

# READ THE BOOK

*One Way to Live Effectively*

Stephanie A. Anderson

*Preview Copy*

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# Preface

During my childhood I collected different awards as incentives for bringing my Precious Moments Bible to Kingdom Kids on Sundays. I was a pastor's kid and was becoming familiar with the voice of God. (Becoming familiar with God's voice doesn't mean it is easy to trust it; it just means I had learned to hear it.) I was so fortunate to be raised in a family and church where the members love the Word of God and do their best to understand it and live by it.

While I was in high school my youth pastor taught a series on the Bible. I don't remember the title or the theme of his presentation, but I do know that as I sat in the front row doing math homework (which is probably why I don't remember much), seeds were being planted in my heart—seeds of passion for the Word. To this day I believe that series of messages was just for me. It stirred a hunger in me to know the content found on the pages of my Bible. Every Wednesday I looked forward to Gen Church, our church's high-school student gathering, as I wanted to hear and know more about the Bible. I remember three things from that series:

1. About forty different authors wrote the Bible. They lived different lifestyles, had different family structures and educational backgrounds, and held different economic and political points of view. This group of writers was a diverse bunch! Yet there is no error or contradiction in the Bible between them because they were all inspired by God. I learned that if something in the Bible doesn't seem to make sense or appears to show contradiction, it's because I was reading with my personal worldview as the filter. The idea of team-writing and context principle still challenge and inspire me today. (Context principle comes from the idea that one statement is part of a larger message and can't stand alone; otherwise, the statement loses its full meaning.) The fact that it took upwards of 1,500 years to write the Bible is also an incredible sign that God was involved in the process.

2. The Bible contains sixty-six separate books. Each of them is inspired by God and make up the Canon, which means "measure" in the Greek language.<sup>1</sup> In high school, I learned the Bible should be the standard by which I measure my life.

3. Throughout history, and still today, there has been opposition to the Bible. The Good Book has survived burnings, banishment in certain countries and institutions, and movements led by deep hostility toward the authority of its pages. There has never been a more influential book than the Bible. God's Word has prevailed throughout history. Think about it: people hate Bible believers. In the United States Bible readings were banned in public schools in 1963,<sup>2</sup> and people all over the world

believe only portions of the Bible because they view it as hard to understand. But Truth is the same yesterday, today, and forever. God's Word is still here. God's ability to cover and protect His message, regardless of the opposition it has faced, proves His sovereignty. God is always in control; and His Word will never be useless, will always exist, and will always produce results (Isaiah 55:11).

Looking at past messages I have taught since I was a teenager, I notice a common thread: They all point to the Word. What is the "Word"? "The Word" is another way of referring to the Bible.

On July 11, 2004 my church's children's pastor trusted me with the Sunday morning kid's ministry pulpit while he was away on vacation. I was seventeen years old, and I was so nervous about sharing. My notes were in twenty-point font, and on both sides of the page I had written, "Speak slow" and "Breathe." The topic that day is still relevant today, and I want to share with you the points from that message:

- God has a word for everyone.
- God has a word for every day.
- Every word has (requires) a response.
- Every word has (includes) instructions.
- I can get every word God has for me.

On August 22nd of that same year I had the privilege of preaching in the junior-high class. The topic? "Taking Over the World for Jesus." (That's a totally realistic goal for a seventeen-year-old with big dreams, right? Very little has changed—well, except my age.) Here are the main points of that day's message:

1. What does it take to take over the world?

Faith.

2. What is faith?

"Faith is the assurance (title deed, confirmation) of things hoped for (divinely guaranteed), and the evidence of things not seen [the conviction of their reality—faith comprehends as fact what cannot be experienced by the physical senses]." (Hebrews 11:1 AMP) and "Firm belief in something for which there is no proof."<sup>3</sup>

3. How do we get faith?

We get faith by reading the Bible, and believing its content, and by listening to God. It's possible to read and still not believe it. (Romans 10:17)

4. What do we do with faith?

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” (Hebrews 12:1)

5. How do we run the race?

“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” (Hebrews 12:2)

6. What is practical? (Yes! I actually asked this question, even as a teen.)

Inviting people to church and telling people about Jesus Christ. (Tell them His story.)

7. God has called you to take over the world, your world, by faith, which comes by hearing the Word and looking to Jesus.

To this day, I believe these thoughts are true, but as I have grown up I have realized the Bible does not communicate to me how to make decisions for a fulfilling life in the way I want to be communicated to. I don't always find a practical list of things to do so that I am able to live an effective, successful, and meaningful life. In the pages of this book I begin to break down the process of understanding how the Bible is a tool that is both powerful and practical for every day choices. I think about my country and my generation across the world, and I want them to learn the content of the Bible; and be inspired to live a life that matches what they understand.

I am not writing this book because I have mastered understanding the Bible, but because I am looking at what is in my hands (Exodus 4:2) and asking, “What can I do to further spread the Gospel?” I believe part of spreading the Gospel is helping people understand it. If the Bible is the Gospel story, understanding the Bible is key. I am believing as you read this book a hunger to discover the Word and understand how it is relevant to your life today will be ignited.

# Powerful and Practical

In April 2016, in Kumamoto, Japan, a middle-aged man opened the passenger-side door to his car for his wife to get in. He closed the door and proceeded to walk around to the driver's side. Just before getting inside the car, he looked around—at his home and property—and took a deep breath; then he sat down inside the car and closed the door. It was a quiet moment with only a loud sigh in the middle of the unknown. On his wife's lap was a blanket, and next to her head was the pillow she rested on, but there was no plan to travel anywhere. They were sleeping in their car because they felt ultimately this was the safest place for them to sleep that night.

Just two days before Kumamoto had experienced an earthquake with a magnitude of 6.9 on the intensity scale; and though their house was still standing, they had a feeling something wasn't right. In the wee hours of the next morning, at about 1:25 a.m., the main earthquake at a magnitude of 7.3 shook Kumamoto, which meant the previous earthquake had been a foreshock of what was to come. Parents were in pain seeing the fear in their children's eyes. Children were upset seeing their parents so stressed. Buildings collapsed completely, roads split, thousands were injured, and dozens of lives were lost. The couple sleeping in their car woke up in the middle of the earthquake only to watch their home implode right in front of them. Everything was destroyed. Well almost; they still had each other.

A year later, my husband had the privilege of meeting this man, hearing his story, and seeing the damage that still existed from the earthquake.

Just four days after the 2016 earthquakes, a church in Kumamoto formed the Kyushu Christ Disaster Relief Center.<sup>1</sup> Since that time hundreds of groups from all over the world have partnered with this center by either giving money, sending supplies, or sending teams to assist in the cleanup and rebuilding of the Kumamoto Prefecture and the surrounding district. In 2017, about fifteen months after the founding of the relief center, my husband, Trevin, led a short-term mission trip to partner with the relief center. During the time spent there, the team heard stories of

loss and stories of provision, and they worked hard to accomplish their assignments with care and excellence. Yet, even as rebuilding was taking place, the mission team watched as Typhoon Noru developed along the Pacific and threatened Japan. South Osaka, where the team was stationed, was in the direct path of this storm.

I was at home in Portland, Oregon, with our two little boys, ages one and six, knowing that while my husband was helping others to rebuild from a previous disaster, another was possibly on its way. My mom drove seven hours from Idaho to stay with us while Trevin was out of the country. I found myself thinking about storms, recovering from pain, living in ruins and brokenness, and how we can't control when "storms" hit, but we can trust God during them. Thankfully, Noru settled down from a Category 5 to a Category 1 by the time it hit Japan; and though the rainfall from this storm was immense, the people there were able to live through what had to have felt like the longest three days ever. I was relieved to know that our team moved south before the storm made landfall and were safe to continue their work of bringing hope to the people of Japan.

This trip Trevin took to Japan was the "final thread" to a long list of thoughts I've had since my youth—thoughts that have woven together to confirm how I have decided to live the rest of my life. When Trevin came home I listened to his stories about the trip, and he said something that answered questions I have had for awhile now and quieted the unsettled feeling I was having as I thought more about the concept of making decisions based on a calling and living a Spirit-led life. I had come to know Jesus based on my background—a white American Christian culture—and yet my spirit was leading me in a different direction. Trevin shared with me a perspective that made my commitment to Christ richer, enhanced my love for the Word, and changed how I engage and care for people.

I am a pastor and a pastor's wife who grew up as a pastor's kid. I attended a Bible college; and before that, I led Bible studies at the public junior high and high school I attended. I made a list of the fourteen friends I wanted to bring to church in high school and checked off their names as they began their own journeys with the Lord. I served at church events and studied how our country was formed on Christianity. Later, I wrote curriculums for children's camps and Sunday morning programs, and I have taught Christian theology to adults. I went to Christian concerts and had the "JC - Jesus Pieces" Calvin Klein knock-off T-shirt. I was raised being asked "What would Jesus do?" and having to find the answer, rather than laugh at this mass-produced phrase that stirred many emotionally but motivated only some. I have been so fortunate to have parents and leaders in my life who led me to love the Lord and encouraged my love for people. I was taught a lot and I knew a lot; I was (and still am) so blessed. However, I still struggled because I knew something was missing; something was unsettled and questions were unanswered. I knew I needed answers, not just for me, but for my kids, their kids, and others who want to live powerful lives



but struggle to understand how to do so practically. I, myself, am still searching, but this book contains what I've learned so far.

### *Enough about Me—What Did Trevin Say?*

I have observed that anytime someone leaves the United States to serve people in another country, that specific person comes home with a changed life. Trevin was no exception, and the Japanese values made an impact on him. Knowing this, I was so excited to extend my love to Japan as my best friend left to serve and build (something he loves to do!). When Trevin returned home, he began talking about the Japanese culture and about how it affected the culture of the churches in Japan. I remember joking, should we move to Japan? I felt as if we shared a lot of the same values as the community he spent time with. Trevin talked about their families, about how the parents love and invest in their children, the cleanliness of the streets in the suburbs, the honor/shame culture, and, of course, the beautiful churches the team had the privilege of serving. Then he said something that connected the dots for me regarding how our daily choices affect our destiny. I felt as if I was working on a puzzle with the right piece in my hand, and it just needed to be flipped around to fit correctly. He said this:

They serve their church because of how great God is. Not because it is their job, because it isn't. Different groups would volunteer to take turns over the different weekends caring for the maintenance and cleanliness of their facility. They don't serve God because of what God or the church can do for them. They don't serve God because they have some special gift to contribute to their community. They serve the church and the people because of who God is and how that understanding of His greatness dictates their choices in life. They serve because they understand that in serving people, they are serving God.

Their actions were out of obedience, loyalty, and dependence on the One who is in control of their lives. They live in surrender to a Lord. The Lord. This may sound obvious, but it's not, it's really not, at least not here in the U.S. In my beloved country, we encourage people to join a local church because of what the church does for them; we promise benefits to unconfirmed members, and we lose our young at the same time due to a lack of experiencing the life-changing power of God's love. It's heartbreaking.

Since my husband has taken this trip to Japan, we have discussed frequently the difference between Jesus being our "Savior" and Jesus being our "Lord." I didn't grow up in a monarchy type of government, so having a king that I served or represented wasn't a lifestyle during my childhood. My choices weren't decided for me ahead of

time. I wasn't raised in a theocracy, where priests were the governmental rule, guiding people to know God and live by His standards. The more I studied, the clearer the concept of Lordship and surrender became. Jesus was my Lord and Savior; yet so often I only resourced Jesus as my Savior, instead of submitting my thoughts and daily choices to Christ as my Lord. I asked myself, "What choices am I making, and how does that reflect Christianity?" Thus my journey to discover more of what God desired from me was locked in. I have found my choices were decided for me ahead of time. Jesus said, "Love God and love people." (Mark 12:30-31, my paraphrase).

The book of Hebrews says Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (12:2 NIV). He not only created a way, He perfected the way to live as a Christian. I have only lived one life. That is, this life of faith that I live I am currently living and learning to live, but Jesus has lived a life of faith, a perfect one; and as I surrender all the practical things (my actions and daily practices)<sup>2</sup> in my life to Him, the result is a powerful life. Yet living powerfully and effectively can't happen without knowing to whom I am surrendering my life. It's logical to think. "Why trust someone I don't know?"

*To know God, we read the Bible.*

### *God is Practical*

I want to share some practical things I have learned about God. First, God is a very understandable and present God. He is not someone that we can't understand or someone with whom we can't connect. Even though there is always more to learn, and we can always grow in our understanding of Him, there are things He wants us to know about Him. Absolute truth exists, and we can be sure that He gave us that truth. He is available in the everyday, real life. He knows we need creativity to thrive and routine to sustain us day by day.

Another thing I learned is that God is an organized God. He created the world before creating the animals. Why? Order! To be more specific, if God created animals first, they would have floated in a space of nothingness without the right atmosphere and nutrients to flourish. God desires order in our lives as well. Order creates an atmosphere that we can settle into, so we can grow and flourish. Order is needed for the small, seemingly powerless decisions we make in our everyday lives, the practical things we do.

Have you ever heard the term success sequence? Success sequence basically means that when certain decisions are made and worked out in a specific order, your success in that area increases. The same is true with our lives. God is our Creator. He created all life, including the human race. So, if we want to have success and live effectively according to how He defined it, we must read his guidebook—the Bible.

The older I get (Am I actually claiming the word “old?”), the more I am learning that my role or existence as a Christian is very practical. Our God is a very practical God. He cares about our lives and our role in society. Learning these things gives me the confidence to live in the real world. His original design for humans includes our living a life of order.

### *Defining Power*

When I was a little girl I would walk into my parents’ room in the evening, after dinner was over and the dishes were cleaned, and I would find my mom sitting on her bed studying. She wasn’t finishing a degree or studying to preach; she was studying for her life and her heart. Studying was different back then. I remember life without the internet and studying without search engines in the palm of my hand (I guess I am claiming the word “old.”)

Mom studied with a notebook, a dictionary, a Strong’s Concordance, and other Bible study books, wide open with different colors of sticky notes as bookmarks. Lined up in a row would be pens, highlighters, and three-by-five note cards. The different colors represented different things she discovered: actions, attitudes, promises, and definitions. She would organize her thoughts or highlight answers to some of life’s biggest questions, including how to deal with loss or why bad things happen to good people. Studying this way wasn’t her way of practicing for events, or only for moments when she got to speak, it was a regular discipline in our home. Mom studied the Bible to apply it to her own life. In fact, she studied the fruits of the spirit regularly. I didn’t understand the importance of that until my late teens and my life was really in my control and I had to figure out for myself what was next.

So often I heard my mom pray, “Every promise in the book is mine” (2 Corinthians 1:20). After hearing her pray that over and over again, I wanted to know if every promise could be mine too. The primary definition of the word power is the “ability to act or produce an effect.”<sup>3</sup> A secondary definition of the word power is “possession of control, authority, or influence over.”<sup>4</sup> Nothing can ruin or weaken the power that is found within the pages of the Bible. In my life, I have also found that God’s Word is not useless! It is powerful and practical! The Bible promises that if we act and make choices based on what we are reading (and learning) about God, we can live a life that is effective and fulfilling.

Living powerfully is a choice. We can choose to live a life that is surrendered to God, who is all powerful, and allow His power to influence our everyday choices. Whether you grew up in church or you didn’t, every promise in the Bible is available to you! I constantly remind myself that God is for me and not against me (Romans 8:31). God wants me to succeed! He has proven that He will never leave me nor forsake me (Joshua 1:5). He has never left my side, and nothing can separate me from His love (Romans 8:38-39).

To live effectively in the moment is to feel every emotion, think through every possibility, and get all the facts that you can; and, at the end of the day, to allow God's Word to guide our words and behaviors because power comes from our obedience to the Word.

Living a powerful life requires complete dependence on the One who is all-powerful for our daily choices and habits. (We'll cover this in the next chapter.) But, before turning the page, consider the decisions you will need to make in the next few years, and the choices you most likely didn't make but were made for you at one time—choices that you may make for someone else in the future. These are the practical decisions you have to live through. Understand this: you can make decisions confidently based on the powerful Word of God. Here are some examples:

### Choices You Most Likely Didn't Make

- Living Arrangements: shelter, apartment, studio, shared house, townhouse, mansion
- Education: early childhood, elementary, middle school, and high school
- Natural Abilities: sports, music, technology, art, and so on
- Benefits and Pay: what your hard work earns
- Family Identity: how people see you due to the family you grew up in
- Family Traditions: the fun ones and the creepy old ones
- Family Struggles: abuse, debt, pain, and so on
- Mental, emotional, and physical responses to the environment we grew up in, both culturally and spiritually

### Choices You Will Most Likely Get to Make

- Who to date
- Which colleges to apply for (most likely influenced by budget, goals, and culture)
- What substances and foods you put into your body and how much you exercise
- Job choice (You fill out the applications, right?)
- Debts and investments
- Who you have sex with
- Who you will marry
- Will you go to church? If so, which one?
- How many kids you will have (or at least try to have)?
- Your character: How you choose to act regardless of how family and the community has treated you and labeled you.

# The Problem with Jesus, Our Lord and Savior

Jesus is Lord, and Jesus is Savior. These two truths that we hold as Christians give us power in our practical living. However, while I was growing up I had a problem: it was difficult for me to believe the things the Bible says about Jesus Christ are true. How can Jesus tell us to love our enemies? When He said that, didn't He know that America's enemies are starving people and killing babies? And surely Jesus didn't mean I have to love the people who are causing problems in my life and especially those who post inconsiderate things online. If we misunderstand this and other truths in the Bible, it can be a hindrance in our daily lives.

When the Bible doesn't seem to "fit" my life, I've found the problem isn't that the Bible doesn't fit; the problem is that I don't understand the Bible in the way the Author intended. Plus, I am not living the way I was originally created to live. In fact, living that way doesn't even come naturally. So I can't even begin to understand the message of the Bible and see change in my life until I learn what it is actually saying. I live my life ineffectively until I discover the way it was originally meant to be. I must study Scripture with an idea, with curiosity, and ask questions. To show you what I mean, let's ask two basic questions and find the answers in the Bible: (1) Who is Jesus? and (2) What role does He have in my powerful and practical living? Romans 10:9 says "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." What we can discover from this scripture?

- Jesus is the Lord.
- Jesus died.
- God raised Jesus from the dead, so
- God is more powerful than death.

- Jesus is alive.

If we accept these short phrases as truth, our actions should change, and we can be spared from a life full of regrets. Thus, “you will be saved”! But how can we be saved from death? Death is real, and many people fear it more than anything else. But, what about living a life that is not worth living; being dead inside, without passion or a dream? God can save us from a life that isn’t worth living.

Our confession, something else that is practical, and belief in Jesus can save us from living lives that are unintentional and unfulfilling. How often do we confess Christ instead of confessing our life experiences? How often do we compare our thoughts to the Bible’s content and let the Bible have the last word? There are two things in Romans 10:9 that I want to highlight: Jesus is Lord and Jesus is Savior.

Jesus is Lord on His own; nothing we do makes Him a lord. However, we can surrender our choices to His plans and accept His ruling or Lordship. Then He becomes our Lord. What is a lord? A lord is someone who is the ruler or the expert in something.<sup>1</sup> We get to choose to surrender to Him by submitting our emotions and thoughts to what we are reading in the Bible about Him. (How often do we surrender our ideas?) Likewise, Jesus is a Savior, but He is not our Savior unless we recognize our need for Him. Jesus can only be our Savior if we confess our sins and accept His forgiveness. To say it another way, Jesus is the Savior, but if we don’t ask Him to help us, He isn’t our Savior. (How often do we ask for help?)

One definition of the word believe is “accept[ing] something as true, genuine, or real.”<sup>2</sup> When we believe something to be true, our ideas, emotions, and choices will align with that truth. If your doctor tells you that you have three months to live unless you change your diet, would you change your diet? Of course you would because you believe the doctor. The concept is the same with belief in Jesus. So many individuals are walking around saying they “believe” in Jesus—He is their Lord and Savior—but they still walk around stuck, thinking sinful thoughts that affect their habits and choices, leading them to live through experiences they are ashamed of or have to apologize for later.

Our sinful thoughts effect our habits, and our habits effect our decisions, making us powerless and living without purpose. We are constantly taking Jesus as Savior for granted. He is the only one who has mastered holy living and is the expert at overcoming death. Rather than respecting Him for who He is, we take Him for granted and render Him powerless in our daily lives.

Through the years, as I have learned to trust the Bible, I have been released from others’ opinions and lies that limited me. I thought my own logic would help me build a better life; but, in fact, only following Jesus the Lord leads me to a better life. In John 14:6 Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” In order to know which way we should choose, in order to know what truth we should believe, and in order to

know what life could be possible, we must get to know Jesus better. We should follow Christ instead of our logic and instead of our emotions. Jesus said in John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” This is the truth.

You may find it difficult to believe that Jesus has that much influence over life and death because of your current situation or past. Let’s consider the words of Paul the apostle: “I can do all things through Christ, who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13). The Amplified Bible says, “I can do all things [which He has called me to do] through Him who strengthens and empowers me [to fulfill His purpose— I am self-sufficient in Christ’s sufficiency; I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses me with inner strength and confident peace.]”

Paul wrote this letter to Christians in Philippi. He was in prison, some say in a city called Ephesus, when he wrote these words about ten years after he visited Philippi. This was not the first time Paul had been imprisoned and bound by chains; his situation was nothing new. Paul was writing in a limited space and in unfriendly territory, yet he was able to find strength to write these life-changing words. He was in double confinement: prison and chains. No, wait, triple confinement: there was also a guard! Yet he still believed he was a free man. He understood that being limited physically didn’t equal being limited spiritually because he served a limitless God.

Perhaps you feel limited in your potential at work because you don’t have a car. Perhaps you feel limited in a relationship, however you are afraid of what might happen if you stand up for yourself. Physical limitations don’t have to restrain you spiritually when you serve a limitless God. The truth is, you can find ways to act in these situations that can be effective and bring fulfillment. Our fulfillment should be found in obeying the Lord, rather than achieving a result or fairness in life we feel we should receive.

Paul wasn’t above the law, but his God was above all limitations. Though Paul was in chains, he understood that God is the Ruler over all things and all people, including the chain-makers. This is an example of how studying a verse can make it powerful and personal to you. Instead of just wishing or praying you can be free from physical chains, you can trust that the Lord will sustain you in the “triple confinement” seasons of your life.

Do you remember about my mom studying the Bible at night? She studied for life, for this kind of perspective. When I think about the rough situations and the incredible opportunities that become available to me, and when I think about things I have learned from the Bible, that is what carries me through each decision. I love the clean pages in my Bible that are ready for me to scribble on as the Holy Spirit speaks, and the cover that isn’t dented yet or discolored from a coffee cup. However, with the passing of time, I have been able to see that I always have access to this reality and influence anywhere. And now, anywhere I take my phone I have access to studying the

Word. I can look something up so quickly, and my time is saved. (Take care to notice if the websites and articles you view line up with the Bible instead of someone's experience or opinion. In the Appendix of this book, I share with you some of my favorite resources.)

You might be in a situation you can't change, but that doesn't mean God can't change the situation. Again, let's take our lead from Paul's experience. His power wasn't in his perspective or in his position; Paul's power was found in the person of Jesus Christ. This is so contrary to what is happening in our world today. Paul and his friend (also in chains) started singing and lifting up the name of Jesus, the Lord, who once again proved to be his Savior by breaking the chains that held them. As a result of this chain-breaking miracle, the guard saw Jesus reflected in Paul's hope despite his being chained. The guard became a believer, and his family did too! Our logic and knowledge of the truth are worthless until we genuinely believe it more than opinions, feelings, and experiences. If you want to use your voice, use it to lift up the name of Jesus, speak of God's greatness rather than someone else's perspective or position. Perhaps, like Paul, our trials are the best place to show the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Our chains aren't intended to keep us bound; they are so we can help others find Christ if we recognize the opportunity for it. Let's think of ourselves like Paul when he said in Philippians 1:13-14, "My chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." Consider this: as Christians we are chained for the purpose of honoring the Lord Jesus, regardless of our pain and discomfort.

Can I encourage you to look at your situation with the possibility that God can reveal His power through your struggle? I believe He has chosen you (like He chose Paul) and has allowed you to walk through difficult seasons so that others can grow in their faith as they see you stay committed to Jesus Christ, the Lord. Let's surrender to the Lord and watch Him act as Lord and Savior in and around us, for everyone!

Now let's look at Philippians 4:13 from another angle but still focus on how Jesus really has so much power in our lives, specifically releasing us from the wounds, lies and limitations of our past, by learning about Paul's audience and why he wrote this particular message to the Philippians.

Philippi was a Roman colony and a diverse city that benefitted from being loyal to Rome. Military soldiers were encouraged to retire there, preserving its loyalty. Let's sit here on this one fact.

Here is an example of the Bible being powerful and very practical! By studying behind the scenes of the Bible, I find confidence in making decisions by thinking about how the truths in the passage match my life now. I don't mean confidence as a feeling, but confidence as in a mental reassurance and peace in my soul beyond



everything I know that is true. This is how “faith comes by hearing” (Romans 10:17). My life is different because what I believe to be true affects it.

### *What Did I Learn?*

Here it is: retired soldiers were living in Philippi, assuring the city’s loyalty to Rome, to take advantage of all its benefits. The soldiers weren’t the majority of the population living there; however, their influence and loyalty to Rome was significant. Knowing that was the case prompts me to ask myself, “In what areas of my life have I let one or two wrong things from the past dictate my everyday life in the present? What situation should be ‘retired’ but still affects the way I live? Maybe there are past lies, or possibly wounds from a difficult situation. We must recognize the strong voices from the past that are holding us back from following Jesus. Our identity comes from loyalty to Him instead of the lies or habits in our lives. If we are surrendered to Christ, these habits have to change also.

Lifting up the name of the Lord, in worship, as Paul did, opens the door for the power of the Holy Spirit to move in our lives. Lies have to melt in weakness, and chains have to break. In other words, we have the opportunity to change, as well as the grace and strength to change, by remaining surrendered to the one who transforms us over time—as we focus on the truth. So my question is this: How many of us are living with retired “soldiers” that keep us from advancing in levels of holiness?

*Holiness is being separated to God for His purposes.*

Your past doesn’t have to dictate your future. You don’t have to be a byproduct of your environment. Is your past keeping you loyal to fear? To unforgiveness? To anything else that is sinful or unhealthy?

Even if we are in unfriendly or toxic situations, we must activate our faith and choose truth. Jesus is all-powerful, and He can give us the ability to live powerful lives as we trust Him in the practical spaces such as work, school, and family.

Believing the truth is important. No matter what chains are trying to hold you down or what “retired soldiers” are pressuring you to be loyal to the past—to something other than Jesus, the Lord of lords—no lie and no past have power over Him. If you have prayed and asked Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, the past can stay in the past. You may need to change some habits, forgive someone, or talk with a counselor in order to “retire” the soldiers. But if you have accepted the incredible undeserved gift of salvation, you have the ability to live a powerful life starting now.

*Salvation: Brings Order from the Inside-Out*

God existed before the world, our little galaxy, and the entire expanse of the universe. This God expresses Himself in three ways: as the Father, as the Son, and as a Spirit: the Holy Spirit. God decided to create the universe and all its complexities, from the smallest atom in the bottom of the deepest ocean to the unending edges of the universe, and He still holds all of this in His sturdy hand. Not one thing happens that He does not know about.

After God created our galaxy and, specifically, Earth, He created two humans. These two humans were going to model for the rest of us how to live on this planet. The first human was a man named Adam. The second human created was a woman named Eve. They were not gods; they are humans just like us who walked with God on the earth in a special place called the garden of Eden.

God gave Adam and Eve instructions for living in this garden. He gave them tasks as well, such as naming the animals, plants, and having children. God was their Lord, or King and He gave them the freedom to make their own choices while living on the earth. Still, every king has a kingdom, and the culture of his kingdom is distinct. Laws must be followed to stay within the boundaries and receive the benefits of the kingdom.

Here is where things get confusing. There was one tree in the garden that grew fruit—one tree from which God told Adam and Eve not to eat. Eve was deceived by what Satan, in the form of a serpent, told her, and she ate the fruit. Seeing that her disobedience didn't end her life immediately, she shared the fruit with Adam. Since I haven't had the opportunity to sit down and have coffee with Eve, I try putting myself in her shoes and considering this experience as if it were my own.

Eve may have been thinking about death in human terms, rather than according to Kingdom culture. God had given the humans control over their daily choices. The power of their decisions came from doing things the Lord's way; but in this case, they didn't do things His way. Kingdom culture is living the way God wants us to live, every day.

You see, just because they were the first humans and they knew God, it doesn't mean they understood everything about Him. Instead, they (and we) need to consider death in Kingdom terms. Life without God is a slow, physical death towards an eternal, spiritual death, which is a permanent experience filled with fear, pain, and the absence of the presence of God. Human nature, our fleshly nature, is in constant conflict with this holy God. Choosing to live based upon our natural tendencies is against God's will. This act of disobeying God's will is called sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, God moved them out of the garden, and they had to live a life that was distant from Him. God was still around and available to them, but they couldn't relate to Him in the same way, because God is holy (without sin) and they had become sinful.

God gave them new laws (boundaries) to help Adam and Eve live outside of the garden and still be able to know Him—a new order. But these laws were difficult to keep, since the problem was inside of them, and laws only address outside actions. Outside actions don't change inside problems.

The same is true for us today—no one is perfect; no one has power over sin unless the person is holy (separated to God). In fact, Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Every one of us is wonderfully created by God (Psalm 139); but we are also born into a life of sin. We need another human to show us how to live this life. That is Jesus Christ, the expert. We are in need of a savior in order to be in right relationship with God and to overcome that sin. This Savior, this hero, this Lord, is Jesus! He is the Son of God. John 3:16 says “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” There is a choice for every sinner to make. Believe in Jesus! Jesus the Lord can be your Savior.

Let's read Romans 10:9 again. “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Here is what you need to know:

*Jesus is the Lord.  
Jesus died for your sins.  
God raised Him from the dead.*

Jesus is alive, and He has power over everything, including death, including the things that keep you from living a life that is fulfilling.

The truth about Jesus can save you from living a life of regrets if you will believe it. You can begin to live the way God wants you to and through your actions show that you believe what you know to be true about Jesus.

When talking with friends or coworkers I'll ask them about their preferred method of communication. Usually, depending on what we are talking about, they'll respond with a text or an email. It's up to us to understand God's preferred method of communication is prayer.

*Prayer is our number one way of talking to God.*

Through speaking, journaling, singing, and so forth, we should pray. Right now you can talk to Jesus. Ask that He become the Lord of your life and save you from your sin. Remember that sin is living the way you want to instead of the way God wants you to. It's okay if you don't know what to say. It's okay that praying feels unnatural. You are created by God, and He wants to hear from you. (A salvation prayer is provided for you in the appendix if you are looking for a guide.)

Now, let's talk about how the Bible changes us; the role of the Holy Spirit when we read our Bibles; and how that understanding helps us to live a powerful life in practical ways...



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