

Book Structure:

This book is about life. It is a book about how and where you get nourishment; a book about where you have planted your roots and what fruit you bear. Everybody bears fruit; the only question is: Is your fruit good or bad? Is what you do of a positive impact on others or is it of a negative impact? This book is about growing in the LORD, if you love the world and it's evil lust, you are not in the LORD (1 John 2:15-17); it is about the decisions you make in life. Each chapter starts out with a portion of my true life story because this book is also about the journey - my journey through the bad, the ugly and the good. It is about my journey out of darkness toward Christianity and becoming a true child of God.

But everybody is on a journey as well; we're just traveling at different levels and different speeds. We all start our journeys as sinners in darkness; the question then becomes what you do about it. Will you love the darkness or will you search for the light? Often it is difficult to gain perspective on where you stand and so reference points can be gleaned by seeing others in action. Therefore, each chapter in this book will contain, in the second half of each chapter, real examples and some current events of what that particular chapter is about. I hope that by showing examples within our culture, that perspective can be revealed for each reader to see how society is impacted by all of our actions (good or bad) and how it is reflected by the morals (or lack thereof) of individuals around us. The fact is, we all fall short and we are all sinners with room to grow, as you will see within my own personal story. Boy, have I made mistakes! There is a way out of the abyss; it was prepared for you and I long ago by an innocent man hung on a tree for what we did.

If we don't look around us, what benchmark would we use to view our own standing? I will use solid examples; it is my hope that regardless of your politics, you will see my point. I pray you might see yourself within these present day examples, or possibly within my own personal story, and that you might be able to make changes for the better because of these examples. I think it is

easier to see yourself in the actions of another person or group, than it is to actually step outside and try to look back at yourself.

Of course, there will be some who will criticize me for being judgmental by my position on the cultural examples. That is exactly part of our problem today, people are afraid to take a position believing that all things are relative, so there can't be a right or wrong absolute. This will ultimately kill us! There are indeed absolutes; stand up for them. This is what real growth is all about. Make a judgment about yourself. Where are you today? Is there room for improvement? Do you want to improve? Are you self-destructive? Without personal reflection you won't grow. One way to reflect on yourself is to view what others are doing and make a comparison, good or bad. "I'm not like that...am I?" "I don't treat others that way." It is a kind of barometer. Sprinkled throughout each chapter are Bible references in order to stay orthodox and Bible centered. The Bible is foundational; without it, you can't stand for long. What does it mean to be a Christian? What does it mean to be in this world but not of this world? What does it mean to be a new creation in Christ? How does belief in Jesus help me now? What is my witness, do I have one? Answers and examples to these questions will be revealed herein.

Our lives are never perfect; marriages are never perfect. I beg you. Stop looking for perfection! Building your life and building your marriage takes a lot of work. Your selfishness will kill your growth if you let it; you've got to overcome it. My life is a testimony to this fact as you will see. Once you start to grow, a smart tree will realize and acknowledge where its good nourishment comes from. Just as a tree searches for light and water, you must strive for nourishment. The first and most important place to begin is to open the door to Jesus Christ, your LORD and Savior who already stands knocking at your door. Sink your roots here first. Give Christ the preeminence in your life and you will be a better person, a better child to your parents, a better spouse, a better parent, a better grandparent, a better friend, and most of all...you will have peace!

The Bible has much to say about a future judgment, a judgment by God to separate the sheep from the goats, the righteous from the evil. Matthew 13:47-50 (ESV) has Jesus telling His disciples:

“Again, the Kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Many contend that the 66 books in the Bible are simply letters and literature written by men thousands of years ago and thus it is foolishness and has no value to modern man (1 Corinthians 1:18). I have a better question. How can you possibly doubt text that has withstood in-depth scholarly scrutiny for thousands of years? No other text can make such a claim. Augmented by physical facts borne out of actual archeological digs; and the fact that hundreds of actual eyewitnesses to the events in the Bible stood up for those events against dreadful persecution and ultimately did die defending those truths, no other Truth can say the same. People can be misled, but they will not die for a known lie. The evidence of the existence of God is all around us (Romans 1:18-23); why then would so many firmly doubt His Word? I know and believe that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, the Logos! The Word became flesh in the Incarnation, the physical birth, of the pre-existent Jesus Christ, by whom all things in the universe were made.

In this book, I will quote Bible verse from one of three excellent translations. Most will be the English Standard Version (ESV), but the New International Version (NIV) and the Contemporary English Version (CEV) may also be used.

Many people like to think there will be no heavenly judgment, but the Bible is very clear on the subject. Used 163 times in the Bible,

the word “judgment” should not be feared by those who know Christ, for Jesus said:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”
(John 5:24 ESV)

Many will firmly state that there is no hell or fiery furnace; it is a safe way to gloss over their lack of commitment and understanding. But, the Bible is very clear on that subject as well.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” (2 Corinthians 5:10 ESV)

Many believe in the “fairy tale” that all go to heaven with no judgment. Now nice, comfortable and convenient your invention is. Tell that to the selfish and greedy man who died and found himself in torment in Hades; there is no crossing back to the side of comfort. The selfish man got a “wake-up call” too late, so he wishes to save his brothers by asking them to “wake up”. What about you? Will you wake up now or will it be too late for you too?

“And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’” (Luke 16:24-28 ESV)

There are persons who believe in two judgment chances; so if you miss Glory the first time, there is an opportunity for “do-overs,” - thus allowing you to wake up, say that you believe in Christ Jesus and get in the door by having the second chance. There is absolutely nothing in the Bible that even hints to such a thing. It is a hopeful selfish fabrication at best. Jesus tells a parable of the Ten Virgins waiting for the Bridegroom, Matthew 25:1-13. Five of the ten were not ready and they were locked out of the wedding feast when the Bridegroom came. There are no second chances; I invite you to turn to the LORD Jesus Christ today, don't wait, ask Him to come into your life, repent from your sins and believe in Him!

Besides the sure thing of a coming judgment, one thing is also for sure, I am not the one to make that judgment decision. I want to make that clear because in this book I use real-life events, people and my personal situations as examples as I see them of the various kinds of “nourishment” (good or bad) one receives that apparently make them do what they do. I am not judging the person's relationship to God, but I am making my own personal judgment as I believe the recorded events relate to the chapter in which the examples occur. You may disagree with me, but I know we can learn from the behavior of others. The purpose is to bring a present-day example to which we can learn by reflection.

It is easy for a person studying the Bible to view it as history and say it doesn't relate to modern times; thus it becomes difficult to see the Biblical truths as being foundational in the everyday actions of man. I expose myself as well in these chapters; I have been on this journey my whole life. I invite you to look deeper for what is right and beneficial. I wish to bring some comparisons of my life, some current events, and weave in Bible text to make this book more relevant to those trying to understand what the real truth is, what a Christian should be, and how to grow in the Spirit of the LORD. Sure there are some quick 3-day Saul-Paul conversions, but most of us grow in the Spirit over time, that is what this book is about. Hopefully with the comparisons found within these pages, you will be able to see your own faults, as I

saw mine; then do something about those faults...repent and grow...grow and be happy! Grow in the LORD and be saved!

The benefits of being a Christian have nothing to do with being free from hurt and pain, or free from rejection and slander, or free from the wants of food and shelter. Those “gospel of health and wealth” preachers are leading thousands in the wrong direction for the flood waters rise up on the Godly and the ungodly. Jesus said:

“Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.” (Luke 6:47-49 ESV)

You see, the flood waters rose against the Godly man, but he had the faith, hope and assurance that he would survive. The other unbelieving man had the same tribulation upon him but he fell into ruin. So too will you without Jesus Christ. The main benefit of being a Christian is your personal relationship with your Savior, Jesus the Christ. It was Jesus who created you (Col. 1:15-17). Jesus loves you (no matter what you have done), and Jesus wishes to be in relationship with you. If you don't have this relationship, then it is your own undoing, for Jesus stands at your door knocking; it is only you that will keep Him away. Those “pearly gates” (Rev. 21:21) are always open (Rev. 21:25). It is not Saint Peter that will keep you out of heaven. Only you will keep yourself out, for Jesus has already paid the price of your sin. Once you place your faith in your Savior, you will become a Child of God, a new creation in Christ. Your other benefits are hope, peace, a lack of worry and comfort that Jesus has prepared a place for you in Glory.

Turn toward Jesus, give up the old self, and become a new creation in Christ. That is what I did and I've had a very good

life...not easy, but good and I know I am loved. This book tells my personal story and the reflective story drawn from our culture...the bad and the good. It is a story of growth; sometimes slow growth, sometimes painful growth but growth just the same. It shows how I grew and developed through trials and tribulations to become a new creation in Christ Jesus. Like tempering steel, change for the better requires a change in physical state. This book also shares why our culture should do the same...that is, become a collection of new individual creations, turn toward the LORD Jesus or be doomed.

As of this writing, our country, the United States of America, is on a very bad path racing toward destruction. It is just a matter of time now before we implode. Maybe Jesus will return soon. There is still time to change; that is the point for writing this book. Will you strive to become a "Different Kind of Tree"? At that ultimate separation, where God divides the sheep and the goats, don't you want to hear the Creator of the universe who knows you better than you know yourself, say: "Well done my good and faithful servant (Matt. 25:23); come to me and find your rest and peace."