit to him when we find him, and come near to him with gratitude that he has offered to give us “treasures in heaven” that are far greater than anything the world tries to tempt us with.

The “Precious Promises” Series

God has made several precious promises that form a foundation upon which he intends for us to build our spiritual lives. My temperament of thinking best by writing in order to sort through my own convictions has developed into in a series of booklets about these promises. They can be read in any order, though the order in which they are listed here follows a logical progression. I wish I had realized much earlier how basic these questions are. Many years of confusion and struggle could have been at least shortened. So I hope God can use them to help others who may be sincere seekers but who may not have the compulsion to sort through what the questions are, much less the answers. My pondering temperament seems to serve a purpose that God intended to be used for the good of others with different temperaments. As 1 Corinthians 12 emphasizes, we all need the benefit of others’ strengths to help us grow stronger in our own faith.

New Birth! Known by God focuses on a very basic question that is shockingly neglected nowadays even among those who have been religious their whole lives: “How can I be born again?” Because the question is not asked, and the biblical answer is not widely taught, many people may be sincerely religious but they may not yet be born again as Jesus said one must be in order to enter God’s kingdom (John 3:3-6). I remember being helped to face this question by a visit from a high school friend while I was in college. She didn’t tell me how to be born again, only that it was necessary, so that I was left to seek the answer on my own.

I’m thankful in hindsight that I was forced to pursue the subject, because when I finally found someone who could show me the Scriptures that answered what had become a burning question, I was so thankful to finally see it for myself. Even though it was hard to accept that I hadn’t been born again yet—though I loved God and believed in Jesus—I knew that God had been leading and guiding me to find out the truth and have the opportunity to be born again at last. Then the good news of knowing I was now truly God’s child outweighed the humiliation of realizing that I hadn’t been before that point.

I do hope that you will be a humble seeker of truth and that you will want to study the topic for yourself, to be sure you have been born again and that God knows you as one of his dear children.

New Life! The New Covenant Paradigm is about being motivated by love and relationship, not a list of rules. As Colossians 1:27 says, the new paradigm (framework or model) is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” It describes the need to shift from a worldly to a spiritual outlook. As our perspective changes, God promises to transform us from the inside out and help us to become like Jesus more and more as we live in this world and as we look forward to living with him forever. Rather than “do right to know God,” we “know God to do right.” My experience has been that this subject has not been proactively taught and emphasized in most churches. May you deeply appreciate it and know the joy God intended for you to have as you learn to live consciously aware of the New Covenant!

New Love! Focus on Phileo describes a very special type of love that is a gift from God to his children.

When understood and experienced, it fills one's heart and life with deep and affectionate, morally pure relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ and other friends. The goal is to change our (and our children's) perspective from our culture's focus on romantic love (eros) to a godly focus on being friends with many men and women in the way God designed for us to enjoy all relationships outside of marriage.

New Family! Koinonia in the Ekklesia of Christ asks the question, "What is 'church,' anyway?" It's healthy to examine our experiences of "church" because many of us go to church but have never questioned the assumptions and traditions that we're used to. We are warned over and over in the Bible that it's easy to drift away from God's revealed truth and instead rely on human wisdom. With all the confusion of different denominations and even contradictory doctrines, it's helpful to look afresh at what God intended for fellowship ("koinonia") to be like in the "called out assembly" (the "ekklesia").

New Spirit! Sharing in the Divine Nature describes the promise that God will give each of us his Holy Spirit when we become his child. It's hard to grasp the amazing news that God himself will live in us and give us his strength, power, and wisdom to live up to his commands and plans for our lives. Though it seems mystical to think that the unseen God could inhabit our lowly beings, it's not mysterious to discern the different ways he's worked throughout history and to understand what he has revealed in the Bible about what he desires to do on our behalf. This subject is either neglected or taught out of context in most religious groups today, mostly because of preconceived ideas about how we want God to work. Few people seek biblical answers about the role of the Spirit in the life of a Christian, which means that many miss out on the gifts he offers.

New Purpose! Christ's Ambassadors flows as a natural result of understanding the principles of the previous booklets. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:11-20, "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.... All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." When we are secure in our relationship with God, we want to share what we have with others.

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 is our responsibility, to "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." But when we understand, experience, and appreciate all of the precious promises we've already looked at in the other booklets of the series, this responsibility becomes a privilege. It's amazing that God would entrust his message to us, weak and timid as we naturally are. This last booklet provides a positive, practical, proactive perspective for sharing our faith with others to help them find what we have found.

God's wisdom in inviting us to share in his work is seen in Philemon 1:6: "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ." Sharing the good news with others helps us appreciate even more for ourselves what spiritual treasure God has given us! There is no greater experience than being used by God to draw others to him. He wants us all to share the joy he has when lost sheep are rescued by the Good Shepherd, one at a time.

"Where Is My Treasure?"

Where are you in this? Is God still watching, as the father of the prodigal son, waiting with open arms for you to come to your senses and come home to him? Are you seeking him—really, proactively, and earnestly seeking him? If you are, God promises to reward you. You will receive, you will find, and the door will be opened to you as long as what you are seeking is to know him and to have what he says is truly precious. Are you seeking to know God and to know his truth as revealed in his word, through his Son and through his humble servants who recorded his inspired message, from Moses to the Revelation to John? In other words, are you reading and studying the Bible for yourself?

Jesus said in Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." What do you crave and long for? What and where is your treasure? Where is your heart?

My prayer for every person who reads this is what Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:7-9,17-19: “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ...I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.” God is the source of true riches—truly new treasure!

Will you take God up on his offer? Will you read about these precious promises and allow him to reveal his treasures to you? And are you ready to give up anything that gets in the way of taking hold of them when you find them?



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MastersHandPublishing@hotmail.com (Subject: New Treasure)

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