

The Divine Outline

By Henry H. Mitchell, 2025

Jesus at the Door

Jesus says, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” (*Revelation 3:20 NIV*)

We don't have to go looking for him. He is at all times available to us and present, if we will respond to his knock and let him into our selves and our lives.

Four Points, or Two

When Jesus eats with us, over our lifelong meal, in the heart of our house, he shares, counsels, and helps us live God's Plan. There is a general version of that Plan, and it applies to all people. Christian writers often describe it in a few points or steps, such as:

- 1. I realize I am in need.**
- 2. I submit myself to Jesus, and am born again.**
- 3. I receive the Holy Spirit.**
- 4. I mature, with the fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit.**

Although God's Plan can be simply stated, the actual working of it for an individual can have infinite variations according to the person's needs and circumstances. One example is that these four points are usually described as sequential; however, an individual may experience some of them overlapped. I did.

I do not disagree at all with the four points. It all added up to that for me. But in my own mind and memory I tend to simplify it down to these two parts:

- 1. I sincerely, absolutely, and entirely turn my life over to Jesus to lead me and protect me.**
- 2. I never stop learning and practicing 2-way God-communications, in order to live his Plan in matters large and small.**

It is like marriage. You meet your spouse at the altar and make a sincere and absolute commitment to each other. And then you keep the conversation with your spouse going for a lifetime – that's where and when the miracles happen. Marriage is ideally a picture of Jesus's relationship with us, and *vice versa* (see *MysteryOfMarriage.com*).

I Am In Need

A cry for spiritual help may originate with a quiet nagging feeling, or in the midst of full-blown life-and-death disasters, or anything in between.

This Child's Troubles

Severe childhood illnesses almost killed me at age six. During one, my fever was off-the-charts in brain-damage territory, and the family doctor did not hospitalize me, said I would never survive there, but tasked my parents with cool-bathing me. In the midst of this, I slipped into awful blackness in which I felt totally paralyzed, with the only light that eventually appeared being around a figure who was sadistically manipulating me. I thought I was dead. Thankfully, I wasn't, and returned to the conscious world. I decided the figure must have been the devil himself.

Later, while I was bedridden in the middle of a day, my vision began rapidly tunneling, darkness closing down. I was absolutely sure I was dying and called out to God, saying I wanted to live. An indescribably comforting voice answered, telling me that not only would I live, but I would have a long life. My windpipe had been blocked by a cough drop, and simultaneously with the sound of the voice it dislodged and I could breathe again.

At age 7, I received from my parents at Christmas my first complete Bible, leather-bound with concordance and my name embossed in gold. I still have it. Thinking it was like all other books, I followed the household rule of reading it through, cover to cover. It took the rest of the holidays and all my spare time well into January. It had a profound influence on me which is still in progress.

The following spring, after my eighth birthday, with my father I attended a revival meeting at a local Methodist church. As soon as the altar call was given and "Just As I Am" began to be sung by the congregation, I raced to the altar. Having been through the events of the previous two years, I wanted whatever Jesus has to offer in protection, guidance, and reservation of an eternal home in Heaven. Please, God, no more darkness for me!

At that point my theology was not thorough, and that is surely OK. I had cried to God the Father to help me live. Now I was crying out to Jesus the Son as my forever Good Shepherd. Looking back, I am not sure how to correlate the four points to these events. I surely felt a need. Perhaps I was born again. Or maybe that second step would wait. In the meantime, I carried forward an indelible memory of having made a spiritual connection to a very compassionate God who was readily available and responsive to me.

This Young Adult's Troubles

After the altar visit, there was not much more spiritual learning. The expectation was that I would be a church member (my family were all members) and actively support the chosen church (we did). I had pressure from several directions, even at that first altar visit, to commit to becoming a clergyman. That disturbed me. I was only eight! And I already was confused about the spiritual purposes of church buildings and clergy and programs such as we had. I saw little, if any, resemblance to the activities of Jesus and the apostles recorded in the New Testament.

It seemed as though church was considered to be like choosing a favorite team. I was a Yankees fan. I owned a Mickey Mantle glove and a Mickey Mantle bat (I still do). But that didn't make me a major leaguer. I wanted something more from spiritual life, beyond watching from a seat, listening on the radio, or watching TV. I didn't expect more than that from the Yankees, but surely there is more than that from God.

Life proceeded, and with intensity. At age 26, I found myself, much to my surprise, back in our home community with my wife Patricia. I (we) had planned a very normal life subdivided as to marriage and careers: academic, military, and professional, with sufficient financial comfort. Each portion was off to a promising start, then forces beyond our control wrecked every aspect, at times violently. Due to all the other turmoil and disappointments, now even our marriage was endangered. I had the mental picture of a neatly coiled rope atop a high scaffold. Somehow the end of it slipped over the edge, the rope uncoiled and fell faster and faster, until I was left desperately grasping at only the final frayed end of it.

Through it all, I kept the memories of my God-connection close. I assumed God was with us, and he certainly kept us alive when circumstances pointed otherwise. I kept assuming that if every day and at every turn I made the best choice available to us, we would find our way. Maybe I could grab the elusive end of that rope and pull it all back up.

During that summer of 1975 Patricia found and read the 1974 book *Something More* by Catherine Marshall. She insisted that I read it, too. Then the young adult Sunday school class at our church studied it together. Perhaps Catherine Marshall was pointing to the Something More that Patricia and I had been seeking separately and together for the past eighteen years.

One afternoon Patricia and I were driving through the countryside in the tiny community of Weal, just west of our home in Chatham, Virginia. As we drove, we were discussing intensely Marshall's book, especially chapters 10 and 13, "The Roof on the House" and "Run for the Strong Tower." Patricia was saying that the writer was insisting that, for protection and direction, we really needed to turn our lives over to Jesus, not continue to direct everything under our own control. I insisted, "But we need to be the captains of our own destiny. We need to be responsible people. That works. Just look at us!" Patricia was dead silent. We drove on while I mulled what I had just said. Then I stated, "You know, she's right."

I surrendered in theory at that moment, but I did not take any specific action until November 11. On that date Graham Kerr, "The Galloping Gourmet," took over Phil Donahue's TV talk show from the dumbfounded Phil, gave his and his wife Treena's Christian testimony, and issued an altar call. Patricia and I dropped to our knees in the freezing-cold ramshackle kitchen of our newly-purchased ancient house and gave our lives to Jesus.

So in the summer and fall of 1975 I had recognized a need. Maybe I was born again. Patricia felt a huge internal release at that point, probably to the extent of not only being born again but also experiencing step 3, receiving the Holy Spirit. I'm not sure where on the chart I fit at that moment. I will discuss the topic further below.

Hidden Truth, Hidden Need

When things go wrong, it is easy to recognize external factors. We want protection from sickness, natural disasters, economic crashes, thieves, murderers, and all else that come like the devil himself to "kill, steal, and destroy." We need help from Jesus, who says, "I have come that you may have life, and more abundantly." (See *John* 10:10.)

We live in a fallen world. But we ourselves are fallen, too. I had trouble recognizing that. We hide it from ourselves. I had such good intentions, how could I be bad? The truth is that we are in a sinful state of being, genetically cursed as a result of our ancestors Adam and Eve's rebellion. (In *John* 8:44, Jesus

shocked the very-religious Pharisees by telling them, “You belong to your father, the devil”) That curse we are born with can only be reversed with a new spiritual birth.

I Am Born Again

In *John* 3:3 Jesus explained to the Pharisee and ruling council member Nicodemus, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” Paul detailed in *Romans* 10:9-10, “If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” John wrote (*1 John* 5:1), “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.”

Because I Know Who Jesus Is

Although it isn't always taught this way (but my fast childhood reading pointed me firmly in this direction), much of the New Testament (really, just about all) is dedicated to the question of who Jesus is – God come to earth to dwell among us, the Christ/Messiah/Lord, described in great detail (in the writings we call the Old Testament) hundreds of years before he was born in Bethlehem. The precision of the prophetic descriptions of his birth, ministry, death, and resurrection, in detail, in time, and in place, could obviously never be fulfilled by a mortal human. It is mathematically as well as physically impossible. (See *EverythingHangsOnThis.com*.)

Because Jesus is Available to Me Here and Now

That Rock-solid fact (see *Matthew* 16: 13-18) is the rock-solid basis of our faith. Emotions and even decisions on our part can waffle and waver. So our faith cannot rest solely on our own feelings and promises. Our faith rests on who he is. We recognize him as the Lord of creation and history, and also the Lord of our own life. And since he is raised from the dead and is alive and available right now, he can be the active and present Lord of our own life. When we believe and can talk about this certainty of his identity and our submission to his living presence, that establishes the salvation which Paul and John describe above. We are born again, new people. Paul, speaking again, says, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (*2 Corinthians* 5:17)

I Receive the Holy Spirit

I Gained Life; Now I Need the Power to Live It

Some writers call this “the Second Touch,” because it is in addition to the initial born-again experience. We need to invite and receive the internal guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. This is the third person of our three-in-one God. It is the Holy Spirit who lives in us and guides us and empowers us in our spiritual maturation and walk. It is through the Holy Spirit that God's plans are executed in infinite ways in every place and time. No human program, no matter how well-intentioned, can accomplish this feat.

In *John* 14: 26 Jesus promised, “. . . the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” In *Luke* 24:49 and *Acts* 1:8, after his resurrection, Jesus instructed his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”

I find it helpful to think this way: God the Father is author of our personal design and **plan**; Jesus the Son is our **defense**, granting us forgiveness of sin and eternal life; and the Holy Spirit is our **offense**, enabling us to accomplish our assignments in life. I personally believe we are created to reflect that three-fold character of God: we are created in God's image. (See *ThreePartHeart.com*.)

One Couple, Two Different Experiences

As I mentioned above, Patricia sensed a great release and freedom after our November 11, 1975 event. It was so sublime for her, that I suspect that she made steps 2 and 3 at the same time, being born again plus receiving the indwelling Holy Spirit. She had unreservedly submitted her life to Jesus, and was deeply changed. I did not share that positive feeling. For the next nine months I battled a sense of gloom, and for the first (and only) time in my life I had a foul language problem and could not seem to restrain it. I decided this must be an example of Jesus's parable of the sower and the seed: the birds (the devil) had come to steal the seed (the Word) that had been planted in me. (See *Matthew* 13: 1-23.)

I was determined to resist, but I was at the same time also resisting the message of Catherine Marshall's third chapter, “Forgiveness: The Aughts and the Anys.” It is based on Jesus's instruction in *Mark* 11:25 – “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

Patricia and I had encountered a long list of evil acts against us in those past few years, and I didn't see how I could ever bring myself to forgive. Events kept building, our finances totally collapsed in spite of our best efforts, and on a Saturday afternoon in August of 1976 I was frightened by the intensity of my rage. I was also thankful that the objects of my anger were too far away for me to reach them physically. But the thought of what I might do drove me to close myself up in a room in our house and cry out to God, with the same intensity as when I was sick 21 years earlier.

This time I was not afraid of dying, I was afraid of killing. I said, “Lord, I can't hold this by myself any more. I turn these people and these situations totally over to you to take care of as you see fit. And just like in *Mark* 11:25 I ask you to forgive my sins.” At that instant I heard no words, but a sensation started at my head and proceeded slowly down through my body and out through my feet. I can only describe it as an overwhelming pouring of hot honey. I never experienced anything like that before or since. I felt totally clean. My pent-up rage was gone. My conversation became proper.

With the rush of events that then began happening, I believe that hot honey flow confirmed my born-again status I had tried to establish in 1957 and 1975, and added a baptism (or receiving, or filling) of the Holy Spirit. I suspect that these events require both deep sincerity along with obedience to what we know internally we must do. This is where a life of miracles begins. The first miracle inside us, and our awareness of how profound it is, opens our eyes and availability to participate in other miracles.

Because of the above account, and countless descriptions I have heard from others, I would never tell another person how they will experience a new birth and a filling of the Holy Spirit. The infinite Lord customizes our experience depending on what we need and what he wants for us.

Fruit and Gifts

As a result of entering and walking in a life of the Spirit, we receive both fruit of the Spirit and gifts of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit should become apparent at all times for all who allow the Spirit to mature us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (See *Galatians* 5:22-23.) We can measure our own maturity as we note to what extent we are allowing ourselves to exhibit these traits.

The gifts of the Spirit may work through any of us who allow the Spirit to mature us. They are not magic. They do not display our own power. We cannot exhibit them at our time of choosing and by our own will. They display the love and power of God, and become evident at the times and places he chooses. In my experience, they usually occur quietly and without any fanfare, to fill a deep and sincere need. They are immediately evident to the attentive observer. Others present may not be so attentive, or may be unaware of the need being met, and miss the occurrences entirely. The real gifts circumvent the laws of nature and far exceed mathematical probability, leaving the recipients reverent, awestruck, and deeply grateful. Unfortunately, sometimes Christian practitioners attempt to force the gifts and end up imitating them in some way. In sharp contrast to the real gifts, imitation gifts may at best be well-meaning, at worst self-serving, and always unhelpful.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit include wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues (*I Corinthians* 12: 8-10).

I Mature

The work of the Holy Spirit is the *Something* I was missing in my early Christian walk. My wife Patricia and I together searched for several tumultuous years for spiritual answers regarding both life and death. We even stumbled into experiences in the negative spiritual world. (See our article “We Met Ghosts; We Prefer Angels.”)

Truths That Are Hard to Find

It is sad that most churches emphasize the teaching of the written Word (the Bible) or emotional worship, or sometimes both. Both can be very good. But most churches do not teach and encourage a personal – not institutional – walk in the constant presence of, and submission to, the Holy Spirit. (See *AConstantPresence.com*.) The omission may occur because the work of the Holy Spirit is miraculous and surprising, therefore disruptive to the plans of human organizations. (See *OurExtensionCords.com*.)

I am forever grateful to Catherine Marshall for detailing the spiritual aspects of Christianity in her book *Something More*. Without the internal workings of the Holy Spirit, we cannot mature in our faith and Christian life. We will be forever infants, stunted, undeveloped.

It is impossible to map the maturing process of a Christian. It is not a matter of classrooms and degrees. Surprisingly, it is not even a matter of how much one learns about the Bible. It is, at the least, a matter of how much one applies what one learns from the Bible.

Don't Just Shop, Build

We could think of Bible study as being like a huge building supply big-box store, such as Lowe's or Home Depot. Every department, every aisle, every rack, every shelf is packed with products, tools, and appliances one could use to build a home and make it more enjoyable and more useful. But if we spend all our time and energy walking the aisles of the store, studying the boxes and labels, asking advice of the employees, and never have a home and never fix a home, then what good is it? It could be that all the Lord is pointing out to us at the moment is the equivalent of a leaky faucet. Rather than wandering the aisles (of Bible study) looking at all the wondrous things available, maybe we should buy the appropriate replacement faucet cartridge (take the appropriate principle), go home, install it, and use it. And then ask what the Lord wants us to do next. In my case, as a 27-year-old I needed to, first, forgive and ask forgiveness. Then there were plenty more internal projects needed, to be revealed one thing at a time. They are still happening.

One thing at a time, we will see the miraculous results, often not what we expected, but ultimately better than we could have planned, and we will learn to sense the presence and direction of the Holy Spirit. Manna will appear from Heaven. Angels will quietly work. (See *AConstantPresence.com*.) We will bear the fruit of the Spirit. We will exhibit the gifts of the Spirit. Above all, we will become avenues through which God's love becomes evident in the world. (See *I Corinthians 13*.)

We are not perfect. We do not always bear perfect fruit. But we are being perfected, if we allow it.