



SESSION THREE

A JOURNEY OF FAITH

3 The
Meeting
House
of God

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“The Meeting House of God”
Session Three of Ten Sessions from the book:
A Journey of Faith Discipleship Ministry:
Bible Answers to Life’s Toughest Questions

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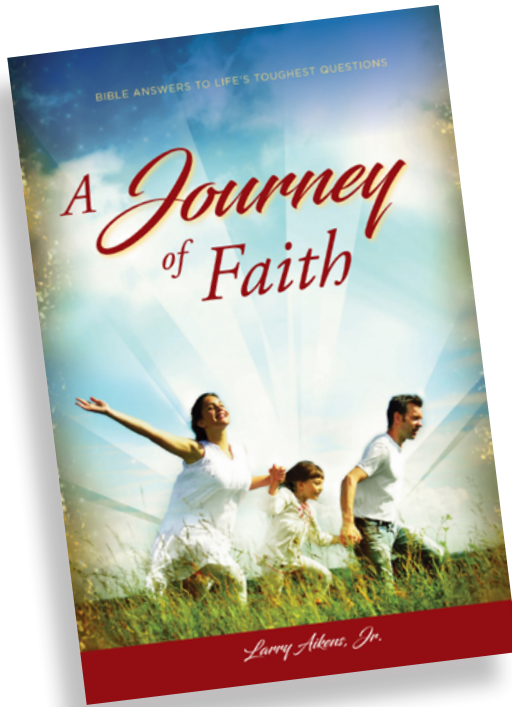
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SESSION **THREE** FROM

A Journey of Faith

BIBLE ANSWERS TO
LIFE'S TOUGHEST QUESTIONS



Only Jesus 4 Me, Inc.
www.OnlyJesus4Me.com
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

HEBREWS 10:25

And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his [Christ's] return is drawing near.

1 TIMOTHY 3:14-15

¹⁴I am writing these things to you now, even though I hope to be with you soon, ¹⁵so that if I am delayed, you will know how people must conduct themselves in the household of God. This is the church of the living God, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth.

HEBREWS 13:17

Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.

INTRODUCTION TO SESSION THREE

My earliest memories are centered on what was happening at the local church. By the time I was three years old, I remember standing on a chair behind a pulpit, quoting Psalm 100 for the audience. I was very blessed to grow up in a Christian home in which we tried to keep Christ at the center of our family, and the local church was understood to be a vital part of our Christian faith.

It wasn't always like that for my folks. My dad grew up in the home of a faithful Methodist family. They took him to church each and every Sunday. When he reached 18 years old, he vowed that he would never go back to church again. By the time he was 26 years of age, all that changed. For the first time in his life, he became serious about pursuing a relationship with God and gave his heart and life to Christ. He followed the Lord in believer's baptism, deciding to become a true and faithful follower of Jesus Christ. About that time, a pastor challenged him with a thought along these lines: "If you will pay the price to be faithful to church, I will pay the price to faithfully study the Scriptures and try to teach you what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ." Dad, eager to know the Bible better, took him up on that challenge. My Mom was already committed to the idea, and they started going to church faithfully.

I came into the world just a few years later, and I was reared in church. My folks became thoroughly convinced of the importance of the local church, and they did not let anything get in the way of faithfully attending the meeting house of God. To this day, I remain firmly committed to the local church with the same kind of understanding that my folks had: ***born-again believers thrive in the setting of a local church where the Bible is taught and practiced!***

Sadly, we are not experiencing that kind of commitment as a normal way of life. We live in a land where churches are everywhere, yet faithful attendance no longer seems to be a priority for many people—even people who claim to be born-again. Among these, it seems that church attendance is viewed as an extra-curricular activity to participate in when convenient, rather than a vitally important aspect of one's spiritual well-being.

Perhaps this lack of commitment comes from a lack of understanding. I sure hope so. I believe that if a person truly discovers what God intended for

them in a local church setting, it will change their priorities and make them eager for the next worship service or activity.

*Christ Gave his life
on the cross to Birth the
New Testament Church.*

I truly pray that this session will open your understanding to the kind of church that Christ intended when he gave his life on the cross to bring the New Testament church into existence. With that understanding, perhaps you will come to believe with all your heart that the local church should be at the center of your commitment to Jesus Christ.

TEXT: PSALM 84

For the choir director: A psalm of the descendants of Korah, to be accompanied by a stringed instrument.

- ¹ How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of Heaven's Armies.
- ² I long, yes, I faint with longing to enter the courts of the LORD. With my whole being, body and soul, I will shout joyfully to the living God.
- ³ Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow builds her nest and raises her young at a place near your altar, O LORD of Heaven's Armies, my King and my God!
- ⁴ What joy for those who can live in your house, always singing your praises.
(Interlude)
- ⁵ What joy for those whose strength comes from the LORD, who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
- ⁶ When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings.
- ⁷ They will continue to grow stronger, and each of them will appear before God in Jerusalem.
- ⁸ O LORD God of Heaven's Armies, hear my prayer. Listen, O God of Jacob.
(Interlude)
- ⁹ O God, look with favor upon the king, our shield! Show favor to the one you have anointed.
- ¹⁰ A single day in your courts is better than a thousand anywhere else! I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God than live the good life in the homes of the wicked.
- ¹¹ For the LORD God is our sun and our shield. He gives us grace and glory. The LORD will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right.
- ¹² O LORD of Heaven's Armies, what joy for those who trust in you.



SESSION 3: THE MEETING HOUSE OF GOD

Can you imagine what it would be like to live in a land where there was no church? Evidently the Psalmist, writing our text in Psalm 84, was in this type of situation. Due to circumstances beyond his control, he was unable to attend worship, because there was not a sanctuary where he was dwelling. In this Psalm, he affirms the importance of God’s house and expresses his sincere desire to once again meet God in worship and work alongside other believers.

Our text serves as a foundation for discussion of the importance of God’s house, launching us into some New Testament passages to form a better understanding of the New Testament Church and how it is beneficial to a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

I. An orientation to the Meeting House of God, or the local church.

A. The value of the church.

1. A two-fold definition of the term **church** should be considered.
 - a. There is the *Church Universal* (designated in this session by *Church* with a capital C) that includes all born-again believers who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, regardless of denomination. Often, the Scriptures refer to such as “the Church” or “the Body of Christ.”

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 – ¹²The human body has many parts,

but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. ¹³Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

- b. The *local church* is a visible assembly of this greater Church, where believers associate themselves in an accountable fashion for the purpose of knowing Christ and making Christ known.
2. Each local church represents the shared value of what Christ has invested in the Church.
 - a. Christ has given himself for the Church.
 - 1) Christ founded the Church.

Ephesians 5:25-26 – ²⁵For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her ²⁶to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word.
 - 2) Christ leads the Church.

Colossians 1:18 – Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything.
 - b. Christ has given of his heart to the Church:
 - 1) The Holy Spirit.

Acts 9:31 – The church then had peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and it became stronger as the believers lived in the fear of the Lord. And with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, it also grew in numbers.
 - 2) The Holy Scriptures.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 – ¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

- 3) Pastors and teachers to equip the Church.
Ephesians 4:12 – Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.
 - 4) Deacons and leaders to serve the Church
(read Acts 6:1-7).
 - 5) Talents for believers to use within the Church.
Ephesians 4:7 – However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ.
- c. Christ has commissioned the Church to continue his work on earth—his ministry.
Luke 19:10 – For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.
- John 20:21b – As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.

*Commissioned by Christ
...continuing his Work.*

ILLUSTRATION

Jesus often spoke of his mission in terms of planting and harvesting. Jesus came from heaven and planted the Seeds of salvation and healing—investing much in the good crop of souls that are still being born again. We are continuing to sow the Seed of God’s Word, and that Seed is still bringing forth a harvest—the souls of people being born again by God’s wondrous grace.

For the sake of illustration, let’s suppose for a moment that you were a farmer who had invested much in planting a large crop. Just before harvest,

you were seriously injured. After surgery, you were confined to a rehab center for 6-8 weeks for therapy and recovery. This made it completely impossible to harvest your crop, so you called in a favor. You asked a friend to kindly harvest the crop.

Well, let's suppose that friend went over to your farm, intending to reap the harvest, as agreed. Yet along the way, he or she got distracted by other things they felt they could do to help improve your farm. They repainted the barn, fixed up the house, and landscaped the yard—but never got around to getting in the crop. It all went to waste.

Can you imagine coming home to find the crop ruined in the field? As much as you would be thankful for your friend's kindness around the farm place, you would be very disappointed that he or she failed to accomplish the primary and most important task.

The purpose of Jesus' ministry was to reach the least, the lost, and the last. As you follow the life of Christ in the Gospels, you find Jesus reaching out to people everywhere. Then, Jesus gave his life so that all of us might be forgiven and reconciled to God! He was crucified on a cross, was buried and rose again—that is the Good News of salvation!

Before Jesus ascended back to heaven, he gave us "The Great Commission" (Matthew 28:19-20). We are to share the Good News and continue Jesus' work. The Church was organized for this express purpose.

That is what makes the Church so valuable. We are continuing Jesus ministry of redemption and reconciliation. Sadly, so many Christians have forgotten that mission and have become focused on many other things that may be important, but not nearly as important as reaching people with the Gospel.

Christ clearly told the Church to "**Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone**" (Mark 16:15). Isn't that mission the very reason that we participate in a local church? Isn't it true that we can do a much better job working together than working alone?



B. The vision of the local church.

1. We should go to church for the right reasons. The elements of a biblical vision for our local church were taught by the Apostle Paul:

Ephesians 4:11-13 – ¹¹Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹²Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. ¹³This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

Therefore, our local church is for the purpose of:

- a. **Believers *growing*** in their faith toward maturity.
 - b. **Believers *doing*** the work of the ministry.
2 Corinthians 4:5 – You see, we don't go around preaching about ourselves. We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we ourselves are your servants for Jesus' sake.
 - 1) We are witnesses for Christ.
 - 2) We are also working with Christ.
 - c. **Believers *building up*** each member.
 - 1) We need mutual encouragement and fellowship.
Galatians 6:2 – Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.
 - 2) We need unity around the common goals we share in Christ.
Ephesians 4:3 – Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.
 - d. **Believers *worshipping*** God and bringing honor to Christ.
2. If we are not careful, we might attend church for the wrong reasons.
 - a. Some come because it is good for business. They might ask, "What is in the church for me?"

- b. Some come because they enjoy a good show. They might ask, “I wonder if everyone is having a good time?”
 - c. Some come to keep up appearances. They might ask, “What does everyone think of me?”
 - d. Some come to preserve traditions. They might ask, “Why are we changing?”
3. Instead of attending church for the wrong reasons, we should be seeking to please Christ.
- a. We should be willing to set aside ourselves for the cause of Christ. Our question should be, **“What can I do to continue Jesus’ work?”**
 - b. We should be surrendered to Christ and his gospel. We should be asking ourselves, **“Are we ready for Jesus to return?”**
 - c. We should be growing in our faith. A good question is, **“Are we making progress in our Christian lives?”**
 - d. We should be seeking wisdom and power from Christ to continue his work. We should be asking, **“How can I learn more of Christ so that I may be more effective in serving others?”**

II. The operation of the Meeting House of God, or the local church.

- A. Once we have a biblical vision in mind, we are then able to understand the local church’s vocation, often referred to as its mission.
- Ephesians 4:14-16 – ¹⁴Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. 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. ¹⁶He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

This text gives us a four-fold mission as a local church of the living Christ. Our goals should be:

1. **Providing a stable environment** for believers to grow in the faith of Jesus Christ.
2 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.
2. **Establishing a testimony** for the Lord by living out our faith in our day-to-day lives.
3. **Seeking to please Christ** in everything we do.
4. **Reaching out to our community** with the love of Christ in both word *and* deed, seeking to include others in our fellowship.

B. The mission of the church has always been accomplished by the participation of volunteers.

Philippians 2:2 – Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

1. Volunteers in mission together, “agreeing wholeheartedly” about the goals above.
2. Volunteers motivated by love for each other.
3. Volunteers working together with a mind of humility.
4. Volunteers never losing sight of our purpose to carry on Jesus’ work.

III. The officers discussed in the Bible for the Meeting House of God, or the local church.

Please Note: Treasurers, trustees, teachers, moderators, chairpersons, committee members—these are some of the many leaders within the local church. All of these positions are *very* important to the smooth operation of a local church. In addition to the leaders of a local

church, leadership positions at the district and/or denominational level are also *vital* to the health and support of local congregations.

With that said, we must be clear that many of these positions have been created by churches and/or denominations in order to organize and operate within a cultural context. Not to say that these officers and leaders are not biblical—that is not the case at all. [1 Corinthians 14:40](#) instructs us to “[be sure that everything is done properly and in order.](#)” The polity of the church, or its organizational methodology that calls upon various leaders to take responsibility in well-defined ways, ensures an orderly organization.

For the sake of this Bible study, however, we are going to focus on the two leadership positions that the New Testament has clearly defined for us: the Pastor and the Deacons or Deaconesses. These officers, operating according to God’s intent, are necessary for a local church to function properly.

- A. The Scripture gives us a two-sided picture of the pastor’s position, using three titles to describe the function of the office.
 - 1. The administrative function of the pastor is described by the following two titles:
 - a. *Elder* – This speaks of the spiritual authority given to the pastor by nature of the position and calling of God.
[1 Timothy 5:17](#) – [Elders who do their work well should be respected and paid well, especially those who work hard at both preaching and teaching.](#)
 - 1) The title of “Elder” is not expressive of physical age, but denotes one who has been brought to a place of leadership in the local church by the selection and calling of God.
 - 2) Further, this title “Elder” emphasizes the anointing of the Holy Spirit.
[Acts 20:28](#) – [So guard yourselves and God’s people. Feed and shepherd God’s flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders.](#)

- b. *Bishop* – This speaks of the practical function God has given the pastor in relationship to the church.
 - 1) The title “bishop” could also be translated “overseer” or “manager.”
 - 2) Administratively, the pastor has the responsibility to God to see that the physical affairs of the church are managed properly.
- 2. The ministerial function of the pastor is described by the title “Shepherd” or “Pastor.”
 - a. *Pastor* – This speaks of the spiritual gift of a shepherd’s heart, or that of what we commonly refer to as the heart of a pastor.
 - b. This spiritual gift is the enablement of the Holy Spirit for the pastor to be able to shepherd, or care for, the flock of God.
- B. The other office of the local church described in Scripture is that of deacon or deaconess.

1 Timothy 3:13 – Those who do well as deacons will be rewarded with respect from others and will have increased confidence in their faith in Christ Jesus.

 - 1. The Greek word for this office carries the idea of one who serves.¹ Deacons were appointed in Acts 6 for this purpose.
 - 2. The Deacon body serves the church alongside the Pastor to help bring unity and harmony within the local church.
 - 3. The Deacon body should be men and women of complete dedication to Christ’s work.

IN CONCLUSION

I like the sign that I see sometimes on church signs: “CH_ _CH... What is missing? UR!” There are a lot of people who are missing when the church assembles—many of them are professing believers in Christ. What is the problem? Why are they not in church? When I have asked questions like these of Christians who are out of church, many times they have talked about various difficulties they have experienced with people who are in church. They talk about hypocrites in the church, they talk about power struggles, they talk about people taking advantage of them, pastors who have disappointed them, and so forth.

*People Disappoint,
but Christ will Never fail us.*

These things happen, but I want you to see a common theme in what these folks have said. These people have lost sight of Christ and the real reasons we have been called by Christ to be part of the church assembled. Believe me, I have been there as well, so I don't judge anyone. Even so, I am grateful for those who have continually pointed me to Christ. People disappoint, but Christ will never fail us.

If you have lost faith in the church, would you look carefully at Hebrews 12:1-4 in your Bible? The only way that we can stay faithful to serving Christ in the local church is by “[keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith](#)” (Hebrews 12:2).

IN SUMMARY

1. **Every born-again believer should belong to a local church that is operating according to God's design.**

Acts 2:47b – And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

2. Every church member should volunteer to help accomplish the mission of the church.

Hebrews 10:24 – Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.

3. Every church member should be faithful to attend as many of the services/activities as possible.

Hebrews 10:25 – And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

The place where we meet God, our local church, is a possible place of spiritual blessing for your life as well. If Christ is calling you to attend, we would like to invite you to come—and even consider joining our church. This will be a mutual blessing. You will be blessed because you have made a commitment to Jesus through a local church. But also, your presence will be a blessing to us—we would certainly love to have you.

Even so, if our church is not the place where Christ would have you to attend, we pray that God will guide you to a local church that will be the focal point of your commitment to Jesus Christ. The important thing is to find a place where you can assemble with God's people. The church is not the physical building or location, but it is the people of God assembled for the purposes we have discussed in this session. The Apostle Paul reminds us, “[We] are members of God's family. Together, we are his house” (from Ephesians 2:19-20). When you are not present, someone in the family of God is missing, and the church suffers from your absence.

Don't give up, there is a wonderful church family out there somewhere, just waiting for you! It will be a wonderful place where you can serve Jesus and feel right at home.

ENDNOTES

¹ Strong, NT:1249: diakonos (dee-ak'-on-os); probably from an obsolete diako (to run on errands; compare NT:1377); an attendant, i.e. (genitive case) a waiter (at table or in other menial duties); specially, a Christian teacher and pastor (technically, a deacon or deaconess).



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. **The author mentioned a four-fold vision of the local church. Based upon these four things, please write a vision statement for the church where you would want to belong.**
2. **Some people say that you don't have to go to church in order to worship God. Is that true? Is there any reason that we should actually be part of a church assembly? Why not just watch church on TV? Please explain your answer.**
3. **Please discuss what is most important to you about your relationship with a pastor.**
4. **If you could change one thing about the church(es) you have been associated with, what would it be? Please explain your idea.**
5. **What would you say to a person who has dropped out of church because of some disappointment they encountered at church? How would you encourage them to get involved again?**

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

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Photo 1: “Photography of Waterfalls between Trees,” May 16, 2017, by Rifqi Ramadhan from Yogyakarta, Indonesia on Pexels.

Photo 2: “Shallow Focus Photography of Water Splash,” Bhubaneswar, India, June 30, 2018, by Sourav Mishra 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!