Introduction:

As born-again believers, we can live in the closeness of God every day of our lives. God is continually pouring out His love, joy, peace, revelation knowledge, and every other blessing. But, we can get to a point where we’re not receiving and “feel” like He has drifted away.

You are as close to God—as connected to God—as you believe, sense, comprehend, or understand that you are.

Romans 1:21 gives four ways that people progressively move away from God.

“When they knew God,
(1) they glorified him not as God,
(2) neither were thankful;
(3) but became vain in their imaginations,
(4) and their foolish heart was darkened.

This scripture contains four separate elements, or keys, that are involved in our perception of our closeness to God. The reverse, moving toward God, expressed positively, is:

1. Glorify God.
   Magnify God, have a high opinion or estimate. To esteem or value God and His promises.
2. Be thankful.
   Unthankfulness is in the same category of blasphemers and unholy and is expressed by murmuring and grumbling. Remembering what God has done in our lives helps us maintain our relationship with God.
3. Recognize the power of your imagination.

These four things listed in Romans 1:21 are progressive. First they quit thinking and talking about how great God is. When they quit valuing what God has done this leads to unthankfulness. Secondly they stopped thanking God for all His benefits to them. And then the third thing happens—their imaginations become vain. “Vain” means useless, non-productive so that their thoughts turned to useless ideas that produced no good.

I. Defining imagination.

- Your mind functions through imagination. You can’t do anything without imagination.
- Albert Einstein said, "Your imagination is your preview of life's coming attractions."
- One of the meanings of the word “imagination” in the Old Testament is “conception”.
  - Your imagination is the mental function where you can see things.
  - Without an imagination you would be totally noncreative and unproductive.
There are only two ways for a human to "see" something:

- physical vision through their eyes, or
- imagination.

Without imagination: man would be completely limited -- virtually robots. All human progress has been born out of imagination -- the ability to "see" things differently than they were.

The only way a human can see the past or the future unaided, is through their imagination. Memory uses the imagination. Much of our thinking, whether planning or "jumping to conclusions," involves our imagination. Fear and faith operate in the realm of imagination.

Many top athletes successfully use their imagination in training. Vividly imagining a successful action seems to be more effective in training than doing it physically. When we experience an event vividly in our imagination it is imprinted as an experience, even though we did not physically do it.

Children seem to naturally have active imaginations. As we grow older and become more "educated" we tend to use our imaginations less and less.

Everyone has used their imagination negatively by worrying. We should use the same process in a positive way, based on God's Word.

**Faith**

Seeing something by the "eye of faith" has to be the same as imagining it.

- The following three common statements express the same meaning.
  - "I can't see that happening."
  - "I can't imagine that happening."
  - "I can't understand how that could ever happen."

2 CORINTHIANS 4:18 NKJ

18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

How can you look at things which are not seen? Only by imagination.

- To the builder, his blueprint is his conception. First an idea, then a mental picture which he imagines, and then the drawn blueprint.
- The picture you imagine is the seed of something that will be born later from it.
- Imagination is your mental rehearsal before you act it out.
- Your conception is your ability to see things with your inner eyes instead of your outer eyes. You think in pictures.
If you think “dog” you don’t imagine or mentally see d-o-g. You see an image, a picture, of a dog. Your version of a dog will be different from my version of a dog. Our visions of a dog will be different based on our past experiences. And with my words I can change your picture—“dog”, “big dog”, “big black dog”, “mean big black dog.” With words your image of the dog changed, but you think in pictures. You probably have a picture of the house you grew up in. If I ask how many bedrooms did it have, you picture it. You haven’t just stored the technical information. If I ask directions to the airport, you picture your drive to there. You use your imagination constantly. Your imagination is the creative part of you. It’s the seed of your actions.

II. We all have imaginations.
Your imagination functions whether you are aware of it or not. In every situation you are imagining what is going to happen or how it will turn out. In your mind you are picturing what you are thinking about.

- You don’t get to chose whether you imagine or not.
- The only thing you get to chose is whether your imagination is working for you or against you.
  - If you quit glorifying or valuing who God is and what He has done, and if you quit praising Him, and being thankful to Him, then your imagination will instantly, automatically, start imagining your world without God—negative things instead of positive things.
    - You can’t control that.
    - Your imagination is a by product of where your focus is.
    - If you are remembering and valuing all the things God has done for you, thanking Him and praising Him, your imagination will start seeing things happen positively.

III. The importance and effects of a negative imagination.
Isaiah 40:26 "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things."
The people of God in Isaiah’s day had starved their imagination by looking on the face of idols, and Isaiah made them look up to God. He made them look beyond the natural. If you praise God and glorify Him a lot, your picture of Him will stay vivid and His promises will be real. But if you don’t think about Him, your thoughts and images will go North and become negative.

- The task of spiritual growth is bringing your imagination under your control.
  - What is your imagination looking on? Your own abilities, your money, your friends, your doctor.
  - Then your imagination of God is starved, and when you are up against difficulties you have no power.
• You see someone old and suffering and you will begin to imagine yourself like that some day. Someone your age dies and immediately you see yourself in a casket.
• Your natural imagination is very negative and will work against you bringing on doubt and fear.
  o Your image of others determines who you think they are.
  o Your image of yourself determines who you are.
    ▪ I used to think I was an introvert. But I began to see myself as a leader.
    ▪ When the Lord started telling me who I was in Christ Jesus, I started changing my image of myself.
• In Genesis 6:5 And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. A lot of our imaginations are negative and contrary to God’s Word.
  o God sees the imaginations of our hearts (Gen. 6:5). Also 1 Chronicles 28:9 And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts:
  o We just naturally see ourselves failing, sick, angry, bitter, rejected, unloved, poor
  o There is at least 6 times in the Old Testament that God brings judgment against people because of their imaginations.
• Much of what you see on TV leaves you with negative or evil images—imaginations.
  o These planted images are conceptions. When you get in the same situations you are tempted to give birth to that same image.
  o If you stay away from these imaginations and think more on God’s Word you will react with love, patience, joy, and peace. Isaiah 26:3 You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.
• Worry is a vivid imagination in the negative realm.

IV. The Word of God comes alive when you can picture what it’s talking about.
If you will start glorifying and magnifying God and remembering all the times He has pulled you out of the fire and thanking Him for all His promises, your image of Him, yourself and your future will change drastically.
• As you read God’s Word you enter data into your mind. But it is when you meditate on it that it forms a picture, an image, in your mind.
• When people who have read their Bibles all their life go to the Holy Lands, the Word becomes much more real. As they now read, they imagine what it was like back then.
• You have read about the blind, deaf and crippled being healed, But, when you see someone crippled suddenly become whole, you begin to see yourself being healed and it becomes a real possibility for you.
• Seeing something by the "eye of faith" has to be the same.
• The following three common statements express the same meaning.
  "I can see that happening."
  "I can imagine that happening."
  "I can understand how that could happen."
2 CORINTHIANS 4:18 NKJ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

- How can you look at things which are not seen? Only by imagination.
- Imagination is where the conception takes place. If you cannot see it on the inside, you won’t ever see it on the outside.
- The Word of God can replace those images that you have received through your eyes.
- When you can imagine God blessing you, prospering you, healing you, you will glorify God and He will be real and close to you.
  - Peter knew the importance of remembering what God has done. In 2 Peter 1:12
    Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. In verse 15 Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. And then again in 3:1 This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:
  - You can stir yourself up through memory. A memory can stir you powerfully. I can hear a song that was sung at my son’s funeral and it stir up the memory of my sitting in that auditorium when we were singing that song, with my 19 year old son lying up front in a casket.
- King David recognized the value of imagination. After David generously contributed over a billion dollars to the future building of the temple from his own personal treasury, and all the Israelites gave several billion, David glorified God for blessing them so much that they could give this much freely. He then emphasized the importance that they keep this memory in their imagination.
  - 1 Chronicles 28:9-18 As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee. O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee:
- In Mark 6 the multitude following Jesus needed to be feed. The apostles couldn’t imagine how they could feed so many. But Jesus could imagine that those five loaves of bread and two little fish could feed them all. Verse 41 says, And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them;
  - “he looked up” is from a word (anablepō) that means “to look again”. Jesus remember how God worked.
  - We need to imagine how God can increase our health, our money, our influence, or in what ever area we have need.
- What ever you have is more than enough if you can see what God has promised instead of seeing with your physical eyes.
  - Take what the Word of God says about who you are and what God has given you and paint a picture of the same power that raised Jesus from the dead
dwelling inside of you and get pregnant with what God has for you. You will see yourself succeeding instead of failing.

- If you don’t remember what God has promised and what God has already done for you and put value on all this and have a thankful heart; if you don’t imagine yourself blessed, you are going to be one negative person.

- Your imagination is important. You don’t get to choose whether it functions. It’s a matter of choosing whether it blesses you or curses you.

Look in Hebrews 11. Right in verse 1, faith is defined as "... evidence of things not seen
Now if it is something you can't see, then it has to deal with the realm of the imagination. People would say we were believing something that is just imaginary if it couldn't be seen.

In fact the dictionary says imagine means: “to form a mental image of something not present.” What could more closely describe the Bible definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1!

Throughout the 11th chapter, time and time again, you can see that people in this chapter had used their imagination; they had "seen" what was not visible to others. Faith is linked with imagination like wet is linked with water. The two are inseparable.

When you read of Abraham in Genesis 15:5 where God told him to "count the stars . . . So shall your descendants be," if God wasn't telling Abraham to use his imagination, I don't know what He was telling Him to do!

So be Biblical; be spiritual. Take what God has said in His Word, and imagine it that way in your life, and God will be so much closer to you.