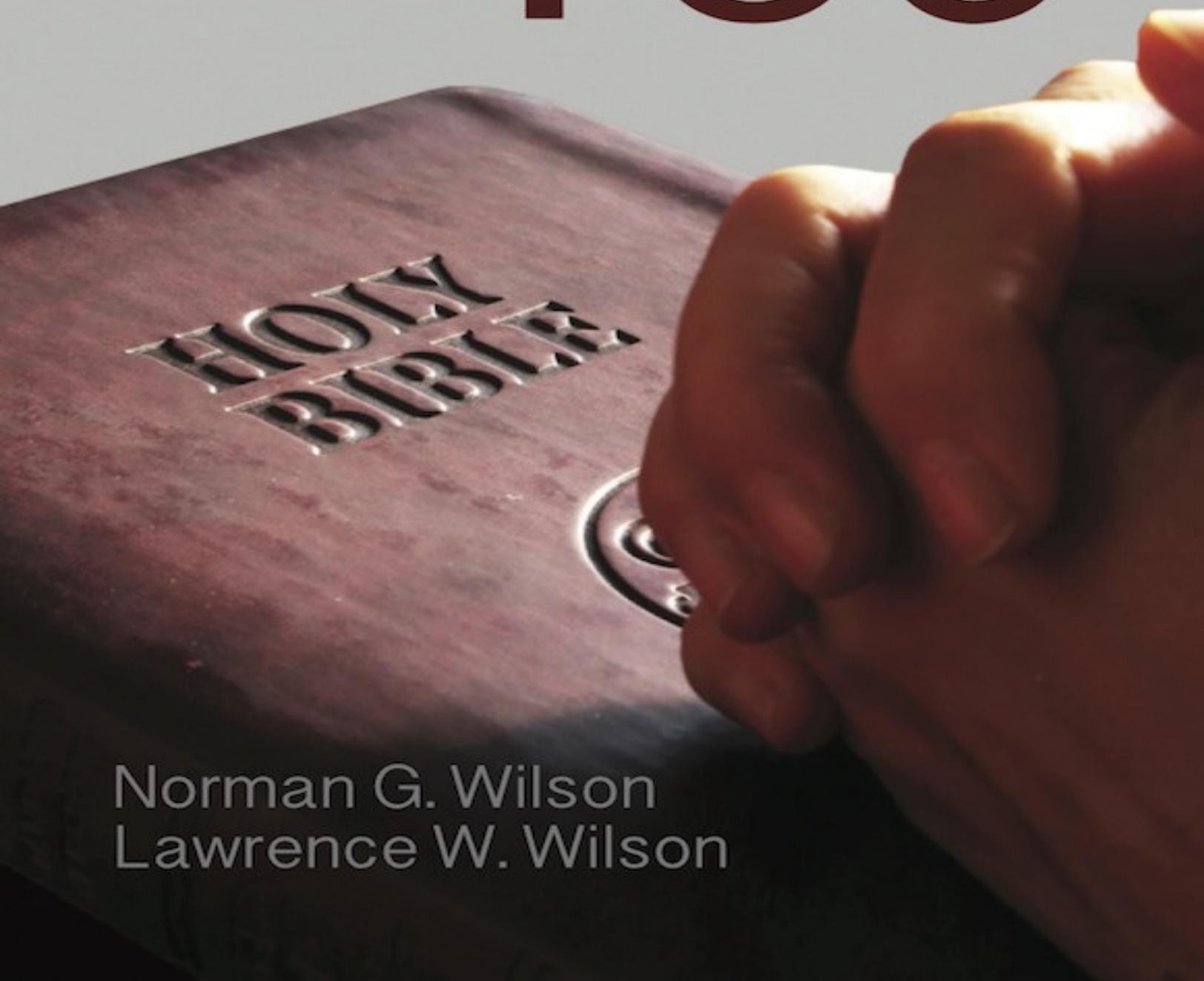


Let this
MIND
be in **YOU**

A stylized dove in flight, rendered in a light gray color, positioned to the right of the word "MIND".A close-up photograph of a hand resting on the cover of a Bible. The Bible cover is dark brown and has the words "HOLY BIBLE" embossed on it. The hand is positioned in the lower right corner of the frame, with fingers slightly curled. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the hand and the cover.

**HOLY
BIBLE**

Norman G. Wilson
Lawrence W. Wilson

LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU

31 DEVOTIONS ON THE HOLY LIFE

Norman G. Wilson
Lawrence W. Wilson

Foreword By
Stan Toler



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FOREWORD

Over more than forty years in ministry, it has been my privilege to work with some of the finest leaders in the Holiness Movement. My friend Norman Wilson has the incredible ability to articulate the doctrine of holiness as well as anyone that I've ever heard preach on the subject. In a preaching career that began six decades ago, he has made the message of heart holiness simple and inviting for tens of thousands in churches, revival meetings, and camp meetings. Through a thirty-three career as speaker on *The Wesleyan Hour* radio broadcast, he reached millions around the globe. His words are an encouraging, convicting, and powerful witness to the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit.

In this volume, I am pleased also to introduce Norm's son Lawrence W. Wilson, an outstanding thinker, preacher, and author in his own right. I've had the privilege of working with Larry on numerous occasions, and I know him to be an outstanding communicator of the holiness message, both in the pulpit and in print. Together, this father-son team continues to demonstrate that life transformation is not merely a future goal but a present hope and experience. By the power of God's Holy Spirit, we are daily transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Through these pages we invite you to center your mind and heart on the one example of true holiness, the life of Jesus Christ. Open your heart to the Spirit's leading. Open your mind to renewal and transformation. Offer your body as a living sacrifice before our God. May you come to know the joy of living the life of perfect love and perfect peace—the life of Jesus Christ himself.

With prayers for your journey—

STAN TOLER

1

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Being fervent in the Spirit . . .

—Acts 18:25, KJV

There are few forces on earth as powerful as the wind. I once saw a picture showing a piece of straw that had pierced a solid piece of wood, driven by the force of a tornado. I'm told that if all the wind in the world ever stopped blowing, it would take the force of all atomic weapons possessed by of all the countries combined to get it moving again. There is tremendous power in the movement of air currents.

Power is one of our most basic needs. We need power to drive machines, and we need power to light and heat our homes. We also need another kind of power, the power of authority. Some have authority that comes from position and influence, and some have the power that comes from physical strength. Yet there is another source of authority, more powerful than either of these. The Holy Spirit is the power we need in our lives. Jesus promised his disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:7). This is the power that provides the strength, the light, the heat, the authority and the influence every Christian needs.

A man once sent his New Testament to a bookbinder to be rebound. The craftsman could not fit the words *The New Testament* on the spine of the book, so he abbreviated it with

the letters TNT. How appropriate! The Holy Spirit puts the power into our lives to accomplish what we can never do on our own.

Life Response

Name a situation that seems beyond your ability. Now ask for the Spirit to empower you.

GOD HAS NO GRANDCHILDREN

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!

—1 John 3:1

One lady boasted that her grandchildren were the sixth generation of the family to be members of their 275-year-old church. Their great-great-grandfather was one of the founders, and their father had been on the consistory for forty-six consecutive years. I hope she realizes that being her grandchildren does not necessarily make them God's. There is no place in the New Testament that speaks of second-generation Christians, God's grandchildren. That family's long record of faithfulness to the church is admirable, but it does not give those children a favored status with God. Our relationship with God depends on personal faith.

I, too, have a godly heritage. All of my grandparents were believers, and there are many preachers in my family tree. I have always appreciated the benefits of a Christian home, though perhaps not as much when I was younger as I do now. I was carried to church when only a few weeks old. I don't remember a time when I didn't go to Sunday school and church every week, and my family was always been involved in ministry. We were the first to arrive and the last to leave. During those years of faithful attendance, I learned many things *about* God. But one day as a young boy, I repented of my sins, received Jesus Christ as my personal savior and became a child of God. Having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ requires a personal commitment of faith.

Life Response

When is your spiritual birthday? Share your story with someone today.

WHOM DO YOU LOVE MOST

Do not love the world . . . for everything in the world . . . comes not from the Father but from the world.

—1 John 2:15–16

Some years ago a young man in my church who was a talented musician told me that his band had started performing in bars in order to witness their faith to the world. I asked if they sang Christian music in those places. He said, “Oh, no. We sing the music they like so they will accept us; then we can talk to them about Christ.” I didn’t question his motive, but I had serious reservations about his method.

When the church strives to win the approval and affirmation of the world, something is out of place. The world cannot be won by our compromises but by our contrast. Jesus told his disciples the world would hate them because it hated him. One must wonder about a church’s relationship with Christ if it gets along too well with the world. Does the holiness of God no longer provoke hostility from the sinful world?

John said that if we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us, and the first commandment is to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Let nothing else compete for your affection or commitment.

Uncle Buddy Robinson, the renowned evangelist, visited New York and saw the sights. He later said, “Thank you, Lord, for letting me see New York, and thank you that I didn’t see anything I want!” Longings for the approval of the world cannot live in the same

heart with love for God.

Life Response

Name something that competes for your love of Christ, and resolve to abandon it.

OWNER OR GUEST

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in your midst?

—1 Corinthians 3:16

Quite often I am invited to be a guest in someone's home during my travels. People sometimes welcome me saying, "Please make yourself right at home." To be funny, I have often replied, "I guess that means I can kiss the cook, look in the closets, or open dresser draws!" I don't do those things, of course, because I really am a guest. They don't expect me to act as I would in my own home. The greeting is meant to welcome me as a visitor so that I'll be comfortable with them, but nobody expects me to move in and take over.

Many born-again Christians, who have welcomed God through his Holy Spirit into their lives, tell him something like my hosts say to me: "Make yourself at home." Too often, however, they really mean, "You are an honored guest, but this is still *my* house." They keep the Spirit restricted to certain areas of their lives. They want his help and fellowship or want him to remain in their hearts, but they don't want him to take over and truly be in control of their lives.

To have the fullness of the Holy Spirit means to welcome him as something more than a guest. It is to allow the Spirit to be Lord of all your life, the one who holds the key to every door.

Life Response

Open your entire life to God's Spirit today.

WE NEED GUIDANCE

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.”

—Psalm 32:8

The promo for a television program promised that it would help people understand their dreams and interpret voices heard from another world. Undoubtedly, it gained a wide audience. Millions of people claim to have received some kind of prompting, leading, or intuition that affected their decisions. Many would say that leading came from the stars. Perhaps you have consulted your horoscope, seeking guidance from the alignment of the stars. Astrology, spiritism, and other quasi-religions hold the attention of millions of people, all eager for a look into their future. Generations have looked to the stars, prophets, fortunetellers, and palm readers, even tea leaves, tarot cards and Ouija boards for information regarding the future.

Every day we make dozens of decisions, many of them without a second thought. Yet sometimes a seemingly insignificant decision turns out to be of major importance. It is not surprising that people look outside for help. Perhaps you are facing a major decision right now and wondering what to do.

Following the right guide is crucial. Jesus said, “If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit” (Matt. 15:14). God has promised guidance for his children through his Word, through the Holy Spirit, and through prayer. Live close enough to God to be able to discern the difference between his voice and the voices of deception.

Life Response

Ask God for guidance regarding an important decision you must make, then wait for his reply.

UNLIMITED POWER?

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but
Christ lives in me . . . I do not set aside the grace of God . . .*

—Galatians 2:20–21

A farmer was watching his fourteen-year-old boy drive the pickup truck around the farm. Rounding a curve in the lane too fast, the boy lost control and flipped the truck into a ditch containing about two feet of water. The father came running and found the unconscious boy pinned under the truck with his head half submerged.

Although the man was only five feet seven inches tall and weighed about 155 pounds, without a moment's hesitation he jumped into the ditch and lifted the truck off his boy. A farm hand ran up and pulled the boy out. Later, the man could not budge the truck. A doctor explained that under crisis, the human body can produce an enormous discharge of adrenaline, bringing forth seemingly superhuman strength.

Human beings are capable of accomplishment beyond our imagination. I do not believe we have yet seen the limits of human achievement. Now imagine what would be possible if we would tap the unexplored potential of the Holy Spirit's power. Too often, we set this power aside or place upon it the limits of our own thinking. Jesus told his disciples that they would receive power through the Holy Spirit. That is not mere physical power but the strength to live godly lives in the midst of an unholy generation. By God's grace, we do have the power to live lives that are pleasing and acceptable to him.

Life response

Today I will allow Christ's supernatural power work in me and through me.

SEEKING FULFILLMENT

And in Christ you have been brought to fullness.

—Colossians 2:10

I often hear people say, “I don’t feel fulfilled,” or, “I feel there is something lacking in my life. I haven’t reached my full potential as a person.”

One reason for this is that the world suggests that fulfillment can only be found in a career, or in marriage, or in friendship, fame or fortune. But as someone has put it, there is a God-shaped vacuum inside each of us, and we can never know fulfillment until he fills us with himself. Too many people feel empty, cold, or dead when they are not feeling some high from spending or eating or adrenaline or alcohol. They cannot bear for the party to end or their friends to leave. They don’t want to go home to face being alone.

You may know someone like this, or maybe have this experience yourself. Do you always feel that fulfillment is just around the corner, yet you never seem able to turn that corner? Perhaps you have felt that if you could just find the right formula, meet the right person, or make the right deal, you would finally arrive at happiness. By this way of thinking, happiness depends on circumstances.

In reality, personal fulfillment is based on having a right relationship with our creator. God made us, and he can remake us in his image, no matter how marred and scarred we may be. Martin Luther said, “God created the world out of nothing, and as long as you are yet nothing, he can make something out of you.” What we need is not one more experience or

achievement. We need simply to be open and available to God.

Life Response

Ponder this question: What have I relied on, other than God, as my source of happiness?

BE NOT AFRAID

“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

—Mark 6:50

When I was a small boy during World War II, my neighborhood would practice air-raid drills and blackouts. My father was an air-raid warden, so when the sirens blew, Dad would leave the house and go through the neighborhood to make sure all lights were out. If any light whatsoever could be seen, it might be used to guide an enemy bomber.

While dad made his rounds, we all sat in the darkness, listening to the sad wail of the siren. I didn’t understand why the lights had to be out. Sitting there with Dad outside and the siren moaning, I was afraid.

After a few minutes, the all-clear whistle would blow, my father would come back into the house, the lights would be turned on, and our spirits would brighten. Things weren’t nearly as frightening when Dad was close by.

Fear can have devastating physical effects, even causing actual illnesses. Far more serious, however, are the spiritual conditions caused by fear: double-mindedness, instability, inconsistency, unhappiness, lack of contentment, and backsliding. Fear is the enemy of faith and the great disrupter of the spiritual life, which is lived by faith.

Fear dissipates in the presence of Christ. Often when Jesus came to troubled disciples he spoke the words, “It is I, do not be afraid.” When you have the comforting, reassuring presence of Jesus in your life, you need not be afraid

Life Response

Consciously surrender your greatest fear to the Lord Jesus Christ.

NEVER ALONE

My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.

—Exodus 33:14

Late one night I was driving home from a preaching assignment while a storm blanketed the roads with ice and snow. The road was getting more treacherous by the minute. Several large trucks had slid off the highway, and my route home was blocked. The words of the apostle Paul came to mind from 2 Corinthians, where he recounted the dangers he faced in his travels. I prayed, “Lord, like the apostle Paul, I am in danger on the highway, in danger from a storm. I need your sustaining presence.” During another time of danger Paul said, “Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul’” (Acts 27:23–24). I can tell you, I was no longer alone in the car that night.

Many people feel alone. I have often visited the elderly who often live out their last years in heart-breaking isolation. I remember one lady who boasted of her son, telling of his successes and how busy he was. But behind her boasting, I could hear the cry of her lonely heart. She really wanted her son to visit, to call, to show some attention. Her talk of his busyness was her way of covering up her disappointment.

Yet no one needs to feel alone. Children or parents may neglect you. Your companion may be gone. Neighbors may not drop in to visit—but you are not alone. The presence of Christ will always be with you.

Life Response

Be continually aware of the presence of Christ today.

THE COMFORTER IS HERE

Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit . . .

—Acts 9:31

For half a century, artist Charles Schulz drew the familiar comic strip *Peanuts*, which featured an array of child characters including Linus, who carried his faithful and familiar blanket with him everywhere. For Linus, happiness was a warm blanket. Adults as well as children often seek some kind of security blanket. We long to be comforted by the familiar.

It is interesting, then, that the most comforting symbol of Christianity throughout the world—the cross—is a symbol of suffering and shame. All of the tragedy, pain, anguish, injustice, suffering, and sorrow of human existence are wrapped up in that old rugged cross. By taking that cross, Jesus Christ brought us the greatest source of comfort available to the human heart. Even in your time of mourning, you can be happy, Jesus says, because you will be comforted.

When Jesus taught his disciples about his departure from this earth, they were filled with fear. But he promised he would not leave them comfortless. He said he would give them another Comforter, who would stay with them at all times. That comforter is the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus had been with them physically, the presence of God would dwell within spiritually. We have confidence that we do not face the difficulties of life or the shadow of death alone. We have the Comforter within.

Life Response

Right now, welcome the Holy Spirit into your heart.

THE DARK TIMES

*His wife said to him, "Are you still maintaining your integrity?
Curse God and die!"*

—Job 2:9

In *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom tells how her family risked their freedom in order to hide their Jewish neighbors during the Nazi occupation of Holland during the Second World War. After their activities were discovered, Corrie and her sister were imprisoned at Ravensbruck, the infamous women's concentration camp. Years later, Corrie traveled worldwide telling her story. For thirty-three years she had no permanent home. She called herself "a tramp for the Lord." When she was eighty-five years of age, some of Corrie's supporters provided a lovely house for her in California. It was a luxury she never dreamed she would have.

One day her friend, the late movie director Jimmy Collier, visited her home. As he was leaving, he stopped at the door and said, "Corrie, hasn't God been good to give you this beautiful home?"

She replied firmly, "Jimmy, God was good when I was in Ravensbruck too."

Some mistakenly believe that God's goodness is manifested only in health, wealth, and prosperity. That implies that God's blessings cannot be seen during times of hardship, suffering, or loneliness. Job knew better. Though he had lost home, health, and family and was urged by his own wife to curse God, Job refused. "Though he slay me," Job said, "yet

will I hope in him” (Job 13:15). God is good in the bad times as well as in the good. And his greatest blessing is not health or wealth but his very presence with us.

Life Response

Name the ways you see God’s goodness in your life regardless of your circumstances.

ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE OF JESUS

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

—Matthew 16:24

The director of a camp whose purpose is to lead troubled young people to Christ has said, “Being a Christian is the toughest thing in the world. What is tougher than loving your enemies?” One of the boys in the program, who later developed into a rugged disciple, said, “In this outfit we are all brothers, and we’re all men. It was too tough for me at first, but then I heard that through Christ all things are possible. I say a man is not a man, not a full man, until he gets to know Jesus Christ.”

The Christian life is difficult, and that is what makes it challenging. When you pick up the cross to follow Jesus, you have accepted the greatest challenge you will ever face. The Bible says that “the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son” (Heb. 12:6). In other words he disciplines those he loves in order to make them more useful. A trained horse is far more valuable than a wild one. Athletes know that to be at their best, they must accept the discipline of training. The player, who cuts corners with the training rules and doesn’t want to bother with practice, will never make it.

Discipline in the Christian sense is not meant to break you, but to make you. The uncontrolled energy of our lives will destroy us, but God can channel it into productivity.

Life Response

Focus on one area of your life in which you need discipline today.

GUARD YOUR MIND

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

—Isaiah 26:3

Oliver Wendell Holmes said, “The human mind is like a checking account. As long as you keep putting money in the bank, a checkbook is like a book of magic. But stop making those deposits, and the magic evaporates with a rude statement from the bank—no funds.”

With what do you feed into your mind? The word of God, Christian literature, inspirational music? Or mindless television programs, sordid movies, profane music? When you put into your mind things that are pure, honest, and of good report, you will have a reservoir from which to draw power, strength, and peace. But if you put into your mind things that are evil and sinful, you have nothing from which to draw. Peace of mind is for those whose minds are centered on God.

Many people suffer from anxiety, frayed nerves, tension, and fear. Our reliance on mood-altering medications is evidence that our society is wracked by troubles of the mind. To have peace of mind, discipline your mind. Bring your thoughts into captivity. Fill your mind with good things. Meditate on the Lord and his goodness. Reject worry and fear, and rejoice in the salvation God provides. Learn to be grateful—cultivate the habit of thanksgiving, the attitude of gratitude. Guard your mind.

Life Response

Choose one good source from which to feed your mind today, and identify one source to avoid.

SUFFERING BRINGS UNDERSTANDING

The God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble . . .

—2 Corinthians 1:3–4

Queen Victoria, a story goes, learned that the wife of a common laborer had unexpectedly lost her baby. Having experienced deep sorrow herself, the Queen called on the bereaved woman and stayed with her for some time. After she left, the neighbors gathered round, curious to know what the monarch had said. “The Queen said nothing,” the grieving mother told them. “She simply put her hands on mine, and we silently wept together.”

A few years ago, I was preaching at a camp meeting in when my wife and I received word that our five-month-old granddaughter had died. Many of our friends came to us and expressed their sympathy, and we appreciated all of them. However, visiting the camp that same weekend was a young couple that had lost their daughter just a short time earlier. We sensed that they understood our pain perhaps better than most others. They had been there.

When you endure suffering, keep in mind that you will be able to help others realize the comfort of Christ better as the result of your experience. Jesus himself identifies with our pain because he, too, suffered. He was tempted in every way we are. Scripture tells us that he was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. No matter what you suffer, Jesus knows that pain first hand. Let him take you by the hand and share it with you.

Life Response

Offer comfort to someone in the name of Jesus today.

GROW UP!

Grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

—Ephesians 4:15

A week or so after the funeral of one of the older members of my church, I asked the congregation, “Who will take the place of this person who have been a pillar of the church?” We had leaned on that mature saint, looked to him for counsel, felt secure in his presence. Now he, and some other senior saints, had dropped from our ranks. “Who will step into the gap?” I wondered. We must mature in the grace of God so we can become a support to others.

One young lady responded to my challenge. She said, “As one who has been raised and nurtured in the church, I recognize my responsibility to take up the torch.” That young lady eventually devoted her life to missions.

It is possible to become a Christian but fail to grow to maturity in the faith. Christian maturity means attaining stability and steadfastness, not being tossed about by every new idea. Maturity means serving others, not being waited on. Mature Christians support one another, building up the body by their words and actions.

It may have come as a shock to young Timothy when his mentor, the apostle Paul, addressed him saying, “You, man of God . . .” (1 Tim. 6:11). But Paul realized that his young protégé was mature enough to bear the responsibility of a leader in the church. Don’t

let your spiritual life suffer from arrested development. Put away childish things and mature into a productive saint in the kingdom of God.

Life Response

Reach out to a younger Christian and encourage him or her today.

A NEW MIND

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus . . .

—Philippians 2:5, KJV

Modern medicine, with its miracles of transplant surgery and genetic engineering, has raised serious speculations about the future. Things that once seemed like science fiction have become commonplace. Major organ transplantation is accomplished every day. Prosthetic joints enable people long crippled by arthritis to walk freely. Yet given the seemingly unlimited possibilities of science, some fear the implications of possible future breakthroughs in medical treatment. One such speculation involves brain transplants. What would happen if the brain of one person could be transplanted into the body of another? It sounds impossible, but so did heart transplantation until 1967 when it was done successfully for the first time. What would be the result of putting one person's brain into another's body? Which person would he or she be?

A physical brain transplant may never happen. Yet the Bible says we all need a new or renewed mind. God promised through Ezekiel that he would remove old heart of his rebellious people—the heart of stone—and replace it with a new heart of flesh (Ezek. 11:19). Paul urged the Romans to be transformed by the renewing of their mind (Rom. 12:2). And he tells the Philippians to have the mind of Christ. God's Word speaks about the spiritual heart and mind, and a "mind transplant" is exactly what we need. Having the mind of Christ will make us new people, with a new attitude of selflessness, humility, and obedience. Just what

the Doctor ordered.

Life Response

As you interact with others today, identify the ways in which your mind must change to be more like Christ.

BEARING FRUIT

I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last . . .

—John 15:16

Have you ever thought about the difference one piece of fruit can make? One piece of fruit has within it the potential to produce an entire orchard. One piece of fruit has the seed power to feed millions. One piece of fruit is part of a chain of production and reproduction that can continue for centuries.

The oldest existing apple tree is said to have been planted in Vancouver, Washington, in 1826. It is considered the matriarch of the entire apple industry in the United States. Someone has said, “Any fool can count the seeds in an apple, but only God can count the apples in a seed.” I think that’s true. No one can fathom how much fruit owes its origin to the single seed from which that old tree grew.

Jesus said he chose you to bring forth fruit and that your fruit will remain. Jesus keeps on producing the fruit of righteousness in our lives; and as we introduce others to him, the reproductive process will continue indefinitely. Today, you and I can share in the same abundance of life he had.

We choose the kind of fruit we bear by choosing the kind of tree we will be. A good tree bears good fruit, and a corrupt tree bears corrupt fruit. If Jesus is the Vine and we are the branches. Remain in him, and bear good fruit.

Life Response

Choose the kind of fruit you will bear today.

KNOWING CHRIST PERSONALLY

I want to know Christ . . .

—Philippians 3:10

When Jesus asked his disciples what others were saying about him, they gave him a variety of opinions: some thought he was John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the prophets. Then Jesus asked a more personal question: “Who do *you* say I am?” (Mark 8:29, emphasis added). Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

Each of us must answer that same question. What is your opinion? Who is this Jesus? C. S. Lewis made the well-known observation that Jesus must be either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord of all. His claims about himself leave no room for other conclusions. So which is it? Was he a liar? Were his claims of divinity, of oneness with God, carefully calculated falsehoods? If those claims are not true, he must a liar.

Was he a lunatic, an egomaniac? Was he plagued with delusions of grandeur? He believed himself to be the Messiah. He claimed that “all authority in heaven and on earth” had been given to him (Matt. 28:18). He announced, “I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! (Rev. 1:18). Such statements would be madness if not true.

The only alternative must be that Jesus is, in fact, Lord of all. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most remarkable event in history. When he came forth from the grave, he authenticated every claim he had made. So how would you answer the question, “Who is Jesus?” Is he the living Savior? More important, is he *your* personal Savior?

Life Response

Acknowledge that Jesus is Lord of all, and Lord of your life.

GRACE, OUR TEACHER

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us . . .

—Titus 2:11–12

Grace is the unmerited favor of God. It cannot be begged, bought, bartered, or bargained for. None of us deserves it. We can't choose it, and we can't demand it. Through grace, God does for us that we cannot do for ourselves. The function of grace is to save us. By grace we are saved through faith, not because of anything we have done. And God has done this based on no obligation on his part. Salvation is pure grace, a demonstration of God's unconditional love for us. And the power of grace is such that it teaches us a great lesson. Grace teaches us to say no to old, godless ways and to live a good and righteous life, here and now.

My seventh and eighth-grade English teacher was a stern lady named Miss McQuaid. Her lessons were hard, and her standards high. She was a strict disciplinarian. Although I did not appreciate her methods at the time, I now see that she was one of the most outstanding teachers of my entire educational career. Why? I learned something from her. She did one thing and she did it well. She taught us English grammar.

Grace is our teacher. She teaches us to say no to wrong and yes to right. She teaches us to live godly lives and to be ready for the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ. Like any top-notch teacher, grace makes a tremendous contribution to our lives. We show our appreciation

by listening and putting her lessons into practice.

Life Response

Name the lesson grace is now teaching you, and tell how you will apply it.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS

To know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings . . .

—Philippians 3:10

A young doctor with much ability and a brilliant future was working at a leprosarium. One day the car in which she was riding went down an embankment and turned over. She was severely injured and was never able to walk again. At first, she thought her medical career was over. But with the help and encouragement of others, she began treating her patients again, even though she was confined to a wheelchair. Before long she discovered that something wonderful was happening. The leprosy patients displayed less self-pity, hopelessness, and sullenness, which had been evident among them before. When they were treated by a doctor who herself was disabled, in some cases even more so than her patients, they had a different outlook and greater hope. They recognized the fellowship of suffering.

The Bible says Jesus suffered in order to make his people holy. That is a reference to his crucifixion. And the apostle Paul said that he longed to know Christ, the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering. He wanted to identify with Jesus even in his death. If we recognize that suffering creates a greater bond with Christ, we will be better able to bear that suffering and to bless others who suffer.

Life Response

Name one way your suffering has drawn you closer to Jesus.

COMPLETE TRUST

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding . . .

—Proverbs 3:5

Many years ago my wife and I went to visit my brother and his family. We stayed in their guest room, which was decorated with second-hand furniture. None of us had much money in those days, and few possessions. We were happy to have a bed to sleep in. At about midnight, we were jarred from a sound sleep by a loud bang and a quick drop. The slats, which had supported the springs and mattress of the bed, had fallen out, tumbling us to the floor. I fixed the bed as best I could and tried to go back to sleep, but it was no use. I couldn't relax. I didn't trust that bed anymore. I feared that it might collapse again at any minute. I was tense all night, attempting to hold myself up rather than resting on the mattress.

Sometimes the things we trust—everything we thought would support us through life—falls out from under us. Perhaps that has happened to you. Someone you trusted may have betrayed you. Or you lost a job that you thought was secure. You are left with the awful feeling that the very foundations of your life have failed.

The fact is, every foundation we construct for ourselves will fail sooner or later. Life is filled with disappointments. But there is person you can trust explicitly. You can put your full trust in the Lord, for he will never fail. There is no need to exhaust yourself trying to hold yourself up through life's trials and difficulties. Relax. Rely on God. He will never let you

fall.

Life Response

Identify one thing you are relying on other than God; now relax and trust him.

PLAYING A DUET

Strengthen the feeble hands . . .

—Isaiah 35:3

A story is told of renowned pianist Ignacy Jan Paderewski that is touching, although it cannot be verified as true. The legendary pianist and composer was about to perform in a great American concert hall, and in the audience were a mother and her young son. The boy grew weary of waiting for the concert to begin, so while his mother talked with friends he was slipped out of his seat, walked down the aisle, and stepped onto the huge stage. Unnoticed by the sophisticated crowd, the boy sat the Steinway grand piano and began to play “Chopsticks.” The crowd at first grew quiet, then increasingly irritated. They shouted for the boy to be taken away. They had come to hear Paderewski, not a child playing “Chopsticks.”

Backstage, the great master overheard the commotion and looked onto the stage. He grabbed his coat and approached the piano. Standing behind the boy, he instructed him to keep playing. Then Paderewski, reaching around the boy on both sides, began to improvise a counter melody. The crowd was awed at what a master pianist could do to turn a child’s song into a beautiful arrangement.

How much like that little boy we are. Our best efforts at holiness are no better than a boy playing a child’s tune. But when the Master comes and places his strong hands alongside ours, he makes something beautiful of our lives. And all while he whispers, “Don’t quit. Keep

on playing!” Our efforts are amateurish and feeble, even childish; but with God’s help, our life can be a symphony of praise to him and a blessing to others.

Life Response

Today, rest in the knowledge that God’s grace is sufficient in your weakness.

THE WIND OF THE SPIRIT

The wind blows . . . but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

—John 3:8

When I pastored a church in upstate New York, my family enjoyed the seasonal winds that blew down from the Adirondack Mountains. With kites in hand, our children loved to climb a beautiful hill across the street from our parsonage. The kites would soar high into the sky with very little effort on our part. All we had to do was let out the string, and the wind did the rest. The kites were well constructed, balanced by a tail, and fed with plenty of string. Even so, no kite can fly itself. Without the wind, those kites were useless bits of wood and paper. Yet empowered by the wind, they could fly to breathtaking heights.

Just as a kite cannot fly on its own, we cannot live the holy life without the power of the Spirit. Our human effort will never be enough to lift us into the holiness of Christ. Yet with the Wind of God's Spirit, we can be empowered to reach great heights. The Spirit made the dry bones of Ezekiel's vision become a mighty army. The wind of the Spirit blew into the Upper Room and propelled the infant church to evangelize the world. Just as there is no limit to the power of the wind, there is no limit to what God, through his Holy Spirit, can accomplish in us and through us.

Let the Holy Spirit be that wind in your life. Do not rely on your own efforts at self-improvement. Yield yourself to the unlimited power of the Spirit, and see where it may lead

you.

Life Response

Give the Holy Spirit enough “string” to make your life soar.

BLESSING FOR BITTERNESS

*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man
who fell into the hands of robbers?*

—Luke 10:36

Abraham Lincoln is reported to have said, “I am sorry for the man who can’t feel the whip when it is laid on the other man’s back.” I learned something of the meaning of that quote while ministering in South Africa during the years of apartheid. There I met a fine young man who lived in one of the segregated townships. I asked him about tension that existed between Blacks and Whites. He said, “Many of our people are preaching hatred. And I myself once had bitterness and hatred in my heart. But no more. Jesus Christ has given me love for others, no matter what color their skin may be.”

A man in Charlotte, North Carolina, was filled with hatred of and prejudice toward people of another race. He had joined an extremist organization and was on the verge of engaging in violence. Out of curiosity, he attended a Billy Graham crusade and was gloriously converted. He later wrote to Billy Graham, “All bitterness, hatred, malice, and prejudice immediately left me. I was in the counseling room seated next to a person of another race. Through my tears, I gripped the hand of this man, who, a few hours before, I would have detested. I now find that I can love all men regardless of the color of their skin.”

The love of God can transform even the bitterest attitude to one of blessing. The apostle Paul wrote, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with

every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:31–32). That change of heart is possible. Allow the Spirit of God to take away your bitterness and replace it with blessing.

Life Response

Today, reach out to help a person you have been at odds with.

NORMAL LIFE

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you . . .

—Matthew 5:44

After your first reading of the Sermon on the Mount, you may feel that it turns everything upside down. However, after reading it for a second or third time, you will discover that Jesus' teaching in this great sermon really turns everything right side up. On first reading, you may think, "This is impossible!" After reading it again, you will come to believe that nothing else is possible.

We have become so accustomed to living according to human reasoning that we think anything else is outrageous or impossible. One day, I sat for some time with my legs twisted under me in an unnatural position. When I got up and tried to walk, my legs were first numb and then painful. I stumbled and nearly fell. Having been seated in that position for so long, the natural function of my legs seemed unnatural at first.

Do the natural human impulses of selfishness, greed, competitiveness, pettiness, and revenge seem normal to you? Do you find the idea of loving those who hate you or praying for those who have harmed you to be unnatural, even a bit crazy? If so, you are not alone. Many think the life Jesus described in his teaching is unnatural, even painful.

Yet the real pain comes from trying to live at peace with others by following human instincts rather than Jesus' teaching. In truth, the Sermon on the Mount is the only practical way to live. Impossible? Through human effort, yes. But to a life transformed by God's

grace, this is the natural way to live.

Life Response

Pray for an enemy today.

CALLED TO BE SAINTS

. . . to all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people.

—Romans 1:7

When the Sunday school teacher asked her students, “What is a saint?” one little boy shot back, “A dead Christian.” That retort summarizes what many believe about holiness. No living person can possibly be a saint. The church declares someone holy only after they’ve been dead for centuries. When pressed, we might say that some older members of the congregation are saints. A kindly, white-haired grandmother could perhaps be holy, but not an ordinary Christian such as you or I.

It is amazing, too, how few people aspire to holiness. Some say, “I don’t mind having some religion, but I don’t go too far with it.” Or, “I’m no saint.” Perhaps they don’t like what they have observed in the lives of those who claim to be saints—an air of superiority, false piety, or a holier-than-thou attitude.

Sainthood is not reserved for those who have “made it to heaven: or are “too old to sin” anymore. All of us are, “called to be his holy people”—that is, saints (Rom. 1:7). The apostle Paul addressed the Christians of Rome as saints even though they lived in a sinful city, under a tyrannical government, in a hostile environment—just as many Christians do today. We are surrounded by evil on every side, yet we are called to the way of holiness. We do not need to wait until we are called to heaven in order to be saints. God calls his people to

holiness now, and, by the power of his Spirit, makes them so.

Life Response

Accept the identity of *saint*, and live up to that today.

FAULT VS. BLAME

*May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless
and holy in the presence of our God . . .*

—1 Thessalonians 3:13

How can we faulty people ever be blameless before God? Most people believe it is not possible. “After all,” some say, “nobody is perfect.” One reason people often think that way is that they do not understand the difference between *faultless* and *blameless*.

Consider a hypothetical situation. Suppose your young children are arguing with each other at the table. You reprimand them, warning them to be careful not to break something. But they persist in their actions. In their disobedience, one of them knocks over a glass, breaking it and spilling the milk. You would have quite a mess on your hands.

Now imagine another situation. The children are behaving very well, and even offer to help set the dinner table. In their eagerness, one child knocks over a glass, breaking it and spilling the milk.

In both cases, the result is the same: a broken glass and spilled milk. And in both cases, the fault is the same. Whoever knocked over the glass is at fault. In the first instance, however, there is not only fault but also blame. The deliberate, disobedient action of the children caused the problem. And with blame comes punishment. In the second instance, however, the child is at fault but is not to blame. Why? Because the motivation of his heart was right. We often “spill the milk” in life, creating a mess for others and ourselves through

our own fault. But God knows our heart. He knows the difference between a mistake made with good intentions and intentional disobedience. And he is gracious. Though we are imperfect, we are held blameless when our hearts are set on doing his will.

Life Response

Praise the Lord for his acceptance and understanding.

FREEDOM FROM SIN

No one who is born of God will continue to sin . . .

—1 John 3:9

I once heard someone say, “The difference between being a Christian and a non-Christian is that now that I’m a Christian, I still sin but I no longer enjoy it.” That summarizes the attitude of many, who believe that God’s grace has the power to convict the heart of sin but not to change it. Yet God’s Word says more.

The apostle John teaches that believers not only dislike sin but also abandon it. And Jesus did not say to the woman caught in adultery, “Go on sinning, but remember to feel bad about it.” He said, “Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11). The apostle Paul asked, “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!” (Rom. 6:1–2).

To people who do not know God, sin seems like a small matter. We often hear people joke about sinful things, and popular entertainment mocks the idea that anything could be truly sinful. But sin is no laughing matter. It was sin that sent Jesus to the cross, and it is sin that condemns unrepentant souls to hell.

A person who continues to sin is a slave to sin; but when Jesus rules in our hearts, sin is no longer our master. Jesus came to destroy the work of the devil (1 John 3:8). Paul makes it crystal clear: “We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Rom. 6:2). The good news of the gospel is that we do not have to remain in our sin. “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

Life Response

Imagine yourself set free from sin, then live that way today.

A CRY FOR HELP

. . . to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

—Luke 18:1

At the conclusion of a camp meeting service in which I had preached about prayer, a boy of ten or twelve years of age came to speak with me. Having heard someone else preach about prayer, he had retained much of the truth. He said, “There is a prayer that needs no introduction, contains no preamble, and no conclusion. There is no problem with grammar, and it is contained in one word.”

I was intrigued. “What is that one word?” I asked him.

“Help!”

It is simple but true. God considers that one-word prayer just as acceptable as an eloquent petition. Jesus teaches a lesson on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:5–13). He begins by saying, “This, then, is how you should pray.” He does not stipulate certain hours or days for prayer. Prayer can occur at any time, day or night, any day of the week. And he does not indicate whether prayer should be long or short. Prayer is important, and we should pray regularly. But the time, the day, and the duration are far less important than the faith of the one who prays. An earnest plea from a sincere heart is always acceptable to the Father.

Life Response

Ask God for help. Right now.

INSPECTION

I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless.

—Genesis 17:1

When I read God’s instruction to Abram that he walk before God blamelessly, I picture a military parade. I envision the commander-in-chief, seated on a reviewing stand with his top generals, ready to observe the troops as they march by. Every soldier has carefully and meticulously donned his dress uniform. Each column is perfectly straight, and the soldiers march in rhythm with practiced precision. As the troops pass in review, the commander inspects them for precision, appearance, and readiness.

I also think of the encouragement given by the apostle Paul to the Christians at Ephesus. He urged the Ephesians to “walk worthy of the vocation” they had received (Eph. 4:1, KJV). He meant that they should live in a manner fitting for those who have been called to salvation. We have a high calling, and God desires us to live up to it.

Now imagine that the troops have passed in review. The commanding officer criticizes the band because not all of the trombone slides were in the same position while they played? He doesn’t seem to understand they were each playing a different part. Only when blended together would there be perfect harmony.

Unity in Christ does not mean uniformity in performance. We are each called upon to do our part, which may be different from those around us. When blended together, it we make a pleasing appearance to God.

Someday we will be called to the judgment seat of Christ, where we will pass in

review before God. How can we be ready? By walking daily “in the light of the LORD” (Isa. 2:5). For “if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Life Response

Live *here* so that you will not be ashamed to stand before Christ *there*.

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

—Psalm 23:6

Several years ago I visited Rapid City, South Dakota, after a flood had left hundreds of people homeless. Areas that had been lined with homes just days prior now lay in rubble. We frequently see similar scenes on television after a tornado or hurricane has devastated an area. Our earthly homes are, at best, temporary. Even the most solid and palatial homes are temporary shelters. The Bible says that this world and everything in it are passing away.

During my years as a pastor, I lived in many different homes. Once, when moving away from a particular home, we loaded everything we owned on a moving van for a long-distance move. The house was empty and swept clean. Our footsteps echoed as we walked through the deserted rooms one last time. I watched forlornly as the truck pulled away, carrying all of our earthly possessions with it. I was smitten with an awful feeling of homesickness. Even then it struck me as odd because we had lived in that house for just a few years. We had never thought of it as a permanent home. Then I realized the reason for my sadness. My heart was longing for the safety and security of a truly permanent home, which we can have only in heaven.

But heaven is our eternal home. Once there, we will never have to pack the van and say goodbye. A quotation attributed to Saint Augustine says, “God has made us for himself and our hearts are restless until we find rest in him.” Do you ever get homesick for heaven? Don’t be too attached to the things of this earth. Here, we will always feel a bit out of place,

like strangers living in a foreign land. Heaven is our one true home.

Life Response

Take a mental inventory of the things in your home. Now imagine heaven.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Norman G. Wilson began his ministry as a church planter during the 1950s and went on to pastor one of the largest congregations in The Wesleyan Church during the 1970s. For over thirty-three years, he preached the gospel around the world through *The Wesleyan Hour* international radio broadcast. He is the author of numerous books including *Follow the Leader* and *People Just Like us*.

Lawrence W. Wilson is an author, thinker, preacher, and believer in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. During his thirty-year ministry career, he has served as a senior pastor and as editorial director for Wesleyan Publishing House. He is the author of three books, including *A Different Kind of Crazy: Living Like Jesus Lived*. He blogs at www.lawrencewilson.com.