

Leader's Guide

# SET YOUR **FOUNDATION**

EIGHT TRUTHS THAT STABILIZE YOUR FAITH



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## YOUR IMPACT IS GREATER THAN YOU THINK...

On a late January afternoon in 1982, Air Florida Flight 90 crashed into the Potomac River in Washington, D.C. during takeoff. Heroic bystanders and helicopter crews plucked five people from the ice-clogged waters in a dramatic race against time. The rescuers needed to get to the passengers before the ice got to them. Seventy-four passengers and crew lost their lives.

Roger Olian, a thirty-five year old metalworker at St. Elizabeth's Hospital had just driven across the 14<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge when the plane went down. People were tying battery cables and plastic bags together to make a rope. Olian said later, "I just took the end of the rope and waded in. I didn't think I would make it...but I knew I wasn't going to spend the rest of my life wondering if I could have made a difference."

Bert Hamilton had surfaced, one arm broken, on the other side of the plane. The helicopter lifted him to safety first. The four other survivors doubt they would have made it if not for Olian. One said, "I was fascinated by this man...he just kept coming. It was he who saved my life."

The river was so cluttered with chunks of ice that Olian had to pull himself up and crawl across them, breaking two toes in the process. He was five yards short of the floundering passengers when the helicopter arrived for the passengers. Olian was also hauled in and rushed to a hospital, having been in the icy water for 20 minutes. His car was ticketed and towed away.

Later Olian recalled, "I never actually touched one of them. I didn't know who they were, but as they pulled me back in I realized that I loved them all." (Penny Ward Moser, "Survivors and Heroes of an Icy Crash," *LIFE*, Vol. 6, January 1983, p.112.)

When you lead, you have the potential of making the same impact on others as Roger Olian did in the icy Potomac River. You won't give them everything they need, but they will

be encouraged to persevere because you moved into their lives.

Think of the people who invested in your life as a young believer. They were individuals who moved toward you with their words, presence or encouragement. They explained the Scriptures, resolved issues and answered questions. They gave you courage and direction to walk with Christ. Their initiative and availability left a lasting impression.

Several benefits of studying the foundational aspects of the Christian life are listed in the Introduction of *Set Your Foundation*. A few more issues to consider:

## VALUE THE BASICS...

For 33 years I served as a team chaplain to professional sports teams in baseball, basketball and football. Every year, every training camp and every athlete focused on the basics: double-plays, base running, screen plays, free throws, blocking and tackling...from rookies to seasoned veterans, from borderline players to All-Pros. Everyone worked to master the basics.

*Set Your Foundation* is the "basics." We often think of them as a topic for new believers, but we all need them. Believers of all ages will sooner or later wrestle with guilt, feel powerless to change, doubt their salvation, battle temptation, grow cold toward God, stumble in their growth and make disastrous decisions. They will return to these basics as a starting point to find hope, encouragement or direction.

There will be a right time to discuss the theological intricacies of regeneration, justification, sanctification...later. Dr. George Patterson of Western Seminary comments on the timing of what we teach: *Classroom instruction is appropriate for mature believers. But teaching heavy theology before one learns loving, childlike obedience is dangerous. It leaves a person assuming that Christianity is merely having scripturally*

*correct doctrine. He becomes a passive learner of the Word rather than an active disciple.* (Dr. George Patterson, Portland, OR, Missions Frontiers, March-April, 2003, p.15.)

As older believers, we easily forget our early days of questions and insecurity. For the young believer, it seems that everyone else understands what he doesn't. One fall season I was leading a weekly Bible study with several athletes on the Cleveland Browns NFL team. They were seriously engaged in studying through the Book of James together. A few weeks into the series, a young believer attending the Bible study asked, "I am kind of lost in all this...is there some kind of a 'starter kit' you can give me?" He recognized that he was at a different starting point than those more familiar with the Scriptures.

If you have walked with Christ for several years and sat under sound Bible teaching, this material may seem too simple to you. It is not too basic for a young believer.

## THERE MAY BE MORE EXCITING THINGS TO STUDY...

I enjoy various television series that feature home renovation. In the early stages of preparing the home for moving walls or a kitchen remodel, the contractor has to break the news to the new (fearful) homeowners, "There is a problem with the foundation." Whether it is related to cracked foundation walls or faulty drainage, everything stops until the foundation issue is corrected. The homeowners are so anxious to show off their shiny new granite countertops or the luxury bathroom accessories, not their concrete foundation. No matter what it costs in time or money, the good contractors know they cannot build on a weak foundation.

To our benefit, there is a wealth of Biblical information freely available as never before: church sermons, Bible studies, Bible resource internet sites, blogs, books, and online sermons. Set your foundation for growth and the other studies will build upon it.

## THE DESIGN OF SET YOUR FOUNDATION...

One of the most common statements heard from new believers as they begin to read the Bible is, "This is amazing. It is like the Bible has just been re-written for me. It makes sense now!" They have experienced one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit, to illumine the Scriptures as God's revealed word of truth. It is like someone turned the lights on. It doesn't make them Biblical scholars or prevent them from drawing erroneous conclusions, but God's Word should make sense to them.

*"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God." 1 Corinthians 2:12*

*"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Hebrews 4:12-13*

*Set Your Foundation* has been designed for people to draw their own conclusions before reading others' commentary. They may not see all the implications or details of the texts, but they can summarize what God has said. As they interact about their discoveries, a group leader or discipler can clarify any passages in question. It becomes an opportunity to introduce principles of observing the context, letting the Scriptures speak for themselves, and taking verses at their plain literal sense.

We all need Bible teachers to keep us on course in understanding God's Word. But from the start, new believers should discover that God's Word will generally make sense to them in their own reading. Sermons, small group studies, commentaries, books and devotionals should equip us to better handle the Bible, but not replace our personal time in the Scriptures.

## THE ROLE OF THE LEADER...

The level of maturity of those you lead is the best factor in determining your role as the leader. If the participants are relatively new in the faith, you may be answering more questions and clarifying the implications of the texts. If the participants are older in their walk, ask them to study the material together with a perspective of eventually leading others through the same foundational series.

While our objective is to help younger believers learn to handle the Scriptures accurately, we need to create an environment where they can openly process what they are reading. When a new believer verbalizes what he is concluding from the Scriptures, we are able to see what is making sense to him.

If leaders only lecture and participants only listen, they will never grow in confidence to handle the Word on their own. If they are always told what to believe, they will rarely search the Scriptures for themselves. Effective leaders guide them back to the Scriptures to find clarity and application. You can avoid a group discussion disintegrating into a pooling of ignorance by shifting them back to the words of the text as the final authority, not people's quotes, experiences and opinions.

Some adults initially find it awkward to meet with another individual to cover content like *Set Your Foundation*. How do you lead the meeting? Do you check his answers, read through the chapter line by line or deliver a prepared commentary?

If you have agreed to read the chapter and verses before getting together, the meeting is not unlike two people discussing a football game they both watched the previous week. One person happens to be a football coach who also played the game for several years. The other person has just recently become interested in football. The coach has a wealth of football knowledge, but he is curious what the other guy is learning about the game.

The new guy has all kinds of observations and questions, so the meeting becomes a conversation about the game. The coach knows this is too early to unload every

quarterback option or assorted defensive schemes on third downs. A coach listens to what the new guy picked up, clarifies any confusion and builds on his questions. He creates an atmosphere where it is acceptable to ask questions, state conclusions and raise conflicts with his past knowledge without feeling foolish or rejected.

In the course of your discussion, there are several general questions that are helpful in any of the chapters of *Set Your Foundation*:

- What stood out to you in the passages in this section?
- What doesn't make sense in this topic? What do you wish were clearer?
- How has this changed your view of Christ or the Christian life?
- How would you summarize this section?

As the leader, talk about the ways each topic has affected your own spiritual journey. Let the other person hear your highs and lows, what helped you grow and how the Scriptures answered your questions.

It is best to avoid statements or implications like "I will disciple you." Studies show that adults learn best when they feel they are part of the process. It will be obvious that you may have walked with Christ longer and are taking the leadership in the meeting. Most people respond best to understanding they have been invited to study a series together.

## OUTCOMES OF THE BASICS...

1. You will influence another person's lifetime relationship with Christ. They will build on these Biblical truths as they mature in Christ.
2. You will experience what it means to come alongside another believer. It will be a building block for your ministry in the body of Christ.
3. You will grow in your own faith, study, knowledge, convictions, prayer and ministry.

THE FOLLOWING PROVIDES SOME INSIGHTS FOR DISCUSSING EACH CHAPTER.

# 1

## BASE YOUR SECURITY IN CHRIST

You have the privilege of helping others answer the most important question in their lives: Is Christ really in my life?

In Ephesians 1:1-14, Paul lists the amazing blessings we receive when we put our faith in Christ. The rest of the chapter is his prayer that they would know the depth of these gifts, the greatness of His power, and the revelation of His person.

Paul knew that what he taught would only be grasped if God worked in his readers' hearts. The same is true as we study these things with others. God must open eyes and hearts for it to make sense to them. Our goal is not to persuade others that Christ is in their lives. As we process these Scriptures, our prayer is that God would make it clear to them if they have begun a relationship with Him.

Believers wrestle with the sureness of Christ's work more than most Biblical truths. We know Jesus died for us, but we assume we must do something to finish the deal. We think we must earn God's blessings. When we fail Him, we work to regain His approval. Recurring sin leaves us with nagging guilt or doubt.

Your own testimony of questions and doubts will be so helpful to others in this study. Your story can set the atmosphere for others to openly process these truths.

- When did you have doubts about your relationship with Christ?
- What passages gave you answers?

When others commit to study these passages, begin to pray that their hearts would be open to God's prompting. Pray that His Spirit would reveal to them if they have responded to His invitation and given their lives to Him.

CONSIDER TWO ISSUES:

1. What is our security? Security has to do with what God has promised and completed. What are we relying on? On what basis does God grant forgiveness and eternal life? What did I need to do to obtain salvation? What does it mean to "believe" in Christ?
2. What is our assurance? Assurance has to do with personal evidence. How can I know that God fulfilled His promise? Over time there will be evidence of a changed life, changed perspectives, changed attitudes or changed lifestyle. God does not enter a person's life and leave it unchanged.

As you discuss the things that stood out in the texts, listen for the other person's conclusions. When particular doubts surface in the discussions, gently probe for the reasons for his conclusions. Seek to uncover what he has been taught or he has wrongly assumed that the Scriptures teach.

Some people will falsely believe they are Christians. They may be religious, interested in spiritual things, or faithful in church attendance. Too often we are quick to assure a person of his salvation simply because he prayed a prayer sometime in his life. When Paul wrote to a church whose people were walking in disobedience to the Word, he asked them to test themselves to see if they were in the faith. We should be hesitant to attempt to persuade a person that Christ possesses his life if God is not confirming it to him.

Encourage the doubter to ask God to confirm His presence as he spends time in prayer and Bible reading. Continue to interact over it.

## CLAIM YOUR NEW POSITION IN CHRIST

Our security in Christ focused on our entry into God's kingdom. This chapter is focused on embracing our position in His kingdom. Colossians 1:13 says: "*He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.*"

We often limit our view of Christianity to possessing a new set of beliefs. Those new beliefs have resulted in a relationship with God. Having been transferred to His kingdom, we also have a new standing before Him. Our standing reveals how we should relate to Him:

- As children of God we can freely approach Him with any request, any time.
- As citizens of heaven, we embrace God-directed responsibilities.
- As servants of the King, we submit to His will and purposes.
- As temples of His Holy Spirit, we glorify God by our obedience.

Consider the list of blessings in Ephesians 1. They can be neither bought nor earned; they are bestowed by grace. If we only embrace what we have received and neglect the responsibilities of our new position, we can easily distort the relationship God intended.

He is our Father, King and Master; we are His child, subject and servant. God has placed us into a secure relationship defined by mutual loyalty, with blessings, responsibilities, privileges and obligations.

Understanding our new position in Christ enables us to rightly respond to what God asks of us as we walk with Him. In our depravity, we often tend to protect our independence from Him. God never intended the relationship to function that way. We actually short-circuit the enjoyment of His blessings when we guard our independence.

As you review the texts listed in this chapter and note the things that changed at salvation, forgiveness and redemption are obvious. His forgiveness has made us acceptable; we can freely approach Him. Could our shift from being His enemy (Romans 5) to becoming His beloved child be any more radical?

When we ignore the bigger picture of our position in Christ, we are prone to treat Him as a grandfather, not Father. Fathers tend to hold us to responsibilities more than grandfathers do. As our Father, He is committed to transform us to be more and more like Christ. He made us His workmanship to equip us to do good works in His name.

As believers, we are residents of a heavenly kingdom (our true citizenship) and aliens (temporary visitors) on earth. God uses us on earth to accomplish His purposes. We are ambassadors in His service, therefore we must be careful to represent Him accurately.

When we fail to see the standing in which God has placed us, we can easily interpret our free salvation as freedom to live as we please. In our culture we often emphasize the privileges of living in God's kingdom over the personal responsibilities of living in His kingdom.

This chapter is meant to help believers process the changes that God has made in us. To prepare to discuss this chapter, think back to the early days of your Christian life:

- What did you discover about your new life in Christ?
- What issues and questions did you want others to process with you?
- What have you realized about your privileges as His beloved child?
- What have you realized about your responsibilities as His servant in the kingdom?

## EMBRACE GOD'S LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

You will commonly encounter two general categories of people in discipling others:

1. Some new or young believers are surprised that they still commit sin. They thought that with Jesus in their lives, they would easily overcome both old and new temptations. They probably assumed that old habits would die quickly. They were stunned by the new level of awareness of sin in their lives.

Their response could range from confusion to timidity when thinking about approaching Jesus now. They wonder if God could have changed His mind about them. They could be questioning if they have done enough to warrant God's acceptance because they see their sin in a new light.

2. Some are not walking consistently with God despite having known Him for years. The longer they have avoided resolving things with God, the more they fear that He may be angry with them. They have probably given Satan an open door to cast doubt on God's character, grace and faithfulness.

They have become dulled by the residue of unconfessed sin. Fellowship with God doesn't feel too comfortable. They may have resolved to either hide or manage their old sin habits. Shame or timidity often keeps them from boldly approaching God. Their reaction is to hide from God as Adam and Eve hid in the Garden of Eden.

The passages in this section resolve so much fear, guilt and discouragement. It is a step in learning to believe God's unconditional and unchanging love. The objective of this chapter is to embrace God's faithful solution for sin in our lives:

- If we put our trust in Christ, the Holy Spirit will regularly convict us of present sin. It is evidence that we belong to Him.
- In Christ we are already forgiven. Confession of sin before God gives us the continued experience of that forgiveness. Confession of sin before God keeps short accounts with Him.
- When we persist in an unwillingness to confess and deal with our sin, we lose our boldness in approaching His throne of grace. Yet, the entrance to His throne remains open.

When Adam and Eve first sinned, they hid from God. When we live with unconfessed sin, our natural reaction is to hide. His throne seems so unapproachable, so we pull back in our prayer life. We are aware that He sees and knows everything, so we feel reluctant and unworthy to stand before Him.

God invites us to deal with our sin in His presence! Hebrews 4:14-16 – *“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.”*

Review some of the passages together. When there is a conflict between our uncertain feelings about God's love and His unconditional promises, we must choose to believe His Word. Share with others what has helped you deal with temptation: Scripture memory, accountability, and consistent time with the Lord. The next chapter on the Holy Spirit will provide added insight on resisting temptation.

## BE EMPOWERED FOR LIVING

This chapter may require you to do more teaching than you have in other chapters. Unfortunately, the doctrines of the Holy Spirit have been a long-held battleground between churches and denominations, especially in regard to spiritual gifts. The confusion can be heightened by a mixture of misused Biblical terms and personal experiences. As a result, the critical ministry of the Holy Spirit is often overlooked.

It is impossible to live as God asks us to live apart from the ministries of His Spirit. The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 5:16, “*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.*” Following Christ means that we respond to the Spirit’s guidance, conviction and encouragement.

The objective of this chapter is to present the Holy Spirit as the One who enables us to walk consistently with Christ. The objective of this chapter is three-fold:

1. Introduce the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer.
2. Provide an overview of the ministries and roles of the Holy Spirit.
3. Appropriate the filling of the Holy Spirit as the source of empowerment to live a consistent Christian life.

Much of the confusion surrounding the doctrines of the Holy Spirit is resolved by defining terms like filling, baptism and indwelling. It is necessary to distinguish the purposes of His roles: the fruit of the Spirit for character, the spiritual gifts for service and His filling for empowerment.

The word *baptism* had two meanings. One, to immerse and secondly, to dye or stain. The latter is more common in the New Testament

and infers that we are placed in the Body of Christ, are identified with Him and come under His influence. (Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. VI, p.138-159.)

The Apostle Paul’s letters can appear to contradict the Book of Acts in some descriptions of the Spirit’s role. Romans 8:9-11 clearly states that every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In the Book of Acts, there are accounts of some groups of people who received the Spirit subsequent to salvation. Those differences appear to be contradictory.

The Book of Acts was written to give us a historical account of the early Church. Paul’s letters were written to teach doctrine. There are several transitions in process at the time, including Jew to Gentile, synagogue to church, and Law to grace.

In Acts, the established church in Jerusalem needed to be convinced that the salvation of Gentiles and Samaritans was valid. Their receiving of the Holy Spirit and subsequent display of His gifts were evidence that they also were part of the Church by faith. It unfolded that way in Acts, but Paul’s letters (doctrine) teach that the all believers receive the Holy Spirit at salvation.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit has been alternately minimized or overemphasized. God the Holy Spirit is an equal with God the Father and God the Son. Yet, in His roles, the Holy Spirit seeks to shift the focus to Jesus, not to Himself. When the roles of the Holy Spirit are given rightful emphasis, Jesus will be the central focus and receive all the glory.

The grid on page 16 of *Set Your Foundation* describes the Spirit’s different roles in our lives. Spend time talking about the ways that the Holy Spirit will affect your life through each of His ministries.

## COMMUNICATE WITH THE SOVEREIGN GOD

When Jimmy Carter was president he set aside Saturday mornings to talk with his “fellow-Americans.” The first Saturday he got nine million calls, but only 54 got through. Our chances of getting through to God are far better than reaching the White House!

If we grasp the heart of God, our prayer life and Bible reading will become more relational than ritual. God is delighted to have us in His presence. When our devotional life is mere ritual or duty, our enjoyment of God grows stale.

The heart of God is to dwell with His people. We see it in the Old Testament tabernacle (meaning “to dwell”), the announcement of the Messiah (Immanuel – “God with us”) and at the culmination of end times. Revelation 21:3 – *“And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them.”*

There is a critical point that a young believer reaches when he is self-motivated to spend consistent time with the Lord. He doesn’t need to be prodded or enticed to get into the Scriptures. He seeks to know God on his own initiation, reverence and need.

Along the way, he learned some “how to’s” of spending time with God. He probably discovered the discipline needed to guard that time as a priority. If his time with God became impersonal, it may have degraded into duty, merely checking off a daily chapter in the Bible in the hope that God would be pleased.

The passages in *Set Your Foundation* are meant to invite us into His throne room, to hear from Him (the Scriptures) and to speak with Him (prayer).

The Psalmist says, *“In Thy presence is fullness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever”* (16:11). *“He hears my voice...He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I shall call upon Him...”* (116:1-2). There is no need to announce yourself—He recognizes your voice!

As you meet to discuss this chapter, talk about your own fellowship with Jesus:

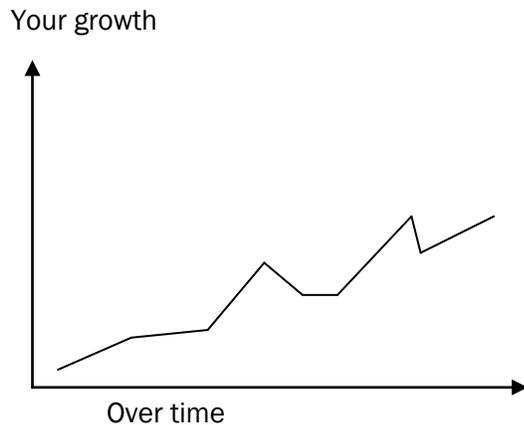
- How did your devotional life become a priority? When is it rich and deep?
- How do you keep your time with God fresh? How do you vary your prayer and Bible reading?
- When has your communication with God become stagnant or complacent?
- What are you looking for as you read the Scriptures? What do you read? When? How long?
- What do you pray about? Is prayer more than a “shopping” list?

It takes time for some people to establish consistency in this area. If this is really new to people you meet with, consider spending another week on this chapter. Agree to a plan: pick a passage, choose some questions to ask about the passage and compare notes on your devotions that week. Encourage people to record new questions they have when reading a passage. They will be amazed to find answers as they continue in the Scriptures.

New believers will benefit from the connection between this chapter and the chapter on God’s love and forgiveness. Unconfessed sin, apathy and busyness keep each of us from consistency at times. When these things persist, we begin to doubt God’s love and forgiveness, and become hesitant to approach Him. How often have we all needed the reminder of Hebrews 4:14-16?

## GROW IN CHRIST

When you prepare to lead this chapter on growing in Christ, try this exercise. Make a personal chart that reflects the ups and downs of your own growth over time. It will be a good review of the factors that affected your progress. It might look something like this:



What were the factors that contributed to the changes in your graph? (people, success, tragedy, failure, sin, conviction from the Word, disappointment, repentance, serving, a new faith challenge, grace...)

Was there a pattern—what triggered a change in direction on the graph?

What roles did other believers have in the changes in your graph? (I Corinthians 3:6-11, encouragement, challenges, teaching, leading, accountability...)

What major decisions contributed to changes in your graph? (Lordship, friends, marriage, jobs, geographical moves, ...)

Those who have recently come to Christ will obviously not have much to put on the above graph. Your personal journey will provide practical insights for them as they set their own expectations for growth.

### SOME THINGS TO EMPHASIZE:

1. Growth is marked by transformation.

*“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”* Romans 12:2

God will use the Bible to change the way we think and live.

2. Salvation requires faith, but growth requires trials and effort.

*“...like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.”* 1 Peter 2:2. The wording in this verse is a command, not an observation. We will not grow in our relationship with Christ if the Scriptures are not our regular spiritual nourishment.

This is a good time to emphasize the disciplines of the Christian life (Bible reading, prayer, fellowship) to help protect spiritual priorities.

James 1:3-4 says trials move us toward maturity: *“...you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”* (NIV)

3. Real change is slow. We can memorize the words on the page and embrace their meaning, but it takes time to apply them, observe the results and develop new convictions.

## ENCOUNTER GOD'S CHARACTER

The Scriptures record majestic, awesome, and enlightening descriptions of God from Genesis to Revelation. We see Him revealed in creation, the deliverance from Egypt and the wilderness accounts. Job, David, Isaiah, Paul and John give detailed descriptions of His character. Jesus, in His earthly life, has explained God to us.

God delights in revealing Himself because our view of Him affects the way we relate to Him. This chapter is an invitation to seek to know God as He describes Himself in the Scriptures. Our view of God affects our motivation to worship Him, our ability to trust Him and our commitment to obey Him.

In our human nature, we have already constructed our own views of who God is and how He works. We have based it on the speed by which He answered prayer or delivered us from difficulty. We differ with God on what "good" means. Because He is so powerful we hold expectations of how He should work in the world, especially in our own world.

### DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING:

- The Scriptures are the baseline for defining who God is and how He functions.
- God functions outside our timetable and expectations. (Psalm 27:13-14)
- There is so much to learn about God that we will be growing in our understanding of Him our entire lives.
- God's works are always aligned with His character, i.e., His sovereignty, will, purpose and wisdom.
- We are prone to expect God to act the way we want Him to.
- By the nature of His character, He always does what is best and right.

This chapter can be a healthy challenge for you as a leader. Ask yourself a few questions.

How many of the attributes of God can I list?  
 How do the attributes connect to each other?  
 When do I doubt Him – Is He good? Always?  
 What attributes remain a mystery to me?  
 What have I concluded about God recently?

### ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD'S ATTRIBUTES:

1. How does this attribute affect the way we relate to God?
2. How do these attributes connect? Can God be holy and not be good?
3. What is your reaction to some of the attributes? (Holy–fear; love–secure...)

It is so helpful for younger believers to see how more seasoned believers have honestly wrestled in their trials to understand God's character. Our struggle with our difficulties is ultimately a struggle with God. Why hasn't He resolved this issue? Why did He not prevent this? Why has this trial lasted so long?

The Biblical writers instruct us to remember what He has done in the past. He keeps His promises. Note Psalm 77.

A caution is needed. We can paint an inaccurate portrait of God if we isolate a few words of a paragraph, or take a verse or book out of context of the whole of the Scriptures.

For example, the Book of Proverbs is written as general principles of life, not as a list of promises. Proverbs 22:9—*"He who is generous will be blessed..."* Absolutely true as a principle. If we assume that to be a promise, we often begin to expect God to reward us financially. Then we give in order to get. When God fails to come through according to our faulty expectations, we question His character.

## FIGHT YOUR SPIRITUAL BATTLES

By the time a new believer gets to this chapter, he has probably been:

- regularly tempted to sin.
- faced with decisions to do things either his old way or God's way.
- presented with a conflict between the world and the Scriptures.
- discouraged by nagging guilt.

At this point a young believer may be confused about sin. In light of his expectations, he may wonder if he is left to stumble through the Christian life. Other people appear to handle temptation better than he does. He has been surprised that his new view of life seems to be in conflict with his friends.

You are in a position to offer hope and courage in the arena of spiritual warfare. If a younger believer feels free to discuss his struggles and questions, you may find it helpful to return to previous Scriptures listed under forgiveness, empowerment and growth. (*Set Your Foundation* - Chapters 3, 4, 6)

Use this opportunity to give him a glimpse into ways that God has helped you fight your own spiritual battles. Share some practical ways that the Scriptures strengthen you.

### SOME POINTS OF DISCUSSION:

**The world.** How have you seen the culture in conflict with the Scriptures? Where have you felt pressure to conform to the world—at work, with friends, with family? When has it been difficult to stand apart, or alone?

**The flesh.** How do your natural desires make you vulnerable? Why is temptation so strong? What do you do to resist or flee temptation? How does God use the Scriptures to help you resist sin? Review Ephesians 6 together.

**The devil.** Satan is in a battle for our minds—how we think and what we decide. How does Satan try to deceive you? What are you tempted to think about God? How does the way you think help you to obey Christ? What does Satan seek to contradict in the Bible?

We are made new at salvation, but some old habits die slowly, especially the addictive behaviors. Transformation happens when God convicts and we obey. Because God does not immediately change every aspect of a believer's life, we should be cautious about the timing and manner that we confront another believer about his obvious sin. Real change is slow.

In the early stages of a young believer's growth, it is important to allow the Holy Spirit to reveal and convict him of specific sins. Sometimes leaders feel compelled to point to everything that needs to change. A new believer needs to recognize the Spirit's conviction, rather than to merely conform to someone else's pressure. If he has made a true commitment to Christ, his response to the Spirit's conviction is evidence of genuine faith.

When God convicts us to address a particular sin in another person's life, we need to be willing to come alongside him in his struggle. He will find strength in a friend's commitment to persevere with him. Remind him of God's mercy and grace in Hebrews 4:14-16. Show him how to find helpful passages by using his Bible concordance.

Paul offers practical advice in how to address others in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 – "*And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men.*" Disruptive people need a rebuke. The fainthearted don't know what to do; they need encouragement. The weak lack strength to obey; they need support.

PERSONAL NOTES—