

Guard Your Heart with All Diligence

Key Scripture:

*“Watch over your heart with all diligence,
for from it flow the springs of life.”*

Proverbs 4:23

Portion for the Journey:

Throughout the Word of God, we see men held back from walking in the fullness of God’s plans and purposes by the condition of their hearts. Jesus frequently expressed dismay at the hardness of heart He observed in the crowds of people who gathered around Him. Even His disciples, the very men He had chosen to train and continue His work on the earth seemed unable to grasp the spiritual truths He was teaching! Jesus taught as one having great authority. His teaching fascinated and amazed the people, but they did not understand what He was saying.

Matthew 13:13-15 "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE. FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.'"

This study came out of my desire to understand a perplexing passage in **Mark 6:51-52**. In **vs. 51**, we are told the disciples were astonished (utterly astounded) when the tempest of the sea was stilled when Jesus got into their boat.

Why were they so amazed that Jesus walked on the water and calmed the sea? They had seen Him perform many miracles at this point in their relationship with Him. They had seen Him cleanse the lepers, heal the sick, cast out demons, still a storm, raise the dead. That very day they had observed Jesus miraculously feed 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. The disciples picked up twelve baskets after everyone had eaten their fill. **vs. 52** answers this question! “...for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.” Their hardness of heart had prevented them from learning from their experiences! The Amplified Classic version says, “For they failed to consider or understand [the teaching and meaning of the miracle of] the loaves; [in fact] their hearts had grown callous [had become dull and had lost the power of understanding].”

How could this be? This is sobering because if this could hardness of heart was in men who walked with Jesus, what are the implications for us? These men weren’t rebelling against His Words like the scribes, Pharisees and religious leaders. These were men chosen by Jesus to be His disciples (learners, pupils). During their time with Jesus, they were often confused and could not understand His teaching. They did not understand Him but they did not leave Him. They chose to follow Him. They clearly loved Him. They served Him willingly and showed no signs of rebellion or contention with His message. They stayed close and asked questions. They seemed eager to understand. It is my impression that they had seeking hearts!

We are told they failed to consider the teaching and meaning behind the miracle of the loaves and fish. Many followed Jesus to see the signs He would perform and the benefits and blessings of His ministry but few understood His teaching! Jesus was amazed at the faith of centurion and commented He had seen no such faith in all of Israel. The word ‘consider’ (G4920) used in Mark 6:52, means to mentally comprehend or understand the meaning behind the miracle. Consider carries the concept of mentally bringing together the perception with the thing perceived. To join the pieces of information together into a cohesive whole that results in understanding or comprehension. In other words, they had watched the miracles but not connected the dots to understand that only God could perform the signs they witnessed.

Their hearts were hardened. Their minds were closed, made dull or insensible. The word for hardness indicates their minds were impenetrable and unable to comprehend truth. Wuest, in his Word Studies of the New Testament states, “Their hearts were like the wayside hearers [in the parable of the Sower], like a beaten path in which higher truths cannot sink so as to germinate.’ They were trapped in ways of thinking instilled in them through the Pharisaical teachings and traditions of man. They had not yet fully comprehended He was the Son of God. All the evidence was before them, but their minds could not understand! They demonstrated limited expectations of Jesus plans and purposes, still focused on establishment of an earthly kingdom.

“Always learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the Truth!” Mark 8:1-9 provides an almost identical situation to the feeding of the 5,000 that took place in Mark 6. Note that the disciples had no idea how the problem of the hungry crowds would be resolved! This hardness of heart created such a spiritual dullness that it clouded their memory they could not grow through their experiences. **Matt. 13:14-15, 23; 17:17-20; Mark 8:13-18**

Even Jesus was wondered at their hardness of heart and lack of faith! In Matthew 17:17 “And Jesus answered and said, “You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me.” As we saw in Mark 8:15, Jesus charged them to take heed, beware and exhorted them to think! Use their heads!

Digging Deeper in the Word

The Heart

In the Old Testament, the word for heart is “leb” (H3820). It refers to the physical heart which beats in our bodies and is the sustainer of our physical life. Without a functional heart, all essential organs of the body cease and we die. ‘Leb’ more importantly refers to the seat of man's spiritual and intellectual life, his inner nature, the center point of our emotions, understanding and knowledge. The heart is the seat of our intelligence, ability to think and reason, dream and express creativity. It is in our heart that our will and ability to choose good or generate evil resides. In short, the Hebrew's used the term "heart" refers to the person in totality. It is a comprehensive term for the personality, our inner life and character. It is the place where soul (nephesh) and the spirit meet. Most importantly, the heart is where we experience our relationship with the LORD.

King David was said to be “a man after God’s own heart.” (1 Sam. 13:14) David was far from perfect. He committed some whopper big sins in his day. But the Lord loved his heart! He was a man of faith who rushed toward Goliath with a handful of stones! He thirsted for God and displayed a deep love for His Word. He constantly sought the Lord in the secret place. In times of trouble, he turned to the Lord and trusted Him. David was first and foremost a worshipper. When he sinned, he repented deeply.

The New Testament uses the word heart in the same way. The Greek word for heart is 'kardia' (G2588). It is the inner life, the center of the personality and as the place in which God reveals himself to men. This truth is expressed more clearly in the NT than in the OT. 'Kardia,' as used in the New Testament most often to the spiritual meaning than the bodily organ. It is used to denote the center of spiritual life, reason, human will, the soul, the feelings, passions, instincts, again--the whole person. "The most significant instances of 'kardia' occur in those passages which speak of man's standing before God. It is in the heart that we are addressed by God. It is. The heart is also the seat of doubt and may be hard or full of faith and obedience.

The Lord works in and through our hearts so that we can know Him. When a person is not open to the Lord's knocking at the door of their heart, they are described as darkened, rebellious, callous, unfeeling or idolatrous. When our hearts are tender toward the Lord, we are pliable and responsive to His teaching and leading. A soft heart is a heart that is undivided in loyalty, free from double-mindedness. The person offers their whole heart to God. This is the soil where the seed of God's word can take root and flourish.

- The heart of man, however, is the place where God not only arouses and creates faith but where faith proves its reality through obedience and patience (Rom. 6:17; 2 Thess. 3:5).
- The word of God is kept in the human heart (Lk. 8:15).
- The peace of Christ begins its rule in the heart (Col. 3:15).
- God's grace strengthens and establishes the heart (Heb. 13:9).
- A heart directed unreservedly to God as a "pure heart" through the blood of Christ which cleanses it (Heb. 10:22; cf. 1 Jn. 1:7; Matt. 5:8; 1 Tim. 1:5).
- Christ dwells in our heart by faith (Eph. 3:17).
- The greatest thing we can do is to love the Lord our God with our whole heart--our entire being--with everything we are. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength." (Dt. 6:5) Loving God with your whole heart means to love Him with every aspect of your life--withholding nothing.

"Non-Christians have to find an external absolute to give their life meaning and their hearts turn to the created order to define themselves. Either a person follows the law of God or he doesn't, there is no "in between." If the heart rejects God as its absolute master and reality, it will choose something to replace him and this will become their reality." (Author unknown)

PART 2: Heart Conditions:

"Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief (apistia) and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen."

Mark 16:14 (NASB)

There are three conditions of heart that were repeated given as reasons the LORD could not work in those to whom He was sent: Hardness of heart; Doubt and Unbelief; Double-mindedness

1. **Hardness of Heart:** When our heart is hard, we are incapable of responding or learning from the leading of His Spirit. A hard heart is unable to learn from teaching or experience. In **Mark 3:5** Jesus healed a man whose hand was withered. He was grieved by the hardness of heart of those in the synagogue who put their laws ahead of the needs of an individual.

The Greek word used for 'hardness' is '**porosis**' (G4457) meaning to cover with a callous, blindness. From the root word 'poros' (G4456) which is a kind of stone, petrified, indurate, to render stupid and callous, thick-skinned. Metaphorically, 'poros' describes spiritual deafness and blindness. Hearers who repeatedly resist the Holy Spirit become insensitive and dull and lose their powers of understanding.

This same word is used in 2 Cor. 3:14 "But their minds were hardened (poros); for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil (covering, spiritually darkened vision) remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 "And even if our gospel is veiled (concealed, covered), it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has **blinded** (to make blind) the minds of the **unbelieving** (see below) so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

A second Greek word is used for hardness of heart, (G4641) 'sklērokardia Root: from a compound of G4642 (skleros-dryness) and G2588 (kardia-heart); hardheartedness, i.e. (special) destitution of (spiritual) perception. I think of this word as 'hardening of the arteries in which the blood flow is clogged or stopped to the heart and brain. This is the word used in Matt. 16:14.

2. **Doubt:** *"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting (diakrino), for the one who doubts (diakrino) is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.* James 1:5-8

Doubt means to overthink and question a matter in places where we should have faith. It is common for all believers to have doubt. The enemy loves to tempt us to doubt and question if what God has said is true. Satan's first tactic to deceive Eve was to cause her to question the truth of what God had said. If God's Word says it, we need to believe He will do it faithfully.

John the Baptist: Jesus said there was no one born of a woman who was greater than John the Baptist but when John remained in prison and Jesus did nothing to help him, he began to question whether Jesus was the One. Jesus sent word to him, 'And He answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. "Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me." Note Jesus instructed John to look at the works He was performing. Luke 7:22-23

Doubting Thomas: Jesus demonstrated great mercy and helped Thomas to believe. Thomas was a skeptic who refuses to believe Jesus' resurrection without direct personal experience — Note Jesus returned to show Thomas His scars. He never rebuked Thomas for his doubt, but asked him to believe

and offered him assurance, allowing Thomas to touch His hands and see His scars. While Jesus did not rebuke him for his doubt, it is clear that those who believed without seeing were displaying greater faith in Him and His Words. The difference between doubt and unbelief is that doubt is looking for the light and rejoices in the Truth while unbelief rejects the truth and stubbornly refuses to believe. John 20:24-29

The Greek word for **doubt** is 'diakrinos' (G1252) means to:

- Separate, make a distinction, discriminate, to try, to decide, to determine, to make a judgement. The mind separates from the spirit of truth.
- To withdraw from one, decide a dispute, to separate oneself in a hostile spirit; to withdraw from the society of Christians

We are to be free from doubt when we pray and believe God will do what He has promised. Doubt waivers between truth and lies, but Heb. 5:14 says the mature believer has trained his senses to distinguish between good and evil. To distinguish means to discern what is right and acceptable. Discerning and choosing godly actions leads to wisdom with God and with other people. Absence of doubt allows us to put complete faith in Him without hesitation that what we ask will be done. Romans 4:20 tells us that Abraham "with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God..." v. 21 tells us that Abraham was fully assured of what God had promised, that He was able to perform it.

Doubt is a state of uncertainty or hesitation about something, including matters of faith. It can arise from intellectual questioning, personal experiences, or the influence of others or the enemy. Doubt is not condemned outright in the Bible but is viewed as a challenge that requires resolution. We must not allow doubt to linger! Doubt can serve as a catalyst for seeking deeper understanding and can lead to a strengthening of faith when it is properly addressed. When doubt is not addressed, it can lead to unbelief.

As believers, we need to eliminate all doubt that hinders our faith in God's promises. We can pray that God will give us total assurance of the things we are hoping for and to resolve all doubt in our heart. Ask Him for greater faith!

Unbelief: Doubt can lead to unbelief if it is not resolved. Unbelief is a far more serious heart condition than doubt. It is a deliberate rejection of truth or refusal to accept God's Word and His promises. Unbelief is rooted in a hardened heart and is considered willful rebellion against God. In the Bible, unbelief is portrayed as a serious spiritual condition with grave consequences. The Israelites repeatedly demonstrated unbelief in God's ability to provide for them and protect them from their enemies despite having witnessed His dramatic deliverance from Egypt. Their unbelief prevented them from entering the Promised Land and they died in the wilderness. The witnessing of miracles, signs and wonders will not eradicate unbelief.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, He frequently encountered unbelief, particularly among the religious leaders who rejected Him despite seeing His miracles and hearing His teaching. While doubt can be a stepping stone to deeper faith, unbelief hinders the working of God in that person's life. Unbelief represents a hardening of heart against truth. It prevents the person from experiencing the blessing and

salvation of God. When Jesus was in His hometown of Nazareth, "He did not do many miracles because of their unbelief." Matt. 13:58; John 5:38-40

Unbelief requires repentance. It hinders spiritual growth, obstructs the work of the Holy Spirit, and separates us from fellowship with God. Mark describes Jesus' time in Nazareth saying, "But Jesus said to them, A prophet is not without honor (deference, reverence) except in his [own] country and among [his] relatives and in his [own] house. And He was not able to do even one work of power there, except that He laid His hands on a few sickly people [and] cured them. And He marveled because of their unbelief (their lack of faith in Him). And He went about among the surrounding villages and continued teaching." Mark 6:4-6 (AMP)

3. **Double-mindedness: "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." James 1:5-8 (KJV)**

In 1 Kings 18:21 the prophet Elijah addressed the nation of Israel who had been led astray to worship Baal. "Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people did not answer him a word."

The word "hesitate between two opinions" can also be translated to limp between, to halt, to waver, to hobble or balance between two opinions, or to be paralyzed between two choices. Israel provides a classic case of double-mindedness.

Joshua confronted this same mindset in Joshua 24:14-15 when he spoke to Israel, saying, "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, **choose** for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

- **Double-mindedness:** The word "double-mindedness" comes from the Greek word 'dipsuchos' (G1374). This word has two parts: 'dis' (G1364) twice, two and 'psuche' (G5590) soul, mind. Psuche means literally, of two minds, double-souled, of two minds, two-souled" or "animal spirit". It indicates a wavering attitude in which a person looks first one direction, then another. This state results in constant doubting or wavering. The double-minded person thinks in two directions at the same time. It carries with it the implication of one who is wavering between the world, his sin nature/passions/desires and one who desires the things of God. The word corresponds to "wavering" (Strong's #1252, see below). In James 4:8 double-mindedness describes a highly unstable person.
- **Wavering:** "Diakrino" (Strong's # 1252) means literally to be separated or divided in one's ability to decide. It comes from two words: dia (1223) denoting separation; and krino (2919) to distinguish, decide, discern or judge. Krino is the ability to make a distinction or to make a determination. There is literally a battle in the mind between two thoughts or opinions! The person who wavers is at constant war with oneself. Matt. 16:3; Acts 15:9; 1 Cor 4:7; 11:29; 6:5; 14:29

Characteristics of the double-minded person: James 1:5-8 provides a very graphic picture of the life of a person who is double-minded.

1. **The Double-minded has weak faith.** Faith cannot operate in a person whose mind is not set upon the Lord. God's word assures us that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, the double-minded person has not formed his foundation in Christ upon the Word of God. James 1:5-8 passage indicates that he cannot expect to have his prayers answered.
2. **Such a person will be lacking in wisdom** necessary to determine the course of life pleasing to God. They are like the fool spoken of so frequently in the book of Proverbs and will not be able to make wise decisions for their lives nor will they see when they are on a path leading to destruction (see Prov 14:1,6,8,12,15,16,26-27).
3. **The double-minded person will feel driven by forces outside of his/her control.** He will feel tossed about, never feeling sure of himself or the direction of his life. James 1:5-8 provides us with a graphic picture of the life of a person who is double-minded. They hesitate, vacillate and waver without a firm foundation. They are like a wave in the ocean, literally driven by whatever direction the wind blows and tossed about. They are not able to find firm footing in anything they do! Discouragement and loneliness of heart is always be a part of their experience.
4. **They are unstable in all of their ways.** Unstable (182) akatastatos comes from the negative "a", "not" and kathistemi (2525) which means to settle. Hence the unstable personality is unsettled, unsteady. He does not stand fixed in his position and is not established fully in the way of God. Inconstant. Easily beguiled, enticed or caught with bait.
5. **The double-minded is easily enticed into sin,** because the power of the flesh has equal pull in their hearts against the desire to obey the LORD. The sin nature coming from the flesh is a stranger to the Spirit and from the divine principles of eternal life. James 3 compares earthly wisdom versus godly wisdom and the one operating from earthly wisdom is destitute of the spirit, and opposed to God and acknowledges no restraints. He does whatever his heart dictates. Gal 5:19-21; Eph 4:17-24; 1 Pet 4:1-6
6. **Unstable souls are easily let astray in times of darkness.** He will not be able to stand in the evil day spoken of in Eph. 6, because he has not determined in his nature to resist evil and to stand firmly according to God's ways. Unstable souls are easily beguiled, enticed or caught with bait because they have not crucified the flesh with its evil desires. (see 2 Pet. 2:14). In experience, we will see one who is double-minded become a Christian but continue to waver between the ways of the flesh/world and the ways of God. They will seem to be in a constant state of backsliding.
7. **They are a target of the false teacher** who would seek to use their carnal desires as bait by which to entrap or ensnare them. False teachers appeal to the soul-side of man. (see Rev. 18) Watchman Nee writes that the human soul will become a commodity in Babylon, the human soul will be used as instrument of the anti-Christ and false prophet in the end of this age as Satan seeks to gain control of man's soul. See 2 Pet 2:1-22. This passage indicates that those who are false teachers will especially seek to entice those who are unstable (double-minded, wavering), see vs.

Responding to the LORD:

Prayer Points:

1. **Seek to grow in faith.** Faith is belief in God which results in action! Faith is the placement of one's confidence in submission to truth. It holds an expectation for God to act based on the Truth of His Word! Faith is a gift of

God, not something we can muster by our own efforts. Faith comes as a result of God's work in our hearts. True faith rests on trusting in Jesus alone and surrendering our hearts to Him. When we walk in faith, we are positioned to receive God's blessings and His power to transform our hearts. Our faith is in God, not necessarily a specific outcome for our prayers. Genuine faith will allow us to overcome trials, We need to trust His character and promises. When we find our faith wavering, ask the Lord to encourage our hearts with His Truth. Heb. 11:6-7; Rom. 1:17; 10:6-8, 10-11, 17

We are told that "the righteous shall live by faith." This is one of the most quoted verses in the Bible—very important. It was recorded by Habakkuk in a time of great darkness. Israel lived in perilous times. God revealed to Habakkuk that His time of judgment against Israel was coming at the hands of a cruel invading army. This was a promise and a word of great encouragement. The term "shall live" (G2421) means to stay alive, be preserved, flourish, enjoy life, recover health. The fundamental idea is to "live and breathe" with breathing being the evidence of life. It literally reads, "The righteous person in (or by) his faithfulness (firmness, consistency, belief, faith, steadfastness shall live." This verse is said to have sparked the Reformation! Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38

- It is impossible to please God without faith. Heb. 11:16
- Faith that hasn't changed you, hasn't saved you. Faith is evidenced by our works. James 2:14, 26
- "If you will not believe, you will not last, you will not be established." OR "If you are not firm in your faith, you are not firm at all." Isa. 7:9
- "The righteous do not just believe in God, they believe God." R.C. Sproul

2. We are called to seek God with our WHOLE HEART. The Lord repeatedly calls His people to seek Him with their whole heart and promises that when we do, we will find him. It is significant that He doesn't just say to seek Him, but to seek Him with our "whole heart." The Lord promises to show Himself strong to those who are fully devoted to Him. The phrase "fully devoted" means to be fully committed, devoted with a heart that completely belongs to Him. Jer. 29:13; Deut. 4:29; Ps. 42:1-11; 119:2; 2 Chron. 12:14; Ps. 27:8; 69:32; 1 Chron. 16:9-10; 1 Chron. 28:9

3. We are to contend earnestly for the faith. The word for "contend earnestly" (G1864) is 'epiagonizomai' the prefix 'epi' defines the scope and in this case it is to be superimposed over everything we do, constantly making a motion toward. 'agonizomai' means to struggle, to strive for mastery, to fight and wrestle as in the public games, to persevere in the midst of opposition and temptation. To contend for the faith means to exert endurance and stretch ourselves toward the finish line. We must remain firm in our faith despite pressure under difficult circumstances. The character of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings. Heb. 10:32-36; Rom. 8:37-39; Heb. 12:1-3

Ask Him to help to aggressively tackle the doubts that seek to hinder our walk of faith. When we have doubts, we need to seek the Truth and bring our doubts into His light. Refuse to allow discouragement or disappointment to enter our hearts by maintaining and open and honest dialogue with Him about our thoughts. Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. 1 Tim. 6:12 calls us to "fight the good fight of faith." When we bring all of our stray thoughts into His light and seek His guidance, we will find a deeper and more intimate relationship with Him. Doubt and unbelief will cause us to despair. We need to be diligent to choose faith. Ps. 27:13-14 says, "I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the Lord." James 1:6-8; 2 Cor. 10:3-5

4. Confess our sin of unbelief and pray for God's help. While doubts vanish in light of the Truth, unbelief is a sin that requires repentance. We need to confront unbelief with repentance (change of heart and direction) because it is a sinful, rebellion against revealed Truth. In Mark 9:19 Jesus called them an unbelieving generation! The father with the young son implored Jesus to come to the aid of his unbelief. See Mark 9:16-27 "I do believe, help my unbelief (apistia)!" This father chose to acknowledge the unbelief that caused him to say, 'If You can...' He demonstrated humble recognition of an element of unbelief that remained in his heart and humility to ask for Jesus to help him. Jesus honors the person who comes to Him in their human frailty and dependence on His grace!!

5. Renew your mind through His Word. Our faith is cultivated as we make spending time with Him in His Word as the highest priority of our lives! Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. The Word of God is a powerful discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart! Heb. 12:1-3 We need to steadfastly choose believe God's Truth as given to us by His Word. Rom. 10:8: 14-17 directly connects believing and faith to the Word of God. "But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching... How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" So, then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Eph. 4:22-24; Rom. 10:8, 14-17 (See handout "The All-Powerful Word of God")

6. Deliberately cultivate a deep trust in God's character and promises through remembering and meditating on the Word, focus on God's goodness and love. Study the attributes of God. Study His names. The more we know the Lord the stronger our faith will grow and our doubts will be eliminated. A childlike faith will allow us to trust in despite our circumstances. Psalm 63 is a prayer of David's when he was in the wilderness and it provides a beautiful example of a heart deeply reflecting on God's faithfulness. Read entire chapter. He says, "My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips. When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches, For You have been my help, And in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy. My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me. (See Anchors of Truth for Every Storm handout)

7. Remember and meditate on God's past faithfulness and answers to prayer. The Word frequently calls us to 'remember' His commands and promises. Israel was instructed to remember God had done as a memorial His deliverance from slavery, His leading through the wilderness, deliverance from our enemies, the wonderful deeds He has done. God told Moses to write it in a book and to rehearse it in the ears of Joshua. The word "rehearse" is translated 'recite' and it means literally to put or set into place. This verb was to describe Samuel's action concerning a stone he named Ebenezer in order to remember God's deliverance from the Philistines. (1 Sam. 7:12) Israel strayed when they forgot what God had done for them. Remember what He has done for you, the times He has answered prayers. As David faced Goliath, he rehearsed the times when God When we deliberately turn our focus to God's goodness and love, we will have hope. Psalm 63:5-8; Lam. 3:21-26; 1 Sam. 17:34-37

8. Develop a habit of seeking wisdom so we can understand the will of the Lord and apply it in our lives. Remember in Mark 6:52, the disciples did not carefully consider in order to gain insight from their experiences.

Proverbs 1:2 "To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding,

Proverbs 2:2 "Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding;"

Ephesians 5:15-17 tells us, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

Colossians 1:9-12 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding [prudence], so that you will walk [to walk, to live, to walk in order to live] in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

Understanding is wisdom that is applied in a practical manner. The Word combines the need for wisdom AND understanding 94x.

Prov. 8:12 “I wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion.” Prudence is a word that is little used in the English language in our day. It is defined as wisdom applied to practice; so wherever true wisdom is, it will lead to action, and its activity will be always in reference to the accomplishment the most appropriate means to reach the best ends. The farther a man grows in wisdom, the more practical knowledge he gains. Wisdom requires understanding and prudence to know how to apply in practical ways to choices and directions we choose in our daily walk! It is vital to being able to apply God’s Word in our daily lives. We need understanding in order to accurately handle the Word of Truth!!

Solomon, responsible for a large portion of the Proverbs in our Bibles was given a great gift of wisdom, but sadly he failed to put wisdom into practice and did not apply the wisdom to the practical affairs of his daily life. His lack of application of God’s truth in his life resulted in his heart being led astray and into worship of false Gods.

Both the Hebrew and the Greek offer insights into the meaning of prudence, often translated as understanding. A summary of what prudence/understanding includes:

- Prudence is a form of practical wisdom at work and avoiding evil in real life situations
- It is the habit of discerning the true good in every circumstance and the right means of achieving it.
- The ability to reason well about the best course of action for the well-being of oneself and others until it becomes a required habit.
- Knowledge of things to be sought and things to be shunned
- Prudence is at the heart of moral character, for it shapes and directs the force of our moral lives indispensable to moral excellence
- It is the basis and measure of all other virtues, helping us to apply general principles to specific situations to avoid evil and accomplish good.
- The ability to govern & discipline oneself by the use of reason
- Virtuous prudence is characterized by purity, straight forwardness, candor and simplicity of character
- Prudence requires a person to make judgments regarding the overall trajectory of a flourishing life as well as making accurate judgments about how to achieve it. “Be circumspect at all times.”
- Understanding conveys the concept of using wisdom and looking ahead to see where one is going. It is fully analyzing the consequences of various potential actions and determining that which is most pleasing in God’s sight. This is in contrast to impulsivity that has disregard for consequences. To wisely consider, i.e., Prov. 21:12 “The righteous man wisely considers the house of the wicked...”
- It conveys the concept of one considering and paying attention to their actions and words.

- In Nehemiah 8:13 the leaders of Israel gathered together before Ezra in order to “give attention” or “gain insight” from the Words of the law. It involves having insight or comprehension that comes from careful consideration.

9. **Actively resist the devil:** When Satan comes to plant doubts in order to defeat us, we need to take up the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. We are promised that if we resist the enemy, he will flee from us! When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, He used the Word of God to withstand his temptation to question His position as the Son of God. We often focus on the three recorded temptations at the end of Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness, but do not forget, Satan was tempting Jesus for 40 days! James 4:7; Ephesians 6:17; Luke 4:1-3

10. **Be filled with the Holy Spirit:** Jesus’ last instructions to the disciples were to go to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. The disciples were transformed when the Holy Spirit fell on them at Pentecost! Gone was the doubt, unbelief and hardness of heart! God truly transformed these men and those who heard them preach recognized that they had been with Jesus. God has promised us that He will give us a new heart and put a new spirit in us!! “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new Spirit in them, I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.” 1 Corinthians 2:1-14; Ezekiel 11:19; Acts 1:4-5; Acts 2:1-4; Luke 11:13

Be encouraged! God is the author and the finisher of our faith!! Hebrews 12:2

What is God Speaking to you?

What is your response to God?