

Teenagers:
Answers for Life

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psalm 119:9).

Behind Psalm 119 is the extraordinary story of the sufferings of God’s people in captivity. Special emphasis is placed on the life of Ezra as a teenager. If he were alive today, Ezra could easily identify with the worst situations teens face. He witnessed the murderous torture of his family and friends, and he lived in constant dread of being brutalized by the enemy that ruled his people with a vengeance. In the face of it all, Ezra had hope! He poured out his heart to God and was instructed by God’s Word in the night seasons.

As you grow in Christ in this day and age, your struggles are not taken lightly. God’s Word is sure. The authority imparted to Ezra as a young man is available to everyone. No matter what you have faced or how badly you have failed, God is waiting to be gracious to you!

How Teens Can Love Themselves

Chapter One

THE PERSONAL LOVE OF GOD

“For thou has possessed my reins [that is, my emotions]: thou has covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee” (Psalm 139:13-18).

As the Lord thought of you in eternity past, He decided how He was going to make you.

You were in His thoughts before the foundation of the world. Psalm 139:16 says, “Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect...” Verse 15 says that we were “curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.” God created you, and He knew exactly how tall or how short you would be. He knew what color your hair and eyes would be, and He also knew exactly what He wanted you to weigh.

Think of it. The Lord created us, but we went bad. We chose to sin. First, we inherited Adam’s sin nature. It was imputed to us before we ever sinned, and we were condemned. Then Jesus Christ came to die on the Cross and shed His blood for us. He saw us defeated, frustrated, and living in the dominion of the old sin nature. So, to rescue us from a horrible pit, He became a man, went to the Cross and bore every one of our sins on His own body. Jesus shed His blood for our sins. He died, was buried and went into hell. After that, the Spirit of God resurrected Him (Romans 1:4), He ascended into heaven (Acts 1:11) and appeared before the Father to represent anyone who would trust and believe upon Him.

The moment you believe upon Christ as Savior, He imputes His own righteousness to you

without works. He saves you by grace through faith in Him and not of works, lest any man should boast. Jesus will save anyone—and *any* young person—and give them a new birth from on high.

Just As You Are

God, in His foreknowledge, knew all the sins you would ever commit, yet He commended His love toward you. While you were yet a sinner, He died for you on the Cross (Romans 5:8). Don't you think He loves you a lot? Yes, He does. God's love for you doesn't depend upon *you*. You're used to getting praised when you do well; you're used to feeling good *when* you do well, but God loves you just as you are. Say this to yourself, "God loves even me, *just as I am.*"

God loves you today just as you are. Don't be afraid of it. He is *not* going to hurt you. Now, if God loves you just as you are, and you don't have to do anything to get God to love you, then why can't you love yourself? It is vital that, for the rest of your life, you understand the answer to that question.

These are the reasons why, as a teenage Christian, you ought to be able to love yourself: First, God created you. Second, He sent His Son

to die for you, to shed His blood, and to take the penalty for your sin. Third, once you believed, God saved you totally by grace. You couldn't earn salvation. You simply believed and He came to live in your heart. He gave you righteousness without works. Fourth, once the Lord Jesus Christ comes inside of you, He will never leave you.

Though we may grieve God's Holy Spirit with our attitude, or quench His Holy Spirit by being rebellious, will God ever leave us? No! God will never leave us nor forsake us no matter what we're like (Hebrews 13:5). If we break fellowship with Him, He will discipline us and He may scourge us, but He won't leave us.

Doesn't that reveal how much He loves you? If God loves you that much, why can't you love yourself? You can. God knew what you were going to be like. He knows everything about you and He still loves you. If God loves you like that, you ought to be able to love yourself.

One of the greatest factors in getting to know God is being able to love yourself. Loving yourself takes away guilt, once you have named your sin and forsaken it. It takes away insecurity, inferiority complexes, and fear. Loving yourself does away with laziness, comparing yourself

with others, and living in your emotions and feelings—the hazards of growing up. It does away with rebellion and negative speech. How? If I love myself with God’s love, if I love myself with Calvary’s love, and if I love myself because I’m filled with the Holy Spirit, then I don’t feel bad about what I look like. God made me and I love who I am. In the dust of the earth, He saw what I was going to be like a long time ago. God said, “That is what I want her to look like. That is the size I have chosen for him—I love each person I have made.” God loves you as you are, so you certainly ought to be able to love yourself.

Chapter Two

LOVE PRODUCES CHARACTER

People don't always love you as you are. They reject you when you are bad, or when you've done wrong. But God loves you as you are. God forbid that we fail, but He loves us even when we do fail. Remember God loves you as you are. You must learn to love yourself as you are. I'm not talking about living in sin or taking God's grace as a license to sin, but I'm saying that God loves you just as much in your weakness as He does in your strength. God accepts us with our strengths and our weaknesses. He wants us to develop through His Word, His Spirit, and His patience. God will be patient, kind, and gracious. He will help you through transitions while you're not yet what you want to be.

Ephesians 2:10 says that we are God's workmanship. This means that God designed us and created us. That's why we ought to be able to

love ourselves. When we fail, He tells us to name our sin, forsake it, isolate it and go on. Be honest about it. Don't be a phony. Tell the truth! Define your weakness and let God help you to get out of it.

Bring peace and happiness into your home and try to bless others in your household. Try to make your parents feel good about themselves and about the environment of the home. Build them up and edify them. Surprise everyone in the household by edifying and honoring your mother every day, and not just on Mother's Day. Honor her now because you won't have her around forever. Don't expect your parents to be perfect, because they aren't. Just thank God for all the good things they've done, for who they are, and for their love toward you. But don't make demands upon them. Just cooperate and make the home a happy place to live because you're there.

Love Produces a Change

God's love doesn't demand a change, it produces one. When we start responding to God's love, we are changed. I've seen teenagers on drugs. I've seen them get into trouble at the age of ten or eleven. And by the time they are fifteen

or sixteen, things have gone so bad that their souls are in complete disorder. Then I've seen those same kids spend two years letting God love them; letting the pastor, their family, and other Christians love them; and you know what? The love God gave them produced a change in their lives.

First, we learn to respond to God's love. As we are loved, we love ourselves, and we desire both to develop a capacity for God and to make something of our lives in the kingdom. So we enter into self-discipline, which starts in the mind. By taking courses that are difficult for us, we develop discipline. We enter into situations and volunteer to do things that require discipline. Discipline produces character. Character is what God *knows* we are, while reputation is what people *think* we are. Through character we begin to operate on the basis of love and grace and will begin to enjoy the rewards of making a series of right decisions through discipline.

As a result, teenagers go to school and they learn how to listen, how to communicate, and how to express themselves. By learning how to respond intelligently to their teachers and to ask stimulating questions, they are developing character. Then they learn how to make good deci-

sions in the home and in their studies. They begin to make good decisions about companions and friendships, about witnessing and living clean—and they find that it's easy!

Teenagers can begin to make a whole series of right decisions. You know why? Because God loved them *first*; His love doesn't demand a change, it produces one. God's love produces young people who have a capacity to love themselves. Once they love themselves with God's love, just as they are—the way God loves them—then they can love their parents just as *they* are. They can love their friends and other people just the way God made them. This love is not conditioned by the other party; it's a love that is based upon God's presence, God's grace and God's Word.

Chapter Three

LOVE PRODUCES MATURITY

Someone has said, "Put Jesus first, others second, and yourself third." Did you know that isn't right? It is impossible. Do you know how it should be? Jesus first, *myself* second, and others third. Galatians 5:13 says "by love serve one another." Verse 14 states, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." So you see, it is not Jesus first, others second. That may sound good, but it's not proper. I love Jesus first, then I love myself. After I love myself, I can love others. This takes a young person out of living in their emotions. Knowing this takes them out of fear, guilt, pleasure, and worldliness.

Worldliness is a mental attitude. Long before you ever did anything worldly, your thoughts were worldly. If you experience Christ's love then you will not love the things of the world. God's love doesn't love sin, so you don't love sin. When God's nature and His Word take over,

everything in your soul is put into its proper perspective. Consequently, as teenagers, you become mature at a much younger age than people ever thought possible.

A Disciplined Thought Life

In order for you to enter into this kind of maturity, the first thing you must do is bring your thoughts into subjection. What is wrong with being told—as a teenager—to bring your thoughts into obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5)? This means having a disciplined thought life. In so doing, you're able to concentrate, that is, to focus on one thing at one time and to exclude all other stimuli. You can think one thought at a time without the confusion of uncontrolled thoughts that seem to "creep" in. In other words, you can bring *each* thought into obedience to Jesus Christ, commit it to Him, and have your mind fixed (2 Corinthians 10:5-6).

Because you love yourself, you will take steps to improve yourself, and you end up with a good self-image. As you keep helping yourself to be better, your capacity continues to grow. When I say "better," I do not mean doing good works; I simply mean that you live with an advantage over Satan. As you experience your ad-

vantage over the world, you will begin to see that you are developing a capacity for wholesomeness, and your life is occupied with something bigger than you, something bigger than your problems. As you grow in this capacity, you choose the right friends, the 'right thing' to do, and the right attitude toward subjects in school.

Open Doors

After your capacity begins to be established, God teaches you the principle of open doors. In Revelation 3:8*b*, the Lord Jesus Christ said to a certain church, "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." What are these "open doors"? There is a door of salvation, open for a person to be saved, to be washed in the blood, to be born again. Jesus is the door of salvation (John 10:9). He will show you the open doors. Then there is the open door for service. You may go out to minister on a Bible club or to go soulwinning. There are also open doors in your home and church, open doors to stand up and be counted and to enter into godly ethics characterized by conviction.

Chapter Four

GOD'S PERSONAL WILL

The subject of *situational ethics* was explained by a man named Fletcher. Don't take advantage of situational ethics—they're *always* wrong. Situational ethics says, "The other kids are doing it, so I'll do it." "My best friend started to do it; I'm going to do it." "It is right to rebel because of the situation." No it isn't!

Then there are *moral ethics*. Moral ethics simply means that though I'm going to be outwardly moral, I will still live with an immoral mental attitude.

Finally, we have the proper ethics—*divine ethics*. A teenager said to me, "I think it's all right to smoke." I said, "Do you really?" And he said, "Yes, my parents don't care. My mother said it's all right." I said, "Let me ask you something. What does God say about it? What is God's will for you on the subject? I'm not going to say anything, but what is *God's* will on the subject of

smoking?" Do you know what that teenager said? "It's God's will not to smoke." I said, "Oh it is? What makes you say that?" He said, "Because I've already asked Him and He showed me it isn't His will."

I said to a teenage girl, "You've been going with a guy and you've become so occupied with your relationship that you don't pray any more. You don't love Jesus like you used to, and you're not the same kind of a teenager." Then I asked her, "Have you ever let this guy touch you?" She bowed her head and said, "Yes I have. Not much, but..." I said, "Let me ask you something." I was very frank but very broken. "Is that God's perfect will?" You know what she said? "I don't know." I said, "Okay, just pray and ask Him. I'm not going to say a word. But, is it God's perfect will? Just ask Him." She prayed and said, "God, is it your perfect will?" I waited a minute and I said, "What did He tell you?" And she said, "He showed me it isn't His perfect will." She entered into *godly ethics*. Do you know what godly ethics means? It means doing what God's will says.

I approached a man who was going out on his wife and I said, "Let me ask you something. What kind of ethics is that for a Christian, to go

out on his wife?" He answered, "It is terrible." I said, "That's right. You pray and ask God right now what you should do about it." He said, "I don't have to pray. Of course I should quit it." I said, "You're not getting the point. I want you to pray right now and ask God what you should do." He said, "I don't have to do that. I know I should repent." I said, "I know that, but pray right now and ask God *how* you're going to go about it and what *exactly* you should do."

After we prayed I said, "Okay, what should you do about it?" And the man said, "God has shown me that first, I should call up this woman and tell her the relationship is off and that I never want see her again. Second, go and ask for my wife's forgiveness. Third, love her like I've never loved her before and lay down my life for her. Fourth, really invest in my family and be responsible." He never would have thought of these things if I hadn't encouraged him to ask God what His will was. You know, it is a simple thing, but it is so important for a young person to ask, "What is God's will?" I'll guarantee that He'll tell you.

God loves you just exactly as you are, and He doesn't love anybody any more than He loves you. He did everything for you that He

has ever done for anybody else. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Even when you're bad, He loves you. When you fail, God provides a way for you to get right and forsake your sin and go on. He is going to make you just like His Son. He started a good work in you and He's going to finish it! Remember, He's *never* going to stop loving you.

The Privilege Of Discipline

It is our privilege to say, "Lord, I want to be disciplined to get to know you. I want to be disciplined in my spiritual life. I want to be disciplined in my mental attitude, my emotions, my free volition, and my conscience (which is the norm and standard for my thinking). I want to be disciplined in my self-consciousness so I'll be occupied with God and the right things in life. I want to plan my time (James 4:14), redeem the time (Ephesians 5:16), and appropriate my time with wisdom (I Corinthians 7:29-31)."

Plan your time and you won't get into mischief. Plan who you are going to be with, and you won't get involved with the wrong crowd. Plan how you're going to think, and you won't think the wrong thoughts. Plan how you're going to treat your parents, and you won't treat

them wrong. Plan how you're going to be in school, and you'll be right in school. Plan, then redeem the time with the filling of the Spirit and the Word of God. Take advantage of opportunities and appropriate what you know. Appropriate God's Word in simplicity. Appropriate God's love, and give God's love to others.

Chapter Five
LOVE'S DESTINY

God made you in His image, and He sent His Son to die for you on the Cross. When you were saved, He came to live inside you and will never forsake you. He loves you forever, with an everlasting love. Someday, He's going to make you perfect, either when you go home to be with Him or in the Rapture. He will give you a perfect body just like His Son's body. Every Christian has this destiny. We have eternal life, and we are destined to spend eternity with God. As members of God's royal family, we are destined to be saints forever, to enter into an eternal purpose, and to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Oh, what a destiny! This is why now, as you prepare to meet Him, He wants you to have a joyful, abundant, pure life. He wants you to make positive decisions toward His Word and His Spirit, bringing every thought into obedi-

ence. Make positive decisions in how you relate to others, in the way you sit, and in the way you dress, because these things are important to your image. Do the best you can in school, and develop a spiritual life that counts with God.

God's Thoughts and Ways

The Lord Jesus Christ has His thoughts and you have your thoughts. You can manufacture your own misery, problems, hang-ups, and guilt. You can manufacture some of your own hazards, or you can let the Lord Jesus Christ come in and produce love, joy, peace, and discipline. Learn how to think properly, with conviction, and make decisions privately with God. "My thoughts are not your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8). Tune into God's thoughts and learn how *not* to make decisions in your own thoughts.

God also says, "Neither are your ways My ways." Learn to accept God's way with conviction. Once you've become established by making decisions with moral conviction and godly ethics, then you can begin to walk through open doors. Open doors mean opportunity. When you reach an open door, you go into another room. Once you establish convictions there, you go into the next room. As you progress with

each opportunity, you go forward with God.

There is an open door that you haven't stepped through yet. God is saying, "I've opened it. I love you. I've paid to give you an opportunity to go through that open door; but you've got to come in through your own will, your own decisions, and your own desire. You can go through that door and *I'll be in there.*" He has prepared each "room" in this life for us. He draws us unto Himself. He beckons us, using circumstances to get us to go through open doors. He takes us into places where we've never been: new, positive, creative relationships with new goals, habits, motives, desires, and pure convictions.

Future Rewards, Present Goals

One day, every one of you will stand before Jesus. Your family and friends will be there, as well as people in your church. As you stand before the Lord, He will make a decision based upon how you responded to grace, the Word of God, and open doors. He will give you either a crown of joy, a crown of life, the Tree of Life, or the Morning Star Order. The Morning Star Order, which is the highest honor in heaven for the redeemed, means you will reign with Him

over nations. He may award you the Tree of Life in the Garden of Paradise, which means you will understand mysteries in eternity that few will understand. You will have revelations that no one will have except those who eat from the Tree of Life and you'll enter into a pleasure that only Tree-of-Life recipients will experience—special wisdom from God for eternity (Revelation 2:7).

Each one of us is writing an eternal book right now, and today we have written a page. Maybe this week, we've written a chapter. Our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. God is writing a Book of Remembrance (Malachi 3:16) as we go through open doors. Maybe God wants you to go to Bible College. Even if you're going into a profession such as teaching or accounting, He may want you to first have a year of Bible College. Having a profession is beautiful as long as you glorify Christ and do your work for God. Maybe you will become a missionary in the Third World. Whatever your dream, it is vital that you have both short-range and long-range goals. Your goals may be subject to change, but your heart must reach out to honor Christ and obey Him.

Say “No” to the Sins of Youth

Remember the principle found in Job 13:26b, —God makes me “possess the iniquities of my youth.” Sins committed during youth bring about a long-time inheritance. “His bones are full of the sin of his youth” (Job 20:11a). When you sin heavily in your youth, your bones become full of those sins and you’re enticed to go back to them. Psalm 25:7 says, “Remember not the sins of my youth.” Bitter memories, shame and remorse are the results. Jeremiah 3:25 says, “We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God.” The sins of youth begin to establish something in the memory center and in the frame of reference that is so difficult to overcome.

Say “no” to rebellion. Say “no” to worldly pleasure. Say “no” to being a prodigal against your parents. Say “no” to pleasure-seeking and self-indulgence. Say “no” to worldliness and worldly music. Say “no” to smoking and drugs and lust. Learn to say “no” and you won’t enter into the sins of youth. There is time for a beauti-

ful marriage when you get older. In God's timing, He will lead you into a wonderful relationship. Don't be impatient; don't hurry things along. Just learn to get to know God. Learn how to study and enjoy life and enter into the balance of a good wholesome life. The Bible teaches that it is possible to be godly at a very young age. Do what is right through the grace of God and the Word of God as you make choices backed by godly convictions.

True Freedom for Teens

Dignity and Integrity

There are two things everyone needs: dignity and integrity. *Dignity* is honoring yourself as you were created in God's image; honoring yourself because you bear the image of a holy God, because you've been redeemed by God, and because He lives inside of you. That's the dignity that you should come to respect and reflect.

God created you. You did not evolve from a one-celled creature. God created you and breathed into you the breath of life, even though He made you out of the dust of the earth. Because we were created in God's image and He redeemed us, we develop *integrity*, which means honesty toward ourselves, toward God, toward our families, and toward others.

There are many misconceptions about freedom. Many people think that rebellion is freedom. Rebellion is not freedom. Many people rebel on their way to freedom, but rebellion is not freedom.

Fear and Anxiety

Often teenagers will rebel against their parents; and their rebellion, after it is analyzed, is nothing more than anxiety and a mistrust of themselves. Because they mistrust themselves, they develop anxiety. Then they transfer their mistrust and anxiety about life toward their parents.

There is a tremendous difference between fear and anxiety. Fear energizes me to have sharp faculties. But anxiety is different. Often when I have to do something vital, or perform in some way, tension and stress produce anxiety.

Psychiatrists tell us that anxiety sometimes blurs our vision—physically as well as mentally. Anxiety over a period of time will cause physical problems and emotional disorientation. Fear, as bad as it may be is said to sharpen our faculties with negative energy.

For example, if you were crossing a busy highway with cars suddenly coming from both directions, and you couldn't do anything about it, you would experience fear and anxiety. The fear would help you escape being hit by the cars, but the anxiety might make you panic and be involved in an accident. These two things con-

tribute toward paralyzing the human race. They interfere with true freedom.

When our self-life is threatened, it causes anxiety. This threat produces fear. It incapacitates us from developing intellectually, spiritually, and morally.

Freedom, Not Independence

True freedom is something we discover outside of ourselves. Many times, rebellion is caused by subjective reactions, but we discover freedom outside of ourselves. For example, when we understand the Word of God properly in the character of grace, trusting it completely, then the Word in us begins to develop an amazing capacity for real freedom. But rebellion is not freedom and freedom is not rebellion.

Let me illustrate this principle. Through rebellion, a young person becomes “independent,” and he gloats over his new freedom. But actually, he is in terrible bondage to whatever he has taken on in the name of “being free”—lust, rock music, or words of slander and cursing. In the eyes of his Creator, he is not dignified, nor is he walking in integrity. So the very freedom that he thinks he has is not freedom at all because it is dependent upon rebellion and sin. Something

that depends upon rebellion and sin is not freedom. Something that's independent of dignity is not freedom. Something that's independent of integrity is not freedom. So this person has not found true freedom at all. He has found a new way to be independent, which has locked him into a condition of negative decisions and has given him a negative state of mind.

True Freedom Develops Potential

When freedom is properly understood, we don't fight reality, but we submit to it with discipline through proper information (in our case, to grace orientation and categorical thinking with God), and we grow in an amazing capacity to develop our potential in every area of life. If a young person with a high IQ wants to go to an Ivy League college, then as long as he has received solid training in the Bible, he will be able to develop his potential because he has developed his character through the Word of God. You see, developing your potential and developing your character go hand in hand. The problem with our nation is that we think that we are developing our potential by developing our intellect yet without developing our moral understanding in character. And so our nation has

fallen into the pit, especially in the teenage realm.

What we desire for ourselves is for God to help us to develop our potential through study and discipline, and through taking advantage of proper educational opportunities as we develop our character of dignity and integrity. Real freedom does not fight the reality of who we are.

Young people who develop real, godly freedom are aware of who they are and can be honest about it. Though you develop a self-consciousness of your weaknesses and strengths as you mature, you are becoming, by the same token, self-conscious of God's love, His grace, His thoughts toward you, and His Spirit in you. It becomes a matter of choosing the right kind of life and the right kind of source to think right, feel right, decide right, and act right. This is true freedom.

True freedom grows in the process of understanding the truth about God, the truth about ourselves and, by submitting to God, using the benefits of grace to grow in the reality of liberation from "self."

A person who lives in true freedom is not preoccupied with "self." He is preoccupied with God, but develops in his self-awareness of God,

in practical ways, through fellowship.

When we pray, let's make it sacred. That's freedom in prayer. Let's have the right posture by having our eyes closed. Let's have the right stance. Let's imagine ourselves before the living Christ, who has wounds in His hands because He loves us. When we sing, let's get up and sing with all of our might. When we worship, let's worship God and God alone.

Many times we rebel against concentrating when concentration would set us free from rebellion. Many times we cultivate foolishness, when fellowshiping with concentration on truth would liberate us from foolishness.

Inner turmoil and conflicts mean that my self-life is threatened, which is the basis for fear and anxiety. I want you to develop your awareness of God and of yourself as an individual letting God take over. You must be very aware of what you're doing as you exercise your faculties toward learning about the Lord. Allow Him to impart the power, energy, love, and grace necessary for your inner happiness, your inner peace, and your ability to develop your potential.

Do you realize the potential you have? Adults shouldn't legislate rules to you, but we *are* going to tell you the truth. Adults who love

you won't keep you from expressing yourself and developing in a process of individuality. We're going to help you do that. But, when you acquire knowledge without humility, that knowledge morally darkens your self-image. Humility, on the other hand, brings in God's power and God's life to teach you how to think. A lack of humility allows me to use my knowledge to exalt myself in pride above others with independence in rebellion against true freedom.

A Threat Met with a Promise

Think of the things that threaten society. Loneliness and anxiety are said to be the two greatest threats to teenagers, yet these things are never discussed. Secret, mystical loneliness and anxiety threaten those who are adventuring in the world of the unknown, taking on the struggles and strife of survival in the teenage world. Cosmic loneliness and cosmic anxiety rob teenagers of the privilege of developing their self-image with God, and of entering into the creativity of God's grace. It robs them of the privilege of faith through God's promises, humility through God's Cross, and love through God's Spirit.

As we learn God's promises, they become a

part of us, and sooner or later they become our resources. At first, they do not appear to be our resources because they involve a process. But when the promises become “ours,” then instead of going into the resource factory of this world’s kingdom, we will draw from the divine enterprise of spiritual industry. We enter into the very life of a Christian who has learned to be spiritual in a very practical, industrious way.

It’s a precious thing to know that the Bible is right when it says, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free....If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:32,36). The Son doesn’t make you rebellious. He doesn’t make you independent. But He does give you every right to develop in the process of becoming an individual. Most of all, He makes you *really* free. You don’t have to fight reality because reality is something that lines up with what you know in your conscience—regulated by the norms and standards of love and grace.

This reality is something that fills up the dull places, the empty places. Reality comforts the lonely person and gives the anxious person boldness and confidence because Somebody bigger than the world is inside of you, loving you,

supping with you, being your friend. He eliminates the pressures of the world for the time being and gives you everything you need on the inside in a very personal way. If you develop this relationship and cultivate it, you'll be amazed at the practicality and the availability of true freedom.

Dream Goals

Chapter One

DREAMS OF THE HEART

“And [Jacob] dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven...” (Genesis 28:12a). Before the full canon of Scriptures was completed, dreams were given by God to guide His people in specific situations. Today, we depend upon the Word of God as our source of reliable information, but there is another type of dream that we are interested in: dreams of the heart. Heart dreams motivate our thinking in a godly way, causing us to establish goals at a very young age. When these goals are established, they are regulated by discipline. As a result, we are sustained as individuals.

Many years ago I had a dream. I don't mean a literal dream, but a dream of the heart—a hope, a burning desire. I had a dream that I would be a baseball announcer. Of course, the

team that I would announce for would be New England's team, the Boston Red Sox. Using my tape recorder, I would go through their lineup and announce the game. I even used sound effects to imitate the noise of the crowds. My brothers thought it was crazy, especially when there was work to be done, like hoeing corn. But that was a dream I had, and in my dream I actually had to pay radio stations not to sign me up!

After I became a Christian, I had a dream to become a preacher. I practiced preaching to trees on our farm. I preached to one tree after another (nobody was around). I would get so excited. Some people dream that they are missionaries. Some dream of really understanding the Bible and being able to relate it to others. Still others dream of having a ministry to help young people.

I know a young man who has already been to India; he has a dream to go back. It's his desire and his goal. I know another young man who is in the service. He has a dream to be a solid witness for Jesus Christ in the military. These dreams are all good, healthy, wholesome attitudes of the heart.

I once witnessed to a couple in Maine who were living in sin. They were only fourteen and sixteen years old, and they were drinking and

doing everything under the sun that was wrong. But I always loved them. Finally they started coming out to services. They would go out with me on Saturday nights to pray over the city of Portland. We prayed over every seat in our church, including the choir loft, and the Sunday school rooms. We prayed for people to get saved, and these young people began to come through for God beautifully. They said that in their worst moments they had a tremendous desire to be delivered. They had a dream to live clean for God.

Dreams are beautiful things. A dream of becoming an engineer, a nurse, or a teacher is a very special thing if it's motivated by God. I'm not talking about subjectivity, but about a strong desire in the heart, a strong purpose that motivates a goal. This type of dream causes teenagers to make preparations for life and to live in the consequences of their goals. They check their performance with their goals. They have some tremendous dreams. And do you know what? These dreams really do protect the soul.

Chapter Two
DREAMS REALIZED

I had the privilege one summer, as I have on many occasions, to talk with some of the major league baseball players. We were on the field for an hour and a half with Canseco, McGwire, Greenwell, Harold Reynolds, Ellis Burks, Marty Barrett, and Dwight Evans. One of the things that Dwight Evans said to me was, "Many years ago, I had a dream. In this dream, I wanted to be a major league ball player. I was kind of muscle bound. I didn't have good reflexes, but I worked and worked. All of a sudden everything changed for me, and I began to hit the ball with authority. Even in my twenties, when I came into the major leagues, some of my hitting abilities were questionable, even though my fielding was professional."

Evans went on, "But I remembered the dream I had as a young boy. Instead of going out drinking and living in sin I stayed with my

dream, and I've kept my body healthy." He is healthy. He had thirty-two-inch waist when he was thirty-nine years old. He said, "I'm a born-again Christian, and I'm so thankful for Jesus Christ. I want to play ball for another two years, but even if I don't, I have a dream that my life is going to be better than ever because of the Savior Jesus Christ." Dwight Evans had a dream and he has realized his dream.

Marty Barrett told us, "When it's all said and done, you win, you lose, you do well, you don't do well; but walking with Jesus Christ and having goals for eternity are the most important goals for me, my wife, and my family."

I don't believe that there has ever been a person in any profession who can be really effective under most circumstances, unless he has first become effective through Christ, the Word of God, and his dreams. Did you know that a person who has dreams lives better because he has goals? A person who has healthy dreams checks his performance against his goals. The consequences of a person's goals will maintain his performance. Consider some dreams for yourself under the guidance of the Spirit of God. Ask the Lord for a dream goal.

I hope girls will have a dream to stay pure

before God. I hope that you will not let your emotions run wild, having desires apart from God's will and making wrong decisions in these precious years of your life. I pray you'll have a dream to one day go to your pastor and say, "I'm going to get married, and I'm a virgin. I thank God that years ago I had a dream to keep myself pure for Jesus, for my family and for my church. And today, as I walk down that aisle, my dream has been fulfilled. My body is the temple of the Holy Spirit." I hope that you'll have a dream to one day be a godly wife. Boys, have a dream that you'll be godly husbands and fathers.

Chapter Three
GODLY GOALS

Values lead to goals, and goals are checked by performance. Your performance is checked by God's Word and God's grace, which is always there to help you. You have the ability to develop your capacity to concentrate on the Word of God. In every area where a desire, a goal, and a purpose are formed through the grace of God and the will of God, you will understand what it means to have a dream.

As a teenager, David took care of his father's sheep. When David was threatened by a lion and a bear, he was so God-conscious that God gave him a beautiful victory. David pictured himself as a great warrior for God. Then one day, he defeated the giant Goliath and protected the entire nation of Israel from the reign of the Philistines. David, who had a dream as an eighteen-year-old lad, went out with his slingshot

and killed Goliath. David had a dream.

It's a beautiful thing to understand the value of having dreams. Paul had a dream that one day at the Bema Seat of Christ he would receive a great prize for serving God—a crown of righteousness. This was a unique dream, and certainly, Paul was able to fulfill his goals and he will experience the fulfillment of his dreams.

Show me a person who is filled with emptiness and passivity, without purpose in life, and I'll show you someone who doesn't have a dream. Show me a teenager who doesn't have a dream, and I'll show you someone who isn't motivated before God. A person without a dream is passive, frivolous, empty-headed, and easily influenced by people who have no purpose in this life. The book of Proverbs says, these people hang around the wrong crowd, even in the church (Proverbs 13:20). They make wrong decisions and justify them, but they never have a dream.

I want you, through the Holy Spirit and the Word of grace, to consider some very practical dreams that God wants you to have. Dream about what you're going to be like this year. Have a dream for God to change your attitude, if that's what you need. Have a dream for God

to conform you to the image of his Son. Remember, at one time, Jesus was a baby, then a young child. As He went through His teenage years he faced every single situation that each of us face. Have a dream that you're going to be a happy, joyful, spiritual, victorious, triumphant representative of God. Establish some precious dreams.

In Isaiah 29:8, it says a hungry man dreams. It also says that a thirsty man dreams. Think of it. A person who is hungry dreams of having food. A person who is thirsty dreams of drinking water. When God puts us in a place where we have honest needs because of heartaches and circumstances, then we can begin to have dreams. With your dreams, you can be disciplined and let God help you to fulfill those dreams.

Isiah Thomas said that when he was in elementary school playing basketball on the streets, he had a dream to one day be a forward in professional basketball. He was told that he would never be able to make it. But his dream and God's help took him all the way to the Detroit Pistons. I think you, too, will discover that again and again, God will help *you* fulfill your dreams.

Chapter Four

PASTOR LOVE'S TESTIMONY

(Note: Pastor John Love is the youth pastor for Greater Grace World Outreach.)

I think one of the greatest compliments that Joseph's brothers gave him was to say, "Behold, the dreamer cometh" (Genesis 37:19).

For those of you who can't dream, there are people who are dreaming for you. God will create within you a capacity for dreaming. We are people who have the opportunity and the privilege to dream because the Kingdom of God is a place where dreams can become a reality.

As a young person, I didn't really know what I wanted to do, but there was a desire within me to see people happy. I thought rock and roll musicians made people happy. I didn't realize that wasn't the case. It *looked* that way but after experiencing a little bit of that lifestyle, I realized how disillusioned I was: Rock stars *didn't* make people happy, and alcohol and partying

didn't make people happy. Drugs didn't make people happy either.

Then, at the age of seventeen, I got saved. Over the years, God did so many different things in my life, and finally He said, "You know, this is the way that you're going to be used to make people happy. You're going to be able to give them a message that can change their lives and bring them into a relationship with a living God." I can honestly say that dreams do come true in the Kingdom of God. Outside of the Kingdom of God, I don't know if dreams can ever come true.

Bill Alexson is another person who dreamed. If he couldn't play in the NBA or work side-by-side with these professional athletes, he just somehow wanted to be with them to minister to them and communicate Christ's life. Today Bill is working with the professional athletes.

Let's dream. As we see one another, let's say to ourselves, 'Behold, the dreamer cometh.' We know that Joseph's brothers' attitudes were critical and negative. They hoped and imagined that they had put an end to all of his dreams. They dashed his hopes to pieces when they left him in that pit to die. I suppose there will be times, even if we dream, when it will look like

we have been left in a pit to die. But there's also another beautiful verse in the Bible about Joseph's life, and it says, "But the Lord remembered Joseph." It just keeps saying throughout the story in the book of Genesis, that the Lord remembered Joseph. Before long, Joseph was prime minister of Egypt and he was the very one God used to save his own family. Joseph dreamed and his dreams turned into reality.

If we dream with God, there is also that possibility that our dreams will turn into reality. So aim high and dream great dreams for God because in the Kingdom of God, they can come true.

Knowing the Will of God

How do you know you're dreaming the right dreams? Some dreams could be motivated by self-interest. We can be certain that some of those dreams will remain unfulfilled.

Many people ask, "How do you know the will of God?" There are a few answers to that question. First, the Holy Spirit will always speak loudly enough for a willing soul to hear. In other words, God is not going to leave us hanging and wondering. He's not going to leave us out in the dark. Secondly, God will never lead us in a way

that is contrary to His Word. His leading will always be consistent with the teachings of the Word of God.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Holy Spirit will lead those who have already committed themselves to do as God would choose for them. In other words, if a dream is motivated by self-interest and we have already committed ourselves to our choices instead of allowing God to choose for us, then we will find roadblocks. We will come up against closed doors because God doesn't want us to go in that direction. Many of us have been saved from dreams that were motivated by self-interest. The bottom line in our hearts must be "God, not my will, but thy will be done. And if this dream isn't of you—and won't bring you glory—then I don't want to dream in that direction." We don't want to have self-oriented dreams because they can turn into nightmares.

Can you honestly say that your dreams glorify God? When you dream, is the goal of your dream to glorify Him? Dreaming should take us beyond ourselves. God wants to take us beyond what we can do today into a realm of trusting Him to do the impossible. God's people should always glory in the impossible.