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"Steve did it again. This real look into the lives of biblical teens as they might have sounded and lived today delivers an incredible message of love, truth, purity and freedom. What a great book for students to think through and plug into their lives."

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"Steve Gerali has done a wonderful job of taking teenagers from the Bible and retelling their stories in a relevant and captivating way without losing the biblical truth. High school students will easily identify with the issues that these teenagers were facing and learn from their stories."

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"Instead of telling students what to do, Steve engages their hearts and minds in a manner that will lead to transformation and hope. I wish I had this type of spiritual encouragement when I was a younger believer in high school."

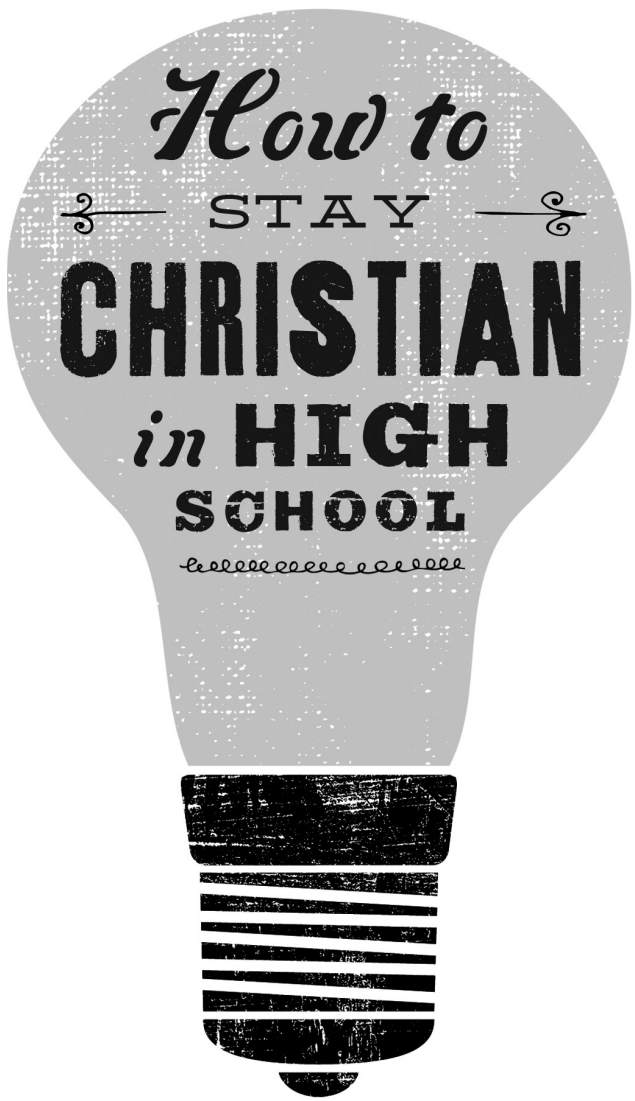
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"Steve Gerali did a superb job of smoothly connecting story, scripture, and getting into the lives of teens today. How refreshing to see young Bible characters being placed into our 21st century to bring hope to Christian kids in high school today."

—MICHAEL L. BEATTY, commissioned minister,
Mokuaukaia Cong'l Church Kailua-Kona, HI,
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How to

— STAY —

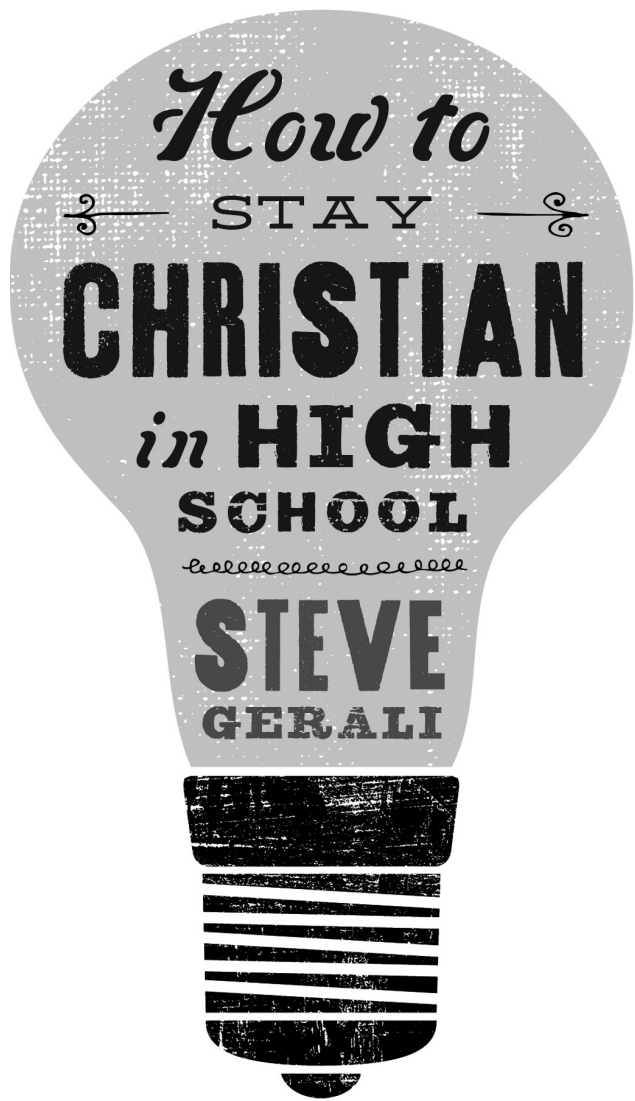
CHRISTIAN

in **HIGH**

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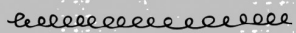


*How to*

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**CHRISTIAN**

*in* **HIGH  
SCHOOL**



**STEVE  
GERALI**

NAV PRESS 

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ISBN 978-1-61291-571-5

Cover design by gearbox  
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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Gerali, Steve.

How to stay Christian in high school / Steve Gerali.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-57683-424-7

1. High school students—Religious life. 2. Christian teenagers—Religious life.

I. Title.

BV4531.3.G47 2004

248.8'3—dc22

2004006298

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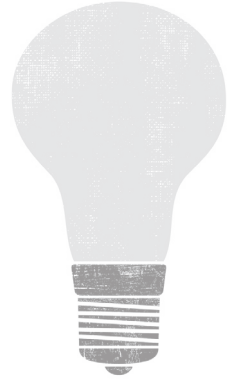
Repackage first published in 2014 under ISBN 978-1-61291-571-5.

Printed in the United States of America

18 17 16 15 14

5 4 3 2 1

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# IS IT POSSIBLE TO BE CHRISTIAN IN HIGH SCHOOL?



"It's really hard to be a Christian; I hate it!"

That was Mark talking, right after youth group. He was a typical high school sophomore—tall, handsome, healthy, energetic, possessing a great sense of humor. Being outgoing and friendly, Mark hung out with lots of friends at school and church, and he loved to laugh and joke around. Mark also worked hard to get good grades, played soccer on the JV team at school, and had started a lawn-mowing business so he could save money for a car (when he got his license). Mark loved life. His enthusiasm was contagious.

Mark grew up in a "Christian home" from day one. The weekend after his folks brought him home from the hospital, they were in church. His family had always been active in their congregation, so Mark and his sisters never knew life apart from Christian worship and fellowship. And Mark's parents were super-busy in the

congregation. In fact, they did everything from teaching Sunday school to helping on cleanup days. So Mark grew up with a love for service too. He often helped wherever he could and was a vital part of the youth group's leadership core.

Mark heard all the Bible stories in Sunday school, and he loved them. He was dedicated to the Lord as an infant, asked Jesus into his life when he was seven years old, was baptized when he was ten. He recommitted his life to Christ at junior high camp in seventh grade . . . re-re-committed his life in eighth grade . . . and re-re-re-committed his life during his freshman year of high school.

"It was so much easier being a Christian when I was little," Mark continued, as we sat down together at a table holding several bowls of leftover snacks from the meeting. "I'm really confused, because so many things about it seem contradictory. And that makes it too hard. This isn't my idea of abundant life."

"What do you mean, Mark?" I replied.

"Well, for example, I've been told all my life that Christians are supposed to be *in* the world but not *of* the world, right?"

"Right. Jesus talks about that in the gospel of John."

"Okay, so I hear my parents and my youth pastor always saying I shouldn't hang out with non-Christian friends. Christians aren't supposed to go to parties or have [he makes air quotes here] '*unequally yoked relationships*.' A lot of my friends at church are home-schooled or going to Christian schools. That way they can stay separated from the influences of the world. But I'm in public school, so I get attitude from my Christian friends when I miss youth group activities because of soccer. My youth pastor has even confronted me about my priorities.

"But here's the thing: Every time we have an outreach event at youth group, they tell us to bring our non-Christian friends! Can you believe that? I'm expected to be a witness to my non-Christian

friends. Don't you see the mixed message—*I'm not supposed to have any non-Christian friends!* How can I have non-Christian friends if I can't hang out with them? If I can't hang out with them, then they'll only be casual friends. And you can't talk about deep things—like a relationship with Christ—with casual friends.

"I mean, I can't go up to the guys on my soccer team and just start telling them about Jesus. They don't know me, and I don't know them well enough to talk about deep stuff. So how do I beat the guilty feelings I have over not being able to 'witness' [more air quotes] when I'm not close enough to them to talk about Christ?"

I could see that Mark felt defeated. He reached out, took a couple of pretzels, and began toying with them on the table as he kept thinking. "That's not all," he continued, with a new burst of energy. "I know we can't be perfect, but we're *expected* to be perfect. Christians are supposed to be all righteous and have everything together. But then we're told we *don't* have to have it all together. But the truth is, we're expected to have it all together. So how can I be expected to do something that I can't do?"

"This is just another mixed message! How am I supposed to be a Christian in high school?"

## **TESTING THOSE MIXED MESSAGES**

Can you relate to Mark? I sure can. He's committed and passionate about living for Christ. He really loves Jesus. On the other hand, I understood his frustration. He was working hard at being a Christian and being a normal teenager in high school. It seemed those two aspects of his life were always colliding, resulting in a sense of defeat.

You see, Mark is a thinker. As he thought things through, he ran headlong into contradictory messages from parents and church leaders. Yet, as he once told me, he felt guilty questioning the

things he'd been taught as a kid about being a Christian.

What could I say to Mark? For one thing, I suggested that the same book of the Bible that tells him to be separated from the world also gives him permission to question and challenge the things he'd learned. For example, in 1 John 4:1, the apostle John says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (NASB).

That's right. God gives you permission to test the teachings you hear. He will faithfully reveal what's true. God won't get angry, nor will He get His feelings hurt, when you think through, question with a proper attitude, or challenge the things you hear and learn. The Holy Spirit is renewing your mind constantly. That means He is solidifying and internalizing His truth in you. He wants you to think.

That's why this is a Th1nk Book. It's *not* a big "To Do" list. It won't be filled with steps or formulas to follow for better Christian living. You see, anyone can follow a list, or mimic a pattern of behaviors, and think they are Christian. Let me explain what I mean by talking about my background for a moment. . . .

My family heritage is Italian, and I am full-blooded, 100 percent Italian. My grandparents on both my father's and mother's sides came to the United States directly from Italy. So imagine how I felt when a friend gave me a book titled *How to Be Italian*. It listed all the funny stereotypical behaviors that Italians supposedly do, like using their hands when they talk, or saying certain phrases like "Whatsa you problem?" or "Forgetta bout it." You get the picture. "The book reminds me of you," my friend said.

As I think about that silly little book, I now realize it should be titled, *How to Act Like an Italian*. Do you see the difference? A guy like Mark could pick up the book and mimic all those so-called

"Italian ways." But that wouldn't make him Italian any more than acting like a monkey would turn him into a hairy, tree-climbing chimpanzee! The point is, many people refer to actions when describing a Christian. But acting like a Christian doesn't make you one—nor does it make you a better one.

People may think that what they do defines who they are. The truth is that *who* you are defines *what* you do.

## HOW THIS BOOK CAN HELP

Doing "Christian things" won't make you more of a Christian. But being a Christian will make you behave differently. So in this book we will look at what it means to *be* Christian, *think* Christian, and *behave* Christian in high school. The method is simple: Starting in chapter 2, we'll look at real teenagers in the Bible: Mary, Daniel, Joseph, brothers James and John, and Timothy. I think these teens understood that being God's person shaped how they acted. They faced the same types of pressures and problems you face today. They were not super-spiritual teen wonders. They had no great powers and no more of a "special connection" to God than you have. They were just like you. They learned how to *be* God's person, and that shaped what they *did* as people of God.

To help you see them as real, and see how they relate to you, I've retold their stories with a modern-day twist. I've imagined how some of their conversations would have flowed, based on lots of talks I've had with teens today. But the thing is, are you ready to use your imagination too? I'm inviting you to come along on this trek with an open mind, ready to think things through. I also invite you to have an open heart before God as you read. I'm going to ask you to use your imagination and step into these biblical teens' lives, conversations, and struggles. You'll probably see that they had a hard time living out their faith, just like you do.

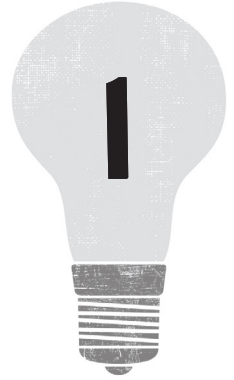
And I'm inviting you to . . . *think*. I hope you will think long and hard about how all of this applies to you, personally, on a daily basis. As you walk through your high school, every day, remember that God is at work in you. He is making you great, through all your ups and downs, all your successes and failures. He is totally in love with you and has a plan for you that includes purpose and fulfillment.

So let's look closely at who you are in God. Ask Him to help you see how being a Christian defines your identity, shapes the way you think, and affects your behaviors.

Ask God to help you think it through.

—Steve Gerali

# "I AM" IN CHRIST



*"It sounds like this is all about you and not about God, Drew."*

*"What do you mean?"*

*"Well, you're concentrating so hard on doing the right things that your attention is out of focus."*

*"You mean I shouldn't do anything about my temptations?" Drew asked.*

*"No, all I'm saying is: Focus on Him, not on the problems."*

I have two teenage daughters. Almost every day, as they were growing up, I would tell them certain things that I never wanted them to forget. When they went to bed at night, when they left to go to school each day, when they went away for the weekend, I would always say: "Remember *whose* you are."

One day a friend overheard me. He said, "Don't you mean remember *who* you are?"

"No," I replied. "I know that they will have to learn about

who they are. But I want them to know *whose* they are—that they belong to God and to me.”

When a person trusts Christ for salvation, the Bible says many things happen to that person besides receiving eternal life. One of those things is becoming part of God’s family. If you thought that all people who are created are all God’s *children*, you were wrong. They are all God’s *creation*, but not necessarily His children. Think about it. John 1:12-13 says, “to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” Paul kind of says the same thing in Galatians 3:26, stating that we are “children of God through faith [in Christ Jesus].”

Only the person who trusts in Jesus is a child of God. The apostle Paul refers to it as being *in Christ*. Being God’s child brings great responsibilities but it also provides great privileges. Most of the time we hear only about the responsibilities, and these often come with a list of things we have to do because we wear Christ’s name. Now don’t get this wrong; those responsibilities are important, and we’ll talk about them later in this chapter. But if we hear only about the responsibilities, we can become discouraged.

There are privileges too. When I told my daughters to remember whose they were, I wasn’t just reminding them to watch their behavior. I was also encouraging them to enjoy their family life.

So now that you’re clear about whose you are, are you ready to get more specific about your own privileges and responsibilities? Let’s jump in by looking at three implications of being *in Christ*. The first two focus on the privileges, and the third one focuses on the responsibility. I’ve come up with three words to help you remember: Ownership, Sonship, and Partnership.

## **WHOSE I AM IMPLIES OWNERSHIP**

How well I remember the day when each of my daughters was born! Those two days are riveted into my memory forever. Years later, I recall thinking, *These two precious, wonderful, beautiful girls . . . belong to me!*

The more I thought about it, the more profound the idea became. I started to think that someday they would get married and change their names. But that didn't make them any less mine. They have my DNA. My genetic code is written through them, and no matter what, they would always belong to me. They could do nothing to change that.

That's exactly what it's like when you belong to God. Ownership means you belong to Him forever. Stop and think about that for a minute. If you are a Christian you belong to the God of the universe, the God who just speaks and things suddenly exist, who holds all things in the palm of His hand. He's the almighty, all-knowing, all-being God. He *owns* you. How cool is that?

Here's how it works. At one point, sin owned you, because you were born in sin. The book of Romans tells us that because of Adam and Eve's sin, a sinful nature was passed on from generation to generation. Carefully study the verses below to see how this generational problem unfolded . . . and then was solved through Christ.

*You know the story of how Adam landed us in the dilemma we're in—first sin, then death, and no one exempt from either sin or death. That sin disturbed relations with God in everything and everyone, but the extent of the disturbance was not clear until God spelled it out in detail to Moses. So death, this huge abyss separating us from God, dominated the landscape from Adam to Moses. Even those who didn't sin precisely as Adam did by disobeying a specific command of God still had to experience this termination of life, this separation from God. But Adam, who got us into this, also points ahead to the*

*One who will get us out of it.*

*Yet the rescuing gift is not exactly parallel to the death-dealing sin. If one man's sin put crowds of people at the dead-end abyss of separation from God, just think what God's gift poured through one man, Jesus Christ, will do! There's no comparison between that death-dealing sin and this generous, life-giving gift. The verdict on that one sin was the death sentence, the verdict on the many sins that followed was this wonderful life sentence. If death got the upper hand through one man's wrongdoing, can you imagine the breathtaking recovery life makes, sovereign life, in those who grasp with both hands this wildly extravagant life-gift, this grand setting-everything-right, that the one man Jesus Christ provides?*

*Here it is in a nutshell: Just as one person did it wrong and got us in all this trouble with sin and death, another person did it right and got us out of it. But more than just getting us out of trouble, he got us into life! One man said no to God and put many people in the wrong, one man said yes to God and put many in the right. (Romans 5:12-19, MSG)*

As you can see, along with the sin nature came death, making you dead . . . in sin. That means you were *in sin*—dead (owned by sin). The only solution to becoming alive is to be *in Christ*. Christ has to become your owner.

So He bought you: "You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). What a great price was paid to buy you—the blood of Christ! Consequently, this means you are incredibly valued by God. He thinks that you are so valuable that He bought you by dying for you. Ownership means you are highly treasured—esteemed, cherished, beloved—by God.

So many times I run into Christian high school students who

think they are worthless. Satan wants you to believe that lie. You are not worthless; Jesus Christ bought you, and He paid the highest price He could to own you. You may not be *worthy* of that price, but you certainly are far from *worthless*.

Being bought and owned by Christ is what theologians call the act of *redemption*. Redemption doesn't just mean you were purchased. It also implies that you were bought and then remade, new and improved. When you are in Christ, you are continuously made into a brand-new person. The old things, the old attitudes, habits, and behaviors of your sinful nature, keep on passing away or dying out. That new person God is making you into keeps on becoming new, stronger, more dominant. As Paul put it: "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). And the new keeps coming! I know this is a hard concept to grasp, but think of it like this. There is never an old; when God redeems, He only keeps making you new. You are not the same person you were a second ago because that person was changed into a new person.

God also reminds you that *He* is the one doing all the work, not you. Because *He* owns you, *He* does the work of perfecting you and maturing you. All of this reminds me of a conversation I once had with a guy named Drew.

Drew was a typical high school student who believed that God had saved him, but that he (Drew) had to work hard to prove that he was saved. Every time he messed up, he would get discouraged. One day I confronted Drew about his thinking patterns.

"You know, it sounds like this is all about *you* and not about *God*, Drew."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it sounds as if you're concentrating so hard on doing the *right* things that your attention is not on the God who really is in

control of your life. You are trusting in your own power to overcome some problem instead of trusting in the Lord to make you new. You're focusing more on the problems and on changing rather than on the God who can control the problems and is already changing you."

"Does that mean that I just shouldn't do anything about my temptations?" Drew asked.

"No, it means remembering that God started a great work in you and that He will complete that great work like Philippians 1:6 says. *He* started the work and *He* completes it. All I'm saying is: *Focus on Him, not on the problems.*"

God owns you and values you. And because He owns you, He is making you new all the time. What a relief, right?

## **WHOSE I AM IMPLIES SONSHIP**

One day an important man came to Jesus. He didn't want anyone to see him because he was a religious leader and teacher. He was expected to have all the answers about the spiritual life. So he came at night, when there were no crowds around Jesus, to find out: *Is there a guaranteed way that I can be a part of the kingdom of God?*

Jesus answered Nicodemus's question by telling him that he needed to be born again. Well, you can imagine a grown man's reaction to that! Nicodemus had never heard such a thing before. He never read about rebirthing in any of the sacred writings. None of the prophets ever mentioned it, and Moses never wrote about it in the Law. What did Jesus mean?

Nicodemus truly wanted to be part of the *kingdom* of God; he didn't get it when Jesus started to talk about being a part of the *family* of God. But Jesus was telling Nicodemus that, as a family member, you're already in the kingdom. He explained to Nicodemus that he needed to be born spiritually into God's family. (You can read this entire story in John 3.)

Jesus talked about something the religious group had never heard. He was introducing them, and us, to the fact that we get the distinct privilege of becoming God's children. That's sonship. That carries a lot of weight.

The apostles John and Paul help us understand this more clearly. They knew what it was to be a part of God's family. John says that because we are called the sons and daughters of God this shows that God is pouring His great love on us (see 1 John 3:1). It's a love that can never separate us from God, according to Paul:

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:*

*"For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)*

Think about it! Because you have sonship in God's family, He loves you with a great love from which you can never be separated. That love is so enormous that you can't even wrap your mind around it. It is limitless; it never has any conditions; it can never be changed, affected, or taken away. This means nothing you can do will ever dent or put a ripple in God's love for you. Fill in the blanks:

But what if I did \_\_\_\_\_ ?  
 But what if I said \_\_\_\_\_ ?

But what if I thought \_\_\_\_\_ ?

But what if I went \_\_\_\_\_ ?

But what if I tried \_\_\_\_\_ ?

But what if I \_\_\_\_\_ ?

No matter what you put in those blanks . . . God would still love you.

On the other hand, Satan wants you to think that you can screw things up when it comes to God's love for you. He wants you to believe that God will love you less if you mess up. That's not true. In the Romans 8 passage that you just read, Paul supplies a list of categories that includes just about everything bad that you can think of (plus, he adds anything that you *can't* think of that would be created), and he says that because of your *sonship*, none of these things can separate you from God's love. He will never *not* love you; you're His kid. That also means He will never love someone else more than He loves you.

The other side of Satan's lie is that, while God will love you, He will love others more than you. While my wife was pregnant with our second baby, I remember worrying that I might not love this new child as much as I love my first child. I loved my first daughter so much that I didn't think I had the capacity to love another child to the same degree. We have this idea that there is only so much love in us, and that when it's used up, well . . . it's used up. How ridiculous! I learned fast that my capacity to love was far, far greater than I had thought. My second daughter was born, and I loved her instantly and equally as much. And the amazing thing is that my love for both of them keeps growing and growing. Now, if I am a limited man, and I can love my children like that, how much more can an unlimited God love His children?

You see, God doesn't love others more than you. You don't

have to compete for His love. And you don't have to earn it! We think that we can get more of God's love if only we were better in our behavior. There's Satan's lie again. You are God's child. That sonship means you are the receiver of His great love. It is an unlimited love that you can't alter by doing bad things or good things. You get it all.

So, should I just kick back and enjoy that love? No. There's a little matter of expressing some gratitude. Being God's child and getting all this love makes me feel very free and it makes me want to do things for God. God's love motivates me to do good things because I'm so thankful to Him. As a matter of fact, Paul felt the same thing. He said that it is the love of Christ that compels him (see 2 Corinthians 5:14). Christ's love, demonstrated by His death for me, is the motivation for me to live for Him. His love drives, or compels, me to want to please Him.

I hope you're getting this. I hope you feel that freedom and motivation, too, because it comes with the territory of *being* God's child. Take a minute and think about it, because there's more.

Not only do you have sonship because you are *born* into God's family but you also have sonship because you are *adopted* into God's family. It's the ultimate double whammy of blessing! You're His child because you chose Him by faith. And you're His child because He chose you by adoption.

"Adoption" is also a technical, theological term in the Bible, and it is a very cool thing. Paul talks about this in the book of Galatians. He tells the believers in Galatia that they are sons and daughters by adoption.

*That is the way it is with us: When we were minors, we were just like slaves ordered around by simple instructions (the tutors and administrators of this world), with no say in the conduct of our own lives.*

*But when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent his Son, born among us of a woman, born under the conditions of the law so that he might redeem those of us who have been kidnapped by the law. Thus we have been set free to experience our rightful heritage. You can tell for sure that you are now fully adopted as his own children because God sent the Spirit of his Son into our lives crying out, "Papa! Father!" Doesn't that privilege of intimate conversation with God make it plain that you are not a slave, but a child? And if you are a child, you're also an heir, with complete access to the inheritance. (Galatians 4:3-7, MSG)*

Adoption gives a person all the rights and privileges of the family that he or she is adopted into. This is done because the parent, out of great love, chooses to give these things. Paul says that because Christ redeemed you (bought you—ownership), He adopts you too. Therefore you are no longer a slave to sin, Satan, and the world. Adoption gives you all the rights of a free person.

The Galatians knew about these things because some of them were once slaves or now owned slaves. During the time when Paul wrote this letter to them, Rome ruled the world. The Romans believed that the people of Rome were far superior to everyone else, so they'd often take slaves to do their labor. Being a slave could range from working for someone to being in chains for hard labor. One thing for sure: a slave had no rights. Slaves could not own property, they could not participate in many of the luxuries of the time, they couldn't go where they wanted to go or do what they wanted to do. If a slave made the master upset, the master could have the slave punished severely or even put to death. Obviously, slaves lived in fear. The only way he or she could be free was to be adopted as the child of a free person.

If a slave was adopted, he or she became part of the family.

That person received everything the family received, including the privilege of sharing in the family inheritance. He or she would be called by the adopted family's name and be equal to the children of that family. Adoption was sonship, and sonship was more about privilege than responsibility.

Paul says that God *adopted* you! Because He adopted you, "you are no longer a slave, but God's child, and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir" (Galatians 4:7). A lot of students miss the point on this, so follow the logic closely.

I hear Christian high school students say that their life is crummy. They think that because they are Christians (God's children) that God is going to make life boring and no fun—and make them into nerds. And God won't allow them to have really great friends.

That sounds like bondage to me. You are the child of the King of the Universe. He adopted you, and you wear His name. Not only that, He allows you to be part of the inheritance that He has waiting for His beloved ones. All that He has is yours because, as Paul says, you are an heir. An heir is a person legally entitled to the properties, riches, and assets of the father. An heir is also entitled to the rank that the father has; for example, if he is king then the heir has the rank of ruler. So . . . what if you are adopted by the King of the Universe? If you are part of this inheritance, and if God didn't spare His only Son to adopt you, won't He freely give you all good things? Simple logic says that God adopted me *in order to give me good things*, not to make me friendless, boring, mundane, and nerdy.

Sonship means you are part of God's family. He is your Father. He loves you, and nothing can change or alter that. You have His spiritual DNA coursing through your being. You are adopted. You wear His name, which carries great freedom. You are heir to all that is His. You will actually reign with Christ someday: "For if, by

the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17).

## **WHOSE I AM IMPLIES PARTNERSHIP**

When you enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ you enter into a partnership. That means you share things with Him, you have a special association with Him, and you get to be an active participant in what He is doing. If you are still thinking, then you are realizing that this must come with great privileges too. But it also has its responsibilities.

Let's get one thing out in the open right away about responsibilities to God: They are not meant to generate fear in us. They are meant to draw us into the great things that God is doing. In that sense, the privilege clearly outweighs the responsibility.

Here's how it works. You and I both know that God is doing great things all over the world. He does this daily and has been doing it since the beginning of time. He does great and marvelous things. By being *in Christ* you are allowed to be a part of those great things. God makes you His partner. I don't know about you, but I want to be a partner in something exciting and great that God is doing . . . and the crazy thing is that He lets me. That's quite a privilege and a very cool partnership.

This means that God doesn't *demand* that we tell our friends about Christ. We receive the *privilege* of being the person who tells the story. God is going to do something great in the lives of the people at your school. He is! You can get on that ride and have a firsthand, up close, down and dirty partnership in that great thing, or you can sit back and miss it. God allows you to be His partner, so be it. Being God's partner means that you will always win, even

if it doesn't feel like it, or even if you don't see the end result right away.

Peter reminds us that we are not only partners in Christ's inheritance but also in His tough times: "Rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ" (1 Peter 4:13). Ouch! That doesn't sound like fun. It may not be, but it is a whole lot easier to take when we know that the end means we win, because God wins: "so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Peter 4:13).

Another way that we are in partnership with God is that we are allowed to imitate God. That's right, *imitate* Him. Consider Ephesians 5:1-2: "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Imitating God doesn't mean that I have to pretend to be perfect or that I have to walk on eggshells out of fear that I might do something wrong. The only way I imitate God is in His love. Even then I don't actually reproduce His love; He works through me. I get to be *partners* with God in loving people. It's like I'm going to be the conduit through which His love flows. God is going to pour His love through me into the lives of others. When He is pouring His love through me, I am being like Jesus. I am imitating Christ. This is a fun partnership.

We've looked at several ways we are in partnership with Christ. Let's look at one more: The Bible says that we are partners in a ministry of reconciliation. This means God is making the world right with Himself through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. As He is doing that, He is letting us help by giving us the role of being God's representative to explain what God is already doing. God calls His partners who do this "ambassadors." Here is where Paul explains it:

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:17-20)*

An ambassador is a dignitary, a spokesperson, a representative, an honored guest in a foreign place (the list can go on, but you get the idea). That's what God says we are, and that He speaks through us on Christ's behalf to encourage people to be reconciled to Him.

Lots of people thirst for God's love. If you are in this partnership with God, then He is going to let His love flow through you. It will knock people over—as if they were taking a drink from a fire hose. I want to go on this ride!

So many people are afraid that they are going to mess up God's work. Again, that's Satan wanting to rob you of your partnership. The key word is "partner." God isn't just handing things over to you. He isn't taking a hands-off approach. He isn't setting you up to fail. He is still, and always, in control.

I heard a youth pastor tell a youth group one time to imagine standing before God one day . . . "You see all of the other students from your school there too. God opens His books, and your non-Christian friends' names are not there. So those kids have to be cast into hell, into the eternally burning lake of fire. As your friend is being carried away to eternal judgment, that friend may turn to you and say, 'Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you show me Christ's love?'"

I wanted to stand up and yell: "That will never happen!"

Because it's not true. It's not even in the Bible. Romans 1:20 is clear. It says that every person will be without excuse when they stand before God. That means that they will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that they rejected Christ, because God loves them and wants them to have every chance. Nobody will be caught with their pants down, because God is in control. He loves those unsaved friends of ours more than we do. And He will never entrust the eternity of anyone into the hands of a mere mortal. Can you imagine it? God telling people that they have to go to hell because somebody dropped the ball and didn't do the job? What kind of a loving and all-knowing God would entrust the eternity of someone to another sinful human being? That's not loving, nor is it smart.

Jesus did the job. Jesus does the job. The Holy Spirit convicts people of sin and draws them into a relationship with Christ. That's His role, not yours.

But you do get to be His partner in this. Look at it like this. He is drawing these people into a relationship with Himself, and someone is going to get a chance to be His representative, His mouthpiece, His love, His partner. If you don't do it, you'll miss that joyful experience, and He'll give someone else the privilege. He is not willing that anyone should perish, so He's going to hold the reins and let another be His partner in this great adventure. (By the way, you're not going to mess it up, because it's a partnership. That means that He is walking alongside you the whole way.)

When my kids were very little, I would ask them if they wanted to drive the car. "Yes! Yes!" they cried. I'd sit them on my lap, and they would grab the steering wheel, white-knuckling their tiny little fingers. I would then drive around the parking lot, allowing them to steer. They *couldn't* reach the pedals, of course, and the car was never out of my control. They couldn't make a wrong turn because I also had access to the wheel, and I was much

more powerful than they were.

They thought they were driving the car. But really, who was driving? My point is simple: I let them be part of a partnership with me, a partnership of driving that car. Partnership with God is like that. Partnership with God doesn't mean that He does His part and then you do your part as a solo act. He partners *through* you. When you look at partnership like that, the privileges far outweigh the responsibilities.

So do you want to drive the car? Think about it.

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*If you want to stay a Christian in high school,  
be absolutely certain WHOSE you are.*

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## THINK IT THROUGH

1. Think about the worst thing you have ever done. Has it made God love you less? Why or why not? What points from this chapter have helped you answer this question?
2. What concept from this chapter most encourages you? Why?
3. What would you tell a Christian friend who feels worthless?
4. How does being a partner with Christ affect your day-to-day life?
5. Do you ever worry about your salvation? What biblical truths in this chapter seem to help?
6. What does it mean to you that "Jesus did the job"? Think: How will this truth affect your life today?