

FAQs for CLI Ministers

A small group of experienced Bible Ministers put together questions that they have encountered as they have corresponded with students, either through letters or Bible studies. Suggested answers have been compiled to provide you with a valuable resource. We know that you are equipped to write your own answers, but we developed this tool for the sake of unity and to save you time.

Before you start reviewing lessons, pray for the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom and discernment to know how to encourage and respond. Answers are often found in Scripture, and quoting Scripture or referring the student to a verse is the best answer for most of our questions. One website is BibleGateway.com, and you can put in a subject to find appropriate Bible verses.

Please do not address matters of doctrine or any other type of theological question from your student. When a student asks a theological question that is not covered in the answer key, ask them to refer back to the lessons. Then write, "If this question is not addressed in our lessons, please search for the answer in your Bible while asking for the Holy Spirit to lead you to the correct answer." Several handouts compiled by CLI that deal with specific topics are available. You may use these to copy and send back with the student's Bible lesson.

Part One addresses common questions from volunteers. **Part Two** deals with common questions from students and issues with which inmates struggle.

PART ONE: Volunteer Questions and Answers

Q1. What can I do when it seems that a student is **not giving his best effort** on a lesson?

- Q2. What can I do when it seems that **the student is not grasping the question?**
- Q3. How I should I reply when the **student does not seem to have followed through with the assignment given?**
- Q4. What should I write when **the answer is wrong?**
- Q5. How should I handle an answer that is **left blank?**
- Q6. What is the appropriate response when a student's answer is **off topic?**
- Q7. What if a student memorizes and records **only part of his memory verse?**
- Q8. How can I encourage the **student to memorize?**
- Q9. How do I give encouragement to someone who is being punished for a crime while knowing that we have **to suffer the consequences of our past actions?**
- Q10. What are ways we can provide encouragement?
- Q11. What should I write if a student leaves four or more answers blank?

Questions and Answers

Q1. What can I do when it seems that a student is **not giving his best effort** on a lesson?

A1. It may be that the student is not used to putting effort into a study; it may be a lazy way of thinking. Encourage the student to dig deeper. There has to be a hunger in each Christian's soul to seek and find our Heavenly Father's spiritual truths. See these verses on Spiritual Hunger: Psalm

107:9, Proverbs 27:7, and Matthew 5:6. Pray for them to hunger after God and give their best effort.

Q2. What can I do when it seems that **the student is not grasping the question?**

A2. There are several possibilities for why this happens. The study may be too advanced, the student may have a mental handicap, effects from substance abuse, or it may be a pattern of not thinking deeply. Ask the student to read the questions carefully and suggest re-reading the lesson material before answering. Always keep in mind the point of the lesson.

Affirm any positive points and direct them back to the question, such as, "Take another look at this question." Try adding helpful hints to key questions or answers: "I suggest you read the question again and rethink your answer. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand." See scripture references: John 14:26, John 16:13, 1 Colossians 2:10-14.

There are some guidelines that may assist you in understanding scripture. Look at the context and consistency with other scripture. For the context, read the verses before and after a passage of scripture. Ask what is the main point of the passage? The Bible is consistent all the way through, so understand that one verse will not contradict other passages of Scripture. Pray for God to give them wisdom.

Q3. How I should I reply when the **student does not seem to have followed through with the assignment given?**

A3. Ask the student to try to follow through on the requested project or assignment. The student will get more out of the lessons if he or she will follow through, as these assignments are designed to help the student become a Christian leader.

Some scriptures you can use: "Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress." 1 Timothy 4:15. Other verses on importance of spiritual progress: Job 17:9, Psalm 87:4, 92:12

We show our love for Christ by following through and completing every aspect of the lessons. It is easy to tell when a student's heart is not in the lesson. When our love for Christ is shallow and we are just going through the motions, there is little desire for spiritual growth. Pray for the students in all these situation that they would have understanding. See 2 Peter 3:18, 1 Peter 2:2, Hebrews 6:1.

See verses about the importance of a deep love for Christ: John 14:15-23, 15:9-10.

Q4. What should I write when **the answer is wrong**?

A4. Please do not write that an answer is incorrect or mark it wrong. Instead, write the correct answer preceded by: "Also...," "Yes, and..." or "Have you thought about..." You may be able to refer the student back to the question if appropriate. The student's answers in the rest of the lesson can give you an indication of how to respond.

Q5. How should I handle an answer that is **left blank**?

A5. It may indicate lack of interest, they may have skipped it, or they may not have understood the question. Perhaps there was an interruption, and they forgot to go back and fill it in. Write the correct answer, keeping in mind how the student answered questions on the rest of the lesson. Remember that some questions only require a response if the student chose a certain answer on the previous question, e.g. if you circled 'no' on the previous questions.

Q6. What is the appropriate response when a student's answer is off topic?

A6. If the student did answer the question, add encouraging comments about the topic. It may be appropriate to thank them for their answer and redirect them back to the topic.

Q7. What if a student memorizes and records **only part of his memory verse?**

A7. Ask the student to keep trying to memorize the verse until they can recite the entire verse. Request that they do not begin their next lesson until they have successfully memorized all the verses in the lesson you are reviewing. Tell them you are trusting them as a fellow believer to finish this task before they move on in the course. Here are some verses on integrity you can share: 2 Corinthians 8:21, Hebrews 13:18, Proverbs 11:2.

Q8. How can I encourage the **student to memorize?**

A8. See [Memorizing Scripture](#) below.

Q9. How do I give encouragement to someone who is being punished for a crime while knowing that we have **to suffer the consequences of our past actions?**

A9. We could offer our own circumstances that we have faced and let them know how God is helping us through this by His discipline and grace. We could also mention biblical figures who suffered the consequences of their sin but still experienced God's faithfulness, such as David, Moses, the nation of Israel, the criminal on the cross, etc. Scripture references: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Colossians 1:13-14, Psalm 103:1-4.

Q10. What are ways we can provide encouragement?

See the Encouraging Words list below

Q11. What should I write if a student leaves four or more answers blank?

A11. CLI has a policy that if 4 or more questions are not answered, we cannot send out the next new lesson. Therefore, please reconsider the questions left blank (list the Q #'s) in this lesson. Complete these Q's or write out your answers on a separate piece of paper, including the lesson # and Q #'s, and mail back to us. We will then review it and mail back to you with your new lesson. Diligence pleases the Lord! Proverbs 12:24, 21:5, 22:29. Also, faithfulness and self control are evidence of the Holy Spirit's work. Galatians 5:22-23.

We desire to encourage and challenge you to do your very best in each lesson, and for God's glory. 1 Corinthians 10:31. This means to consider each question well, read and reread, if necessary, to understand all that is being asked of you. Then go back to your lesson notes and check to see if there is anything else you need to consider when writing your answer. In this way, you are taking the time to put forth your best effort.

I believe you do really desire to please Him. God wants us to complete what He has led us to start. Please prayerfully consider these things. We look forward to hearing back from you.

The following verses speak about different aspects of diligence:

- 2 Timothy 2:15
- John 4:34
- Philippians 2:5
- 1 Corinthians 15:58, 9:25
- Colossians 1:10

Encouraging words to use

- a seeker
- Absolutely excellent
- Amen
- Awesome
- complete answer
- deep thinker
- deep thoughts
- Gives me joy
- good thinking
- great
- great diligence
- Great job
- growing in your faith
- happy to know
- hard worker
- I agree
- I'm impressed
- I'm proud of you
- insightful
- Keep up the good work
- Like your wording

- May God bless you greatly for becoming a leader – for serving Him
- most excellent
- motivated
- original wording
- perfect
- pleases our Father
- putting in lots of effort
- right on
- Showing maturity
- so glad
- Super
- superb
- Thank you for your steadfastness in completing your lessons!
- thorough answer
- trying hard
- very true you're not alone
- wanting to understand
- Well done
- Willing
- worthy answer
- Yes!
- You are:
- you got it

Encouraging Promises:

- When we know God's love, we can then love others and ourselves: Luke 12:6-7
- Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom: 2 Corinthians 3:17
- Also see Psalms 86:5; Isaiah 41:10, 13, 40:29-31; Hebrew 11:6; Psalms 103:17

Encouraging words of challenge:

- Try giving it more thought
- great start
- yes, and also....
- May also add...
- look again...
- and another thought...
- Look again at these verses
- May God give you help and understanding to do your best.

MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE

In our Christian Leadership Bible Study, you will be asked to memorize scripture. Memorizing scripture is a way of filling our minds with what it needs, so that we can be ready to use it at any moment of trial or temptation. We memorize because the Bible tells us to do so. Proverbs 7:1, 3 *"keep my words and treasure my commandments within you...write them on the tablet of your heart."* The only way to put God's Word on our heart is to have it committed to memory.

Chuck Swindoll wrote, "I know of no other single practice in the Christian life more rewarding, practically speaking, than memorizing Scripture. . . . No other single exercise pays greater spiritual dividends! Your prayer life will be strengthened. Your witnessing will be sharper and much more effective. Your attitudes and outlook will begin to change. Your mind will become alert and observant. Your confidence and assurance will be enhanced. Your faith will

be solidified" (Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], p. 61).

Scripture tells us why it is important to fill our mind and heart with the word.

Psalm 119:9-11 *"How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."* This young man's experience was not only hearing God's Word, but to also keep it inside of him, storing it for use in the future, becoming a powerful influence for pure, holy righteous living.

The word of God is our weapon to fight against sin. We are told how to battle against sin in Ephesians 6:10-11, 17 *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"*.

When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, he recited Scripture from memory and to fight off Satan. (Matthew 4:1-11).

TIPS ON HOW TO MEMORIZE A BIBLE VERSE

Everyone memorizes all the time. You've learned to speak by memorizing thousands of words. The problem is not that people can't memorize. It's that they won't memorize. Memorization is like exercise. The more you do it, the easier it gets. The less you do it, the harder it gets. So do it.

1. Pray for God's help in memorizing and in letting His word change you.
2. Read the verse through several times thoughtfully, aloud or in a whisper. This will help you grasp the verse as a whole.
3. Writing the verse out can be helpful. This deepens the impression in your mind.
 - Give the verse a topic name, for example: salvation, witnessing, personal growth, Jesus' supremacy.
 - Each time you read it, say the topic name, the reference (i.e. Ephesians 6:17), verse, and then the reference again. Example: "salvation (the topic name I chose), John 3:16, For God so loved the world., John 3:16." Repeat this several times in a row. When you can say it well, add the next phrase and repeat, going back to the beginning, saying the topic, reference, verse and reference.
 - Apply the verse's meaning to you personally and to your daily life.
 - Study the verse to get a clear understanding of the meaning. Read other translations and the context (the verses before and after the one you are learning).
4. Find a friend to check you for accuracy as you say the verse from memory. Better yet, memorize together!
5. Review! Review! Review! Repetition is the best way to engrave the verses on your memory.

PART TWO: Student Questions and Answers

This section deals with questions that our students might ask you or issues with which inmates struggle. Most of the answers were provided by Christian counselor Mike Garrett, PhD.

Q1: "What does the Bible say about anger and controlling my temper?"

Q2: "What does the Bible say about depression? How can a Christian overcome depression?"

Q3: "How do I forgive myself and how can I forgive others?"

Q4: "How can I forgive those who sin against me?"

Q5: "What does the Bible say about loneliness and feeling alone?"

Q6: "What is the key to victory when struggling with sin?"

Q7: "What is prayer?"

Q8: "Why pray? What is the point of prayer when God knows the future and is already in control of everything? If we cannot change God's mind, why should we pray?"

Q9: "How can I have my prayers answered by God?"

Q10: "How should a Christian respond to unanswered prayer?"

Q11: "What does the Bible say about overcoming lust?"

Q12: How can I memorize when my memory is so bad?

Q13: What are the best ways to memorize Scripture?

Q14: Will you pray that my attorney and the judge gets me out soon?

Q15: Do you know of an organization that will help me when I am released?

Q16: What can I do to avoid falling back in to the same lifestyle when I get out?

Q17: Can you get me a pen pal? Questions and Answers

Q1: "What does the Bible say about anger and controlling my temper?"

A1: Handling anger is an important life skill. Christian counselors report that 50 percent of people who come in for counseling have problems dealing with anger. Anger can shatter communication and tear apart relationships, and it ruins both the joy and health of many. Sadly, people tend to justify their anger instead of accepting responsibility for it. Everyone struggles, to varying degrees, with anger. Thankfully, God's Word contains principles regarding how to handle anger in a godly manner, and how to overcome sinful anger.

The Bible has a lot to say about the importance of controlling one's temper. It calls a person who easily loses his temper a "fool" ([Proverbs 29:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:9](#)) and describes someone who cannot control himself as a "city whose walls are broken down" ([Proverbs 25:28](#)). A person with a hot temper is often at odds with those around him, becoming easily offended and lashing out in anger for even the smallest slight ([Proverbs 15:18a](#)). As children of God, we are called to love others ([John 13:35](#); [Ephesians 4:2, 31-32](#)) and to be at peace ([James 1:19](#); [Proverbs 19:11](#); [James 3:17-18](#)). "Love covers a multitude of sins" ([1 Peter 4:8](#)). A person who maintains a calm, even temper is quicker to forgive and better able to live peaceably with others ([Proverbs 15:1, 8b](#); [12:16](#); [19:11](#)).

But anger is not always sin. There is a type of anger of which the Bible approves, often called "righteous indignation." God is angry ([Psalm 7:11](#);

[Mark 3:5](#)), and believers are commanded to be angry ([Ephesians 4:26](#)). Two Greek words in the New Testament are translated as “anger.” One means “passion, energy” and the other means “agitated, boiling.” Biblically, anger is God-given energy intended to help us solve problems. Examples of biblical anger include David’s being upset over hearing Nathan the prophet sharing an injustice ([2 Samuel 12](#)) and Jesus’ anger over how some of the Jews had defiled worship at God’s temple in Jerusalem ([John 2:13-18](#)). Notice that neither of these examples of anger involved self-defense, but a defense of others or of a principle.

That being said, it is important to recognize that anger at an injustice inflicted against oneself is also appropriate. Anger has been said to be a warning flag—it alerts us to those times when others are attempting to or have violated our boundaries. God cares for each individual. Sadly, we do not always stand up for one another, meaning that sometimes we must stand up for ourselves. This is especially important when considering the anger that victims often feel. Victims of abuse, violent crime, or the like have been violated in some way. Often while experiencing the trauma, they do not experience anger. Later, in working through the trauma, anger will emerge. For a victim to reach a place of true health and forgiveness, he or she must first accept the trauma for what it was. In order to fully accept that an act was unjust, one must sometimes experience anger. Because of the complexities of trauma recovery, this anger is often not short-lived, particularly for victims of abuse. Victims should process through their anger and come to a place of acceptance, even forgiveness. This is often a long journey. As God heals the victim, the victim's emotions, including anger, will follow. Allowing the process to occur does not mean the person is living in sin.

Anger can become sinful when it is motivated by pride ([James 1:20](#)), when it is unproductive and thus distorts God's purposes ([1 Corinthians 10:31](#)), or when anger is allowed to linger ([Ephesians 4:26-27](#)). One obvious sign that anger has turned to sin is when, instead of attacking the problem at hand, we attack the wrongdoer. [Ephesians 4:15-19](#) says we are to speak the truth in love and use our words to build others up, not allow rotten or destructive words to pour from our lips. Unfortunately, this poisonous speech is a common characteristic of fallen man ([Romans 3:13-14](#)). Anger becomes sin when it is allowed to boil over without restraint, resulting in a scenario in which hurt is multiplied ([Proverbs 29:11](#)), leaving devastation in its wake. Often, the consequences of out-of-control anger are irreparable. Anger also becomes sin when the angry one refuses to be pacified, holds a grudge, or keeps it all inside ([Ephesians 4:26-27](#)). This can cause depression and irritability over little things, which are often unrelated to the underlying problem.

We can handle anger biblically by recognizing and admitting our prideful anger and/or our wrong handling of anger as sin ([Proverbs 28:13](#); [1 John 1:9](#)). This confession should be both to God and to those who have been hurt by our anger. We should not minimize the sin by excusing it or blame-shifting.

We can handle anger biblically by seeing God in the trial. This is especially important when people have done something to offend us. [James 1:2-4](#), [Romans 8:28-29](#), and [Genesis 50:20](#) all point to the fact that God is sovereign over every circumstance and person that crosses our path. Nothing happens to us that He does not cause or allow. Though God does allow bad things to happen, He is always faithful to redeem them for the good of His people. God is a good God ([Psalm 145:8](#), [9](#), [17](#)). Reflecting on

this truth until it moves from our heads to our hearts will alter how we react to those who hurt us.

We can handle anger biblically by making room for God's wrath. This is especially important in cases of injustice, when "evil" men abuse "innocent" people. [Genesis 50:19](#) and [Romans 12:19](#) both tell us to not play God. God is righteous and just, and we can trust Him who knows all and sees all to act justly ([Genesis 18:25](#)).

We can handle anger biblically by returning good for evil ([Genesis 50:21](#); [Romans 12:21](#)). This is key to converting our anger into love. As our actions flow from our hearts, so also our hearts can be altered by our actions ([Matthew 5:43-48](#)). That is, we can change our feelings toward another by changing how we choose to act toward that person.

We can handle anger biblically by communicating to solve the problem. There are four basic rules of communication shared in [Ephesians 4:15, 25-32](#):

- 1) Be honest and speak ([Ephesians 4:15, 25](#)). People cannot read our minds. We must speak the truth in love.
- 2) Stay current ([Ephesians 4:26-27](#)). We must not allow what is bothering us to build up until we lose control. It is important to deal with what is bothering us before it reaches critical mass.
- 3) Attack the problem, not the person ([Ephesians 4:29, 31](#)). Along this line, we must remember the importance of keeping the volume of our voices low ([Proverbs 15:1](#)).

4) Act, don't react ([Ephesians 4:31-32](#)). Because of our fallen nature, our first impulse is often a sinful one (v. 31). The time spent in "counting to ten" should be used to reflect upon the godly way to respond (v. 32) and to remind ourselves how the energy anger provides should be used to solve problems and not create bigger ones.

At times we can handle anger preemptively by putting up stricter boundaries. We are told to be discerning ([1 Corinthians 2:15-16](#); [Matthew 10:16](#)). We need not "[cast our pearls before swine](#)" ([Matthew 7:6](#)). Sometimes our anger leads us to recognize that certain people are unsafe for us. We can still forgive them, but we may choose not to re-enter the relationship.

We must act to solve our part of the problem ([Romans 12:18](#)). We cannot control how others act or respond, but we can make the changes that need to be made on our part. Overcoming a temper is not accomplished overnight. But through prayer, Bible study, and reliance upon God's Holy Spirit, ungodly anger can be overcome. We may have allowed anger to become entrenched in our lives by habitual practice, but we can also practice responding correctly until that, too, becomes a habit and God is glorified in our response.

With the Holy Spirit in our lives, we will show the fruit of His work inside us. Some of the [fruits of the Spirit](#) are peace, patience, and self-control ([Galatians 5:22-23](#))—these are essential to controlling the tendency to lose our temper. In fact, the Greek word translated "patience" ("longsuffering" in the KJV) carries the idea of "long-burning," as in having a long fuse. As we grow in Christ, we should continue to deal appropriately with anger (no short fuses!) and react with love and patience ([Colossians 3:8](#)).

We may often feel justified in losing our temper, particularly when someone has hurt or offended us. But we are instructed to forgive ([Matthew 5:44](#); [6:12](#); [18:21-22](#)), not yield to anger or seek vengeance. It is ultimately God's prerogative to punish evildoers ([Deuteronomy 32:35](#); [Romans 12:19](#)). For an example of this forgiveness, we need only look to Jesus. When He was hanging on the cross, crucified for sins He did not commit, He did not release His wrath on the perpetrators. Instead, He asked God the Father to forgive them ([Luke 23:34](#)).

It's important to note that anger is a valid emotion and is not always sinful. God allows for "[righteous anger](#)," which is anger with the proper focus, the proper motivation, the proper control, the proper duration, and the proper result. Our problem is that our temper is often motivated by selfishness and directed toward other people instead of toward sin. That's why God tells us to "let all bitterness and indignation and wrath (passion, rage, bad temper) and resentment (anger, animosity) . . . be banished from you" ([Ephesians 4:31](#), AMP). With God's help, we can keep our temper in check.

Q2: "What does the Bible say about depression? How can a Christian overcome depression?"

A2: Depression is a widespread condition, affecting millions of people, Christians and non-Christians alike. Those suffering from depression can experience intense feelings of sadness, anger, hopelessness, fatigue, and a variety of other symptoms. They may begin to feel useless and even suicidal, losing interest in things and people that they once enjoyed. Depression is often triggered by life circumstances, such as a loss of job, death of a loved one, divorce, or psychological problems such as abuse or

low self-esteem. Depression can also be caused by physical conditions such as chemical imbalances in the brain.

The Bible tells us to be filled with joy and praise ([Philippians 4:4](#); [Romans 15:11](#)), so God apparently intends for us all to live joyful lives. This is not easy for someone suffering from situational depression, but it can be remedied through God's gifts of prayer, Bible study and application, support groups, fellowship among believers, confession, forgiveness, and counseling. We must make the conscious effort to not be absorbed in ourselves, but to turn our efforts outward. Feelings of depression can often be solved when those suffering with depression move the focus from themselves to Christ and others.

Clinical or chemical depression is a physical condition that must be diagnosed by a licensed therapist or physician. It may not be caused by unfortunate life circumstances, nor can the symptoms be alleviated by one's own will. Contrary to what some in the Christian community believe, clinical depression is not always caused by sin. Depression can sometimes be caused by a physical disorder that needs to be treated with medication and/or counseling. Of course, God is able to cure any disease or disorder. However, in some cases, seeing a counselor or doctor for depression is no different than seeing a doctor for an injury.

Depression is often viewed as a persistent feeling of sadness. Of course, it is okay to be sad. We live in a world of pain ([Genesis 3:14-19](#); [Romans 8:20-22](#)), and Jesus wept over the death of Lazarus ([John 11:35](#)). There is no need to always put on a happy face and pretend that things are okay when they are not.

There are many biblical examples of men of God struggling with sadness, even to the point of depression. David wrote, "Record my misery; list my tears on your scroll—are they not in your record?" ([Psalm 56:8](#)). David, a "man after [God's] own heart" ([Acts 13:22](#)), did not gloss over his sadness; he expressed it to God. Both Moses ([Numbers 11:15](#)) and Elijah ([1 Kings 19:3-5](#)), two heroes of the faith, confessed to God that they preferred to die than live in their current reality. Neither was rebuked by God for his feelings; rather, both were met with God's love and provision. The Bible is not shy about admitting the realities of human emotion. Sadness is part of life, and it is not condemned.

As believers, we are exhorted to see the greater reality of God's plan even in the midst of our sadness and depression. Yes, this world is fallen and often painful. It can be depressing. But God is far greater. He is at work, victoriously. Moses and Elijah received God's provision and experienced His refreshing. Shortly after pouring out his sadness, David praised God. Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Christians are permitted to call trouble for what it is. At the same time, we take heart in God's care. Taking heart does *not* mean pasting on a smile or ignoring the feeling of emptiness that depression brings. It does *not* mean neglecting to treat depression through counseling or medication. It does *not* mean ignoring the relational hurts or the misperceptions that have led to depression (Satan's lies, if we believe them, will lead us to despair). It does *not* mean denying the fact that depression could be a lifelong struggle.

What taking heart *does* mean is bringing all our pain to God. It *does* mean continuing to trust in Him. It *does* mean believing that what He says about

Himself and about us is true, even when we don't feel like it is. It *does* mean getting the help we need, battling depression rather than giving in to it. We acknowledge the depravity of the world, but we also acknowledge the sufficiency of God.

It is not wrong to be depressed. But it is wrong—and not especially helpful in overcoming a depressed state—to give up on God when we are depressed. “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” ([Psalm 43:5](#)). There are many spiritual issues that, if left unaddressed, can pull a person into depression. For instance: Do you have unbiblical beliefs about yourself and/or your relationship with God? Are there things in your life that have damaged you that you have not fully dealt with? Are you harboring unforgiveness and bitterness in your life? Are there things you did in your past for which you feel guilty? All of these things can contribute to a Christian feeling depressed. Deal with them, biblically. Seek solid biblically based counsel. Ask God to transform your mind ([Romans 12:2](#)) and help you to think biblically about the things that have happened and are happening in your life.

Fighting depression spiritually will not necessarily free you from depression. But, it can't hurt. And, if the potential spiritual causes of depression are dealt with, you will be more empowered to deal with any biological causes that exist. And vice versa. What we are saying is that, for a Christian, the spiritual aspect of depression must be part of the formula for how depression is dealt with.

If you are a Christian who is struggling with depression, our best advice is — fight it! Examine yourself to see if there are any unbiblical and ungodly beliefs that may be causing it. Understand who you are in Christ and allow

the power of the Holy Spirit to transform and renew your mind. Seek counsel from other Christians. And, do not neglect the possibility of a biological/clinical cause/role in the depression that may need medication. If there is genuinely something biologically wrong with you that is causing the depression, there is absolutely nothing wrong with trying some of the medical helps that have been developed.

Fight it! Fight it spiritually. Fight it medically with medication if it is moderate to severe. Fight it prayerfully. Fight it biblically. There are spiritual things that those who suffer from depression can do to alleviate their struggle. They should make sure that they are staying in the Word, even when they do not feel like it. Emotions can lead us astray, but God's Word stands firm and unchanging. We must maintain strong faith in God and hold even more tightly to Him when we undergo trials and temptations. The Bible tells us that God will never allow temptations into our lives that are too much for us to handle ([1 Corinthians 10:13](#)). Although being depressed is not a sin, one is still accountable for the response to the affliction, including getting the professional help that is needed. "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name" ([Hebrews 13:15](#)).

Q3: "How do I forgive myself and how can I forgive others?"

A3: Never does the Bible talk about the idea of "forgiving yourself." We are told to forgive others when they trespass against us and seek forgiveness. When we ask for God's forgiveness based upon Christ having already paid for our sins and our having trusted in Him as Savior and Lord, He forgives us. It is as simple as that ([1 John 1:9](#)). However, even though we are released from the bondage to sin (as spoken of in Romans chapters 6-8), we can still choose to wallow in it and act as though we are not freed from it.

Likewise, with guilty feelings we can accept the fact that we are forgiven in Christ, or we can believe the devil's lie that we are still guilty and should therefore feel guilty.

The Bible says that when God forgives us, He "remembers our sins no more" ([Jeremiah 31:34](#)). This does not mean that the all-knowing God forgets because He forgives us. Rather, He chooses not to bring up our sin to Himself or others. When our former sins come to mind, we can choose to dwell upon them (with the resulting guilty feelings), or we can choose to fill our minds with thoughts of the awesome God who forgave us and thank and praise Him for it ([Philippians 4:8](#)). Remembering our sins is only beneficial when it reminds us of the extent of God's forgiveness and makes it easier for us to forgive others ([Matthew 18:21-35](#)).

Sadly, there are people who don't "forgive themselves," that is, who don't move beyond their past, because they really don't want to forget their former sins, choosing rather to continue getting a vicarious thrill out of reliving them in their minds. This, too, is sin and must be confessed and forsaken. A man who lusts in his heart after a woman is guilty of the sin of adultery ([Matthew 5:28](#)). In the same way, each time we mentally relive our sin, we commit the same sin over again. If this is happening in a Christian's life, the pattern of sin/guilt/sin/guilt can be destructive and never-ending.

Remembering that our sins are forgiven should make it easier to forgive others their sin ([Matthew 7:1-5](#); [1 Timothy 1:15](#)). Forgiveness should remind us of the great Savior who forgave us, undeserving though we will always be, and draw us closer in loving obedience to Him ([Romans 5:10](#); [Psalm 103:2-3,10-14](#)). God will allow our sin to come to mind (Satan may intend it for an evil purpose, but God allows it for a good purpose), but He

wants us to accept His forgiveness and rejoice in His grace. So, the next time your former sins come to mind, "change the channel" by choosing to dwell upon His mercies (it might help to make a list of verses that encourage you to praise) and think about how we should loathe sin.

Q4: "How can I forgive those who sin against me?"

A4: Everyone has been wronged, offended, and sinned against at some point. How are Christians to respond when such offenses occur? According to the Bible, we are to forgive others. [Ephesians 4:32](#) declares, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Similarly, [Colossians 3:13](#) proclaims, "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." The key in both Scriptures is that we are to forgive others as God has forgiven us. Why do we forgive? Because we have been forgiven!

Forgiveness would be simple if we only had to grant it to those who come asking for it in sorrow and repentance. The Bible tells us that we are to forgive, without condition, those who sin against us. Refusing to truly forgive a person demonstrates resentment, bitterness, and anger, none of which are the traits of a true Christian. In the Lord's Prayer, we ask God to forgive us our sins, just as we forgive those who sin against us ([Matthew 6:12](#)). Jesus said in [Matthew 6:14-15](#), "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins." In light of other Scriptures that speak of God's forgiveness, [Matthew 6:14-15](#) is best understood to be saying that people who refuse to forgive others have not truly experienced God's forgiveness themselves.

Whenever we disobey one of God's commands, we sin against Him. Whenever we wrong another person, we not only sin against that person, but also against God. When we consider the extent to which God forgives all our transgressions, we realize that we do not have the right to withhold this grace from others. We have sinned against God infinitely more than any person can sin against us. If God forgives us of so much, how can we refuse to forgive others of so little? Jesus' parable in [Matthew 18:23-35](#) is a powerful illustration of this truth. God promises that when we come to Him asking for forgiveness, He freely grants it ([1 John 1:9](#)). The forgiveness we extend should know no limits, in the same way that God's forgiveness is limitless ([Luke 17:3-4](#)).

Q5: "What does the Bible say about loneliness and feeling alone?"

A5: Being alone and being lonely are two different things. One can be alone without being lonely, and one can be lonely in a crowded room. Loneliness is, therefore, a state of mind, an emotion brought on by feelings of separation from other human beings. The sense of isolation is very deeply felt by those who are lonely. The Hebrew word translated "desolate" or "lonely" in the Old Testament means "one alone, only; one who is solitary, forsaken, wretched." There is no deeper sadness that ever comes over the mind than the idea that we are alone in the world, that we do not have a friend, that no one cares for us, that no one is concerned about anything that might happen to us, that no one would care if we were to die or shed a tear over our grave.

No one felt loneliness more keenly than David. In a series of earnest, heartfelt appeals to God, David cried out in his loneliness and despair. His own son was risen up against him, the men of Israel went after him, and he was forced to flee from the city, and leave his house and family. Lonely and

afflicted ([Psalm 25:16](#)), his only recourse was to turn to God and plead for mercy and God's intervention ([Psalm 25:21](#)) because his only hope was in God. It is interesting to note that the word "lonely" is never used in the New Testament to describe people. In the New Testament, the word "lonely" only occurs twice and both times refers to desolate places ([Mark 1:45](#); [Luke 5:16](#)), where Jesus moved off into the wilderness to be alone.

Unfortunately, all Christians have feelings of spiritual emptiness from time to time. Fortunately, God knew it would happen and has given us a lot of helpful advice in His Word.

It is often sin that causes our feelings of spiritual emptiness—possibly the sin of apathy toward God or sluggishness in our daily lives. Also, how we feel physically can impact how we feel spiritually. So the best advice to overcome feelings of spiritual emptiness might be to first examine if we have been disobedient to God's commands for us. [Ephesians 5:15–18](#) says, "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Then, we should make sure we are doing all right physically—are we getting enough sleep, eating properly, etc.?

A Christian may *feel* spiritually empty sometimes, but he need never be truly so. No born-again Christian is ever without the Holy Spirit. All who are born again have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit the moment they believed in Jesus ([Ephesians 2:1–10](#)). The Holy Spirit has sealed each believer "for the day of redemption" ([Ephesians 4:30](#)).

So the key to overcoming spiritual emptiness is to "fill up" with the Holy

Spirit. Maybe that sounds obvious enough, but how exactly does one do that? Dr. Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, in his booklet "Have You Made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit-Filled Life?" suggests these steps:

- 1) Sincerely desire to be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit ([Matthew 5:6](#) and [John 7:37-39](#)).

- 2) Confess your sins and thank God that He has forgiven all of your sins whether past, present, or future ([Colossians 2:13-15](#); [1 John 1:1-2:3](#)).

- 3) Present every area of your life to God for His gracious control ([Romans 12:1-2](#)).

- 4) By faith claim the fullness of the Holy Spirit according to His commandment in [Ephesians 5:18](#) and His promise in [1 John 5:14-15](#).

In doing those four steps, you are essentially doing spiritual breathing—exhaling the impure and inhaling the pure. In faith you are praying for what God already knows you need—the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Often in allowing the Spirit to fill oneself, there will be an immediate desire to dine on God's daily bread—the Bible. "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" ([Matthew 4:4](#)).

It is also helpful to know where to turn for encouragement. Overcoming feelings of spiritual emptiness is often not a mental or academic exercise; rather, we need the personal touch of another born-again believer. Here is where the church comes in, with brothers and sisters everywhere, Bible

study and support groups meeting locally, and, of course, worship services and the preaching of God's Word. What a shame to dwell on spiritual emptiness, when brothers and sisters would love to help.

Whatever the cause of loneliness, for the Christian the cure is always the same—the comforting fellowship of Christ. That loving relationship with our Master has reassured and encouraged countless thousands who languished in prisons and even went to their deaths for His sake. He is the friend who “sticks closer than a brother” ([Proverbs 18:24](#)), who lays down His life for His friends ([John 15:13-15](#)), and who has promised never to leave us or forsake us but to be with us until the end of the age ([Matthew 28:20](#)). We can take comfort in the words of the old hymn that says it best: “Friends may fail me, foes assail me, He is with me to the end. Hallelujah, what a Savior!”

Q6: "What is the key to victory when struggling with sin?"

A6: The key to victory in our struggles with sin lies not in ourselves, but in God and His faithfulness to us: “The LORD is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth ([Psalm 145:18](#); see also [Psalm 46:1](#)).

There's no getting around it: we all struggle with sin ([Romans 3:23](#)). Even the great apostle Paul lamented over his ongoing struggle with sin in his life: “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me” ([Romans 7:18-20](#)). Paul's struggle with sin was real; so much so that he cried out, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” ([Romans 7:24](#)).

Yet in the next breath, he answers his own question, as well as ours: "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" ([Romans 7:25a](#)). In this passage, Paul not only provides us with the very key to victory when struggling with sin, but explains the never-ending conundrum between our sinful nature and spiritual nature: "So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin" ([Romans 7:25b](#)).

Earlier, Paul said, "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin" ([Romans 7:14](#)). Paul is comparing our sinful nature, our flesh, to a slave. Just as a slave obeys his master, so our flesh obeys sin. However, as believers in Christ, we have become spiritual beings under the law of Christ; our inner selves are under the influence and ownership of God's grace and the life of Christ ([Romans 5:21](#)). As long as we are living in this world, our sinful nature and fleshly desire will remain with us. But we also have a new nature in Christ. This leads to a struggle between what we want to do and what we actually do, as sin continues to assault our earthly nature. This struggle is a normal part of living the Christian life.

It's interesting to note that Paul, the greatest of the apostles, declared that, of all sinners, "I am the worst!" ([1 Timothy 1:15](#)). Paul affirms the struggles we all have as we battle with sin and temptation in our lives. The struggles are real, and they're debilitating. We grow weary from the never-ending temptations and in falling short of God's glory. Paul, in essence, is telling us that we need not pretend that we're untouched by our struggles. He's been there. He understands. Though our efforts to do right seem desperate, we do have hope "through Jesus Christ our Lord" ([Romans 7:25](#); [Hebrews 4:15](#)). And He, in fact, is the key to our victory over sin.

A true Christian will war with Satan and his daily efforts to undermine us. The devil is the ruler of this world, and we are living “behind enemy lines” ([Ephesians 2:2](#); [Ephesians 6:12](#); [John 12:31](#)). With our focus on Christ, however, we will be able to cultivate a mindset that proclaims we’d rather die than do anything to hurt God. When we give ourselves to Christ totally ([Matthew 16:24](#)), Satan will flee from us. When we draw near to God, He, in turn, will draw near to us ([James 4:7-8](#)).

Our key to victory in our struggle with sin lies in the very promise of God Himself: “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” ([1 Corinthians 10:13](#)).

As true believers in Christ, even when we “face trials far beyond our ability to endure” ([2 Corinthians 1:8](#)), we can echo the reassuring words of Paul, who declares, “God has delivered us and will continue to deliver us” ([2 Corinthians 1:10](#)). Finally, the psalmist gives us these words of encouragement: “Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him, and He will act” ([Psalm 37:3-5](#)).

Q7: "What is prayer?"

A7: The most basic definition of prayer is “talking to God.” Prayer is not meditation or passive reflection; it is direct address to God. It is the communication of the human soul with the Lord who created the soul. Prayer is the primary way for the believer in Jesus Christ to communicate his

emotions and desires with God and to fellowship with God.

Prayer can be audible or silent, private or public, formal or informal. All prayer must be offered in faith ([James 1:6](#)), in the name of the Lord Jesus ([John 16:23](#)), and in the power of the Holy Spirit ([Romans 8:26](#)). As the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* puts it, "Christian prayer in its full New Testament meaning is prayer addressed to God as Father, in the name of Christ as Mediator, and through the enabling grace of the indwelling Spirit" ("Prayer" by J. C. Lambert). The wicked have no desire to pray ([Psalm 10:4](#)), but the children of God have a natural desire to pray ([Luke 11:1](#)).

Prayer is described in the Bible as seeking God's favor ([Exodus 32:11](#)), pouring out one's soul to the Lord ([1 Samuel 1:15](#)), crying out to heaven ([2 Chronicles 32:20](#)), drawing near to God ([Psalm 73:28, KJV](#)), and kneeling before the Father ([Ephesians 3:14](#)).

Paul wrote, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" ([Philippians 4:6-7](#)). Worry about nothing; pray about everything.

Everything? Yes, God wants us to talk with Him about everything. How often should we pray? The biblical answer is "pray without ceasing" ([1 Thessalonians 5:17](#)). We should keep a running conversation going with God all day long. Some find the [ACTS formula of prayer](#) helpful, but there is really no special formula for [how to pray](#) in the Bible. We should just do it. We can pray under any and all circumstances. Prayer develops our

relationship with God and demonstrates our trust and utter dependence upon Him.

Prayer is the Christian's way of communicating with God. We pray to praise God and thank Him and tell Him how much we love Him. We pray to enjoy His presence and tell Him what is going on in our lives. We pray to [make requests](#) and seek guidance and ask for wisdom. God loves this exchange with His children, just as we love the exchange we have with our children. Fellowship with God is the heart of prayer. Too often we lose sight of how simple prayer is really supposed to be.

When we make petitions to God, we let God know exactly where we stand and what we would like to see happen. In our prayers, we must admit that God is greater than we are and ultimately knows what is best in any given situation ([Romans 11:33-36](#)). God is good and asks us to trust Him. In prayer, we say, essentially, "Not my will, but your will be done." The key to answered prayer is praying according to the will of God and in accordance with His Word. Prayer is not seeking our own will but seeking to align ourselves with the will of God more fully ([1 John 5:14-15](#); [James 4:3](#)).

The Bible contains many examples of prayer and plenty of exhortations to pray (see [Luke 18:1](#); [Romans 12:12](#); and [Ephesians 6:18](#)). God's house is to be a house of prayer ([Mark 11:17](#)), and God's people are to be people of prayer: "Dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love" ([Jude 1:20-21](#)).

Q8: "Why pray? What is the point of prayer when God knows the future and is already in control of everything? If we cannot change God's mind, why should we pray?"

A8: For the Christian, praying is supposed to be like breathing, easier to do than to not do. We pray for a variety of reasons. For one thing, prayer is a form of serving God ([Luke 2:36-38](#)) and obeying Him. We pray because God commands us to pray ([Philippians 4:6-7](#)). Prayer is exemplified for us by Christ and the early church ([Mark 1:35](#); [Acts 1:14](#); [2:42](#); [3:1](#); [4:23-31](#); [6:4](#); [13:1-3](#)). If Jesus thought it was worthwhile to pray, we should also. If He needed to pray to remain in the Father's will, how much more do we need to pray?

Another reason to pray is that God intends prayer to be the means of obtaining His solutions in a number of situations. We pray in preparation for major decisions ([Luke 6:12-13](#)); to overcome demonic barriers ([Matthew 17:14-21](#)); to gather workers for the spiritual harvest ([Luke 10:2](#)); to gain strength to overcome temptation ([Matthew 26:41](#)); and to obtain the means of strengthening others spiritually ([Ephesians 6:18-19](#)).

We come to God with our specific requests, and we have God's promise that our prayers are not in vain, even if we do not receive specifically what we asked for ([Matthew 6:6](#); [Romans 8:26-27](#)). He has promised that when we ask for things that are in accordance with His will, He will give us what we ask for ([1 John 5:14-15](#)). Sometimes He delays His answers according to His wisdom and for our benefit. In these situations, we are to be diligent and persistent in prayer ([Matthew 7:7](#); [Luke 18:1-8](#)). Prayer should not be seen as our means of getting God to do our will on earth, but rather as a means of getting God's will done on earth. God's wisdom far exceeds our own.

For situations in which we do not know God's will specifically, prayer is a means of discerning His will. If the Syrian woman with the demon-influenced daughter had not prayed to Christ, her daughter would not have been made

whole ([Mark 7:26-30](#)). If the blind man outside Jericho had not called out to Christ, he would have remained blind ([Luke 18:35-43](#)). God has said that we often go without because we do not ask ([James 4:2](#)). In one sense, prayer is like sharing the gospel with people. We do not know who will respond to the message of the gospel until we share it. In the same way, we will never see the results of answered prayer unless we pray.

A lack of prayer demonstrates a lack of faith and a lack of trust in God's Word. We pray to demonstrate our faith in God, that He will do as He has promised in His Word and bless our lives abundantly more than we could ask or hope for ([Ephesians 3:20](#)). Prayer is our primary means of seeing God work in others' lives. Because it is our means of "plugging into" God's power, it is our means of defeating Satan and his army that we are powerless to overcome by ourselves. Therefore, may God find us often before His throne, for we have a high priest in heaven who can identify with all that we go through ([Hebrews 4:15-16](#)). We have His promise that the fervent prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much ([James 5:16-18](#)). May God glorify His name in our lives as we believe in Him enough to come to Him often in prayer.

Q9: "How can I have my prayers answered by God?"

A9: Many people believe answered prayer is God granting a prayer request that is offered to Him. If a prayer request is not granted, it is understood as an "unanswered" prayer. However, this is an incorrect understanding of prayer. God answers every prayer that is lifted to Him. Sometimes God answers "no" or "wait." God only promises to grant our prayers when we ask according to His will. "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked

of him" ([1 John 5:14-15](#)).

What does it mean to pray according to God's will? Praying according to God's will is praying for things that honor and glorify God and/or praying for what the Bible clearly reveals God's will to be. If we pray for something that is not honoring to God or not God's will for our lives, God will not give what we ask for. How can we know what God's will is? God promises to give us wisdom when we ask for it. [James 1:5](#) proclaims, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." A good place to start is [1 Thessalonians 5:12-24](#), which outlines many things that are God's will for us. The better we understand God's Word, the better we will know what to pray for ([John 15:7](#)). The better we know what to pray for, the more often God will answer "yes" to our requests.

Q10: "How should a Christian respond to unanswered prayer?"

A10: How many Christians have prayed for someone, only to see their prayers go unanswered? How many have prayed and perhaps have "given up" because either they have become discouraged through a weakness of faith or have come to the conclusion that whatever they have been praying for isn't God's will? Nevertheless, how we deal with unanswered prayer is not just for our own benefit but for the benefit of others as well. When we pray, we are engaging in the most precious and God-given act of communication with the One to whom we are accountable in all our affairs. We have been truly bought at a steep price—the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ—and therefore we belong to God.

Our privilege of prayer is from God, and it is as much ours now as when it was given to Israel ([Deuteronomy 4:7](#)). Yet, when we pray or speak to the

One in Heaven, there are times when He seems not to answer. There can be many reasons for this, and the Scriptures suggest why and how our prayers are being dealt with by the One who is so tender and loving, who Himself loves our communing with God the Father, for He, Himself, is our representative ([Hebrews 4:15](#)).

A primary reason why prayer is unanswered is sin. God cannot be mocked or deceived, and He who sits enthroned above knows us intimately, down to our every thought ([Psalm 139:1-4](#)). If we are not walking in the Way or we harbor enmity in our hearts toward our brother or we ask for things with the wrong motives (such as from selfish desires), then we can expect God not to answer our prayer because He does not hear ([2 Chronicles 7:14](#); [Deuteronomy 28:23](#); [Psalm 66:18](#); [James 4:3](#)). Sin is the “stopper” to all the potential blessings that we would receive from the infinite “bottle” of God’s mercy! Indeed, there are times when our prayers are heinous in the Lord’s sight, most notably when we clearly do not belong to the Lord either because of unbelief ([Proverbs 15:8](#)) or because we are practicing hypocrisy ([Mark 12:40](#)).

Another reason why prayer seems to go unanswered is that the Lord is drawing out of our faith a deeper reliance and trust in Him, which should bring out of us a deeper sense of gratitude, love and humility. In turn, this causes us to benefit spiritually, for He gives grace to the humble ([James 4:6](#); [Proverbs 3:34](#)). Oh, how one feels for that poor Canaanite woman, who cried out incessantly to our Lord for mercy when He was visiting the region of Tyre and Sidon ([Matthew 15:21-28](#))! She was hardly the person a Jewish rabbi would pay attention to. She was not a Jew and she was a woman, two reasons that Jews ignored her. The Lord doesn’t seem to answer her petitions, but He knew all about her situation. He may not have answered

her stated needs immediately, but still He heard and granted her request.

God may often seem silent to us, but He never sends us away empty-handed. Even if prayer has not been answered, we must rely upon God to do so in His own time. Even the exercise of prayer is a blessing to us; it is because of our faith that we are stirred to persist in prayer. It is faith that pleases God ([Hebrews 11:6](#)), and if our prayer life is wanting, does that not reflect our spiritual standing also? God hears our impoverished cries for mercy, and His silence inflames us with a sense of persistence in prayer. He loves us to reason with Him. Let us hunger for the things that are after God's heart and let us walk in His ways and not our own. If we are faithful to pray without ceasing, then we are living in the will of God, and that can never be wrong ([1 Thessalonians 5:17-18](#)).

Q11: "What does the Bible say about overcoming lust?"

A11: Most words in the Bible that are translated "lust" mean "a passionate desire." Strong desire can be either good or bad, depending upon the object of that desire and the motive behind it. God created the human heart with the capacity for passionate desire so that we would long after Him and His righteousness ([Psalm 42:1-2](#); [73:25](#)). However, the concept of "lust" is now usually associated with a passionate desire for something God has forbidden, and the word is seen as synonymous with sexual or materialistic desire.

The dictionary definition of lust is "1) intense or unrestrained sexual craving, or 2) an overwhelming desire or craving." The Bible speaks of lust in several ways. [Exodus 20:14, 17](#) (NLT), "Do not commit adultery. . . Do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else your neighbor owns," or [Matthew 5:28](#), "But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart." [Job 31:11-12 \(NLT\)](#) sums

up lust quite nicely: "For lust is a shameful sin, a crime that should be punished. It is a devastating fire that destroys to hell. It would wipe out everything I own."

Lust has as its focus pleasing oneself, and it often leads to unwholesome actions to fulfill one's desires with no regard to the consequences. Lust is about possession and greed. The Christian faith is about selflessness and is marked by holy living ([Romans 6:19, 12:1-2](#); [1 Corinthians 1:2, 30, 6:19-20](#); [Ephesians 1:4, 4:24](#); [Colossians 3:12](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, 5:23](#); [2 Timothy 1:9](#); [Hebrews 12:14](#); [1 Peter 1:15-16](#)). The goal of each person who has put his or her faith in Jesus Christ is to become more and more like Him each day. This means putting off the old way of life of which sin was in control, and conforming one's thoughts and actions to the standard put forth in Scripture. Lust is in opposition to this ideal.

[James 1:14-15](#) gives us the natural progression of unrestrained lust: "Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

According to this passage, sinful lust begins with an evil desire. Being tempted by evil is not the sin. Jesus was tempted ([Matthew 4:1](#)). The sin begins when the evil desire "drags us away" from where our hearts need to be. When an evil desire introduces itself, we have a choice. We can reject it as Jesus did and refocus on the path God has set before us ([Matthew 4:10](#)). Or we can entertain it. As someone once said, "We cannot stop the birds from flying overhead, but we don't have to let them make a nest in our hair." When temptation beckons, we need to remember that we are not helpless. We can choose to give in or to resist.

The reason we are “dragged away” by temptation is that we are “enticed.” That word in the Greek refers to bait, as on a fishing line. When a fish sees the wiggling worm, he is enticed by it and grabs hold. Once the hook is set, he can be “dragged away.” When we encounter temptation, we should immediately reject it as Joseph did when he was tempted by Potiphar’s wife ([Genesis 39:11-12](#)). Hesitation opens the door to enticement. [Romans 13:14](#) calls such hesitation “making provision for the flesh.” Like the unwary fish, we grab hold of the tempting thought, believing it will delight and fulfill us. We savor the fantasy, imagine new and sinful scenarios, and entertain the idea that God has not provided all we need for happiness ([Genesis 3:2-4](#)). This is foolish. [Second Timothy 2:22](#) says, “Flee youthful lusts.” To “flee” means to take off immediately. Joseph did not stick around to consider his options. He recognized sexual temptation, and he ran. When we hesitate, we make provision for the flesh and give it the opportunity to choose evil. Often, we are overwhelmed by its power. Samson was a physically strong man, yet he was no match for his own lust ([Judges 16:1](#)).

The next step in the downward progression of temptation, according to [James 1](#), is that “desire conceives.” Lust begins as a seed, a thought packed with wrong desire. If we allow the seeds of lust to germinate, they will sprout into something bigger, more powerful, more difficult to uproot. Temptation becomes sin when it is allowed to germinate. Desire takes on a life of its own and becomes lust. Jesus made it clear that lust is sin, even if we do not physically act on it ([Matthew 5:27-28](#)). Our hearts are God’s domain, and when we allow evil to grow there, we defile His temple ([1 Corinthians 3:16](#); [6:19](#)).

Wrong desires plague every human being. The tenth commandment forbids

coveting, which means lusting for something that is not ours ([Deuteronomy 5:21](#); [Romans 13:9](#)). The human heart is constantly seeking to please itself, and when it discovers something or someone it believes will satisfy, lust begins.

Nobody will ever be perfect or attain sinlessness while still on this earth, yet it is still a goal for which we strive. The Bible makes a very strong statement regarding this in [1 Thessalonians 4:7-8](#), "God has called us to be holy, not to live impure lives. Anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human rules but is rejecting God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you." If lust has not yet gripped your heart and mind, ready yourself through a life lived above reproach to combat the temptations of lust. If you currently struggle with lust, it is time to come clean before God and ask for His intervention in your life, so that holiness can be a mark of your life as well.

It is only when our hearts are dedicated to the glory of God that we can overcome intrusive desires and conquer lust. When we surrender to the Lord, we find our needs met in a relationship with Him. We must "take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" ([2 Corinthians 10:5](#)). We must allow the Holy Spirit to keep our thoughts where He wants them to be. It helps to pray daily the words of [Psalm 19:14](#): "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer." When our heart's desire is to please God more than ourselves, we can keep lust at bay.

Q12: How can I memorize when my memory is so bad?

A12: See the "Guide to Memorizing Scripture" document on the Inmate Bible Study Lessons page of our website.

Q13: What are the best ways to memorize Scripture?

A13: See the "Guide to Memorizing Scripture" document on the Inmate Bible Study Lessons page of our website.

Q14: Will you pray that my attorney and the judge get me out soon?

A14: Thanks for asking me to pray for you. I will pray for God's will to be done.

Q15: Do you know of an organization that will help me when I am released?

A15: Volunteer, please e-mail CLI at cliministers@gmail.com and we will send you an aftercare packet for the student.

Q16: What can I do to avoid falling back in to the same lifestyle when I get out?

A16: Abide in Christ and don't go to places or let your mind wander to places where you might be tempted. Romans 13:14: "Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

Although our old nature still exists, we no longer have to be slaves to its sin nature, see Romans 6:6, 6:4.

We must recognize two things:

1. One is our inability to defeat our sin nature in our own strength, Galatians 3:3. We need to rely upon the indwelling Holy Spirit to enable us to live as we should. The Holy Spirit will exercise more control as we abide in Jesus and He in us, see Romans 13:14 and John 15. Realizing that sins come from the thought life, see Matthew 15:17-20, we need to think on things above, see Philippians 4:8.

2. The other is to recognize and claim who we are in Jesus. We need to claim the promise in Romans 6:11 of being dead to sin. We need to recognize that we have the fullness of Christ within us and live upon that assurance, Colossians 2:9-10, John 14:20. We can yield to His Holy Spirit or to our old sin nature, Romans 6:12-14. We need to claim the victory that He has already won for us and live upon that fact, 1 Corinthians 15:57. Paul gave us an example in Galatians 2:20.

Take it step by step. Say to yourself, "I will not ...before lunch, I will not... before supper, etc." Trust that He is working in you to mold you into His image, 2 Corinthians 3:18, and that He has already given you all the resources you need to succeed.

Q17: Can you get me a pen pal?

A17: We do not provide pen pals, but volunteers can e-mail cliministers@gmail.com to request a list of Christian pen pal ministries.