

GPS FOR LIFE

OUR HEARTS BURNED WITHIN
AS HE OPENED THE SCRIPTURES



BRANDY A COFFEE MARKS, D.R.S.

GPS for Life:

GUIDANCE OF A PERSONAL SAVIOR

Brandy Ann Coffee Marks

Published by Doctrine of the Cross

Vancouver WA 98661

www.dotcross.org

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 0-9841522-5-3

Coffee Marks, Brandy A

GPS: Guidance of a Personal Savior

1st ed. – Vancouver WA: Doctrine of the Cross

ISBN: 0-9841522-5-3



INTRODUCTION

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor... to heal the brokenhearted, to declare freedom to the captives, to open the eyes of the blind, and to set at liberty the oppressed;" (Luke 4:18)

There came a day when I desperately needed to be set free however turning to Jesus was not my first but my last choice. Determined to live life on my own terms, I soon found myself in a whole lot of trouble.

"Coffee, you have a visitor" the guard shouts. Surprised, I wonder who could be visiting (Attorney's usually visit us outside the cells). Curious to see, I walk to the window in the wall. It opens to another world, then, I see my mother on the other side. She's not alone but her face is all I see and the tears come. I want to reach out and feel her arms holding me, but the walls hold us back, safe from contact. Later I'm in court –where I've been at least a hundred times over the past six months –but this time, I get to go home!

On April 10, 1989, thirty years to-the-day after my release at age seventeen, again I leave jail. Back in 1959, I just wanted to get out and stay out of jail but two years earlier I had rejected God and became an atheist. Nothing about *that* had changed in 1959 yet by 1989 the change I was seeking was more radical than merely staying out of jail. My life was hell and I wanted freedom from *all* the misery. Thus, I went looking for and found not only freedom in Jesus Christ, but the love and acceptance I had been seeking.

GPS for Life was written to share the lessons I learned in becoming a disciple of Christ. As such, it offers a place for new believers to start and learn about the Lord and grow in his Word as a disciple. Not only for new Christians, but for anyone who desires to renew their relationship with God, and anyone else enslaved by whatever controls their heart, mind, and emotions.

To be set free, in your search of answers there are four stages:

- 1) Awaken: You awaken to what it is you want or need to change in order to have the life you desire. Having a friend, mentor, counselor or sponsor to confront faulty thinking and keep you focused is vital.
- 2) Awkward: Learning new ways is uncomfortable. In time, with practice, like learning to walk or talk, using the skills becomes less awkward.
- 3) Awareness: Practicing new skills and with increased awareness, we begin to make better choices thus, we become a more mature person.
- 4) Assurance: As our mental, emotional, and spiritual maturity develops this new way becomes as natural as walking and talking. Developing maturity takes time, commitment and knowledge of Scripture.

MEDITATION

We learn best by hearing and meditating upon the Word. King David learned that meditating on Scripture had one great benefit, among many.

"Your word I have hid in my heart *so as not to sin against you*" (Ps 119:11).

Thus, we learn Scripture so thoroughly and with such good understanding that it makes it *nearly* impossible to sin against God.

HOW TO MEDITATE

- Read the verse and consider it
- Write it down and look at it often
- Speak it out loud to yourself, repeatedly
- Discuss the Word, post it, and teach it at home

"You will carefully teach [the Scriptures] to your children [or anyone else who will listen], talk of them when you sit in your house, walk by the way, lie down, and rise up" (Deut 6:7)

So turn off the TV. Put down your magazine. Grab your Bible. Go for a walk. Trust that God will meet you along the way.

"Draw near to me," God says "and I will be near to you" (James 4:8). God wants to be near, *no matter who you are*; so he meets you where you are.

Meditating on his Word, we gain knowledge and our lives are changed.

You will not watch the same television and may even turn it off and your interests and friends will change as you draw closer to God. Your attitude and behavior will change so much that everyone who sees you will know the love of God is in you. Some will admire you and some will hate you and some may want to know how you did it so they can have their lives, homes, and marriages changed. So, study to be a true worker in Christ not needing to be ashamed, but rightly discerning the Word of Truth (2Ti 2:15).

The following eight chapters take you on this eight step life-altering journey to become a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. First is Faith, our hope in Christ and the foundation of all that we do.
2. Jesus was born for a purpose. We each have a god-given purpose, thus, awareness of your personal purpose and its pursuit is needed.
3. Jesus believed in his god-given purpose. Our purpose or dream may seem impossible, at times, but believing in God makes all things possible.
4. From the start, Jesus verbally confessed his purpose to the people and we must also confess our faith in Christ and faith in our purpose.
5. Having thus begun our journey, discipline is needed to achieve our goals and to be a delight to the Lord so we are truly blessed.
6. Now you will learn to express yourself in love in your attitude, behavior and communication, so that others can see the love of God in you.
7. Jesus was without sin and therefore, he did not need to be forgiven, but we cannot say the same and must learn to forgive and be forgiven.
8. The Grace of God goes with us as we share Jesus' message as disciples. What this means for each person differs, and that understanding is vital so you follow God's guidance throughout your journey.



You may be wondering how you can apply these eight steps within your life. On the next page, I will share a brief understanding of the eight steps and their application to real life.

REAL LIFE

Here's how I apply these step in life. Shortly after inviting God into my life in 1989, I began to read a Bible. The first Scripture –one that I remember still today –was from Luke, and is known as the Song of Mary.

"You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what He said he would." (Luke 1:45)

I too hoped that if I believed God then he would fulfill his promise to me.

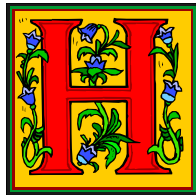
Hope [in Christ] is what saves us. If we already have what we hope for, there is no need to keep on hoping (Romans 8:24). But, anyone who responds by faith to a promise has hope in its fulfillment.

While this speaks of our hope in Jesus Christ, we can hope in anything else. For example, we hope that a certain dream will come true. In faith, then, we take the next step, which is to Aim for our dream or the next goal we desire. Of course, we also 'hope' that this is God's desire for our life because, then, we are all the more assured that it will come to pass. We Believe in God and trust that he gave us the dream or set us upon this path. Walking by faith, we now trust that he will fulfill it. If it does not happen then we have faith that God has another path for us to take, which he will reveal.

Having confidence that God's will is being done, we now Confess our faith in the fulfillment of our dream, and do so in our attitude, how we behave, and our communication, the words of our mouth. Thus, everything we think, say, and do is directed toward faith that God will fulfill our dream. However, we must also do our part to be a delight to God. Now we discipline our lives to achieve the goal, and express ourselves in love, so that others know the love of God is in us. Because we are human and imperfect, failure is inevitable. Therefore, Forgiveness becomes necessary.

We not only forgive others when they fail us, but because we have forgiven, we can go to God, and with a pure heart, ask his forgiveness for our failures. Finally, having completed these steps, as a disciple of Christ, we share the Grace of God with others and pass on Jesus' message of hope because we understand what having that in our life means for other people.

As you can see, this eight-step process helps to have a deeper more intimate relationship with God so that you have the kind of life you desire. Now that you know how, you can by faith pursue the dream. God bless.



HOPE A FOUNDATION OF FAITH

"You formed me in my mother's womb; I praise you for the wonderful way you created me. Everything you do is absolutely marvelous! I have complete faith that this is true" (Psalm 139:14)

The writer of this above psalm was no agnostic or doubter but knew the truth and the wonderful nature of God with absolute assurance and faith. From experience he knew that the Lord does amazing and marvelous things while completing his designs with and for us. If we are made so marvelously before we are born imagine that God does even more astounding things as he directs our path throughout the journey! A doubter and an agnostic for most of my life, as I read Scripture that changed as I developed a deep and profound relationship with Jesus Christ.

When I first began to read Scripture I didn't believe in anything but I *hoped* that the Word of God would show me a better way. For several years, I had tried various beliefs (witchcraft, astrology, astral projection, tarot cards, and a host of religions) but none offered anything of lasting value. However, in reading the story of Jesus Christ, his life, what he said, how he lived, and the way he loved people but more so, was his sacrifice –it was amazing –the Scriptures came alive for me as 'the truth' was revealed.

At first, my one goal was to find out who God was, and what He was all about. Reading the scriptures I finally found what I was looking for, absolute perfection.

While it is marvelous to imagine this, there are many who like me –or the person I use to be –who place their emphasis on education, money, and other pursuits rather than the pursuit of God and his will for their life. God however wants our lives to be spent in pursuit of him and his will so that the way we live our life glorifies him.

When Jesus began his ministry, after leaving the wilderness he began to teach and to heal, then, in the synagogue he faithfully stated his purpose. After Paul was struck blind, then had his eyes opened, and was baptized he immediately went about proclaiming the faith. So being chosen and now followers of Christ we too must proclaim or tell about our faith. Paul taught that as believers we must first proclaim the *faith*, then, grow in *knowledge* of the truth, which then is illustrated by our living *godly lives*.

Through this process, we learn and grow by sharing our faith and become mature in the faith rather than seeking after things of the world, which leads only to despair and hopelessness. One woman lamented_

Despair seeps in as I lay in the dark considering. College degrees, many talents and skills –a successful life – yet, it is an empty one. Nothing that I thought would bring peace has. I’ve tried everything I know how; what’s wrong with me; what’s missing?

These age old questions we all ask. How would you evaluate your life? What brings happiness? Do you look to your accomplishments to see how well you’ve done or to your relationship with God? Does your life show clear evidence of Christ? If you were to describe how you are living, and to what you are devoted what would it be - God or something else? If, like this person above, you have done everything you know how and did your best then nothing’s wrong with you. As to what’s missing ...

I once thought (education, power and prestige] gave me worth/value; now I see they are worthless because of what Christ has done for me. Everything is worthless when compared with the inestimable value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything, counting it all as garbage, just to gain Christ (Phi 3:7-8).

There is nothing wrong with having college degrees because knowledge and discernment bring wisdom, but faith in Jesus Christ is what gets us through life and the tough times. Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the basis of God’s promises, and though the world bring troubles yet Jesus said, “Take heart; for I have overcome the world!”

In the past, as an atheist, my choice when life became unbearable was to turn to drugs and suicide. Now these sinful ways have been replaced with faith in Christ when life is difficult and rather than fear and despair, I turn to Scripture to strengthen my faith.

So, you have a choice to either give into despair or be faithful to see God's purposes and plans fulfilled. Rather than doing as Israel did who wavered between the Lord's promises and pagan gods, turn to God. There will be many times when you are tempted to pursue things in life that promise pleasure, comfort, or security apart from God—God gave us freewill—yet if we want the good life, we must refuse and remain faithful:

“Wait on the Lord; have courage; he will strengthen your heart; wait, on the Lord!” (Psalm 27:14)

Yet sometimes it seems God takes forever. The Lord gave Abraham and Sarah a promise and they waited a long time for it (twenty-five years). They also tried to bring it to completion and paid for their faithlessness. In spite of their disobedience their dream came true as God promised for he always fulfills his promises.

God gave me a promise that I could barely wait to see fulfilled. But time moved on and the days passed and weeks became months then years, yet I wait – at times impatiently. However, I know that God is working all things together for the good of all concerned in its fulfillment. It's not just about me!

Waiting for God is not easy and our prayers may seem unanswered or that God does not understand our situation. Lamentations calls us to wait for the Lord *with hope* because God uses our waiting times to refresh, renew, and teach us. Reading Scripture that says to wait patiently sounds great and we idealize that in our minds but it's not always easy when we want a dream so much that we think we cannot live without it. However, God uses these waiting times to teach us lessons (Psalm 25:9). Rather than watching for the pot to boil, so to speak, spend time with God and his teachings and learn of his love and how to be patient.

Jesus commanded the people to love God with all their heart, mind and soul, and to love their neighbor as their self” (Luke 10:27); that's a whole lot of love! To know that God loves us, though we are sinners, and then wholeheartedly accept his love makes it easier to love others.

To realize God gave his only son as *a living sacrifice so our sins were forgiven* is monumental. But to know that Jesus *chose* the cross and to sacrifice his self out of love is even more astounding because of the sacrifice. Would you sacrifice a child or your own life for someone who repeatedly offended you?

The question is "do I love, even my enemy a sinner"; "am I willing to show this enemy love": and, "will I sacrifice my selfish desires to love them?"

Oh. It's easy to imagine this love. I myself love the sound of those words, but find that unquestioning obedience to God in loving even my enemies requires greater faith than I seem to possess at times. There are people and situations that I flat out rebel against when it comes to love! At least, until I read this Scripture, which forces me to reconsider my attitude.

"As the Father loved me, so have I loved you. Now trust in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is: Love each other as I have loved you." [No matter how stubborn, foolish, or sinful] (John 15:9-12)

Jesus made it clear. The Father loves the Son. The Son obeys the Father. God loves us therefore we obey God as did Jesus, by living as did Jesus. This is not an "I'll love you as long as you love me"; it is love without limits or expectations. Can you imagine putting aside all your expectations for a relationship? "I give 110% in this marriage" as you ruminate on the hurts, you complain "and I'm lucky to get half that back. It's not fair."

To genuinely know – deeply believe in our heart – God loves and always will love us no matter how foolish our behavior creates a loving heart and brings complete joy. Can you imagine that kind of love? Do you deeply believe this is true? To deeply believe is vastly different than having an intellectual knowledge of God's love from simply reading it. Who would not want to live in God's love? Faith alone makes this possible.

My journey can help you to learn and grow in the Lord. Yet these steps are meaningless without a relationship with God through knowledge of him and his ways and following in the footsteps of his son Jesus Christ.

Peter told people, "Everyone (believer and unbeliever, alike) should know for certain that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ". (Acts 2:36)

When those he taught asked, "what should we do?" (v37) Peter replied,

"Turn to God! Be baptized in Jesus name so your sins are forgiven, then he gives you the Holy Spirit who teaches all things; this is for everyone our Lord chooses" (v38-39).

"You did not choose me" God said. "I chose and sent you to produce fruit that will last. [When you do this] my Father will give whatever you ask in my name" (John 15:16). The fruit he speaks of is joy and peace of mind.

Consider this, are you at peace, and if not, are you ready to turn to God? Would you like to know all things and have a genuinely peaceful life? Wouldn't it be great to have a life of peace and contentment simply by believing in and trusting God? Better yet, is it not amazing that God has chosen you to have this kind of life? Do you hope this is true? It is!

So, if you ready to accept God and make Jesus your Lord and Savior then simply admit that you are a sinner and ask Jesus to come into your life. Instantly God forgives all your sins and though your sins are as scarlet he washes you whiter than snow (Isaiah 1:18). Now that God has called and you have chosen to follow, you may be wondering, "What's next?"



1. THOUGHT FOR TODAY

There are so many people here. But there is a man, standing separate from the rest. John turns toward him. He sees him too, among the reeds. Sunlight reflects off the water and plays over his face, light and shadows, the eyes, sparkling amber, flecked with gold. He lifts his hand in greeting and I see that John does know him. "Jesus", he exclaims. "It's been so long since I last saw him - "Eighteen years!" Then, John smiles and shakes his head in wonder, as Jesus moves toward him. He says to his disciples. "Look. There is the lamb of God."

Then face to face Jesus says, "Baptize me." But John seems confused and does not understand. "It is I who should be baptized by you" he said. But Jesus sinks into the waters and in a single moment John recalls all he heard about this man. Then, remembering Jesus beneath the water he slaps the surface and cries "Arise!" Jesus comes forth from the water and the heavens split and a dove of blinding whiteness alights on him. "This is my beloved Son" John hears "In whom I am well pleased" (John 1).

- | | | |
|---|------------|-----------|
| Do you believe John's story? | YES | NO |
| Do you know that Jesus is both Lord and Christ? | YES | NO |
| Have you accepted Christ as your Savior? | YES | NO |
| If not, what's holding you back? | | |
| Do you believe God has called you as his own child? | YES | NO |

As Napoleon was talking to a group of high-ranking officers, his horse got spooked and bolted. A quick-thinking private saw what was happening and went after the horse, returning it safely to Napoleon.

"Well done, *Captain*," said Napoleon upon his return.

The *private* saluted, and said, "Yes sir." He then went to the supply tent and got a captain's uniform, and moved into the officer's quarters.

He could have said, "Surely he didn't mean what he said. "Instead, he took Napoleon at his word and said, "Yes, sir" then acted on it.

The Lord calls us "Friend," All we need say is, "Yes!" then walk alongside him as his friend and companion. Are you a friend of Jesus? **YES** **NO**

What does it mean to you to be a friend of Jesus? Describe

THE WAY TO GOD

Once we make the choice to follow Jesus he showed the way by leaving his childhood home to begin his ministry [later his family followed him]. The books of Matthew and Luke tell the story of Jesus' childhood, his baptism, his wilderness journey, and his ministry as it unfolded. So too, each of us must leave our childhood, our immature self-seeking ways to become mature men and women of God - to be prepared for ministry. Jesus was in the wilderness a mere forty days while the Israelites were there forty years. Developing spiritual maturity, we see, takes time. How much time it takes depends upon each person and what they are willing to sacrifice.

Leaving our past, we enter the unknown. Often we are tempted to return to our former ways. Jesus was tempted just as the Israelites were, after leaving their bondage in Egypt. When tempted in the wilderness, Jesus overcame by relying solely on God's word; "Man does not live by bread alone" he said, "But by every word of God" (See Luke 4:4).

When entering the unknown on my journey to healing, I found a safe place to live, and avoided those who tempted me to return to that life. I read books on the Bible (Chuck Swindoll's 'Come Before Winter'), and bought a Bible. I focused my attention on knowing God by listening to pastors, and reading the Bible. In the process, I learned to discern the truth of man from that of Scripture. I gained understanding by looking up verses and reading commentaries; I studied the Word.

No one should blindly accept everything anyone else says. The Holy Bible is the only book that is the authoritative Word of God! Yes, it is difficult especially if you are not gifted as a student to learn by reading. However, there are tapes and CDs available, and books that can be downloaded can usually be listened to for those who learn best by hearing. Scripture does say that belief comes by hearing the Word. Start simple. Go to church and take a note pad with you. Write down the scripture references given and write whatever comes to mind, questions or comments.

If you want to know God and understand Scripture you will soon discover that is like getting to know anyone. Other people can tell you about God and you get some idea from their opinion. However opinions come with personal experiences and resulting presumptions. So, the way to really know God is to meet him yourself as he speaks through his Word. Once you gain certain wisdom and discernment and can separate the wheat from the chaff, so to speak, you will be able to discern biblical truth from other.

After Jesus' wilderness journey and after the 40 days and the temptations of Satan had ended, he set out to fulfill his life purpose. He first began to teach and heal and in the synagogue, boldly stated his life purpose: "the Holy Spirit anointed me," he read from Isaiah, "to proclaim the Gospel to *the* poor, heal the brokenhearted, deliver the captives, give new sight to *the* blind, and to set free those who are oppressed..." (Luke 4:19; Is 42:7). Thus Jesus committed himself outwardly to his purpose and fulfilled it living a life that was well-disciplined in complete obedience to God.

Jesus made it clear that to follow in his footsteps and to have God's grace in our lives and his promises fulfilled we must deny our selfish interests and take up our cross (Luke 9:23); be an example for others to follow. Our cross can be whatever challenge we face and in obedience to God, show our love towards others even our enemies in whatever we think, say or do - our attitude, behavior and communication.

As we follow in Jesus' footsteps, we learn that all things are acceptable but not all things are profitable. There is nothing wrong with a beer or a glass of wine occasionally. However, if you are not a disciplined person and you are unable to tell yourself 'no' after one or two beers, then the obvious choice for you may be abstinence.

Upon entering recovery from drug addiction I also stopped drinking alcohol. Then I began to have a glass of wine in the evening. Pretty soon I was having a glass of wine every night. One night I had a dream where I fell through the floor of an outhouse. Immersed in liquid poop to my neck, I was terrified and called for help. Instantly there was a ladder and I climbed out. I stopped drinking wine!

A funny story, yet true. Discipline is vital to a healthy life. Twenty years later, I live a more disciplined life and as a result, there are occasions when I drink. It took a long time to learn to say no to chocolates by the box however, I still love cheesecake; that's a work in progress!

When speaking of the successful athlete Paul referred to the person who was "wholly self-controlled" or "self-disciplined."

Those who compete ...are moderate in all things. [Athletes do it] to gain a perishable [trophy], [Christians do it] to gain an imperishable crown (1Corinthians 9:25).

So, we learn to live in moderation. We learn that we can have times of great joy or sorrow but those should not dominate our lives. Moderation may be

boring to some, but being undisciplined is not the answer either. To strive for continual highs or immersed in sadness or depression continually is sin.

To believe and obey God –that Jesus came so that we might have life –and a joyful one at that –we avoid the highs and lows of sin. Thus, in obedience to God we choose the life Jesus chose though that life at first takes extra effort to achieve through study, prayer, meditation, and making conscious choices to discipline or moderate our attitude, behavior and communication.

In spite of all our efforts, at time it seems we fail miserably. Like an infant learning to walk and talk, we fall down while learning to stand on our feet and stumble over words. Yet that too is part of the learning process.

WHERE IT ALL LEADS

In Genesis 46:1-7 we see Israel choosing to leave Canaan and go to Egypt. Yet it also shows that God wanted this to happen; he had plans for them and this bondage was part of the plan. While they did not realize the trip to Egypt would lead to bondage that is exactly what happened.

Can you imagine God allowed your bondage so you would return to him because he has a purpose and he is using this situation to get you to back on track or move you to another place, to pay attention? Of course, this means that God has a way to set you free too, just as he did the Israelites. Nonetheless, you have to be willing to call on God and when he answers, leave that dependent life you are living.

Leaving my addictions was not easy however, going to jail and losing my freedom made it easier. Yet it was harder to leave the man I had come to depend on. Leaving was a learning process that brought me a lot of grief before I finally trusted God's love, and gave up the man.

It was by God's power that the Israelites left Egypt, generations after they left Canaan. In their minds, they were likely Egyptian and did not want to leave, though they hated their slavery. We too love the *idea* of freedom, but as we leave our bondage we hunger for the quick fix that seems to make life more endurable be it drugs, sex, gambling, or any number of *things*.

One man described the experience of leaving as a deep depression, at first, followed by a tremendous euphoria that gave way to despondency. During this third phase, feeling downcast he was sorely tempted, but rather than return to his bondage, he asked himself, 'Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed?' He says to himself, as did David, 'Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God'. (Psalm 42:11)

OUR LIFE STYLE

Often our bondage is to whatever life-style we have become accustomed (anger, control, gambling, drugs, pornography, alcohol, even prison life) and we do not realize that our true life is with God in heaven. Jesus said “the Kingdom of Heaven is within” [if we just take hold of it]. Heaven is within our grasp but we must grab hold, refuse to look back, and move on toward or into the promised-land.

Like the man above, you may feel very depressed at first, then, find yourself extremely euphoric, feeling nothing can defeat you and re-enslave you. But that is when Satan will use his best resources to defeat you as you sink into a mire of misery and even despair of life itself. Nonetheless, like King David and this man you too can turn to God in your despair and find a way out.

If God does not lead you along the shortest path, follow him anyway and trust that he will lead you around unknown obstacles and always into ways that help. God doesn't always work in the way that seems best to us but goes a roundabout way. Like the Israelites God may take you on a longer route to avoid conflicts because he can see the end of your journey too, from the beginning so he knows the safest and best way. Trust him!



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