



A JOURNEY OF FAITH
SESSION ONE

1 God's
Wonderful
Assurance
of Salvation

Larry Aikens, Jr.

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“God’s Wonderful Assurance of Salvation”
Session One of Ten Sessions from the book:
*A Journey of Faith Discipleship Ministry:
Bible Answers to Life’s Toughest Questions*

Written by: Larry Aikens, Jr.
Contributing Editor: Diane Aikens

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SESSION **ONE** FROM

A Journey of Faith

BIBLE ANSWERS TO
LIFE'S TOUGHEST QUESTIONS



Only Jesus 4 Me, Inc.
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Virginia USA

A SPECIAL INVITATION

As a pastor since 1992, I have realized that many people have questions on their mind about God and the Bible. Sometimes they tell me that they aren't sure they should ask, but they wonder, "Why *do* bad things happen in this world—especially to good people? Doesn't God love us, can't God protect us? Why doesn't God answer *my* prayers?"

So many people have said to me, "Pastor, I have been trying to read the Bible, but I just don't understand it. And besides, where did all these different versions of the Bible come from. Which one should I use? It's just so confusing!"

And the questions keep on coming: "How can I know for sure that I will be in Heaven when I die? Has my life really mattered? Is there any help in the Bible for my personal finances? How can I make better decisions? Do you believe in speaking in tongues? Can a person recover from addictions?" And on they go...

All of these are good and fair questions—completely necessary—and they have caused me to really pray for guidance of the Holy Spirit as I have studied God's Word to try to find answers for what I consider to be *the toughest questions about life*. This book is the product of that research and experience—trying to get at answers that will help you understand God better.

I am quick to admit that I can't answer all of the toughest questions completely—some of life's mysteries God just hasn't fully explained—but I have tried to provide sessions in *A Journey of Faith Discipleship Ministry* to at least engage with these questions fairly.

These sessions provide a framework to process these mysteries through a biblical understanding of what God has explained to us and really wants us to know. You might be surprised at just how much can be uncovered if you are willing to do a little bit of discovery in a guided setting. So many people with the toughest questions have told me that this study has helped them immensely.

I want to thank these folks who have *journeyed* with us up to this point. Each sincere person has deepened my faith, and has in some way been an encourager to produce the resource that you hold in your hand. I feel indebted to all who have spoken into my *Journey of Faith*, and especially to the Holy

Spirit who has guided each of us, and has revealed the truth of God's Word to our hearts as we have diligently pursued a relationship with God through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

It is my sincere hope that you will also travel with us and take the time to study these provided materials carefully. This *Journey* very well could be a wise investment in your relationship with Almighty God. My prayer is that through the power of the Holy Spirit, you may emerge from this series of studies a more informed and dedicated follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your fellow Journeyer,

Larry

Psalm 40:1-3

WELCOME TO THE JOURNEY!

We are delighted that you have joined us for *A Journey of Faith*. We know that this is a wise investment you are making in your life, and it is our sincere desire that you will understand more of God's love for you and how you fit into God's plan of grace. We would like to introduce you to a few practical ideas:

- ✓ When you watch or attend the sessions, be sure to have a Bible, this resource, and a way to take notes. We will be studying the Bible, using the *New Living Translation*. While it is not required, it might be helpful for you to purchase this translation. We suggest the *NLT Illustrated Study Bible*.
- ✓ Before each session, please read carefully the material you have received. We believe that *Truth Discovered Is Truth Retained!* Please come to the sessions prepared.
- ✓ We offer this *Journey* with appreciation to those whose questions, together with our own, have challenged us to dig deep into God's Word for answers. It is because of their curiosity that this discipleship ministry has been developed. As you study, we realize that you also may have questions of your own. Please feel free to ask your questions during our discussion time, or contact your facilitator throughout the week. We are always happy to talk with you about your *Journey*.
- ✓ After the session, please complete the Discussion Questions and Abiding Principles on our website. Submit these for extra credit!
- ✓ If you are enjoying *A Journey of Faith*, please refer a friend to Journey with us. Visit www.onlyJesus4me.com to discover how to become a Licensed Facilitator and offer this life-changing resource to others. It is easy and rewarding!
- ✓ Before our study each week, we will say this prayer together:
“Dear heavenly Father, I ask that you open my heart to receive the Scripture for today's lesson. I also ask for the Holy Spirit to give me courage to take the steps of a true disciple in following Jesus, as truth is revealed to me through this *Journey of Faith*. Thank you for your grace at work in my life to draw me closer to your awesome love. I pray in Jesus' holy name, Amen.”

THEME VERSES

2 Peter 1:3a, 5a

³By his *Divine Power*,
God has given us
Everything we need
for living a *Godly Life*.

⁵In view of all this, make
every effort to *Respond*
to God's *Promises*.
Supplement [or add to]
Your Faith.



ABIDING PRINCIPLES

JOHN 5:24

“I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.”

PHILIPPIANS 1:6

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

JOHN 1:12

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

INTRODUCTION TO SESSION ONE

The Bible records the stories of many people who had peace and assurance in their hearts that heaven was their eternal destination. Consider the testimonies of:

- **Job**

Job 19:25-27 – ²⁵“But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon the earth at last. ²⁶And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! ²⁷I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!”

- **Mary, the mother of Jesus**

Luke 1:47-50 – ⁴⁷“How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!... ⁵⁰He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him.”

- **Paul**

II Timothy 1:12 – That is why I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return.

- **Peter**

I Peter 1:3-5 – ³All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born-again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, ⁴and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. ⁵And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see.

- **John**

I John 5:11 – And this is what God has testified: he has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

From these testimonies and others in the Bible, it is clear that God has made it possible for true disciples of Jesus Christ to have the peace and assurance of knowing that heaven is their eternal home. Even so, many sincere born-again disciples of Jesus are struggling with doubts about eternity and live in fear that they may miss heaven. This lack of assurance causes:

- **Personal witness to waver.**
Psalm 107:2 – Has the LORD redeemed you? Then speak out! Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies.
- **Purpose to wane.**
Daniel 11:32b – But the people who know their God will be strong...
- **Progress to be withheld.**
Ephesians 4:14-15 – ¹⁴Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. . . .
¹⁵Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.
- **Peace to wither.**
Philippians 4:7 – Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.
- **Power to be weakened.¹**
II Timothy 3:14 – But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you.

TEXT: I JOHN 4:8-18

⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

⁹ God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him.

¹⁰ This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

¹¹ Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.

¹² No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

¹³ And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us.

¹⁴ Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

¹⁵ All who confess that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God.

¹⁶ We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

¹⁷ And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the Day of Judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.

¹⁸ Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.



SESSION 1: GOD'S WONDERFUL ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

I John 4 was written to believers who have entered into a life of committed discipleship to Christ and are thus born-again, or saved by God's marvelous grace. In our text we find six reasons that we can have God's wonderful assurance that we will spend eternity with Christ in heaven. When considered together, these reasons bring confidence to our hearts and lives before God. Let's explore each of these reasons individually:

I. We can know that we are born-again because we know that God truly loves us—that is God's character (vss. 8-9).

A. God loves everyone in the world (vs. 8b).

Romans 10:12 – Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him.

B. God showed his love by providing salvation for everyone (vs. 9a).

II Peter 3:9 – The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise [to come again], as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.

C. God desires for everyone to be born-again and to be sure of it

(vs. 9b).

I John 5:12-13 – ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life. ¹³I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life.

II. We can know that we are born-again because we are honest about our past (vs. 10a).

A. We really didn't love God before salvation came into our lives.

1. To love God is the first and greatest commandment of the Bible. Matthew 22:36-38 – ³⁶“Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?” ³⁷Jesus replied, “You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment.”

2. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt. 5:6, NIV). Before salvation, we did not hunger and thirst for a relationship with God—we were not seeking God's righteousness in our lives. We were not interested in church, Bible study or prayer.

Romans 3:10-12 – ¹⁰As the Scriptures say, “No one is righteous—not even one. ¹¹No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. ¹²All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one.”

3. We were not pursuing God because we were separated from God by our sin.

Romans 5:12 – When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.

Galatians 3:22 – But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.

B. A changed perspective from being indifferent about God to truly

desiring to pursue a relationship with God and God's Word is a convincing evidence of true salvation.

*God Loves us
Despite our sin.*

III. We can know that we are born-again because God's plan of salvation is not the product of human agency or made-up ideas (vs. 10b).

A. Notice the sobering love of God in our text.

1. God loved us in spite of our sin.

Romans 5:8-9 – ⁸But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ⁹And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation.

2. God initiated our salvation.

1 John 4:19 – We love each other because he [God] loved us first.

B. God provided the Solution for our need.

1. God's Son, Jesus, became our Savior.

Hebrews 9:22-23, 28 – ²²In fact, according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. ²³That is why the Tabernacle and everything in it, which were copies of things in heaven, had to be purified by the blood of animals. But the real things in heaven had to be purified with far better sacrifices than the blood of animals... ²⁸So also Christ died once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.

2. Our Savior sacrificed his life on the cross, dying in our place for our sin.

Hebrews 12:2 – We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.

I Peter 1:18-20 – ¹⁸For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. ¹⁹It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. ²⁰God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but he has now revealed him to you in these last days.

- C. We have simply trusted in the Savior’s finished work on the cross for our salvation (vs. 16a).

1. We have asked him to save us, trusting in his atoning blood to forgive our past, present, and future debt of sin.

Romans 10:13 – For “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”

2. We have been passed from death unto life, never to return to the sentence of death.

Romans 8:1 – So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

3. This was accomplished by a transformational work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Titus 3:5 – He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.

*Upon a Life I did not live,
Upon a Death I did not die,
Another's Life, Another's Death,
I stake my Whole Eternity!²*

IV. We can know that we are born-again because we have the Holy Spirit living within us (vss. 11-13).

- A. The Holy Spirit indwells each born-again believer (vs. 13).
John 14:16-17 – ¹⁶“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. ¹⁷He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn’t looking for him and doesn’t recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you.”
- B. The Holy Spirit’s presence in a believer’s life is a great evidence of salvation (vs. 12).
Romans 8:15-16 – ¹⁵So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children.”

ILLUSTRATION

A missionary related this truth when he told me of his salvation testimony. He had run from the Lord and wanted nothing to do with God, but then a faithful Christian had witnessed to him of the love of Christ. Something this witness shared with him really stuck in his mind. This Christian told him that when he was born-again, he would know it. Three things would happen: 1) He would have a sensitivity to sin. 2) He would have a desire to pursue God. 3) He would have a concern for others to be reconciled to God. This missionary told me that after running from God a while longer, he finally gave his heart and life to Christ. Within hours of his salvation, he remembered what the witness had shared with him. Indeed, he noticed all three things had become reality. These

things were an evidence that the Holy Spirit had come to live in his heart.



1. The Holy Spirit's presence begins to produce a changed life.
II Corinthians 5:17 – This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!
2. The Holy Spirit's presence begins to transform your character traits.
Galatians 5:22-23 – ²²But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

Philippians 2:13 – “For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.”
3. The Holy Spirit's presence brings conviction about sin—you can't get away with sin.
Hebrews 12:5-6 – ⁵And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, “My child, don't make light of the LORD's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. ⁶For the LORD disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.”
4. The Holy Spirit helps you understand the Bible and what God desires for your life.
John 14:26 – “But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.”

V. We can know that we are born-again because we are relying on God's promises (vss. 14-15).

- A. God's Word is absolutely trustworthy—God cannot lie (vs. 14).
II Peter 1:16 – For we were not making up clever stories when we told

you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendor with our own eyes.

1. God promises eternal life to all who place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ for their salvation.

Titus 1:2 – This truth gives them confidence that they have eternal life, which God—who does not lie—promised them before the world began.

Philippians 1:6 – And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

2. God’s promise assures those who are born again that they are on their way to heaven; they cannot go to hell because their destination is changed.

John 3:16-17 – ¹⁶“For this is how God loved the world: he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.”

John 5:24 - “I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.”

*Assurance of salvation
depends on a believer **Choosing**
to **Trust** in God’s promises.*

- B. Assurance of salvation depends on a believer choosing to trust in God’s promises (vs. 15).

1. Notice the testimony of these men who had faith in God's promises:
 - a. "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith" (Romans 4:3).
 - b. The Apostle Paul said, "For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better" (Philippians 1:21).
2. A person must relinquish doubt and choose to have faith in God's promises.

Ephesians 3:17 – Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.

VI. We can know that we are born-again because we are secure in the power of God's keeping (vss. 16-18).

- A. A believer is hidden in the hollow of God's hand (vs. 16).

John 10:27-30 – ²⁷"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, ²⁹for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. ³⁰The Father and I are one."
- B. A believer is surrounded by God's love (vs. 17).

Romans 8:35-37 – ³⁵Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? . . . ³⁷No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.
- C. A believer is protected by God's power (vs. 18).

IN CONCLUSION

You should sincerely consider these questions:

Have you been born again from above? Is there an assurance in your heart that you are a true follower of Jesus?

It is better to be double-sure than to be unsure and live with doubts about eternal life. You can find God's wonderful assurance of salvation by entering into a committed relationship with Jesus Christ as you decide, or re-affirm your decision, to follow Jesus truly from your heart.

This decision must come from your heart—you must be willing to turn your life over to Jesus and allow God to change you from the inside out. If this is your desire, you could pray a prayer something like this, meaning it from your heart to God's heart:

Dear heavenly Father, I come to you in the name of Jesus, knowing that I need true salvation. I acknowledge the awfulness of my sin and realize that I don't deserve your grace and mercy. Even so, I read in your Word that in your great love, you sent your Son, Jesus, to die on the cross to pay for all my sin, and that he arose from the grave to be my Savior. I believe all of that is true!

So the best I know how, I repent and turn my back on my sinful ways and ask you to take control of my life. I believe on Jesus for forgiveness, salvation of my soul, and the gift of eternal life in heaven when I die. I invite you into my heart and life by the power of the Holy Spirit so that I may experience new birth in Christ and that you may begin the transformational process of making me into a real Christian. Please help me to follow Jesus Christ each and every day and thereby to know the assurance of salvation that a close relationship brings. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

If you have prayed a prayer like this from your heart to God's heart, you can rest assured that God heard your prayer, and most of all, God knows the decision of your heart. God has never turned anyone away.

*I know not why God's wondrous Grace,
To Me he hath made known,
Nor why, unworthy, Christ in Love
Redeemed me for his own.
But "I know Whom I have believed,
And am persuaded that He is able
To Keep that which I've committed
Unto him against that day." ³*

ENDNOTES

¹ Francis W. Dixon, *Bible Study Notes: Being Sure of One's Salvation* (N.p., n.d.). NB: My thanks to Rev. Dixon (1910-1985) for his ideas presented in this article. This particular article was very helpful in my own journey years ago. Thus, my introduction to this topic is a paraphrase of his introductory ideas. His Bible studies are now online at www.wordsoflife.co.uk.

² From “Christ for Us,” a hymn for Holy Communion written by Horatius Bonar (1808-1889), a pastor in the Free Church of Scotland.

³ From the hymn “I Know Whom I Have Believed,” written in 1883 by Daniel W. Whittle (1840-1901)—evangelist, Bible teacher, and hymn writer whose life was influenced by Dwight L. Moody.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Have you read and studied this entire session? Yes No

Please answer the Discussion Questions below in complete sentences, using our website. When you submit your answers to OJM, you will get a copy of Larry's and Diane's answers in return via email! (You may wish to keep a copy of your answers to compare yours with theirs as you continue discovering truth.) If you are not sure how to answer each question, go ahead and "take a stab at it." Once you start writing, you may surprise yourself! There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. We want to hear your thoughts!

1. Describe your relationship with God and Jesus before studying this session.
2. Have you had doubts about your salvation? Have you wondered where you will spend eternity? Please discuss.
3. Has your relationship with God changed? Have you committed your life to the Lord Jesus Christ? Please explain.
4. Out of the six reasons presented in this study from 1 John, please identify the reason(s) that speak assurance to your heart about your relationship with God. Please explain why.
5. Of the Scriptures presented in this session, please select one that spoke to your heart and life, and type it out on the website. Why was this verse especially meaningful to you?

IN ADDITION...

Remember to write out the Abiding Principles on the website. If you complete these simple assignments, you will earn an upgraded certificate!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All the glory and praise goes to God for all of the many blessings we have in Christ Jesus our Lord. I truly am grateful to God for the wonderful people God has put in my life since I was but a small child. I chose the theme verses for Only Jesus 4 Me (OJM) from [Psalm 71:17-18](#), for truly as the Psalmist said: “[God has] taught me from my earliest childhood.” I am indebted to many voices and guides who have spoken into my faith *Journey* to bring me to this new opportunity to teach others *A Journey of Faith*.

My *Journey of Faith* started many years ago, when in God’s grace and providence, God allowed me to be born into a Christian home. When I was but three years of age, God led my parents, Larry and Linda, into full-time missions work. My early life was enriched by their experiences of faith and service to Christ. I owe them my lasting gratitude for the many ways they gave me a wonderful start in life.

Further, I am very grateful for the church families that have allowed me to serve Jesus in their midst since 1992. So much of what I have learned has been in the pursuit of their needs. Also, searching questions that have come to the surface in both my life and theirs, have called forth a diligent study on my part. I love each and every person with whom I have had the opportunity to minister throughout the years, and I appreciate all that they have taught me. Space would not allow me to thank each person by name, but to those who were part of these church families, know that I am eternally grateful that our journeys have intersected. I feel that we have blessed each other forward in our mutual faith, and I am thankful for what you have brought into my life.

I am grateful for a host of professors, pastors, teachers, and counselors who have spoken into my faith journey. I studied officially in many classrooms, but unofficially, I have sat at the feet of so many wonderful Christians—some whom I have pastored and others whom I have led as part of my church staff. Those very ones whom I was called to lead have led me in many ways. I can’t thank these mentors enough. I only wish that space would allow me to mention each one by name.

I also want to offer my appreciation to my first wife, Holly, and my children, Nathaniel and Jessica, for allowing me the time to pursue ministry, writing,

education, and the lofty dreams that I felt God placed within my heart. While I felt my motives were pure and my intentions were the best, I haven't always known how to balance my time and priorities well. I am sure that in my early zeal for God, I often got caught up in lofty goals that were more than what God had called me to pursue. In those times, my family suffered a great deal for my lack of attentiveness to them, and I regret that. I also made my share of mistakes and needed forgiveness. For those sacrifices they made to invest in who I have become, I offer my sincere thanks and humble gratitude. If I could go back, I would do things very differently. My children are grown now, and I love them very much.

God in his mercy and grace has allowed me to remarry a wonderful partner, Diane. I am very grateful for her support and the expertise that she has brought into my life. She is a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ, a grammarian, and an excellent musician. Her humble ways of living out her faith in Jesus Christ are constant lessons to me. She has a gentle spirit and has modeled to me the Christ-life, to which I aspire. I can't say "thank you" enough to her. She has a courage about her that is remarkable, and even though God has entrusted to her a battle with Stage IV cancer, she fights on with great courage. My thanks for her careful review of all of our written materials and the excellent edits. She might just make a grammarian out of me yet. I doubt it, but it is worth her continued try! Also, a special thank you is in order for Diane's parents, Don and Doris Johns. They are special folks, and they sure reared a fine daughter!

I must give a special thanks to my church family at Bethel. They are simply the BEST. I would never be able to express to them how much I love them and the church that we all call "home." It is such a privilege to be their pastor and to help carry on the work of Jesus. I appreciate Bethel's support and belief in the project of OJM. Their partnership is such a blessing to us. I want to give my appreciation to the chairperson of our Church Board, Robert Phillips, and his wife Lena, and also the chairperson of our Deacons, Ron Wampler, and his wife Carolyn. All of the leaders at Bethel are dear friends and encouragers in the work of Christ—I wish I had the space to list all of their names. I also want to thank our District Executive Minister, Bro. John Jantzi, for his review of some of our lessons and his excellent input and ideas. Also, my thanks go to him for believing in me and being the conduit that God used to bring Bethel and us together. He is a blessing and such an encouragement as we endeavor

to serve Christ together. I also want to give a shout out to the Discipleship Ministries Team with whom I have the privilege of serving: David Chappell, Jan Orndorff, and Debby Rimel are wonderful friends and encouragers. My “thank you” to the team! They have made me a better disciple of Jesus, and I appreciate their steady encouragement to look to Jesus and keep the attention on HIM!

Only Jesus 4 Me (OJM) was born out of a calling that I felt through fervent prayer on my knees. I shared the vision first with Diane, and she was right there to support me. We both prayed for God’s direction in putting the right people into our path to help launch this ministry. In the early days, God led us to a local businessman, C.L. Russell of C.L. Russell Photography in Broadway, Virginia. He is the creative genius behind the videography and photography! He and his wife, LaShonda, have become good friends, and we are very grateful for the ways they have supported OJM. In those early days, God also led us to Josh Hallahan of Christian Internet Design in Missoula, Montana. He and his team have brilliantly developed the website and have constantly been a source of encouragement in the Lord. They have found the tools to make the vision a reality! We are very grateful to them.

As we began to delve into the work of creating OJM, we realized very quickly that we needed some expertise in graphics design, technical issues, and developing the ministry materials, such as the book that you are reading. After much prayer, the Lord reminded me of a good friend who had assisted us on many previous projects, Tillman Ross of Graphic Imaging in Concord, North Carolina. We asked Tillman to consult with us as our Impressions Manager, and he graciously accepted. He is gifted at bringing colors, web pages, pictures and concepts into a unified whole. His creations speak of excellence, and we feel they are a wonderful reflection on OJM’s passion for Jesus. A “thank you” to Tillman for his steady and creative guidance, as well as being a friend in the Gospel ministry since 2003.

On the business side, we have been working with our CPA and friend, Ed Neese, from Greensboro, North Carolina. I pastored there in the late 1990’s and asked Ed to do my personal taxes. Since that time, Ed has done my yearly return and has counseled me on many financial matters. He loves the Lord Jesus, and he has been a true business friend. I am deeply grateful for his

guidance in financial matters concerning OJM, and ministry in general, but even more so for his consistent friendship and encouragement to both me and Diane. God has also brought into our lives a good friend and attorney, Dan Neher from Harrisonburg, Virginia. He is a solid brother in Christ and has been a source of encouragement and assistance in advising us on legal matters concerning OJM. We are grateful to Dan for his expertise.

Musically, God has put in our path a new friend from Nashville, Tennessee, Peter Young. Peter is an accomplished drummer, arranger, and producer. He has given “wings” to the theme song God allowed me to compose, “Only Jesus 4 Me,” and brought together incredible talent in Nashville to produce the song at the legendary Studio 19. He has been awesome to work with. Our thanks to Peter, and a thank you to the recording studio and all of the musicians who played on the project: Kyle Hershman, Studio Engineer; Chris Nole, Keyboards; Ron de la Vega, Bass; Peter Young, drums; Tony Paoletta, pedal steel; Joe Spivey, Acoustic Guitar, Fiddle and Mandolin, and Chas Williams, Lead Guitar. Mike Lusk is the awesome singing talent on the theme song, and he sounded just great. We appreciate Mike and all the musicians for their contributions!

There are so many others God has used in my life—many friends, family members, neighbors, and colleagues who have prayed for me—and I am truly grateful for each and every one. If I have failed to mention you by name, please understand that it was not on purpose. Yet above and beyond all others, I am humbled by the friendship of Jesus. I am so grateful that Jesus would entrust to me his vision for *Only Jesus 4 Me* and *A Journey of Faith*. I realized long ago that inspiration and creativity do not come from a human being; rather, all that is good comes from the Holy Spirit working through a yielded person to accomplish the purpose of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ. When I am at my best, I feel the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, and I give all the glory to Jesus. “In him, I live and move and have my being” (Acts 17:28). I know all the glory goes to God and I am eternally grateful for any small part that I have in Jesus’ kingdom. If this ministry touches your heart and is a help to you, please join with us in giving God the glory. God alone is worthy! Praise be to Jesus! Thank you, Jesus. Only Jesus 4 Me! Amen!

PHOTO ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Images used in *A Journey of Faith* were provided under a Creative Commons License (CCO); yet to show appreciation to these artists, here is a list of the photos used with appropriate credit where possible.

Photo 1: “Christian cross appears bright in the sky background,” March 9, 2017 by contributor: nu1983, on istockphoto.com, stock photo ID: 650816290.

Photo 2: “Big Wooden Cross on Green Grass Field under the White Clouds,” Frederick, Maryland, United States, August 13, 2016, by David Dibert on Pexels.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Larry was born in Atlanta, Georgia, and reared on the missionary field. He is the second of six children. His folks served the Spanish-speaking world until Larry was a teenager, and then they traveled as a family in full-time evangelistic work in the United States. He recalls being in forty-three states and three other countries before going to college. During these formative years, Larry gave his heart and life to Christ and felt a calling to serve the Lord in local church work.

Larry was ordained to the full-time Gospel ministry in 1992, serving as a music and youth minister until 1995. Since that time, he has had the privilege of lifting up Christ as a pastor in the Baptist Church, the United Methodist Church, and the Church of the Brethren (COB). He is currently serving as the pastor of Bethel-Mayland COB in Broadway, Virginia, and the interim pastor of Pine Grove COB in Harrisonburg, Virginia. He also serves with the Shenandoah District COB as a member of the Discipleship Ministry Team.

Larry has earned three seminary degrees: a Master of Theology (Th.M.) and a Doctorate of Theology (Th.D.) from Covington Theological Seminary, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia; and a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) from Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Larry is the father to two grown children, Nathaniel and Jessica, and a grandfather to Kirsten. Larry and his wife Diane reside in New Market, Virginia. When not busy in the ministry, Larry enjoys music, the outdoors, golf, tennis, riding motorcycles, and reading—especially biographies. Diane shares many of the same interests and is also a wonderful pianist. They both enjoy ministering, spending time together, traveling, and meeting other believers.



ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



Diane was born near Tacoma, Washington, and grew up as the baby sister of two brothers. At seven years of age, her family moved across the country back to her mother's home in the mountains of Pennsylvania. They took up residence in an old farmhouse on the edge of the family farm and got very involved in their local church and Christian school. Diane's dad served as an assistant to the pastor, and her mother taught high school maths and sciences in the Christian school.

After graduation from high school, Diane went to Pensacola Christian College (PCC) and earned her bachelor's degree in Music Ministry in 1999, traveling with the PCC Ensemble for two years and helping to promote the college. She was offered an opportunity to continue her studies as a Graduate Assistant and earned a seminary degree in Church Music (M.C.M.) through Pensacola Theological Seminary in 2001.

Diane has had a diverse opportunity to experience Christ and how various traditions practice their faith. She grew up in a Community church, belonged to a non-denominational church, served on staff at a Baptist church, attended a Full Gospel church, and has belonged to the United Methodist Church. She is now a member of the Church of the Brethren, where she serves with her husband, Larry. Diane has also served the local church as a choir member and director, pianist, Sunday school teacher, secretary, and financial secretary. She is very involved in supporting Larry's ministry as a pastor's wife.

She offers her input in the discussion questions throughout this book as a person who has experienced the *Journey* many times. She hopes that her input will help to broaden the discussions and further the conversations around these important topics.



A JOURNEY OF FAITH INCLUDES

- Session 1 | God's Wonderful Assurance of Salvation
- Session 2 | What Does Baptism Mean?
- Session 3 | The Meeting House of God
- Session 4 | Is the Bible Relevant for Today?
- Session 5 | A Guide to Prayer and Fasting
- Session 6 | God's Will: Revealed & Concealed
- Session 7 | Financial Wisdom
- Session 8 | The Worldwide Ministry of the Holy Spirit
- Session 9 | Anointed by the Holy Spirit
- Session 10 | Why Do Bad Things Happen to God's Children?



Don't Miss A Session!