



REIGNITE YOUR FAITH

The First Step
to Becoming
Unburdened





**I AM GETTING PAID,
YET I AM THE ONE BEING CONVICTED**

I was in a coaching meeting with a high performing sales executive who had recently given his life to Christ. He had such joy and peace. He said that he fills his days with listening to sermons, singing to great worship music, fellowshiping, and sharing his faith with relatives who don't yet know Christ. He said that coming to Christ transformed how he saw his work and how he interacted with potential clients and their staff. Gone are the days of flirting with the women in the office. Instead, he sees them more as God does. He respects them and looks to do his job with excellence as a means to share Christ with them.

He tells me that he now "gets it." Everything is about Christ. Everything he does is an opportunity to say "thank you" for all He has sacrificed and gave in order to adopt him as His son.

As he spoke, I found my heart screaming, "I want that back!" I found myself remembering 1989. I was a 20-year-old student at NYU attending a few-week-old new church, Redeemer Presbyterian Church of New York City. As Tim Keller preached, the Holy Spirit used his words to draw me deeply to Him, and I gave my life to Him. Each week I would take copious notes. I would think about the sermon all week long. I could not wait to hear the next one. I wanted more and more.

Where did that hunger go? Where did my love for Christ go? Where is all the risk-taking I did back then - confessing embarrassing sins, sharing my faith, entering into deep theological discussions with non-Christian friends and family members?



Have you forsaken your first love?

As I listened to my client share the joy he has in Christ, it hit me in a way that I had not felt before - that I have forsaken my first love. Yet even as I type, it leads me almost to tears to realize that despite the fact that I regularly forsake Him, He has continued to be so good to me. I don't deserve Him, my wife, my kids, my friends, the love I feel for them, my practice, or any other gifts He has given me. Yet He loves to show His children grace.

You would think that with the hits I have taken in the past, hits that brought me to my knees, I would be one who constantly fights to show Christ gratitude for all He has done for me. I wish that were so. But sometimes I am so stubborn and hard-hearted. Despite mentors, coaches, my wife, friends, and some counselors urging me to consistently pursue Christ, I put Him on the side while I pursue the god of Significance. I am behaving like such an idiot. Sometimes it seems like I come close to fitting the Biblical definition of a fool. I can preach my heart out in meetings with clients, and then not apply my own advice. Usually I do share that I myself need to implement what I am sharing with them, but I still feel like a hypocrite.

What happens if you try to have Christ and...

Recently I heard a sermon by my pastor, Aaron Messner, of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Decatur, Georgia in which he called us to leave the world of cowardice and really sacrifice for Christ despite the fact that we will face persecution. I saw that I have allowed my fear of persecution to get in the way of my fully living for Christ. I wanted Christ and I wanted a comfortable life. How foolish could I be? That is like asking God to make liquid and ice out of the same molecules at the same time.

I have wanted man's approval so much that my heart was becoming hard. My thought-life was filled with fantasies of success, of the great things God could do in my practice. These vainglorious fantasy times revealed how ungrateful I had become. They also showed me how much I longed to have both Christ and a comfortable life... Let's be real: I wanted Christ, and I wanted to be rich.





WHAT I LEARNED FROM ATTENDING REDEEMER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NYC

Attending Redeemer for 13 years more than taught me that I was designed to live to please God. It taught me that, as John Piper puts it, "the chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever."

The Road Back to My First Love

How do I come back from where I am? How do I recapture the joy and passion I had for Him? I need to beg Him for it, and I will do things that put me in a position where I can receive this gift.

Remember His Love

I have forsaken my first love because I have forgotten His love for me. I have been deceived into (Romans 7:11) believing that there is something better than His love. Right now in a sober moment I see how ridiculous it is to think that something could be better than the God of the universe loving me. However, when I am deceived and captured by sin it is easy to forget.

Therefore, the battle needs to start now, in this sober moment. How can I remember His love for me? It starts with the Gospel. To paraphrase Tim Keller, the Gospel says that:

- We are far more wicked than we care to know
- While at the same time we are far more loved than we can ever imagine
- Christ lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died.
He substituted His perfect, holy record with our sinful one. When by faith we accepted this more core truth, we were saved, and God adopted us as His children.



Now life is about living in gratitude for what He has already done for us. Life is not about performing in order to get His love. It is about being absolutely surrendered to Him because He absolutely surrendered to save us. That makes us want to obey. We want to please Him because of His great love for us.

As we consider His love for us as displayed in the Gospel, we start to realize that His love is the most satisfying thing in the universe. The more we chew on His love, the more we praise Him. The more we praise Him, the more we desire to live for Him. It is a natural outgrowth of His love to us. "We love because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

Another way to recognize His love is to be grateful for what He is doing in our lives present day, and for what He has given us. He has taken good care of us. Ask yourself what good things has God allowed you to have and don't stop your life until you get to 50.

You can also remember His love for you by knowing what He is going to do. A thousand years from now we are going to be in Heaven. I can't imagine what that is going to be like. What will it be like to see Him face to face? I have to imagine that our hearts will absolutely melt as we see with our eyes His unsurpassed love for us. What's it going to be like when we notice we don't have a sinful nature anymore? Can you imagine living out of the Fruit of the Spirit - always?! Chewing on what He will do - not just in Heaven but even in this life - will also remind us of how much He loves us. We don't deserve Heaven or all the promises He gives us on Earth, including turning all situations for good (Romans 8:28), never forsaking us (Hebrews 13:5), and removing our sins - past, present, and future - as far away as the east is from the west (Psalms 103:12), etc.

Realize the Need to Confess

The more we get in contact with His love for us, we will see what we need to confess. When we are hard-hearted, it is because sin has been accumulating. We need to make a list of our known sins and confess them before God. Where we have impacted others, we need to appropriately confess to them. We must do this with wisdom, of course, but I believe it is really important that we make things right. Even if it costs us something, we must be right with God above all else.



Beg God for the Gift of Heart-level Repentance

Then we need to beg Him for the gift of repentance. I mean deep-down repentance - the type that ends the patterns of sinful behaviors because the heart is changed. Confession may start the "turning around process," but it needs to go way deeper than changing my behaviors and stiffening my will to make right what I have done wrong. It needs to come from that heart. Only the Lord can gift us with that.

Regardless of What You Feel, Praise and Thank Him

Next we need to start praising Him, and thank Him more. If you look at Romans 1:18 - 2:6, we see that a really dark progression happens when we suppress the truth. After we suppress the truth, the next thing that happens to us is that we stop praising and thanking God. We need to bring that back into our life. Even if our heart is not fully on board, it is important that we actively pursue this as we continue to beg God for the heart change we and God desire.

Spend Time Being Grateful to Soften the Heart

(see Appendix A - Using a Gratitude Chronicle)

When a heart is hard, it is difficult to praise God, so I recommend that we first start by being grateful. There are four kinds of circumstances that can set the stage for this:

1. When we go through a really hard time, and then it is resolved, we feel a rush of relief and thankfulness.
2. When someone gives a gift that hits our heart, we are so thankful.
3. When someone else shares a story of being grateful and it encourages us to the point of feeling gratitude on their behalf, or even for how it connected to us.
4. When we remember 1, 2, or 3.



Being Grateful Naturally Leads to Thanking and Praising Him

Notice that when you are feeling the peak of gratitude, you can't help but thank Christ. Then, as you thank Him, you can't help but praise Him for who He is. The gift is always superseded by who He is. The gift came from Him, and you can't help but praise Him.

The More You Thank and Praise Him, The More You Want to Functionally Please Him

Then, the more you thank Him and praise Him, the more you want to please Him. You want to give back. The more you praise Him and thank Him, the more you realize that He gave all of Himself to you, and that pulls us to want to do the same. Obeing becomes joyful. It is something you are privileged to do, instead of a duty you have to do. Suffering for His sake becomes an honor, not a disgrace.

Make Gratitude a Ritual

Our hearts are desperately wicked and stray so easily that this has to become a ritual. You have to pursue this in much the same way you see excited new Christians pursuing it. Once again, you also have to beg Him for the gift of repentance. You want this to become a lifestyle, not just a momentary event.

The More You Thank and Praise Him, The More You will Want to Engage Him

So this leads us to what it is that naturally flows from gratitude and praise. The more you are grateful and the more you praise Him, the more you want to know Him and engage Him. So dive in. Have at it! There are more tools at our disposal to connect to Christ than at any other time in our history. What do I mean by this? Before 1440, when the Gutenberg press was developed, believers did not have Bibles. They were unobtainable. Yet believers connected to God back then. How do we know? We would not be Christians today if they had not, if it were not for God using people to share the Gospel with one another. In this way, the Gospel has been passed on from generation to generation until it has reached us.



A Few Options for How to Engage Christ

So how did believers connect to God before 1440? There were many means. Some include:

- Praying
- Pondering throughout the week the sermon they had heard on Sunday
- Real genuine fellowship
- Spiritual mentorships
- Studying the stained glass windows of their churches and chewing on the images they saw
- Singing hymns and spiritual songs to themselves
- Sharing their faith with believers and unbelievers
- Etc.

Today with the internet, TV, radio, smartphones, volumes of commentaries, etc., we have multiple options as to how we can connect to God. However, the staple must be reading the Bible and praying. One of my favorite Scriptures is, "There is a way that seems right to a man but it ends in death." (Proverbs 14:12; Proverbs 16:25) It tells me that my heart, mind, and whole being can be fully convinced that something is right, but if Scripture tells me that it is not right I must yield and fully submit to what Scripture teaches is true. Please keep that in mind as we go through the next exercise.

EXERCISE: Capture and reflect on the details of a time you felt especially connected to God.

I would like you to write down, using as many facts and feelings as you can, a specific moment in time when you were especially connected to God. Include the story that led to that moment. There may have been some "fantastic" things happening or it could have been a seemingly normal experience that the Holy Spirit decided to highlight in your life. Regardless of what it was, the thing that counts is that you felt strongly connected to God.

(see Appendix B for my own Connection Story)



Look for Themes in Your Stories of Connection Times to God

After you complete your story, think about other times when you felt really connected to God. Feel free to write them out as well. Do they have anything in common?

If you look at my story (see Appendix B) and assume for that moment that most of the other times when I felt very connected to God had similar elements, you would see some of the following themes:

1. I was in a dark place, often isolating myself from others who could help.
2. I listened to sermons from someone whom the Holy Spirit used to bring His Word alive.
3. I was given the opportunity to ask questions of someone who was well versed in Scriptures.
4. That person really connected to my heart.
5. As that person shared what they knew, backed with the Bible, Scripture came alive to me.
6. I prayed a lot.
7. I tasted the Gospel in a fresh way.
8. God gave me the gift of being connected to Him.

As a quick aside, when you look at my themes, please don't assume that the first 7 factors guaranteed that God would give me the gift of connection. That is not true. You can't force anyone to give you a gift. If you do, it ceases to be a gift. God could have acted in response to theme 1 apart from themes 2-7.

Now as I look at my themes, I can see that there are certain things that I should do when my heart strays. God has shown up most frequently in my life when I: listen to sermons, dialogue with someone who knows the Scriptures really well, allow my heart to be connected to by that person and others, and pray a lot. I have also been connted to when I have dissected Scripture in its original language, sung songs, listened to great worship music, etc. However, strong connections happen with less frequency doing those things than with the combination of sermon, dialogue, heart-relating, and prayer. Consequently, I will emphasize that combo for my Quiet Times, and especially when my heart goes dark.



Ways that You Can Connect to God

Others have said that God often shows up in their life through:

- Playing an instrument
- Singing out loud
- Reading about the universe
- Reading about the human body
- Watching certain movies or TV shows
- Reading nonfiction
- Reading fiction works like Tolkien or C.S. Lewis
- Doing acts of service for someone else
- Laughing to Christian comedians
- Laughing with friends
- Bible reading/studying
- Meditation
- Breath prayers
- When “practicing the presence” of Christ

I want to separate good feelings from genuine connection. One of my clients reported that she feels especially close to God right after she has been disciplined. “The discipline hurts,” she says, “but the restoration is so sweet.” She looks up to Him and her heart melts. I see in that a genuine connection; it goes beyond emotions. It is a state of being that involves the heart, mind, and soul.

Good Feelings Can Be Deceptive; Filter Everything Through Scripture

Good feelings can be deceptive. Remember, “there is a way that seems right to man, but its end is the way to death” (Proverbs 14:12). Look for a state of being that includes your emotions. Remember to filter everything through Scripture. If Scripture contradicts you, then you are wrong. Don’t ever try to bend Scripture to fit you. You bend to Scripture. There is no room for compromise with God’s Word. He meant for each word to be there or else Christ would not have quoted and referenced the Old Testament writings as coming from God, not from human authors.





OTHER MEANS TO REIGNITE OUR FAITH

So far we have discussed that we need to confess, repent, make amends, beg God to bring heart-level repentance, do the things that have set the stage for God to show up in the past, and not neglect Bible study and prayer, so that we can filter everything through the truth.

Some other things that help to reignite our faith are to:

- Ask others to pray for us
- Get into an accountability group with same-sex people who are trustworthy and wise
- Never forget that we cannot reignite our faith apart from God. It is a gift He gives us.

Prayer is About Us Being Bent to God's Will

Let's break these three down a little more. Prayer is so neglected by the Christian body. We tend to act like cynics. We don't believe it works. When we read that the "prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5:16), that God works through prayer to cleanse and renew and guide us, we gloss over that because, in our experience, prayer did not work in a specific way for us.

What is so sad is that we sell ourselves short when we think that way. We use prayer to try to get God to bend to our will, forgetting that He is God. He is not our genie, servant, assistant, or peer.



The only influence we can have with Him is that which He allows us to have, because He has bound His heart in our hearts. He does hear us, but He also knows what is best for us in the long run. He loves us like He loves Christ (John 17:23). Because that love will never change, His plans for us are for good, not for disaster (Romans 8:37 - 39).

Because He is God, He is far more intelligent and wise than we. He is able to see the ripple effects from all choices. He is good, holy, loving, and more gracious than we can ever imagine. If we were as intelligent, wise, prescient, good, holy, loving, and gracious as God is, we would have allowed the events of our life to go the way they did. We may not have chosen them, especially the calamitous things that may have happened to us, but if we could see from God's perspective, we would have allowed them.

Sometimes we become very angry at God for not allowing some things we wanted or for allowing things to happen that we did not want, like abuse. We want to know why. As someone who was abused and has had several traumatic events in his life, I know what it is to feel that way. But through the help of several friends and professionals, I have come to the conclusion that perhaps to reason God doesn't tell me (or us) why things happen is that it may be like trying to explain calculus to a dog. No matter how hard you try, the dog will not understand calculus.

Instead of taking offense at God and turning away, I have to return to gratitude so I can see how good and loving God is despite my anger or coldness towards Him. I need to remember that God has promised to use even hard and unfair things for my ultimate good (Romans 8:28). I have to go through a wrestling process in prayer in order to get things in perspective.

The Importance of Prayer

Prayer is the tool which shapes my heart into His. As I lay out my praises, confessions, and thanks to God, the motives for my supplications are often revealed. Before you ask God for anything, please get to the root of why you want it. Many things can seem good on the surface, but they may come from wrong motives.

Prayer is you standing before a holy and loving God with your heart open for Him to reveal what He finds in it. It is so very important that we remember to pray, "If it is your will..." Remember that you want your prayers answered only in the way that fits God's perfect will.



Prayer is also a time for us to enjoy Him. If you want a way to start, I recommend that you start with thanking Him. Once again, thanksgiving leads to gratitude, and gratitude leads to praise. When you are at the peak of praising Him, then see if your supplications fit. Sometimes I have to start prayer with confession. Sometimes I confess after I am grateful. That is just me. Let your prayer times flow with Him. Engage Him. Don't just talk to the air.

Get Two Prayer Partners

Since prayer is so important, have some prayer partners with whom you can share requests, and also share how they were answered. Take these prayer partners really seriously. I know of prayers partners who set up times to pray together on a regular basis. Others send emails to each other and actively pray for one another. Use a means that works for you and take it seriously.

Be sure to update your prayer partners as things change. Encourage them to pursue you. At church I asked for a Sunday School class to pray for a friend and his wife whose baby was born with great deformities and was not expected to live. A member of that group kept coming up to me and asking for an update. It meant the world to me that he cared. So please pursue those who share prayer requests with you.

I often send my prayer partners requests having to do with business. God is about redeeming the entire globe, and that includes the business world. Don't neglect sharing these kinds of concerns with prayer partners. Encourage them to pray for you to accomplish your work with excellence, as that glorifies God.

Who Should Be Your Prayer Partners?

If you don't have prayer partners, take some time to pray right now as to who should be on your prayer partner list. You are looking for trustworthy and faithful people who will lift you up, and whom you will lift up, in prayer. As you are praying, write down any names that come to mind. Talk to them about being your prayer partners, and together decide on how you are going to circulate your concerns (i.e. will you meet in person? exchange emails? etc.).





ACCOUNTABILITY GROUPS

Accountability groups are powerful when done well. So many of us are not willing to be vulnerable to others, and in the process we miss a powerful means of transformation. Your accountability group should be small. I recommend three. The reasons are many, but three that stand out are:

- Two people listening to someone's harder areas are not as easily overwhelmed as a single individual may be.
- If there is a conflict between two, the third one is present to help facilitate.
- On the rare occasion that one can't attend one week, the other two can still keep the group moving forward.
- It's Biblical!

**"Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." (Ecclesiastes 4:12)**

Choose Trustworthy People

Triad accountability groups must sign off that they will hold everything that is shared in strict confidence. They are not to share anything in that group with anyone else. This is essential if people are going to feel free to be truly vulnerable with one another.



Meet Weekly for At Least an Hour

I recommend meeting weekly for at least an hour. This gives time to get into all three stories. For those who like templates for questions to ask one another, you can use these: What are some wins you've had since we last met? How are you progressing on the areas you asked to be held accountable for? Where are you struggling? What are you going to do differently with those areas this week?

All Three of You Open and Close In Prayer

I would recommend that everyone pray to open and to close, and that you emphasize begging God for the gift of repentance and strong connection to Him. The goal of these groups is for each person to be actively volunteering what's going on; there should be no hiding or withholding. If two sense that the third is hiding or avoiding being vulnerable, they should lovingly pursue and encourage openness.

Since these groups are about vulnerability, it is important that the members trust each other. Some accountability groups start off as fellowship groups and then turn into accountability groups once the trust level is up.

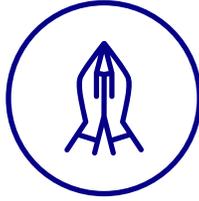
Some clients have formed accountability groups with other executives so that they can have another level of accountability for the work they have been called to do. Typically, I don't recommend that people from the same company form these groups unless they work for different departments and are not directly impacted by one another's work. I have heard of executives who start off well together, but then start to hide or avoid areas that can directly impact another member in their work.

Avoid Temptation: Choose Same-Sex People

Due to the level of intimacy that can characterize prayer and accountability groups, I do not recommend that men and women be in the same group. It is too easy for things to move into the direction of romance as mixed company becomes vulnerable and shares with one another what is closest to their heart. If you struggle with same-sex attractions, then make sure that no one else in the group does as well. That can easily lead to a stumble.

If you don't have accountability partners, be praying for the Lord to provide!





KEEP BEGGING GOD FOR THE GIFT

Last but not least. As has been said earlier and repeatedly, let me stress it again: You can do all the right actions but the reigniting of your faith is ultimately a gift from God. The good news is that God promises that He will be found when we seek Him with all our hearts (Jeremiah 29:13). I believe that is true for those of us who are His and have strayed.

Set Up 3 Appointments a Day to Beg God for the Gift of Heart-level Repentance

I recommend that you put it on your calendar three times per day to beg God for the gift of being reignited in your faith. While you wait, do the things where He has traditionally showed up. Ask others to beg on your behalf. Make sure to thank Him profusely when you become aware of your strong connection to Him. Also be sure to write down the story of your strong connection in your Gratitude Journal.

As someone who is rising in the marketplace, it would be easy for you to rely on your own strength and not fight for your connection to God. Please remember that Jesus Himself said, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). I have personally witnessed this. There is a difference when a client meeting is done in my strength vs. when it is done in God's. Even if on the surface the results seem strong, whether I use my strength of God's, there is noticeably more joy, peace, and other Fruit of the Spirit when I am working in His strength. The way I communicate is also more effective, and usually others - even non-Christian clients - sense a difference.





HOW TO CONNECT TO GOD WHEN TIME IS TIGHT

1. Practice the Presence of God

Many of my clients have very full schedules and find it hard to spend long periods of daily time with God. I have a couple of suggestions for them and for anyone else with this concern.

No matter how little time you have, you can always “practice the presence of Christ.” Basically, what this means is that, in your mind, you place Christ somewhere in the room with you. Some clients have chosen an empty chair in a boardroom or in their office. Some place Him in the passenger seat next to them while they drive to work.

In the 1990s, I learned about Harry Lorraine’s memory techniques. One thing that I learned is that the brain remembers things that are impossible, or at least greatly exaggerated. For example, if you saw a giraffe driving a car with its head protruding through the sunroof, you would never forget that.

Put Christ in a Ridiculous Place in the Room

A fun way that I have found to practice the Presence of Christ is to “put Him” in the most ridiculous place in the room. For example, sometimes I have Him hanging upside down with his head just over my client’s head. The desk in my office is under a windowsill. The windowsill cannot hold a human behind, but I pretend that his hairy legs are dangling down from the windowsill so that when I look up, that is what I picture seeing. In my car, he doesn’t sit on the passenger side - instead, he is scrunched up on the dashboard against the glass. These lead me to chuckle a little. As such, I remember to practice His presence more effectively.



Lest it seem that by using these mental pictures I am trivializing Christ, I assure you it is the opposite. I need Him so desperately that when I put Him in a ridiculous place in the room, it helps me to remember how great He is and how much I need Him.

2. Breath Prayers

Breathe prayers are a very short mantra, based on Scripture, which you repeat over and over again to yourself. The more you repeat it, the more truths you glean from it. The more truths you glean from it, the more you believe. A simple Scripture based mantra could be “Jesus love me.”

This technique comes from Brother Lawrence, a monk in the 17th century. Despite spending all day preparing the meals, cooking the meals, and cleaning up after the meals for his monastery brothers, he seemed to develop an incredible character and “glow” about him that was palpable to the others. This was true even though the other monks spent hours in Scripture, prayer, fellowship, etc.

If it works for Brother Lawrence, try it; it may work for you. Choose a short mantra that is based on Scripture and you will find that the more you repeat it the more truths you will gain from it.

Spend Five Minutes Laughing Before You Start Your Quiet Time

Finally, I want to encourage you to spend some time laughing during your daily times with Him. So on days when you don’t have to pour out a heavy heart, you may want to try laughing for five minutes first, then going into your time with Him. Laughing switches you into a positive frame of mind; it will bond you more to Him (those who laugh together feel more bonded together), and it will release endorphins that will increase your enjoyment of your time with Him.

I keep some YouTube clips of funny Christian comedians on hand to watch before I dive in with God. Sometimes I will just look at other funny clips before I start. I often start my time thanking Him for the gift of laughter and praising Him for creating humor.





**A SONG THAT CAPTURES
THE DRY TIMES OF OUR EARTH**

Let me leave you with a song that captures how it is when I feel distant. I pray that you begin to long for Him more as you read these words by Keith Green.

*My eyes are dry, my faith is old
My heart is hard, my prayers are cold
And I know how I ought to be
Alive to You and dead to me*

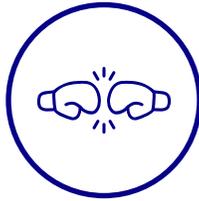
*Oh what can be done for an old heart like mine
Soften it up with oil and wine
The oil is You, Your Spirit of love
Please wash me anew in the wine of Your Blood*

*My eyes are dry, my faith is old
My heart is hard, my prayers are cold
And I know how I ought to be
Alive to You and dead to me*

*Oh what can be done for an old heart like mine
Soften it up with oil and wine
The oil is You, Your Spirit of love*

Songwriter: Keith Gordon Green | Published by: Lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group





**IN CONCLUSION:
FIGHT FOR YOUR CONNECTION WITH CHRIST**

Connect to Him in a way that is consistent with how He has met you in the past. Do not neglect Bible study and prayer, as your heart can be deceived. For those who love routine, find a system that works for you. For those who feel suffocated by routine, know what your options are and leave time and space for your connection to Christ. If you are tight on time, especially practice the presence of Christ. Whether or not you are tight on time, practicing the presence of Christ will move you towards Him.

Sometimes your times with God will be really serious; sometimes they will be lighter and fun. What matters is that you related to Him. Showing up is the key. It is like parents finding magic moments with their children. It can seldom be planned. It usually happens after several times of just showing up. One of those times becomes magical, but had you not consistently shown up, the magic probably would not have happened. The same holds true with God. Not every time is going to be a home run, but keep showing up. You will see more home runs than you currently have.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me. Take care!

In Christ,
Ryan C. Bailey
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USING A GRATITUDE CHRONICLE

I strongly encourage you to write down instances of gratefulness so that you can review them frequently. Doing something as simple of chronicling times of gratitude helps me to track times when I was grateful to come back to in times that I may not be feeling the same way.

Start by writing the details of a hard time you went through. Really get into what you felt about the details, not just the details themselves. Let your heart feel how dark it was for you. Let yourself feel the pain again. Once you've captured that, write the details of what you felt when it was resolved. Once again, really focus on a detailed description of what you felt. Let yourself experience the joy, relief, and gratitude of that time. Use a gratitude journal. Do the same with the times when you received a gift that really touched you.

Sample: Gratitude Story

A time I will never forget was when I was 11 years old. I absolutely loved tennis. I would watch hours of matches and hardly blink; after watching Bjorn Borg, I would run across the street and practice hitting my backhand against Columbia Medical School Library's wall for hours. One day my mother was playing with me and a coach, Ms. Arvelia Myers, saw us. To my surprise, she asked if I wanted to join the Harlem Junior Tennis League. Later that evening, she and my mother spoke on the phone. When I heard my mom say "Yes" to me joining the team, I jumped up and down in excitement. I remember her being surprised by how joyful I was. It was like my whole heart was happy. I could not contain myself. I could not wait for the first practice. I felt like I could not have received a greater gift. I told all my friends at school the next day, I arrived early at practice, and when they had us run 20 laps around the armony to warm up, I sprinted just to get on the court faster. I was in love.



After Writing Your Gratitude Story, You Should Feel Something Like...

Even as I write that story now, my heart feels so warm and happy. I feel excited and alive. I feel focused and driven. My heart is beating faster. There is a smile on my face. I also feel so grateful to my mom for providing me with that experience. More than that, I feel so grateful to God who put the coach there on one of the few days my mother played tennis with me. God lined the whole thing up.

For the next seven years, I would play and train for as many as 40 hours a week. I absolutely loved the entire experience.

Thank you Jesus for that gift. You are a great and wonderful God who knows how to give great gifts to your children! To you be all power, praise, and majesty.

Remembering that time when I was 11 makes me feel grateful right now. I want you to experience the same thing. So please take some time now to write down a few of the times when you felt grateful. Let yourself describe the facts and what you felt about the facts. You should be feeling similar emotions to what you remember feeling back then. Then let your gratitude turn towards God, who orchestrated events to bring it about.





SAMPLE:
MY PERSONAL STORY OF CONNECTION TO CHRIST

I had just left the International Church of Christ. This is not the denomination, Church of Christ, but the cult ICOC. They believed they were the only church going to Heaven. Their method of discipling was designed to keep a great deal of control over their members. I was really confused as to whether their claim to be the only church going to Heaven was valid or not. I also was confused as to what the Gospel actually was. The ICOC includes more than just faith in the Gospel. For example, they believe that one has to be baptized in their church in order to be saved.

This period of time was a dark one for me. While I was in the ICOC, I abandoned friends who did not join the ICOC, so two years later when I left, none of them were around and I felt utterly alone. I can tell you as an ENFJ that is not a good thing. So I started seeing a Christian counselor. In sessions, I would fire theological question after theological question at him until he finally said that I should check out this new church that just started on the Upper East Side. He said that the pastor was a former seminary professor and I would enjoy his style of sermons and could ask him my questions.

I was leery of going to any church outside of the ICOC because I still wasn't sure if it would be a true church. At the same time, that whole week I had a burning theological issue that neither my counselor nor I could resolve, and I prayed for the answer often.

Without the aid of an alarm clock, I woke up early on Sunday morning, knowing I was going to go to Redeemer. I showed up five minutes late, sat in the back, and left five minutes early because I did not want to talk to anyone.



Sure enough, the topic of the sermon just happened to be the burning theological issue that was on my mind that week. The Holy Spirit used Tim Keller to settle my heart over that issue. As I ducked out early, I remember being really deep in thought and feeling like God was acting on my behalf in a way I had rarely experienced. I felt humbled, loved, and a bit scared. I was still confused over so much that had to do with Him.

The following week I had another burning theological issue, and once again, it happened to be the topic of that Sunday's sermon. For seven weeks in a row, whatever the burning theological issue was for me that week, it just happened to be the topic of Tim's sermon on Sunday. I knew God was wooing me. I knew He was tracking me like the shepherd who left his other sheep to chase down the one who had strayed (Matthew 18:12).

The seventh Sunday, as Tim was making his way back at the end of service, I asked him if I could speak to him and he said yes. I started asking him questions immediately. Tim was incredible patient, gracious, and attentive. He met me where I was, in my confusion and uncertainty, and thoroughly answered every question I put in front of him. I remember sensing that God was using Tim to melt my fears and bring me back to Him.

As I asked my questions, I noticed that others were listening to Tim's answers. I remember feeling guilty about monopolizing Tim's time, so I looked around and asked if anyone else wanted to ask questions. One guy said, "No kid - keep going - you're doing great." Tim smiled, looked at me, and I kept going.

The next two Sundays the same thing happened. I would shamelessly monopolize Tim during the coffee hour after service. Then on the third Sunday he suggested that I read the book of Romans in one sitting. "Do not stop reading it," he said. "Go all the way through. No breaks."

I nodded in agreement and walked out of the church. I rode the subway up to the Cloisters in Upper Manhattan, near where I was raised and was still living. I sat on a park bench and read the entire book of Romans in one sitting. I was so deeply focused. I felt like God was speaking to me. I saw so many things that I had not seen before. Most importantly, my questions about how we become saved, the ICOC teachings, and sinning after being saved were all answered.



I was on top of the world. I knew that God loved me. I knew that His love for me was not conditional. I knew that I did nothing to earn salvation and therefore could not do anything to lose it. The Gospel was truly good news. It was an event in history not something I had to work towards. As a result, because of the faith God gives His own, they are not only saved, but become His adopted children.

It was such a relief to see the Apostle Paul using present tense and present-progressive tense verbs in Romans 7. The guy who “almost single-handedly preached to the entire known world” said, “For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Romans 7:15) and then repeats it four verses later “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Romans 7:19). Wow! That’s what Paul said even while he was preaching around the world. This must mean that God knows that we are always going to sin, and yet He does not abandon us. He is still with us.

I remember feeling so wanted, loved, and accepted by God. I knew that He really knew me, not just the good and bad things I had done, but He knew my essence. He understood what it was like for me to have a sinful nature. He loved my counter-conditionally. That is, despite all the evil I still do, He loves me. He paid for all my sins. He substituted His perfect record for mine. Now it is as if I never sinned. He then adopted me and brought me into His family. He sealed me with the Holy Spirit and no one, including me, can take me from His hand. As a loving father He will discipline me, but never abandon me. It gave me a profound sense of awareness. There was joy. There was such peace. I felt like a three-year-old in his father’s arms. No one could harm me. My Heavenly Father was so big to me.

