



# Welcome to the culture of Christ: an environment filled with rich appreciation for the ways of God!

*The Christ Culture* describes the ways of God experienced among us as a transforming presence. This book brings clarity to the most important concepts of Christianity and shines light on some of the most unappreciated aspects of our faith walk. It affirms God as our heavenly Father who wants to dwell in our midst today, rather than as a someday Judge or eventual King.

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## 1. The Way of Life Develops Us

Life is the journey God designed to birth and grow offspring. How we view God and what we think about Him affect every area of our life. It is in the fellowship of God's presence that we get to know our heavenly Father and begin to understand the character, attitude, and personality of His heart.

- 1. Why did God create the material realm?** As a place to birth His kids... An atmosphere for parenting His offspring... What aspect of the physical realm do you appreciate the most? The least?
- 2. In Genesis 1:26 God refers to Himself as “us” and “our.” What is He referring to?** Personalities of God... Father: our parent... Jesus Christ: our example son... Holy Spirit presence... Angels... Even us?
- 3. God declared His will for us in humanity's beginning. What is it?** His image and likeness... His reflective resemblance... As His offspring... And as siblings... Do you sometimes feel you fall short? Why?
- 4. What did Jesus identify as the primary message of Scripture?** To teach us to love God and one another... Relationship... When did he do this? Discuss 2 Corinthians 13:11.
- 5. What does the acronym CAP stand for?** Character, attitude, and personality... What is it about us that is able to reflect and resemble our Father? How would you describe your own personal CAP?
- 6. Consider how the following verses help you reflectively resemble your heavenly Father:** Micah 6:8; Philippians 4:4-8; 1 Thess. 5:16-18; Matthew 7:12.
- 7. What do you think Scripture means when it speaks of the “ways of God”?** The methods, systems, and processes God uses to deal with us... How do you feel you best reflect the ways of God?
- 8. How did Moses seek to know the ways of God? In what respect?** Experience insightful fellowship... Know God as friend... Face-to-face fellowship with God...
- 9. Who can know, understand, and walk in the ways of God?** All who seek... Are we seeking? What kind of people do you think struggle the most with walking in the ways of God?
- 10. Compare our seeking miracles with seeking our heavenly Father's fellowship.** Do we seek gifts or Giver? To learn of Him or to get physical healing and material realm stuff? Have you ever felt the Lord withheld a miracle to show you something more important?
- 11. Is it important to view life as a developmental process? Why or why not?** God's still forming us... An ongoing process... Is anyone a solid reflective resemblance of God? We realize we can do better and keep trying... Helps us have patience with ourselves and with others...
- 12. Discuss the ways you co-labor with God to develop His offspring (1 Corinthians 3:9).** Is each child one of God's offspring? Parenting His children... What faith roots do we provide our children? As the many member body of Christ... What of our cultural and racial differences? Teaches to know God and be godly... How loving and encouraging are we? Do our actions agree?

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### **2. The Way of Salvation Transforms Us**

The choice our first parents made in the Garden to ignore God's guidance resulted in deadly effects. The ill effects complicate our ability to grow into the men and women we are created to be. Salvation is God's provision to free us from our deathly lifestyles and return us into the fellowship of His presence. In the culture of Christ, we are increasingly transformed into maturing children who reflect and resemble our heavenly Father.

- 1. What perception brought humanity's separation from God?** I am as God... Our submission to God's Fatherly advice died... Understanding became tougher... Who initiated it?
- 2. What are the similarities between the Prodigal Son and humanity's initial separation from God?** Who initiated the separation? Man... Who tends to maintain it? Man... Us... Have you ever been or known a someone like the prodigal? How close to home was it?
- 3. Consider how these verses speak to the issue of you accepting God's guiding presence: Eph. 5:14; Rom. 8:1-2; Luke 15:24, 32.**
- 4. Moses and Jesus were "representative" saviors. Who actually provides our salvation?** God our Creator... Our heavenly Father...
- 5. What does our heavenly Father "save" you from?** Ourselves... Death's reign, influence... Bondage to separation's way... (See John 17:15.) Mention something the Father saved you from that changed your life dramatically.
- 6. Consider how the salvation God provides is not reserved for someday or for the next life.** God's way of living on the earth... We are to receive and adapt eternal life perspectives... What area of your life changed immediately when you began to pursue the way of salvation?
- 7. The Old Testament example of salvation illustrates three stages of salvation. What are they?** 1) Delivering releases... 2) Transitional adjustments... 3) Maturing lifestyles... In different areas of life... Seasons...
- 8. Focusing on the second stage, what have saving transitions done for you?** Restores fellowship... Shares God's insights... Teaches God's ways... Are salvation's benefits for today?
- 9. Which perceptions might be hindering your personal transition into maturity?** I'm not worthy or good enough... I said yes once, that's it... We are saved for heaven... I can't hear God... You or society owes me... I don't want to change... Are we seeking and learning to live by God's ways?
- 10. Is it important to see salvation as a transforming process? Why or why not?** We are not finished... An ongoing forming... Why do we put off the old as we accept the new? Is God interested in our supposed sinless life or our willingness to lean on Him and learn of Him?
- 11. Discuss what Scripture really means by being "born again."** "Again": as from above... "Born": an event that starts growing processes... Series of progressions... Ongoing maturing transitions... Are the transitions similar to three stages of salvation? When did you first become aware that you experienced a new birth?
- 12. Are these good phrases: "I'm saved," "Are you saved?" "When were you saved?" Why not?** Indicates salvation is a one-time experience... Suggests an event... What could be better phrases? How is your relationship with God? What is God doing in your life? What are you hearing God say to you?
- 13. Consider how these insights help you better know God and grow to reflect Him.**

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### **3. The Way of Forgiveness Restores Us**

God is the embodiment of love. Love defines who He is and guides all His actions. Our heavenly Father's love for His offspring is so full that He forgives us without reserve. Forgiveness is His open invitation for us to repent and be restored into the fellowship of His presence. It is to the degree we accept God's forgiveness that we find release from our bondage to error and are able to partake of His guidance in the culture of Christ.

- 1. What motivates God to forgive His offspring?** His love for us... As a gift to His kids...
- 2. From God's perspective, when was your sin issue resolved?** Before the world began... From our perspective—as we repent... Do you have a personal sense that your sin is forgiven?
- 3. What words does God use in Exodus 20:5 and 34:6 to describe His forgiving nature?** Showing lovingkindness, compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, forgives...
- 4. How does God's forgiveness compare to His leaning toward justice?** Forgiveness 500 times greater... much stronger... Does forgiveness override any apparent anger? Are you a person who easily forgives?
- 5. How can God, who knows everything, forget your sin?** A paradox... God chooses to not hold account... His Fatherly love makes our sin irrelevant to Him...
- 6. What did Isaiah and John identify as the primary reason God forgives?** His own sake... Knows we are growing... He does not beat Himself up over our shortcomings...
- 7. What is the primary reason God sends judgment upon His offspring and children?** Correct waywardness... Teach to do right... When does correction appear to be rough? As we refuse...
- 8. What removed the Prodigal Son from his father?** Desire to self-rule... To live without father's insight and direction... As in Garden of Eden... Have you ever felt that your bad actions caused a rift between you and another person?
- 9. Was forgiveness in the Prodigal's father before he heard the son repent?** Yes... It was expressed before he heard the son repent... As God has already forgiven...
- 10. Does God's forgiving action require your repentance? Why or why not?** While enemies—we are reconciled to God (Romans 5:6-10)... The adulterous woman (John 8:1-11)... Before we know our need... God freely forgives... Our turning from error is evidence of repentance...
- 11. How does Scripture define death?** Separation... Lost... Out of fellowship... In trespasses... Not together... Can't see face-to-face... Is there someone close to you who is "dead" though they are living?
- 12. What expressions of God's love add defining depth to His forgiving nature?** Grace... Mercy... Loving-kindness... Compassion... Mention two ways you have experienced God's mercy and grace.
- 13. How do these insights help you better know God and follow Him in the culture of Christ?**

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### **4. The Way of Repentance Releases Us**

Separation from God's fellowship is what produces our deadly lifestyles. When we repent (accept responsibility for error and turn from it), God's forgiving grace and mercy comes to assist our desire to change behavior. Our lack of repentance keeps us from receiving the full benefits of His loving forgiveness. In the culture of Christ we learn to become people who are humble and quick to repent.

- 1. When Adam and Eve erred, how did they respond to the presence of God?** Covered up and hid... Became fearful... Blamed the other... Do we tend to "excuse and accuse" as well? As a child, did you ever hide from your parents after committing an offense? Please describe.
- 2. Read Psalms 7:12-16 and consider the five degrading conditions of a lack of repentance.** Self-protecting... Why is God's face hidden?
- 3. Wanting self-rule produced a separation that Scripture calls death. What needs restoring?** Our submissive fellowship with God... Is separation the real problem or our lack of repentance?
- 4. Why were Adam and Eve removed from the Garden of Eden?** They were unrepentant... God's Fatherly love limited their ability to eat of the Tree of Life as unrepentants...
- 5. What keeps you from seeing the face of God and partaking of the Tree of Life (Isaiah 59:2)?** God's anger, His inability to tolerate sin... OR our lack of repentance... Are we the ones hiding? Is there an area that you know you really should deal with but are struggling with it?
- 6. Discuss the factors in Ezekiel 18:26-27, 30-32 that describe the activity called repentance.** Turns from and casts away our error... Practices right behavior... Makes or renews our hearts...
- 7. What is the difference between asking for forgiveness and repenting?** We ask to dodge correction or we change... Repentance involves our turning from error... Have you ever said you were sorry but hadn't really repented? What was the outcome?
- 8. If God has already forgiven, why do we need to repent?** To receive what is given... To remain recipients of God's enabling grace, which helps us improve...
- 9. Why are people so hesitant to repent?** Pride... Offerings and sacrifices rather than change... Fear of condemnation or judgment... Hide... Do you understand that repentance means a change in attitude or behavior? Is there something in your life you are hanging on to?
- 10. Read Acts 17:30; 26:20; 3:19-10 and discuss the "times" of ignorance and of refreshing.** Ignorance: thinking sacrifice is needed... Refreshing: releases into God's restoring presence...
- 11. Is repenting closely linked to the kingdom reign of God? Why or why not?** Way we enter His governing presence... How we continue to experience His guiding influence...
- 12. Does God want you to just repent or become a humble person who is repentant?** Jesus accepted responsibility for our error... We can accept responsibility for relational strain with others... What do you think the difference would mean to you personally?
- 13. How can your repentant attitude encourage right behavior in others?** Release them from condemnation... Humility instead of arrogance in you... Be examples of God's forgiving nature... Give an example of how your repentance had a positive effect on another person.

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### **5. The Way of Change Adjusts Us**

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. While He never changes, we must. History is the record of God making, molding, and refining us as maturing children. God not only creates and births us into existence, He wants to assist our development. Our growth process is easier when we embrace the changes He encourages. In the culture of Christ, we become adjustable and learn to be better reflections and resemblances of God's heart.

**1. Review chapters 1-4 and discuss how “process” is a core value in the culture of Christ.**

In Ch. 1, we saw that life is the process God uses to birth His offspring into reality, to grow and develop us. In Ch. 2 we found salvation is the process God uses to transform us from mere offspring into developing children. In Ch. 3 we realized forgiveness is God's open invitation for us to enter His fellowship. In Ch. 4 our focus turned toward our response to God and how our repentant attitude and activity open to us the fuller benefits of God's forgiving love. Is everything God does in our lives progressive? Does development follow every beginning? How is anything that begins actually established?

**2. Describe the dual characteristics which Scripture speaks of as “the creative process” (to create and to make).** To create: forethought, plan, intention, design... To make: develop, form, grow, make it so

**3. Consider the Genesis account of man's creation. Did it include a plan, a making and reforming?** Formed body, infused spirit, then soul emerges... Then, a cutting and forming of Eve... Many over time...

**4. Is anyone created, born, or reborn into maturity without a developmental process? Why or why not?** Appears in a moment but needs to grow/process and establish... Discuss 1 Corinthians 3:9; Ephesians 4:15-16.

**5. What is the big difference in God's perspective of change and your perspective?** God is and changes not... But He causes change... We grow and our perceptions develop... We are processed... Is change easy for you or do you find it difficult? Explain.

**6. Growing and developing offspring are constantly changing.** The only constant in this life is change... How well are we submitting to our heavenly Father's lead, guidance? Who are your agents of change? Does their influence encourage stabilizing change?

**7. How is God's design and intention for you illustrated in Scripture?** Jesus as our Elder Brother (Romans 8:29); Jesus as the image and likeness (reflective resemblance)... (Colossians 1:15-18)...

**8. Consider what the Scripture means by being “born again.” Is it an event, a process, or both?** An event may begin the ongoing process... Do we really believe it's a process? Can you describe the event that began your own born again experience?

**9. Why does Colossians 3:10-13 speak of your new self in past, present, and future tenses?** Process of establishing what has begun... Ongoing...

**10. How do you respond when someone offers you suggestions for change? Do you resist, become defensive, or welcome the advice? Explain.** Intimidated... Defensive... That's just the way I am... Stubbornly refuse... Slow to accept... Excited...

**11. What would happen if you quit changing and adjusting? What does inaction generally produce?** Stagnation... We lose improvement... Hardness... Invite tough times... Is it survival of the fittest or of the most adaptable?



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### **6. The Way of Balance Strengthens Us**

A greater truth exists beyond the partial truth of separation. Balance speaks of a truth that dwells above and beyond division. As we embrace the One who dwells above our separations and receive His insights, we are strengthened and stabilized by eternal perspectives. The Prince of Peace reigns in lives that gravitate toward the flexibility maintained in balance. In the culture of Christ, our perspective about life and one another becomes more balanced and godly.

- 1. When you view variables as contrasting values, how do you tend to react or respond?** Defensive... Argumentative... Judgmental...
- 2. What are good ways to describe balance?** Adjusting influence between differences... Fluid, flexible state... A stabilizing position... A greater value... Are you a balanced person? In what ways?
- 3. Compare the two perspectives: “contrast” and “complement.”** Exclusive or inclusive... “Or” vs. “and”... Is gray bad? (In art, gray adds depth to most any color.) How do marriages thrive? As give and take compliments... Practicing balance... Has there ever been a situation where you made a deliberate choice between contrasting or complementing a difference of opinion with another person? What did you do?
- 4. Discuss how balance is different from compromise.** Compromise maintains position... Balance accepts contributing values... Which is more of a win-lose or a win-win approach?
- 5. Separations can be helpful and hurtful. Discuss the difference between godly influence and another’s influence.** A contrast perspective tends to destroy... A complementary perspective tends to improve and allow life to flourish...
- 6. Which perspective dominates your attitude and influences you more: contrast or complement?** Do you consider yourself a debater or a peacemaker? Why? In marriage... On job... Toward each other...
- 7. What are some of the different life roles and seasons that can affect your balance?** Childhood... Adulthood... Marriage... Parenthood... In sickness... In difficult times...
- 8. Can full truth reside in any issue or created thing?** The full truth dwells in God, who is above all... Variables are made to complement... As “and” not “or”... Can the full truth dwell in any of us?
- 9. What can a complementary, balanced approach toward people and ideas produce in you?** Less tension... More tolerant of others... More humility... More flexibility... Less self-centered...
- 10. Do weaker members of families have something of value to contribute?** Who are they? Youth... Weak in faith... Not so spiritual... How do you improve as you lend support?
- 11. How can a balanced perspective make you stronger?** Strength is not in our self... God infuses strength... We experience a greater value in us... Stability... Mention a time in your life when you felt that expressing balance was a better choice than asserting you were right.
- 12. How can you discern what is or may be a balancing complement (people, idea, theology)?** Draws us closer to God... Brings peace and rest... Does balance tend to divide us or bring enrichment?
- 13. Discuss examples of how a balanced approach creates a greater life experience and how a divisive approach produces pain and suffering.** Recall an experience when you were hurt because of an argument with someone close to you.
- 14. How can we become more mature expressions of God? Discuss Eph. 5:1, 15-20; Col. 3:12-16.**

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### **7. The Way of Interaction Matures Us**

We are birthed to live and grow in families and communities. The quality of our interaction with God and with each other as family greatly affects the quality of our maturing development. The central theme and purpose of Scripture is achieved when we lovingly interact with God and with each other. In the culture of Christ, we develop the desire and skill to live out the greatest commandment: to fully love God and one another.

- 1. The first “not good” in Scripture speaks of what relational condition (Genesis 2:18)?** Alone... Separated... Without “like” type of interaction...
- 2. Did the woman’s “helper” designation mean the man was not a helper as well?** No... Husbands too... (The Hebrew for helper means counterpart, mate, in front of, in sight of, opposite to.) Do you feel that men or women are more capable? Explain.
- 3. What are some of the “Nod Effects” you might experience when you reject God and His ways?** Unwise decisions... Separation... Loneliness... Depression... Have you experienced a Nod Effect recently? Describe it.
- 4. What did Jesus identify as the central theme of Scripture?** Relational (love God and one another)... Teaches us to love God and each other... Love requires proper give and take interaction...
- 5. How did Jesus demonstrate interactive love for “one another”?** Gave His life for us... Read Philippians 2:1-4. What is perfect love? Read Luke 6:27-36. Is our loving interaction just for or toward believers? Read Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:5; 1 Timothy 1:1.
- 6. Consider the deterioration of interaction that came during our human beginnings with Adam, Eve, and Cain.** Eve was deceived... Adam clearly rebels... Cain gets mad and kills...
- 7. When is weakness considered to be strength?** When we interact with God... When we allow others to contribute... We experience better give and take... Have you ever had an experience when you felt spiritually weak but somehow God used you anyway?
- 8. Does God see you as an individual or as an interactive participant?** Both... More as participants... As members of God’s family... Do you tend to be a loner or are you a joiner? Please elaborate.
- 9. Discuss how interaction helps your maturing process.** We contribute and receive from others... We lend value and receive... Thankfulness... Experience balance...
- 10. Compare what life is like when you interact with God and when you exclude Him.** Inspiration to improve comes from God... Communism and socialism exclude... We become so much more as children in training... Do you find things go better when you interact with God? Explain.
- 11. Discuss how “serving God” compares with “interacting with God as a friend.”** Service vs. friendship... Know what God is doing vs. know why and what He seeks to accomplish...
- 12. Consider how these insights can help you know God and hear Him speak to you in the culture of Christ.**

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### **8. The Way of Forgiving Commissions Us**

God wants us to be people who forgive like He forgives, without reserve or condemnation. Our forgiving activity invites God's healing grace and mercy into our situation and circumstance. When we forgive offenders, we function as godly invitations to repent. In the culture of Christ we learn to forgive as a means of restoring right relationship with God and with one another. God gives each of us this ministry of reconciliation.

- 1. What are the two maintenance factors that are attached to God's restoring forgiveness?** We change our ways... We forgive others as God forgives us...
- 2. Can you receive forgiveness and then lose it? How can this be?** Yes... As God does, we freely forgive... We receive... We lose if we return to error... And if we do not freely forgive...
- 3. What holds you captive when you do not forgive?** Our feelings of anger, bitterness, anxiety, stress, even cancers... Does God or our offender bind us? No... Is there someone whom you need to forgive but you find it difficult to do so?
- 4. What do you do: a) if an offense was not intended, or b) if your offender repents before God but you don't forgive them?** We bind ourselves to ill side effects... We are stuck in a pit of hurt... Irritations... Stress of not letting go... What if you loan \$50, and they don't repay (maybe they forgot), and you don't forgive? Who actually suffers?
- 5. Who benefited from Joseph's forgiving way of life?** Joseph... His brothers... His nation... All surrounding nations... Everyone... Read Hebrews 12:14-15.
- 6. Why should you forgive even when it is not requested?** So we don't suffer further from ill effects... Remember Joseph... Jesus to crucifiers... God to us... Can you think of an example of when you did so?
- 7. How do you know you are forgiving someone as God forgives?** You are not angry, bitter, or want retribution... even 7 x 70—a process... Speak comfort to the offender... Pray for their good...
- 8. How do you respond to people whom you believe are in error?** Condemn and convict... Forgive... Holy Spirit convicts, not us, John 16:7-11... In one particular situation, did you respond in humility or indignantly?
- 9. Can you repent in the midst of conflict? What if you are not in the wrong?** What did Jesus do on Calvary? What of a brother's irritation, Matthew 5:23?
- 10. Which view of God influences your view of Him most? Do you fear or respectfully trust Him? Why?** Are we fearful? Do we create fear in others? To what degree do we trust? Are we kind to others?
- 11. What about forgiving yourself? Should we feel a need to forgive ourselves?** Not a scriptural concept... No biblical example to indicate such... To forgive self is man's approach toward forgiveness... When we need to fully accept God's forgiveness and realize our repentance means we are forgiven... Is there something you've done for which you are having a hard time believing God can forgive you?
- 12. What does Scripture identify as our primary ministry to others?** To forgive... Invite repentance... Be ambassadors and proclaim... Is it better to scare or invite into the kingdom?
- 13. Consider how these insights help you to better forgive others and draw people to God-in-Christ.**



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### **In Conclusion**

Our heavenly Father loves every one of His human kids and desires to have personal fellowship with each of us. God wants to lead us through life's journey and teach us as a loving Father. He longs to reveal His heart and show us how to properly be His reflective resemblance (image and likeness) in each situation and circumstance we encounter.

*Life is our process of development. Salvation transforms us as God's forgiveness restores us from condemnation and encourages our releasing repentance. This enables us to enter the processes of change, which allows us to find the strength in balance. Then we can partake of maturing interaction in each of the situations and circumstances we encounter, as we inspire and influence others.*

Participants in the culture of Christ partake of the fellowship of our heavenly Father and of one another. We learn to live by the ways of God. One way to articulate our primary purpose is to say:

My purpose in life is to love God and learn to be an expression of His heart. I want to reflect as a mirror and resemble as a son, God's heart—His character, attitude, and personality (CAP) to everyone within my reach.

We hope your time with *The Christ Culture* has moved you along life's journey toward maturity but don't stop here. Continue to learn and grow into better reflective resemblances of our heavenly Father. You will find the other two books in this series, *The Fellowship of His Presence* and *Created To Relate* very helpful.