

WHERE
GOD GUIDES



GOD PROVIDES

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible. Additionally, for the sake of clarity, all Scripture quotations and parenthesized Scripture references have been placed in italics.

DEDICATION

On my 25th anniversary as the pastor of First Baptist Church in Pasadena, Texas, I lovingly dedicate this booklet to the precious people who make First Baptist Church such a special body of believers. This must certainly be the most loving church in all the world, and I feel blessed beyond words to get to be a part of it. Being the pastor of First Baptist Church for these many years has been and continues to be one of the greatest blessings and honors of my life.

During these years, God has shown me time and time again that where He guides, He provides. I will always be grateful that He guided our family to Pasadena twenty-five years ago. And I will always be grateful for each of you. You have become our family.

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” (Philippians 1:3).

“Now to Him Who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

INTRODUCTION

Years ago, I heard someone say, “*Where God guides, God provides.*” That little statement somehow stuck with me, and over the years it has certainly proven true. In the forty-seven years I have been a pastor, I have seen God’s provision in my own life and in the lives of thousands of others. I have seen God supernaturally meet needs. I have seen God miraculously open doors. I have seen God keep all of His promises. And I have learned some wonderful lessons about God along the way.

Where God guides, God provides. That is more than just a little saying. Those five words have sustained me during these forty-seven years as a pastor. In this booklet, I want to share with you ten of the greatest lessons God has taught me in my journey with Him. My prayer is that what I share with you will be more than just part of my journey. I pray that it will add to your journey as well.

“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).



Time alone with God is time well spent.

The most important lesson I have learned in my life is that spending time alone with God is an absolute necessity. A daily time with God is vital to a life of sustained spirituality, effectiveness, and love. It is the barometer of the Christian life. A daily quiet time keeps us fresh and energized.

Before I share about my daily time alone with God, I must share with you about my salvation experience. I became a Christian when I was seven years old. One Sunday morning in church, I felt something I had never felt before. When we got home from church that day, I told my mother that during the invitation the pastor gave that morning that I felt like Jesus wanted to come into my heart. My mother talked to me about what I had felt, and she told me that she wanted the pastor to talk to me as well. The following Saturday, the pastor came to our home and shared with me how to become a Christian. That Saturday

morning, I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my heart, forgive me of my sins, and make me a Christian. I wish now that I could remember the exact date when I received Jesus, but I do not. What I do remember is the experience. It was real then, and it is real now.

After I was saved, I lived what I would consider to be a fairly typical Christian life. As a boy, as a teenager, and then as a young adult, I attended church, read my Bible some during the week, but did not know much about a daily time alone with God. In seminary, I read my Bible and prayed most days. But my seminary studies wrongfully became my “quiet time” with God. In my first church after seminary, the time I spent preparing three sermons a week actually became my quiet time. The amazing thing is that I continued this way for three years. At the end of those three years, I realized that something was missing spiritually. God never intended for the Bible to just be a “sermon preparation book.” He intended for it to be our life-line to Him.

About this time, the Lord reminded me of a little booklet about having a quiet time entitled *Manna in the Morning* by Dr. Stephen Olford. Years earlier, I had picked that booklet up while attending a Bible conference. I had read the booklet at the conference, but I had not

applied it to my life. So I read it again. This time I realized that I needed to build into my life a daily quiet time with God. Over the years, I have developed what works for me as I strive to meet with God each morning.

Typically, I begin by reading a devotional book. I then read a biblical passage. Then I pray. I write down many of my prayers in a little prayer journal. This helps me to remember to thank God when He answers them. It also reminds me of His faithfulness to me. Other prayers, of course, are not written down at all. They are simply voiced from my heart to God's heart.

If you do not have a daily quiet time with God, I encourage you to begin having one. A good way to begin would be to take five minutes to praise and thank God. Next, take five minutes to read God's Word. Then, take five minutes for prayer. These fifteen minutes will become the best part of your day. You will find that these fifteen minutes will soon become thirty minutes or longer because there is so much to say *to* God and so much to receive *from* God.

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).



God has a plan for our lives.

I grew up in a good Christian home and was active in church from birth through all of my growing up years. I had good Sunday School teachers and good Bible-preaching pastors. My family was at church Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, and any other time the church met. I am sure it was my fault, but somehow I was married and twenty-five years of age before I realized that God had a unique plan for my life. I am sure my Sunday School teachers had taught me that. I am sure my pastors had taught me that, too. But somehow I had missed it. Let me share with you how I learned that God had a plan for my life.

Dottie and I were married on August 21, 1964, in her church in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia. At that time, Dottie worked for Delta Air Lines, and I worked for a car dealership. Soon after our marriage, I went to work as a claims adjuster for Allstate Insurance. I loved my job, and Dottie loved hers. Time passed, and I had the opportunity to go into the dry

cleaning business with Dottie's father. In those days, the dry cleaning business was a very profitable business. Dottie's father had worked hard and made it possible for all three of his children to go into the business if they wanted to. Dottie and I both felt like this was a good opportunity for us and that it would be financially rewarding. Time went by, and things were going well. But inside of me, there was a lack of peace. Dottie seemed to realize that God had something else He wanted us to do before I did. She has the gift of discernment on some things better than I do...on most things actually!

One night the assistant pastor of our church came by our home for a friendly visit. He and his wife were the same age as we were, and we used to do some things together. Sitting at our kitchen table, he picked up my Bible and asked me if I could show him from God's Word how to know God's will for my life. I did not have a clue. At that time, I couldn't show him a single verse in the Bible about God's will. He took my Bible and showed me a few verses that teach some principles about knowing God's will. God used that man to get my attention. Dottie and I prayed for several months. We then came to the place where we realized that God was calling us into the ministry. We shared this with our families, with our pastor,

and soon with our church. We had no idea what a life in the ministry would look like, but we did know that where God guides, God provides. We also knew that He would always take care of us.

As you think about what God wants you to do with your life, let me give you several questions to consider. These questions will help you to clarify what God's plan for your life really is:

1. What do I enjoy doing?
2. What am I good at?
3. What experiences have I had in the past?
4. What do others affirm in me?
5. What opportunities are before me now?
6. What am I passionate about?
7. What do I feel peaceful about doing?
8. In my heart of hearts, what do I think God wants me to do?

What is true for me is true for you. God has a plan for your life. There is something special

He wants you to do. He doesn't call everyone to be a pastor or a missionary. But He has a specific plan for each of us nonetheless. And the greatest place in all the world to be is in the center of His will.

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV).



Following God's will is not always easy, but it's always right.

Growing up in church, I heard sermons about how following God's will is not always easy. I believed those sermons, but only when Dottie and I entered the ministry did we begin to experience the truth of those sermons. My perception of the ministry and what I discovered about the ministry were very different. I knew my pastors growing up, yet I never really understood what they did. What I saw was a man preaching sermons on Sunday

mornings, Sunday nights, and Wednesday nights. That looked pretty easy to me. Little did I know what else these men did. What I would learn is that they did a lot of other things as well. Many of those things, of course, were not easy. The most difficult part about serving God, though, is not the weekly responsibilities of the job. The most difficult part about serving God is being obedient to Him when obedience isn't easy. That is true whether you are a pastor or not.

One of the hardest things for me to understand was the call of God. I often heard preachers talk about their "call" into the ministry. I wondered how that worked. Did they hear God speak? Did they have a dream? Did an angel tell them? Even as a young adult, I continued to wonder what ministers experienced when they were called into the ministry. To me, God's call was a mystery that I would not understand until I was twenty-five years of age. That was how old I was when God called me to be a preacher. Did an angel tell me? No. Did I have a dream? No. Did I audibly hear God speak to me? No. It was more real than any of that.

God called me by placing within my heart a desire to serve Him in a full-time way. He then placed a thought in my mind. I began thinking

about being a pastor. I then began seeing myself as one. Then God led Dottie and me to take a step of faith by surrendering our lives to His work. We did not know where the road God had for us would lead. But we did know that God had called us. We also knew that He had a place for us to serve.

When God made clear to me that His plan was for me to be a preacher, I knew I had to prepare myself for the work ahead. The old saying, “*A call to serve is a call to prepare*” is certainly true. I knew I needed to prepare myself for what God had called me to do. So I went back to college to complete my college work at Georgia State University before going to seminary. I had previously completed a little over a year of college before deciding to quit school and go to work. That was a bad decision. But God was giving me a second chance, and I needed to make the most of it.

I never really liked college. I thought it was a waste of time to study things that I would never use. But I was wrong. Through my studies, God expanded my world. He also gave me an opportunity to honor Him in the little, seemingly insignificant things of college life.

I never will forget an experience I had in a biology class. One day the professor gave us

the assignment of dissecting dead cats. I thought to myself, “This is ridiculous. God has called me to preach, not to dissect cats. I’m going to quit college again and just focus on preaching.” I called Dottie from a pay phone at school and told her of my new plan. She wasn’t impressed. She said, “Charles, God has called you to preach, and getting your education is part of His plan for your life. This is all part of His call. Now you get back in that biology lab and dissect that cat to the glory of God!” With those words of instruction, I humbly obeyed. I dissected the cat and made a decision to finish my college education. A little fear from my wife was just what it took to get me through!

About this time, a wonderful country church asked me to be their pastor. The church understood that in three years I would graduate from college and leave for seminary. So they knew when I came that if I was not good I would be gone soon! That wonderful church, Providence Baptist Church in Rico, Georgia, was a blessing from God. For those three years, I did the best I knew how. They loved us. They encouraged us. They provided for us. And I completed my college work. God had provided a place for us to serve, to learn, and to prepare for what He had next.

What He had next for us was in Texas. It was time to begin seminary. So we left our family and friends and moved from Georgia to Texas so I could attend Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. This was one of the most difficult things Dottie and I had ever done. We had always lived in the city where our parents lived, and our lifelong friends were like family to us. To leave everything we knew and everybody we loved and move to Fort Worth, Texas, where we knew no one, was very hard for us. Writing about it now after all these years reminds me of how hard that move was. I remember the day we loaded the U-Haul truck and headed to Texas. I drove the truck. Dottie and our son, Jon, who was seven months old at the time, along with one of our dearest friends, rode in the car. I cried as I drove the truck, and I was certain that Dottie was doing the same.

That move was one of the hardest things we ever did. I learned for the first time in my life that God's will is not always easy. That's true for you, too. God will at times lead you to take a step of faith that you don't necessarily want to take. But if you will take that step, He will bless you a thousand times over again. He's certainly done that for us.

I soon discovered that God had a plan for me in Texas more than just going to seminary. For the three years I was in seminary, I served on the staff of Travis Avenue Baptist Church as assistant pastor. Through that experience, I learned things about working at a large church that I never could have learned in a seminary classroom. In fact, the membership of Travis Avenue Baptist Church was larger than the population of the county I grew up in. The pastor of that great church, Dr. James Coggin, became my father in the ministry. Most of what I do as a pastor today I learned from him. He literally taught me how to be a pastor. At the same time I was learning those valuable lessons, I was also able to go through seminary and study under some of the greatest Bible teachers on the planet. I had the best of both worlds. Where God guides, God really does provide. I was beginning to see this happen.

When I graduated from seminary in December of 1972, First Baptist Church in Lenoir City, Tennessee, called me to be their pastor. We moved to Tennessee, and this time there were four of us. Our son, Joel, was born on June 5, 1972, in Fort Worth. The moving company came and loaded our belongings, and off we went to Tennessee. I was thirty-one years of age. The almost nine years we served in Tennessee were wonderful years. Then God

led us to First Baptist Church in Sulphur Springs, Texas, where we served for nine fantastic years. In both Lenoir City and Sulphur Springs, God more than met our needs. He gave us a lot of new and wonderful friends. He incredibly blessed both churches. He also continued to teach us that being in His will is the key to experiencing His greatest blessings.

In the fall of 1988, the Pulpit Committee of First Baptist Church in Pasadena, Texas, contacted me about the possibility of becoming their pastor. Over a period of about twelve months, I sought God's will about the matter. Interestingly enough, at about this same time a strong church in Miami, Florida, and two other great churches in the Dallas/Fort Worth area had met with us about the possibility of coming to be their pastor. We were very happy in Sulphur Springs, but in my heart I sensed that God was up to something. Another move seemed likely.

In the late fall of 1989, God made it remarkably clear to me that I was to become the pastor of the Pasadena church. One Thursday afternoon, I was walking from my study in the Sulphur Springs church to the main church office area. I walked through the sanctuary to get there. As I was in front of the altar in that beautiful old sanctuary, the Spirit

of God spoke to my heart. He said to me, “If the Pulpit Committee from Pasadena comes to church here on Sunday, then you will know that it is My will for you to go there.” It was a very clear word to me from God. I didn’t hear His voice, but I knew that He had spoken to my heart. Well, the next Sunday morning I was standing on the platform during the song service, and as I looked out upon the congregation, I saw the Pasadena Pulpit Committee. And I knew at that moment that our lives were about to change forever.

God had spoken to me by placing a thought in my mind and in my heart. He will speak to you like that as well. If you desire to hear from God, He really will speak to you.

Next came the hardest thing I had ever done. Our younger son, Joel, wanted to complete his senior year of high school in Sulphur Springs and graduate from there. Jon was already at Baylor University. So I moved to Pasadena by myself in January of 1990 and lived alone until Joel graduated in June. Those were the longest six months of my life. I had thought leaving my family of origin and our lifelong friends to go to seminary was hard, but this was much harder. But God took care of us. He made it possible for Dottie and Joel to stay in our Sulphur Springs home for the entire six months

even though we had already sold it. And He was teaching me to lean solely on Him.

I have often thought about how difficult it has been through the years to move away from family. Then I look at things now. We have followed God as best as we have known how, and now, many years later, most of our family from Georgia has gone to heaven. Had we stayed in Georgia to be with those family members, we would be in Georgia without them. We obeyed God, left our families, and now our family is here in the Pasadena area. Dottie and I never dreamed that our sons would live where we live. We assumed that they would live in other cities or even in other states. But in the providence of God, we are all here. We are with them, and with Joel's wife, Jodi, and with our two grandchildren. In the beginning, we left our families to follow God. And now, at the end, our family is here with us. Only God could do a thing like that. Where God guides, God really does provide!

Following God's will is not always easy, but it is always the right thing to do. When you know in your heart that God is leading you to take a step of faith, I encourage you to take it. There will come a day when you will be grateful that you went God's way...even if it's not easy on the front end.

“I tell you the truth,’ Jesus replied, ‘no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for Me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life’” (Mark 10:29-30, NIV).



God leads us one step at a time.

One of the greatest lessons I have ever learned about God is that He leads His children one step at a time. He rarely shows us the big picture all at once. Instead, He gives us a step of faith to take. And after we have taken that step, He will show us the next step He wants us to take. He continually leads us one step at a time.

Looking back over our time in the ministry, that is exactly what God has done. He's led us one step at a time. From one assignment to another assignment. From one church to

another church. From one building program to another building program.

One of the most difficult times for me personally was the relocation of the Pasadena church. What made that so hard was that it didn't actually start out as a relocation. In 1991, God opened a door for our church to purchase 49 ½ acres in the southeast corner of Pasadena. Although God was leading us to purchase a prime piece of real estate at the spot where several communities come together, there were more questions than answers. And most of the questions were honest ones. Would we sell our downtown location and completely relocate? Would we always be a church with two locations? These were the questions I couldn't answer back in 1991. And some of the people in the church thought that I was holding back information from them. But I wasn't. I told the church all that I knew. I explained that God had opened a door for us to buy some land and begin an additional work. And that's what we did. We bought the land in 1991. Then, in 1994, we started having services at the new location while continuing to have services at our old location. For the next five years, we were *one church at two locations*.

I remember how a faithful member of the church, in fact, one of my close friends, said to

me in a meeting one day, “Dr. Redmond, if you would just tell the church what the plan is then everything would be ok. If people knew the plan they would stop speculating about our church’s future. Are we going to always have two locations or not?” I said, “Well, I would tell them if I knew, but I don’t know. All I know is that God has opened the door for us to have two locations now. And if we will stay faithful to Him, He will continue to lead us.”

In 1997, a Hispanic church approached our church about the possibility of buying our downtown property. After several months of meetings and prayerful consideration, our church voted to sell our downtown property to La Iglesia Del Pueblo. For the next two years, our church and La Iglesia Del Pueblo shared those downtown facilities together. It was a sweet time and blessed experience. Then, in 1999, we moved completely to our Fairmont location.

Obviously, neither I nor anyone else could have known back in 1991 how all of that would work out. I wish I were that smart! But, of course, I’m not. And that’s not how God typically leads His children anyway. He doesn’t tell us how it will all work out. He just gives us a step to take. If we will take it, He will honor us. In time, He will give us another

step to take...and another step...and another step. Then, one day, the whole process will make sense.

But it won't always make sense along the way. And it won't always be easy. On the Sunday morning our church voted to buy the land in 1991, there were some church members who tried to prevent the vote from happening. When I got to church that morning, several men were laying on the ground in front of my office trying to prevent me from getting in. They appeared to be praying, but it was obvious to me that what they were doing was more of a protest than a prayer meeting. They didn't want the church to buy the land. As I looked at them, I thought to myself, "What should I do now?" Then I thought, "Well, I'll do what I encourage others to do when they face obstacles. I'll step over them." So that's what I did. That's all I could do. I stepped over them, walked into my office, picked up my microphone, walked out of my office, stepped over them again, and went into the sanctuary to preach. At the end of the morning worship services, the church voted to buy the land.

Several years later, on the Saturday night in 1997 before our church voted to sell our downtown facilities to La Iglesia Del Pueblo, our home phone rang. This was before the day

of caller identification. I answered the phone. A man on the other end said, "Is Dr. Redmond there?" I said, "This is he." The man said, "Dr. Redmond, several of us in the church don't want to sell the downtown facilities to the Hispanic church, and we'll do whatever we have to do to stop this from happening. We know where you live. This call is a warning to you. If you try to go from your house to the church in the morning to lead the church to vote, we will see to it that you don't make it from your house to the church..." I let him finish talking. Then I ended the conversation and hung up the phone. When Dottie asked me who had called, I wanted to say, "They had the wrong number." But I didn't. I told her what had happened. We both shook our heads. We knew that anyone who would make a threat such as that was either evil or sick. We also knew in our hearts that such a person did not speak for the loving members of First Baptist Church, and that he certainly didn't speak for God. We prayed about it, committed the next day to God, went to bed, woke up, ate breakfast, and drove to church. We didn't have a police escort. But we did have God, and He got us to church safely. At the end of the morning worship services, the church voted to sell our downtown facilities to La Iglesia Del Pueblo.

One thing I've learned about the devil is this: He's an intimidator. He wants to instill fear into the children of God. He goes about like a roaring lion trying to scare God's people (*see I Peter 5:8*). But always remember this: "*He Who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*" (*I John 4:4*).

At times, it may seem as though God is leading you to take a step of faith that you just cannot take. But if God is *leading* you to take it, He will *enable* you to take it. And as you take that step, you will experience a renewed courage and a deeper peace than you can imagine. You simply cannot go wrong by following the Lord. He will always take care of you.

So what step of faith do you feel that God is leading you to take? Will you be courageous enough to take it? Will you risk the criticism? Will you follow God even if the way ahead isn't clear? If you will, you will never regret it. And one day, you and a lot of other people will be greatly blessed.

"Teach me Your way, O LORD, and lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies" (*Psalm 27:11*).



It is better to forgive than to hold grudges.

Forgiveness is never easy. I wish I could say that forgiving people is not a problem for ministers. But I can't say that. Forgiveness is an area in my life that I work on regularly. I like to think of myself as a forgiving person, but there have been times when I have struggled to forgive people. Sometimes I still do. I do not know of anyone who has not, at some time, struggled with forgiving another person.

We need to learn to forgive people because not only are we imperfect, but everyone else is, too. People hurt us. People wound us. People betray us. People talk behind our backs. And sometimes people try to destroy us.

I have noticed something interesting about forgiveness...it is more difficult to forgive those who are the closest to us. If someone I barely even know says something mean-spirited to me, that's one thing. But if someone

I am close to says something hurtful *to* me or *about* me, it really stings.

In my years as a pastor, I have been hurt the most by those who at one time were my closest friends. Thankfully, it hasn't happened often, but there have been times through the years when the people who were my partners in ministry, my confidants, and even my prayer partners have turned against me. In every case, looking back, it was because I didn't lead the church in the way they thought I should. In a few instances, they have even walked away from me and criticized me openly. How do you handle something like that?

Well, first of all, you have to expect that these things might happen along the way. Dr. Roy Fish, the late professor of evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, once did a study of Southern Baptist churches that averaged over 1,000 people in Sunday School. He found that within five years of a new pastor going to one of those churches that the majority of the people who served on the Pulpit Committee actually left the church themselves. Think about that. The majority of people who help a pastor come to a church eventually leave the church. Dr. Fish used to say that if this only happened in a few churches then he wouldn't have been concerned. But

when he discovered a trend, he became very alarmed.

My purpose here is not to study that trend and try to figure out what has happened in all of those churches. My purpose is to make a greater point. When a pastor begins his new work at a church, the only people he knows are the members of the committee who brought him there. They were the ones who thought it was God's will for him to lead the church in the first place. So if some of them turn against him, that can be a tough pill to swallow. In my time in Pasadena, I have had to swallow that pill myself. I must confess that it isn't an easy thing to do.

Perhaps you have been hurt by someone close to you. Maybe part of the conflict was your fault. Maybe it wasn't. But what do you do now? How does forgiveness work? Let me share some steps that have been helpful for me:

1. Ask yourself, "Is there anything I have done to cause this conflict?" If there is, ask the other person for forgiveness.

2. If someone has hurt you, forgive that person in your heart...alone with God. To forgive means "to release." You release them from whatever they have done. You let it go.

That doesn't mean that what they did was right. If they purposely hurt you, that was wrong. But you release them to God, and you let it go...and you do this whether they ask for forgiveness or not.

3. Pray for that person.
4. Be kind to that person.
5. Never speak ill of that person.

Again, I have not mastered the art of forgiving people. But by the grace of God, I am farther along than I used to be. Remember this: Sometimes God will allow someone close to you to turn against you just to see how you will respond. Jesus forgave and even prayed for His enemies. We should forgive and pray for ours, too.

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32, NIV).



You cannot put God in a box.

My parents were faithful Christians and faithful church members. I thus grew up going to church. I was blessed to have two Sunday School teachers growing up who greatly impacted my life. Mrs. Ruth Cooper and Mr. George Tucker inspired me to love God, love the Bible, and best of all, to memorize Scripture. When God called me into the ministry, I was blessed to go to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for my master's degree. The professors I studied under were some of the best Bible teachers in the world. I went on to receive my doctoral degree from Luther Rice Seminary. I was blessed beyond words with that experience as well.

I say all of that to say that I have been taught the Bible all of my life. But I was in my sixties before I began to more fully understand that God is much too big to be put into any kind of theological box. I have no one to blame for this but myself. For most of my life, I was under the impression that God worked in

certain ways in New Testament times but that He no longer works in those ways today. But that isn't biblical. In fact, the Bible says that God never changes (*see Malachi 3:6 and Hebrews 13:8*). There is not a single verse in the Bible that teaches that miracles stopped in the first century. God is still on His throne. His power hasn't changed. He still works miracles. He still heals. He is still involved in our lives today.

There is something in our nature that makes us want to be able to explain God. We want to compartmentalize God and put Him into a neatly organized theological box. The only problem with that is that God won't fit into any such box. He is much too big for that. His ways are beyond our ways. His thoughts are above our thoughts (*see Isaiah 55:8-9*). Our human minds will never be able to fully understand God. We should certainly study the Scriptures, and we should study theology as well. But a purely biblical theology would indicate to us that God is much too big to be fully explained or understood. And I'm thankful for that. I wouldn't want to be able to fully explain God. That would reduce Him down to my size.

What I long for is a fresh moving of God's Spirit in my own life, in the life of my family,

in our church, in our nation, and in our world. I know most Christians long for the same thing. But my fear is that too many of us are spending too much time arguing our theological positions and too little time seeking God for a fresh moving of His Spirit.

Friend, whatever your denomination may be, or even if you are not part of a denomination, if you have repented of your sins and trusted Jesus Christ to save you, then you are my brother or sister in Christ. We should unite ourselves around His cross and call out for a fresh touch from heaven. Then we should anticipate that the Holy Spirit will work in our midst...even in ways that we might not expect.

Instead of trying to *explain* God, we should desire to *experience* God. We should yearn to know Him more fully and to love Him more dearly. And we should expect Him to work miracles in our lives today.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9).



You cannot out-give God.

All of my life, I have heard preachers say that you cannot out-give God. I have always believed that. But only when I began to experience the reality of that truth did a new dimension of the joy of giving become part of my life. Jesus said, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35). That truth is one of the secrets of the Christian life. I am still learning that you cannot out-give God. Let me share some of my journey.

As a child, I remember that each Sunday my father would give me a quarter to put in the church offering envelope. There were little blocks on the envelope to check if you had studied your lesson, had read your Bible each day during the week, were staying for church, had made contacts during the week, and were giving. I was excited each week to put my quarter in my envelope and check the blocks. When I got older and began to get an allowance, I would tithe (give 10% of) my weekly allowance to God each Sunday. When

I got my first job as an adult, for some reason I began to just give a fixed amount to the church each week instead of an actual tithe. I was a faithful giver, but I was not a tither. When Dottie and I married, she was a dedicated tither, and her influence led me to tithe. In all honesty, I tithed when I was first married because of Dottie. My motive was wrong, and in a short time I saw that. As time went by, I continued to tithe, but actually with the right motive...to obey God. This is when I began to experience the supernatural blessings of God in material ways and in other ways as well. God Himself has said that if we will bring our tithes to Him that He will open the windows of heaven and give us more blessings than we can receive (*see Malachi 3:10*). I have seen God fulfill this promise time and time again.

As grateful as I am for God's material and financial blessings, God greatest gift to us is spiritual in nature. Think about this: We give our lives to God. We repent of our sins, ask Christ to come into our lives, and trust Him to save us. We give our hearts to Jesus. That is our gift to God. Then God gives us forgiveness, salvation, and the righteousness of Jesus Himself. The Bible says, "*For He (God) made Him (Jesus) Who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (Jesus)*" (*II Corinthians 5:21*,

emphasis mine). The salvation that God gives to us is obviously much greater than the sins we give to Him.

I am a father of two sons. I love them both, and there is nothing I would not give them unless I did not have it to give. If you are saved, God is your heavenly Father, and you are one of His children. Thankfully, there is nothing that He does not have to give. The truth is, God loves His children even more than earthly parents love their children. God loves you and wants to bless you and give you what is best for you. Whatever you give to Him, He will out-give you every time. You simply cannot out-give God. So be a “giver.” Give your tithes and offerings to God. Give as you can to help others. Let your life be characterized by generosity, not stinginess. God will bless you for it!

“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38).



Be a person of grace.

I thank God for His grace. I was saved by grace. I have been sustained by grace. And today I want to be a person of grace. This does not mean that I am light on sin. What it does mean is that I extend grace to people who have sinned. That is what God has done for me, and that is what He does for others. God is a God of grace, and we should be people of grace. As we have received grace from God, we should extend grace to others.

As a boy growing up in a small Baptist church in rural Georgia, I experienced something I never will forget. I did not know at the time what an impact this experience would have on my life in the years to come. A man in our little church whom we'll call Mr. Fullerton had done something that was questionable. It was not a sexual issue, but an ethical one nonetheless. I was probably eight years old, and I overheard people in the church talking about it. Our church had monthly business meetings on Wednesday nights before

Bible study. Children and adults attended Bible study on Wednesday nights. There were no children's programs back then like we have today. One Wednesday night at a business meeting, a man made a motion to remove Mr. Fullerton from our church membership. In fact, the motion also included removing his wife from membership. If you have never been in a bad church business meeting, you have been blessed. There is no mean like "church mean." While there is a time and a place for church discipline, to my childhood mind this did not seem to be the time, the place, nor the occasion for it. I remember that my father got up in that business meeting and spoke on behalf of Mr. Fullerton. He said that it would be wrong in this instance to vote him and his wife out of the church. Well, the majority of the members agreed with my father and voted not to kick the Fullertons out. But the damage had already been done. The Fullertons left the church and to my knowledge they never went to any church again.

I share this story because it played a big part in helping me to decide what I would believe about grace even before I knew what grace was. I was only eight years old, but I knew that what I saw and felt in that Wednesday night business meeting was not right. What I was witnessing was the absence of grace. I don't

remember ever saying anything to my parents about that meeting, and they never said anything to me about it. But fast forward sixty-five years, and I still remember that night.

As Christians, we shouldn't criticize those who have fallen. Instead, we should look for ways to help them up and restore them to God. God is a Forgiver, a Restorer, a Mender. As His children, we should be, too.

In our church in Pasadena, we have a ministry that we call *Christians in Recovery*. It is for those who struggle with addictions. This ministry extends grace to every person who comes. Over three thousand people have experienced God's grace through this ministry, and many have been set free from their addictions. Many in the *Christians in Recovery* ministry regularly attend our church. Many have been saved. Some have been baptized. Others have joined our church. Why? Because they have felt loved and accepted. They have felt the grace of God.

In my forty-seven years as a pastor, I have sadly seen church people judge, turn their backs on, and reject people who have sinned. I have also seen people ignore those who are going through hurt and pain. I have observed that some who pride themselves in being good

Bible teachers are often the most judgmental. In their study of God's Word, they have somehow missed the main teaching of the Bible...the grace of God.

Jesus is an example of grace. When the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus, He did not condemn her. Jesus told her to sin no more, but He extended grace to her (*see John 8:1-11*).

Jesus certainly extended grace to Peter. Peter had denied even knowing Jesus, but Jesus did not reject him (*see Matthew 26:69-75*). Jesus extended grace to Peter and gave him another chance. Grace does that. Peter then went on to preach the great Pentecostal sermon (*see Acts 2*). The *recipient* of God's grace became *the great preacher* of God's grace.

I want to be a man of grace because God is a God of grace. I am thankful that our church is a church of grace, and I pray that it always will be.

"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).



Enjoy each day.

Life is a wonderful gift from God. Some people endure life. I enjoy life. I stay up fairly late most nights because I want to stay awake and enjoy as much of the day as possible. I get up early because I want to enjoy as many hours as I can. I love life. One of my weaknesses is that sometimes I love life too much and forget that I need some rest.

I know many people who just do not seem to enjoy life. They never seem happy, seldom laugh, and do not appear to enjoy what they are doing. I see no excitement in their lives. Maybe that is just the way they are, but it is not how God wants us to be. Jesus said that we are to live abundant lives (*see John 10:10*). In Jesus, we not only have *eternal life*, but we can have an *abundant life* as well. God wants us to enjoy the journey every day. I believe that with all of my heart. And I believe that I live the abundant life more days than I don't. I have some things built into my life that enable me to

enjoy life. Let me share some of those things with you. Hopefully, they will be helpful.

At the top of my list each day is my quiet time with God. I have observed that when I have a good quiet time in the morning that I simply have a better day. The days that I neglect or cut short my quiet time with God never quite work out for me. My soul needs spiritual food, and my mind needs specific instructions from God each morning. When I skip my “spiritual breakfast,” I can tell a difference in my attitude and so can those who are around me.

Just like I need a spiritual breakfast, I also need a physical breakfast. When I eat a good, healthy breakfast, my day is just a better day. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day, and I never miss that meal.

Exercise is another thing that helps me. My goal is to exercise five days a week. Some weeks I do not reach my goal, but most weeks I do. The older I get the more important exercise seems to be to me. When I feel good, I naturally enjoy the day more.

Additionally, I try to have a clear plan for each day. This really helps me. Before I go to bed at night, I write down on a small card the

things that I need to do the next day, and then I arrange those things in the order that I will do them. As the day progresses, things inevitably happen that I had not anticipated. But having a plan for my day helps me to manage my time and stay on track. I not only plan what I will *do* the next day before going to bed, but I also plan what I will *wear* the next day. Once my day begins, I do not want to spend time and energy on my schedule or my clothes. I just want to get up and get started with the new day.

Most of my day is at work. I love my work whether in my church office, church study, or my study at home. If a person is not happy with his work, he will not enjoy his life to the fullest. When I was a teenager, I heard a Methodist preacher explain how a person could never work. He said, *“Find something you love to do so much that you would do it for nothing. Prepare yourself to do it so well that somebody will pay you to do it. Then, you will never have to work.”* That saying stuck with me. I would do what I do even if I did not get paid for it. I would do it for nothing. The way the Methodist preacher would look at it would be that I don’t work. One thing is for certain...you can’t enjoy your day if you are miserable at work.

Eternal life is God's greatest gift to us. Our life on earth is God's second greatest gift. I made up my mind many years ago that I would try to enjoy each day knowing that when I have lived a day that I would never be able to live it again. The Bible tells us that our days are numbered (*see Psalm 139:16*). I do not know the number of days that God has given to me, but I want to enjoy every one of them. Don't let Satan rob you of the joy of a day. Enjoy each day. Live your life to the fullest.

"This is the day the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24).



God's approval matters most.

No one can please everybody. Unfortunately, it's just not possible. If you are trying to please God, there will always be those who will criticize you. In the first four churches I served, any criticism that I received was minimal. But in my early years in Pasadena, I was criticized greatly over the

relocation. I had never experienced anything like that, and I didn't know how to handle it. I knew other pastors who had left their churches over criticism. Some had left the pastorate itself. And others had left the ministry altogether. I didn't want to do any of that, but I needed to know how to handle criticism...and so do you. If you will think for a moment, you will probably think of someone who has criticized you for something. How can we handle it when others don't approve of us?

Well, that is not an easy question to answer. As we seek to handle criticism biblically, there are some guidelines we can follow that will help us. These guidelines have helped me. I hope they will be helpful to you as well:

1. Expect criticism and evaluate criticism. Some of it may be valid.
2. Respond to criticism in a spirit of love and don't defend yourself.
3. Don't let criticism stop you from doing what is right.
4. Don't hang around critical people.
5. View criticism as a test and pray for your critics.

If you will respond to criticism properly, God will see you through it. I will always be grateful to God that He saw me through those difficult early years in Pasadena. The spirit of our church has been so sweet for so long now that any criticism I received in the beginning is just a distant memory. And in a strange way, it somehow makes the blessings of today all the more special to me. So don't give up if you are being criticized. A better day is coming!

The Bible says that the fear of man is a snare (*see Proverbs 29:25*). In other words, if we spend all of our energies trying to please people, we run the risk of displeasing God. Moses couldn't please all of the people. Neither could David. The early disciples couldn't please all of the people. Neither could Paul. But these men, imperfect as they were, devoted their lives to trying to please God. At the end of the day, it was His approval they sought.

At the end of our earthly journey, we will stand face to face with Jesus. On that day, it won't matter if we pleased everybody on earth. It will only matter that we pleased Him. If we can hear Him say to us, "*Well done, good and faithful servant,*" then we will have spent our time on earth well (*Matthew 25:21*).

One pastor used to say, “If you please Jesus, it doesn’t matter who you displease. But if you displease Jesus, it doesn’t matter who you please.” Truer words have never been spoken.

Let me close by saying that seeking God’s approval does not mean that you do not care what others think. But seeking God’s approval means this: If God is pulling you east and people are pulling you west, you better go east. You better go with God and leave the consequences of your obedience with Him. You will never regret it!

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (II Corinthians 5:10).

“Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (II Timothy 4:8).

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

A Closing Word

Hopefully, some of the things I have shared in this booklet will be helpful to you. The Bible says, “*As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another*” (Proverbs 27:17, NIV). We learn *from* each other, and we grow best *with* each other.

If you have never received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, I encourage you to do so now. Pray this prayer from your heart to God’s heart:

“Dear Jesus,

I need You in my life. Come into my heart, forgive me of my sins, and make me a Christian. I trust You, Jesus, to save me. Thank You that I am now saved.

*In Your Name I pray,
Amen.”*

If you prayed that prayer, God just saved you. The Bible says, “*For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved*” (Romans 10:13).

Dr. Charles Redmond

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A graduate of Georgia State University (B.A.), Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and Luther Rice Seminary (D.Min.), Dr. Redmond's desire is to see people trust Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord and to help them grow in their relationship with Him.

Dr. Redmond and his wife, Dottie, have two sons. Their older son, Jon, is the assistant pastor of First Baptist Church in Pasadena. Their younger son, Joel, is the owner of a mortgage company and is also involved in a variety of the ministries of the church. Joel is married, and he and his wife, Jodi, have two children, Charli Jo and Joel, Jr.