

STUDY GUIDE

GOD'S BEST-KEPT
SECRET



CHRISTIANITY IS EASIER
THAN YOU THINK

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For Personal Study or Group Discussion

CHAPTER 1

SECRETS CHRISTIANS NEVER SHARE

Have you ever harbored secret thoughts about God, your personal life, or your spiritual life that you were/are uncomfortable sharing with others? Have you ever wondered if there might be something better than the kind of relationship you presently have with God?

1. When life is going well, it's easy to believe God loves you. But life doesn't always go well, does it? Do you struggle on those days to believe he loves you? Explain.
2. What did you learn about your view of God on the God Is Quiz on pages 15-16?
3. How do you feel about God when he doesn't seem to answer your prayers? What have you thought about him on your worst day?
4. Take a minute or two to think about your worst day and your view of God at the time. What did you say to him, or what would you say to him as you recall that day?
5. If you could take a selfie of you with God, what would it look like?
6. When you think about God, do you see any parallels with your past or present family?
7. Has religious, legalistic Christianity tainted your view of God? If so, how?
8. Read Genesis 2:7. What do you learn about God's original intent for every human, including you, from this verse? (Hint: see pages 23-24 in the book.)

God's best-kept secret is this: the Christian life is easier than you think, because you already have everything you need in Christ to live it!

CHAPTER 2

CHRISTIANS DON'T NEED TO FOCUS ON RIGHT AND WRONG

1. What's on your checklist of right things you think God expects you to do each day or week?
2. Which tree do you see yourself living from most of the time—the Tree of Life (dependent on the life of Christ within you) or the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (living independent of God)? Explain.
3. What does it mean that Jesus restarted the human race?
4. Write down three things Jesus Christ has done for you and to you (Hint: see page 33 in the book):
 1. He has _____
 2. He has _____
 3. He has _____
5. Read Galatians 2:20. What does it mean that Christ lives in you in your daily life?
6. What hope does Matthew 11:28–30 bring to exhausted Christians who are tired of trying so hard to keep their spiritual checklists?
7. Have you taken the 7-Day No-Checklist Challenge and prayed the prayer below? If not, pray it now!

Dear heavenly Father, I admit that I have tried hard to live as a Christian, to keep my checklist of right and wrong for way too long. I'm ready to begin depending on Jesus Christ to live in and through me instead. Literally or in my mind, I take my checklist and burn it into ashes. Now that it is gone, Jesus, I ask you to live in and through me for the next seven days. Holy Spirit, please

remind me not to go back to my checklist but to rely on Jesus instead. I pray this is the beginning of how I will live the Christian life for the remainder of my life. By your grace, Amen.

God wants our behavior to be based on the overflow of a dependent, loving relationship with Jesus in us, not on trying harder to perform all the tasks on our checklists.

CHAPTER 3

CHRISTIANS BELIEVE WEIRD STUFF ABOUT THEMSELVES

1. Do you believe a Christian can be a liar, thief, alcoholic or a sinner? Explain then read 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. Notice the amazing shift in identity from who we once were in Adam to who we are now in Christ.
2. What lies have you believed about your identity?
3. What is your God-given identity and how was it stolen?(Hint: see pages 44–45 in the book.)
4. Which of the six key areas do you focus on most often to define your identity? Parents? Friends? The past? Social media? Performance? Possessions? How has searching for your stolen identity in these ways defined you in your own mind?
5. What core lie about yourself does Satan often whisper to you? If you're not sure, ask God to show you.
6. How does this core lie make you feel about yourself?
7. How has listening to Satan's lies about who you are affected your life? Explain How can understanding the truth about your identity in Christ help you counter Satan's lies?

*God's view of you is astonishingly better than anything
you could ever imagine!*

CHAPTER 4

CHRISTIANS DON'T HAVE A CIVIL WAR RAGING INSIDE THEM

1. Do you ever feel as though two equal powers are inside you with completely opposite desires?
2. What is the so-called civil war raging inside you most often about?
3. What do the following verses teach you about your new identity in Christ?

Ezekiel 36:26

Ephesians 2:1–2, 4–5

John 3:3

2 Corinthians 5:17

4. What are the problems with “two-self teaching”? (Hint: see pages 64–65 in the book.)
5. Personalize Galatians 2:20

I _____, [the old me in Adam], have been crucified [past tense] with Christ and I [the old me in Adam] no longer live, but Christ lives in me [the new me in Christ]. The life I [the new me in Christ] now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God [who is in me], who loved me and gave himself for me.

6. What defines our identity according to our culture?
7. What defines our identity according to God?
8. Are you ready to let go of your false identity based on your past, your family, your failures, your successes, your friends, your marital status, your behavior, your sins, and so on? If not, what is holding you back?

12. Spend a few minutes talking with your heavenly Father about your identity struggles and thanking him for your new identity in Christ:

Father, because I didn't know my identity in Christ, I've spent all my life searching for my identity. As a result I've developed a false identity, which has controlled my life. Today I give up my false identity and choose to embrace by faith my true identity in Christ, regardless of the messages of my past, how I feel, or how I've been behaving. I choose to stop agreeing with Satan about who I am, and instead I choose to agree with who you say I am in Christ. Please give me understanding more and more about my true identity in Christ through the Holy Spirit who lives in me. Thank you for loving me so much as your child. In Jesus's name, Amen.

***God wants you to enjoy the true identity he gave you
when you became a Christian.***

CHAPTER 5

CHRISTIANS ARE JUST AS RIGHTEOUS AS JESUS

1. Do you believe you're as righteous as Jesus? Why, or why not?
2. Do you believe God loves you?
3. Do you believe God accepts you?
4. How righteous do you feel most of the time? How does this impact your thoughts, emotions, and behavior?
5. What does it mean that you have been justified? (Hint: see page 82 in the book.)
6. Read Romans 5:19. How righteous does God say you are? What does this mean to you?
7. Which distortions about being righteous have you been believing?
8. Write the statements below on a piece of paper and tape them where you'll see them regularly. Believe these truths, repeat them, and watch them come alive in your life!

Because you say I am righteous in Christ, I agree with you and say I am righteous in Christ.

Because you say I'm acceptable in Christ, I say I'm acceptable to you in Christ.

Because you accept me, I accept me. And I can't mess any of this up.

9. Do you accept the reality that you are unconditionally acceptable to God? I invite you to believe what he says about you and pray these words in faith:

Father, when I examine my feelings and remember my failures, it doesn't seem true that I am righteous. Yet your Word tells me you have made me the righteousness of God in Christ. I now realize I have been trying to make myself more righteous so you would accept me more. I'm sorry I've done this. I realize this is error and sin. I agree with you right now that you have made me 100 percent righteous in my identity in Christ. I believe that because you gave me your righteousness, I am as righteous as you. I also choose to believe right now that you unconditionally accept me. And because you accept me, I choose to accept myself. Please make this more real to me day by day. In Jesus's name, Amen.

The gift of righteousness brings the incredible blessings of full forgiveness of all our sins, freedom from our slavery to sin and Satan, and especially unconditional acceptance with God.

CHAPTER 6

CHRISTIANS DON'T NEED THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

1. Before this study, did you believe that Christians need to keep the Ten Commandments? What do you believe now and why?
2. How do we know that God created Adam and Eve to live by grace through faith in him alone? (Hint: see page 93 in book.)
3. Read Jeremiah 31:31–34 Who are we in Christ? Who is Christ in us? How much forgiveness do we have?
4. What is God's part in the New Covenant? What is your part? (Hint: there's only one thing you are to "do".)
5. Have you had an Old Covenant mind-set or a New Covenant mind-set about your Christian life? Has this study changed your mind-set? Explain.
6. What do the following Scriptures say happened to your obligation to keep the Ten Commandments?

Romans 7:4, 6

Galatians 3:25–26

7. What has God given us in place of the Ten Commandment? (Hint: see pages 99–101 in the book.)
8. Have you had enough of trying to live by religious rules? If so, it's time to start living by the dynamic, life-giving power of God's grace, which will lead you into freedom. Confess this aloud:

I have something amazingly better than the law or religious rules to live from today. I have my new identity in Christ. I have Jesus Christ in me to love me and to live the Christian life through me. I am going to live by grace through faith today because of these New Covenant truths.

9. When are you most inclined to live by religious rules? (See the examples on pages 101-102 in the book.) How can you break and replace this pattern?
10. Pray this prayer to let go of trying to live by the law and live instead by God's grace through faith in Christ:

Dear Father, I admit that I have not understood that I have something better than the Ten Commandments or religious rules to live by. I realize that I have been living from a law mentality instead of a grace mentality. I'm very sorry, and I give up on trying to get you to help me try harder. I embrace my identity in Christ and Christ in me in place of the law. I want to live by grace from this time forward. I look forward to living in the freedom from the law and sin you gave me when I was crucified and raised with Christ. I also look forward to the freedom to love you, myself, and other people. Amen.

***God created you and saved you to live
by grace through faith in him.***

CHAPTER 7

CHRISTIANS ARE FORGIVEN BEFORE THEY EVER SIN

1. Think about one or more sins you commit over and over. Do you think in God's eyes you're forgiven? Why, or why not?
2. Read Ephesians 1:7. Where is your forgiveness found? Where are you also found? (Hint: see page 112 in the book.)
3. List the blessings you have in Christ from Ephesians 1:3–14.
4. Read Colossians 2:13–14. How many of your sins has God forgiven? What does that mean to you?
5. Can you out-sin God's grace according to Romans 5:20? Explain your view.
6. Personalize Romans 5:20.

Where _____'s (your name) sin of _____ (name the sin you struggle with most) increased, [God's] grace increased all the more.

7. Read Romans 6:1–2. Since we're forgiven for our future sins, what is there to keep us from sinning?
8. Do you believe God has completely forgiven you for your past, present, and future sins? Why do you believe this?
9. Accept God's complete forgiveness today. Use this prayer as a starting point:

Father, based on your Word, I believe Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for all my sins. I believe because of this, I am forgiven in Christ for all the sins in my past, my present, and my future. I also believe the punishment for my sins was placed on him and that you will never be angry with me or punish me. When I sin

in the future, remind me to run toward you, not away from you. Then I can tell you my sin with the confidence that I am already forgiven. Remind me that I can repent, not promising to do better next time but turning to Jesus Christ in me. Then I can ask him to live through me so I don't do it again but obey my Father instead. Thank you for loving me so much that I am completely forgiven now and forever. Amen.

***Forgiveness from God isn't based on what you do.
Forgiveness is based on what God has already done for you.***

CHAPTER 8

CHRISTIANS ARE DESIGNED TO BECOME STRONGER IN SUFFERING

1. What suffering have you experienced in the past or are you experiencing now?
2. In the book, Mark heard God speak these life-giving words he desperately needed to hear: “Mark, even if this church fails, I still accept you.” Ask your heavenly Dad to speak to you the life-giving words of grace he knows you need right now.
3. Read John 16:33, 1 Peter 4:12, and 2 Corinthians 12:8–9. What do we learn about suffering in life?
4. In the book, I stated that God doesn’t use suffering to build character, because we are already being complete in Christ (Col. 2:10). How did this discussion change your perspective on this issue?
5. What lies has Satan whispered to you during times of suffering? If you not sure, ask God to tell you.
6. What is the three-fold process of spiritual brokenness? (Hint: see page 137 in the book.)
7. What rights have you been holding on to that you need to give up to God? Write them down then give them up to God in the prayer at the end of this chapter study.
8. Review the following New Covenant points from the book and make each one into your own prayer expressing your desire to walk in God’s truth.
 - Confess the truth of God’s unconditional love and acceptance, and the power he offers to live within you, as described throughout Scripture and this book.

- Realize that your fleshly strategies of self-dependence are the ultimate problem that prevents you from experiencing Christ in you.
 - Openly tell God you believe his truth, whether or not you feel it. Ask him to reprogram your mind by reinforcing the revelation of Christ in you.
 - Don't be concerned with how quickly your circumstances will change or how fast you grow in your Christian walk.
 - Don't focus on yourself; focus on Jesus.
9. Are you willing to tell God he can do whatever it takes to reveal Christ in you as your all in all rather than just a fact? If so, pray this prayer of faith:

Dear Father, I realize I need spiritual brokenness in my own life and only you can bring this about for me. I understand that my flesh is preventing me from experiencing Christ living in and through me the way you designed me to live. I give up these rights to you. [Use the list of possible rights earlier in this chapter and add others God may show you to help you here.] I give you permission to use whatever is necessary to reveal the bankruptcy of the flesh to me, to free me from my consistent reliance on the flesh, and to reveal Christ in me so I can rely on him more and more. I pray this in Jesus's name, Amen.

***Our desperation is often God's preparation
for his revelation.***

CHAPTER 9

CHRISTIANS WILL NOT FEEL FREE UNLESS THEY FORGIVE

1. Read Matthew 18:21–35. What is true forgiveness?
2. Think of a situation where you find it hard to forgive. Which of the reasons listed on pages 150–51 in the book have kept you from forgiving?
3. Read Ephesians 4:26–27, 32. What do these verses tell us about God’s forgiveness and why we are to forgive?
4. Are you experiencing (or have you experienced) any of the types of torture from unforgiveness described on pages 156–58 in the book? Explain.
5. Whom do you need to forgive even if you don’t feel like it? Sit in a quiet place with paper and pen and ask the Holy Spirit to show you the people you need to forgive. Write down:
 1. The name of the person who offended you.
 2. What the person did to offend you.
 3. How that made you feel then, or even now.
6. Use the following prayer as a guide to forgive each individual on your list. When you’ve forgiven each person, destroy the list.

*Father, I’m coming to you now to forgive _____.
He/She did this to me: _____ and I feel
_____. _____ doesn’t deserve my forgiveness.
But I didn’t deserve your forgiveness either, and you forgave me
for all my sins when I placed my faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior.
I forgive because you tell me to forgive even as you completely
forgave me in Christ. I also realize I am a forgiver through my*

identity in Christ. I choose to forgive _____ even though I don't feel like it. I release this person from what they owe me, which was/is _____. I'm sorry for my sin(s) of anger/bitterness/vengeance toward _____. I thank you that Jesus Christ died on the cross for this sin so that I am already forgiven. I choose to trust you and to believe that you can use this experience to reveal Jesus Christ in me in a deeper way. In his name, Amen.

7. Is there anything you're upset with God about that you need to release him from? Pray this prayer to release your anger toward him:

Dear God, I realize I've felt angry toward you for _____. I release you from _____. You don't owe me _____. I'm sorry I have lived in my sin of bitterness toward you. I thank you that Jesus Christ died on the cross for this sin so that I am already forgiven. I choose to trust you and to believe that you can use this to reveal Jesus Christ in me in a deeper way. In his name, Amen.

8. Is there anything you need to forgive yourself for? Use this prayer as a guide for forgiving yourself:

Father, I come to you today to tell you I feel disappointed in myself. I feel like this because _____. I don't feel as though I deserve my own forgiveness, but I know that is not the truth. You forgave me for all my sins through the death of your Son, Jesus Christ, when I didn't deserve it. If you forgave me, I can forgive myself. I also realize I'm a forgiver through my identity in Christ. I choose to forgive myself. I release myself from the debt of _____. I'm sorry I have lived in my sin of bitterness toward myself. I thank you that Jesus Christ died on the cross for this sin so that I am already forgiven. I choose to trust you. I believe you can use this to reveal Jesus Christ in me in a deeper way. In his name, Amen.

Forgiving God's way is an intentional choice to release someone who has offended us from what we believe they owe us. The power of true forgiveness can then unleash a level of freedom and healing like nothing else.

CHAPTER 10

CHRISTIANS CAN BE CONTROLLED BY THEIR UNKNOWN LIES

1. Do you ever deal with feelings of depression, anxiety, anger, shame, guilt, loneliness or others? If so, which ones?
2. What do we learn in Isaiah 61: 1–2 about Jesus’s desire to heal and free us?
3. What strategies have you tried to meet your God-given SCALE needs—security, competency, acceptance, love, and esteem—your way instead of God’s way?
4. What is the flesh, and why do each of us express it differently? (Hint: see pages 172–73 in the book)
5. Look at the lists below and put a check mark by any pattern of behavior you see in your life.

Negative Flesh Patterns

- ☐ Abusing others
- ☐ Adultery
- ☐ Addiction to drugs
- ☐ Arguing disrespectfully
- ☐ Bitterness
- ☐ Committing murder
- ☐ Controlling people
- ☐ Dividing people
(in a family or a church)

Positive Flesh Patterns

- ☐ Acting with superiority
- ☐ Arrogance
- ☐ Codependence (trying to make sure everyone is happy instead of loving them correctly)
- ☐ Exercise and nutrition for self-centered purposes
- ☐ Focusing on doing what is right and wrong, rather than what is loving

- ☐ Envy
- ☐ False guilt
- ☐ Fighting
- ☐ Getting drunk
- ☐ Gluttony
- ☐ Gossip
- ☐ Habitual anger
- ☐ Inadequacy-based living
- ☐ Inferiority-based living
- ☐ Jealousy
- ☐ Lying
- ☐ Performing for acceptance
- ☐ Practicing witchcraft
- ☐ Rage
- ☐ Rebellion
- ☐ Rejecting others
- ☐ Same-gender sex
- ☐ Sex between singles
- ☐ Sexual lust
- ☐ Shame-based living
- ☐ Stealing
- ☐ Viewing pornography
- ☐ Worry

- ☐ Perfectionism to feel good about yourself
- ☐ Performing well for acceptance
- ☐ Philanthropy apart from depending on God
- ☐ Practicing “religion”
- ☐ Practicing legalism
- ☐ Practicing moralism
- ☐ Pride
- ☐ Self-reliance instead of reliance on Jesus
- ☐ Serving God for the wrong reasons
- ☐ Spiritual disciplines for the wrong reasons (praying, reading your Bible, giving, and so on to prove to God, yourself, and/or others that you are a good Christian.)
- ☐ Too much television, social media, video games, or sports
- ☐ Trying to be a good Christian
- ☐ Trying to be a good person
- ☐ Trying to impress God, yourself, and/or others

6. Would you say you lean more toward negative flesh patterns or positive flesh patterns? Explain. Remember, positive flesh patterns may seem superior to negative patterns, but they are just as destructive and sinful.
7. Read Romans 8:6. What happens when we focus on our relationship with the Holy Spirit?
8. Each of us is susceptible to falling for three central lies from Satan about (1) about God, (2) ourselves, and (3) others. Ask your Father to reveal each of these central lies in your life. Keep asking often or daily until God shows you all three.

First, pray these words:

God, please show me my three central lies about you, about myself, and about others.

As each central lie is revealed to you, you can then pray immediately,

God, what is the truth you want to show me that will replace this lie?

As each central lie and God's counteracting truth becomes clear, you can go on to this next prayer:

Father, I have sinned by believing the lie [name it] and have let it control my life. Thank you that Jesus died for that sin and that you have already forgiven me for it. Based on the finished work of Jesus, I ask you to break the power that this lie, [name it], has held over my life. I now thank you for the truth that you have shown me that [name the truth]. Whenever I'm tempted in the future to believe this lie again, please remind me of this truth. Amen.

Spiritual growth is learning to live more dependent on Jesus in us to be our everything so we can live the abundant life God intended for each of us.

CHAPTER 11

SINNING IS NOT NORMAL FOR CHRISTIANS

1. Do you ever feel hopeless about your struggle with certain sinful habits? Have you resigned yourself to believing this is the best things will ever get? What has caused you to feel or think this way?
2. Read 1 John 3:9. Have you ever heard before that sinning is not normal for a Christian because of our righteous and holy identity in Christ? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
3. Where does temptation come from? (Hint: it doesn't come from you! See pages 189-92 in the book.)
4. In what ways do you believe you aren't special or don't measure up?
5. How does it make you feel about yourself to realize that sinful thoughts don't originate with you?
6. What is a current or ongoing temptation you're facing?
7. When you're tempted with that sin, pray something like this:

Jesus, because I'm not under the law but under grace, I know I'm free to _____ [name sin]. You will love and accept me even if I do. But I don't want to _____ [name the sin] because I know that in my identity in Christ I'm not a _____ [use an identity statement about that sin and you such as angry person] person. I'm a righteous and holy child of God. To _____ [name the sin] is not consistent with my identity in you. I know this activity is not good for me. It is not for my benefit. It will hurt me. Please live through me to handle this temptation. I can't overcome it on my own, but I know you can.

8. If praying this way doesn't seem to stop the temptation, it could mean you're dealing with a stubborn habit or are stuck in a prolonged pattern of Satan's lies. In that case, take the authority you have in Jesus Christ and tell Satan to leave you alone because you belong to Jesus. Do it out loud and say something like this:

Satan, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom I sit at the right hand of the Father today, I command you to leave me alone right now. I belong to Jesus Christ, who lives in me. I'm not a _____ [use an identity statement about that sin and you such as angry person] person but a holy and righteous child of God. Be gone from me, in Jesus Christ's name.

9. When you're tempted, do you try to overcome your particular issue by putting yourself under the law along with your willpower? Explain how you have done this.
10. Read Romans 6:14. What is the only way to overcome temptation?
11. Read 1 John 4:4 and 1 Corinthians 15:57. What do these verses tell you about what you already have when temptations come?

You can give up on trying to win over sin through the law and willpower. It will never work. Instead, you can rely on Jesus Christ in you. He is always greater than any temptation to sin Satan can put in your mind.

CHAPTER 12

THE SECULAR AND SPIRITUAL ARE THE SAME FOR CHRISTIANS

1. Is the concept that everything in a Christian's life is spiritual new to you? In what ways have you compartmentalized your life into secular and spiritual?
2. In what ways has God spoken to you through the Bible?
3. In what ways has God spoken to you outside of the Bible?
4. Use these questions to help you identify the passions God created within you:

If money wasn't an issue, what would you do with your life?

What makes you feel really alive?

What specific topics or activities repeatedly draw your attention?

What spiritual gifts have you experienced that give you great joy?

5. Is God showing you something you have a passion for him to do through you? If so, what?
6. What practical steps do you think God wants you to take to pursue this passion?

All of life is holy when Jesus is living through you. All of life is worship when Jesus is living through you. All of life glorifies God when Jesus is living through you.



Mark Maulding is founder of Grace Life International, one of the largest Christian counseling and teaching ministries in America. A speaker, counselor, and leadership coach, Maulding is a regular blogger who is passionate about sharing the transforming message of God's grace with a world in desperate need of it. He and his wife, Ellen, have four adult children, including a daughter with Down syndrome who, along with her three brothers, recently finished college. They live in North Carolina.

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For counseling, conferences, training, and other resources online or in person, go to www.GraceLifeInternational.com.