



living image

G B WOODCOCK

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Now to Him
who is able to do
far more
abundantly beyond
all that we ask or think,
according to the power
that works within us,
to Him be the glory
in the church
and in Christ Jesus
to all generations
forever and ever.
Amen.

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Living Image - G B Woodcock

Spiritual Life by Design

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Introduction

1 Timothy 1:5

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

The love of God is the overarching focus of Scripture. God is love. In Christ we are called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. By His grace we are to love others as ourselves. Love is the fulfillment of the entire law.¹ As such, to remain true to the heart of Scripture, the goal of all teaching should therefore be the real and experiential love of God.

In this book we look at subjects such as predestination, identity, salvation, foreknowledge, nature and the design of life, all from the context of love. The goal of each study is to lead the reader by the grace of the Spirit into a greater faith and a deeper love for God. If this is your desire, may you be blessed as you read these pages and discover more of your calling and true design in Christ Jesus.

Author, *Living Image*

I | Predestined

On a few occasions in Scripture we find the word *predestined*. For some people this word is almost entirely overlooked throughout their spiritual lives. For others it is a word that shapes their spirituality and defines the way they view their salvation in God. So what does it mean to be predestined by God? How does predestination affect our spiritual life and our growth in God?

Predestined To

Romans 8:28-31

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also

justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

In this passage we learn that those whom God foreknew He also predestined, called, justified and glorified. So if God foreknew and predestined us, does this mean that we were always destined for salvation? If so, does this mean that God also gives us the faith and desire to receive His salvation? If so, were we ever truly free to choose our salvation? Or is God orchestrating our every thought and action according to His master plan?

A Spiritual Destiny

Destiny

The events that will necessarily happen to a particular person or thing in the future; the hidden power believed to control what will happen in the future; fate.¹

A destination is the endpoint of a journey and so when we read the word *predestined*, we often tend to read it in terms of what happens after we die. Like the word *destination*, the word *destiny* conveys the sense of an ultimate and inescapable fate. So from this perspective, if our predestination is our spiritual destiny then it is not a possible outcome that *may* come to pass, but rather it is an inevitable end that we are compelled towards and must experience.

So if God has *predestined* us to salvation then it is inevitable that we will receive eternal life with Him after we die. This means that nothing we do or fail to do can alter the outcome. If this is true then it also follows that God has predetermined all our choices towards receiving the grace of salvation. And if He makes our choices for us then it stands to reason that He is orchestrating all of our thoughts, motives and desires that shape the choices we make. This complete sovereign control of God over every aspect of life is the belief called determinism. In this determined sense of predestination we have no control over our choices or desires, but rather our will, along with every other aspect of our lives, is entirely scripted by God.

So is God controlling every detail of our lives? Is that what the Scriptures imply when they speak of predestination?

Proorizo

Predestined: *proorizo*

From *pro*, meaning before; and *horizo* meaning: to define, mark out the boundaries or limits (of any place or thing), to determine, appoint, decree or ordain.

The word *horizo* comes from the Greek word *horio* (meaning coast or border) and is the source of the English word *horizon*. The sense of horizon here is not a future that we are endlessly journeying towards but a boundary or limit of a plan. At its core, the word *proorizo* is focused more on **design** than it is on destiny. It is about **defining a plan** rather than sealing a fate.

From this perspective, the word *proorizo* can be translated as predefined or predesigned. So instead of using the term *predestined*, which focuses on the control of God over our lives and our future destiny, we can use the word *predesigned*, which focuses on God's plan for us now and our present spiritual experience in Christ.

Predesigned

Romans 8:29a

For those whom He foreknew, He also
predesigned...

When we read Romans 8:29 again from the perspective of predesign, we learn that before we were created, God had a specific design for our lives. Like the rest of His creation, God created us for a defined purpose. So what is our true design? What have we been created for?

2 | Predesigned

The Greek word *proorizo* speaks of being *predesigned* according to a defined plan more than it speaks of being *predestined* to a certain fate. Predestination is not a question of destiny but of identity. As God's creation, we are predesigned with a definite purpose. So what is God's design for our lives?

In His Image

Genesis 1:26

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness..."

Romans 8:29

For those whom He foreknew, He also predesigned to become conformed to the image of His Son...

In the beginning, God created people in His image and according to His likeness. And His design has never changed. God has designed us to bear His image in the world. As such, we are not special just because we are designed by God; we

are special because of the nature of our design. As an artist, God has created us as His self-portrait. He has designed us at our very core to be infused with His life and nature so that we may truly express His image in the world. And that sets us apart from all other creation.

So from the beginning God designed us to be conformed to His image. But how do we know that being conformed to the image of Christ is a reality that we can experience in this life? How can we be sure that God's design is not just a part of our future destiny in heaven?

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (emphasis added)

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, **are being** transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

When the word *proorizo* is translated as predestined, it implies that our conformation into the image of Christ is a reality that we only experience in our future spiritual destiny. Yet here we see that we **are being** transformed into the image of Christ. Thus our transformation into His image is not just a part of our future destiny but rather it can be our present reality. The Holy Spirit can transform us *now* as we behold the glory of God. Therefore we do not need to wait for the future in order to experience our true design in God. From glory to glory, we can start being conformed to the image of Christ now.

Conformed to His Image

Image: *eikon*

From 1503/efkō, “be like” – properly, “mirror-like representation,” i.e. that which is very close in resemblance (like a “high-definition” projection, as defined by the context). Image (#1504) exactly reflects its source. For example, Christ is the very image (#1504 “supreme expression”) of the Godhead (see 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15).

HELPS Word-studies

Conformed: *symmorphos*

Properly, conformed, by sharing the same inner essence-identity (form); showing similar behavior from having the same essential nature.

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To be conformed to the image of Christ means that the very nature of Jesus is formed within us.¹ In an actual literal way, the nature of God is infused into our hearts and we are transformed from within. Through His love and grace our hearts are entirely renewed.

It is only as we are transformed inwardly that we can begin to exactly reflect the image of Jesus outwardly. The fruit comes from the root and so in His design God looks beyond actions to the heart.² He forms His nature in our hearts so that the life of Christ is revealed naturally through our word and actions.³ In this way, God changes us from the inside out.

Unity by Design

John 17:20-23

“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.”

Here Jesus prays that the Father would make us one with Christ so that the world may know that the Father has sent Jesus and that He loves us in the same way that He loves Jesus. If we took a minute to meditate on the Father’s love for Jesus, how would we describe that love? We could say that His love is consummate, perfect, intimate, intense, unfailing, unchanging, overwhelming, consuming, uniting, unbreakable, extravagant, immersive, pure and in every way beyond comprehension. Yet none of these words really do justice to the Father’s love. His love for Jesus is a reality that far exceeds the greatest love that we could ever dream of. It is the divine and eternal Love of Love.

Love for Us

In John 17, Jesus reveals that God has loved us with the same love that He has for Jesus. The all-consuming, indescribable and infinite love of the Father for the Son **is the same love** that the Father has for us.⁴ The Father loves us with the same intensity, passion and purity that He loves Jesus. And just as the perfect love of God demands the unity of the Father and Son, so God's love calls us to become one with Him.⁵

1 Corinthians 6:17

But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

Our call to become one with Christ is a call to return to our original design. Unity with Christ is an essential aspect of living in our design for we cannot bear the image of Christ apart from Him. **He is His image.** We are simply designed to be living vessels of the divine nature and life of Christ. So in the same way that we can only truly love when the love of God is present within us, so we can only bear the image of Christ when we are filled with the Spirit of Jesus and we are made one with Christ.

Thus from the very beginning, God designed people to live in love and unity with Him and so bear His image in the world. As His creation, we are designed for spiritual unity and unbroken connection with God. But if this was God's plan for us from the beginning then what went wrong? If we were always designed for love and unity then what happened to break that design?

3 | Paradise Lost

In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve in His image and likeness. God is Spirit and so the image of God was infused into Adam and Eve by the Spirit or Breath of God. From their creation, Adam and Eve were one spirit with God. Through a unity of spirit and nature, Adam and Eve enjoyed communion with God and lived in His image.

The Fall

Genesis 3:1-8

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’” The serpent said to the woman,

“You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they allowed sin to enter into their hearts and souls. Their purity was lost and sin began to separate them from God. Instead of leading them to draw closer to God, the sin of their hearts compelled Adam and Eve to hide themselves from God’s presence.

Isaiah 59:1-2

Behold, the LORD’s hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.

In God's perfect design the human identity or self-life only exists in union with Him. And because God is entirely pure, this unity demands purity. The Holy Spirit cannot be united with sin any more than light can unite with darkness.

So when Adam and Eve accepted sin in their hearts, they lost their purity and broke the unity which was at the core of their design. By choosing to sin, Adam and Eve abandoned God's design and embraced a different image for their lives. Through the fall, Adam and Eve created a sense of self that was independent and disconnected from God. They tore the human nature away from the divine and united it with sin.

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.

Through Adam, sin spread to everyone throughout all time so that no one was blameless or pure. We all gave in to our sin and so like Adam we all chose to pursue a different design for our lives. We forgot about God's original design for us and through sin we became something less than our true selves.

A Distorted Image

When our hearts are affected by the presence of sin, we are drawn into a design and image that is not Christ. Sin blinds us to God's design and through its sinful desires it leads us to think and act in a way that is not who we truly are.

The Living Dead

Ephesians 2:1-3

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Apart from Christ we were dead in our sins. Sin had soaked into our hearts and minds and made us self-centered rather than God-centered. Our fallen image of self dominated the way we felt, thought, willed and acted, and it constantly led us away from God.¹ The infection of sin corrupted our desires, making us selfish, lustful, greedy, insecure and proud. As we acted on our desires we outwardly expressed the sin that was living in our hearts. At our very core we were united with sin and so by nature we were children of wrath.

The Plan

Yet in spite of the fall of all mankind, God did not forget His original design. He always purposed that His people would live in His image and express His nature in the world. So to restore us back into His image, Jesus came to overcome our sin and unite us again with His Spirit.

The Reason for Redemption

Acts 2:38-39²

Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

Galatians 3:13-14

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us — for it is written, “cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

In Acts 2 Peter calls the people to repent and be forgiven, not so that they might receive the gift of eternal salvation, but so that they might receive the gift of the Spirit. Paul then echoes the same truth: Jesus redeemed us for more than life in heaven. Jesus died to take away our sin so that we might be free to receive the Holy Spirit and become one spirit with God. Thus the good news of the gospel is not that we can live forever with God after we die, but that we can be filled with the life and presence of Christ through His Spirit. As we let the blood of Jesus wash away our sin, we can become the people who God created us to be: people who live in love and unity with God.

4 | Discovering our Design

In the beginning God created people to live in unity with Him and bear His image in the world. However through sin our unity with God was broken. Our design was corrupted and we forgot who we were created to be. Yet God did not give up on His plan for us. Through the sacrifice of His Son, the Father has made a way for us to be restored into His image. By His grace we can be recreated and changed into our true design.

The New Self

Colossians 3:9-10

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.

Ephesians 4:20-24

But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Our new self is created in the image and likeness of God. In this sense our new self is our true self. It is God's original design for us. So as the Spirit transforms us into our new self, we do not receive a new identity. Rather we receive our true identity. As God renews us we become the people He always designed us to be: people who are created in righteousness and holiness and who truly reflect the nature and love of God.

In this passage our call is to lay aside our old self and put on (*enduo*) our true identity.¹ The sense of the word *enduo* is one of being clothed or enveloped. By God's grace we are to abandon our false selves and from the inside out we are to be clothed in our true selves. So how can we put on our new self?

In Colossians 3 we find that a key part of putting on our new true self is being renewed in the spirit of our minds to a true knowledge of His image. In other words, **we start putting on the new self by learning the truth of our design**. So how can we learn more about our true identity in the image of Christ? How do we discover the reality of our design?

Mirror of the Word

James 1:22-25 (emphasis added)

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his **natural** face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

Natural: *genesis*

Source, origin; used of birth, nativity; that which follows origin, viz. existence, life.

When we look into the word of God we see our natural or genesis face. Our genesis face is God's original design for us. It is who God always created us to be. Through the word of God we discover the truth of our spiritual design. As we look into the mirror of the word of God we see the image of Christ and we see who we truly are in union with Him. As we see Jesus we see our true selves.

The more we look into the word of God, the more detail we see about Christ and about ourselves. Yet as James writes, if we see our genesis face in the word of God but fail to act on what we see, then we immediately forget who we truly are.

Thus simply knowing the truth of our spiritual design is not enough to experience the reality. We need something more than revelation. We need experience. We need the word of God to come to life and take effect in our lives. But how does this actually happen? Once we see our genesis face in Christ, how can we then be transformed into that design? How does the image we see in the mirror of the word become the image of our actual life?

Regeneration

Titus 3:4-7

But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Regeneration: *paliggenesia*

New birth, reproduction, renewal, recreation, regeneration.

In this passage, the word *regeneration* comes from the Greek word *paliggenesia*, which combines the word *palig* (anew, again) with *genesis* (origin, source, birth). Regeneration is re-creation; it is being transformed into God's original design for

us. The power of this regeneration is only found in the Spirit of God. He is the Spirit of Truth that breathes life into His word and brings His truth into being within us.

In these passages we see the word and Spirit working together to lead us into reality.² Through the word of God we receive the revelation of our true design in Christ and then through the Spirit we are spiritually recreated into our genesis design. In this way, the Holy Spirit and the living word of God work together to conform us to the image of Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (original Greek emphasis³)
 Now the Lord is the **Spirit**, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But **we** all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the **glory of the Lord**, are being transformed into the **same image** from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.⁴

Transformed: *metamorphoo*

#3339 (metamorphóō) is a compounded term using the prefix *metá* (“after, with”) with *morphē* (“form embodying inner nature”) to express God “metamorphizing” believers. This transforms them into conformity with the inner reality of the Lord’s indwelling glory, i.e. causing “the new man” to grow in likeness of nature with God (“reflecting the Lord”).

HELPS Word-studies

As we continue to behold (as in a mirror) the glory of God, we are continually transformed into that same image. What we see we become. So if we learn to behold the glory of God in Christ Jesus then we will begin to take on His likeness. The Spirit will bring life to the word of God and saturate our hearts with more of His nature. In this way, every minute we spend focusing on the glory of God in Jesus will bring us into a greater degree of conformation to His image. Every moment is an opportunity for transformation.

5 | Nature and Word

Before we were born, God designed us to be conformed to the image of His Son. This image is found in the indwelling life and nature of Christ.

The Spirit is Life and so the life of Christ becomes present within us through His Spirit. As we are filled with the Spirit we receive the spiritual life and energy of Christ and we become one spirit with God. But what about the nature of Christ? What is His nature? How is His nature formed within us?

The Heart and the Word

Luke 6:45

“The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.”

Our hearts are expressed in our words. In the same way, the heart of God is expressed through the word of God. Scripture is the written revelation of God's nature. So by studying the word of God we can learn more about His nature. As we learn to see the nature of God in the word, we start to discover our real nature as it truly is in union with Him.

The Written Expression

John 14:6-10

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works."

Here Jesus says that the words He speaks and the works He does all flow from His unity with the Father. In this way Jesus is the living revelation of the Father.¹ When we look at Jesus we see the life and character of the Father.

Every account of Jesus in the word of God reveals something of the nature of God to us. Yet the nature of God in Christ Jesus is not just revealed in the gospels. Jesus is the center of the whole of Scripture. The shadows and types of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Christ who is the Substance.² Every word of wisdom is sourced in Jesus, who is the Wisdom of God.³ Every prophecy in Scripture finds its origin and expression in Christ, who is the Prophet.⁴ Every letter of the New Testament is a revelation of the heart and mind of God in Christ Jesus. As such, the more we learn how the Scriptures connect to Jesus, the more we will see God's nature and glory in the word.

Nature of Commands

1 Peter 1:14-16

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "you shall be holy, for I am holy."

In addition to all the accounts and events in Scripture, the commands of Scripture also reveal the nature of God to us. We are commanded to be holy because God is holy. We are to be pure because He is pure.⁵ We are to forgive others because it is in God's nature to forgive.⁶ We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, because Jesus loves the Father with His entire being.⁷

Thus all the commands of Scripture reveal the nature of God and call us to live according to His nature. And the only way we can live according to His nature is to have His nature established within us. For example, we cannot act in love if love is not present in our hearts. Likewise, we cannot make ourselves holy by our own efforts. As such, the command to be holy is a call to become one with Christ in His holiness. Like all the commands of Scripture, it is a call to discover our true design in unity with God.

When we read Scripture in light of the nature of God we see that the commands of God are not intended to be a source of discouragement but of inspiration. They describe who we truly are in Christ. According to His word, we are truly holy, pure, loving, noble, beautiful and whole in Christ.

So when we read the commands of God our first thought and prayer should be: “this is who I can become in Jesus. This is who I truly am. God please make this a reality in me. Fulfill your word and make it natural for me to live like this.” And because these commands have all come from God, we know that He is both willing and able to answer our prayers.

Partakers of the Divine Nature

Ezekiel 11:19-20

“And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.”

2 Peter 1:1-4 (emphasis added)

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

God has given us everything we need for life and godliness. For life He has given us His Spirit and for godliness He has given us His nature. As we partake of the nature of Christ we receive a new heart that is infused with His love and as we are filled with His Spirit, we receive the life, energy and grace to live according to our new nature.

In Ephesians, we are called to be continually filled with the Spirit of God.⁸ Growing in the Spirit and receiving more of His life is to become a daily reality for us.

In the same way, partaking of the nature of Christ is not an event that takes place at a point in time. Rather it is a way of life. His nature is to be our daily bread. As we learn how to partake of Jesus' nature each day, we are conformed more and more to His image. Through the nature and Spirit of Christ we grow in His heart and life and mature into His likeness.

So how do we practically partake of the nature of Christ?

The Word in Action

Deuteronomy 11:18-19

“You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up.”

In this passage we hear the call to *impress* God’s word on our hearts and souls. The word of God is to be at the forefront of our minds and imprinted in the depths of our souls.

By itself, the word of God is the written expression of His nature. However, when the Spirit brings the word to life and establishes it in our hearts, the written nature of God becomes the living nature of God within us. In this way, when we spend time in the living word of God, we partake of the divine nature and the actual heart of Christ is formed within us.

Colossians 3:16a

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you...

Joshua 1:8 (NKJV)

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

Like Joshua, our call is to meditate on the word of God and let it dwell richly in our hearts so that we might act according to God's word and prosper in our ways. This passage echoes our call in James to look intently at the perfect law of liberty and act on what we see. By doing so, we become doers of the word and find blessing as we act according to the nature of God that is revealed in His word. Thus the way of blessing and success is simple: as we meditate on God's word and impress it on our hearts, the nature of Christ is formed in us. As our old nature is overwhelmed by the nature of Jesus, we act more and more according to God's love and will.

To meditate on the word is to think about, imagine, ponder, contemplate, muse, research, study and intently focus on the truth of God. Such reflection is not merely an intellectual exercise, but rather it is a form of worship, focusing both the heart and mind on God. As such, we need to value our time in the word of God as a real way of worshipping God. Through the word we lay down our own will and instead seek our transformation according to God's will. We devote our lives to God's design so that He may know the blessing of unity and love with us. The more we meditate on the word of God, the more we are changed and renewed into our true selves and the more God is blessed in us.

1 John 5:3

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

Our nature is the inner character of the heart that compels our natural or instinctive behavior. So as an expression of God's nature, the commands of Scripture are not intended to be burdensome. We are not called to live an impossible life by trying to keep God's commands without first having His life and nature formed in us. On the contrary, God is calling us to partake of His nature and to be filled with His Spirit so that we can instinctively keep His commands. And faithful is He who calls us. By His grace, He can bring it to pass in us. As we take His hand in faith, we can become partakers of the divine nature of Christ and know the reality of living in unity with Him.

6 | Image of Love

The Divine Nature

2 Peter 1:2-4 (original Greek emphasis)

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

God's divine power has given us **everything** we need for life and godliness. Through His magnificent promises, we can become partakers of the divine nature. It is possible. We can become one nature with Jesus and be united with Him in the

very core of who we are. Every thought, intention and action can be created in union with Jesus as we become partakers of His divine nature by faith. But what is the divine nature?

God is Love

1 John 4:16

We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

The Scriptures reveal the nature of God: God is Love. All the qualities of God are therefore expressions of His essential nature of love. As such, every thought, word, action and grace of God to us is an expression of His love. His voice is love. His healing is love. His commands are love. His correction is love. His judgment is love. His forgiveness, peace, righteousness, holiness, life, joy and power are all gifts of His unfailing love. Absolutely every work of God is a work of love.

Romans 8:1-4

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the

requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

As we come to know the loving nature of God we can see why we are not subject to any condemnation. God has created us in His image and so He will never condemn us for who we truly are in union with Christ. Instead, God condemns *sin* in us and consumes everything in our hearts that corrupts His image. Therefore, even when God comes in judgment as a consuming fire, He comes to love us by purifying our hearts and restoring us to His design. From blessing to judgment, in every way God is always true to His nature of love.

Love Poured Out

Romans 5:3-5

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

The nature of God is love. Therefore the Holy Spirit recreates us in the image of Christ by filling us with the love of God. In this way, being conformed to the image of Christ is not an abstract spiritual concept. It is the tangible experience of the love of God filling our hearts through His Spirit.

The Father's Love

John 17:24-26

“Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

“I have made Your name known to them...so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

In this passage Jesus is praying for all believers when He promises that He will make the Father's name known to us, so that the **Father's love for Jesus might live within us.**

This is one of the most powerful passages in Scripture. Not only does God want to pour out His love into us, but this love is the Father's love for Jesus. Take a moment to dwell on this truth. Say it out loud: *“The Father's love for Jesus can live in me.”* Our love for Jesus can have the same passion and consuming intensity as the love that the Father has for Jesus. Jesus does not pray futile prayers and here He speaks of a work of love that He knows can be a reality. This is perhaps one of the greatest promises in God, exposing the depths of what it means to be created in the image of God. We can have the Father's love for Jesus living in us. But how is this possible?

*Name and Nature***John 17:26**

“I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

Here Jesus says that He will make the name of the Father known to us. In Scripture a person’s name represents their character and nature.¹ So when Jesus leads us to know the Father’s name, He gives us the knowledge of the Father’s nature of love. And this knowledge is not theoretical. It is the true knowledge of the heart. It is the knowledge that comes from experience.

So when Jesus makes the Father’s name known to us, He reveals and imparts the nature of God to us. He speaks it into being within us. He gives it to us as His flesh.² He impresses it on our hearts through His living word. He soaks us with it as we rest in His presence. Every time we open our hearts in faith and seek God for His love, the Spirit will fill us with the Father’s pure love for Jesus.

I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known. As He did for the disciples so Jesus makes known the nature of God to us and will continue to make it known. The loving nature of God is infinite and so our knowledge of His love can always grow deeper. As we seek His love, Jesus will be faithful to make the Father’s name known to us. Through His Spirit and His word, Jesus will continue to reveal the love of God to us and so create more of His love in our hearts.

Love and Unity

*So that the love with which You loved Me may be in them **and I in them**.* Jesus and the Father are one in every way. So by leading us to know and receive the nature of the Father, Jesus also releases His very nature and life into our hearts.

So we see that it is God who makes every aspect of our love possible. We love Him because He first loved us and filled us with His love. And through His continuing presence within us, we are able to love Him and love others with His love. It is all by His grace, presence, nature and life.

Ephesians 3:14-19

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

In this passage Paul prays that Christ would dwell in our hearts through faith and that we would be established in His love. He also prays that we would know the love of Christ so that we may be filled up with the fullness of God.

The picture of being rooted in love is that of a tree that draws its life from God's nurturing and life-giving love. The picture of being grounded in love is that of a building that has its foundations in the rock-solid and unshakeable love of God. Through these pictures we see the firm connection between love and unity. The tree cannot live apart from its soil just as a building cannot stand apart from its foundation. So the love of God requires unity and unity requires love.

Thus it is through faith and love alone that Christ comes to dwell in our hearts and fill us with fullness of God.³ As such, we do not need to try to earn God's love or strive for unity. It is a work of grace in every way. All we need to do is open our hearts to God in faith and receive His love.⁴

Colossians 3:14

Beyond all these things put on [*enduo*] love,
which is the perfect bond of unity.

Again we see the deep connection between love and unity. True love cannot exist apart from God. On the contrary, true love demands unity with the Source of love. In this way, the foundation of our genesis design is love and unity with God. As we clothe ourselves in love, we are bound in unity to God. Through His love, we are filled with the Spirit of God and we become one with Christ.

7 | Design and Desire

In the very beginning, God predesigned us to be conformed to the image of Christ. We were designed to live in unity with His Spirit and share in the nature and love of Christ.

But how does this spiritual design for our lives affect our will and our desires? If our hearts are designed by God to be containers of His love then are our desires and our will also designed by God? Or do we have an independent or free will that exists outside our unity with God?

A Natural Parallel

The relationship between our will and our design can be seen in the development of children. Before a child is born, they are physically *proorizo* or predefined. Every newborn baby is biologically designed to eat, sleep and grow. And in keeping with this blueprint of life, every child is predesigned to walk.

So how does a child's biological programming affect their will to walk? Does a child's biology force them to walk or are they free to choose? Is it a case of destiny or free will?

From an experiential perspective, learning to walk is a choice that a child only makes when they are ready. Parents can encourage a child to walk but inevitably it is the child that decides when they are ready to take their first steps. So even though walking is a part of a child's natural design, it is not just physical ability that determines when a child learns to walk. Rather it is ability combined with a willing desire. Both are necessary to know the reality of our design. But where does the willing desire actually come from?

In terms of biology, a child's instinctive desires are shaped by their physical design. A child *wants* to walk because they are *designed* to walk. In this way, our genetically-coded design works through our desires and our will to bring us into the reality of who we are created to be. Design and the will work together and complete each other.¹

Spiritual Predesign

1 Peter 2:1-3

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

The natural relationship of design and desire is also true for our spiritual design. Being predesigned in the image of Christ is not enough to know the actual reality of living in His image. Rather, we need to set our will on His design. Like newborn babies, **we need to desire** the pure milk of the word so that we may grow in our salvation. In this way, our willing desire is essential to knowing our true design.

This principle of desire and design is echoed in *Series One* of the *One with Christ* studies. There we learn that when we first come to faith in God we receive a spiritual inheritance that surpasses our imagination. This inheritance is our true design in the image of Christ. It is our life in union with Jesus. However, our inheritance is of no value to us if we do not actually experience the various aspects of our inheritance and let each experience change us. Through experience we need the theory of our spiritual design to become our reality.

In *Series One* we discover that it is through faith, desire and the grace of God that our potential life in Christ becomes our actual life. As we have the confidence of faith combined with a willing desire, we access God's grace to bring us into the reality of our inheritance in Christ. Therefore we need to focus on having a confident and willing heart if we are to be conformed more to our true design.

Encoded Design

In the physical realm, our biological design is encoded in our DNA. When we are born we instinctively know how to suckle, sleep and cry because our genetic code has preprogrammed

those behaviors and created within us the innate desire to act according to our design. But is this also true on a spiritual level? Is our spiritual design encoded within us? If so, how? And if the blueprint for our spiritual design is present within us then does that blueprint also produce the desires in us to act according to its design?

Energizing Desire

In the *Paradise Lost* study, we learned that through the sin of Adam, sin was sown into the hearts of all people throughout time. Our sin broke our unity with God and so our original design in the image of Christ was lost. Instead of God's true design, we took on a different design and we were recreated in the image of sin.

Romans 7:4-5

Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work [*energeo*] in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

At work: *energeo*

To be operative, be at work, put forth power.

1754 energéō (from 1722/en, “engaged in,” which intensifies 2041/érgon, “work”) – properly, energize (work) in a situation to bring it from the previous stage (point) to the next (like an electrical current energizing a wire, bringing it to a shining light bulb). Energéō generally refers to believers as divinely-energized by the Lord working in them. The focus is on the internal transformation of the believer, i.e. God’s energy at work in the inner-man (interior, character).

HELPS Word-studies

Before we were renewed by God, the sin in our hearts had redefined our design. Our sinful design then energized us and compelled us to act sinfully. So while we were living under the control of sin, the principle of design and desire was still at work but in a profoundly negative way. Our corrupt design was encoded in our hearts and it produced desires that caused us to instinctively act in sinful and selfish ways. As we yielded to those desires we outwardly expressed a heart of darkness.

Titus 3:5-6

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Through the washing of regeneration, the Holy Spirit works in us to transform us into our genesis selves. Our corrupt design was encoded in our sin and so when the Spirit washes away our sin He also erases the design of sin for our lives. In its place He establishes His true design in us. The image of Christ is encoded in the presence of the Spirit of Jesus and is written in His nature within us.

Philippians 2:12-13

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work [*energeo*] in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Just as the design of sin created sinful desires within us, so now the Spirit of God energizes us to will and to work for His pleasure. So again we see the relationship between design and desire, yet now it is working as God intended. Through His presence within us, the Holy Spirit forms the nature of God in our hearts and restores our true design and identity. Our new design energizes us and creates new desires that express the image of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:14 (NKJV)

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died...

The presence of God's nature of love within us compels us to willingly act according to His good pleasure. In other words, the love of God within us creates desires that naturally lead us to will and to work according to our true design in Christ.

Any created being finds its fulfillment by living according to its design. So like the child that truly wants to walk because they are designed to walk, when the Spirit renews our hearts and minds we will want to love because we are designed to love. Then the more we act on our godly desires, the more fulfilled we will be as we live in God's design.

8 | Will and Desire

In the last study we learned that our desires flow from our design and lead us back into the reality of our design. As such, having a willing desire to know our true design is essential if we are to be renewed and restored into Christ's image.

But what exactly is a willing desire? Is there a difference between our desires and our will? If so, how is our will related to our desires and to our design?

Design and Will

Desires are the motivating force behind our actions. They are feelings and thoughts that lead us to act. Quite simply, we act because we want to act.

We all experience desire in many different ways. Some desires come from our emotions while others are physical. Still other desires are purely intellectual without any emotion. Each pure desire that we have reveals an aspect of our true design. For example, our desire for sleep reveals that sleeping is a part of our pure physical design. Our desires for intimacy,

love and respect all reveal that as people we are designed for love, we are valuable and we are worthy of respect.

Yet, as we saw in the *Paradise Lost* study, not every desire within us is pure or godly. Through Adam's choice, sin was infused into our hearts. The presence of sin carried with it a false image that produced sinful desires in us and led us away from God's design. As a result, there are times when we experience desires that come directly from the sin within our hearts. At other times, we can receive desires that come from outside us. Such desires can be implanted into us through media, images, music, words or actions.¹ Each of these desires expresses a competing design for our lives. The media tells us that we are designed for pleasure. Advertising says we are designed to consume. Business tells us that we are designed to work. Education teaches us a different design again. However, the Scriptures tell us that we are designed to live in love and unity with God.

All these designs have the power to create desires in us. Yet regardless of the source or timing of our desires, we are not forced to act on any of these desires. Instead we have the ability to judge our desires and act on those desires that seem right to us. This ability to determine our actions is the united power of the heart and mind that we call our will.

Will: The faculty of conscious and especially of deliberate action; the power of control the mind has over its own actions; power of choosing one's own actions.

Will Over Desires

Our will is the power of our inner nature to choose how we will act. So even though our desires are derived from a potential design, we can embrace or reject that design through our will as we choose which desires to fulfill and which to deny.

For example, hunger is the physical desire to eat. Each day we eat because our bodies are designed to live on food. In this way, hunger is a reflection of our biological design. When we fail to eat, we act against our natural design. Our bodies sense that we are no longer living according to our design and so they create hunger within us to lead us to eat again. Through desire we are restored back into our design.

Yet while our biological design compels us to eat, our will is able to overrule our need for food. If we choose not to eat, our will prevails over our design. Likewise, if we choose to deny our design by over-eating, our will again overrules our design. Thus within our will we have the power to choose a design for our lives simply by selecting which desires we will act on and fulfill.

Will and Design

Because our desires come from different sources and reflect different designs, it is not our desires that define us but rather it is our will. When we decide to act on a desire, we choose to let that desire and its design become a part of our identity. Every desire that we act on either reinforces or redefines who we are.

For example, when we act in faith, faith itself becomes a more dominant part of our personality and we grow in the image of Christ. Conversely, if we act in lust then we give lust a place in our hearts. If left to grow, that lust will quietly corrupt our design. Simply by its presence we will start to think of ourselves as being partly lustful.²

Thus our will is constantly shaping our identity as we decide which desires we will fulfill. But what shapes our will? What leads us to choose who we will be?

Know Thyself

In James we hear the call to discover our genesis face in the mirror of the word.³ God wants us to know the truth of who He has created us to be. It is important that we know our true design in Christ because it is this knowledge that ultimately shapes our will. Again, it is not an actual spiritual design that determines our will, but the *knowledge of our design*.

So if we do not hear of the truth of who we are in Christ then we are left to construct an identity for ourselves. And most often the design that we build for ourselves is not even a faint shadow of who God created us to be.⁴

For example, if we believe that sinfulness is a defining part of what it is to be human then we will naturally continue to choose to sin. Yet if we seek the truth and discover that God's true design for us is one of holiness then we will begin to naturally reject sinful desires. Through this knowledge, our will is changed and we begin to instinctively fulfill those desires that reflect the purity of our true identity in Christ.

Knowledge of the Heart

Ephesians 3:16-17a

...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts [*kardia*] through faith;

In Scripture, the word *kardia* (heart) is almost entirely used in a spiritual sense, referring to the center of our spiritual being.⁵ It is our place of reality and spiritual experience. Jesus comes to dwell in our hearts. He pours His love into our hearts.⁶ We believe in our hearts.⁷ We see with our hearts.⁸ And when the Spirit teaches us, we come to know His truth *in our hearts*.⁹

While we can learn the theory of our design in Christ, our will and desires are not changed until our intellectual or head-knowledge becomes heart-knowledge. Only when the truth of God pierces our hearts does the theory of our design become a reality. Only then can we say that we know in our hearts who we truly are. So how can we come to a heart-knowledge of God's design for us? How does His truth become real for us?

Revelation and the Living Word

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Acts 2:37

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”

It is the Holy Spirit that brings life to His word. When the Spirit breathes on His word, He turns the written word of God into the living word.¹⁰ The living word of God then penetrates our hearts and opens our eyes to His truth.¹¹ In this process of revelation, God’s truth becomes real to us; His truth becomes *our* truth.

Ephesians 1:15-17

For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

As God gives us a spirit of revelation, we come to know Him more in our hearts. Through revelation we also come to know who we are in Him. When God’s truth enters our hearts, the true heart-knowledge of our design changes our will. As we then choose to act out of our knowledge and faith, we begin to experience more of our true identity in Christ Jesus.¹²

9 | To Will and Work

Desires of the Heart

Psalm 34:7

Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give
you the desires of your heart.

The desires of the heart are those desires that reside at the core of who we are. They are desires that reflect who we are and so perfectly align with our will. And if we delight in God, then it is these desires that God will fulfill.

So how do we know if a desire is truly of our heart? Will God fulfill every pure desire in us? Or will He only fulfill those desires that run the deepest and strongest within us?

Desire to Love

Mark 12:28-30

One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?” Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’”

The commands of Scripture express our true identity in God. So here we find that our primary call in Christ is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Knowing that this is a defining aspect of our new self it is natural for us to *want* to love God with our whole life.

Deuteronomy 30:6

“Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.”

Here we learn that the only way to love God with all our hearts is to let Him circumcise our hearts. So even though we may *want* to love God with all our heart and soul, we are not truly *willing* to love Him until we actually act on our desire and honestly call on God to circumcise our hearts.¹ As we act to fulfill our desires we confirm their place in our heart.

Mark 10:17-22

As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’” And he said to Him, “Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up.” Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.

This relationship between the will and desire can also be seen in the rich young ruler.² He ran to Jesus *wanting* to know how he could receive eternal life and yet he was *unwilling* to accept it. So although he had a godly desire in his heart, the young man did not have the will to fulfill his desire. So for this man it was not his desire that defined him but his will. He was a well-intentioned but materially imprisoned soul.

So how do we have a true and willing desire for the things of God? How does our *desire* to love God become our *will* to love Him?

To Will and Work

Philippians 2:12-13

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

To Will: *thelo*

To desire (wish, will); desiring what is best (optimal) and to be ready and willing to act on it.

It is the Holy Spirit who works in us to both will (*thelo*) and work for His good pleasure. The Greek word *thelo* not only encompasses our desires but also includes the actual will to act. So from desire to action, the power of the new will comes solely from the grace of God. He forms His desires in our hearts and then gives us the energy and will to act on those desires.

So we find that it is not by our own effort or determination that we can act on our righteous desires and so please God. Rather it is by faith. Through faith we access the grace of God and experience the power of the Spirit to desire, will and work according to the will and pleasure of God.

Through His focus on both our desires and our will, we see that God does not want us to dispassionately serve Him and work for His pleasure. Rather He wants us to be united with

Him in His desires. He wants to change our hearts so that we genuinely want what He wants. As God forms His desires in our hearts, we will find true fulfillment in seeing His will done.

One Spirit, One Nature, One Will

John 6:38

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do
My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

A person’s will is an expression of their nature. So because Jesus shares one nature and one Spirit with the Father, He also shares one will with God. The Father and Son are one in every way.

John 17:20-23

“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.”

1 Corinthians 6:17

But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

God has designed us to live in spiritual unity with Him. Thus Jesus prays that God would make us one *just as* Jesus is one with the Father.³ So like the unity of the Father and Son, our unity with God is to extend to our desires and our will.

In this prayer we see the heart of the Father expressed in the Son. Jesus prays this last prayer from the depths of His heart, knowing that this is the ultimate will of God for us. He prays with the absolute certainty of faith, knowing that God is both willing and able to answer His prayer. As such, we can also have complete faith in the power of God to answer Jesus' prayer in our lives. Through His amazing grace, God wants to make us one Spirit and one will with Him.

New Spirit, Nature and Will

Ezekiel 36:26

“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

In this passage we find that walking in the will of God is a direct result of having a new heart and a new spirit. So to make us one will with Him, Jesus starts with the heart.

In the *Nature and Word* study we saw how God changes us by giving us His Spirit and forming His nature in us. Through the Spirit and nature of Christ, God makes us one with Him and gives us His desires and His will. Because God's will is an expression of His nature of love, the more we partake of His nature, the more our will is changed. This means that we do not need to strive in our own strength to try and keep the will of God. We simply need to continue to partake of His nature. As the nature of Christ grows within us, we will no longer choose to live by our own will. Instead we will live more and more to do the will of God.⁴

Not I but Christ

Galatians 2:20

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

When we become partakers of the divine nature we give up our old life. There is no longer any ‘I who lives’ because we no longer have an identity that is independent from God. Rather we live in union with Jesus and the Father. Our hearts are entwined with God and so it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us. Through His Spirit and nature, Jesus is constantly present within us, uniting our hearts with His and leading us into the reality of His will.

10 | The Boule Will

In the last study we looked at how Jesus is calling us to be one with Him in nature, life and in will. But what is the will of God? How do we know His will?

The New Testament uses two Greek words to describe the will of God: *boule* (boo-lay) and *thelema* (thel-ay-mah). Each of these words gives us a unique insight into the will of God.

The Immutable Will of God

Hebrews 6:17-18

In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose [*boule*], interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.

Will: *boule*

Properly, a resolved plan; used particularly of the immutable plan of God which purposefully arranges all physical circumstances, guaranteeing every scene of life also works to His eternal purpose.

HELPS Word Studies

The boule-will of God is His defined plan and purpose for all creation. It is the inescapable will of God that will come to pass *come what may*. Nothing that anyone does or fails to do can ever compromise the boule-will of God. God is sovereign and His predefined plan will be completely fulfilled down to the smallest detail.

The Crucifixion

Acts 2:22-23 (original Greek emphasis)

“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which **God** performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this Man, delivered over by the **predetermined plan** and **foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the **hands of godless men** and put Him to death.”

Jesus was condemned and nailed to the cross by the hands of godless men and yet this worked to fulfill God’s boule-plan. God orchestrated all the timing and circumstances of Jesus’

death. Jesus was crucified during the Passover feast according to God's plan. He was crowned with thorns, beaten, whipped and stripped, all according to plan. God ensured that Pilate was the governor at the time as a more righteous and fearless man would have chosen to set Jesus free. All the people in positions of influence were set in place by God so that when they acted according to their fallen desires, they worked to fulfill God's plan for the redemption of His creation. In this way, God did not need to force anyone to act against their nature to do His will. He simply arranged events so that when people acted on their own desires, they were unknowingly fulfilling the boule-plan of God.

John the Baptist

Luke 1:13

But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John."

The Spirit of God works to arrange life according to His boule-will. At times the Spirit reveals His boule-plan to people and involves us in the fulfillment of His will. For example, it was in God's plan for John the Baptist to be sent as a messenger to prepare the people for their Messiah. A part of this plan was that he would be called John. Thus before John was born, God told Zacharias to name his son John, just as He told Mary to choose the name Jesus. As Zacharias was faithful to do as he had been commanded, he fulfilled the boule-will of God.

Ruth and Naomi

At other times, God works out His boule-will without directly revealing His plan to people. This can be seen in the book of Ruth. To escape a famine in Canaan, Naomi and her husband and family moved to Moab. In Moab her sons took wives, one of whom was Ruth. Over the next ten years Naomi's husband and two sons died. Naomi then decided to return to Israel with Ruth, who had devoted herself to the God of Israel.

In Israel, Ruth went to glean in the fields as widows were allowed to do.¹ She found herself in the field of Boaz who was one of Naomi's relatives. Ruth proposed to Boaz and they were married. Boaz and Ruth had a son called Obed, who had a son called Jesse, who had a son called David, who became the king of Israel. Thus it was in God's boule-plan that Boaz would marry Ruth, for without their marriage, king David would not have been born and the family line that stretched to Jesus would not have been the same.

Although the circumstances and events surrounding Ruth were unfolding according to God's plan, there is no record of God speaking to or guiding Ruth or Naomi. They simply acted according to their hearts. Naomi even felt that God had set His hand against her, to the point that she asked people to call her Mara, meaning bitterness. Yet even though Naomi and Ruth were unable to perceive God's boule-plan in what they initially experienced, in the end it was clear that God had been directing their steps. Even in difficult times, God was continually sheltering them under His wing and orchestrating everything to work together for good and for His boule-plan.

Physical Design

So is it fair that God leads us without our knowledge or consent like He led Naomi and Ruth?

To answer this question we can look at the boule-will of God in terms of design. God's boule-plan is His ultimate design for creation as a whole that is worked out, in, through and around the will of people.

The idea that God would work out His plan through us without our knowledge may seem a little disconcerting at first. Yet in the natural realm we are familiar and comfortable with our own will being entirely bypassed by our design.

For example, we do not have to will our bodies to breathe. Our bodies are designed to breathe without needing us to consciously choose to breathe. It simply happens by design.

In the same way, there are times when our physical design takes control of our bodies and makes us act without any conscious thought. For example, when our hands touch a hot surface we experience a withdrawal reflex. Our hands move instantly away from the heat while we also act to counter-balance the withdrawal action. All of these actions are initiated outside the brain. It happens by design, not will. So because we have not willfully chosen to act, our conscious minds only become aware of a reflex action as it is occurring.

When we experience a reflex action, we do not get upset because we were controlled by our physical design rather than by our conscious will. We are not upset because our reflexes have worked for our good and produced a better result than we could have achieved if we had been consciously in control.

These principles also apply on a spiritual level. Most of the time in our spiritual lives we deliberately choose our actions. And it is a real gift and blessing of God to be able to willfully act according to His boule-will. Yet at times the Spirit of God will move in or through us to bring about His boule-plan without our knowledge or consent. Like a spiritual reflex, we may only become aware that God has worked through us after it has happened. Such sovereign acts of God are acts of His grace and love towards us. For in these times God is actively working all things together for our good and for His glory. He is fulfilling His divine plan in and through us, and no matter how uncomfortable or even painful things get, we can be sure that God's boule-plan is always for the very best. We can rest secure in the knowledge that no matter what, God is good, He is in control and He is fulfilling His perfect will.

11 | The Thelema Will

The boule-will of God is His undefeatable plan for creation. Before the universe was created God had entirely laid out His plan. History was written before time began. According to His plan, God created people in His image. Knowing that we would fall from grace, the Father predetermined to give the life of His Son to atone for our sin and restore us into love and unity with Him.¹ Through His own sacrifice, the Father saved us so that we might be conformed to His image as He always designed.

The boule-will of God is the ultimate expression of His love for us. It is the work of a sovereign God to see His love prevail in creation and to restore us into His image. In terms of what we have been learning about desires and the will, the boule-plan of God is God's sovereign will in action, working to fulfill His ultimate desires for His creation.

So is every desire of God fulfilled in His boule-will? Or does God have some desires that He chooses not to fulfill?

The Desire of God

1 Timothy 2:1-4

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires (*thelo*) all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Matthew 18:14

“So it is not the will (*thelema*) of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.”

Will: *thelēma*

From 2309/thélō, “to desire, wish” – properly, a desire (wish), typically referring to God’s “preferred-will” – His “best-offers” to people which can be accepted or rejected.

HELPS Word Studies

All of God’s desires express His unfathomable love. This love of God requires that He desires the absolute best for all His creation. God loves each and every person and so in His love He genuinely desires that everyone would be saved. Yet not everyone is saved. For the same love of God that desires our best also empowers us to turn from God and leave His highest desires for our lives unfulfilled.

Thus there is a will of God that is not certain to be fulfilled. This is God's *thelema-will*. It encompasses all the desires and blessings that God freely offers us but that He does not force upon us in the manner of His *boule-will*. So while God would like His desires to be fulfilled in our lives, unlike His *boule-plan*, God has made His *thelema-will* subject to our choices. We can therefore choose to embrace or reject His best desires for us.

1 Thessalonians 4:2-4

For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. For this is the will [*thelema*] of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor.

God's will is for our sanctification. It is His heart's desire that we would be truly holy and pure in heart. However God does not force this will upon us. Rather, He gives us the choice of purity or corruption. If we want to sin, we can turn from God and deny His *thelema-will* for us. Through our sinful actions God's will for us at that moment in time remains forever unfulfilled. However, if we choose to obey God then we can experience the reality of His *thelema-will* for us. By faith and obedience we can know the blessings that God wants to bring to us and release through us.

Choice of Love

We have no choice in God's boule-will. His divine plan will be fulfilled regardless of our actions or inaction. As such, there is little scope for us to express our love for God by choosing to submit to His boule-plan simply because we cannot choose otherwise. His boule-will is undefeatable and so it is entirely an expression of *His* unfailing love for us and for His creation.

In contrast, God does not guarantee that His thelema-will is going to be fulfilled in us. The fact that He freely offers people the gift of salvation does not mean that everyone accepts His gift. So while it is certain in design, God's thelema-will for us requires our willing obedience and participation. We need to actively seek and choose this will of God for us if we are to experience the reality of His best desires in our lives.

Love and Obedience

2 John 1:6a

And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments.²

Through the call of His thelema-will, God constantly gives us the opportunity to express our love to Him. When we choose to obey His will, we choose the very best for God, ourselves and others. And that is love. So according to the ways of God, we love through obedience. In this way, we fulfill the greatest command to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength when we choose with our entire being to *obey His will*.

Your Will be Done

Matthew 6:9-10

“Pray, then, in this way:

Our Father who is in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will (*thelema*) be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

It is without question that God will fulfill His boule-will and so there is no need to pray for it to happen. However it is not certain that God’s thelema-will will be fulfilled in or through us. We need to choose His will. Thus Jesus teaches us to pray by asking God to let His *thelema-will* be done on earth.

From this perspective we can see that this prayer is actually a cry for transformation. When we pray to God to let His will be done, we are really asking Him to change our hearts and minds so that we would choose to obey His will for us. In this prayer, we are calling on God to unite our hearts with His and to establish His desires within us so that every day we would choose to embrace His thelema-will for us.

Thus the greatest love we can express to God is when we say from the depths of our hearts: **Your will be done.** These words unite our hearts with His. They are our white flag of surrender and our banner of advance. In these words we find the depths of repentance and humility and the heights of love and worship. In these words our spiritual and natural lives are drawn into one and we are wholly devoted to the perfect love of God.³ *Your will be done.*

Praying the Will of God

1 John 5:14-15

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His [*thelema*] will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

When we have a true desire to see God's will done we can pray with absolute confidence. God has promised that when we pray according to His thelema-will He will hear us and will answer us. Through our prayers we work in unity with God to see His will done on earth as it is in Heaven.

Working in Unity

Through His sovereign power God brings every aspect of His boule-will to pass. However in contrast to His unshakeable boule-plan, God chooses to fulfill His thelema-will in unity with us. Through our prayers, words and actions, God works with us to fulfill His thelema-will.⁴

So while He remains absolutely sovereign, God has chosen to work out His will in unity with us and in doing so He has empowered us beyond measure. God has invested in us the nature and power of His Spirit to do His will, and as such we are now people of consequence. Every prayer that we pray or action we make according to the will of God releases the grace and power of God to see His will done in our lives and the lives of others.

Yoked with Christ

Matthew 11:28-30

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Doing the thelema-will of God is the essence of what it means to be yoked with Christ.⁵ We are united with Jesus in doing the will of God and through our obedience we bring blessing to God and others. Thus God does not involve us in His work in a token way.⁶ He does not call us to pray just so that we can feel like we are helping. He has chosen to work with us in genuine unity. He has called us to do His will which means that we have genuine responsibility to pray and act in order to release the power of His will.

Consequently this means that if we fail to pray or do the will of God then God forfeits the blessing of seeing His thelema-will done through us. This is the cost for God of His design. By enabling us to turn from our unity, He has made His own blessing subject to our faithfulness.

The Weight of the Yoke

Though we are spiritually empowered through our unity with Jesus, it is Christ that bears the weight of the work. We do not need to worry about the outcome of our obedience; we simply need to be faithful to obey. The results are entirely in His hands. In this way, our yoke is easy and our burden is light.

We just hear, pray and act according to the will of God and let Him do the rest. Knowing that Jesus will bear the load, we can freely embrace both the joy and responsibility of being yoked with Christ.⁷

12 | Renewing the Mind

Jesus teaches us to pray that God's thelema-will would be done because God has chosen to do His thelema-will *in unity with us*. So when we pray according to God's will, we can have confidence in the promise that God will answer our prayers.¹

1 John 5:14-15

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His [*thelema*] will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

Here we find that praying according to God's will means more than just saying "Your will be done." It means making requests of God, all of which express His will. So to pray effectively we need to know the details of His will. We need God to reveal to us His best-desires for the people and situations that we are praying for.

Knowing the Will of God

Ephesians 5:15-17

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the [*thelema*] will of the Lord is.

In the *Will and Desire* study we saw how we need to discover God's design for our lives so that we can live according to His design. In the same way, to do the will of God in unity with Him we need to come to a true knowledge of His will. We need to *know* the will of God in order to *pray and do* the will of God.

A Renewed Mind

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

When we know God's will we can confidently act in faith and unity with Him. Yet the will of God will is beyond the logic or reasoning of our natural minds. As such, we cannot pray or

act in faith when we find ourselves assuming or guessing what the will of God is in a given situation. Rather we need the Holy Spirit to renew our minds so that we can confidently discern His will.

John 16:13

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”

The Spirit renews our minds not only to reshape the way we think, but also to help us to hear His voice more clearly. As we learn to listen to the Spirit, He will show us what He is doing and reveal the will of God to us. Then, when we know the revealed will of God, we can pray with confidence and act according to His will and good pleasure.

In Ezekiel 36 we learned that God gives us a new heart and a new spirit so that we can walk in His will. The Spirit of God also renews our minds so that we can know His will. So we find that God gives us everything we need to follow Him. He gives us the knowledge of his will so we can act in faith; a heart of His nature so that we may act in love; and the life and energy of His Spirit so that we can act in His grace and power.

Thus to know and live in the will of God we need to let God give us a new heart, a new spirit and a new mind. In other words, to be united with Christ in His will, we need God to renew us with a whole *new self*.

The New Self

Ephesians 4:23-24 (emphasis added)

...**be renewed** in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

As we learned in *Discovering our Design*, the new self is our true self. It is who God designed us to be as people who are created in His image and likeness. In this passage we see that being renewed in our minds is connected to putting on the new self.

Continual Renewal

Colossians 3:9-10 (emphasis added)

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who **is being renewed** to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.

2 Corinthians 4:15-16

For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

As we abide in Christ our inner man is continually renewed to a true knowledge of God. Though our bodies age, our hearts and minds are being renewed each day by the Spirit of God.²

To renew our minds to His truth, the Holy Spirit brings His word to life and makes it real for us. Through His living word the Spirit opens our eyes and we see Jesus as the *Logos* of God. Jesus becomes our new reasoning and our new logic. He becomes our revelation and understanding of the will of God.

In this way, our knowledge of God's will comes directly from a living relationship with His Spirit.³ Through the Spirit of Jesus, God speaks to us and renews our minds with His truth. In His love, God reveals His will to us and empowers us to will and to work with Him.

The Spiritual and Natural Will

In terms of seeking God's will for our own lives, often in our desire to do the will of God we can become overly focused on learning His will for our natural lives. We ask God to show us His will in our work, our relationships, our material life decisions and our ministry. And this is good. Yet often we can think of God's will for us in terms of His boule-plan rather than His thelema-desires. We focus on our obedience to God as keeping His blueprint rather than following His heart.

Colossians 1:9-10 (emphasis added)⁴

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be **filled with the knowledge of His will**

in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

In this passage Paul prays that we might be filled with the knowledge of the thelema-will of God in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. When we pray for God's will to be done, we need to approach the will of God from a spiritual perspective.

If we think of God's will mainly in terms of our natural lives then we risk missing out on God's will for our spiritual lives.⁵ It is this spiritual will of God for us that is the primary focus of Scripture. The inner nature of our heart radiates out through our actions and decisions and so if we focus on the spiritual roots of the heart then the fruit of outward obedience to the will of God will naturally follow. So when we pray according to the will of God, our first focus should be on His will as it applies to the heart. But what is God's spiritual will for us?

One with Christ

According to Scripture, God's will is that we would be saved from our sin so that we might love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and love others and ourselves.⁶ His will is that we would be circumcised in our hearts and be made holy and righteous in Christ.⁷ God wants us to abound in faith and love.⁸ He wants to saturate us with His Spirit and His word.⁹ God's will is that we would abide in Christ and be conformed to His image and likeness.¹⁰ His will is that we would walk in the newness of life and know His presence, love, nature, life and joy within us.¹¹ God's will is that we would become one with Christ.¹²

The question for us is: is this our will too?

13 | Faith, Love and Action

Every experience that we have of God's will for us is a gift given entirely by grace. There is nothing we could ever say or do that would make us deserving of the riches that God offers us. It is God's grace and His grace alone. Our part is simply to receive His grace.

Access by Faith

Romans 5:1-2 (NKJV emphasis added)

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we **have access by faith into this grace** in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

God's thelema-will for us is a gift of grace and it is faith alone that accesses grace. Therefore faith is the key to experiencing the will of God. Through faith we are yoked with Christ in doing the will of God. But what is faith?

Faith¹

Faith: *pistis*

Conviction of the truth; derived from *peitho*, meaning to have confidence, be persuaded.

In Scripture, the word *faith* is used in several ways. At times it refers to the group of beliefs that shape our relationship with God. At other times it is used to refer to a person's conviction of the truth. However, when we look at the root word *peitho*, from which the word faith (*pistis*) is derived, we find that in simple terms, faith is confidence in God.

With the Heart

Romans 10:8-10 (emphasis added)

But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; **for with the heart a person believes**, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

In this passage we see that those who are saved are those who believe in their hearts, *for with the heart a person believes*. In verse ten, the word translated as *believes* is the Greek word *pisteuo*, which is derived from the word *pistis*, meaning faith. So just like true belief, true faith is of the heart rather than the

mind. It is the deep confidence in our hearts that shapes our thoughts, character and behavior. In the heart we have faith and from the heart we are changed. So how can we grow in faith?

The Grace of Faith

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith;
and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;
not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We are saved by grace through faith, and even that is a gift of God. Faith is a gift from God.²

1 Timothy 6:11

But flee from these things, you man of God, and
pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love,
perseverance and gentleness.

Just as God is the source of righteousness, godliness and love, He is also the source of faith. True faith is a gift that God creates in our hearts by grace. Just as we cannot generate joy, love or peace by our own efforts, so we cannot make faith by ourselves. It is a gift of God that only comes from Him.

So how does God give us this faith?

Growing in Faith

Romans 10:17

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word [*rhema*] of Christ.

The word *rhema* means a spoken word from a living voice. Thus faith comes by hearing the voice of God. As we hear God speak to us, He forms the deep confidence of faith in our hearts. Through faith we know beyond any doubt that God will keep His word to us.

So can everyone hear God speak? Or is hearing God's voice something that happens only as we mature in God?

The Spirit Speaks

John 10:27

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”

John 16:13

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”

Here Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will speak to us. From the youngest believer to the oldest, absolutely everyone who follows Jesus is able to hear His voice.

In order to hear Jesus' voice we need to have a living and real relationship with His Spirit. Our spiritual life is not meant to be built just on theology but on a two-way relationship with God in which we speak with Him and He speaks with us. So as God's children, we need to learn how to listen to God so that we can hear Him with clarity. As we hear the voice of the Spirit we will find that new faith rises in our hearts. Simply by hearing God speak to us we will gain a greater confidence in Christ and experience a greater measure of His grace.

Faith, Grace and Reality

Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace you have been saved through faith;
and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;
not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.
For we are His workmanship, created in Christ
Jesus for good works, which God prepared
beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Faith is the gift of complete confidence in God. In this passage we find that faith is not the results of works. On the contrary, works are the result of faith.

In the beginning God predestined us to be conformed to His image, but He did not stop there. Not only did God design us to live in His likeness but He also prepared good works for us to do. God has created us for being *and* doing. His desire is that we would express *who we are* in *what we do*. So as we put on our new self and clothe ourselves with Christ, we need to start expressing our unity with God by doing His will.

Working in Unity

John 5:19-20

Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.”

Jesus came to do the will of God and so He could only do what He saw the Father doing. Jesus could do nothing of Himself because if Jesus acted outside the will of God then He would break His unity with the Father and redefine Himself in a different image. So Jesus chose to maintain His unity with the Father by only doing His will.

If Jesus could do nothing apart from His unity with God then we are the same. So like Jesus, we need to know who we truly are in God and then we need to act according to our unity with His Spirit. In this way faith is essential if we are to live in the will of God and do His work in unity with Him. To have real faith, we need to see what the Holy Spirit is doing and hear what He is saying. We need to sense His heart and know His leading. As the Spirit of God speaks to us and reveals His good works, we can then work with Christ in the absolute confidence of true faith. Through our faith we can then release the Spirit to move in power and fulfill His will.

Calling, Desire, Will and Work

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here Paul prays for the believers in Thessalonica that God would consider them worthy of their calling and fulfill every good desire in them and every work of faith with power.

In this prayer we read a summary of life in God's design. Our calling in Christ is to live in God's image and find our true identity in union with Christ. Thus Paul prays that God would find His people worthy of their calling. To be worthy in this sense is not to discount the grace of God but to honor His grace by remaining true to our calling. It is to bless God by faithfully living in the reality of His design.

Paul also prays that God would fulfill every good desire in His people. As the Spirit infuses us with the nature and life of Christ He restores us to our true identity. Through the process of restoration our hearts and minds are renewed and God's true design begins to naturally create His desires in our hearts. The Spirit of God also works in us to change our will so that we truly want to act on God's desires. As we desire and will according to the love of God, we find that God is ready and willing to grant us the desires of our hearts.

Paul also prays that God would fulfill every work of faith with power through us. Here we see how God intends our inward transformation to flow through our outward actions. As we are yoked with Christ, He will show us the works that He has prepared for us to do. As we receive the revelation of God's will for us, the Spirit creates the complete confidence of faith in our hearts and we can act in true unity with Christ. Through the gift of faith we access the grace of God and release His power to fulfill His will. In this way we can do good works of faith and power through the Spirit of God. As we are obedient to His leading, we bring blessing to God, to others and to ourselves.

Like Paul, this should be our continual prayer for our lives and for the lives of those for whom we are called to pray. We cannot simply assume that one day God will conform us to His image. Rather, we need to actively seek the will of God. We need to constantly pray that God would take us all into the reality of our true design, transformation and calling in Christ.

The end result of living in the design of God and working with Christ is that the name and nature of God is glorified in us and we are glorified in Him. As such, it is not only for our own benefit that we seek the awesome transforming power of God. It is ultimately for His benefit, His blessing and His glory.

14 | Foreknowledge of God

In some of the Scriptures we have looked at so far we have seen how God has had a plan since the very beginning of time. Jesus was crucified according to God's foreknowledge and *predetermined* plan.¹ We are created in Christ for good works that God prepared *beforehand*.² We, whom God *foreknew*, were predesigned to be conformed to the image of Christ.³

So exactly what is the foreknowledge of God? How is it possible that God planned everything from the beginning of time? To answer these questions we need to look at the nature of God with respect to time and creation.

All in All

Jeremiah 23:24

“Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him?” declares the LORD. “Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?” declares the LORD.⁴

Ephesians 4:4-6

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

God fills all the heavens and the earth. He is over all, through all and in all. The Spirit of God infuses His entire creation and He is as present in the remotest corners of outer space as He is to every person here on earth. We are all able to connect with God regardless of where we are, because He is *always* present *everywhere*. Right now, God is present within *all* of His creation.

God in Time

Time is a creation of God. So in the same way that God infuses all creation with His presence, so He infuses time itself. Just as God is present *everywhere*, so He is also present *everywhen*.

Before we look at how God can fill time as well as space, we need to understand the created nature of time. Time itself is simply a measure of change. We measure the change in daylight as hours and days. We measure the change of the earth's position around the sun in seasons and we call a complete orbit a year. In every way, time is a measure of change. So if there was no change, if the entire universe stayed exactly the same, then the past, present and future would be identical and there could be no time. Thus time is a creation that is necessary to support the changing nature of physical life. In order to live and grow, we need to have time.

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Time is essential to change because it provides the *before* and *after* that allows change to take place. Therefore everything that changes is subject to time. Yet because of His eternal nature, God exists outside of time and so He does not change, ever. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever and so He can never be subject to time. On the contrary, Scripture says that all things are subject to God, which includes time itself.⁵

Isaiah 57:15

For thus says the High and Lofty One
 Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
 “I dwell in the high and holy place,
 With him who has a contrite and humble spirit,
 To revive the spirit of the humble,
 And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

God inhabits eternity.⁶ Because God exists outside of time, He is able to infuse all of time equally with His presence.⁷ In this way, just as God is present everywhere in creation, so He is present everywhere in time. He is the Great I AM. God is present at every moment in time *at the same time*. He is the Almighty God who was, and is and is to come.⁸ He is I AM in the past, present and future.

Initially this can be hard for the natural mind to make sense of. How can God be as present in the past as He is in the present? And how can He be already present in a future that for us is yet to come into being?

We experience reality in a linear way and so we have a past, present and future. For us, a single moment can exist in the past, present or future, depending on where we stand in relation to that moment. However, because God exists outside of time, He can relate to every moment of our time from an eternal perspective. For God, each moment of our time exists in His eternal present.

A Certain Future

The idea that God can exist outside our natural laws of time can be a little difficult to grasp at first, but the truth of His eternal presence can only strengthen our faith in God.

God knows our future and our ultimate end because for Him it is already happening. He is there; it is done. Everything that God has spoken will come to pass with absolute certainty because He is already witnessing it come to pass. This means that we can have complete confidence in every prophecy and promise in the word of God. There will be a resurrection, all evil will be defeated and every tear will be wiped away. Jesus will reign in ultimate glory and we will be forever blessed in His presence. It will happen because for God, it is already happening.

The Intimate Foreknowledge of God

Psalm 139:15-16

My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.

Jeremiah 1:5

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Romans 8:29

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son...

Foreknew: *proginosko*

To have knowledge before hand.

All of David’s days were known and ordained by God before David was born. God also knew Jeremiah long before he was born. In the beginning, when God laid out His boule-plan, He set David and Jeremiah apart for His purposes.

In the same way, before we were born God also knew us. He has known us since the beginning of time because He has already experienced all of time in a single eternal moment.

God has always been and already is present at our birth, life, death, resurrection and glorification. From His eternal perspective, we are already seated with Him in heavenly places even though from our temporal perspective we are still living on earth, yet to experience the glory of our death and resurrection in Christ.⁹

Foreknowledge and the Boule-Plan

Acts 2:22-24 (original Greek emphasis)

“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which **God** performed through Him in your midst, just as **you yourselves** know this Man, delivered over by the **predetermined plan** and **foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the **hands of godless men** and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.”

Jesus was offered up according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. From the beginning of time, Jesus' sacrifice was designed by God. And because Jesus exists outside of time, the power of the sacrifice of Christ has always radiated throughout all time.

However, even though Jesus' death was designed by God, the men who crucified Christ were acting according to the sinful intentions of their hearts rather than acting in the love of God. And still God's boule-plan was fulfilled.

Because God is present at every moment of time at this very moment, the boule-plan of God is made with complete certainty and perfectly accounts for every person's nature and their choices for good or evil. He knows our whole life, our every thought and breath, and our every choice. Knowing every part of every heart, God weaves His perfect plan throughout time without any hindrance from sin, people, or the forces of evil. He performs His boule-will of love in every moment of our time, all from within His one single moment of eternity.

15 | Infinite Awareness of God

Limitless

Romans 11:33

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

Job 11:7

“Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?”

God is awesome beyond all comprehension. No one can discover His limits because He is limitless. And this makes it hard to understand and appreciate so much of the nature of God. For example, how can we begin to comprehend what it means for God to fill all space *and* all time?

While we may not be able to come to a full understanding of the eternal and infinite nature of God, we can still try to come to a better understanding. To do this we can start by connecting some of the smaller pieces of the puzzle. So instead of looking at how God can infuse *all* time with His presence, we can start with just one single moment in time.

A Moment in Time

When we experience a single moment of time we process and produce multiple sensations in that moment. We hear, we feel, we smell, we see, we think, we move, and so on. From a sensory perspective, our experience of a moment of time is entirely unique to us. Yet because God is present everywhere, He is also aware of our complete experience in each moment. In this sense, our entire lives are shared with God.

If we were to combine all the sensations of all living people that occur in a single moment of time, we would have billions of sensations. All of these take place in an instant and yet God is consciously aware of every one. If we were then to add to that the experiences of all living things (from the smallest bacteria to the biggest mammals), we would then have an immeasurable number of experiences—all of which God is equally aware of in that very moment. Thus God is always present and aware of each one of the countless billions of experiences that take place within a single moment of time.

Yet the total experience of God in each moment of time far exceeds just the sum of all living things. God is equally conscious and present in every environment within creation.

He is as present in the corners of space as He is in us. The unlimited presence of God means that He experiences every moment of time in every dimension of creation, from a sub-atomic to a stellar scale. He senses the orbit of every planet around every star and every electron around every nucleus. The Spirit of God is there, knowing every thought, observing every sensation, absorbing every change and infusing every single aspect of created life. In this way, our minds simply cannot fathom the awesome infiniteness of God in every single moment of time.

So if God truly is limitless and if He can process the whole experience of creation at one moment of time then it stands to reason that He could also experience all the other moments of time, from all perspectives, all in a single eternal moment.

An Eternal Moment

2 Peter 3:8

But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.

To understand this passage we can imagine what it would be like if God concentrated all His presence and attention on a single moment of our time and experienced that moment from a single perspective. If He went on to experience that same moment from all the different possible perspectives one by one then that single moment of time would stretch out to

become practically eternal in nature. Thus the infinite nature of God allows Him to experience a virtual eternity of life all sourced in a single moment of time. In this way, for God a day is easily like a thousand years and vice versa. Because God is always present at every moment in time, all of time can be experienced in a single eternal instant, and a single temporal moment can last an eternity.

God within Time

Even though God is infinite in eternal glory, even though He exists outside time and creation, He still moves by His Spirit within the world and within our time. Adam walked with Him in the cool of the day. David sat and communed with God. Jesus dwelt among us. God our eternal creator and the source of all life, despite all His infinite power and glory, still talks with us and spends time with us. He exists outside of time and yet He delights in sharing each moment with us.

Because of His eternally present nature, God can continue to experience time long after it has become a part of our past. A passing moment for us is an eternally present moment for God. As such, our time is much more valuable than we could have ever imagined. Every moment that we give in blessing to God is a moment that can radiate blessing to God throughout eternity. Every time we express love, the anointing of our love can be enjoyed by Jesus forever. Every time we act in faith, the aroma of our worship can bring unending pleasure to God. In this way, we can take the moments of our temporal life and make them spiritually and eternally fruitful for God.

War on Time

Ephesians 5:15-16

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

Our call here is clear: we are to make the most of our time. Each moment of our time has eternal value and so time itself is one of our most precious spiritual and natural resources. Yet in many ways modern society wages a war on time and undermines our ability to invest spiritual value in our time. Our modern work culture is obsessed with efficiency and productivity. Economics says that time is money and so we are put under pressure to *save* time rather than *spend* time.¹ The fast pace of life means that our time literally flies by, which in turn means that we often miss the opportunities to turn our temporal moments into eternal blessing. Too often we get too busy and suffer too many demands to take time to connect with God and bless Him in His presence. So how can we change? How can we fulfill the demands of life and still make the most of our time?

Galatians 5:25

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

One of the solutions to overcoming the worldly pace of life is simply to keep in step with the Spirit and learn to walk with Him in every part of our lives. As we abide in Christ we can

work with Him, not only in good works of faith and love, but in the ordinary activities of daily life. As we learn to involve Jesus in the details of life we will find ourselves making the most of our time with Him.

At times the Spirit will lead us to move quickly with God but without the sense of being rushed. At other times God may call us to stop everything and simply spend some time enjoying the sense of His presence. By learning to live in step with the Spirit, we will increasingly find the opportunity and grace to bless God with our time.²

Come to Me

Matthew 11:28-29

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

This passage echoes our call to stay in step with the Spirit. As we are yoked with Jesus we will feel at complete rest in the work with do with Him. Regardless of the pace that He leads us at, His grace will always be present with us to keep us in the place of rest. We simply need to become sensitive to His voice and leading and learn to enjoy taking life at His pace. He will take care of the rest.

16 | A Few Questions

Election

How does election work in terms of God's foreknowledge and sovereignty?

This is essentially a question of mechanics. Scripture is clear that we are saved entirely by God's grace and that He has chosen us and drawn us to Himself. Every godly desire we have is sourced in His design for us. The ability of our will to choose His desires also comes from God as does our faith. So from beginning to end, from creation to recreation, every aspect of our salvation originates in God. As such, the glory and credit for our salvation will always belong to God.

Scripture clearly speaks of the reality of election by grace. Yet what is not clear is *how* God chooses us. Scripture does not comment on the mechanism of election, which tells us that it is not that important for us to understand *how* God calls us.

However, we can be sure that our election is made in the context of His eternal presence. So once we grasp the eternal nature of God and see how He acts in our time from within a single eternal moment, perhaps then we can turn our thoughts to understanding how God elects His chosen people.

Future Glory

Just how conformed to the image of Christ can we become while we are alive? Don't we have to wait until the after we die to be fully conformed to His image?

Philippians 3:20-21

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

After we die we will be resurrected and receive an immortal and incorruptible body. Our physical bodies will be gone and we will be conformed to the heavenly body of Christ's glory.

When Scripture speaks of a future conformation it concerns our resurrection into new bodies. These bodies may or may not be similar to the body Christ received after His resurrection. In contrast to this, Scripture describes our conformation into the image of Christ through His Spirit as a present reality that we experience *in this life*. Thus physical or

outward conformation to the body of Christ comes after we die. Inward conformation to the image and nature of Christ is a process that takes place over our natural lifetime by faith.

As for the possible extent of our conformation, there is yet to be any record of a person who has found the limit of God's transforming power. Due to the infinite nature of His love, being conformed to Christ's image will always be a process in which we can continually experience more of His love and be filled with more of His Spirit. The question for us is therefore not how much can we be conformed? Rather we need to ask how much do we want to be conformed? Are we going to seek to be continually filled with more of God's Spirit and love?

Freewill

Is there such a thing as free will? Are we really in control of what we choose to do?

Our will is an expression of the heart and mind. The question of free will is therefore firmly connected with our nature. Do we have a free nature? Can our human nature exist apart from God *and* apart from the influence or presence of sin?

God has designed us for unity.¹ We were created to bear His image by living in unity with Him. So when we choose to define ourselves apart from God, we are actually choosing to unite our hearts with sin. There is no middle ground. We cannot disconnect from God without connecting to sin. If we pull up a field of wheat, the weeds soon take over. In the same way, our human nature simply cannot exist in isolation.

When we sin we adopt an image of independence, self and corruption. If we continue in our independence, the decay of our hearts will begin to corrupt our desires and our will. Through our sinful and selfish desires, we will be compelled to sin and eventually we will become *slaves to sin*.²

Therefore there is no such thing as a will that is entirely free from the influence of God *and* the influence of sin. Rather true freedom comes from God and leads to God. He sets our will free from the influence of sin so that we can freely choose His will. Thus a free human nature is one that exists in unity with Christ and a free will is one that is united with the will of God.

Chosen for Salvation

The Scriptures say that God has chosen us from the beginning for salvation. So doesn't this mean predestination relates to our future and ultimate salvation?

2 Thessalonians 2:13

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

We have been chosen for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. This passage is speaking of our salvation in terms of our sanctification. And sanctification is a reality that we experience in this present life *by faith*.³ So

we find that God has chosen us for both a present salvation (as we are sanctified and conformed to His image), as well as an ultimate, future salvation in heaven with Him.

It is by faith that we receive our present salvation through the sanctifying work of the Spirit. However, if we only have a limited understanding of sanctification then our faith will only allow us to accept a limited experience of sanctification. As such, it is crucial to our present salvation that we understand and embrace the full nature of sanctification in Christ.⁴

The Future is Past

So does God's knowledge of all our future actions affect our ability to willfully choose His thelema-will? If He already knows what we have chosen, can we ever choose otherwise?

This question springs from our own perspective of our past. We are aware of our past choices and we know that there is nothing we can do to change the choices that we have made. So we think that because our future choices are already known to God, we are also powerless to truly choose how we will act in the future. In other words, if our future is already known then how can it be different? And if it cannot be different then how can we have an authentic choice regarding how we will act?

However it is not the case of our future being in the past to God. Rather our future exists as part of God's eternal present and so He is experiencing our future as present moments of time. And the present is where we live.

So if we reframe the original question from a present perspective then the question becomes: Because God knows what I am currently choosing, is it really possible for me to choose otherwise?

The answer is that we can choose how we will act in the present because God has given us the power to embrace or resist His will in our present time. The grace we need to submit to God's will is always with us. So even though all our choices in each moment are known to God, we are still fully empowered and responsible for the choices we make. As such Scripture calls us to make the most of our time.⁵ In every moment we need to seek to act in unity with Jesus and live according to the nature, love and will of God.

Making Time

How is it possible to live moment by moment in the will of God? Will the Holy Spirit direct us in every detail of life?

Our time is one of our most valuable possessions and so Scripture calls us to make the most of our time. We do this as we give ourselves to living in the will of God in each moment of time.

However this does not necessarily mean that we need to receive guidance from God in every detail of our lives. Rather it means that we need to learn to live according to His nature within us and act entirely in faith, love and unity. If at times the will of God requires more than our natural instincts of love then we need to trust God to reveal to us the specific

details of His will. When the Spirit of God speaks to us, from a place of confident submission we can respond in love and follow God as He leads us in His will.

Hearing God

I want to do God's will. How can I learn to hear God so I can know what His will is for me?

In terms of the reality of hearing God speak, it is the Holy Spirit who speaks to us and it is the Spirit who teaches us how to hear His voice. As such, there is really no one method of hearing God that gives everyone the secret formula for hearing. It all comes from the unique relationship that each of us has with God. So in learning to hear God's voice, we all need to keep our eyes on Jesus and sincerely seek Him to teach us how to hear His voice.

In terms of learning some of the theory of hearing God, it can be helpful to look at both the principles and the mechanics of hearing God. The principles of hearing God are found throughout the word of God. As we discover these principles and let His truth soak into our hearts we will find that our faith regarding hearing His voice will grow and we will begin to hear with greater clarity.

Some of these principles are: From the youngest to the most mature, *everyone* is able to hear God. God wants to speak to us. The Spirit will teach us how to hear His voice. He is on our side and He will help us. We need to have a heart that is willing to obey His voice. Every word that God speaks will be

confirmed with two or three witnesses. His voice is always consistent with Scripture. God's voice expresses His will, which is primarily concerned with who we become rather than what we do. As we quiet our minds, we hear more clearly. God's voice always leads us into a greater love for Him. His voice is always edifying and even in correction there will be a sense of life in His words. His voice will resonate with love and life in the Spirit.

The actual mechanics of hearing God are also found in Scripture. God speaks within a person's heart in the form of a thought or impression. He speaks through His living word as He infuses Scripture with a sense of spiritual life. He speaks through visions and dreams. God speaks through people in the form of prophecy. God speaks through circumstances. He also speaks through signs, wonders and lots. There are so many different ways that God can communicate with us. Yet rather than looking to the different methods of hearing God we need to look only to Him. Jesus is a person and so we simply need to get to know Jesus in a relational way and let Him teach us how to hear His voice.

About | The Author

Geoff (pronounced Jeff) Woodcock is writer, Bible teacher, musician, software designer, husband and father of four. Known mainly for the *One with Christ* series of Bible studies, he is also a part of the team behind the Discovery Bible software. He lives with his family in New Zealand.

Geoff comes from a Christian background that is both Evangelical and Pentecostal. He is currently a part of a non-denominational Christian fellowship. He believes that the Bible is the written expression of God and that the Spirit has been given to us to make the word of God a reality in our lives. He has been transformed by the love of God and now lives to see others fall in love with Jesus Christ.

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About | The Discovery Bible

In this book there are several places where material is quoted from the HELPS word studies and where Scripture is quoted with the original Greek emphasis. This material is taken from the Discovery Bible. The Discovery Bible itself is not a new translation but a system for enhancing a Bible translation with insights from the original languages of Scripture. The main features of the Discovery Bible are verb tense markings, emphasis markings and HELPS word studies.

HELPS Word Studies

The different versions of the Bible that we have today have been translated from the original inspired Hebrew and Greek texts. In the process of translation, translators generally choose words that closely reflect the original Greek and Hebrew words used in Scripture. However there are times when there are simply no English words that fully convey the meaning of the original words being translated.

Repentance

To illustrate the need for in-depth word studies we can look at the Greek word *metanoia*, which is translated into English as *repentance*. The word *repentance* means to show deep sorrow, remorse, regret or contrition for past actions or sins. However, the Greek word *metanoia* means more than being sorry for our sins. It means to have an inner change of heart and mind that in turn leads to an outward change of behavior.¹ In this sense, *metanoia* implies a complete change of character whereas our word *repentance* implies a feeling of regret or sorrow.

If we were to read Scripture without appreciating the wider meaning of *metanoia*, we might think that we are repenting when we feel sorry for our sins and we ask God to forgive us. However, when we discover the meaning of *metanoia*, we realize that we only come to repent of our sins when we have a lasting change of heart, mind and behavior.

Such change is a work of God's grace. He is the source and sustainer of true repentance.² As such, we can only come to repentance through faith. Faith allows us to access the grace of God and so experience His power of His Spirit to change our hearts, minds and our outward behavior.

In the Discovery Bible, Greek and Hebrew words that have such depths of meaning are called Golden Concept words. The meaning of these words is explored in the HELPS word studies section of the Discovery Bible. As we learn the meaning of the original words used in Scripture we can read the word of God with greater understanding and so grow in His truth.

Verb Tense Markings

In addition to the Golden Concept words, the Discovery Bible also enhances a translation by marking the underlying Greek and Hebrew verbs with tense symbols. These symbols let us read the Scripture with an appreciation of the wider meanings of the original tenses.

The benefit of such symbols becomes clear when we see the different design of English as compared to Greek and Hebrew. Verb tenses in English are oriented around time. Using the past, present and future tenses we can communicate when an action happened simply by using a tense rather than adding extra words. However in Greek and Hebrew, many verb tenses not only reveal the timing of an action, but they also communicate the impact or nature of an action. So when verbs are used in Scripture, the tense of a verb directly affects the meaning of the passage.

For example, the perfect tense is often used in Scripture. The Greek perfect tense conveys the sense of an ongoing or lingering effect of an action. So when Paul writes in Galatians that “I have been crucified with Christ” he uses the Greek perfect tense to tell us that the effects of being spiritually crucified with Christ are continuing to resonate throughout his life.

Another example is the Greek present imperative tense, which is used to issue a command that requires continual obedience. The tense itself calls the reader to continually and habitually obey the command. So when Paul tells Timothy to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith and love, he uses the

present imperative to call Timothy to *continually pursue* these things.³ Paul wanted Timothy to make his pursuit of God's nature an ongoing way of life.

Because English has no verb tenses that exactly match some of the Greek and Hebrew tenses used in Scripture, the wider meaning of these verb tenses is most often lost in translation. However, through the use of overlaid symbols, the Discovery Bible restores these meanings to our translated texts. As we learn the different symbols, we can begin to read God's word with a greater appreciation of the meaning that is inherent in the original Greek and Hebrew tenses.

Emphasis Markings

In addition to verb tense markings, the Discovery Bible also highlights words that are emphasized in the original Greek and Hebrew texts. In modern writing we emphasize words by *changing the font* to **focus** a reader's attention or to add inferred meaning to a text. In Scripture, rather than changing fonts, words are often emphasized by rearranging their position in a sentence or by changing their written form.⁴ By emphasizing important words, the authors of the Bible have infused the Scriptures with a sense of connotation, color and intensity.

I AM!

The dialog between Jesus and the Jewish people in John 6 highlights the value of emphasis in Scripture. In this passage Jesus calls Himself the Living Bread and calls people to eat His flesh and drink His blood.

John 6:51-52

“I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.” Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?”

When we read the Scriptures without any emphasis, we can subconsciously add our own emphasis. For example, we may think that in this passage the Jews took issue with the call to eat Jesus’ flesh and are therefore questioning how Jesus could give them His flesh to eat. Yet, when we read more of the passage with its original emphasis, a different picture appears.

John 6:41-43, 51-56

Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, “I am the bread that came down out of heaven.” They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven?’” Jesus answered and said to them “Do not grumble among yourselves...I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.” Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?”

So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”

Through emphasis we find that the real issue for the Jews was not the call to eat Jesus’ flesh. Rather the emphasis implies that the Jews thought Jesus was nothing more than a mere man who was claiming to be divine. To the Jews, Jesus was *this man*. They knew His parents and could not accept that He came from *heaven*. Jesus responds by using emphasis to challenge their pride and confirm His position both as the Son of Man *and* as God. It is *His* flesh that we are called to eat. It is *Jesus* (as God) that will raise us up on the last day. *Jesus* is more than a man. *He* is God; the One in whom we can abide and who can abide in us.

So we see how the emphasis of a passage brings out the subtle meaning and beauty in Scripture. By revealing the emphasis present in the original languages, the Discovery Bible lets us connect more with the word of God and read it with a sense of life, color and reality. By combining emphasis and verb tense markings with the HELPS word studies, the Discovery Bible helps us to come to a better understanding of the original meaning and intention of Scripture.

To find out more about the Discovery Bible or learn where to purchase the Discovery Bible software or the print edition, please visit www.thediscoverybible.com

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Thank you for taking the time to read this material. I sincerely pray that God may use it to lead you into a deeper experience of your true design in the image of Christ.

If you would like to make contact with me, please visit the website or send an email to the address below. On the website you will be able to find links to the *One with Christ* series of studies as well as articles and other resources.

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Please feel free to send through any feedback you may have on the material or testimonies of God's grace that you are happy to share with others. I would love to hear from you.

Author, *Living Image*

Reference Notes

Introduction

¹ God is love: 1 John 4:8, 1 John 4:16

Our call is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and love others as ourselves: Mark 12:28-34

The whole law is fulfilled in love: Romans 13:8-10, Galatians 5:1

1. Predestined

¹ “Destiny”. Oxford Dictionaries. © 2010 Oxford University Press

2. Predesigned

¹ 2 Peter 1:4, Romans 5:5

² Matthew 7:15-19

³ See 2 Corinthians 5:14: the love of Christ *compels* us. If we have the nature of Christ within our hearts then His love will naturally compel our words and actions.

⁴ Note that the Greek word *kathos* is used in the phrase “You sent Me and loved them, even [*kathos*] as You have loved me”. *Kathos* means fully corresponding to (exactly); as compared to; to the extent or degree of; or in direct proportion to (see HELPS Word-studies #2531). Therefore the Father’s love for us is of the same substance, quality and depth as His love for Jesus. As hard as it may be for us to believe, the Father loves us with an incomprehensibly deep, absolutely unfailing and entirely perfect love. This love is not based on any quality found in us apart from Christ, but rather it is entirely an expression of His nature. God is love and so to be true to Himself, He must continually love.

⁵ Take some time to meditate on the love of the Father for Jesus. Could it ever fail? Could it ever fade? Could the Father’s love for Jesus be anything less than an absolutely perfect and infinitely deep love? Could we ever come to understand His love? If the Father’s love for Jesus surpasses all understanding then we can dream of the greatest love we could possibly imagine and know that the love of the Father for Jesus far exceeds our dreams. His is the most perfect love.

Only as we come into a revelation of the Father’s love for Jesus can we start to appreciate His love for us. For it is the same love. It has the same depth of passion, intensity and purity. It is absolutely unfailing. There are no situations in life that could ever separate us from His love. God is always true to His essential nature of Love and His love is always set on us.

3. Paradise Lost

¹ Sin dominated us, not always in thoughts or desires of abject evil, but through a life of independence and self-centeredness. Thus the reality of sin is found not just in what we perceive to be truly evil, but in those things that exist in independence from God.

² See Ephesians 1:13-14

4. Discovering our Design

- ¹ See *Series Three* of the *One with Christ* studies for more on putting on Christ and putting off the old self.
- ² See *Series One* of the *One with Christ* studies for more on the connection between the Holy Spirit and the word of God in bringing us into reality.
- ³ Anyone can read the emphasis that is present in the original Greek and Hebrew texts by using the Discovery Bible. See *About the Discovery Bible* for a short introduction to the features of the Discovery Bible or visit www.thediscoverybible.com for more information.
- ⁴ This passage refers to the transformation that Moses experienced as He entered into God's presence. Like Moses, the Holy Spirit conforms us to the image of Christ as we spend time in His presence. The more we soak in the presence of God, the more of His nature and life are formed in us and the more we reflect His image and love. For more study on the transforming power of the presence of God see *Series Three* of the *One with Christ* studies, available at onewithchrist.com.

5. Nature and Word

- ¹ John 1:18
- ² Colossians 2:16-17
- ³ 1 Corinthians 1:30. Jesus is the wisdom of God and so when wisdom cries out in Scripture, it is the voice of Jesus that is heard (Proverbs 1:20).
- ⁴ See Deuteronomy 18:15-18, John 1:21
- ⁵ 1 John 3:3
- ⁶ Ephesians 4:32
- ⁷ Matthew 22:35-40
- ⁸ Ephesians 5:18

6. Image of Love

- ¹ See Matthew 1:21. Jesus was named Jesus (meaning Yahweh saves) because He would save people from their sin. See also 1 Samuel 25:23-25 where Nabal is of one name and nature. To use a person's name in reference to their character and nature is still used in modern language. For example, if someone has a 'good name among the poor' then it means that they have gained a good reputation based on good character. For more on the connection between name and nature in Scripture see *Series Three* of the *One with Christ* studies.
- ² This refers to Jesus' call to eat His flesh and drink His blood (John 6:22-63). See *Series Two* of the *One with Christ* studies to learn more about the flesh and blood of Christ.
- ³ See John 14:20-24 where Jesus says that if we love Him and keep His word then Jesus and the Father will make their home within us. In this we again see the connection between love and unity. Through faith and love we experience the indwelling of the Father and Son and become one spirit with God.
- ⁴ By promising to pour His love into us through His Spirit, God is bearing the burden of love. The Father's love for Jesus is a gift of immeasurable value that we cannot possibly earn. So by His grace God has set us free from the responsibility of trying to have love. We do not have to strive or try harder to earn God's love. All we need is the desire for His love and the faith that God really does want to fill us with His love.

When we act on our confidence and ask the Father to fill us with His love we can leave the results in His hands. Only He can reveal His nature to us and give us His love for Jesus. So our part is simply to give Him the opportunity to do His will in our lives. As we continue to yield to God and trust in His grace, we will know more and more of the love of God in our lives. It is a promise.

7. Love and Desire

¹ Note that the connection between our natural design and our will continues even as our physical design changes. As we mature through adolescence and into adulthood our physical design changes and we begin to desire and will according to our new design. We leave behind our childish ways and our will becomes focused on those things that reflect our design as adults. In this way, the relationship between the will and the design continues throughout our entire lives.

8. Will and Desire

¹ These desires may be of God or of sin depending on the nature of what we accept into our hearts. The principle of implanting desire is the foundation of the advertising industry. The desires that advertising creates in us reflect the design of consumerism. Advertising attempts to define us, not as people who are created to live in love and unity with God, but as people who simply exist to consume. To avoid the influence of such a design, we simply need to minimize our exposure to advertising and not let it take root in our hearts.

² Because it is our will that shapes our identity, the sinful or selfish desires that arise within us do not define us. If we deny those desires then they will be nothing more than temptations. But if we give into them then they not only become sin, but they become a part of our current identity.

By choosing to sin, we choose an impure design for our lives; we unite ourselves with sin and we act out a belief that we are not truly holy in Christ. If this happens then we need to quickly return to God in repentance, humility and faith. As we repent and seek the power of Jesus' blood to remove the sin from our hearts, the Holy Spirit can again restore us into the nature and image of Christ.

When we reject our sinful desires they are not brought to the maturity of actual sin and instead they fade away as passing temptations. However, this principle is also true for our godly desires. If we fail to act on our godly desires then these desires will not bear the fruit of righteousness in

our lives. Instead these desires will fade away as good intentions and lost opportunities. So in order to grow in God, we need to be faithful and willing to both reject our sinful desires and to act on our godly desires.

- ³ See the *Discovering our Design* study and James 1:19-25.
- ⁴ In this sense the gospel is not just the good news of God's salvation but it is the good news of our recreation. It is the truth of our original design in Christ as being made loving and holy and righteous in Him. As we come to truly understand that we were created for love and unity with God, we inherit a new identity.
- ⁵ In Scripture, the only time that the word *kardia* refers to something other than our spiritual center is in Matthew 12:40. There Jesus uses it when He speaks of the Son of Man spending "three days and three nights in the heart (*kardia*) of the earth."
- ⁶ Romans 5:1-5
- ⁷ Romans 10:8-10
- ⁸ Ephesians 1:18
- ⁹ See *Series One of the One with Christ* studies for more on truth, reality and the knowledge of the heart.
- ¹⁰ Hebrews 4:12
- ¹¹ See *Series One of the One with Christ* studies for more on the living word of God. See *Series Two* for more on revelation.
- ¹² Note that this process of revelation, change and conformation to the image of Christ is an ongoing process. There is always more of God that we can experience and explore, and so the Spirit constantly calls us to pursue greater depths of unity and love in Christ.

9. To Will and Work

- ¹ Deuteronomy 30:6, Mark 12:28-30, Colossians 2:9-12
- ² Mark 10:17-22
- ³ Note that the Greek word *kathos* is used in the phrase "that they may all be one; even as [*kathos*] You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us". *Kathos* means fully corresponding to (exactly); as

compared to; to the extent or degree of; or in direct proportion to (see HELPS Word-studies #2531). Thus in the same way that Jesus is one spirit, nature and will with God, so we are also to become one with Him in every aspect of our inner life, from spirit to will to action.

- ⁴ God's will presents the very best option in every respect of life. So by choosing to do the will of God we will be set free from the compromises and second best choices that arise in our own will. Instead of knowing the mixed results of an imperfect will, we will know the abundant spiritual blessings that result from doing God's will.

10. The Boule Will

- ¹ Leviticus 19:9-10. The process of gleaning involved going through a field after it had been harvested and picking up what was left behind. This was a form of provision for the orphan, alien and widow.

11. The Thelema Will

- ¹ Acts 2:22-24
- ² See also John 14:15-23, John 15:10, 1 John 5:3
- ³ The love of God within us is primarily expressed through the choices and actions of our will rather than in our feelings or emotions. So while we may experience the joy of the Lord as we participate in His will, the absence of emotion does not mean that we lack love. It simply means that we are acting in love purely by faith.
- ⁴ The idea that God makes His thelema-will subject to our participation may give rise to questions regarding the sovereignty of God. For example, can God still be sovereign if He has made a measure of His will subject to our involvement?

We are created not only to live in unity with God but to work in unity with Him. The overarching boule-will of God has determined that His thelema-will is carried out in unity with His people. In this sense the

sovereignty of God is preserved. He has sovereignly determined to work through us even though that means making His thelema-will subject to our weaknesses. So even when we fail God, His sovereign boule-will is still done. Though His thelema-will may be temporarily unfulfilled, God is still fulfilling His boule-decision to work in unity with His people.

⁵ Matthew 11:28-30

⁶ With power comes consequence and responsibility. So if God genuinely empowers us to release His will through prayer then we have the ability to bring about genuine consequences for good. However, if we fail to take up our call to prayer then we fail to release the great consequences that come as we pray according to God's will. So we must be responsible and faithful to seek God's will in prayer. As we consistently call on God to let His thelema-will be done, we will see the Spirit of God do awesome things as He brings His will to pass through us.

⁷ If we start to feel burdened by the weight of responsibility then we need to return to our unity with Jesus. He is the one that bears the load. Within ourselves we have nothing (apart from Christ) that can bear the weight of our call to obedience and righteousness. It is entirely by the grace and presence of Christ within us that we can live in obedience to God. As such, our part is to simply seek God to reveal His will and then release Him to speak and move through us. All we need to do is hear and obey (and stay out of the way).

Note also that we are designed to live in unity with God. As such, we will find the greatest sense of life in doing what He is doing. We will *love* working with Him. Even in hard times, knowing that we are doing the will of God will be a source of joy, pleasure and ultimate fulfillment.

12. Renewing the Mind

¹ Matthew 6:9-10, 1 John 5:14-15, Mark 11:23-24

² Every day gives us the opportunity to inwardly grow in our vitality and youthfulness as we are renewed by the Spirit of God. Therefore every believer should look forward to growing older. God has prepared for us

more than we can ask for or even imagine and so we can face the future with faith, anticipation and thankfulness.

- ³ Note that Jesus said that He only did what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19-20). Doing the will of God is not simply a system of love in action. It is a relationship in which we talk with God and He speaks to us and shows us what He is doing. Then we can truly act in love. We will look more at this in a future series of the *One with Christ* studies.
- ⁴ See also Ephesians 5:15-17.
- ⁵ For example, if we are only listening to God to find out *what we should do* then we may miss what God is saying about *who we are to become*. And in missing His voice we may miss the reality of His thelema-will for us at that point in time.
- ⁶ Mark 12:28-31
- ⁷ Deuteronomy 30:6, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 1 Peter 1:14-16, 2 Corinthians 5:21
- ⁸ 2 Corinthians 8:7, Philippians 1:9
- ⁹ Luke 3:16, Colossians 3:16
- ¹⁰ John 15:1-9, Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:18
- ¹¹ Romans 6:4, Galatians 5:22-23
- ¹² 1 Corinthians 6:17

13. Faith, Love and Obedience

- ¹ Note that this section is largely adapted from Study 12 of *Series One* of the *One with Christ* study series.
- ² Note that the Greek word translated as *this* is neutral in gender, meaning that it is attached to grace (masculine), being saved (masculine) and faith (feminine). Thus in this passage Paul is describing the whole experience of being saved through faith as a gift of God's grace.

Just as we cannot earn our salvation, so we cannot earn the faith that leads to salvation. The confidence of faith is not a debt that God pays to those who work for it. It is a gift of His grace. As such, all we can do is come to God in humility and love and ask Him to give us greater faith.

And He will. When God gives us the gift of complete confidence in Him, everything that our faith then leads us to experience will also be a gift. In this way, our entire spiritual journey begins, continues and ends in the grace of God.

14. Foreknowledge of God

¹ Acts 2:22-23

² Ephesians 2:10

³ Romans 8:29-30

⁴ See also Psalm 139:7-10

⁵ Hebrews 2:8

⁶ Note that even though God lives in eternity, He also dwells within the hearts of those who are humble and contrite. When we humble ourselves before God, our hearts are prepared as a high and holy place. As the Spirit fills our hearts with His presence, we can commune with the eternal God and so experience a measure of eternity from within our own time.

⁷ It is noted that there is some debate as to whether God is atemporal or omni-temporal and the complexity of the arguments is beyond the scope of this study.

The concept of atemporality asserts that God exists beyond time. The view of omni-temporality says that God is present within all time. While there is Biblical support for both positions, many people consider these views as opposing and therefore incompatible, for how can God possibly be both temporal and atemporal? At first glance, trying to accommodate both points of view appears to be an exercise in self-contradiction.

A proposed answer lies in the omnipresence of God. God is spirit and yet He infuses all physical creation. The presence of God within physical life does not mean that God is physical. Nor does it mean that physical life is God. God is spirit. The fact that God is the reality in which all physical life exists does not negate His essentially spiritual nature. In the same way, just as God can be spiritual and yet present in the physical, so He can

be atemporal and yet present in time. He can inhabit eternity and yet take His timeless self and infuse it into a finite creation within the confines of time.

Philippians 2:5-8

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

When God invests Himself in time, He limits His own eternal nature. This self-limiting power of God is evident in the life of Christ. Even though Jesus existed as God, He emptied Himself by taking on a physical life and dying on the cross. So if God can limit Himself by taking on a physical body without any compromise to His spiritual nature then He is also able to limit Himself by being present with us within our time without compromising His eternal and timeless nature.

⁸ Revelation 1:8

⁹ Ephesians 2:4-7

15. Infinite Awareness of God

¹ In our modern economy, most of us trade our time for money. We spend our time working and get paid money in return. This however can lead us to value our time only in terms of the money it brings. Yet our time is so much more valuable than the money it can earn. Given the choice of time or money, we should value our time for its eternal value far above the temporal value of money.

² Note that outside of the time pressures of work, we also live in a culture that is obsessed with entertainment over edification. Entertainment has its place, but for the most part it is simply an enjoyable way to waste time. As such, we need to be discerning in how we spend our time on entertainment. We only have a short time to live, but it is time that can literally last forever if we spend it well.

16. A Few Questions

¹ 1 Corinthians 6:17

² Romans 6:5-7

³ John 17:7, Acts 20:32, 1 Corinthians 6:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. Faith is the confidence that comes from God *in this life*. After we die we will no longer need faith to believe what is unseen for we will see God as He is. So when Scripture speaks of experiencing the grace of God by faith, it is promising us spiritual blessing and change that we can experience in Christ in this life.

⁴ This is explained well in *My Utmost for His Highest* where Oswald Chambers writes:

“If our experience of being set apart from sin and being made holy through the process of sanctification is still very shallow, we tend to mistake the reality of God for something else...

“Sanctification is not my idea of what I want God to do for me—sanctification is God’s idea of what He wants to do for me. But He has to get me into the state of mind and spirit where I will allow Him to sanctify me completely, whatever the cost (see 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).”

⁵ Ephesians 5:16, Colossians 4:5

About the Discovery Bible

¹ *Metanoia* means a change of mind, however this change includes the heart as the source of our actions and behavior.

² Acts 5:31, 2 Timothy 2:25

³ 1 Timothy 6:11

⁴ Even in English we can rearrange words for emphasis. For example we can say “Jesus opened the book” which places our focus on Jesus or we can say “The book was opened by Jesus” which moves our focus to the book.

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