

# INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

(PUBLISHED 2008)

## **In Church but Not in Christ**

While speaking in a series of meetings several years ago, I was approached by a man during a break. He appeared visibly shaken by what I had said and told me he was a professor at his denomination's Bible college. He explained that for years he had taught his students to treat the Bible like a classic piece of literature—a book to read and to enjoy its beauty but not something through which Almighty God would speak directly to the reader. Through tears, he confessed that he had done this because he had not personally experienced God communicating with Him. But during that conference, the Spirit of God had spoken clearly to the man and reminded him that Christianity is fundamentally an interactive relationship between God and people. When this man was younger, he had experienced God's guidance in his life. As he grew older, however, and entered the academic world, he had steadily grown more distant from God. Eventually, his estranged relationship with God seemed normal for him. Now he assumed it also should be normative for the students he taught.

Here was a man who had studied the Bible all his life. Yet for him, Scripture had become merely a collection of ancient writings that had little direct application to his life. Now that this man's heart

had been awakened to the living God of those Scriptures, he realized he had been poisoning the minds of a generation of young people by teaching that God does not speak to His people. This man had experienced revival, and he was eager to re-enter the classroom to tell students that God is real, and that He wants to encounter every person.

Sadly, we experience this scenario regularly. There are far too many people who settle for practicing a sterile religion rather than enjoying a growing, vibrant, personal relationship with the living God.

## **God's Invitation**

God is not a concept or a doctrine. He is a Person who seeks a close, one-on-one relationship with you and me. God does not want us to merely believe in Him, He wants to relate to us on a personal level. He does not just want to hear us recite prayers. He wants to converse with us. God's plan is not to abandon Christians once we are born again, leaving us to build the best life we can. He does not intend that we simply use our wits to "get by," to bravely "survive" until we are finally ushered into heaven. God wants to be actively involved in our lives each day.

God knows what your life can become. Only He understands your full potential as His child. He does not want you to miss out on anything He has for you. I believe that within the heart of every Christian is an innate desire to know God and to do His will.

When you became a Christian, you were immediately adopted as a child of the heavenly king. The king's business became your business. And now, as your Savior and Lord, Christ wants to bring your life into the middle of His activity, which offers salvation to every person on earth. God Himself will give you the desire to serve and obey Him. The Holy Spirit will create within you a longing to know the Father's will and to become involved in what God is doing around you. Yet God has far more in store for your life than merely giving you an assignment to accomplish for Him. He wants you to have an intimate love relationship with Him that is real and personal. Jesus said: "This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and the One You have sent—Jesus Christ" (John 17:3).

## Eternal Life—Now

The essence of eternal life—and the heart of this book—is for you to personally know God the Father and Jesus Christ, His Son. Knowing God does not come through a program, a study, or a method. It is the result of a vibrant, growing, one-on-one relationship with God. Within this intimate connection, God will reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways so you can know Him in deeper and profound dimensions. As you relate to Him, God will invite you to join in His activity where He is already at work. When you obey what God tells you, He will accomplish through you things only He can do. As the Lord works in and through your life, you will come to know Him ever more closely.

Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance” (John 10:10). Would you like to experience life in its fullest and richest dimensions? You may, if you are willing to respond to God’s invitation to enjoy an intimate love relationship with Him.

## Prerequisite: A Saving Relationship with Jesus Christ

The pages that follow assume that you have already trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior and acknowledged Him to be the Lord of your life. If you have not made this most important decision, the rest of this book will have little meaning for you because spiritual matters can only be understood by those who have the Spirit of Christ dwelling within them. Scripture says: “The natural man does not welcome what comes from God’s Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to know it since it is evaluated spiritually” (1 Cor. 2:14).

Perhaps you were baptized as an infant. Or you may have regularly attended church since you were a child. You may even be a leader in your church. Baptism, worship attendance, and church involvement are all appropriate, obedient responses to a relationship with God. However, they do not *create* or *replace* the relationship. Was there an occasion when you repented to God for your sins and asked Christ to be your Savior and Lord? If not, then the most important thing you could possibly do right now is to obey what Scripture exhorts and settle this matter with God. Ask the Lord to speak to you as you read and consider the following Scriptures:

- Romans 3:23—All have sinned.
- Romans 6:23—Eternal life is a free gift of God.
- Romans 5:8—Because of His love, Jesus paid the death penalty for your sins.
- Romans 10:9–10—Confess Jesus as your Lord and acknowledge that God raised Him from the dead.
- Romans 10:13—Ask God to forgive your sins and trust Him to do so.

To place your faith in Jesus and receive His gift of eternal life you must:

- Recognize that God created you for a love relationship with Him. He wants you to love Him with all your being.
- Admit you are a sinner, and that you cannot save yourself.
- Believe Jesus paid the penalty for your sin by His death on the cross and that He rose from the dead in victory over death.
- Confess (agree with God about) your sins that separate you from Him.
- Repent (turn away from) your sins.
- Ask Jesus to save you by His grace, which is an undeserved gift.
- Turn over the control of your life to Jesus.

If you need help, call on a minister, a deacon, an elder, or a Christian friend. If you have just made this important decision, tell someone the good news of what God has done in your life. Then share your decision with your church.

## **Looking to Know God Better?**

You may be frustrated as a Christian because you know God has a more abundant life for you than you are presently experiencing. Or you may earnestly desire God's directions for your life as you seek to serve Him. Perhaps you have recently experienced tragedy and now you stand bewildered in the middle of a broken life, not knowing

what to do next. Whatever your present circumstances, my sincere prayer is that this book may help you to do the following:

- Believe and experience daily God's infinite love for you.
- Hear when God is speaking to you.
- Identify God's unmistakable activity in your life.
- Believe Him to be and to do everything He promises.
- Adjust your beliefs, character, and behavior to Him and His ways.
- Identify a direction He is taking in your life, and recognize what He wants to do through you.
- Know clearly how to respond to what He shows you.
- Experience God doing through you what only He can do.

These are not things that *I* can do or that *this book* can do for you. *Only God can accomplish these things.* I can serve as your guide, encourager, and, hopefully, as a catalyst to help you enjoy a deeper walk with God. I will share with you the biblical truths by which God has guided my life. I will recount for you some of the amazing works the Lord has done when God's people have applied biblical truths to following Him.

I invite you to interact with God as you read this book, asking Him to reveal the ways He wants you to apply these truths in your own life, family, ministry, job, and church. But take your time! Many people have told me that as they were reading this book, they suddenly encountered God face-to-face and He changed their lives forever. That is my prayer for you. As you read, take time to pause and pray, asking God to speak to you, to guide you, and to reveal how He wants you to respond. If God speaks clearly about something He wants to do in your life, don't move quickly on to the next chapter. Instead, camp out on what God said, and let Him show how He wants to implement that truth in your life. Once you feel you have processed what God wants you to understand, begin reading further to discover what else God has in store for you.

I have found that God always has a fresh and deeper truth He wants us to learn about Him. So once He has taught you one thing, get ready for the *next* marvelous truth God will soon introduce!

## Where Are You?

People can be in many different places along their spiritual walk. I've noted below some of the ways you might describe your spiritual life. See if one or more of these descriptions matches your present relationship with God:

nonexistent	plateaued	in decline	confused
exciting	growing	miraculous	victorious
discouraging	powerful	bewildered	defeated
dynamic	contagious	hopeless	joyful
sinful	embarrassing	deepening	ashamed

This book is unlike most you will read. Repeatedly, God has used the truths it explains to initiate a profound encounter with those who read them. So before you go further, take a moment to ask yourself, "*What does God want to do in my life as I read this book?*" Pause now to pray, and ask God to accomplish His will in your life as you continue.

## Your Teacher

Jesus said, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit—the Father will send Him in My name—will teach you all things" (John 14:26). God's Holy Spirit is your personal teacher. He will draw you into a closer walk with God as He reveals God's purposes and ways to you. Jesus said, "If anyone wants to do His will, he will understand whether the teaching is from God or if I am speaking on My own." (John 7:17).

That is the criteria for this and any book. The Holy Spirit, who resides within you, will always confirm in your heart the truth of Scripture. When I share in this book what I perceive as a biblical principle, you can depend on the Holy Spirit to affirm whether that teaching comes from God or not. You shouldn't automatically take my word for it! Always ask the Holy Spirit to verify—through

Scripture—what I am teaching. As you read this book, be sure to nurture your relationship with God through prayer, meditation, and Bible study so you will be able to receive and obey everything God tells you.

## Your Source of Authority

The Bible is God's Word to you. The Holy Spirit honors and uses God's Word as He speaks to you. The Scriptures will be your source of authority for how you live your Christian life and how you relate to God. You can't depend on human traditions, your experience, or the opinions of others to be accurate authorities on God's will and ways. While these can be helpful, they must always be evaluated in light of the teaching of Scripture.

Anything of spiritual significance that happens in your life will be a result of God's activity in you. He is infinitely more concerned with your life and your relationship with Him than you or I could possibly be. Let God's Spirit bring you into an intimate relationship with the Lord of the universe "who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think—according to the power that works in you" (Eph. 3:20). *Would you pray at the outset of your reading, and surrender your life to God so He may guide and instruct you in any way He pleases?* As you prepare to obey Him, trust that God who has already begun a good work in you will complete it in His time (Phil. 1:6).

I urge you to allow the Holy Spirit to take your life to a new, higher, dynamic level in your walk with God. You may be presently enjoying a vibrant Christian life. But I can assure you, there is still much more God wants you to experience of Him, for He is an infinite being. You may have been disappointed in the past. Perhaps you attempted other studies or made other commitments to grow spiritually, but your enthusiasm eventually waned and your growth fizzled. I encourage you: Don't let any previous failure or disappointment stop you from confidently moving forward with God. No matter where we are, why would any of us ever become satisfied with the current status of our walk with God when there is so much He wants to do in and through our lives?

Each chapter of this book includes a section featuring questions to ponder, set apart like the one on the following page. You might

wish to keep a notebook nearby as you consider these issues and apply the book's message to your life circumstances.

### **Questions for Reflection**

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1. Are you certain you are a child of God, that He has forgiven you of your sin? If not, stop right now and settle that matter with the Lord.
2. What in particular would you like to see God do in your life as you study this book? Do you long for a deeper walk with Him? Do you need victory over a particular sin in your life? Do you desire more profound times in prayer and reading God's Word? Would you like to gain a deeper sense of joy in your life or to better understand God's will? Ask God to address these specific issues as you read.
3. Do you have questions regarding the Christian life or your own personal experience? If so, list them in the margin of this book or in a prayer journal, and then watch to see how God guides you into the truth of your circumstances.