

BIBLICAL CHALLENGES 2007 (03).

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Introduction.

We began these “**Biblical Challenges**” studies by looking at the life of Mary and Martha under the heading, “**Making Mary’s Choices in a Martha’s World.**” We saw there are good choices and there are better or best choices. Martha made the good choices. Mary made the better or best choices. Jesus gently rebuked Martha but He commended Mary.

In the second study the question was asked : **what Biblical basis do you use for evaluating and making your choices or making the better choices?** The answer I set before you had three points : (1) you must have your priorities right; (2) you must know and use the Word of God wisely; (3) you must be devoted to prayer. Now it is not my intent to do an extended review of these first two studies. The tapes or CDs are available for those who missed them and for those who wish to hear them again.

However, there are a couple things I want to point out that would lead us to today’s study. I stated that your primary priority as a Christian is to live your entire life to the glory of God. *Rom.11:33* makes it clear that all the glory belong to God. *Isa.42:8* makes it clear that God will not share His glory with anyone or anything. And Paul declared in *1Cor.10:31*, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Living for the glory of God must begin at the most basic points of your life : eating and drinking. And then Paul added, “whatever you do”. “**Whatever**” has no “**what ifs**”, no “**what about**”, no exceptions attached to it. “**Whatever you do**” means just that. Whatever you do must be done to the glory of God.

Then we saw that Jesus said we must pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (*Matt.6:10*). And in *Matt.6:33* Jesus commanded us to live out this prayer when He said, “seek first [God’s] kingdom and His righteousness.” I want you to note a couple points here. *Firstly*, when you pray, “Your will be done on earth”, you are praying this, first and foremost, for your self. You are praying that you will do God’s will on earth. The prayer is reinforced by the command to “seek first [God’s] kingdom and His righteousness.”

Secondly, I want you to note the peculiar point of final judgment that you will be facing. In *Matt.7:21* Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord”, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.” In other words, in the final judgment the Lord will reject and cast out all those who did not do the will of the Father.

Thirdly, take note of the word “**first**” in *Matt.6:33*. The word “**first**” is not used sequentially. “**First**” does not focus on one thing competing with other things to be first. “**First**” emphasizes that which is the most important thing of all. In other words, there must be no competition here. “**Seek first**” means that you must continually make something your most important priority. And there must never be a time when this thing is not your most important priority.

Your most important priority is God and, by extension, your devotion to God. I want to make it very clear that half-hearted devotion to God is not acceptable. Double-minded devotion to God is not acceptable. A devotion of convenience to God is not acceptable. A devotion that relegates God in your priority list is not acceptable. A devotion that fails to give God an incontestable priority is idolatrous and I should add, in keeping with *Jas.4:4*, it is also adulterous. God has said He will not share His glory with idols. That idol may be your immediate family, your extended family, your friends, your sweetheart, your job, your personal needs, your goals in life, your hobby, your culture. Or like Nebuchadnezzar, that idol may be you.

Firstly, your incontestable priority must be God. He is the One who created you. (*Psa.139:13-16*). He is the One who holds your life in His hands and determines whether you live or die. (*Deut.32:39*). He alone is the Savior and He alone is able to save you. (*Isa.45:21-22*). He will be your Judge on that final day and determine your final and eternal destiny. (*Acts 17:30-31; Matt.7:21-23*).

My exhortation to you is to stop the train of your life that is moving so fast in so many different directions. If you pause and examine these directions you will discover that they have to do with earthly things, things that will be left behind when you die. You need to stop, re-structure your priorities and start paying attention to God. You need to make God the incontestable priority of your life and let Him restructure the order and priorities of your life.

When you do, God will not take away your earthly goals and desires. *Matt.6:33* says, “seek first [God’s] kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Note carefully the clear promise : “and all these things will be added to you.” What God will do is get you to re-examine your goals and desires in the light of His glory and His revealed word, restructure them in accordance with His revealed will and prioritize them in a Biblical manner.

Secondly, your incontestable love must be God. Jesus said in *Mk.12:29-30*, “The foremost [commandment] is ... “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength”.” Note the word “**foremost**”. It is the same Greek word Jesus used when He said “**seek first**”. Is your love for God incontestable? Do you love God more than father, mother, brother, sister, relatives, friends, husband, wife, children, job, houses and land? Do you love God more than your own life? If you can’t answer with a firm unhesitating “**yes**”, then your love for God is not incontestable.

Knowing God.

Thirdly, your incontestable desire and delight must be to know God. This is the point I want to deal with today. I want to begin this point with a story. It's the story about a young man we will call Jack. Jack was poor, dirt poor. He lived alone in a rented rat and cockroach infested apartment. He slept on an old mattress that was on the floor. He had an old one-burner stove for cooking. And his cupboards were generally empty.

One day, Jack got a letter from a very wealthy man. The man had an office on the top floor of the highest building in the city. This man invited Jack to visit him in his office. This man had a reputation for being kind, gracious and generous. But there were also rumors and darks whispers that he was just the opposite. The letter disturbed Jack because he knew about the rumors.

At first Jack thought the letter was a prank. But day after day the letter and its invitation bugged his mind. Finally, one day, several months later, Jack decided to check out this man and see if the letter was for real. When Jack got to the building, he approached it very cautiously. He saw a guard standing at the main entrance. Very nervously he approached the guard and asked about the man.

The guard asked Jack his name. When Jack answered, the guard said, *"So you are Jack. We've been waiting quite a while for you. Come this way."* He took Jack to the elevator and sent Jack up to the top floor. When the elevator stopped and the door opened, Jack came face to face with the man's office. The office was open and there was no one there but the man. He was sitting behind a very large desk. The man smiled and waved to Jack to enter and then pointed him to a seat.

Then the man got up and came towards Jack with a bunch of keys in his hand and a large envelope. He gave Jack the keys and the envelope. The envelope had an address on it. Then the man said, *"Jack, this is the keys to your new house. And this envelope*

has in it a deed that is made out to you. The address on the envelope is where you will find your new house."

Jack's hands began shaking. His knees felt weak. And he felt he couldn't speak because his throat was suddenly very dry. The man continued, *"Jack, after you move in, I want you to know that my door will always be open to you. You can find me here any day. You will not need an appointment to see me. You have a need, you have a problem, just come and see me and we will talk about it and deal with it. What's more Jack, I want us to get to know one another. So feel free to drop in anytime for a drink and a chat."*

Still shaking and completely confused, Jack managed to get up and leave. He took a taxi and journeyed to the new address. When he got there, he couldn't believe his eyes. There was the house. Jack approached the house very nervously and tried the lock on the door and it opened. Jack went in, closed the door, and with his hand on his mouth to stifle his screams of delight, he began jumping for joy. When he finally calmed down he realized the house had no furnishings. He had a problem. The man had said, if you have any problem or need, come and see me.

But Jack thought, *"No, I can't do that. The man just gave me a house. He will think the worst of me if I go and ask him for furnishings."* So Jack decided to hire a van and bring all his old furnishings into his new house. Months went by. Then the old stove died and he couldn't stand the smell of the old mattress anymore. So he decided to visit the man and tell him about the stove and mattress. After talking for a while the man gave to Jack an open check made out to Courts and told Jack to buy whatever he needed. As Jack left, he reminded Jack, *"Come and visit me sometime. Let us talk some more and get to know one another better."*

Jack hurried down to Courts but the thoughts on his mind were that he cannot impose on the man and abuse his gracious generosity. So Jack left all the beautiful things he saw in the store and bought a cheap bachelor bed, a small two-burner table-top stove, a small

table with two chairs and a little transistor radio. Months passed by and Jack continued, as we say, to *“ketch his nenen”* while thinking that he had no right to impose anymore on the man’s kindness and generosity.

One day Jack met his good friend Jim. They sat down and had a nice long talk, catching up on old times. Finally, Jack summoned some courage to tell Jim about the letter and the man. Jim responded, *“You mean, you got one of those letters also. You remember John? He got one also and threw it away, saying it was a prank. Furthermore, John said he believed the rumors he had heard and could never trust the man. But not me! I went the next day to see the man. He gave me a house and this open invitation. I took him at his word and began to visit him and get to know him. Man, you should see all the things he has given to me. And then, one day he invited me to his house. Man, what a mansion. That day he told me that I do not have to visit him in his office anymore. Now I must feel free to visit him at home any time I want. Now you tell me about all that the man has done for you.”*

And Jack said, *“Well, you see, I am not like you. I did not feel I could impose on the man’s kindness and generosity. I got a few things from him and I am most grateful. I know the rumors about him are not true. But I’m sure he is a very busy man and I do not want to impose on his time or his generosity.”*

The majority of Christians in this world are like Jack. If you are a Christian, there is no questioning the fact that you know God. Jesus made it clear that to be a Christian is to know God. Jesus said in *Jn.17:3*, *“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”* What does it mean to know God? Firstly, it means to know about God. You know about God, who He is and what He has done in His Son, Jesus Christ, for your salvation.

You know that He is the only true and living God and there is no other God besides Him. (*1Thess.1:9; 1Cor.8:4-6; Isa.45:5-6*). You know that He loves you and that in love, He

sent His Son, Jesus, into this world. His Son came and lived a perfect life and then died on the cross for your sins. (*Jn.3:16; Rom.5:8; 1Jn.4:10*). Then you received from Him the letter of invitation, the message of the gospel. You believed the message and went to Him and received from Him the house of your salvation. You entered into the experience of this gracious, loving, generous God and salvation in His Son, Jesus.

The house of His salvation gave you great joy. But like Jack, despite the open invitation and promises, you have lived in spiritual poverty because you do not want to impose on this gracious, loving and generous God who is also your Heavenly Father. Week after week you come here and get a full plate of spiritual food from His banquet table. And you leave, not knowing what to do. So you eat a little of that spiritual food and throw away the rest.

God is kind, generous and gracious. God is your Heavenly Father. But you are afraid to get close to Him. You are afraid of the commitment He would require of you. You are afraid of the demands He would place upon you. You are afraid He would spoil your little selfish world that you are comfortable with and enjoying, a world in which you alone live, a world that has little or no impact on others for good, a world of enough spirituality to ward off any questions, but a world of half-hearted commitment, devotion and service to God, a world in which you can talk big but deep in your heart you know what a hypocrite you are.

Moses' incontestable desire and delight was not to eat a little food and throw away the rest. Moses' incontestable desire and delight was expressed in his prayer, "I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You." Then Moses added, "I pray You, show me Your glory." (*Exod.33:13, 18*). God answered Moses' prayer in *Exod.34:5-9*. *Psa.103:7* says "[God] made known His ways to Moses." There are a couple points I want you to note here. In *Exod.33:12* Moses said to God, You said to me that I have found favor in your sight. In *vs.13* Moses rooted his prayer in that fact. "**Favor**" is a free and gracious kindness not based

on obligation. In other words, Moses did not do anything to deserve and receive God's favor.

If you are a Christian, you do not deserve God's favor but you have received God's favor. **Eph.1:4-6** makes it clear that in love God chose you in Christ from eternity and predestined you to adoption as His son or daughter. Paul said God did this "according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." Here are my questions : what do you pray for and where do you root your prayer? Do you root your prayer in the astounding wonder and privilege of God's favor towards you, and do you pray, first and foremost, that you will know Him and that He will show you His glory?

Now Brethren, if there is one thing that can be said about Moses, Abraham, Joseph, Joshua, Samuel, David, Daniel, Nehemiah, Peter, Paul, John and a host of others is that they knew God. **Psa.9:10** says, "those who know Your name will put their trust in You." They knew God and they trusted in God. They trusted God in the good times. And they trusted God in the bad times. They trusted God in the days of contentment. And they trusted God in the days of crisis. They trusted God when they had to work to produce the desired results. And they trusted God when only a miracle could produce the desired results. They trusted God when hope was strong. And they trusted God when hope was weak. They trusted God when the light shone brightly. And they trusted God when the darkness descended and enveloped them.

Dan.11:32 says, "but the people who know their God will display strength and take action." The KJV translated this verse, "but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits." And exploits they did, these men and women of faith who knew God. Turn to **Heb.11:32-38**. (*read*). History is filled with men and women who knew God, who trusted God, who displayed strength and who did exploits for God. We read of them in God's word and in biographies. We rejoice in their faith and great works. But we do not have their faith in God. We do not have their knowledge of God. And we limp along like Jack, unable to trust God and unable to do any exploits

for God. And we have a host of lame excuses why we do not know God, are not able to trust God and fail to do any exploits for God.

We have seen Moses' prayer. David prayed in *Psa.25:4*, "Make me know Your ways, O Lord; Teach me Your paths." David exhorted Solomon, "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind." (*1Chron.28:9*). *Hos.6:3* says, "let us know, let us press on to know the Lord." And in *vs.6* the Lord said, "I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

In *Prov.3:5-7* we read, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil." There are a few points to be noted from these verses. **Firstly**, this trust in God is not blind trust. Trust calls upon us to bank our all upon God and upon the wisdom of His ways. The child of God who knows God and knows His word has the confidence and knows that trusting in God and living for God is the most reasonable thing to do.

Secondly, the trust required of us is not half-hearted. The trust must be total : you must "trust in the Lord with all your heart". Bear in mind that the "**heart**" represents the totality of one's inner being : mind, emotions and will. Note the word "**all**". You are commanded to love God with all your heart, serve God with your whole heart and trust God with all your heart.

Thirdly, "In all your ways acknowledge Him" is better translated, "In all your ways, know Him." The emphasis here is on the experiential, on a deep experiential knowledge of God, but an experiential rooted in the revealed knowledge of God found in His word. The fact that this knowing of God is to be "in all your ways" and with "all your heart", drives deeper still the level of intimacy intended.

This knowing of God calls upon you to take holy risks. **Waltke** noted that this personal intimate knowledge of God is the result of risking oneself to obey the specific teachings that pertain to all sorts of human behavior in full reliance upon God to keep His promises that are coupled with them. **John Kitchen** wrote, *“The reward is more than the promise of simple guidance. It includes the removal of obstacles from the path of the [Christian] and the surety of arriving at one’s destination.”*

Kitchen added, *“When you abandon yourself to God in trusting obedience, finding your entire support in Him and striving in every avenue of your life to know Him more intimately, He guarantees that the path before you will be clearer and smoother than otherwise it would have been, and that He will keep you in His will.”*

The apostle Paul could declare with the utmost confidence, “I know whom I have believed.” (*2Tim.1:12*). The emphatic nature of Paul’s statement is not seen in the English translation. Paul used two perfect tenses that expressed in an emphatic manner his settled, certain and ongoing confidence. Yet the great prayer of his heart was, “that I may know Him.” (*Phil.3:10*). Paul knew the Lord and Paul wanted to know the Lord more and more and more and more.

Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian Christians and, by implication, his prayer for you is that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.” (*Eph.1:7*). The **NIV** translation is a bit clearer. The **NIV** translated “in the knowledge of Him” as “so that you may know Him better.” A similar prayer is found in *Col.1:9-10*. Paul prayed that the Colossian believers would be “increasing in the knowledge of God.” Paul wanted the Ephesians, the Colossians and you to know the Lord better and to know Him better in an increasing way.

The word “**knowledge**” is intensive and speaks of having and increasing in a profound relational knowledge of God. Once again the focus is on translating the facts into

experiential knowledge. **Harry Uprichard** wrote, “Christianity is not only a matter of **what** we know – though that is of fundamental importance – but of **whom** we know, which is equally significant. Paul’s passion in prayer drives us in this direction. The Christian church must take this seriously. Facts about Christ must have as their objective the practical end of knowing Christ in person.”

Uprichard added, “[Paul’s prayer and passion] should drive believers to passionate and persistent prayer in order to know Christ better It ought to be the ongoing passionate prayer of each believer both for his or her own growth in grace, individually, and for the church corporately.”

As a Christian, is this your passionate and persistent prayer, that you may know God better, that you may know Christ better? Is this the prayer that drives you day after day? If you are saved, you know God. But have you been living your Christian life where Jack lived? This God is a real person. As human beings, He made us in His image and likeness. He made us real persons. And He wants you to come to know Him and day after day to increase in that knowledge of Him. You do not need an appointment to meet with the Lord. The door of His throne room is always open to you. His scepter is always held out to you. You are welcome, always welcome, most welcome. The Lord has given to you a standing invitation that will never be withdrawn.

Adam and Eve knew God. In **Gen.3:10** Adam said to God, “I heard the sound of You in the garden.” Wow! Adam knew that sound, the sound of God present in the garden and walking in the garden. It was a real sound, an identifiable sound. Every day when Adam heard that sound he would go out to meet God and to fellowship with God. Then one day Adam sinned. And when he heard the sound of God coming, he ran and hid himself. Do you know the “**sound**” of God’s presence? In other words, if God came to you, would you know?

I want to close our study with a brief word of personal testimony. I can say with the apostle Paul, “I know whom I have believed.” I can say that my passionate and

persistent prayer has been, *that I may know Him better and increasingly*. I have prayed and continue to pray Moses' prayer, *"Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, show me Your glory."* I continue to pray for you Paul's prayer, *"that you may know God better and increasingly."* I continue to pray that one of these days the Lord will manifest forth His glory in this place. I continue to pray for you and myself that the Lord would ever increase our faith and trust in Him.

I have believed and continue to believe that the God who spoke to and guided the great men of faith in the Bible and in history can do the same for me. This does not mean that I believe in an open canon or on ongoing revelation. In *Acts 8:26* an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip about a special mission and in *vs.29* the Spirit spoke to Philip. In *Acts 9:4-9* the Lord appeared to Saul and saved him. In *Acts 9:10-16* the Lord appeared to Ananias and had a two-way conversation with him concerning Saul of Tarsus. In *Acts 10:1-5* an angel sent from God appeared to Cornelius. In *Acts 10:19* the Spirit told Peter three men were looking for him and he must go with them. In *Acts 18:9* the Lord spoke to Paul while he was in Corinth. In *Acts 27:23-24* an angel of God spoke to Paul.

If you believe that the Lord has stopped making appearances and speaking to unsaved people and saved people, if you believe that the Lord has stopped sending angels to men and women, then you haven't been reading church history and Christian biographies. If you haven't tasted of the Lord's nearness and presence, if you haven't experienced the Lord's nearness and presence, if you have never been gripped and even overwhelmed by His nearness and presence, then I would dare say that you have not been seeking the Lord with all your heart.

Whether in context or out of context, the following verse has been a part of my life for as long as I could remember, *Isa.30:21*, "Your ears will hear a voice (word) behind you, "This is the way, walk in it", whenever you turn to the right or to the left." In God's gracious favor to me, I have heard that voice, I know the sound of that voice, I have talked to that voice and even argued with that voice. Now let me make myself clear. I have made a lot of mistakes in this life. And I have made a lot of wrong choices

in my life. My mistakes and my wrong choices have to do with my own stubborn will and my foolish pride.

But I do know also that when I trusted in God, sought to know God and His will, submitted myself ahead of time to His will whatever it will be and regardless of the demands that may be placed upon me, that *Prov.3:5-7* and *Isa.30:21* and *Phil.4:6-7* worked. In other words, God was faithful to His promises. I can testify that every major decision I have made since I was **19** years, I have made them knowing God's will ahead of time. And sometimes I knew God's will in amazing detail. From ages **16** to **19** I was running from God fighting God. That was foolish, but I did it for a variety of reasons rooted in the sin of pride.

No one had preached a sermon to me like I am doing for you today. I was reading Christian biographies and was gripped by what I was reading and became determined to know and trust this God. And today, I can look back and say like Paul, when I faced major and even minor decisions, I did not consult with men, I got on my knees and sought God and got the answers. When I faced challenges and crises in my life and in this church, I got on my knees and sought God and got the answers.

You young people, you are facing many critical decisions and choices that would impact the rest of your life : studies, career, job, place to live, marriage, etc. Do you know God's will? What clear irrefutable confirmations do you have that your choices are rooted in God's will and that your choices are indeed God's will? I have sought to make my choices guided by Biblical principles. But sometimes there comes the unknown point, and then what do you do? I know what I do. I would pray and pray until the Lord shows me the answer.

In my walk with God and in God's dealings with me I have seen, known and experienced things that I cannot share with you today. But you know what? I am nothing special. I am daily conscious of my weak faith, my fears, my doubts, the weakness of my trust in God and the failure to take holy risks. But I am also trying to be the man God wants me

to be as described in the Bible. And you men, young and old, can do the same. You women, young and old, can do the same. You do not have to fight the battle of life alone. You have God on your side. Paul said God is for us and not against us. (**Rom.8:31**).

But here is the deal : God does not want any half-hearted commitment from you. God will not accept being treated as the religious convenience in a minute part of your life but as an inconvenience in the rest of your life. The Lord said in **Jer.29:13**, “You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.” You must love the Lord with all your heart. You must trust in the Lord with all your heart. You must serve the Lord with all your heart. (**Deut.11:13**). You must seek the Lord with all your heart. You must obey God with all your heart. (**Deut.30:2, 10**). You must walk before God in truth with all your heart. (**1Kings 2:4**). You must follow the Lord with all your heart. (**1Kings 14:8**). You must give thanks to the Lord with all your heart. (**Psa.9:1**).

I close with **Deut.10:12**, “what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”