

30 DAYS
TO
**GROWING IN
YOUR FAITH**

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TO
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YOUR FAITH**

ENRICH YOUR LIFE IN
15 MINUTES A DAY

MAX ANDERS



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

30 Days to Growing in Your Faith
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To my prayer/advisory team:

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*Anyone would be fortunate to have such
friends praying for and advising them.*

It means the world.

Thanks!

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THREE REASONS TO READ THIS BOOK

How many times have you heard life-changing truth in a sermon, a conversation, or a book, but afterward you got distracted, forgot about it, and were *never changed* by it?

100 times? 1,000 times?

The reason is because hearing something once is usually not sufficient to change you.

If something is important, it has to be repeated until it changes you. Otherwise, it goes in one ear and out the other.



1. Because Repetition Is the Gateway to Transformed Behavior

That is why there is a lot of repetition in this book. It is not an accident. It has been carefully designed to drive truth deeply into your brain. This repetition then sinks into your subconscious, changing your fundamental attitudes, values, and behavior.

When this happens, it begins to bring about transformed behavior that is not likely to happen any other way.

If you have been a Christian for a while you may already know some of the information in this book, but you may not have repeated it until it changed you.

Other information in this book is likely new to you. It is very important. It also needs to be repeated until it changes you.

Reading this book will not *complete* the transformation process promised by the truth in it, but it can certainly *begin* it. And,

as the truth is reinforced in your *future* learning, the Holy Spirit can complete the process and bring deep, fundamental change to your heart.



2. Because It Is Better to Get All of a Little Rather Than None of a Lot

This information is so super-condensed that I had to leave out a lot of very important information. Even then, I wish there were things I hadn't left out.

Why did I do it? Because *it is better to get all of a little rather than none of a lot.*

But what is left *in* is essential to a balanced and mature Christian life. Knowledge isn't everything, but everything rests on knowledge. You *cannot* live something until you know it, and you *will not* live it until you believe it.

If you are teaching this book, you might feel that something should be added. Feel free to add what you think is missing.

But, *nothing in the book should be left out.*

So, this is not the *most* you need to know about living the Christian life; it is the *least*. It is not the *end* of your learning about living the Christian life; it is the *beginning*.



3. Because It Is Essential to See the Big Picture

Details are only fully understood when seen in relationship to the whole.

For example, if I were to show you a piece of a puzzle and ask you to tell me what things the blue, green, and red colors represent, you wouldn't know. But if I showed you the complete puzzle picture, you would instantly see that the green was grass, the blue was sky, and the red was a barn.

When we see the big picture of anything, it helps us master the details. The same is true with the Christian life. So, this book will

give you the big picture of the Christian life, which will help you more effectively master the details.

For this reason, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

The methodology in this book is the same as in its companion book, *30 Days to Understanding the Bible . . .* information boiled down to an essential minimum and presented in simple, bite-sized portions, with lots of repetition stirred in. If you see a blank, fill it in! It's there for a reason. It's how the brain works.

If you have not read *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*, I urge you to do so as soon as you have finished this book. The two together will lay a powerful foundation for a lifetime of spiritual growth.

For now, get ready to embark on a journey that has the potential to change your life. Enjoy *30 Days to Growing in Your Faith*.

HOW DO YOU LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE?

First, You Become a Christian

In order to live the Christian life, you must first be a Christian. I wrote this book for Christians, but it is conceivable that someone might begin to read the book without having become a Christian, or not being sure if he or she is a Christian.

As you will see later in the book, Christians are not people who have turned over a new leaf. Rather, by the work of God, they have turned over a new life. The Bible says a Christian is spiritually born again by grace through faith in Jesus, and has become a whole new person. You'll see that explained in chapter 4.

So, you can't earn your salvation by being good or by anything you do for God. It is by believing in and receiving Christ and giving yourself to him.

When a man asks a woman to marry him, he is not looking for anything she can give him. He wants her! The same is true with God. He doesn't want anything we can give him or do for him. He wants us.

If you have not yet become a Christian, or are not sure, I urge you to make that decision now. Please visit www.peacewithgod.net. There you will find full information to guide you in your decision.

Second, You Follow the Scriptural Plan for Spiritual Growth

Shortly after graduating from seminary, I was teaching in a Christian college and had the privilege of leading a young man to Christ.

After he finished praying, he looked up at me in sincerity and trust and asked, “Now what?”

They say that when you have a close brush with death, your whole past flashes in front of you. In this case, my whole future flashed in front of me, because I knew I didn’t know the answer to that question. And I wondered why I didn’t know the answer, and tried to figure out how I was going to get the answer.

So, I did to him what was done to me. I muttered something about reading your Bible, praying, and going to church.

That was all true and good. But I knew my answer was inadequate, and I didn’t know what else to say. That’s what the people told me who led me to the Lord. But no one had ever said, “Max, here is how you live the Christian life; here is how you grow in faith as a follower of Jesus.” No one ever laid it all out for me.

Many years later, I understand why no one had ever laid it out for me. It’s very difficult to do.

Another reason is that the answer has levels of complexity. If you keep it simple, it might be explained in a few sentences. If you make it complex, it might take a small library of books and other resources.

But, because the mind works best when it goes from the simple to the complex, from the general to the specific, I will venture a brief answer, and then I will elaborate more fully in the rest of the book.

Baseline Definition

To grow in your faith, you . . .

- . . . feed your mind the truth (Scriptures and other sources of truth).
- . . . integrate your life with the lives of other solid Christians and learn to imitate their lives as they provide a degree of accountability to you.
- . . . get up each day and try your best to do what is true and right.

You can't believe something until you know it, and you won't live it until you believe it. So, feeding your mind the truth is essential—it is the beginning point. That's why you start with the Bible.

But sometimes the Christian life is more easily caught than taught, so being able to imitate other good examples is a powerful benefit, along with having these examples as a spiritual accountability influence in your life. You can't do it alone.

Finally, you can't be passive. You have to try. You will fail, but you will be better off for trying and failing than if you don't try at all. Then you get up each day and live, as best you are able, the truth you know.

As you do these things, you will learn more truth, and you will try to live that truth with help from others. And God will forgive you, teach you, strengthen you, grow you, and encourage you.

Then you learn more truth, and you try to live that truth with help from others. As you do this, the Holy Spirit will increase your capacity to know, be, and do what you ought in an ever-ascending sweep upward.

Is there more? Of course. But we're trying to establish the baseline. Do you need to pray? Of course. Do you need to learn how to discern God's will? Of course. Do you need to learn how to walk in the Spirit? Of course. And you need to learn that self-effort will not do everything you need. There is an interplay between your responsibility and God's. So, while self-effort is not the only answer, you will never get where you need to go by being passive, careless, or ambivalent.

So, at the baseline,

- You become a truth sponge;
- You become an imitator of other, solid Christians;
- You become a bulldog in pursuit of the truth and the role-modeling you have benefited from so far, believing it will lead to more.

When you are faithful at that level, the Lord will give you more. When you are faithful at that next level, the Lord will give you still more. And so on, for the rest of your life.

Expanded Definition

So, after establishing that baseline, we start adding the things that need to be added, and that is where this book comes in. This book will give you a very simple outline of some of the foundational things you need to learn.

As I said, this book is not the most you need to know—it is the least. It is not the end of your learning about the Christian life; it is the beginning. After you have finished this book, there will still be things you don't know, don't live, and aren't able to do. But you will be closer than you were before. And this book will lay a foundation of information that you can use to build a lifetime of further learning.

Conclusion

There will be people who will feel that I left something essential out. I understand. It was a significant challenge to decide what to put in and what to leave out. As I said earlier, feel free to add anything you think I have left out as you read for yourself and as you teach others.

Overall, this book is a treasure trove of information that I wish I had had when I was just starting out in the Christian life. This is all information that, in the decades since I became a Christian, would have catapulted me faster forward if I had known and understood it from the beginning.

Put another way, this is all information that I would give my life to have known when I was a new believer. In fact, that is what I've done. I've given my life to learning and distilling this information to give you a leg up growing in your faith in an increasingly hostile world.

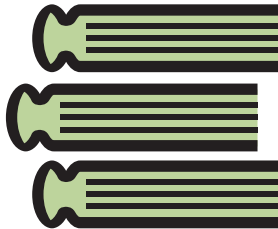
I have prayed for you that, after you finish this book, the Holy Spirit will guide you to the additional resources you will need to become a more complete Christian. For now, dive into chapter one and begin to “drink in” the wealth of information contained in these pages.

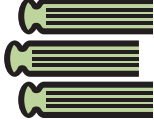
As a complete Christian, you need to:

- Know what you need to know
- Become what you need to be
- Do what you need to do

PART I

KNOW



*You can't believe
something until
you know it.* 

CHAPTER 1

THE KEY TO HAPPINESS

You were created *by* God, *for* God, and you will only be truly happy as a Christian who is growing *in* God.



CENTRAL PASSAGE: Matthew 22:37 ESV—“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

1. It is okay for a Christian to want to be happy.

It is okay for a Christian to want to be h_____.

The desire to be happy is the highest desire of the human heart. It is as Blaise Pascal wrote:

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.¹

However, Christians may feel vaguely guilty about wanting to be happy. We may think our highest desire ought to be something loftier, more self-sacrificing, more “spiritual.” However, C. S. Lewis suggests:

If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it

is a bad thing, I submit that this notion . . . is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.²

Hmmm. This opens up possibilities we may not have considered. Perhaps it might be okay with God for us to want to be happy . . . perhaps God might have actually even created us with this longing for happiness.

2. We naturally doubt that God alone is enough for our happiness.

We naturally doubt that God alone is enough for our happiness.

A problem arises when we don't quite believe that God alone is our source of true happiness. None of mankind has believed it naturally, ever since Adam and Eve.

Living in the Garden of Eden, *in paradise*, Satan slithered up to Eve and began a conversation that changed the course of history:

And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman *saw* that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was *desirable* to make one wise, she *took* from its fruit and ate. (Genesis 3:1–6, emphasis mine)

Eve saw, she desired, she took. Adam, her husband, followed suit.

Satan deceived Eve into doubting God's sufficiently benevolent intentions toward her, and convinced her that in order to be happy she had to take things into her own hands.

It turned out badly.

That is the strategy Satan has used with every one of us since then, because it works so well. We see, we desire, we take.

We, like our first parents, conclude that, in order to be happy, we can take what we want from what God offers us. However, if there are things God's will does not offer us that we think we need for complete happiness and fulfillment, we seek to get those things for ourselves. It turns out badly for us, too.

As believers, it is not that we don't want God. We do. And we want the things he offers us, most notably eternal life. But we also want other things (financial security, good health, respect from others, adequate recreation, friends, good circumstances, an absence of frustration, etc.), and, if the will of God does not give them to us, we are inclined to go outside his will to try to get them for ourselves.

Pascal wrote eloquently of this tendency:

There was once in man a true happiness of which now remains to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present[.] But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.³

3. We must seek our happiness in God.

We must seek our happiness in G_____.

God has created us with deep desires because he wants to use them to draw us to himself, the only one who can fulfill those deep desires. Many of the Psalms carry this theme:

1. "Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart" (37:4 ESV).
2. "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God" (42:1).
3. "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (119:103 NIV).
4. "In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (16:11 ESV).

What deep longings these Psalms express . . . but look to God for their fulfillment. Our desire for happiness and fulfillment is natural and good. The thing we must learn is where to look for these. Real, lasting happiness and fulfillment cannot be found in the things of this world, but only in God.

And think about it: what in this world, by itself, has made you happy for long? A new car, a new home, a new job, a new spouse, a new _____ (fill in the blank)?

Did it keep you happy? Of course not. If we are thinking clearly . . . if we are thinking to the end of the road (death and the afterlife) . . . only God can make and keep his children happy. That's the way we're wired.

Everything God asks of us, he does so to give something good to us, or to keep some harm from us. Therefore, the shortest distance between us and the life we long for is total obedience to Christ.

However, we often resist God's commands because we imagine that they *keep* us from complete happiness rather than *give* us complete happiness. We think that if we give ourselves in total obedience to God, he will make us a pauper missionary and send us to some forsaken part of the globe to waste our lives in third-world futility.

Of course, that's a lie from the pit of hell. But it can be very effective. And while that might not be your specific fear, just substitute your worst fear for "missionary" and "forsaken part of the globe," and "third-world futility," and that's your fear.

We fear that bondage to God will make us miserable (in spite of

the scriptural evidences to the contrary), and that we need to be free to follow our hearts.

Just the opposite is true, however. John Piper, in his book *Desiring God*, asserts that the chief end of man is not “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever,” as the Westminster Confession states. Rather, he contends that the chief end of man is “to glorify God *by* enjoying Him forever.”⁴

He outlines a philosophy of Christian pleasure:

1. The longing to be happy is a universal experience, and it is good—not sinful. In fact, it is a reflection of how God has created us.
2. We should not deny or resist our longing to be happy, but should pursue it.
3. The deepest and most enduring happiness is found only in God.⁵

Elsewhere Piper writes,

The fire of lust’s pleasures must be fought with the fire of God’s pleasures. If we try to fight the fire of lust with prohibitions and threats alone—even the terrible warnings of Jesus—we will fail. We must fight it with a massive promise of superior happiness. We must swallow up the little flicker of lust’s pleasure in the conflagration of holy satisfaction.⁶

Piper’s point is, “long” all you want. Long more than you currently do. But go to God to be filled. Piper’s zeal in promoting this worldview is rooted in his conviction that a commitment not to pursue the pleasures of the world is *not* sufficient to keep many from succumbing to them.

Piper argues that the only surefire way to resist the pleasures of the world is to be fulfilled in the greater pleasures of God. The highest calling of humanity is not the renunciation of joy but rather the consummation of joy, which can only be experienced in God.

4. Only when we are convinced that our true happiness lies in following God and not sin (anything outside the will of God) will we have the power to fully turn from sin.

Only when we are convinced that our true happiness lies in following G____ and not s____ (anything outside the will of God) will we have the power to fully turn from sin.

So, we see both from Scripture and from observation that we are hardwired by God to desire our own welfare, but this is not a bad thing. And, we see that to follow happiness fully is to follow God completely.

What's more, the genius of God's system is that he asks everything of us in order to give something good to us or to keep some harm from us.

For example, Scripture teaches us that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). If we sow that which is good, we reap that which is good. If we sow that which is bad, we reap that which is bad. So, God instructs us to sow that which is good. Doing so reaps good things and avoids bad things.

When we sow bad actions and attitudes, we reap personal pain, including enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, etc., as we read in Galatians 5:20–21. When we sow good attitudes and actions, we reap great personal pleasure, including love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, as we see in Galatians 5:22–23.

Which things would you rather have?

When God commands us to live righteous and holy lives, he is intending to spare us from the formidable list of negatives in Galatians 5:20–21: “enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions” (and much, much more). In its place, he wants to give us “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23).

Anything wrong with that?

Again, God asks everything of us in order to give something good to us or keep some harm from us. Therefore, the shortest

distance between us and the life we long for is total obedience to Christ.

When we come to deeply believe this principle, it helps us make the right decisions. In fact, when we make wrong decisions it is often because we simply don't believe the principle. We might get it right if we had to answer the question on a test, but when it comes to living it out in our daily lives, we prove by our disobedience that we simply don't believe the principle.

If we deeply believe that our true happiness lies in following God and not sin, it puts us on the lookout for opportunities to trust and obey him, and makes us wary of not trusting and obeying him.

As Timothy Keller said, "If you understand what holiness is, you come to see that real happiness is on the far side of holiness, not the near side."⁷

Conclusion

So, do you want to be happy? We all do. We must accept by faith that our true happiness lies in following God and not sin. We must resist the lie of the snake, that God does not have our best interests in mind and that we must take control of things ourselves in order to get what we need to be happy. Rather, we must give ourselves to the pursuit of the one who created us with deep longings (in order to draw us to himself), since he is the only one who can truly and permanently fulfill them.



REPETITION Is the Key to Mental Ownership

Chapter Review

1. It is okay for a Christian to want to be h_____.
2. We naturally d_____ that God alone is enough for our happiness.
3. We must seek our happiness in G_____.
4. Only when we are convinced that our true happiness lies in following G_____ and not s_____ will we have the power to fully turn from sin.

The Christian Life in 1,000 Words—Review

If something is important, you must repeat it until it changes you.

You were created *b*__ God, *f*__ God, and you will only be truly happy as a Christian who is growing *i*__ God.



THOUGHT/DISCUSSION **Is the Beginning of Understanding**

Answer these questions, either individually by journaling the answers or in a small discussion group.

1. What do you *naturally* think you might need other than (or in addition to) God to be happy in life?
2. What is your greatest fear in giving yourself completely to God?
3. Are you convinced that your true happiness is found in God and not in sin (anything outside the will of God)? If not, why do you think you doubt it?



DECISION TIME **Is the First Step to Change**

Answer these questions, either individually by journaling the answers or in a spiritual accountability group.

1. Have you made the decision to follow God completely as the source of true happiness in life?
2. If not, what do you think is the primary reason why? What could you do to bring yourself to the point where you would be willing to make that decision?



RECOMMENDED **Resource**

Desiring God, John Piper (especially chapter 1)