



**Virginia P. Porter**

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Introduction

W

elcome to our strand of pearls! By way of introduction, I would like to tell you a little about my heart for discipling women and give you the backstory on how this book came to be. Have you ever had one of those defining moments when you know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that you have heard a word from God? If you have, then you will understand what I am about to share with you. This one moment would greatly influence the direction of my life. In December of 1998, the Lord, through His Word, impressed three things clearly on my heart. His message was basically this: “Ginny, I want you to sit at my feet daily, listening to my Word and knowing me intimately. I want you to impart all that I have entrusted to you into the lives of your three children. And I want you to invest these truths into the lives of women.”

Timing is more important to God than time. Almost twenty years passed before I fully understood what the Lord was telling me in 1998. The vision was revealed in stages. Now I know what He meant when He said, “Teach your children and women my Word.” He was telling me to “make disciples.”

Once I received the vision and embraced the Great Commission as my personal responsibility, I started with a few faithful women in my local church. Very slowly and inconspicuously, the Lord added and then multiplied. Each person who has caught the vision is impacting her own sphere of influence. By God’s design, our experiences and cultures are diverse.

It is hard to believe that after eight years this interdependent network of disciple-makers has multiplied to reach women from at least twelve ethnic groups. It’s amazing and God-sized; it’s the strategy of Jesus—the Great Commission! Who else but God could reach the world through a handful of women? To echo Paul, “I will not dare to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me” or this ministry (Romans 15:18). To Christ alone be the glory!

This book that you hold in your hand is a collection of Biblical lessons: the “pearls of wisdom” we teach everywhere we go. From the Catalyst training conferences on four continents to our churches and homes, this is what we teach. Disciple-making is not just a program or something we do. It’s a lifestyle. It is who we are as Christ followers.

Our goal, therefore, is to define the concept of Biblical discipleship and give you a simple plan to follow. Thematic in nature, you could think of this book in terms of a guide to get you started in discipleship. That said, it does not matter if you are educated or uneducated or whether you are a novice to Bible study or have your Ph.D. in theology.

While some of these lessons include stories that may be very familiar to you, others contain some meatier truths that you might learn if you attend seminary. But don’t worry. As a middle- aged wife, mother and grandmother, I promise that regardless of your current station, every lesson contains truth that is relevant to a woman’s life. Making disciples is done through intentional, intimate, accountable, and transparent relationships.

Making disciples the way Jesus made disciples is organic. As I have just shared with you, disciple- making, as it pertains to women, is “homegrown.” Just like the parable of the tiny mustard seed that grows into a large tree, all of us have the potential to produce multitudes of disciples in God’s family tree if we are faithful and teachable (Matthew 13:31-32). The main thing is that God’s truth does not stop with you! Let me say that again—the plan is that you learn it and teach others. Believer, you were chosen, appointed, and commissioned by the Lord Jesus to bear much fruit (John 15:16). By investing your life in a few others and teaching them to do the same, the nations will be impacted by the gospel. God’s plan to reach the entire world is encapsulated in His last command: “Make disciples of all nations.”

We are humbled and grateful to give you the tools you will need to obey the Great Commission. May He multiply your seed to the end of the earth and to the end of time until His kingdom comes!



How to Use This Book

A Guide for Leaders and Disciple-Makers

T

he purpose of this book is to equip women with a simple, reproducible plan to disciple other women. Our premise is that there are five phases of spiritual growth, and we have developed a strategy and a series of lessons, which when used in consecutive order, move us forward in this spiritual growth process.

The lessons that compose this curriculum are divided into groups which correspond to the five phases. At the end of each lesson, there will be a set of questions for personal application and discussion. Whether you are learning with one person or a group of people, start in Phase One of the curriculum lessons.

Getting Started

Step One: Begin by reading two pivotal lessons in the curriculum.

As group leader, you should begin by reading two of the lessons found in this book: “Cast the Vision: God’s Great Commission” and “The Five Phases of Spiritual Growth.” These lessons focus on the importance, principles, and methods of Biblical disciple-making. You will find these lessons in Phase Five of the curriculum. It may seem strange for the leader to begin the process by reading the last chapters. But this reveals the very nature of the disciple-making process. There must be a starting place, and whatever method you use, it must be reproducible. As the disciple-maker, you are at phase five. After completing the process, your disciple should be in phase five and ready to begin producing disciples themselves (Luke 6:40). Hence, the placement of the critical chapters and concepts at the end. Please do not skip this step.

Step Two: Choose your Bible.

Every lesson is rooted and grounded in the Word of God. Therefore, you need a Bible, or at least, a Bible application such as these excellent resources: Blue Letter Bible, Net Bible.org or Bible.is by Faith Comes by Hearing.

Step Three: Find someone to join you.

This study is meant to be done in small groups of women. Jesus chose a group of twelve, and then He divided the twelve into three groups of four. Although, even if your group is just a community of two when you have the Holy Spirit joining you, you will have a perfect number.

The questions at the end of each week’s lesson are there for personal application and for getting better acquainted with one another. Most of the questions do not require a right or wrong answer. They are meant to stimulate conversation about what has been learned. Once you find someone to join you, we have included a Commitment Form that is simply an agreement between the two (or more) of you that you are in this together. You will find this form in the appendix.

Step Four: Fill out the Spiritual Survey.

Next, you will fill out the Spiritual Growth Survey Forms. The purpose of these forms is to help you get to know each other and to get an idea of where each person in the group is on their spiritual journey. These forms are in the appendix of this book.

After the surveys are completed and the results are determined, decide if there are any additional lessons that will meet the needs of the individuals in your group. Keep in mind that you are building relationships, and this takes time. Whether you are teaching a large group or an individual, try to cover some of the lessons from each of the five phases. For example, a ten-week class will have two lessons from each phase.

**Additional Tips:**

We recommend doing the following things prior to teaching a lesson:

* Study and pray over the lesson and each person one week prior to teaching it.
* Review the “Digging Deeper” passages throughout each lesson. They can provide further insight into the main points.
* You don’t have to have every lesson memorized to start this process; you only need to be one lesson ahead of the ones you teach.
* Some of the lessons include personal testimonies; feel free to use them or replace them with your own stories and examples. However, you may want to make your own outlines for each lesson.

It brings us great joy to know that your love for the Lord Jesus has prompted your obedience to the Great Commission. As you “Go make disciples of all nations,” we want you to know we are here to offer you prayer support and practical help in this process. Please go to catalystmissions.org and visit the Women’s Training page. There, you will find a “contact us” page to send us a request.

You will also find some audio and video lessons. Disciple-making always begins with those closest to us, in our homes. This is the setting for Biblical, life-on-life disciple-making. For this reason, all the audio and video lessons are recorded live in our homes and churches in the United States, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Bolivia.

Finally, as you live the lifestyle of Jesus—fishing for men and making disciples—He has made you an incredible promise. Based upon the authority of His last words in the Great Commission, you can know for certain that His power, provisions, and, most importantly, His presence will be your guide every step of the way!



The Essential Elements in the Process

Key Passage

Matthew 28:18-20

Introduction

O

ur aim for this first session is to give you an overview of what we are all about, how to use this discipling tool and the scriptural basis that governs Catalyst Missions Women’s Discipleship. We esteem God’s Word and it is the foundation of this ministry. Every lesson is a pearl of wisdom and filled with Biblical truth. You may be wondering if this is a Bible study. Absolutely, it is. Yet, you will discover that it is more than that.

The heartbeat of this book, and methodology behind it, comes from the Lord Jesus’ last command to His disciples – past, present and future. It’s called the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Because of the weightiness of His final instructions, and the implications of His mission, it is of the utmost importance that we clearly understand Jesus’ intent when He said, “Go make disciples of all nations.”

How did Jesus make disciples? His approach was brilliant, yet, intuitively simple. He invested three full years of His public ministry into 12 ordinary uneducated men. Read Acts 4:13. Jesus was their seminary, His Word their curriculum, and over the three-year period, He did life with them (John 3:22). They spent the equivalent of approximately 26,000 hours. Make no mistake about it, Jesus was not spending His time on them, He was investing His life in them. There is a big difference.

Time is a precious commodity we can’t afford to waste. Our goal is to leverage our time by committing at least one-year together, learning these Biblical truths, and sharing our lives with one another. However, knowing that our busy lives will not afford us the luxury of 52 weeks of meetings, and, allowing for holidays and such, we have divided this book into 35 weeks of sessions.

Lesson Learned From Luke

To get us off on the right foot, here’s lesson one. Luke, the writer of two books of the Bible, was a meticulous note taker. How do we know this? It is obvious when we read the introduction to his gospel in Luke 1:1-4. This labor of love was not for his own scholarship. He wrote it to share the gospel with a Roman official named Theophilus. The second personal letter, the book of Acts, was a discipling letter to his new brother in Christ (Acts 1:1-8). Luke hadn’t a clue that his personal letters to Theophilus would make it into the cannon of the Bible. He was inspired by the Holy Spirit and took great pains in researching and interviewing every living eyewitness so that he could accurately compile this information for one person. Think about the treasure trove of truth these two books contain. Imagine all we would miss if he had never written these letters to Theophilus? My point is this: a disciple of Jesus Christ is one who learns God’s truth so that they can give it away. That is not possible if you can’t remember what you hear. A principle tool for learning is as follows: We can remember roughly twenty percent of what we hear, forty percent of what we read, eighty percent of what we write, but we retain almost one-hundred percent of what we consistently repeat. So, always come prepared to take notes.

Eight Essential Elements

The following highlighted alliterated words comprise the eight essential elements that Catalyst Missions Women’s Discipleship employs in the disciple-making process.

The process begins with a small group of women who connect on a weekly basis to put into practice Acts 2:42, 46. This includes, teaching, prayer, and a time of fellowship around a simple meal that everyone contributes to. (The meal is optional.) Jesus divided His 12 into 3 groups of 4. The group leaders were Simon Peter, Philip and James, the son of Alphaeus (Mark 3:13-18). When a group grows to 10-12 you should split and start another group of four.

Disciple-making takes place in the context of accountable relationships where we share two things. God’s timeless Truth and our lives (1 Thessalonians 2:5-7-14; 2 Timothy 3:10-11). To develop this kind of relationship, we must get to know one another. That is one purpose for the Spiritual Survey. Fill out the form this week and discuss your results with your group next time you meet.

This requires mutual commitment on the part of all involved (Acts 16:1-3). At the end of this session, if you are ready, fill out the **Commitment** to Discipling Relationship form in the back of your book.

As noted in Luke’s example, the hallmarks of true discipleship are humility and teachability. It’s a two-way street. Although Luke was an educated doctor, everything he imparted to Theophilus, he first learned from those who had been with Jesus. They discipled Luke. Read Ecclesiastes 4:13; Proverbs 1:5-7, 9:9. Better still, is the discipling relationship modeled for us between Jesus and His Father. Read John 8:23-29. His example exemplifies true humility and submission motivated by love and respect. In turn, Jesus loved and **cared** deeply for His disciples and He fully expected them to follow His lead (John 13:1-35). The same is required of us. It is this kind of humility, teachability, care and concern that fosters genuine love that leads to obedience to the Great Commission. Mark 10:33-45; Acts 18:24-26; and Galatians 5:13.

The Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul employed the most fundamental learning tools in their disciple-making: reiteration and repetition. Emulating them, through **consistent communication**, we are hearing God’s Word, hiding it in our hearts, applying it to our everyday lives, and like them, we will make disciples (Luke 6:39-40).

Strand of Pearls booklet is broken down into 5 phases. It comprises the first five of nine modules used on four continents for Catalyst Missions Women’s training. Read 2 Timothy 2:2; 1 Corinthians 4:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 6:7. The key phrases here are “the same things you have heard,” and, “I teach the same things in every church.” For this reason, be it Memphis, Tennessee, Bradenton, Florida, Colombia, Nicaragua, Bolivia, the Philippines, or on the Continent of Africa - we all teach the same **curriculum**.

Think of your group as a strand of pearls united and connected to The Pearl of Great Price -- the Lord Jesus. Each member is a vital link to the nations (Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15). As of now, our strand of pearls spans the globe. We have not fulfilled the Great Commission by discipling a person. The imperative command in the Great Commission is to make disciples of all nations! By following the pattern of disciple-making that Jesus left us, we are part of bringing to fruition Revelation 5:8-10. Read John 15:16 and 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 and discuss the source of rejoicing when Jesus returns.

Conclusion and Instructions

This concludes our first session. Take a moment to discuss and review the main points we covered today. If the Lord leads, sign the commitment form and spend some time together in prayer. Until we meet again, our homework is as follows: Fill out your Spiritual Growth Survey, read the three-page explanation of Phase One and memorize Matthew 28:18-20.

Memory Verse

Matthew 28:18-20

Then Jesus came up and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”



Phase One — Proclaim the Gospel

1 Corinthians 15:1-5

Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel that I preached to you, that you received and on which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. For I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received – that Christ die for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures,  and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

W

elcome back! Before we start our next session, and to get to know one another better, we will spend some time reviewing our Spiritual Growth Surveys. The rest of our time together we will cover the introduction to Phase One and learn an acronym for the gospel story of the Bible.

The cornerstone upon which we build our lives is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Saving faith starts there. For this reason, we always begin the discipling process by sharing the gospel narratives found in Phase One. As a side note: if you have seven weeks to introduce the gospel, The Good News for You by Charles Brock is an excellent tool. Not only is it available in many languages, but also it cost only $1.00! It is widely used to saturate entire countries. You can order it at [www.churchgrowthinternational.com](http://www.churchgrowthinternational.com).

Upon entering a new town, Jesus and Paul would go into the synagogue first. So, when sharing the gospel and looking for someone to disciple, the church is a good place to start. You may be wondering why we start there. First, we are following Jesus’ pattern. Second, just because someone is religious, or a member of a church does not mean that they are saved (Matthew 13:36-42). See the lesson titled Perishing in the Pew. Furthermore, you can’t assume that anyone has heard the true gospel. Hence, the lesson in this book from 1 Corinthians 11:1-4 titled Promised to One Husband. Signs of Life, the last lesson in Phase One, is a tool for spiritual examination. The purpose of this lesson is to gain confirmation and assurance that we have been born again.

Believers need to be reminded of the gospel. Lost people must hear the gospel to be saved (Romans 1:16). And, those who are saved, need to be sharing the gospel with the lost (Psalm 68:11). The gospel stories in Phase One are intended to do just that. Below are the three main goals and lessons contained in Phase One.

The Main Goals for Phase One:

* Proclaim the good news of Jesus.
* Gain assurance of salvation.
* Equip believers with the gospel message.

Phase One lessons:

* The Gospel of the Three Crosses
* The Well Who Came to the Woman
* Alabaster Box
* Perishing in the Pew
* Signs of Life

The Greatest Story Ever Told

Often, we think of the Bible as a collection of stories compartmentalized in individual books. In fact, it is one long story—the greatest story ever told. Being a disciple of Christ and a disciple-maker means that you are a lifelong learner. The truth we learn becomes like living water. It flows to us and then through us into the lives of others. Recently, I had one of those watershed meetings with a fellow disciple-maker named Betsy Killins. In addition to sweet fellowship and wise insight on how to minister cross-culturally, she taught me a simple acronym (AMPEC) that encapsulates the Bible narrative. While the story could be simplified in just a few sentences, I have included several key passages that allow us to see how the story pertains to the Great Commission. As Paul wrote to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5, what I received from Betsy, I gladly give to you. Here it is.

Anticipation

The word genesis means beginning. The beginning of time and space and all of creation was recorded in God’s big story called the Bible. The first book, Genesis, is the beginning of time. Yet, even before time, God was (John 17:20-24). In fact, one of His self-titles is, “the Beginning” (Genesis 1:1-2; Isaiah 44:6, 48:12; Revelation 1:8, 2:9, 21:6). From Alpha to Omega, A to Z, cover to cover and everything in between, there is One hero in the Bible. The mystery of who the Creator was is explained in John 1:1-14; Colossians 1:15-19 and Hebrews 1:1-3,10.

In the beginning, God made a good and perfect place called the Garden of Eden. When all was ready to sustain their lives, He made Adam and Eve in His own image --they were the crown jewels of His creation. It’s interesting to note that the word image means to shadow or shade. He made them to be with Him in a close intimate relationship. They were God’s disciples. He inaugurated the first family when He officiated their wedding. It was paradise because God was there with them.

For their own good, He gave them only one rule—don’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. All was good, and right, and perfect. Then, Adam and Eve rebelled against God and broke the one rule. From that moment on, everything suddenly changed from very good to horribly bad. The two had to leave the presence of God in paradise.

It seemed that all would be lost. Yet God always had a plan. One day, He would make a way for them to come back home to Him. He gave a promise that a Son would be born who would bridge the gap between God and sinners (Genesis 3:1-15, 17:3-6, 18:18; Isaiah 7:14, 9:2-7,6-7, 53:1-12). From Genesis to Malachi, the entire Old Testament pointed to One whom the prophet Haggai called “The Desire of all nations.”

For approximately four thousand years they anticipated His arrival. We find the explanation for all of this in the New Testament. Read 1 Corinthians 15:45-49, Romans 3:9-23, and Galatians 3:6-9.

Manifestation

How patient and long-suffering God must be! After 4000 years of God speaking about this One, and 400 years of silence, God’s spoken word was manifest in the person of His Son. A virgin gave birth to a baby boy in a stable in Bethlehem – just as it was written (Isaiah 7:14, 9:2-7; Micah 5:2-5; Matthew 2:6; Luke 2:4-14). He lived a perfect sinless life for thirty-three years, and then they killed Him—just as it was written in Psalms 22 and Isaiah 53. But on the third day, He rose again to life —just as it was written. You can read this part of God’s big story in the New Testament gospels written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (John 3:16, 10:16; 1 John 1:1-5, 4:9; Luke 1:1-5, 23:1-56, 24:1-53).

Proclamation and Multiplication

Reversing the curse of Babel, the Lord Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to His disciples so that they could proclaim the good news to the nations. And so, they did. All Jesus’ followers went everywhere proclaiming to everyone that Jesus the Christ had come, lived among us for thirty-three years, and then died and rose again on the third day—just as it was written. Everyone who would repent of sins and trust in Him could live forever. You can read about this in Luke’s discipling letter to Theophilus – the book of Acts. Read Acts 2:1-5, 8:1-5, 27-40, 13:47-48, 14:21-22, 19:7-10 and Acts 20:20-21.

You see, disciple-making is about building people who will go and spread God’s name and fame to all nations. In other word, they will multiply the gospel! The linchpin of God’s plan to bless all nations is through obedience to the Great Commission.

Explanation

The signs that pointed to Jesus were everywhere in the Old Testament (the only Bible in that day). Yet, God’s plan was so intricate, mysterious, and mind-boggling that grasping it required a lot of explanation. That’s what all the epistles from Romans to Jude are about. In Ephesians 3:1-16, we have an explanation of God’s glorious plan to have one multiethnic family. To find our place in the story of the ages, we need to step back into eternity past, before time began. In God’s pleasure and sovereign will, He included you and me in His plans (Ephesians 1:4, 2:10). Read Romans 1:16, 3:9-12, 22-23, 5:1, 6:23, 10:9-18; Hebrews 1:1-3,10:7-12; Colossians 1:15-18.

Consummation

God saves the best for last. The greatest story ever told ends with a wedding. Jesus showed John, His beloved disciple, how the story ends. He wrote it in the book of Revelation. The Lord Jesus will have all His children living with Him in paradise. For now, He is preparing a home in heaven for them. There will be no death, or crying, or pain there. When His name and fame reach the ends of the earth, then God and His people will live happy ever after. Will you be part of making that happen? Read Revelation 5:9-13; 7:9-12; 22:1-27.

The proclamation of the gospel that was recorded in the book of Acts continues today. Our aim is to **proclaim** the gospel in a way that is God-centered, Jesus-exalting and Holy Spirit empowered. If we can achieve all that, then we can find ourselves in God’s big story. The consummation will not happen until the gospel has been proclaimed to the end of the earth. In the meantime, … where are we in God’s story line? We are in the age of **proclamation** of the gospel, **explanation** of God’s big story and **multiplication** as we are going through our lives making disciples of all the nations. Our strategy to accomplish that is woven throughout this book.

Conclusion and Instructions

This concludes our second session. We are off to a good start! Take a moment and read and discuss Romans 1:16, 10:9-18. Suppose you are sharing the gospel with someone who has never heard it, or unfamiliar with the Bible. There are many cultures around the world that have no Bible or written language. They are oral learners and learn through story-telling. That’s how Jesus taught. To follow His lead, and master the skill, here is an exercise. In groups of two, put together a condensed gospel story from the above acronym. Make it simple enough to use in sharing God’s story on a child’s level of understanding.

Next week, we begin our gospel lessons with the Gospel of the Three Crosses. Read this lesson and answer the questions at the end. Also, make note of any questions or comments. When we meet next time, we will discuss the questions and practice reciting our memory verse for this week— Romans 1:16. Here is a suggestion. Write your memory verse on a card and carry it with you. Then you can share this good news by asking anyone who is willing if they will look at the card as you “practice” saying it. That’s Proclamation!

Memory Verse

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God’s power for salvation to everyone

who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.



**The Gospel of the Three Crosses**

Key Passage

Luke 23:32-43

Introduction

O

ne of my favorite gospel messages is the narrative that took place when Christ was crucified on the center cross in between two thieves. The message originated from one of Brother Herb Hodges’ lessons. This is my adaptation of this treasured story, and every time I revisit it, the Lord opens my eyes to truths not previously discovered. As we look at Luke’s account of the passion of Christ, let’s see if we can distinguish between the two thieves on either side of the cross of Christ.

The Cross of Rebellion

We know that the cross in the middle was prepared for a murderer. The murderer was set free, and in his place, was the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. One day, God will put His sheep on the right and the goats on his left (Matthew 25:32-34). The One on the center cross divides the two.

The man on the left of the cross of Christ represents the goats—the once born, unbelieving, unrepentant sinners whose destiny is hell. This man had sin in him and sin on him (Romans 3:9, 23, 5:12, 6:23; Ephesians 2:1-5). He was blind in his unbelief to the gospel on display on the cross in the middle (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Jesus said in John 8:24-28, “Unless you believe I am who I say I am, you will die in your sins.” The man to the left of the Son of Man was condemned to eternal death already for his unbelief. “He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). This man had no fear of God. Oh, he wanted to be saved— but not from his sins. He wanted to be saved from the painful consequence of his sin. His present suffering was nothing compared to the undiluted wrath of God he was about to experience in hell (Luke 12:4-5; Romans 1:18, 2:4-8).

2 Corinthians 7:10

For sadness as intended by God produces a repentance that leads to salvation, leaving no regret, but worldly sadness brings about death.

The man on the cross of rebellion had to pass right by the One in the middle to enter hell despite the following incredible facts.

Fact number one: The God who hung in the middle did not come to condemn him, but to save him. He did not desire that he perish, but for him to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16-17).

Fact number two: The cross in the center is a perfect display of two attributes of God—His holiness and His Love. When we look at the one who hung naked between the two sinners, we see a God who is holy—so holy that He must punish sin. There is no greater love than this -- not only did Jesus lay down His life for His friends, but even for His enemies (Romans 5:6-10).

Fact number three: Hanging next to this ungodly man on the cross of rebellion was the Lord Jesus with his arms open wide. These words of the prophet Isaiah come to mind when I envision this horrific sight: “All day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people” (Isaiah 65:2). And again, “Indeed, the LORD’s hand is not too short to save, and His ear is not too deaf to hear. But your iniquities have built barriers between you and your God, and your sins have made him hide his face from you so that he does not listen” (Isaiah 59:1-3). This sinner had worldly sorrow, not true repentance. Today, he is separated from God in a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth called hell (Mark 9:43-47; Luke 16:23). Read Luke 13:1-5.

The Cross of Repentance

Luke 23:40-43

But the other rebuked him, saying, “Don’t you fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we rightly so, for we are getting what we deserve for what we did, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Now let’s look at the sheep on the right hand of God incarnate. He was born in sin, as all of us were. When he was placed on his cross, he was separated from God in his sins. He started out on this cross just like the criminal on the left. But God had mercy on this man. He had sin in him, but in the end, he had no sin on him because all of his sins were placed on the God-man in the middle. This man is alive today in heaven with the risen King. He had a second birth on the cross of repentance. One moment he was cursing God, just as the other thief, and the next moment he was a preacher (Matthew 27:44). What happened?

All Things New

2 Corinthians 5:17

So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away– look, what is new has come!

Most likely, his eyes were opened, and his faith came by hearing Jesus pray these words on his behalf, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” This man was led by the loving-kindness of God to godly sorrow and true repentance. His transformation was instantaneous. One moment he was dead in sin, and the next he was alive in Christ. He changed from an unbelieving criminal, cursing God, into a preacher. Even though he was a new believer, he didn’t waste a precious moment. He became a messenger of reconciliation (Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21) and preached his first sermon to the other thief. He said, “Don’t you fear God?” He was trying to get the other one to look at God on the cross in the middle.

2 Corinthians 5:21

God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we would become the righteousness of God.

When this man saw the holiness and perfection of the Lord Jesus, he saw his own sins. He said, “We deserve everything we are suffering, but He has done nothing wrong.” He confessed Jesus as Lord and King, and He believed in Jesus’ resurrection from the grave when he said, “Remember me when you enter your kingdom!” And lastly, he called on the only one who had the power to save him: “There is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved but the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:12).

By grace through faith, he took hold of the outstretched hand of the One in the middle and rode a cross into heaven—the cross of Christ Jesus. It just struck me afresh that on that day the Good Shepherd put his found sheep on his shoulders and carried him straight home to heaven and into a party! Remember, all of heaven breaks into joyful celebration over one sinner who repents. Because the Good shepherd died in his place and , this man is also alive. Read John 10:9-18; 11:25-26).

The Center Cross of Redemption

1 Peter 1:18-21

You know that from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors you were ransomed—not by perishable things like silver or gold, but by precious blood like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb, namely Christ. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was manifested in these last times for your sake. Through him you now trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Now let’s turn the spotlight on the center cross. The Son of God was wearing all the shame, guilt, and sin of the world. Jesus had no sin in Him, but He had all sins placed on Him. He, who knew no sin, became our sin. His Father had to look away from His Son because His eyes are too holy to look on sin. Jesus bore the wrath of God in my place and in yours. At that moment, He experienced separation from His Father, and for the first time, He knew the emptiness and loneliness that each of us is born into as sinners. As awful as this was for God, it was the wage that sin demanded and the dowry that Love was willing to pay to purchase His bride.

This gospel has the power to save all who will repent and put their faith in the One whom God chose to carry their sins—the LORD JESUS CHRIST! The cross of Redemption is the greatest dividing force of all of history. But, it’s also the greatest reconciler for those who will believe in the God-man who was on the cross in the middle.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. What did the two thieves have in common? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Acts 17:30-31, 20:20-21, and 26:18-20. What does God command all men and women to do?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. What were the obvious changes in the man on the cross of repentance? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. In John 8:24 and Luke 13:1-5, Jesus made some firm statements concerning salvation. What were they? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Mark 1:14-16 and fill in the blanks: “And Jesus replied, ‘I came preaching the gospel of God and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the gospel.’”
2. In Matthew 4:19, what did Jesus say we would be doing if we are following Him? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Romans 10:9-18. From this passage, describe the person who is bringing the good news. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Acts 1:8, Romans 10:18-19 and Mark 16:15. What is the scope of our outreach with the gospel? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verse

Luke 23:42-43

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom.” And Jesus said  to him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”



**The Well Who Came to the Woman**

Key Passage

John 4:3-42

Introduction

A

n in-depth study of this portion of Scripture has much to offer, and many studies and lessons could be developed from the truth it contains. We could delve into issues of politics, religion, and racial reconciliation. Or we could approach this as a history lesson on Israel’s past, specifically during the divided kingdom. We might also consider the lives of Jacob and his beloved son Joseph. Here, we would learn of what happens when parents show favoritism to their children (Genesis 33:19, 48:22; Joshua 24:32).

Yet, all this is just a backdrop for the real story involving two main characters. One is a woman with a sordid past. Apparently, she was a glutton for heartache and rejection. She had been married five times. One can only guess that by the time the current man came into her life she had abandoned all hope of a “happy ever after.” Nevertheless, she could catch a man, and she had persuaded five to marry her. But she could not keep them. To make matters worse, by all indications, she had no girlfriends (who goes to fetch water at the hottest part of the day?) In any case, she must have been a very sad and lonely person—an empty well of a woman.

The second person in this account is the hero, and He is something else altogether. In fact, He is a real King who will one day come riding in on His white horse to save the day. Although that’s who He was and is, He was incognito when He came to the well that fateful day. As Paul says in Ephesians 1, Jesus had planned this encounter before time began. He was on a mission from God, His Father, and was seeking a bride who would worship Him in Spirit and Truth.

There is much more going on here than a happenstance meeting of Jesus and the woman at the well. In part, this account brings to light God’s eternal purposes and plans as they are revealed in the person of Jesus. So, let’s dive right in and drink deeply of God’s love as we too encounter “The Well” who came to the woman.

A Despised Place

To fully appreciate the significance of this divine appointment, we need to consider the context. Prior to this encounter, Jesus had a conversation with a Jewish man named Nicodemus about being born again. Although Nicodemus was a religious ruler, he was perplexed by Jesus’ radical statement: “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” Jesus then went on to tell him that “God so loved *all* the people of the world, that He gave His Only Son that whoever believed on Him would not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:1-17). Although, the religious ruler should have picked up on Jesus’ veiled reference to Ezekiel chapters 36 and 37, a Messianic text, he had not an inkling that he was talking to his Messiah, and Jesus didn’t disclose Himself to Nicodemus as such. No, that honor was reserved for the Samaritan woman.

The text says that Jesus *had to go* through Samaria. Why the emphasis? The Jews and the Samaritans had a long history of animosity. The Samaritans were a population of Jews that had intermarried with Gentiles. It was considered taboo, even scandalous, for a Jewish man to speak to a Samaritan woman because they were considered “unclean.” Even though the shortest route from Judea to Galilee was through Samaria, a devout Jew would normally walk seventy miles out of the way to avoid its inhabitants.

But, by observing how Jesus interacted with people, it’s quite clear that He was no respecter of the rules of men. He loved everyone, even those who were despised by others. Repeatedly, Jesus demonstrated racial reconciliation before His disciples, yet they didn’t understand the implications and depths of His love and how it related to their sin of discrimination.

As I was preparing to write this lesson, my pastor was preaching through the book of Luke, and we were studying chapter nine. My pastor pointed out how prideful and arrogant the disciples were towards “outsiders,” including the Gentiles (Luke 9:46-56). On one occasion, when the Samaritans, whom they hated anyway, rejected Jesus, James and His brother John (nicknamed The Sons of Thunder) were only too happy to retaliate. They asked the Lord if He wanted them to add lightning to their repertoire of thunder and annihilate the Samaritans.

Since it was John who recorded the account of the woman at the well, I think we can conclude that the Lord had taken the “thunder” of hatred out of John and replaced it with love. After all, it was John who wrote more about God’s love for the world than any other gospel writer. Moreover, when John was much older and wiser, he received the Revelation. What the Lord Jesus showed him was one big, beautiful, multi-racial family with no divisions or schisms. Reconciliation is just one of the by- products of God flooding our hearts with His love and peace.

Revelation 7:9

After these things I looked, and here was an enormous crowd that no one could count, made up of persons from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb dressed in long white robes, and with palm branches in their hands.

Ironically, it was Luke, the only Gentile writer of the Bible, who recorded Jesus’ last words before returning to heaven. Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the World” (Acts 1:8). His commission to them (and us) was total world impact. As the passage below indicates, His intent all along was to include people from every nation in His family.

John 10:14-16

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not come from this sheepfold. I must bring them too, and they will listen to my voice, so that there will be one flock and one shepherd.

A Despised Woman

John 4:9-10

So, the Samaritan woman said to him, “How can you — a Jew – ask me, a Samaritan woman, for water to drink?” (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you had known the gift of God and who it is who said to you, ‘Give me some water to drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

Jesus and His disciples were traveling from Judea to Galilee, and by the time they reached Samaria, they had already walked about thirty-five miles. Suffice it to say, they were hot, tired, thirsty, and hungry. The disciples went into the town of Sychar to buy food. But Jesus went to the well, not just to get water, but to give water. Just as our bodies must have water to live, our impoverished souls need spiritual water to live eternally. That’s the kind of water Jesus came to give the woman at the well.

Romans 3:9-23 tells us that no one seeks after God—God seeks us. So, having crossed ethnic, social, religious, and gender boundaries, there was Jesus, waiting for this woman. Hoping to avoid contact with the other women, she arrived to fetch water in the blazing heat of the midday sun. Who in their right mind goes to get water in the hottest part of the day? A woman who was despised by the women and rejected by the men of her town—that’s who. But that did not stop Jesus from striking up a conversation with her. He has an innate ability to build bridges to communicate with people. Jesus, having been raised in Nazareth, a place synonymous with the word despised, knew how it felt to be despised and rejected (Luke 2:39; Isaiah 53:1-12). So, He could relate to her.

1 Corinthians 1:27-29

But God chose what the world thinks foolish to shame the wise, and God chose what the world thinks weak to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, what is regarded as nothing, to set aside what is regarded as something, so that no one can boast in his presence.

Being fully aware of the Jewish religious traditions, she must have been shocked when Jesus asked for a drink. She knew that a Jewish man would become ceremonially unclean by even being near a Samaritan woman, let alone, drinking from her cup! Unlike any of the men she had ever met, though, Jesus did not come to take from her. The very nature of His love is to give.

Like Nicodemus, she had no idea whom she was talking to. But Jesus knew her—He had always known her (Ephesians 1:1-6, 5:25-32). He knew her past, and He knew her sins—all of them. He knew what was in her cup that would make Him unclean. What do I mean? Throughout His ministry, Jesus kept referring to a cup He must drink from. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He pleaded with the Father that this cup would pass from Him (Mark 10:38; Matthew 26:39). About three years after this meeting at the well, Jesus, who knew no sin, would become ceremonially unclean as He hung on a cross and suffered the wrath of God in our place. The cup was the wrath of God, and our sins were in this cup. At that moment, our sins separated Jesus from the Father. That is why He cried out from the cross: “Father why have you forsaken me?”

Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places

John 4:16-18

He said to her, “Go call your husband and come back here.” The woman replied, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “Right you are when you said, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the man you are living with now is not your husband. This you said truthfully!”

It was Saint Augustine who said, “You have made us for yourself oh God and we are restless until we find our rest in you.” Inherent in all of us is a hunger and thirst to be loved, and we haven’t a clue where to find the love we so desperately need. And so, we settle for human relationships. But, like mirages in the desert, they promise so much but never deliver the kind of committed, lasting bonds we desire. With a track record of five failed marriages, I can imagine the woman at the well had given up on love altogether.

Jesus was about to change everything in her life, but first He confronted her with her sin and idolatry. To understand whether you might have idols in your life, ask yourself the following question: Is there anything I give more time or money to? Is there anyone I love and trust more than God? If so, that thing or person is an idol, and the thing about idols is that they become the object of worship. Someone once said, “Our hearts are idol factories.” From personal experience, I know it is true. False worship, therefore, is a meaningless search to fill the God-shaped hole within us. In her quest for love, the woman in this account had made idols out of men and marriage. But people make lousy gods.

Wasting no time, Jesus got right to the heart of her problem. He told her, “Go get your husband.” She responded, “I don’t have one.” Well, no she didn’t. He told her that she had had five husbands and was, at that time, living with another man. By God’s standard, she was an adulteress with a capital A!

Jeremiah 2:5, 13

5This is what the Lord says: “What fault could your ancestors have possibly found in me that they strayed so far from me? They paid allegiance to worthless idols, and so became worthless to me.” … 13“Do so because my people have committed a double wrong: they have rejected me, the fountain of life-giving water, and they have dug cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns which cannot even hold water.”

After I was saved at twenty-six years old, I had an opportunity to be interviewed on our local Christian radio station to advertise my bridal business. I don’t remember speaking that much about my business, but I do remember what was in my heart. I was making an appeal to Christian women who were wanting to get married to look for a man who truly loved Jesus. I knew that only a man truly *in* Christ could give true love.

Even a wonderful marriage is, at its best, merely a shadow of the genuine article—God’s matchless, unfailing love. As strange as it seems, God’s love (agape in Greek) is defined as a feast or banquet of love. But when you think about it, it makes so much sense. You see, Jesus is love. And when we receive Him as Lord and Savior, we will taste love’s feast and know that He alone can satisfy.

John 6:35

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. The one who comes tome will never go hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.

Reconciliation

John 4:23-26

But a time is coming – and now is here – when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers. God is spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (the one called Christ); “whenever he comes, he will tell us everything.” Jesus said to her, “I, the one speaking to you, am he.”

So here was the woman at the well having a conversation with her Creator. She was completely exposed and uncomfortable, and so she did what a lot of people do when they are confronted by Jesus. She changed the subject. Many people confuse religion with having a relationship with God. The good news is that Jesus came to seek and save sinners. That’s just what happened the day that The Well came to the woman.

This despised woman from a despised place was the very first person to whom the Lord Jesus revealed His identity as the Christ—the long-awaited Savior of the world. *Jesus said to her, “I, the one speaking to you, am he*” (John 4:26). In the original Greek text, the word “He” is omitted. Therefore, it would be more accurately translated this way: “I Am, the Great I Am.” Even the Samaritans knew that Jesus was claiming to be the same God who introduced Himself to Moses in Exodus 3:12-16 (John 8:24-28, 58).

When she left her water pot behind at the well, that was symbolic of her turning in repentance and abandoning her old life of sin. And everything instantly changed. She was no longer thirsty or empty because Jesus had won her heart—she became His bride, and He became her husband. He was the one her soul had longed for. With a new identity, she became a vessel fit for honor in service to Jesus, her King. Now she was a minister of reconciliation, leading all of Samaria to Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17-20). It was all part of His plan for her life.

Jesus came to Samaria that day to do His Father’s work. It was a search and rescue mission. He had a divine appointment to meet this woman in a dry, desolate, and despised place. The goal of salvation is that sinners become saints who worship the One True Living God. That’s what the Father seeks. No, He is not looking for places of worship, He is seeking *people who will worship Him in spirit and in truth*.

John 4:39-41

Now many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the report of the woman who testified, “He told me everything I ever did.” So, when the Samaritans came to him, they began asking him to stay with them. He stayed there two days, and because of his word many more believed.

In conclusion, let’s make some personal applications. Who did Jesus plan to reach when He found you? See John 17:18-21. Open your eyes and see the empty, thirsty people God has placed around you. Missions exist because worship of the One True God doesn’t. Are you a true worshiper? Then His mission is your mission—to reach a world full of empty souls.

Perhaps you can relate to the woman. Have you been searching for love and satisfaction in people? Are you religious but unfulfilled because you have no relationship with God?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. Why is water so important to life? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. The price of any item is set by one thing. Do you know what it is?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Explain the significance of the cup that Jesus drank from. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What is the difference in being religious and having a relationship with God? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What does it mean to be a true worshipper? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read John 17:17-20. How can a person worship God in truth? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read the rest of the story in John 4:31-38 and make a list of some of the lessons He was trying to teach His disciples.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What do you think Jesus was pointing to when He said look at the fields, ripe for harvest?

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Memory Verse

John 4:23-24

But a time is coming -and now is here-when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers. God is spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.



**Alabaster Box**

Key Passage

Luke 7:36-50

Introduction

“A

friend of sinners”—that is what the religious Pharisees called Jesus (Luke 7:34). It was not meant as a compliment. Being the ones who taught the Bible, they should have recognized who Jesus was. Yet, the sanctimonious Pharisees and lawyers spurned Him (John 1:10-12, 8:3-59). They used the guise of curiosity to hang around Jesus. But what they wanted was to entrap Him, and ultimately, to kill Him. They hated Him that much. Self-righteous people still hate Him. By contrast, those who have been drawn by His lovingkindness and lead to repentance, find forgiveness and mercy. That’s why they love Him with abandon.

In this lesson we will look at the differences between the self-righteous sinner and the forgiven sinner, between grace and the law, between repentance and empty religion and finally, we’ll discover that a heart filled with gratitude and worship is evidence that a person has been saved by God’s magnificent grace. The backdrop for this beautiful message of grace and forgiveness is a dinner table. And each of us are invited to come taste and see that the Lord is good, and His love endures forever.

A Self-Righteous Pharisee

Luke 7:36-39

Now one of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went into the Pharisee’s house and took his place at the table. Then when a woman of that town, who was a sinner, learned that Jesus (was) dining at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfumed oil. As she stood behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. She wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the perfumed oil. Now when the Pharisee  who invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a

prophet, he would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him,

that she is a sinner.”

The occasion mentioned in the scripture above is not to be confused with the accounts found in John 12:1-8, Mark 14:3-9, and Matthew 26:6-13. Those events took place just prior to Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection, and the woman who anointed His feet then was Mary of Bethany. While Mary’s story resembles the story in our lesson, it is quite different. The event described in Luke 7 was earlier in Jesus’ public ministry in Galilee.

To set the stage for what transpired and gain insight about the host of the dinner party, we will be pulling some more narratives from Luke’s evangelistic letter to Theophilus. Let’s back track a bit and read the following passages: **Luke 3:1-14, 5:27-32, 7:29-30, 34-35**.

Jesus was invited to the home of a Pharisee (a religious leader) named Simon. This was a big deal. To invite someone to dine at your home and share a meal with you implied a level of friendship, if not intimacy. However, Simon had ulterior motives. Note the fact that it says the Pharisees and scribes had rejected God’s purpose for them and were not baptized by John. What was John’s baptism for anyway?

Read Luke 3:3 and Luke 24:44-47. What is the stated purpose of repentance from these passages? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The Pharisees were teachers of the Law of Moses – whose words they held in high esteem. However, they added 613 new laws to the Ten Commandments. In doing so, they subjugated God’s people to rules and regulations—which, likely, they themselves had not kept. No man could, but One (Matthew 5:17). Even so, they were quite proud and confident of their righteousness in God’s sight. Nothing could have been further from the truth (Psalm 14:2-3). Take a moment and read **Luke 15:1-2, 18:9-14**.

Have you ever tried to keep the ten commandments, not only in your deeds but also your mind and heart? Honestly, how did that work out for you? God’s Laws and commandments were given to us as a tutor, to show us our complete inability to measure up to God’s Holy perfection. See **Galatians 3:22-29**. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God explicitly expressed how repulsed He is by self-righteousness. He does not mince words. Talk about unclean! In stark contrast to the fragrant perfume lavished on Jesus by the woman at His feet, the stench of Simon’s pride and arrogance must have stunk to the high heavens.

Isaiah 64:6

We are all like one who is unclean, all our so-called righteous acts are like a menstrual rag in your sight. We all wither like a leaf; our sins carry us away like the wind.

Contrast the scribes and Pharisees to Jesus who not only kept all Ten Commandments but condensed them into two—love God and love people. Read **Matthew 22:36-40**. The Pharisees’ impertinent load of additional laws were a direct affront to Jesus’ two.

Another thing, how did Simon know what kind of woman she was? Perhaps he had been a patron of hers. Whatever the case was, by Jesus’ standard, all of us have broken the Ten Commandments. Read **Matthew 5:17-22, 27-32, 7:1-5; Proverbs 16:2, 5**. Jesus saw right through Simon’s religious facade. He is God and He knows every heart (John 2:24-25; Psalm 90:8, 139:1-4).

It’s been said, there is none so blind, as those who refuse to see. As it was written, Simon and his other guests remained blind to their own sins (Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 13:13-18). But that is not all they were blind to. By Simon’s estimation, Jesus was just a man, at best a teacher or a prophet - and not much of one ether. Yet, unbeknownst to him and his other guest - God incarnate was in the house (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; John 8:24-30; Acts 26:4-7). The One being worshiped by this woman was none other than the long-awaited Messiah.

A Sinful Woman

Now we’ll turn our attention to the uninvited guest. While, some have speculated that the woman in Luke’s account was Mary Magdalene, that cannot be adequately substantiated. What we do know about her is that she had a reputation. In all probability, she was a prostitute. If so, there is little doubt that the women in this account had been used and abused by many men. She had much in common with the empty woman Jesus met at the well (John 4:1-20). In truth, she had much in common with all of us. We were all born in sin, and therefore, separated from the love of God (Ephesians 2:1-13).

Perhaps the woman was one of those in the crowds of sinners and tax collectors we just read about, or maybe she heard about Jesus from others like the woman caught in adultery. Read **John 8:1-11.** The circumstances surrounding her conversion are of little consequence. What’s apparent though, is that even before she entered Simon’s house, she had encountered the *Friend of sinners*, been lead by His kindness to repentance, and she was changed. So much so that she was completely liberated from her shame and guilt. Read **1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and Isaiah 1:18**.

In further observation, we know that her entering a Pharisee’s house was scandalous in itself. Just by being there she made every Jew in the place ceremonially unclean. But then again, as we just read in Isaiah 64:6, that describes us all, until God forgives us. To make matters worse, she infringed on Jesus’ personal space and began to weep and washed His feet with her tears. I don’t know of a man who is comfortable in the presence of a woman who is crying. The silence at that dinner must have been deafening.

There is another issue here. Apparently, according to the customs of that time, virtuous women covered their hair in public. And therefore, we can assume that the only proper place and time for a woman to “let her hair down” was in the bedroom. To be sure, this shameful act was not lost on the men in the room— except for One. That day she shattered more that her costly alabaster box, she was shattering many man-made rules.

Jesus knew this woman and stated plainly that she had committed many sins. Yet that was not what He saw when He looked at her. He knew what she was, and He also knew the deplorable treatment she had endured. Moreover, in a short time, Jesus would pay for her redemption by dying in her place. It was the ultimate demonstration of His love for her (and us). In Jesus’ sight, she had great worth. And yes, “she absolutely touched Jesus,” but not in the way Simon imagined.

The only one in the room who mattered to her was Jesus. Taking the posture of a servant, in total abandonment, she took her expensive perfume, quite possibly a tool of her trade, and she anointed the beautiful feet of her Redeemer. He even redeemed her oil (Psalm 130:3-7)!

Interestingly enough, the word worship in Greek is made up of two words - *pros*, which means to come near, and *kueno* - like a dog bows down before it’s master in homage, reverence and adoration. Here she was, like a dog licking her master’s hand, she unashamedly worshiped Jesus as her Lord. Thus, displaying the divine influence of grace upon her heart.

Read **Luke 5:17-25**. Who can forgive sin but God alone? Who indeed! She had repented of her sins and been forgiven much, and she loved Him much. She was not forgiven because she loved Jesus. Rather, she loved Jesus because He had forgiven her (1 John 4:8-19). That is why she worshiped Him, and that’s the goal of salvation. There’s an appointed a day when every knee will bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:6-11; Isaiah 45:5-25).

A Parable of a Debtor

Luke 7:40-50

So Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” He replied, “Say

it, Teacher.”  “A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed him five hundred silver coins, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?” Simon answered, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.” Jesus said to him, “You have judged rightly.” Then, turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house. You gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss of greeting, but from the time I entered she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfumed oil. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which were many, are forgiven, thus she loved much; but the one who is forgiven little loves little.” Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives

sins?” He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Although we can’t say for sure what might have changed after this awkward dinner party, we can make some observations based on the text itself. There is a vast difference in those who are trying to earn God’s favor by works and those who have a relationship with Him through repentance and faith. The Law consist of dos and don’ts. Grace declares done!

Furthermore, it matters not how religious you are. Until God opens your eyes to see Jesus for who He is, you will remain lost and separated from Him. It’s faith in Jesus Christ, and that alone, that God credits to the bankrupt account of sinners -- we are all sinners. It requires humility to recognize that fact and to admit it (Romans 3:9-20; 10:9-13; 1 John 1:5-10). Once we admit it, we must take the next step. What is that you ask? The Bible is clear--repentance is the prerequisite of forgiveness. Read the following passages: **Romans 2:1-5; Acts 3:19-21; 17:30, 20:20-21**. You see, we owe God a debt that we will never be able to repay. God is going to settle the accounts. Someone is going to pay with their life; it is either you or Jesus. For those like this woman whose sins are forgiven, Jesus has marked our debt “paid in full.”

As we conclude, I would like to look at another dinner that Luke wrote about. Although we will not read it in its entirety, turn to **Luke 14 and read verses 1, 7-8, 11, 15-24**. Do you see the parallels here?

Every one of us are represented by the sinners in this account. One, a sinner who does not see their sin or the One who came to save sinners. And two, the sinner who believed in Jesus, repented and was forgiven. Which one are you? Through this lesson, Jesus, the *Friend of sinners*, is sending out an invitation. Through repentance and faith, will you receive Him? When you do, then you will know the blessedness of being forgiven and you’ll understand why the woman worshiped Jesus. Will you come and taste the love of God and be eternally satisfied (Psalm 63:1-5)?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. Is your life marked by gratitude or grumbling? What is gratitude evidence of? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read the following passages and make notes of the kind of prayers that are acceptable to God. Luke 18:9-14; Isaiah 59:1-3; Psalm 66:18-20; proverbs 15:8,29, 16:2-18 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read James 4:6-7; 1 Peter 3:8-12, 5:5-9; Proverbs 3:34, 29:23. From these passages, how does God feel about the prayers of a proud person?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Where on earth does God live (Isaiah 66:1-2)? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Revelation 3:19-20. What promise did Jesus make to those who will repent? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Psalm 103:1-10; Romans 4:7; 1 Peter 2:9-10. What do these verses say about mercy and forgiveness? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verse

Luke 7:47-48

Therefore I tell you, her sins, which were many, are forgiven, thus she loved much; but the one who is forgiven little loves little.”  Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”



**Perishing in the Pew**

Key Passage

Matthew 7:13-27

Introduction

I

had been saved for a few years when I wrote my first Bible study. I didn’t realize it at the time, but I was putting my personal testimony down on paper. The study was based on Matthew 7:13-27. The title *A Road Less Traveled* was borrowed from a poem that I selected for my senior quote in the high school yearbook. The poem was “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost. At the time of my graduation, the poem had an entirely different meaning for me. I was traveling my own path of destruction and going my own way on the wide road. However, it certainly wasn’t the road less traveled. Truth is, from the Garden of Eden forward, we are all born on the wide road of rebellion wondering sheep who are separated from the Good Shepard.

From these passages, Matthew 7:13-27; Matthew 13:10-17 and Revelation 3:14-22, we will look at two roads, two kinds of trees, two houses and two kinds of church attenders. Each with eternal consequences. My prayer is that the Lord will use His light and truth to reveal which road you are on. And if you find you are on the broad road to destruction, I pray you will turn from sin and take the path less traveled—the road of life.

A Road That Makes All the Difference

My husband, Art, is not only intelligent but also quite artistic. His most famous work, in my opinion, was done in his senior year of high school. He won an award for his portrait of the king— Elvis that is. Art had not come to know the real *KING* yet. Nevertheless, I thought the painting was so good that I took it to Graceland and entered it in the annual Elvis art contest. I was sure we would win thousands of dollars. I had hoped Elvis would pay for my daughter’s wedding. Well, that did not happen. However, Art’s painting did make our local nightly news. When the contest was over, we picked up the painting and drove Elvis home. On the way home, we sang part of this old hymn: “Coming home, coming home, never more to roam, open wide thine arms of love, Lord I’m coming home.” When we got home, Elvis returned to the closet.



As the adage goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. So now I want to tell you about a more important work of “Art.” When I began to write the study of the wide and narrow roads, I asked Art if he would do a painting for me to give us a visual for our study. And so, he did. You can see it above. As our three young children watched the painting unfold, they appropriately named the wide road *Death Road*.

Art painted a beautiful gold mirrored gate at the entrance to hell. The gate was to reflect the people on the wide road. Have you ever been to Las Vegas, Nevada? If so, you have an idea of the facade of the gate to hell that stands at the end of death road in Art’s painting. All that the world offers us may look good on the outside, but just like the shiny facades on the casinos, it’s all a grand illusion.

However, there was one thing I never liked about the painting. Jesus’ face looked nothing like the one I saw when His light shone in my heart. But you see, Art was blind to the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. And consequently, he was blind to the true condition of his own heart.

Art never completed his painting. He stopped short of painting the people on the broad road, although we talked in detail about what they would look like. Have you ever read the short tale by Hans Christian Andersen titled, *The Emperor’s New Clothes*? If you have, then you will remember the Emperor’s new clothes were no clothes at all. If Art ever completes his painting, the people on *Death Road* will be dressed like the Emperor. They will be as naked as Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, but they won’t know it because the reflection in the gates of hell shows them wearing their Sunday best.

Suppose, if you will, an artist at his easel painting a portrait of a man who survived the atrocities of the concentration camps in Poland. Have you seen the images of the emaciated, naked, half-dead human beings? Now picture the artist standing next to a mirrored wall in his studio. As he paints, he glances at himself in the mirror, and he sees a well-fed, well-dressed man. Here’s the irony—the artist is painting a self-portrait. That was my husband! Perhaps Art was beginning to see himself on the wide road, and that’s why he stopped painting. Like the man who considers the mirror of the Word of God and yet walks away, he quickly forgets what he looked like (James 1:21-25). Aren’t we all guilty of this? This is precisely what happens when we attend church, week after week, hearing the Word of God in vain. It doesn’t penetrate our heart; in fact, it hardens it. As we will see in just a moment, this was the exact condition of the Church of Laodicea in Revelation 3.

Recounting the day of his salvation, my husband said, “When the Lord saved me, He introduced me to two people. First, I was introduced to Jesus in all His holiness. And second, God showed me who I was—a sinner who was lost and separated from the God who loved me. This is when I understood for the first time that sin was not what I did; it was who I was. The devil worked on me for a few days telling me that God was too holy to save someone who was so sinful. Then, in desperation, I pleaded with Jesus to save me, and by His amazing grace, He did.”

Shortly thereafter, he asked me, “How could I have been so blind? How could I have missed salvation all these years in the church?” In other words, “how could I remain perishing in my sins all these years, while occupying a church pew week after week?” How, indeed? Tragically, many people remain lost and empty even though they are members of a church. Until God leads us to the cross, and we see the Lord Jesus dying in our place, we are dead in our sins. A blind man can’t give himself sight and a dead man can’t bring himself to life. This is a work of God and a gift of amazing grace.

Take a moment and look up the following passages making note of the stark differences in those who are spiritually dead and those who are spiritually alive: Ezekiel 36:22-29; Isaiah 6:9-10; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13; Romans 8:9-11.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing, among whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of those who do not believe so they would not see the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God.

The Wide and Narrow Roads

Born again Christians have always been in the minority. Jesus made this abundantly clear with this statement, “For the gate is small and the Way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” That’s shocking to think about. But what is most disturbing about Jesus’ words is the fact that many who are on the wide road that leads to destruction are religious. Imagine thinking you are on the road that leads to life until the day you meet the Lord Jesus and you hear him say, “…I never knew you.”

So how is this possible? First, the road that leads to life is narrow, difficult, and lonely. Following Jesus is not without cost. It requires death—death to sin, self-rule, and love for the world. And secondly, as Jesus warned us, there will be many false teachers who preach false gospels, thus ensuring that those on the death road remain there. The wide road is relatively easy at first. Satan gives the best at first and saves the worst for last. He says “Do what makes you happy. Enjoy yourself!” This is part of the deception. He never gives you a true picture of what is at the end of his road. That road ends abruptly. Then we will live our worst nightmares for all eternity.

Jesus is Not in The Building

Revelation 3:14-22

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write the following: “This is the solemn pronouncement of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God’s creation: ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot! So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth! Because you say, “I am rich and have acquired great wealth, and need nothing,” but do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked, take my advice and buy gold from me refined by fire so you can become rich! Buy from me white clothing so you can be clothed and your shameful nakedness will not be exposed, and buy eye salve to put on your eyes so you can see! All those I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent!

Religious people can be lost in houses of worship because they are blind to the fact that they are sinners. They are blinded by their good works. Their religion is like getting an inoculation. They get just enough knowledge of the written Word of God to convince them that they don’t really need Christ. In their warped reasoning, they think: “I am a good person, and my good deeds outweigh my bad. Therefore, I have earned a place in heaven.” Why do they need Christ? In the words of Jesus to the church of Laodicea, they say, “I am rich and have acquired great wealth, and need nothing,” but they do not realize that they are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. Here is their biggest problem— they don’t realize how sickening their self-righteousness is to the Lord (Isaiah 64:6).

Going to a church building and having your name on the roll, does not mean that you’re a Christian. There are churches of all denominations filled with misguided people who are trusting in church affiliations, reformations, confirmations, dedications, and family relations as their ticket to heaven. Just because your name is on the roster of a church, it does not mean that your name is in the Lamb’s Book of Life. Sadly, many who think they are going to heaven when they die are in for a rude awakening.

The Cure—Repentance

In Luke 15, we find the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son (Luke 15:3- 10). In the parable of the Lost Coin, a woman loses a coin in her house, and then she lights a lamp and searches carefully until she finds the coin. This is a fitting analogy describing those who are lost even though they attend a house of worship. God’s Word represents the lamp. Think of it as a warning signal across the path of those who are on Death Road. Jesus is the seeker knocking on the door of your heart. He desires to enter your life and rule as your King.

In conclusion, we should take a moment to let this truth sink in. If you are trusting in anything or anyone other than Jesus Christ to save you, then you are still lost on the death road. But you don’t have to remain there. Right here and now you can make a U-turn. It is called repentance. In each of the above parables, what happens on earth that causes a joyful celebration in heaven? It is one sinner who repents. Could you be that one? If so, then turn around in repentance and put your faith in the One on whom God the Father put your sins. When you do, you will know that your name has been written on the only roll that ultimately matters—the Lamb’s Book of Life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. In your own words, define the difference between each of the following statements: Remorse is not repentance, conviction is not confession, and sorrow over sin is not surrender toChrist. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What will be at the end of the road for those who remain spiritually blind? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. From all that you have learned from this lesson, make a list of reasons why someone can be in church and yet remain lost.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Take a survey of other believers and ask them about their testimony. Make a note of how many had a spiritual experience, but later in life had a true conversion. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What are some things that religious people put their faith in besides Christ? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verses

Matthew 7:13-14

Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the way is spacious that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. But the gate is narrow and the way is difficult that leads to life, and there are few who find it.



**Signs of Life**

Key Passage

1 John 5:7-15

Introduction

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ave you ever experienced some symptoms that indicated that you may have a serious illness? If so, then you know that the only way to alleviate the nagging anxiety and worry is to visit a doctor who will perform a thorough examination. Only then can you have peace of mind, a proper diagnosis, and a plan of treatment. Likewise, a checkup of our spiritual health can alleviate the uncertainty of where we stand in relation to God.

2 Corinthians 13:5-6

Put yourselves to the test to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize regarding yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you—unless, indeed, you fail the test! And I hope that you will realize that we have not failed the test!

In our last lesson we learned the alarming truth that a person can think that they are on the road that leads to heaven yet be lost and headed for hell. This should serve as a warning and underscores the necessity to find out *now* before it is eternally too late. In this lesson, we’ll be checking our “spiritual pulse” so to speak.

Here’s the plan: Together, we will take the Bible and lay it side by side with our lives. In this way, we can determine if there is legitimate proof that we are saved. However, if this subject makes you uncomfortable, please don’t close the book yet! Ignorance or denial comes at a high cost, and there is too much at stake. This is a win-win exercise. Regardless of the outcome of this examination, God loves you and desires for you to live with blessed assurance.

Three Trustworthy Witnesses

If we have been born again, there are three trustworthy witnesses who will testify to the fact. First, the circumstances surrounding the day of your second birthday is witness number one. You might call this a personal salvation experience. If you’re like me, you may not have an actual date recorded. That’s inconsequential because the next two witnesses speak the loudest anyway. However, before we go any further, let’s add a couple of important caveats. The test is *not* someone else’s experience compared to yours. You can’t look at a one-time event in your life as proof that you are saved nor a time of great failure as proof that you are lost.

Granted, at times you may not “feel saved,” but that’s not the point. Rather, to build a strong case for assurance, you need to look at *all* the evidence in God’s Word, and this is witness number two. Unlike a circus mirror that distorts things, the Bible is a true mirror and judge of our hearts. His mirror will show us our true condition. The signs of spiritual life are primarily found in the book of 1 John. Witness number three is a changed life. When you are born again by the Holy Spirit, He produces His fruit in you (2 Peter 1:10-11; Romans 8:9-14; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Do You Desire the Hearing of God’s Word?

There are two connections between the Lord and His bride. One is the Bible, and the other is prayer. For the believer, these are not obligations but signs of a true, ongoing relationship. The Bible is God’s love letter to His bride. And what bride does not cherish every word from her beloved? Since the Holy Spirit wrote the Bible, when He occupies a believer, He brings with Him a hunger for the Bread of Life—God’s Word. Read the following passages and make note of this key word translated as abide, remain, or continue: John 8:31-32, 15:7-8; 1 John 2:24; 2 John 9 and James 2:25. A person who is alive in the Spirit, will hunger for God’s Word and abide in it (1 Peter 2:2).

John 10:27-28

My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; no one will snatch them from my hand.

On the other hand, spiritually dead people don’t have an appetite for spiritual things such as God’s Word. Let’s look at the words hear, follow, and obey. In Greek, they are as follows: hear— *akouo*, follow—*klotho* and obey—*Hupakouo.* See howthe word obedience is used in the following passages: **Romans 1:5, 6:17, 10:16,16:26, Hebrews 5:9**. It is interesting to note that hear, follow and obey are all derived from the same Greek word. Why does this matter? It matters because Jesus said that those who are His not only hear His voice, they follow and obey Him. This leads us to the next test of salvation

Do You Obey God’s Word?

1 John 2:3-4

Now, by this we know that we have come to know God: if we keep his commandments. The one who says “I have come to know God” and yet does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in such a person.

Jesus is referred to as Savior twenty-four times in the gospels, yet He is called Lord 433 times. Why is that? Because when we believe on Christ for salvation, we relinquish our rights to autonomy and accept Christ’s rule. Jesus explained it this way: “My mother and brothers are those who hear the Word of God and do it” (Luke 8:21). He asked another question: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46).

Someone has said, salvation is a long obedience in the same direction. A lost person has no power in and of himself to obey God (Romans 8:5-10). It is the Spirit of God in a believer who creates both the desire and the ability to do what He commands (Philippians 2:13). We all live by a worldview, and thereby act on a set of beliefs. If the Bible does not inform my worldview and translate into my practical everyday life, I can’t legitimately claim that Christ is my Lord. Read **1 Peter 1:1-2 and 2 Peter 1:1-10.** Note the words “*if* *these qualities’ are yours and* increasing.” This statement proceeds Paul’s admonition to check to see if you are really saved. To sum it up, here is a quote by Precept Austin, “It is not our profession of faith that guarantees we are saved, but our progression in the faith that gives us assurance.” Plainly put, obedience (not sinless perfection) will accompany true saving faith, and a heart that is yielded towards God is evidence of salvation.

Titus 1:15-16

All is pure to those who are pure. But to those who are corrupt and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their minds and conscience s are corrupted. They profess to know God but with their deeds they deny him, since they are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good deed.

Love, the Birthmark of God’s Children

1 John 3:14

We know that we have crossed over from death to life because we love our fellow Christians. The one who does not love remains in death.

Above all the other signs that validate a true conversion, love is the one that is nonnegotiable. It’s the tangible evidence and birthmark of God’s children. Whereas, an absence of love clearly indicates there is no relationship with God—and God *is* love! Those who do not love God, will not love His family. Walking away from God’s family, and not returning, is a sure mark of an apostate. Read 1 John 2:18-25. And hate and love cannot co-exist. Please take some time to look up each of the following passages and do some soul-searching. Then you will know if you are alive or dead. Love and obedience go hand and hand (John 14:21-24). A saved person will remain in love (John 15:9).

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Ephesians 1:15; Matthew 5:43-48, 22:37-40; 1 John 2:7-11, 3:10-24, 4:7-21; Galatians 5:13-22; John 13:34-35, 15:12-13; Romans 5:5; James 2:8

Can God Get a Witness Out of You?

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth.”

You were saved for a purpose. In Acts 1:8, Jesus said that when you receive the Holy Spirit, you *will be His witnesses*. That means that everyone who has the Holy Spirit will bear witness to Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10-19; Philippians 1:27-28). As C.H. Spurgeon said in a sermon in 1888, *“Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you are not saved yourself. Be sure of that.”*

Does God’s Phone Vibrate in You When You Sin?

If you will notice in this subtitle, I did not say *if* you sin—but *when* you sin. Unfortunately, Christians still have a battle with our old sin nature. Consequently, when the Holy Spirit is subjected to sin, He becomes uncomfortable, and so does the child He lives in. One indicator that a person is saved *from* their sins is that they have the desire to fight *against* sins that once enslaved them. To further quote C. H. Spurgeon, he said, The mere professor’ loves a salvation from hell. The true Christian loves a salvation from sin (Psalm 119:128). When the Holy Spirit lives in you, He won’t let you remain in sin for long. You may find it interesting that the Greek word for **voice** is *phone*. Yes— voice in Greek is spelled PHONE! Do you hear God’s phone ring *inside* of you when you are disobeying God, or is He still *outside* convicting you of your sins (1 John 1:8-10; 2 Corinthians 7:10)?

God Disciplines His Own

Hebrews 12:6

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son he accepts.

Hebrews 12 clearly states that those whom God loves, He disciplines. When we sin, we dishonor our Father’s name. Out of love, He will allow the natural consequences of our sins to come upon us to teach us. To ignore God’s discipline is to invite calamity. If He must spank us all the way home to heaven (or take us home prematurely), that’s just what He will do. While God is serious about our holiness and does not sweep our sin under the rug by ignoring it, He will never ever stop loving us. Once we have been placed in Christ, it’s a done deal. We are His for eternity. As my pastor would say, “that’s a good place for an amen!” Amen?

When You Pray, Do You Get Any Response?

1 John 5:13-15

I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have before him: that whenever we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in regard to whatever we ask, then we know that we have the requests that we have asked from him.

There is one final evidence of salvation that we need to see—answered prayer. According to Isaiah 59 and other passages**,** God does not hear the prayers of those who are separated from Him in their sins. But because we are in Christ, answered prayers are one of the fruits of having an intimate relationship with Him. Furthermore, as you will see when you look up the following passages, there is ample evidence that answered prayer is a clear sign of salvation.

But, let me clarify. When it comes to prayer, I am not saying that we can simply name it and claim it. What I am saying, though, is that there should be some undeniably answered prayer in the life of every saint. He is our Daddy, and because of Christ, we have twenty-four hour a day access to Him in prayer. Because He is our Father, He delights in taking care of His children. Just today, my friend Cathy, a widow, shared with me how she was talking to the Lord and expressing her needs to him. She said she had been quite specific in her prayer for an exact amount of money that she needed. And do you know what? Within days she received a call that she would receive a sum of money that was part of her husband’s inheritance. The amount? Just what she needed. Our heavenly Father is just good that way. Answered prayers are one way we know He hears us, and we are His.

As we wrap up this lesson, I will leave you with this final thought, in our key passages, 1 John 5:13, the word *know* could also be translated as *see*. In Greek the word is *eido*. It’s akin to the Greek word *idou* that is translated in 2 Corinthians 5:17 as behold. To the point: You cannot *know* for certain that you are saved unless you *see* the Biblical signs of life. Do you see them?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. Can you honestly say that you are quick to obey God when He reveals actions that He wants you to take? Or do you require complete understanding before stepping out in faith and obedience? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. If so, do you recognize why this could be?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Can you identify a moment when you began to care about other people’s souls? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Can you describe a time in your life that God revealed specific sins that were unconfessed?

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1. List some recent answers to specific prayers. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. If you have ample evidence of these signs of life, do you feel like you are growing in your faith and love relationship with God? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Romans 8:31-39. From these passages, once we are placed in Christ, what are the specific things that can never separate us from the love of God? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Do you struggle to surrender to the will of God when it costs you time, money, relationships, reputation or convenience?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Memory Verse

1 John 5:13-14

I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have before him: that whenever we ask a anything according to his will, he hears us.



Phase Two —Blessed with a New Identity

1 Peter 2:2-5

And yearn like newborn infants for pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up to salvation, if you have experienced the Lord’s kindness. So as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but chosen and priceless in God’s sight, you yourselves, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood and to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The Main Goals for Phase Two:

* Introduce believers to God, their heavenly Father.
* Help believers understand that being a Christian means that they are clean.
* Help them discover their new identity in Christ.

Phase Two Lessons:

* She Who Has Ears
* New Identity
* Redeemed from a Sinful Past
* Abba Father

After completing the “Spiritual Growth Survey” in the back of this book and covering the gospel lessons in Phase One, the foundation has been laid and you are now ready to start Phase Two. These lessons are intended for those who have professed faith in Christ. Once a person has heard the gospel and responded to the message of Christ through repentance and faith, they are new creations. In every respect, a new believer is like a newborn babe (John 3:1-12; 1 Peter 2:2-5). The work of disciple-making is just beginning. Entering a covenant relationship with God in Christ is monumental. Everything is new and exciting, yet, also mysterious and unfamiliar. They need help navigating the uncharted waters of change. For those who come to faith as an adult, coming to terms with who they used to be can be an agonizing process. The consequences of a life of sin, coupled with the accusations of the devil, can keep them from ever realizing all the blessings God has for their lives.

Furthermore, if they remain blind to who they are in Christ, they could easily be led astray back to the bondage of past sins, essentially shipwrecking their walk of faith before it ever begins.

Paramount in the journey of faith is getting to know who God is and where He is, and who we are in relationship to Him. Everything we can know and need to know about these things are found in God’s Word Matthew 4:4;2 Timothy 3:14-17). Hence the importance of God’s Word in the life of every believer. Discipleship is the God ordained method by which these liberating truths are revealed to His children. That’s where you come in (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8). You don’t need to have walked in their shoes or have had the same kind of background to be able to help them. I have observed that when I am lacking in experience, the Lord seems to always supply a person in the group who can relate at a deep level. He comforts us in our sorrows so that we can, in turn, comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

I have heard it said, “Show me your friends, and I will show you your future. To put this in Biblical terms, “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (Proverbs 13:20 (ESV). It is all about building relationships. This takes time and patience. So there is no need to rush to complete any of the phases. There are many passages to look up and study if you so wish. Just be mindful of their level of understanding and go at your own pace. Do not teach a new truth until you are certain that they have grasped the main points. By grasp we mean that they can clearly articulate the Scriptural truths from the lesson and are able to reteach it to others (2 Timothy 2:2). Stick to the key passages but feel free to omit content or examples that are not culturally relevant or pertinent to those you are discipling. Our aim is to have a personal encounter with God through prayer and His written Word.

The truths found in Phase Two will help all of us gain a Biblical worldview as it pertains to our identity in Christ. The main points in this phase is this: Once we were separated from God. There was no internet connection between us. Yet now, we have been placed in Christ, we have an internal link and direct access to God through the Holy Spirit. God communicates to us through His Word, and, through prayer, we can talk to Him as a child to her father. Our past does not have to dictate our future (Ephesians 1:1-16). We are daughters of the King, and He is still in the business of replacing beauty for ashes (Isaiah 60:1-6).

Memory Verse

Ephesians 1:3-4

Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ.  For he chose us in Christ

before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before

him in love.



**She Who Has Ears, Let Her Hear**

Key Passage

Matthew 13:1-45

Introduction

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echnology is a wonderful thing. Through it we can cross time-zones and land masses to see and hear people on the opposite end of this orb we call planet earth. On a weekly basis, women in Catalyst Missions are connecting by cell phones and Facebook Messenger to pray and study these very lessons that you hold in your hands. This brings us close and keeps us close to one another.

It works great unless there’s a problem. For instance, just today our disciple group in Memphis, Tennessee was trying to connect with two women who live in different areas of Nicaragua. At times, although we could see one another, there was no sound. After adjusting the volume, I said, “Can you hear me know?”. We prayed and thankfully, with the Lord’s help, we were able to hear one another loud and clear.

It does not always work perfectly and there are times when we have no connection, but why would we not leverage every conceivable means afforded us through technology to advance the gospel and obey the Great Commission?

I am so very grateful for this and wonder how we ever made it without cell phones and such. As foreign as this may seem to Generation X, I remember the days when my husband was traveling for weeks at a time and connecting this way was not even an option. All of this to say, communication is important in every area of our lives, because no connection equals no communication. No communication equals no relationship.

Being born again means that we are in a true relationship with God through faith in Christ. Our identity is in Him and our Spiritual address is too (Ephesians 1:3-16, 2:4-8)! Among other innumerable benefits of being placed in God’s family is the fact that we can communicate with God. That is huge! Just think about this: according to Ephesians 2:1-3, 11-13 and Isaiah 59:1-3, God nether hears nor speaks to sinners. That’s what we were by our natural births – sinners, and sin separated us from God. Now, because the Holy Spirit lives in us, we can hear from God and He can hear us when we pray (1 John 5:13-15). Which one do you think is more important- to hear from God or God hearing from us? Both are equally vital in communication but really, we don’t even know how to pray without God’s Word instructing us.

The Condition of the Heart Determines the Hearing

Throughout the Bible, there is a great emphasis placed on the necessity of hearing what God says. In Hebrew, the word is s*hama,* and it has special significance to the Jewish people. A prayer known as *Shama Israel* begins with these words, “*Hear, O Israel*” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13- 21; Numbers 15:37-41). The word shama means to listen or to hear obediently. In fact, in different places in the Old Testament it is translated as both hear and obey. Case in point, read Deuteronomy 30:1-2, 6-14. Truly hearing God was synonymous with doing what He said. Another important aspect of the word is this: they were to listen carefully and transfer exactly what they heard to the next generation. Read: Psalm 78:1-8 and Psalm 145:4-13.

When the prophet Isaiah received his commission, he *heard* the voice of the Lord saying, “Who shall I send; who will go for Us?” Isaiah replied, “Here I am. Send me.” The message he was told to preach would fall on deaf ears (Isaiah 6:8-10). Tradition is that Isaiah was killed by being sawed into. How, then was this Old Testament gospel message preserved? Isaiah had disciples (Isaiah 8:1). Although it is sometimes translated as *learned*, the word *disciple* is found only 4 times in the Old Testament. All four are in the book of Isaiah and highlighted below. Read the following passages and make note of the connection between hearing and learning as God’s disciple: **Isaiah 8:16-20, 50:4-5, 54:13, 55:1-11.**

The people refused to hear the message God sent through His prophet, and so approximately seven hundred fifty years later, God spoke through His one and only Son the same message (Hebrews 1:1-10; John 1:1-14). Jesus’ disciples heard what He said and recorded His reference to the words He had spoken through the prophet Isaiah. For example, read Isaiah 54:13; John 6:44-45 and John 10:3, 26-30. Only true disciples have ears to hear. The question is, are you His disciple?

The Soil, The Seed, and The Sower

Jesus cited Isaiah as He described the people who had ears and eyes, but they remained deaf and blind because of the hardness of their hearts. They failed repeatedly to listen to or obey God’s Word. Reading the full message in context will clarify exactly who had ears to hear the Word of God and who didn’t. As we are about to see, when Jesus spoke in parables, He was not merely saying words. He was depositing His truth into the fertile soil of the hearts of His disciples. Now, let’s read Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 11:27-28; Luke 6:46-47; Luke 8:1-3.

In this parable, the soil represents the human heart, the Seed is the Word of God, and the Sower is the Lord Jesus. In his message, “At What Level Do You Listen,” Herb Hodges said there were four types of people who followed Jesus around. The first three categories of listeners he named the curious crowds, the casual listeners, and the convinced listeners. This group represents about seventy-five percent of people whose hearts are exposed to God’s Word. Those who fall into these categories hear God’s Word but do not act upon them. Although they may call Jesus Lord, they don’t do what He says.

* **Soil #1** (**Matthew 13:1-4; Luke 8:11-12) The Crowd:** The ones along the roadside were curious listeners. The seed lay on top of the soil, but it had no reception into their hearts (Matthew 7:18-27). Crowds are often fickle, and they will only follow the leader as long as it benefits them.
* **Soil #2 (Matthew 13:5-6) The Casual Listener:** These were the ones whose hearts were rocky. The seed fell on the soil, took root, but the root was not firm. These listeners were confused in their loyalty, the seed did not put down roots. They were shallow listeners, and they soon fell away.
* **Soil #3 (Matthew 13:7, 13-15) The Convinced Listener:** This type of soil represents those whose hearts are full of thorns. The seed fell on the soil and penetrated it. Yet the thorns kept that seed from sprouting upwards, and, therefore, it produced no crop. There was too much competing for their attention**.**

Just because we are exposed to God’s Word, does not mean that we receive it. When Jesus sows His Eternal Seed (the Word), He expects to receive a harvest. For all His labor, only a few will yield a crop. But their productivity will be greatly multiplied. Jesus “weeded” out the uncommitted majority by telling them some hard truths about the cost of being His disciples. Read Luke 9:18-27, 14:25-35 and John 8:43-47.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Mark 4:1-34; Romans 10:13-18; James 1:21-25; John 5:24-47, 6:32-69; Revelation 3:14-20

A Receptive Heart is a Good Heart

Luke 8:11-15

Now the parable means this: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in a time of testing fall away. As for the seed that fell among thorns, these are the ones who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the worries and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for the seed that landed on good soil, these are the ones who, after hearing the word, cling to it with an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with steadfast endurance.

* **Soil #4 (Matthew 13:8-12, 16, 23-24, 30-43) The Committed Listener:** This last group represents a considerably smaller percentage, and yet, they are Jesus’ true followers; they are the spiritually reproductive listeners. The good seed fell upon the good soil of their hearts. These are careful listeners, true Christians, and disciples of Christ. Although they are few in number, they’re faithful and fruitful investments for the Sower. Jesus calls them sons and daughters of the Kingdom. And He further identified them as good seeds and sowers of His Word.

The word *follow* in Greek is akoloutheo. It could be defined as being united with Christ or accompanying Him as a disciple (Luke 6:40; John 12:26). The root word for follow is derived from the same Greek word for hear and obey. Before we move on, I want to point out one phrase found in these two verses: Matthew 13:24,31. Depending on your translation, it is translated as He told, put forth, or presented another parable. Just a very simple word or phrase, right? One might think so, but it is anything but simple. The Greek word is paratithemi and could be translated as follows: He deposited another parable into the fertile soil of His disciple’s hearts as a trust for protection. They were the keepers of His treasures—yet, not to keep it for themselves. They would sow this eternal seed into the hearts of those they would, in turn, disciple! Now, who would have ever guessed that? Here is the point: only true disciples really hear. And what they hear, they sow into others. Do you get it?

Those without spiritual ears will not hear Jesus. Consequently, they cannot understand what He says, and they certainly don’t follow Him. Those who don’t follow Jesus do not fish for men and women, and there is no return on the Word that was planted within them. They are not “good seeds,” and they don’t become sowers of the Eternal Word. And since they don’t plant, there is no harvest. The Sower—the Lord Jesus—receives no return on His investment in them. In the end, they will receive no reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. But, on the other hand, those who have ears to hear the Word of God understand what Jesus says, and they act on what they have heard. These are His true disciples!

If you have ears to hear, you will understand the will of your Father in heaven. You will obey what He says because He is your Lord. As you go through your life, you will sow the Word of God and obey His last command by making disciples. Through investing His Word into the fertile soil of the hearts of His sons and daughters, He will receive a bountiful harvest. The plan has not changed. If you are truly a daughter of the King, then through you He will reap a large harvest. And one day you will hear these words: “Well done my good and faithful servant, you were faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s joy” (Matthew 25:22).

**DIGGING DEEPER:** John 14:23-24, 15:14-16, 16:1-16; Matthew 4:9, 28:18-20; 1 Corinthians 2:6-15, 5:11-20; 1 Peter 1:22-25; Isaiah 60:1-5

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. Do you desire to hear God’s Word? If so, how much time daily do you devote to reading it and studying it?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Read Luke 10:39-42. Jesus set forth one thing that should take precedence above everything else in our lives. What is it?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Read Matthew 13:37-42 and answer the following question: What will ultimately happen to the weeds?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. When you hear God’s Word, do you think it is being invested or is it an expenditure (Matthew 13:23-24; John 15:16)?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Read the context of Matthew 12:46-50 and Luke 8:1-21. Who was Jesus pointing to when He said, “Here are my mother, sisters and brothers”?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. In light of the fact that the writer of the book of James was Jesus’ half-brother, what is the significance of his words in James 1:21-25? (A clue is found in Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 8:1-21) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Estimate the amount of time you have spent in church “hearing” the Bible taught. How much of the Word of God have you been entrusted with? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. What are you doing with all the Truth you have been given? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. In Matthew 13:34-36, Jesus referenced Psalm 78:1-8. What are the first words of the Psalm? What are God’s people supposed to do with what they have *heard*?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Jesus ended the parable of the Sower with these words: “The righteous will shine like the sun….” Read Matthew 13:43 and compare to Daniel 12:3; Proverbs 11:30; Romans 10:14-18; Psalm 90:4. Who are the “shiny ones” in the Kingdom? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Acts 17:1-4, 11 and 1 Thessalonians 2:13. What about these two groups of people should we be imitating? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verse

Luke 8:21

But he replied to them, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”



**New Identity**

Key Passage

Ephesians 1:3-5

Introduction

I

t was Paul’s custom to address his letters to the *saints****.*** Now you may find this term confusing if you have always believed that saints were holy people who have died. But if the recipients of this letter are dead, then why is Paul writing letters to them? So, you may be wondering how does a person become a saint, or what is a saint? By investigating these important questions, you will discover one spiritual blessing after another. The first blessing I would like for us to contemplate is that although we were born sinners if we’re in Christ, we are saints. And when we become saints, we are holy.

In Ephesians 4:12, the word translated into English as *equipping* the saints has deep and significant meaning. It is rooted in another Greek word which means to bind up or to mend what has been broken. The fact that so many of us have been affected by the subject matter we are about to address only magnifies the immense need for this truth. Learning how to apply the gospel message to the wounded soul is at the very core of disciple-making. That’s exactly what this lesson is intended to do.

Saints in Christ

Colossians 1:21-22

And you were at one time strangers and enemies in your minds as expressed through your evil deeds, but now he has reconciled you by his physical body through death to present you holy, without blemish, and blameless before him.

In over twenty years of experience in women’s ministry, I have found that nearly half of the women I meet in the Church had their innocence robbed at an early age by sexual abuse. Now mind you, these are women who are *in the Church*. But for those of us who have worked with women in prisons and in other countries (especially third-world countries), the statistics are even higher. A staggering eighty-five percent of these women were abused as children. Ironically, many of the ones who perpetrate such vile acts were molested themselves as children. The psychological effects of this despicable sin are innumerable, and the casualties are escalating at an alarming rate. Did you know that statistics now show that one in six children will be sexually abused? What that means is that you or several people you know are victims. May the Lord have mercy upon us! Satan, seizing the opportunity afforded him through the internet, is appealing to the most debased cravings of our sinful nature. Thus, entrapping men (as well as women) in the soul-destroying addiction to pornography.

The fastest growing global criminal enterprise today is not the buying or selling of drugs or weapons, as you might think. It’s something much more lucrative—the trafficking of women and children as sex slaves. Truly, “The love of money is the root of all evil” (1Timothy 6:10). The victims of this horrific evil represent an estimated twenty-one to twenty-seven million human beings! About half of these are defenseless children. And moreover, these numbers do not even reflect the growing numbers of people being sold as slave laborers. Thankfully, the plight of those captive in these hopeless situations have reached the ears and hearts of believers. As tangible expressions of God’s love and concern, many are actively working to do something about it. This includes buying their freedom and binding up the physical, emotional, and physiological wounds of these victims. The Christian organization I am most familiar with is International Justice Mission. (For more information, go to ijm.org)

If you don’t know God’s love personally, you may be cynical and believe the lie that God does not care. And yet, as many who have been rescued by His love will tell you, His heart is grieved by this evil. Furthermore, Jesus came, in part, to destroy the insidious work of the devil. In case you are wondering how He feels about the perpetrators of this heinous treatment of women and children; the following passage should bring clarification.

Matthew 18:5-6

And whoever welcomes a child like this in my name welcomes me. “But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a huge millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the open sea.

I have heard this statement often repeated by those whose lives have been destroyed by such horror. They say: “I feel so dirty, unclean, and worthless.” Consequently, many of these victims spend their lives treating themselves or allowing others to treat them, as worthless. Moreover, it’s not just the abused who feel dirty and worthless. If you have lived a life of shame and guilt for sins you have committed, then you know personally the words of the prophet Jeremiah are true. *The heart is more deceitful than all else and it is desperately sick; who can understand it* (Jeremiah 17:9)? As you read these words, I wonder if you are feeling a stab of pain from wounds that may have been bandaged but never truly healed. You may not even be aware of the many ways these psychological injuries have shaped your life. If this is the case, then most likely you already know that there is no quick fix for these kinds of wounds. However, when you are in Christ, healing is possible. If you, or someone close to you, has suffered these unspeakable traumas, then take heart. The love of God is deeper, and the Great Physician still makes house calls (Luke 4:16-21).

* If you have personally suffered this way, have you believed the lie that you are somehow blemished for life or that you are “damaged goods?” \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Have you ever confided in a trusted friend about why you feel this way? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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* Read Romans 8:1 and John 3:16-18. If you are in Christ, these words apply to you. Fill in the blank: “There is now no condemnation for those who are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”
* Do you think that sharing your story could bring you some healing and help others who may feel all alone in their pain and shame? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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You Are Clean

In Christ, you have been made clean, pure, blameless, and holy. You are a saint, and that means that you are holy. In fact, the words holy and saint are translated from the exact same Greek word *hagios*.

remind the accuser

Zechariah 3:1-5

Next, I saw Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, with Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, “May the Lord rebuke you, Satan! May the Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Isn’t this man like a burning stick snatched from the fire?” Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood there before the angel. The angel spoke up to those standing all around, “Remove his filthy clothes.” Then he said to Joshua, “I have freely forgiven your iniquity and will dress you in fine clothing.” Then I spoke up, “Let a clean turban be put on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the Lord stood nearby.

The passage above is a beautiful metaphor that illustrates the heavenly reality that takes place when the Lord forgives us and dresses us in His righteousness. What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the precious blood of Jesus.

Read the following passages and make note of the descriptive words that are applied to the saints: Ephesians 1:1, 4, 13, 15, 18, 19, 2:19, 21, 4:12,30; 5:2; Romans 1:6-7; John 13:10- 11; 17:17,19; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 1:8, 6:11; 1 Timothy 4:5; 1 Peter 2:9; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Thessalonians 5:23

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Psalm 103:1-5

Praise the Lord, O my soul! With all that is within me, praise his holy name! Praise the Lord, O my soul! Do not forget all his kind deeds! He is the one who forgives all your sins, who heals all your diseases, who delivers your life from the Pit, who crowns you with his loyal love and compassion, who satisfies your life with good things, so your youth is renewed like an eagle’s.

In conclusion, let’s think about Paul before his conversion. He was the one who held the cloaks for the those who stoned Saint Steven to death. This is not to mention the other Christians he hunted down, persecuted, and had killed! How could Paul possibly go forward to serve the Lord unless he truly believed what God said about him in the face of the painful reminders of the accuser? Paul received the healing redemptive truth that he was forgiven of all his sins—past, present, and future! Paul embraced (and so should we) the reality of the truth that when God the Father looks at us, He sees His Son Jesus—the sinless One.

Ezekiel 36:25

I will sprinkle you with pure water and you will be clean from all your impurities. I will purify you from all your idols.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. Keeping in mind that the word saint means holy**,** would you describe yourself as a sinner or a saint?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Have you experienced the trauma of abuse?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Explain your answer\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. If so, have you struggled with any addictions that could have resulted from past wounds?

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1. Has God revealed to you any areas in your life that need further healing or deliverance?

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1. If so, have you sought help through counseling? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Do you think some of our insecurities come from an unhealthy fear that God will treat us as our sins deserve or that God cannot truly love us because of what we have done? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you feel like you must pay penitence for your past sin to earn God’s love? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Read Psalm 103:1-14. In verse 4, the Psalmist describes deliverance from the pit. Can you describe a “pit” that the Lord has delivered you from?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verse

1 Peter 1:18-19

You know that from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors you were ransomed – not by perishable things like silver or gold, but by precious blood like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb, namely Christ.



**Redeemed from a Sinful Past**

Key Passage

1 Peter 1:18-19

Introduction

e live in the information age; through the internet, there are an abundance of sites that afford us the opportunity to trace the steps of our family’s bloodline. Have you ever done a search of your ancestry to see where in the world your forefathers came from? If you have, then you’ve probably found all sorts of interesting folks. You would be proud to hang the pictures of some of them in your family’s hall of fame—while others you would rather keep hidden in the closet of shame. Every family has it’s “skeletons in the closet.” The apostle Peter aptly describes our earthly ancestry this way: “An empty way of life handed down to us from our forefathers.” Perhaps, the word empty doesn’t quite describe your heritage. Maybe your family “handed down” a life filled with pain and shame. If you don’t have a Godly heritage, take heart. As we are about to learn, in Christ, we have a new bloodline. Through the encouragement of Scripture, there is hope for us all.

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1 Corinthians 1:26-29

Think about the circumstances of your call, brothers and sisters. Not many were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were born to a privileged position. But God chose what the world thinks foolish to shame the wise, and God chose what the world thinks weak to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, what is regarded as nothing, to set aside what is regarded as something, so that no one can boast in his presence.

New Bloodline

Let’s do a quick review of the women listed in the earthly genealogy of Jesus. Stop and read Matthew 1:3-12. Women were hardly ever listed in the family tree. Surprisingly, the fact that the Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to list them by name speaks volumes, not to mention, the *kind of women* that are listed here. But before we look at these women, there are three significant points that we don’t want to miss.

* Number one: God chooses all kinds of people, even those who others deem insignificant.
* Number two: God chooses sinful people—for only sinners can be saved.
* Number three: God gives honor and dignity to “these kinds” of people.

The women chosen to be in the royal bloodline of Jesus are shockingly scandalous, to say the least. The first one listed had a sordid past. Tamar was the widow of one of Judah’s sons; she was cheated out of a kinsman to redeem her, so she posed as a prostitute and had sex with her father-in- law. This produced twin boys; the firstborn was Perez (Genesis 38:1-30; Ruth 4:1-22). Perez became the great, great, great-grandfather to Salmon. Salmon married a Canaanite prostitute named Rahab. She was the one whose scarlet cord was used to lower the Hebrew spies out of the window of her “house of ill repute.” Not only did her act save her whole family before the walls of Jericho fell, it also won the heart of Salmon (Joshua 2:1-13, 6:17-25).

Incidentally, the line or cord that hung out her window in Hebrew means hope. Through her marriage, this former prostitute began a new honorable bloodline for her descendants. She had a baby who would grow up to become a kinsman redeemer; his name was Boaz (Ruth 4). Boaz redeemed a Moabite widow named Ruth. Now Ruth’s family heritage was also marred by sexual sin. The Moabites were the product of Lot’s incestuous relationship with his own daughters (Genesis 19). But because Boaz chose to redeem Ruth, she gained the promise that one of her offspring would be a famous redeemer in Bethlehem—the city of David. Bethlehem, by the way, means house of bread—a foreshadowing of the coming Redeemer who is called the Bread of Life. The kinsman redeemer and Ruth had a child. His name was Obed. He was the father of Jesse whose son was King David. Although we know that David was “a man after God’s own heart,” David committed adultery with Bathsheba, got her pregnant, and then killed her husband. Their baby died because of all this sin (2 Samuel 11). Despite their checkered past, God had mercy on these adulterers. He gave them a son: wise King Solomon. We read about his wedding in Psalm 45, but the book of Hebrews attributes this passage of scripture to one of Solomon’s offspring—the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:3-10).

Of course, the last one listed was the Virgin Mary, the mother of our Redeemer. We must not forget the insinuations and accusations inflicted on her by those around her. After all, who had ever heard of a virgin getting pregnant?

All of this is to say that Jesus’ earthly ancestry poignantly stresses a weighty reality: regardless of how dishonorable our heritage may be, our earthly family’s past does not have to dictate the future of a child of God. Please don’t miss this! If you have been born again, you have an opportunity to begin a new legacy and leave a godly inheritance for your offspring—even your disciples and their children’s children. What God did for these women, He can do for you.

Accepted in the Beloved

Ephesians 1:6b (KJV)

Wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.

Every now and again, you come upon a passage of Scripture that you have read before but never thought much about. To the casual reader, it is just a simple clause. Yet, when you approach it with prayerful consideration, digging just below the surface, you find a diamond. An example is Ephesians 1:6. We are going to hold this jewel up to the light and be amazed at the riches that are revealed. Be prepared to be blessed!

The interpreters of the King James Bible picked a seemingly inconspicuous word to describe the honor bestowed upon the ones who have been placed in Christ*.* In the King James translation, the word is accepted, however, some other translators chose the word favored. When you think about the word accepted, don’t you normally think in terms of receiving something half-heartedly? If you’re a person like me who tends to see the glass half empty, the word *accepted* has negative connotations. For example, “She accepted the position, although it was not the job she wanted.” Or perhaps, “He accepted the fact that he didn’t have long to live.” Yet as we explore the deeper truths contained in this tiny passage, it becomes apparent that the Holy Spirit had an altogether different message in mind.

To discover the gems in this lesson, we need to look closely at the original Greek words translated as *highly favored* or *accepted*. But before we do, let’s focus on two other keywords: *pleased and well pleased*. These words are used, with just a few exceptions, in reference to the Lord Jesus. In the following passages, they are they are applied to those who are in Christ. I will underline the words in the following passages. “Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Ephesians 1:5). “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself” (Ephesians 1:9).

* **Highly Favored**/ **Accepted:** The Greek word is charitoo. (It comes from the word grace.) It means to *grace or highly honor.* As a side note: the words gift and forgiveness relate to both words.
* **Good Will/ Good Pleasure:** The Greek words are edudokia or eudokeo. Other definitions are *satisfaction, delight, to think well of, to approve of.*

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Habakkuk 1:13; Isaiah 59:1-2; Colossians 1:16-23; Luke 3:22; Matthew 3:17, 12:18, 17:5; 2 Peter 1:16-17; Mark 1:11

As we have just seen in the passages above, when the Father spoke from heaven, He said: “This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Because Jesus is the unrivaled object of the Father’s affection, the Father’s love and acceptance of us rests solely upon His love for His Beloved Son. Because of this, we are not just accepted by God, but, in Christ, we are highly favored and enormously blessed.

At the birth of Jesus, a heavenly host appeared and declared: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace among men with whom *He is pleased*.” The King James version said, “On whom His favor rests” (Luke 2:13-14). In this instance, the words pleased and favored are the same word applied to Jesus! Do you understand the significance of that? Because Christ Jesus now lives “in us,” and God the Father is *well pleased with Him*, the Father’s *favor* now rests “upon us.” It is mind-boggling. Think through the implications of these wonders. Do you struggle with feelings of insignificance? When you read the Bible, do you think about the people listed as superhumans? They were not. They were every bit as human as you and me.

Take the mother of Jesus, Mary, for example. Can you imagine the thoughts running through her teenage mind when she was visited by the angel Gabriel? Before He announced that her womb would be the incubator of Immanuel, in fact, “the Holy of Holies,” he declared her standing with God. Gabriel said: “Greetings, you who are *highly favored.* The Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28 NIV). We marvel at this encounter and the great honor bestowed upon Mary—and rightfully so. But please don’t miss this hidden treasure; the words *highly favored* are the exact same word used in Ephesians 1:6 for *accepted.* Here is the truth: If you are in Christ, then you are as highly favored by God as Mary!

Consider a further wonder. Mary carried the Son of God (her Creator) within her. Likewise, we also carry God the Holy Spirit within us. Once we were separated from God in our sins. Now, not only is God with us but, like the Virgin Mary, God is in us! If we could but grasp this reality, it would change our lives completely.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Romans 8:28-32; Luke 12:32; John 1:10-18, 14:6-24, 16:27; Matthew 3:17, 12:18, 17:5, 21:28-32; Colossians 1:12-19

The value of anything is set by one criterion. Do you know what that is? An item’s value is appraised by the price that someone is willing to pay to have it. Every living soul is valuable. Not only because they are made in God’s image, but also because of the price He paid to redeem us. If you will look to the cross of Christ, you will know exactly how valuable you are to God because of the price He paid to have you. The catalyst that drove Him to the cross was love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. Could you relate to any of the women listed in Jesus’ lineage? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. If so, how has this chapter given you hope? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. From Exodus 20:1-6, what do you think is meant by the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. When God said He would show His love to a thousand generations, it was contingent upon two things. What are they? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Can you think of anyone who needs to hear this truth? Would you prayerfully consider sharing this with them? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Jesus came to redeem us from the “empty way of life” handed down from our forefathers. What kind of “hand-me-downs” did you get? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. How could this lesson help someone dealing with feelings of worthlessness? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Now read the following Psalm 44-49, 84-85,87-88. Considering who they were, what stands out to you in the writings of the sons of Korah? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read the following passages and make a detailed list of how they personally apply to you in Christ. Mark 10:13-16; John 8:1-11; Luke 5:27-32; Galatians 3:13, 4:5; Revelation 5:9; 1 Corinthians 15:10. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verses

1 Peter 1:18-19

You know that from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors you were ransomed—not by perishable things like silver or gold, but by precious blood like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb, namely Christ.

Ephesians 1:6b (KJV)

Wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.



**Abba Father**

Key Passage

Galatians 4:4-7

Introduction

J

ust the mention of the word father can conjure up a myriad of emotions—some good and some bad. Most of us base our concept of God as a father on our experience with our earthly fathers. For those who were raised by a loving father, this lesson will bring up fond memories. Whereas, if you were raised in a family with an ungodly, abusive, absent, or emotionally disconnected father, then what we’re about to study may evoke memories that are anything but pleasant. Does that last statement describe your father in any way? If it does, you may be thinking, “If God is anything like my father, then I want no part of Him!” This is understandable if you are tormented by the haunting memories of an abusive or absent father. If this is the scenario that you most easily relate to, it may have left you with a false image of God that in no way resembles the God of the Bible. Therefore, it cannot be stressed enough the crucial role a father plays in the lives of his children.

The truth is, many us are quite familiar with difficult family dynamics. However, as we deal with what could be for some, an extremely sensitive subject, let me assure you on the front end, our goal is healing. Intrinsic in all of us is a need to know God, our Father, as He *really* is—a God of real, unending, soul healing love. If you are apt to become depressed or despondent when thinking about your earthly father, when you come to know God as your *real Father,* your gloom will be turned to gladness. You may need to get your tissue box handy for the tears of joy you will shed when you meet your *heavenly Father*.

The Father Chose You

Father is the first word in the Hebrew dictionary, and the first time in the Bible that the word father is mentioned is at the wedding of Adam and Eve. Here, God Himself presided over that ceremony. This was His charge to the couple: “For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Perhaps they were a bit confused by this statement. If you’ll remember, they didn’t have any parents—only God the Father. Genesis 2:24 is a passage that is typically used in marriage ceremonies, and it’s quite relevant to me. Ethan, my first-born son, has recently left his father and me to become united with his new wife Jessica. And while the “uniting” part gives me great joy, the “leaving” part evokes other emotions in this mother’s heart. (I’m still adjusting to having an empty nest.)

We often forget that marriage was God’s idea from the start. Did you know that in many cultures the father is the one who selects the bride for his son? The same is true of the bride of Christ. Our Father chose us for His Son. The Greek word for chose really defines just how special we are to God. It means to *select as a favorite.* God, the Father has favorites—all His children are His favorite!

* Make notes from the following passages of how the word chose is used: Ephesians 1:4; John 13:18, 15:16 -19; 1 Peter 2:4-9 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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God the Father not only selected us for Jesus, He draws us to Him (John 6:39-65; Ephesians 1:3-5). We can’t come any other way. What an honor that through Jesus we have the same intimacy, familiarity, and tender affection that exists between Him and His Father. Nowhere is this relationship so poignantly displayed than the moment when Jesus cried out from the cross in Aramaic, “Abba,” which is translated as Daddy.

John 6:44

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

* The prophet Isaiah gave several names or titles to Jesus in Isaiah 9:2-17. What are they?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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* Read Ephesians 1:3-7 and Deuteronomy 7:6-8. Note every similarity.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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* After reading those two passages, what is the stated purpose of God’s choosing people?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Let’s use our holy imagination here for a moment. In eternity past, God the Father looked through all of time and He saw you—sins, blemishes, hurts, and all. Then He looked to His right hand at His Precious Son Jesus, and He said, “My Beloved, I have chosen for you a Bride, and her name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_” (If you belong to Him, place your name there.)

**DIGGING DEEPER**: Matthew 3:13-17, 25:31-34; John 1:1-18, 3:1-18, 6:45-65, 8:16-58, 10:25-38, 14:1- 26, 17:1-6; Isaiah 49:14-16, 53:1-12, 54:13; 1 Peter 1:9-25, 2:4; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Ephesians 2:11-14; Colossians 1:1-13; 1 John 3:1-10, 4:10-19; Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:3-7; Titus 1:2-4; 3:4-7; Jeremiah 31:3, 31-34

Our Daddy in Heaven

Ephesians 3:14-15

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on the earth is named.

There is something quite unique about the passage above. In the entirety of the New Testament, the one and only time the word *family* is used is in that prayer. And did you notice the location of the family? We’re a family in heaven and on earth, and we have the honor of bearing our Father’s name. The above prayer could possibly be the most meaningful prayer that you could ever pray for another individual. Yet as impressive as Paul’s prayer is, it doesn’t even compare to the Lord’s Prayer, recorded in John 17:1-26.

Just prior to the cross, Jesus had a conversation with the Father about those the Father had given to Him—His disciples. This prayer gives us a rare opportunity to hear Jesus talk to the Father about us. The prayer is full of truths too numerous to ponder in one chapter. We’ll focus on just a few statements such as, “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

We think of eternal life as living forever, yet that is not what the passage says. “Eternal life,” Jesus said, is “knowing God the Father.” But, how is it possible to know the unseen God? We can’t, apart from Jesus! He stated plainly, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:1-6). He also said, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father” and “I and the Father are One” (John

10:30-38). And furthermore, “No one has ever seen God. The only one, himself God, who is in closest fellowship with the Father, has made God known” (John 1:14-18).

Romans 8:14-16

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit that we are God’s children.

While working on this chapter, my husband and I attended a mission conference where we met three brothers in Christ, each from different Muslim countries. One was from Morocco, one was from Iran, and one was from Lebanon. We were riveted by their compelling stories. Gilbert, an Iranian Christian, endured the martyrdom of his father for the gospel. Brother Rachid, the son of a Moroccan Imam, was disowned by his family when he believed in Jesus. And then there was André Houssney, whose believing parents still live in Beirut. Even though they are sometimes alienated from their Muslim neighbors, they faithfully share the gospel. These three brothers in Christ taught us so much about Islam and how to love and reach those who are enslaved by the fastest growing religion in the world.

We learned that Muslims adhere to Five Pillars of Faith. Each one stands in stark contrast to the Christian faith. For instance, take Islam’s second pillar—prayer. Five times a day they must bow down and recite rote prayers in Aramaic—a language that few Muslims speak or understand. For them, prayer is a religious duty, and to refuse to pray is an offense punishable by death! It’s little wonder because the word Islam means submission. Conversely, for the child of God, prayer is communion with God our Father (Hebrews 4:16). Although He is our creator and the King of the universe, He knows us each personally and intimately. It’s a privilege to talk to Him and not an obligation.

At the same conference, André told the story of Maha, an Egyptian girl who was raised in a devout Muslim home. One night while praying with her mother, Maha asked her mother, “Who are we praying to?” Her mother did not know. So, because Maha had a loving father, she began to picture in her mind that she was praying to her loving daddy (in Arabic– “Abu” or “Baba” related to the Aramaic word Abba). One day, as she walked along the street, a lady drove up beside her and gave her a little, white New Testament. Then she simply drove away. (That’s one way to evangelize.) Maha was curious, but she would not dare to read the forbidden book, so she hid it for years. One day she passed a Christian church and heard singing, and she drew near to listen. After the singing stopped, she heard the pastor say, “Let us pray.” She thought to herself, “I wonder who Christians pray to.” As they bowed their head to pray she heard the first words of their prayer “Abnua” Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” The Lord had tendered her heart even before she knew Him personally. Her heavenly Father was speaking to her. Andre’s Lebanese parents led her to the Lord. Now Maha knows the intimacy of a personal relationship with God, her loving Father—her *Abba*.

Adopted to Himself

Psalm 68:5-6

He is a father to the fatherless and an advocate for widows. God rules from his holy palace. God settles those who have been deserted in their own homes; he frees prisoners and grants them prosperity. But sinful rebels live in the desert.

Rarely, does a person make it through life without knowing rejection in one form or another. Yet there is an altogether different kind of pain inflicted upon those who are rejected and abandoned. This is especially true for an orphaned child or a woman who has been deserted by her husband. Quite often these could be haunted by some nagging questions like: “Why I am not wanted?” or “Am I not worthy of love?” When we take the bait of those insidious thoughts, Satan will begin to replay the sorrowful refrain to torment us and to ensure that the wounds remain open and agonizing. This can set you up for a lifetime of self-pity and victimhood. Perhaps you can relate. If so, then my prayer for you is that the heavenly Father will break this record of lies once and for all and replace it with His song of love. May He quiet and comfort you with His love as He sings over you (Isaiah 66:13).

Zephaniah 3:14-15

Shout for joy, Daughter Zion! Shout out, Israel! Be happy and boast with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has removed the judgment against you; he has turned back your enemy. Israel’s king, the Lord, is in your midst! You no longer need to fear disaster.

There are no such things as perfect parents, perfect children, or perfect families! Can we just be honest and admit it? We’re all broken. There has never been an earthly mother or father who could fill the shoes of God. They weren’t meant to. So, when we try to make “little gods” out of people, they will inevitably let us down. When they do, God can use this hunger and thirst for love to point us to our heavenly Father. Contemplate these truths: the hands of God the Father hold you, and the hands of Jesus formed you in the womb. When His hands were pierced on the cross, you were forever engraved there. No one will ever snatch you away from Him. Now, that is security! You are God’s child, precious to Him and loved by Him from eternity past. Because you are His, you are blessed with every spiritual blessing. You inherited them, not from your earthly father, but from your heavenly Father. That fact alone, makes you extraordinary—don’t you think? Someone once said that it’s hard to hear God in pleasures, but we hear Him loud and clear when we are in pain. If rejection and wounds from the past bring pain to your heart, then listen to the words of your Heavenly Father: “I am the Father to the Fatherless.” Whenever you are reminded of your painful childhood in the home of your earthly father, here is a passage to cling to.

Psalm 45:10-11 (KJV)

Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** John 6:37-47; 1 Peter 1:2, 2:9-10; James 1:27; Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:3-6;Jeremiah 1:4-10; Isaiah 43:1-21; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Revelation 17:14; Psalm 10:14, 27:10, 45:10- 11, 8:5-6, 66:13, 103:13-17, 49:15-16; Deuteronomy 10:18

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. What does the word father mean to you, and how do you feel about God being a Father?

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1. Were you or anyone close to you adopted? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. If so, then describe ways adoption has impacted your life or theirs: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Have you ever felt that you had to earn God’s love?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. If so, how do you relate to God when you sin? Do you hide from Him? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Exodus 20:1-6. When God said that He would show His love to a thousand generations, it was contingent upon two things. What are they? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Can you think of anyone who needs to hear this truth? Would you prayerfully consider sharing this with them? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Jesus came to redeem us from the “empty way of life” handed down from our forefathers. What kind of “hand-me-downs” did you get? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verse

Galatians 4:6-7

And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, who calls “Abba! Father! So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if you are a son, then you are also an heir through God.



Phase Three —Abiding in Truth

John 15:4-5

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. “I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me—and I in him—bears much fruit, because apart from me you can accomplish nothing.

The Main Goals for Phase Three:

* Learn the fundamentals of abiding in an intimate relationship with Jesus.
* Solidify the importance of the Word of God.
* Teach them to discern the difference between sound biblical doctrine and heresy.

Phase Three Lessons:

* Holy Habit of Quiet Time
* Twelve Things the Bible Says About the Bible
* The Basics of Bible Study
* Promised to One Husband

Once a person has heard the gospel message, has biblical assurance of salvation, and has been introduced to the concept of their new identity, they are ready for Phase Three. Here we will cover essential spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, prayer, and how to have a devotional time alone with God. As always, the aim is that the disciple learns to have a personal, intimate relationship with the Lord. For some of us, this concept is second nature. For others who have been taught that there is a hierarchy in the church, it is quite radical to think that the God of the universe wants to have a personal relationship with them. We believe in the priesthood of all saints (1 Peter 2:4-10). For there is one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Ephesians 4:4-7). And, therefore, as those in Christ, we all have direct access to God our Father (Hebrews 4:1-16).

Let me give a word of caution. If you are discipling a non-believer and teaching them about the assurance of their salvation, you’re giving them a false sense of security and a false identity. Besides, if you are teaching someone to study the Bible, and they don’t have the Holy Spirit abiding in them, they will either become a “Pharisee,” or worse, a false teacher (1 Corinthians 2:1-15; 2 Peter 15-16)! So, before you move forward, please be sure you are discipling a believer and not a non-believer. Phase Three is about learning to abide in a life-giving relationship with Jesus through His Word and prayer. The most effective way to teach your disciple is to show them how to dig into God’s Word and interpret it accurately. It’s been said, disciple-making is caught more than taught.



**Holy Habit of Quiet Time**

Key Passage

Mark 6:31

Introduction

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uppose you received an invitation from Buckingham Palace inviting you to come and have a private meeting with the Queen of England. Would you pass up that opportunity? Of course not. Well, seeing that you are God’s child, you’ve been giving the honor of having a private meeting with the King of the universe every single day! If we desire to abide in a life receiving relationship with Jesus, keeping this appointment is essential (John 15:1-8). Still, as perplexing as this may be, most of us don’t avail ourselves of this privilege. Why is that? The following quote by Karen Conlee sheds some light on this subject. She said, “Why do I sin? —I don’t love God. Why don’t I love God? —I don’t know God. Why don’t I know God? —I don’t spend time with Him. Why don’t I spend time with God? —I don’t see the need. Why don’t I see the need? —Pride!” (Downline Women’s Discipling Summit at Highpoint Church in Memphis, Tennessee on March 1, 2014.) Thought provoking and convicting, isn’t it?

The sin of pride is certainly one reason we don’t spend time alone with Jesus. However, there is another hindrance to having a meaningful quiet time. Since a large majority of new believers have never been discipled, they don’t even know what a quiet time looks like. When it comes to building an intimate relationship with God, the discipline of a quiet time is fundamental. Without it, we tend to drift towards empty religious rituals instead of the vibrant love relationship that He desires to have with us (Mark 7:6-8). Therefore, we are going to learn some helpful tips to guide us as we seek to develop the holy habit of quiet time. That’s what this lesson is all about.

Seek His Face…Not Just His Hand

Psalm 27:8 (KJV)

When though saidist, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.

Did you know that the words *face* and *presence* are the same word in the Hebrew language? It is true. You can see these two words used in Psalm 16:11; Genesis 32:30, and in Exodus 33:11-23. (Take a moment and read these passages.)

Exodus 33:11

The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, the way a person speaks to a friend….

What’s my point? Through quiet time, we are allowed the same access to God that Moses had. Think about that. You and I are invited to come every single day and have an audience with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. That is life transforming!

But first, let’s differentiate between what it means to seek the face of God as opposed to seeking the hand of God. To seek God’s face is to come into His presence. In other words, to seek *Him*. Whereas, when we seek His hand, we are coming to Him to get something. I don’t know about you, but too often I am prone to seek God when I am in need. And the greater the need, the more earnestly I seek Him. Don’t get me wrong. It is not a bad thing to seek the Lord in times of need. He is a loving Father who desires to help His children. But if we only seek Him for what He can give us, then we have missed the point entirely. And furthermore, this is a marker that we are not abiding in Him (John 15:1-12).

Where and When?

Matthew 6:5-6

Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray while standing in synagogues and on street corners so that people can see them. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. 6 But whenever you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.

The proper place to meet with God is a quiet place where you can be alone and focus your attention on Him. Guard this time well and be aware of distractions that can interrupt this time. To borrow from the words of King Solomon in Song of Songs 2:10-16, things that distract us from being alone with Jesus are like (little foxes) vying for our time. Granted, it may take some intentionality and creativity to carve out the time and place.

Mark 6:31-32

He said to them, “Come with me privately to an isolated place and rest a while” (for many were coming and going, and there was no time to eat). So they went away by themselves in a boat to some remote place.

* Read Luke 5:16 and Mathew 11:27-29. What insights can you glean from Jesus’ words and example? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Psalm 63:1-3 (KJV)

O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.

I know we are spending a lot of time looking at words and definitions, but there is just so much we can learn when we do. In Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, the word for seek is *baqash*. Do you know what it means? It means to seek out in worship or prayer. Likewise, *zeteo*, the Greek word for seek, means to seek after God in order to worship Him. See what I mean? Who would have guessed that the main point of seeking God was to worship Him?

Matthew 6:33 (KJV)

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Then there is the Greek word *proton*. It is translated into the English word *first*. The proper time for worship will vary for each of us, but it is best to have at least some time at the beginning of your day. If we don’t come to Him first, the cares of the world will come crashing down on us and make it almost impossible to get alone with God. Furthermore, it is written in Isaiah 50:4-5 that God wakens His disciples every morning with the ability to hear His voice, and we hear His voice in the Word of God. Jesus is *The First, The Beginning and The Bright Morning Star.* Therefore, He is worthy of having first place every day and in every aspect of our lives.

**DIGGING DEEPER**: Jeremiah 29:11-14; Psalm 10:4, 14:2, 53:2, 90:14-17; John 4:22-23, 8:30-31, 15:7- 8; 2 Chronicles 16:9; Hebrews 11:6; Isaiah 55:1-5; Matthew 11:28-30, 22:1-10; Revelation 22:17; Song of Songs 2:10-16; Proverbs 8:17, 33-36; Lamentations 3:21-25; Luke 10:39-42; Mark 1:35

Tools and Tips of Quiet Time

Psalm 119:10-16

With all my heart, I seek you. Do not allow me to stray from your commands! In my heart, I store up your words, so I might not sin against you. You deserve praise, O Lord! Teach me your statutes! With my lips I proclaim all the regulations you have revealed. I rejoice in the lifestyle prescribed by your rules as if they were riches of all kinds. I will meditate on your precepts and focus on your behavior. I find delight in your statutes; I do not forget your instructions.

Here are a few tools to have on hand when you are having your quiet time. You will need a readable Bible. Use two translations if you have them. There is a free app called Bible.is., and it can be a great resource to use to listen to the Bible or to read the Bible in many languages. In addition, Biblehub.com has many different translations that you may find useful. A journal is another important tool for your quiet time. This is where you will write down what God says to you and your response to Him in prayer. If you don’t write it down, you will forget.

Perhaps the best illustration of prioritizing the hearing of God’s Word is found in the story of Mary and her sister Martha. They give us both a negative and a positive example. From Martha, we learn that working for the Lord is no substitute for worshiping the Lord.

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him as a guest. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he said. But Martha was distracted with all the preparations she had to make, so she came up to him and said, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do all the work alone? Tell her to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things, but one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the best part; it will not be taken away from her.”

Jesus set Martha straight by using Mary as an example. He told Martha that she needed only one thing in her life. What was this one thing? To sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to His every Word. That is what her sister Mary was doing, spending time in the presence of Jesus. To her, nothing else mattered. There will always be plenty of things to be worried and upset about. That’s why we must *choose* to worship Jesus first. Then, out of the overflow of the Holy Spirit, we can work for Jesus. (In another lesson, we will cover this subject in greater detail.)

There are basically three key elements of quiet time: the Word of God, worship, and prayer—in that order. After seeking and finding God through spending time reading His Word, worship is the proper response to beholding Him. Then, you can incorporate God’s Word into your conversation with Him in prayer. To help us remember to keep things in proper order, I will cite Herb Hodges. He said: “The (ACTS) of prayer are: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication.” Here are some tips that may be of help as you learn to develop this essential spiritual discipline.

First, clear your mind and quiet your heart. Recognize you are in the presence of your Lord. He is holy, and we should come before Him reverently. And, as the Psalmist said, we must come to God with clean hands and a pure heart. Our response to His holiness will lead us to see our sin, resulting in confession (Psalm 24:1-6; 1 John 1:5-10).

Second, read the Bible first. I find it helpful to read a Proverb or Psalm along with a passage from the New Testament. Third, ask the following questions: Is there a command to obey? Is there a promise to claim? Is there a sin to confess or avoid? Is there a lesson to learn? Is there a new truth to carry you? Fourth, write it down, and then pray about what He has said to you.

Finally, share with someone the truth you have learned. Did you know that you can remember about twenty percent of what you hear and forty percent of what you read, but you can remember about eighty-five percent of what you write? How can you transfer this truth to someone else if you can’t remember it? As you study, take notes of the things the Lord is impressing on your heart and make a to-do list.

**Consider this:** our actions speak louder than words. Time alone with God should take precedence over all our other activities. By seeking Him first, we communicate to Him the following: “I love you, Lord. I am dependent upon you. I can do nothing without you. You are the most important Person in my life.” Will you accept His invitation?

John 7:37-38

On the last day of the feast, the greatest day, Jesus stood up and shouted out, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me, and 38 let the one who believes in me drink. Just as the scripture says, ‘From within him will flow rivers of living water.’”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. Search your heart and answer this question: “Why don’t I prioritize time alone with God?”

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1. From the following passages what does God seek as He looks upon the earth? (Psalm 53:2, 14:2; John 4:19-24) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Psalm 27:8 says, “…I will seek Your face.” What other Hebrew word means the same thing as seeking God’s face?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Why do you think it is important to seek God in the first part of the day? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. List some ways that you can carve out time in your everyday life to make time to be alone with Jesus in His Word. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. List some of the tools and tips given in this lesson to help in quiet time. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Will you ask someone to hold you accountable as you seek to make this a priority in your daily life? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Memory Verse

Matthew 6:33-34

But above all pursue his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So then, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Today has enough trouble of its own.



**Twelve Things the Bible Says About the Bible**

Key Passage

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Introduction

I

t is written, “This is the Word of the Lord” (Jeremiah 46:1). The Bible is not just a collection of God’s words. It is the very Word of God! In fact, the most literal translation of Psalm 138:2 states that God’s Word is as weighty as His Name. It is that important! There is no book in the world like the Bible. It has the power to transform your life, and it is filled with inexhaustible wealth. However, the source of power and wealth is not found on the written page, but in a person. That person is Jesus Christ—The *Word who became flesh and made His dwelling with us* (John 1:1-14). Let’s see what is written in the Bible about the Bible.

The Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit:

2 Peter 1:19-21

Moreover, we possess the prophetic word as an altogether reliable thing. You do well if you pay attention to this as you would to a light shining in a murky place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet’s own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

“The Bible,” some say, “is just another book written by men.” However, a seeker of the truth who takes the time to learn the historical facts will discover that this is no ordinary book. Written over a span of a thousand plus years, the sixty-six books of the Bible were recorded by the Holy Spirit on the hearts of approximately forty-nine different writers. Each one of these men, inspired by God, took scrolls and ink in hand and meticulously begin to write (Luke 1:1-4). Throughout the ages, God has preserved His Holy Book, and because of this, we can hold in our hands the very WORD of GOD!

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work.

There are two Greek words translated into English as the *Word of God*. It is important to understand how and where the Holy Spirit inspired their use. First, is Logos. In general, it refers to *Christ Jesus* as the origin or conceptualization of God’s Word. Second, is the word Rhema. A rhema is a specific portion of the Bible that the Holy Spirit uses to articulate His thought in a situation. Case in point, read Matthew 4:1-10 and note how the Logos - who is Jesus- articulated specific passage to combat the devil’s temptations. Hence, the importance of hiding God’s Word in your heart (Psalm 119:11).

For further study, here are some passages where you can find each word used.See how logos it is used in the following passages: John 1:1-14; 1 Peter 1:23; Hebrews 4:12; John 8:31, 14:23; 1 John 1:1; Revelation 19:13. Now let’s see how rhema is used in the following passages: Matthew 4:4; Romans 10:8- 17; Ephesians 1:13, 5:26, 6:17; Hebrews 1:3, 11:3; John 3:34, 6:63; John 15:7; 1 Peter 1:25.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

And so, we too constantly thank God that when you received God’s message that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human message, but as it truly is, God’s message, which is at work among you who believe.

**DIGGING DEEPER**: 2 Timothy 3:13-4:4; 2 Peter 1:16-21; 1 Corinthians 2:4-16; 2 Corinthians 1:20-21

In the Bible we “Behold our God”:

1 Samuel 3:19-21

Samuel continued to grow, and the Lord was with him. None of his prophecies fell to the ground unfulfilled. All Israel from Dan to Beer Sheba realized that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord. Then the Lord again appeared in Shiloh, for it was in Shiloh that the Lord had revealed himself to Samuel through the word of the Lord.

God made “the truth” evident in the world through His son, Jesus. The second way that truth was revealed to us is through the scriptures. The entire Bible is the revelation of God. All we can know or will ever know about God is contained within it. In the story of Eli and Samuel found in 1 Samuel 3:1-21, we find two important principles. Number one, the Bible reveals God, and number two, God speaks through His Word (our next point). Is the Word of God rare in your life? If so, you have little vision of God, and without a vision of God people will perish (Proverbs 29:15-18).

**DIGGING DEEPER**: 1 Samuel 3:19-21; Isaiah 40:5-11, 45:17-25; John 17:1-17; Revelation 1:1-8, 19:13; 1 John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-20

In the Bible we hear the voice of God:

Have you ever wondered if God still speaks to people? Yes, He does. He communicates through His Word. When we speak of communication, we are not talking about simply transferring information from one person to another. We are talking about real interaction which fosters deeper understanding and intimacy between two individuals. When communication is interrupted for any length of time, it is hard to maintain a relationship.

John 15:7

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want, and it will be done for you.

As you can see in the passages above, as well as Proverbs 28:9, the Word of God and prayer are linked together. Granted, most people will readily admit that they pray sometimes but seldom bother to open God’s Word to hear His reply. Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice” (John 10:27). The Greek word for voice is phone. We hear God’s “phone” when we read His Word. Do you want to hear His audible voice? Then read the Bible out loud!

The most important bit of information that God could communicate to us, as elementary as it sounds, is that He loves us. As the beloved children’s song goes, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” The lyrics come straight from the pages of the bestselling book of all times—the Holy Bible.

**DIGGING DEEPER**: Genesis 1:1-3; Galatians 2:20; John 3:16; Romans 5:6-10; Proverbs 28:9; John 1:1- 14, 4:9-10, 6:44-70, 10:27-28, 15:7-8; Luke 24:27; Hebrews 1:1-13

The Bible converts sinners:

1 Peter 1:23-25

You have been born anew, not from perishable but from imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. For all flesh is like grass sand all its glory like the flower of the grass; the grass withers and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word that was proclaimed to you

Peter, borrowing from Isaiah 40, clearly stated that salvation is accomplished by the power of God’s Word. When all is said and done, there are two things that will last forever—the Word of God and the souls of mankind. It is the Word of God that brings about the salvation of souls.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Ezekiel 37:4-14; 2 Timothy 3:14-15; Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23-25; Acts 7:38; Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 2:1-8; John 3:1-18, 6:63- 68; Philippians 2:16

The Bible is the spiritual food necessary to grow up in Christ:

1 Timothy 4:6

By pointing out such things to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, having nourished yourself on the words of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.

Without proper nourishment, we will not grow to spiritual maturity. I believe many of God’s children are malnourished. They are living off a once or twice a week spiritual meal consisting of whatever their pastor is serving up Sunday morning. How long do you think a person would live if they ate only one or two meals per week? If they continue to eat the “Bread of Life” only occasionally, then they will remain disconnected from the Lord and never grow up in the faith. And consequently, they never even get a taste of the nutrition found in the deeper mysteries hidden in God’s Word.

Life, at its best, can be difficult. What do these half-starved folks do when Monday morning rolls around and the realities of life in this sin-cursed world hit them? To live without the Bible is to live without Jesus. Yet, for those who have learned to live on “every Word that comes from the mouth of God,” they lay hold of God’s promises, find encouragement and strength, and get real help in times of need (Matthew 4:4; Romans 15:4). Subsequently, a well-fed believer will become the source of *spiritual food* for a world full of starving souls.

Deuteronomy 8:3

So he humbled you by making you hungry and then feeding you with unfamiliar manna. He did this to teach you that humankind cannot live by bread alone, but also by everything that comes from the Lord’s mouth.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** 1 Peter 2:2; 1 Timothy 4:6; Matthew 4:4; Jeremiah 15:16; Hebrews 5:11-14; Psalm 119:103; Romans 15:4; Isaiah 55:1-3

The Bible is the offensive weapon in spiritual warfare:

Ephesians 6:13-17

For this reason, take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand. Stand firm therefore, by fastening the belt of truth around your waist, by putting on the breastplate of righteousness, by fitting your feet with the preparation that comes from the good news of peace, and in all of this, by taking up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God.

In spiritual warfare, the Word of God is our one offensive weapon. I learned this first hand on a trip to Nicaragua. For this trip, we purchased a video camera to tape our lessons. Alba, the Nicaraguan pastor’s wife, began this discipling journey with me at my dining room table. She and I were on the balcony of our hotel trying to tape the lesson on spiritual warfare. As we began to read the Bible, we were besieged by all kinds of commotion and loud noises. The more we read, the louder the noises grew. They grew so loud, in fact, that the sounds were drowning out the Word of God. That is when I stopped and said to Alba, “This is precisely my point; the devil wants to silence God’s Word!” We moved inside so we could finish our lesson.

Think about a new believer. A person who is an infant in their faith has no idea that she has an enemy, and she certainly would not know how to use the Sword of the Spirit (the Bible) as an offensive weapon against that enemy. That situation requires someone who loves them enough to ground them in Biblical truth and, thereby, prepare them for battle. The Lord expects those who know how to use the Sword of the Spirit to disciple new believers. We will be held accountable at the judgment seat of Christ for the spiritual neglect of the babies in our sphere of influence.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** 1 Corinthians 3:9-14; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:17; Matthew 4:1-11; 1 John 2:14

The Bible is the medicine of the Great Physician:

Proverbs 4:20-23

My child, pay attention to my words; listen attentively to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your sight, guard them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and healing to one’s entire body. Guard your heart with all vigilance, for from it are the sources of life.

Whether it be through correction or as a balm to heal our brokenness, God’s Word brings healing. But medicine will not help unless you take it. In Proverbs 4:20, printed above, note the word *health*. In Hebrew the word is *Marpay,* and this is the definition: *a cure, a remedy, a medicine.* In the lesson titled “The Health of My Countenance—Dealing With Depression,” you will find several examples of the medicinal values of God’s Word.

Psalm 107:15-20

Let them give thanks to the Lord for his loyal love, and for the amazing things he has done for people! For he shattered the bronze gates, and hacked through the iron bars. They acted like fools in their rebellious ways, and suffered because of their sins. They lost their appetite for all food, and they drew near the gates of death. They cried out to the Lord in their distress; he delivered them from their troubles. He sent them an assuring word and healed them; he rescued them from the pits where they were trapped.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Proverbs 4:20-22; Psalm 34:19, 42:11, 107:8-21; Jeremiah 8:8-22

The Bible gives true wisdom and counsel:

Psalm 19:7-11

The law of the Lord is perfect and preserves one’s life. The rules set down by the Lord are reliable and impart wisdom to the inexperienced. The Lord’s precepts are fair and make one joyful. The Lord’s commands are pure and give insight for life. The commands to fear the Lord are right and endure forever. The judgments given by the Lord are trustworthy and absolutely just. They are of greater value than gold, than even a great amount of pure gold; they bring greater delight than honey, than even the sweetest honey from a honeycomb. Yes, your servant finds moral guidance there; those who obey them receive a rich reward.

In this era of social media, we can see evil, hear evil, and, if we so chose, speak evil twenty-four hours a day. Facebook, Twitter and such, gives a platform for all manner of false prophets peddling everything from propaganda to mind polluting pornography. Many people use Facebook as their psychologist, their source of information, and counsel. And tragically, it replaces true communication with the Lord and others. Besides this, it can be a real time-consumer, and how many of us really have time to waste? Although I do appreciate those who use social media to proclaim God’s truth and shed light on the face of Christ. It is the very nature of God to give wisdom and counsel to those who seek Him. After all, wisdom is hidden in Christ Jesus; His name is *Wonderful Counselor*! Therefore, all the wisdom we will ever need is found in His book, the Bible. Think of it as a trustworthy compass for our lives, directing us in the way that we should go.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Psalm 33:8; 119:24-50; Colossians 2:2-3; Isaiah 9:6

The Bible continually cleans us:

Ephesians 5:25-27

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to sanctify her by cleansing her with the washing of the water by the word, so that he may present the church to himself as glorious—not having a stain or wrinkle, or any such blemish, but holy and blameless.

My dear sister in Christ, Ruth Anne Bridges, was converted when she was almost fifty years old. She said that early on, she began to meditate and memorize the Word of God. A non-believer in her family said, with negative connotations, “That sounds like brainwashing.” She responded: “That is exactly what memorizing Scripture does; it washes my brain of lies and replaces them with the Truth!” It changes our old, carnal thinking and exchanges it for the mind of Christ. By memorizing passages, we give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to speak specific words (Rhema) to us. The Bible was written by the Holy Spirit; it is the dialect and language He speaks. Therefore, when we store up God’s Word in our hearts, we are increasing His vocabulary within us.

John 6:63

The Spirit is the one who gives life; human nature is of no help! The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.

Studying the Word of God will not make us sinless, but it certainly can make us sin less! How does that work? I can’t spend time in the Word of God and not have the Holy Spirit bring to light the sins that grieve Him. Sin keeps me from the Word of God, or the Word of God will keep me from sin. Oh, but for the grace to choose the latter.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** 2 Timothy 3:15-17; John 8:31-32, 17:7-17; Ephesians 5:26; Psalm 119:9-11, 105; Romans 12:1-3

The Bible is the curriculum of disciple-making:

2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV)

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Understanding and then sharing knowledge of the Bible is the core of disciple-making. The Bible is the curriculum of the entire process. One of the lessons I have written is called “The Basics of Bible Study.” While writing this study, I learned some valuable lessons from Ezra. He was a man who knew the Word of God, and it is believed that he wrote four books of the Bible. Nevertheless, he set his heart to study God’s Word. But why? Didn’t he already know it by heart? Even if he had it memorized, he knew that there were more treasures contained in the Bible than any man could uncover in a lifetime. Besides that, he wanted to be sure that he was practicing what he preached before he taught it to others (Ezra 7:10).

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and exhorting one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, all with grace in your hearts to God.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Ezra 7:10; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 5:12-14

The Bible is alive, living, and active:

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of dividing soul from spirit, and joints from marrow; it is able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart.

The longest chapter of the Bible is Psalm 119. It is uncertain who penned this chapter, although David, Daniel, Jeremiah, and Ezra have all been suggested. Whoever the writer was, he was passionately dedicated to the Scriptures, devoting 171 of the 176 verses to describe the importance of God’s Word. To the writer of this chapter, it was not just a collection of words on a page. He was zealous for it, meditated on it, and kept it within his heart so that he might *obey it*. It was more valuable to him than food, gold, or silver. It was his life and lifeline to God, and it is ours too! This Psalmist vividly describes what this “living book” can do for any believer, in any situation, who will take God at His Word.

There is one word used in Psalm 119:50 that encompasses all the other words we could use to describe the Bible. It is the Hebrew word *chayah*. Here is a partial definition of the word: it can mean to revive or keep alive, to nourish, preserve, recover, and, lastly, to make whole. See how it is used in the following passages: “This is my comfort in my affliction; that Your Word has *revived* me.” It is translated as *quicken*, or *revive*, or *life.* It is also found in Psalm 23, “He *restores* my soul.”

As the end of Moses’ life was approaching, he sang his final song. It is recorded in Deuteronomy 32. In this song, he chose the same Hebrew word the Psalmist used for the word *revived*. Moses was even more explicit about the importance of God’s Word to His people. He translated the Hebrew word Chayah as *life*.

Deuteronomy 32:46-47

…he said to them, “Keep in mind all the words I am solemnly proclaiming to you today; you must command your children to observe carefully all the words of this law. For this is no idle word for you—it is your life! By this word you will live a long time in the land you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.”

He chose the word *“life”* to describe God’s Word because to him it was the equivalent of life itself! When you think about all the incredible work God did on behalf of His people in bringing them through the wilderness and into the promised land, you can understand why God’s Word was life to them. (In 1 Samuel 2:12 through chapter 4:22 see the effects of a man of God who did not teach his sons this truth.)

Take a moment and look back over this list of descriptive words and then reflect on God’s provision for His people: *to live, to revive, nourish, repair, restore to life, save, and be whole.* When I look at those words and remember the times His Words’ have preserved, repaired, nourished, restored, and saved my life, I say “Amen.” It is Life indeed!

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Isaiah 55:1-12; Psalm 119:50, 85:6; Proverbs 4:20-22

The Word of God will *stand* forever:

Matthew 24:35

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Throughout the ages, men have tried to destroy the Bible, and yet it remains indestructible. That will always be true as long as we obey the Lord’s last command to “make disciples of all nations” and build our lives on the Bible. There are invaluable lessons that can be learned from those who treasured this *Eternal Book*, not the least of which is the fact that none of them died without passing God’s Truth onto others.

Isaiah 40:8 (KJV)

The grass withereth, the flowers fadeth: but the Word of our God shall stand for ever.

I hope you will bear with me as I unpack just one more word. The word is pregnant with meaning. The Hebrew word for *stand* is *quwn*. The root of this word means *to rise or lift up, to establish, make good, make new, to endure, or uphold.* A visual of the word is seen in this next passage.

Isaiah 40:28-31

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is an eternal God, the creator of the whole earth. He does not get tired or weary; there is no limit to his wisdom. He gives strength to those who are tired; to the ones who lack power, he gives renewed energy. Even youths get tired and weary; even strong young men clumsily stumble. But those who wait for the Lord’s help find renewed strength; they rise up as if they had eagles’ wings, they run without growing weary, they walk without getting tired.

I urge you to stop and carefully consider each word that is used to communicate the importance of the fact that God’s Word will *stand* forever. If you do, then you will find it vividly describes what the Bible says about the Bible. I wonder as you read this list if you need reviving, saving, nourishing, or repairing. May God take these words and cause your weary soul to rise and soar.

The blessings for the person who will live in, live on, and live out God’s Word are immeasurable. It is impossible to overestimate the life-changing power of God’s Word. We can bank our future on the solid fact that God will keep His every Word. The Living Word is Jesus. There is no life without Him!

Revelation 19:11-13

Then I saw heaven opened and here came a white horse! The one riding it was called “Faithful” and “True,” and with justice he judges and goes to war. His eyes are like a fiery flame and there are many diadem crowns on his head. He has a name written that no one knows except himself. He is dressed in clothing dipped in blood, and he is called the Word of God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. The benefits of God’s Word are many, and yet these blessings are conditional. In the next four passages what is the common denominator to receive blessings and success? Luke 6:46-49; Joshua 1:7-9; Psalm 1:1-3; James 1:21-23.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Make a list of people who have impacted your life because they loved and lived God’s Word.

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Memory Verse

2 Timothy 3:14-17

You, however, must continue in the things you have learned and are confident about. You know who taught you and how from infancy you have known the holy writings, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.



**The Basics of Bible Study**

Key Passage

### 2 Timothy 2:15

**Introduction**

R

ecently, I went to visit my ninety-seven-year-old grandmother and found her napping. On the bed beside her was her Bible. I asked her why she had it on the bed with her, and she said, “I put it there to remind me to read it when I woke up.” Even though she’s read the Bible from cover to cover several times, she said that she was about to start once more in Genesis and read through to Revelation. I pray that the Lord will grant me the wherewithal to study His Word until I stand in the presence of the *Living Word of God—the LORD Jesus Christ*.

There is an old saying that goes something like this: “Give a man a fish and feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and feed him for life.” The spiritual application of this principle is this: It is good to teach a person the Bible, but it is far better to teach them how to study the Bible for themselves. That way, they’ll feast on God’s Word for the rest of their life.

Do you know the difference between reading the Bible and studying the Bible? Reading the Bible gives us knowledge but studying gives us the applications of the truths it contains. When we learn to assimilate God’s changeless truth and apply it to our lives, a metamorphosis takes place. But here is the key that unlocks the door to transformation. We gain information by reading the Bible. We gain understanding by studying the Bible. But we ascertain wisdom by putting God’s truth into practice. In other words, the Word of God becomes flesh when we live it! That is, in part, the aim of this lesson.

The Origins of the Bible

The sixty-six books that comprise the Bible were written and recorded by the Holy Spirit on the hearts of approximately forty-nine different writers in the languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. These men were students of God’s Word and acknowledged its authority as the Word of God (Luke 1:1-4; Romans 1:2-4). Each book of the Bible has correlating truths and principles taught over and over in a variety of ways and in different circumstances. The fact that it was written over a span of one thousand years and on three continents makes the Bible’s symmetry and prophetic accuracy that much more astonishing.

The Old Testament was completed around 1406 BC and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament around AD 95. The Syrian Christians produced a simple translation about AD 110. This was followed by the Coptic Bible in the third century, the Gothic Bible in the fourth century, the Latin Vulgate Bible in AD 382.

The following is a partial list of people who are credited with translating the Bible. In the year 862, two Greek monks named Cyril and Methodius left Thessalonica armed with the Great Commission. They took the gospel to the Slavic peoples of Central Europe. They insisted people should hear the gospel being preached in their own native tongue, and, so they translated the Bible into the Slavic language.

Englishman John Wycliffe (1320-1384) was martyred for translating the Bible. William Tyndale (1494-1536) followed in Wycliffe’s footsteps. He was instrumental in translating the Bible into the English language. He was also martyred for the Word of God.

Then there was a man named Jan Hus. (Hus means goose.) He took his stand for the Bible and was burned at the stake in AD 1450 in the city of Prague by the Catholic Church. Why? He insisted that scripture was the final authority and that it should be made available to all people. The story is told that as he was being burned at the stake, he said theses prophetic words, “Burn this goose and in a hundred years a swan will sing”. Meaning , you can kill me the goose, but in 100 years God will raise up a swan will sing the Word of God. And that He did. 100 years later the swan was Martin Luther.

Jan Hus made disciples, and this insured that the Word of God would continue to be preached. When God’s truth is invested in the hearts of men and women, they grow up and multiply. This ensures that the Word of God is transported from one generation to the next. The result of John Huss’ obedience to the Great Commission was a group of committed disciples—followers of Christ who were called The Moravian Brotherhood. In 1457, these brothers founded the oldest Protestant church—the Moravian Church; they also began the first organized global mission movement. Today, the Moravian Churches can be found all over the world.

One hundred years after Hus’s martyrdom, Martin Luther (1517) began the Reformation, and Luther also translated the Bible. As a side note, the fires of persecution are aflame all over this world today, and our brothers and sisters in Christ are joining those who have been martyred for their faith and the Word of God.

It is important to take a moment and point out the sad implications for future generations if we don’t love and pass on God’s Word. We have just seen a list of men who were so passionately devoted to God’s Word that it cost them their lives. What do you think these men would say if they knew that today less than two percent of the populations of their native countries are Evangelical Christians? We would like to hope that our church programs will make disciples of the nations. It is just not so! In Europe and here in the States, we see the tragic effects. Are you beginning to understand why it is so important to study the Bible?

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Revelation 6:9-11, 7:9-17; Matthew 10:17-39, 23:9-10; John 15:18-26, 16:6-14; Hebrews 11:1-40.

Why Do You Study the Bible?

Ezra 7:10

Now Ezra had dedicated himself to the study of the law of the Lord, to its observance, and to teaching its statutes and judgments in Israel.

Why do you think most people study the Bible? To know God, right? The Greek word for disciple is *mathetes*; the definition is a learner or pupil. For a Christian, Jesus is our subject, the Bible is our curriculum, and our entire life is the classroom. In the Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:18- 20, it states that we are to make disciples and teach them to obey all that God has commanded. The Greek word for teach is *didasko*. Here is the whole definition: to learn—to teach. From this, we can deduce that what we learn, we are to turn around and teach others.

Consider Ezra, a man who Bible scholars believe was the writer, not only of the book that bears his name, but also First and Second Chronicles and the book of Nehemiah. Clearly, he knew God’s Word. Even so, he kept studying. He wanted to be careful to obey God’s Word before he taught it to others. I urge you to spend some time looking at the text and context of his writings. Ezra is a wonderful example to follow because he studied so that he might put God’s Word into practice, as well as teach it to others. As the apostle Paul told Timothy, his main disciple:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work.

When I was a child in the faith, I studied the Bible for myself. It never occurred to me to study for others, but that is precisely what a disciple-maker does! Now, following the example of Ezra, I study to apply these truths to my life and invest them into others. However, no true student of the Bible will ever think they have grasped the riches of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding contained within the precious pages of the Holy Scriptures. The more I study, the more I realize how little I do know, much less, lived up to the truth I have already received.

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and exhorting one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, all with grace in your hearts to God.

When we make disciples, we are leaving an eternal inheritance for our spiritual offspring. Disciples are stewards of God’s Word. It is written by a person upon the heart of another person. I have two questions for you: Are you someone’s *living epistle* of Christ? Who is your *living epistle*?

2 Corinthians 3:2-3

You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone, revealing that you are a letter of Christ, delivered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on tablets of human hearts.

**DIGGING DEEPER**: Matthew 28:16-20; Ezra 7:1-26; Nehemiah 7, 8; Psalm 78:1-7

How Are We to Study?

Acts 17:11

These Jews were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they eagerly received the message, examining the scriptures carefully every day to see if these things were so.

We recommend using the NIV Chronological Bible as a daily reading plan to cover the Bible within a year. Or perhaps a three-year study plan that covers the Old Testament in the first year, followed by one book of the New Testament per month. By the end of the three years, you should have a grasp of the Bible as a whole. As you read, make notes of major themes of each book, and in the margins, make notes of truths to remember. As a spring board for deeper study, you may want to stop and list any questions that come to mind.

By paralleling and cross-referencing you will begin to see that Christ Jesus is revealed in the Old Testament just as He is in the New Testament, although in types, figures, and shadows.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** 2 Timothy 2:2, 3:16-17; 1 Timothy 4:13, 15-16; Acts 17:2-11; Hebrews 5:12-14

Observation and Interpretation

2 Peter 1:19-21

Moreover, we possess the prophetic word as an altogether reliable thing. You do well if you pay attention to this as you would to a light shining in a murky place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet’s own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

How do we find the meaning or interpretation of a passage? The most basic principle of interpretation is to let the Scripture interpret Scripture, and you do this by cross-referencing. There are numerous possible *applications* that apply to the Scriptures, but there is only one *correct interpretation*. We must understand the original context to faithfully apply the scriptures to our context because our application is always built on interpretation.

The writer of *The Jungle Book*, Rudyard Kipling, said, “I keep six honest serving-men (They taught me all I knew); Their names are What and Why and When and How and Where and Who.” As you study the full context and employ these six questions, you will have a good understanding of the background and purpose for which it was written. As you observe the text, ask yourself the following questions: “*Who wrote it?, What* does *it say?, When, where, and how was it written?,* and finally*, Why was it written*? Remember this rule: why something happened is more important than what happened. So, when you are studying a narrative, try to complete this sentence: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ wrote about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

A chronological study of the Babylon captivity, the return of the Jewish people, and rebuilding of Jerusalem would be a great place to practice these principles. Timelines are also helpful. I’ll get you started. Here is an exercise for you.

* Read the following passages and make a time line:

(740-681 BC) - Isaiah 44:28; (626-586 BC) - Jeremiah 15:16, 20:9, 25:12-13, 29:10 31:33- 34,38; (605-537 BC) - Daniel 5:30, 6:10, 28, 7:13-14, 9:1-6; (440 BC) - Ezra 1:1, 7:6, 10; (430 BC) - Nehemiah 8:1, 6-8, 12, 13, 18, 9:2-5.

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There are two terms used for the study of interpretation or explanation of the scriptures. They are hermeneutics and exegesis. Herb Hodges described the word exegesis to me. He said, “Exegesis means to take by the hand and lead out from invisibility to visibility.”

The word hermeneutics comes from the Greek word hermeneuo. It means to translate, interpret, to explain thoroughly, and expound. Jesus used this word in Luke 24:31, 32 and 45. It is translated as *opened their eyes or minds* and *explained.* Just before His ascension, Jesus did an exegesis of the Old Testament. He explained that the entire Bible is about Him! Wouldn’t you have loved to be part of that Bible Study? It is a long passage but well worth the reading. (We can pretend that He was speaking directly to us.)

* Stop now and read: Luke 24:25-49

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**DIGGING DEEPER:** 2 Peter 1:19-21**;** Luke 4:14-21; John 5:39-47; Matthew 5:17-19; Psalm 16:8, 40:7-8, 110:1, 22:1-31; Isaiah 7:14, 28:16, 53:1-12, 61:1-2; Joshua 23:14-15; 1 Kings 8:56

Illumination and Application

### Luke 24:45

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures.

Have you ever wondered what God was saying to you in a passage and how it applied to your life? It takes the mind of Christ and the illumination of the Holy Spirit to understand the Bible. To make relevant life application of a passage requires right belief and right action in response to the truth that is revealed. If what you believe doesn’t lead to action, it isn’t true belief. Bible study is not just for information; it’s for life transformation. Yet without proper interpretation, we can’t find the personal application. If you will allow God’s Word to penetrate your heart and apply God’s truth to your attitude and actions, then your life will be continually transformed.

The following questions will help you as you study:

1. Is there a command to obey? Is there a sin to avoid, confess, and repent of?
2. Is there a lesson to learn?
3. Is there a new truth to carry with me?
4. Is there specific counsel on an issue of my life?
5. Is there an example to follow?
6. Is there a promise to claim?
7. Is there a prayer to repeat?
8. Is there a verse to memorize?

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Matthew 13:12-23, 28:18; Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Romans 12:1-2; James 1:21-25; Ephesians 1:17-19; 2 Corinthians 2:1-16; 1 John 2:27

Meditation and Transportation

Joshua 1:7-8

Make sure you are very strong and brave! Carefully obey all the law my servant Moses charged you to keep! Do not swerve from it to the right or to the left, so that you may be successful in all you do. This law scroll must not leave your lips! You must memorize it day and night so you can carefully obey all that is written in it. Then you will prosper and be successful.

When you meditate on the Scriptures, it is like giving your mind a bath. Here are some tips to help you in this process. Write down the verses and what you believe the Lord is saying to you. By meditating on the passage throughout the day, you can turn the passage into a prayer. When your study becomes further meditation, the Holy Spirit will bring the application into focus. Without meditation, you may walk away from your time in the Word and remember nothing of what He has said. We remember approximately twenty percent of what we hear, forty percent of what we read and eighty-five percent of what we write. But I believe we can remember almost all of what we share with others. So, take notes and share them with others.

To reiterate, it is wonderful to teach someone the Bible, but it is much better to teach them to study for themselves. When we make disciples who will make disciples, there will be multiple of generations of Bible students. They will reach the world for Christ!

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3, 119: 12-24, 97-103; John 17:17

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. How many different men did God use to write the Bible?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What is the significance of the fact that it was written over a span of about one thousand years?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. From our brief history lesson, what are some of the important insights we can learn and apply to our present time relating to our attitude towards the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Using Ezra as the example, make a list of reasons we should study the Bible. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Why is it important to study a passage of Scripture in context? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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3. List all the ways noted to discover the personal application to a passage. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What are some of the questions to ask when you study the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verses

2 Timothy 2:15

Make every effort to present yourself before God as proven worker who does not need to be ashamed, teaching the message of truth accurately.

Acts 17:11

These Jews were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they eagerly received the message, examining the scriptures carefully every day to see if these things were so.



**Promised to One Husband**

Key Passage

2 Corinthians 11:2-4

Introduction

I

was in the process of doing some revisions on this lesson when I heard a knock on my door. Two very friendly men had come to invite me to their church. I knew right away who they were, and I was familiar with the “false gospel” that they had come to preach. It was just such a visit several years ago that drove me to invest seven months into an in-depth study and the writing of the first version of this lesson.

After acknowledging my confidence in the sincerity of their beliefs and quoting John 1:1-3, I informed them that they worshiped a different Jesus than I do; the one I worship *is* God. I politely encouraged them to do some research on the foundations of their religion. As they hurried off, I prayed for them. The last time a group from this persuasion visited my home, I prayed for them out loud in Jesus name, and they literally ran. Because they deny the Trinity, they refuse to pray in the name of Jesus. Usually, when they discover that I know the Bible, they can’t leave quick enough. Perhaps John was dealing the same kind of heretical teaching when he wrote the gospel of John.

John 1:1-5 (KJV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

Most of us, myself included, would be hard-pressed to articulate what we believe and why we believe it. Even those who have some knowledge of the Bible can easily be led astray. Our churches seem to be a mile wide, but an inch deep in doctrine. The word doctrine simply means teaching. In a post-Christian culture, we can no longer afford to live in ignorance. With that being said, I feel a little bit like Jude must have felt when he wrote the book of Jude. He begins by stating that he really wanted to write about “Our common salvation.” Instead, there was a more urgent subject to address (Jude 1-25). The subject at hand was false teachers and false doctrines.

Jude 3-4

Dear friends, although I have been eager to write to you about our common salvation, I now feel compelled instead to write to encourage you to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men have secretly slipped in among you – men who long ago were marked out for the condemnation I am about to describe – ungodly men who have turned the grace of our God into a license for evil and who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Honestly, I would prefer to write about salvation, the love of God, or almost any other subject than this. But, this problem is just as pertinent now as it was in the first century. The Church is the pillar and foundation of Truth, so why then is the world around us crumbling under the weight of satanic deception (1 Timothy 3:15)? Churches that once held hundreds, could now easily fit their members into a classroom. Furthermore, it seems that the only “buildings” that are packed full are the ones where a Scripture is seldom quoted and a Bible is seldom opened. Could it be that the church is experiencing the great falling away from the true doctrines of the faith that Jesus forewarned us about (Matthew 24)? If so, then it is even more crucial that we, as believers, are equipped with the essential teachings of the faith so that we can identify false teachers, prophets, and heretics. This is the aim of this lesson.

1 Timothy 4:15-16

Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

Why does Doctrine Matter?

I would venture to say that, either directly or indirectly, approximately one-fourth of the New Testament addresses this subject. When the Holy Spirit deems a subject so important that He designates this amount of Holy Writ to address it, we can be sure it is significant. Paul is perhaps the staunchest defender of the faith of all the New Testament writers. With the heart of a spiritual father, Paul was deeply concerned for the churches he planted and their doctrinal purity (Ephesians 4:12-14; 1 Timothy 1:18-20).

Acts 20:7-31

For I did not hold back from announcing to you the whole purpose of God. Watch out for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after I am gone fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Even from among your own group men will arise, teaching perversions of the truth to draw the disciples away after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warning each one of you with tears.

As he ended his three-year tenure with the church at Ephesus, not knowing if he would ever see them again, imagine how Paul must have felt as he bid farewell to these saints. The emotions in his departing remarks are unmistakable—he loved them. And because he did, Paul prophetically warned the saints to be on guard against “savage wolves” who would infiltrate the church after he left. Sure enough, when Timothy was the pastor of the church in Ephesus, Paul begins his letter to his beloved disciple by addressing just such “wolves” as these (1 Timothy 1:3-11).

One day, Jesus will return for His bride; she will be pure, both in her doctrine, as well as her devotion to Jesus. Doctrine matters. Not only because wrong doctrine will be reflected in a lack of devotion, but wrong doctrine will determine our eternal destination.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Ephesians 4:11-16, 5:22-32; Isaiah 54:5-10; Acts 2:42-46; 1 John 2:18-29; Psalm 78:1-7, 145:1-6; Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Timothy 1:3-11; 2 Timothy 2:2, 3:16; Titus 1: 9-16; 2:1-10; 2 John 9-10

Heresies Throughout Church History

Jude 17-24

But you, dear friends—recall the predictions foretold by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. For they said to you, “In the end time there will come scoffers, propelled by their own ungodly desires.” These people are divisive, worldly, devoid of the Spirit. But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith, by praying in the Holy Spirit, maintain yourselves in the love of God, while anticipating the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that brings eternal life. And have mercy on those who waver; save others by snatching them out of the fire; have mercy on others, coupled with a fear of God, hating even the clothes stained by the flesh. Now to the one who is able to keep you from falling, and to cause you to stand, rejoicing, without blemish before his glorious presence, to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time, and now, and for all eternity.

To understand the roots of false doctrine and apostasy, we are going to examine some historical heresies, and, in doing so, we can learn from the perspective of what happens when we choose to ignore sound doctrine. We live in a world of knock-offs—products that are copies but sold as genuine. Often, it’s hard to tell the difference. Not only is testing doctrine Biblical, it is commanded (1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22; 1 John 4:1-6).

Were you aware that every historical Christian creed was written by the early church fathers in response to false doctrines and heretics? False teachers and preachers are nothing more than pawns of Satan. While these phonies (a nicer name than God calls them) may seem harmless and their teaching sincere, nothing could be further from the truth. Here are just a few names God’s Word uses to describe them: ravenous wolves, dogs, deceitful workers—masquerading as angels of light, wolves in sheep’s clothing, savage wolves, godless, evil, rebellious men, foolish, sons of the Devil, empty talkers, unreasoning animals, blemishes, clouds without rain, antichrist, liars, scoffers, trees without fruit, brute beasts, and twice dead! After reading this list, how do you think God feels about these people?

The following list is merely a small sampling from church history. In Acts 8 we find a man by the name of Simon Magus who dabbled in the occult and witchcraft. When Philip came to Samaria preaching the gospel of Jesus and performing great signs and miracles, Simon wanted in on the action. Although he professed to believe in Christ and was even baptized, he did not possess the Holy Spirit. This became obvious when he observed Peter and John laying their hands on true believers and seeing them receive the Holy Spirit; he approached the two apostles trying to buy this power. But they saw right through him. Confronting him with the true condition of his heart, they essentially told him, you have no part of this ministry (Acts 8:9-24).

Obviously, Simon did not repent, instead, he decided to start his own religion. Borrowing biblical terminology and mixing it with myths, he claimed to have secret knowledge and said that enlightenment was the way to salvation. Some scholars believe that he was the founder of the what is called Gnosticism. Some relics of the early Gnostics are the false gospels like “The Gospel of Thomas” and “The Gospel of Judas.” These are the origins of false teaching like the book *The Da Vinci Code.*

1 Timothy 6:20-21

O Timothy, protect what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the profane chatter and absurdities of so-called “knowledge.” By professing it, some have strayed from the faith. Grace be with you all.

Then, in Acts 15, we read about another form of false teaching. This is the doctrine that requires the keeping of Jewish laws, like circumcision, to earn salvation. It is, basically, adding works to grace. Here we find the first official church council in Jerusalem called specifically to resolve this matter, at least for a time. But unfortunately, it did not end there. Paul vehemently opposed this false doctrine (Galatians 2:15-21, 3:1-14; Romans 3:5,20-22). As you can see in the next passage, Paul reiterates that those who preach this should be condemned to hell!

Galatians 1:6-9

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different gospel—not that there really is another gospel, but there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we (or an angel from heaven) should preach a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be condemned to hell! As we have said before, and now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be condemned to hell!

When Jesus addressed the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2, He commended their tenacious stand against false apostles. He even names one sect in particular that He hated: the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:1-2, 6, 14-15). The Nicolaitans, contradicting Peter’s admonition in 1 Peter 5:1-3, asserted the rights of the “hierarchy” in the church to rule over and conquer the laity. It is also thought that they were perhaps connected with a man named Nicolas who compromised with the godless society around him and taught that grace was a license to sin and immorality (Revelation 2:20; 1 John 2:15-16).

Revelation 2:6 (KJV)

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.

In AD 325, the Emperor Constantine organized the first world council of bishops and Biblical scholars (318 of them) in Nicaea, a city located in modern-day Turkey. The primary goal was to clearly define the concept of the Trinity. Arius of Alexandria, Egypt, not only denied the doctrine of the Trinity but was spreading his heresies throughout Asia Minor, leading many believers into confusion. Additionally, he taught that Jesus was created and not Creator God—that Jesus was a good leader, but not God. To reaffirm the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity, the bishops drew up what is known as the Nicene Creed. And consequently, Arius was then excommunicated for his heretical teaching.

Nicene Creed

“We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in ONE LORD, JESUS CHRIST, THE ONLY SON of GOD, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, TRUE GOD from TRUE GOD, Begotten not made, OF ONE being with the Father. Through Him ALL things were made, for us and for our salvation. He came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit He became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in the glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end. We believed in the Holy Spirit, The Lord, The Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.”

Every time one satanic messenger was subjugated by the Truth, another one stepped in to take his place. One example is a monk named Nestorius (AD 385-450). What was his false doctrine? He, like Arius, denied the deity of Christ Jesus, stating that Jesus was created (John 1:1-10, 10:28-30). And this leads to the First Council of Constantinople in AD 381. There the bishops gathered again to reaffirm the Nicene Creed. To this day, as an affirmation of these beliefs, these creeds are read and taught in some denominations.

Two Examples

Matthew 7:15-20

Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruit. Grapes are not gathered from thorns or figs from thistles, are they? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree is not able to bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree to bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will recognize them by their fruit.

The following examples represent a long family tree, originating in the Garden of Eden with the fall. Each demonic distortion propagated by these satanic missionaries has been recycled and repackaged from previous heretics. But, as a caveat, let me clarify: I do not bring any of this history to light to bash anyone or to equip you to argue with those who are ignorant of the truth of the Scriptures. Nor, am I trying to justify prejudice or pride in knowledge—which the Bible condemns. The point here is that God loves all people. He is not willing that anyone perishes but that all come to the knowledge of the Truth and be saved! Therefore, as we learn to speak the Truth in love, we will be snatching people from the darkness of hell and saving their precious souls (Jude 19-23).

In 1830, Joseph Smith, an illiterate treasure-hunter who was involved in the occult, founded the Mormon religion (otherwise known as the Latter-Day Saints). Rooted in adultery, he practiced polygamy and married twenty-eight women. Some of these “wives” were as young as fourteen years old. He was accused of sexual assault by nine women in four states. (See accounts published in 1994 by a man who was in Smith’s inner circle. His name is William Law.) Joseph Smith’s disciple and successor, Brigham Young, also had fifty-five wives.

1 Timothy 3:16-4:2

And we all agree, our religion contains amazing revelation: He was revealed in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. Now the Spirit explicitly says that in the later times some will desert the faith and occupy themselves with deceiving spirits and demonic teachings, influenced by the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared.

Since Smith claimed to have been visited by an angel, and we know demons are fallen angels, this group would fall under the category of teaching mentioned above: the doctrines of demons. The Book of Mormon is a plagiarism of an edition of the King James Bible printed in 1765. We know this because this edition of the Bible contained several specific typos and was later reprinted to correct them. Smith’s Book of Mormon, however, plagiarized from this edition, failed to make these corrections. Once again, like the Gnostics before them, they borrowed Biblical terminology and mixed it with lies. To illustrate, they assert the unbiblical notion that Jesus was procreated by God and a goddess mother. If that was not bad enough, they say that Jesus was the spirit brother of Lucifer. What! It’s no surprise then that the secret writings of their “bible” have never been seen or validated. Furthermore, they claim a person has the potential to become a god and populate their own planet. This is reminiscent of other lies told by the father of all liars, “You will be like God” (Genesis 3:1-4).

Jude 1:10-13

But these men do not understand the things they slander, and they are being destroyed by the very things that, like irrational animals, they instinctively comprehend. Woe to them! For they have traveled down Cain’s path, and because of greed have abandoned themselves to Balaam’s error; hence, they will certainly perish in Korah’s rebellion. These men are dangerous reefs at your love feasts, feasting without reverence, feeding only themselves. They are waterless clouds, carried along by the winds; autumn trees without fruit – twice dead, uprooted; wild sea waves, spewing out the foam of their shame; wayward stars for whom the utter depths of eternal darkness have been reserved.

Charles Taze Russell, who in 1876 founded what is today known as Jehovah’s Witnesses or The Watchtower Society, was raised in a devout Presbyterian home. He later abandoned his upbringing and after experimenting with other doctrines and even eastern religions, he began to write his own interpretation of the Bible. Like Arius, he clung to the heresy that Jesus was a created being and claimed that Jesus was Michael, the Archangel. The main fruit that identifies them as antichrists is this: they do not believe Jesus is God. So, they, in direct violation God’s Word, changed their “bible” (Proverbs 30:5-6). One example is this: in John 1:1-2 they took out “He was God” and inserted “he was *a* god.” Do you see the difference?

Revelation 22:18-19

I testify to the one who hears the words of the prophecy contained in this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city that are described in this book.

All this just illustrates, that false teaching has a common origin: the devil. He twisted God’s Word causing Eve to doubt: “Did God really say…”, “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:1-4). The devil’s alternative to the truth is to take some of what God says out of context, dilute it, and blend it all kinds of perversions. Smith, like Simon Magus, was void of the Holy Spirit; therefore, he could not understand the Bible (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). Being led by their father, the devil, they change the Bible to fit their lies. The frightening thing is that all of these false teachers had some knowledge of the Bible. When a person is exposed to the Truth but does not receive nor love Jesus, who is the Truth, they can easily become Satan’s servants spreading his lies.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Mark 9:42-47; John 8:31-46; Jude 3-11; 1 John 2:18-26; 2 John 7-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-15; 2 Timothy 3:1-4; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 1:23-25; 2 Peter 1:16-21, 2:1-22, 3:1518; 1 Corinthians 2:10-15, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6; Romans 1:18-32, 6:16; Galatians 1:6-9, 5:19-21; Revelation 2:6, 14-16, 20-24, 21:8, 22:14-15; Jeremiah 23:9-40; Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32

Common Confessions of The Christian Faith

2 Timothy 2:1-4

So you, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And entrust what you heard me say in the presence of many others as witnesses to faithful people who will be competent to teach others as well. Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one in military service gets entangled in matters of everyday life; otherwise he will not please the one who recruited him.

If you were raised in the church, you may remember singing an old hymn titled “Onward Christian Soldiers.” As far back as I can remember, we sang this song. But honestly, I was clueless about what a Christian soldier was, much less what or who he would be fighting against. Now, based upon Paul’s words to Timothy in the above passage, I know that a soldier is a description of an apologist. What is a Christian apologist? In a nutshell, an apologist is one who defends the common confessions of the faith like the ones that were birthed out of the above mentioned creeds.

Along with the inspired writers of the Bible, here are some very important historical Christian apologists: Justin Martyr, Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Saint Nicolas. Throughout the ages, God has supplied gifted men and women to equip His church. Arguably, men such as Francis Schaeffer and C.S. Lewis may be the most famous and prolific apologists of the twentieth century. But, today there are many highly respected Christians apologists like Tim Keller, Hank Hanegraaff, Lee Strobel, Norm Geisler, Mary Jo Sharp, and Ravi Zacharias. In addition to these, here is a resource from to add to your study: http://www.apologeticspress.org/homestudycourses.aspx.

1. The Bible:

Written over a span of one thousand plus years, the sixty-six books of the Bible were recorded by the Holy Spirit on the hearts of approximately forty-nine different writers. Throughout the ages, though men have tried to deny it and destroy it, God has preserved His Holy Book, and because of this, we can hold in our hands the very *Word of God.* We believe that the One, True, Eternal God has revealed Himself to humanity through the Holy Scripture. Saint Jerome (c.347- 420), historian, theologian, Doctor of the Church, and Bible translator said, “To be ignorant of the Bible is to be ignorant of Christ.”

**DIGGING DEEPER:** John 1:1-18**;** 2 Timothy 2:3-6; 2 Timothy 3:13-4:4; 2 Peter 1:16-21; 1 Corinthians 2:4-16; 2 Corinthians 1:20-21; Hebrews 4:8-12

The Holy Trinity:

Some may argue that the word trinity is not found in the Bible. In this they are correct. Yet as we have already seen, God has revealed Himself repeatedly in the Scriptures as Three Persons who co-exist as One. You may find it interesting to know that the original “Saint Nickolas” was an apologist. Legion has it that, He was one of the bishops who signed the Nicene Creed, and venomously opposed Arius in defense of the doctrine of the Trinity (thegospelcoalition.org).

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Genesis 1:1-27, 11:7; Exodus 20:3-6; Isaiah 6:8, 43:10, 44:6-8, 45:5-22, 46:9, 47:8, 48:16-17; Matthew 3:16-17, 28:19; Luke 9:28-36; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 1:3; John 20:28; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Romans 8:11

The Deity of Christ Jesus:

Paul wrote to Timothy explaining this great mystery that, in Christ Jesus, God was manifested in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16). The scriptures are clear; The Lord Jesus Christ is the second person of the triune God. He is One with God the Father; He is God incarnate, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary. Thereby, His virgin birth fulfilled what the Scripture prophesied, that He is the Son of Man, and yet He is one hundred percent God (Isaiah 7:14; Daniel 7:13-14). The same God who identified Himself in the Old Testament as the great I AM is Christ Jesus Exodus 3:14; John 8:58).

**DIGGING DEEPER**: Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7, 43:10-14; Acts 10:34-48; Matthew 1:23; Micah 5:2; John 8:24, 58, 10:30-33, 17:24, 20:28; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 2:2; Romans 9:5-6, 10:9; Hebrews 1:1-13; Revelation 1:7-16; 1 John 4:2-3; 1 Timothy 2:3-6, 3:16

The bodily death, burial, and resurrection of Christ Jesus:

Just as it was foretold throughout the Old Testament, Christ died for our sins, and He was buried and rose again on the third day. This is exactly as He predicted He would.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Hebrews 10:1-10; Isaiah 53; Psalm 22, 40:6-7; Luke 24:37-39; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 4:1-2; 2 John 7; Romans 10:9; Acts 13:33, 17:30-31; 1 Peter 1:18-21; Galatians 1:6-9; 1 Corinthians 15:1-17

The Doctrine of Grace:

Salvation is by grace alone and through faith in Christ Jesus alone. It is not of works. No one can earn righteousness or reconciliation with a Holy God. Salvation is a *gift of grace*.

**DIGGING DEEPER**: Ephesians 2:4-10; Titus 3:3-8; Romans 1:17, 3:20-28, 4:1-12; Galatians 2:15-16, 21, 3:15-16, 21, 5:4; John 6:28-29; James 2:14-26; Philippians 2:13, 3:9; Isaiah 64:6

The Lord Jesus’ Substitutionary Atonement and Justification of Sinners:

In the account of the fall in Genesis 3, we find the doctrine of original sin. By birth into the human race and by nature of our birth, we are in total depravity. Because of our sins, we are dead and separated spiritually from God, our Creator. This fact necessitates a spiritual birth.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Ephesians 2:1-14; John 3:1-36; Acts 2:38, 16:31; Romans 3:22-26; 4:24-25; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9; 1 Peter 1:22-25, 2:24

His Second Coming:

We have approximately eight thousand years of recorded history by which we can measure the accuracy of the Bible. Because of that, we can bank on the fact that the prophetic utterances written in the Bible that have not yet been fulfilled will come to fruition. Therefore, one day— we know not when, the Lord Jesus Christ will return to judge the world in righteousness, and He will ultimately reign as Lord over all (James 4:12; Matthew 10:28, 24:29-51; Luke 21:25-38; John 5:21-23, 27, 9:39). And the heart’s cry of the bride of Christ is—Come, Lord Jesus!

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Acts 1: 9-11; Philippians 2:9-11; Isaiah 45:23; Mark 16:19; Matthew 16:27; Revelation 1:7-18; Daniel 7:13-14; Hebrews 1:1-13; Psalm 2:1-12; 2 Peter 1:16-21, 3:13-18; 1 Corinthians 10:12; 1 John 2:21-27, 5:9-21

In conclusion, while we will not all agree on every Biblical issue, the only hills we must live and die upon are the historical doctrines of our faith. Everything else, all our crooked theology, will be dealt with at the judgment seat of Christ. Having said that, we must not major on the minor issues while forsaking the Law of Love. To do so would be to lose our eternal rewards (Romans 13:10). When people are learning to distinguish between counterfeit money and true currency, they do not study the counterfeit—they study the real thing. The only way to be equipped to protect yourself and those you love is to know the Truth.

Examine your beliefs in light of Scripture, and don’t check your mind at the door when you sit under preaching and teaching. Study what you are being taught. Make certain the Bible is not being distorted because correct doctrine is a matter of life and death—eternal souls are at stake.

Because we live in the information age, these historical facts are readily available from numerous sources on the internet. Here are some of the sources that I used to amass all this information: John MacArthur’s book *The Truth War,* Walter Martin’s book *Kingdom of the Cults*, and Doug Powell’s *Holman Quick Source Guide To Christian Apologetics*. Another trusted source is www.gotquestions. org. I implore you to do some research. Better yet, look up all the passages in this lesson. Then, “You will know the Truth and the Truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

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1. Based on the following passages, why does correct doctrine matter (1 Timothy 4:1-16; 6:20-21; 2 Corinthians 11:1-15)?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read the following passages and answer this question: Was correct doctrine important to the early church? Why or why not (1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1)?

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1. What are some teachings that you once believed that you now know are untrue?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read 1 John 4:1-21 and make a list of the things that can help us identify a false prophet.

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1. Explain this statement: I will live what I believe even if what I believe is a lie.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verses

2 Corinthians 11:2-4

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy, because I promised you in marriage to

one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that just as

the serpent deceived Eve by his treachery, your minds may be led astray from a

sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another

Jesus different from the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit than

the one you received, or a different gospel than the one you accepted, you put up

with it well enough!



Phase Four —Binding Up the Brokenhearted

Ephesians 2:19-22

So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household, because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The Main Goals for Phase Four:

* Equip and edify believers in areas of emotional and spiritual brokenness.
* Address these issues from a Biblical perspective.
* Prepare them to serve the body of Christ within the church.

Phase Four Lessons:

* The Health of Your Countenance -Dealing with Depression
* The Doctrine of Suffering
* Seasons of Storms, Sorrows, and Suffering
* Spiritual Warfare –Not Being Blind to the Fight
* Cure for the Poison of Bitterness

When I came to faith in Jesus, I had a lot of baggage—as most of us do. I was a broken woman, from a broken home, in a broken marriage. These remnants of my life without Christ left me with an abundance of hurts and soul wounds. Sorrows, suffering, dysfunction, and despair are part of being alive. Christians are not immune to such things. But when you come from a background of brokenness, and there is a void of godly examples to follow, anyone of these issues, if left unaddressed, can shipwreck your faith, destroy your testimony and hinder your growth. Without someone to disciple me, to some degree, I was affected in all these ways.

Whether we grew up in a Christian environment or not, most of us intrinsically know that the answers to at least some of our problems must be found in church. So, we join a church and get involved in anything and everything they have to offer. It is not long before we realize that something is missing. Certainly, going to church is a step in the right direction, and every believer needs a church family. But when it comes to dealing with these kinds of complex life issues, simply going to church, and sitting next to people, even in small groups, will never adequately bring the counsel of God’s Word to our brokenness.

Every time the church (which is God’s people) meets, there is an elephant in the room. There are hurting, broken people in most every seat. Yet, we all pretend that we are just fine, when in fact, our lives are falling apart. Some are so broken and depressed that they may be on the brink of taking their own life!

In Phase Four we are going to tackle a few areas of brokenness that are quite common to most of us such as bitterness, unforgiveness, depression, and weathering some of life’s painful seasons. These lessons are intended to begin a dialogue on such matters and address them from a Biblical point of view. However, they are by no means a substitute for seeking professional, godly counsel. As areas of brokenness come to light, seek out other resources that are readily available and, if need be, spend some time using them to go deeper. It is best not to move on to teach other truths until these issues are resolved.

There are two Greek words found in Ephesians 4:12 that encapsulate the lessons in Phase Four. The first word is *equipping* or, in KJV, *perfecting.* Essentially, it means to complete furnishing, perfecting, to repair, to mend, prepare, and restore. The idea is one of mending something that is broken (like a net or heart). Equipping the saints, therefore, is binding up what is broken in God’s family. In the context of Ephesians 4:12, that would mean that we help them find healing and deliverance from sin so that they, in turn, are prepared to do the same ministry in the lives of others. Now, I would like to draw your attention to the second word used in Ephesians 4:12, and it is the word *building* or, in KJV, *edifying*. In Greek, it is *okodome* (Ephesians 2:19-22)*.* It means *architecture, a structure, or building.* It is derived from the word *house* or *family*. To edify the saints is to build up God’s family.

To do this, we must foster the kind of relationships in the body of Christ where we can share our lives and broken places, come to the Word of God, and find just the right balm of truth to be healed. At the core of Biblical disciple-making is cultivating real, transparent relationships. By this we mean: maturing godly women getting to know other women beyond a superficial, surface level. Why is this so vital? As I have already said, if these broken places remain, this can result in their faith being shipwrecked, their testimony destroyed, and their spiritual growth hindered. Conversely, when we are equipped, we find healing, restoration, and spiritual growth. This is what it means to edify the church and build each other up. Only then, will God’s family grow numerically.



**The Health of Your Countenance: Dealing with Depression**

Key Passage

Psalm 42:11

**Introduction**

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ll of us, at times, and in varying degrees, will struggle emotionally. We use terminology to express how we are feeling such as, feeling down, disillusioned, downcast or depressed. We can try to ignore it or deny it, but we can’t avoid it. It’s part of life. .Be it situational, relational, spiritual or clinical, depression, like all sickness, is a signal that something is wrong. When we are sick, even sick emotionally and mentally, the wise person will seek the help. You may have a physical illness that is affecting you emotionally. After seeing a medical doctor, you may also need to see a Christian psychologist, or at least, a trusted spiritual person who knows the Lord Jesus—the *Wonderful Counselor* (Isaiah 9:2-7).

The intent of this lesson is to spark some heart level discussions on a subject that we can all relate to and offer some practical suggestions that may be of help. But ultimately, we know that when we spend time looking intently into the Bible, the Great Physician, Himself, will apply His Word as a balm and bring healing to our weary souls.

Luke 4:17-21

…and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to tell them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled even as you heard it being read.”

People in the Bible Who Were Disheartened or Depressed

The following is a partial list of people in the Bible who experienced varying degrees of depression. We can learn much from each of their examples.

* **Hagar:** She was depressed because she was rejected. She did know God, but she met Him in her depression (Genesis 16:13, 21:15-20; Psalm 147:3).
* **Jeremiah:** Jeremiah was depressed by all the sinful, sick people around him. Yet, he remembered his God whose mercies are new every morning. This lifted him out of the pit (Laminations 3:1-66; Exodus 34:6-10; Micah 7:1).
* **Elijah:** He was depressed because he was battle weary. He needed food, a nap, and an encounter with His God (1 Kings 19:1-18; Matthew 10:24-40, 11:28-30).
* **Naomi:** She was depressed because her grief had turned into sinful, self-centered pity and bitterness. She did not see the provision that God had made for her in her daughter-in-law Ruth (Ruth 1:14-22, 4:1-22; Exodus 15:22-27).
* **Cain:** He was depressed because He was angry and jealous of his brother (Genesis 4:2-9; Psalm 38:18; Ephesians 2:1-14; 1 John 3:4-15). One definition of depression is anger turned inward.
* **Jonah:** He ran from doing what God told him to do. He was mad because he didn’t want God to have mercy on Nineveh (Jonah 1:1-17, 3:1-10, 4:6-11).
* **John the Baptist:** As he was in jail awaiting his death, he began to doubt Jesus and His love (John 1:19-37, 3:22-30; Matthew 14:1-12; Luke 7:18-28). What should we do when we suffer for doing what is right (Matthew 5:10-12; 1 Peter 3:8-18)?
* **Job:** He did not understand all that had happened to him. His wife and three friends did not help; they added to his pain with words. From them, we learn that sometimes it is best to keep your mouth shut because we do not know all that God is doing in a person’s life.
* **Others:** People can be depressed because they suffer the consequences of ignoring the counsel of God’s Word (Jeremiah 8:3-22; Psalm 107:1-22).

How Did Jesus Cope When His Soul was Downcast?

In His incarnation, Jesus bore our griefs and carried our sorrows all the way to the cross (Isaiah 53:1-12). Because of this, He can truly be our compassionate and empathetic High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16). He experienced in a real body every emotion that we have. This includes soul-crushing depression. Let’s go to the Garden of Gethsemane and see if we can identify His coping mechanisms. Read Matthew 26:36-39 below.

Matthew 26:36-39

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and became anguished and distressed. Then he said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, even to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me.” Going a little farther, he threw himself down with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me! Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

The first thing that stands out from this passage is that Jesus called His closest disciples to be with Him as He suffered. We would do well to do the same. He poured out His heart and soul to them. He pleaded for their intercessory prayers. Knowing that the devil always seizes the opportunity to taunt us when we are down, He asked these disciples to please not leave Him.

Holding nothing back, Jesus cried out to His Father and, in His humanity, requested that the cup of wrath would pass from Him. As He finally surrendered His will to the Father’s, He looked ahead to the joy that would come on the other side of the cross and empty tomb (Hebrews 12:1-2).

On one occasion, after seeking medical help for a variety of health issues, the doctor told me that my physical conditions were caused by depression. To add insult to injury, the doctor’s diagnosis was depressing. A bag of anti-depressants was his remedy. Yet even in this, the Lord is teaching me why I am depressed at times, and He is teaching me *through depression*. It’s ok to be weak because, in my weakness, I am even more dependent upon His strength. When I am weak—He is strong. But I need to be still and allow Him to heal me (Psalm 46:1-11). I might add a word of caution here. I’ve noticed in my experience with depression that self-pity is a slippery slope. Once you fall into that rabbit hole, it’s hard to get out. Like a wounded dog, we could spend the rest of our lives licking our wounds to the point that they will never heal.

Jesus is our Creator; He wrote the story of our lives. He knows where we are mentally, emotionally, and physically. Jesus knows exactly what is going on. We can cast all our cares on Him because He cares for us.

Finally, as King David discovered, our depression can be caused by unconfessed sin (Psalm 107:9-20). Please understand that God’s healing can only be accomplished when we are completely honest and cooperative with His Spirit. Confession, as the Word tells us, is good for the soul.

James 5:16

So confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Psalm 11:4; 18:6; 33:18-22; 56:8-13; 90:8-15; 107:9-20, 139:1-24; Isaiah 9:2-7; Hebrews 4:12-13; John 2:24-25; 1 Peter 5:7

The Medicine

Jeremiah 8:20-22

“They cry, ‘Harvest time has come and gone, and the summer is over, and still we have not been delivered.’ My heart is crushed because my dear people are being crushed. I go about crying and grieving. I am overwhelmed with dismay. There is still medicinal ointment available in Gilead! There is still a physician there! Why then have my dear people not been restored to health?

Speaking through Jeremiah, also called the weeping prophet, God expresses His enormous heart of love. He asked a rhetorical question: “Why has the health of my daughter not been restored?” Jeremiah is also thought to be the writer of the book of Lamentations. In descriptive poetry, the prophet describes depression and a soul in anguish. How fitting and relevant are the words of Jeremiah for the day in which we live. No doubt, many of us have known the emotional pain of suffering from depression. For this reason, Jesus came—to lead us out of the darkness, to bind up our broken hearts, and set our souls free. Is there a pill that will fix us? If so, why has our health not been restored? I would like to unpack a treasure I discovered during a time of depression. When we are sick we need specific medicines for different illnesses. The same is true of God’s Word. Through His Word, the Holy Spirit speaks specifically to your heart. He will use a specific passage to meet your specific need.

Proverbs 4:20-22

My child, pay attention to my words; listen attentively to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your sight, guard them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and healing to one’s entire body.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Matthew 4:23, 9:35; Luke 4:18-20; Exodus 15:26; Psalm 103:3, 147:3; Hosea 11:3

Practical Helps for Depression

**Go see your Doctor.** If he prescribes medicine for you to take, take it! You may be clinically depressed. A word of caution: please do not take depression lightly. It can be a very serious illness, and if left untreated, it can lead to death. Many lives have been lost to suicide. Please seek professional help.

1. **Seek Godly Biblical counsel**. (Jeremiah 8:7-22; Isaiah 8:16-20; Psalm 146:1-10)
2. **Help others**. It will get your mind off yourself (Isaiah 58:1-12).
3. **Take care of your temple** (your body). Take care of your body by eating a healthy diet, exercising, sitting outside in the sun, getting proper rest, and being still before the Lord! (Psalm 46:11) Good, clean humor helps to lighten your mood, and laughing is good medicine.
4. **Draw near to God through prayer and His Word**. Sometimes, what we really need is to get alone with God, cry our eyes out, and release our pain to the One, who alone, understands us (Psalm 139:1-16, 107:9-11, 142:1-7; Jeremiah 1:5-8). The Holy Spirit will take specific scriptures (rhemas) and apply them as medicine to the specific situation you are facing.
5. **Confess your sins**. Own your sins before the Lord and confess them to a trusted Christian friend (James 5:13-20; 1 John 1:5-10; Psalm 51:1-17).
6. **Turn to God in Repentance**. (1 John 1:5-10; Acts 2:38, 3:19-20, 26:20; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Romans 2:4-5; Luke 5:20-32, 13:1-5, 24:46-48)
7. **Make sure there is no unforgiveness or unresolved anger in your heart**. The sin of unforgiveness and bitterness is an open door for the oppressor. Cain is one example (Matthew 18:21-35; Acts 8:14-24; Ephesians 4:17-32).
8. **Remember what God has done for you in the past**. Count your many blessings (Psalm 42:11 KJV).
9. **Praise the Lord for who He is.** Turn off the T.V. and computer and fill your mind and heart with praise songs (Psalm 30:1-12, 34:1-22, 40:1-10, 145:1-21; Acts 2:25-28).

If you or someone close to you is in the darkness and gloom of depression, take heart; the love of God is deeper still, and the Great Physician still makes house calls. Wherever you are today, our prayer is that you will come to know the love of God and that He may bring health to your countenance.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. If so, were you able to differentiate between the possible root cause? In other words, was it clinical, situational, relational, spiritual or physical? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Do you think that mental illness, like clinical depression is looked upon differently than other illnesses? If so why? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Do you think many people suffer through depression in silence because they are ashamed of it? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Could you identify with any of the Biblical examples we have listed? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. From all we have learned, make a list of some root causes that could lead to depression.

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1. Read Psalm 142:1-7. David wrote this while he was hiding in a cave in fear for his life. What instructions can we draw from his prayer that can help us in depression? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Make note of things that others can do to help someone through these times. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. You may want to take a survey of people you know well and ask them if they have experienced depression. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Read 2 Corinthians 7:4-6 and state how Paul was comforted when he was depressed (downhearted), and where this comfort came from? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verses

Psalm 42:11

Why are you depressed, O my soul? Why are you upset? Wait for God! For I will

again give thanks to my God for his saving intervention.

James 5:16

So confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be

healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness.



**The Doctrine of Suffering**

Key Passage

Luke 9:22-26

Introduction

hen I first got the idea that I should open a bridal business, I didn’t have the luxury of lots of cash, nor did I have a clue about what opening a business would entail. Art and I were newlyweds at the time, living in a tiny, old duplex. It was so old, in fact, there was a hole under the kitchen sink so large I could see all the way to the dirt under the little house. I had to nail a board over

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it to cover the opening and keep the critters out. It was the best we could afford.

I am sure folks thought I was crazy to even attempt to open a business. And they were right. All I had going for me was a determination to do whatever it took to be successful. So, one of the very first things I did was to sit down and calculate the cost (both financial and personal) of making this business a reality. We quickly learned that if you have money, banks are happy to loan you money. Since we had none, the bank was not going to help us without someone putting up money as collateral. Thankfully, my grandfather was willing to take a chance on us, and the rest is history. After seven years of giving my all to build a profitable business and giving birth to three babies in six years, I knew that raising my children was by far the most important work of my life. Something had to give, and so, I prayed that the Lord would sell the business and let me stay home with my babies. This prayer was granted when my youngest son Robbie was only one-month old.

Art and I decided to take the proceeds from the sale and use it to build a home. Once again, we sat down with the builder (who was my daddy) and calculated the cost to make sure we had enough to complete the home. These two projects were not to be taken lightly or haphazardly. They required due diligence to assess the costs before we ever started. Not to do so was to risk an embarrassing failure. This Biblical concept is found in Jesus’ sermons also.

Luke 14:28-30

For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t sit down first and compute the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish the tower, all who see it will begin to make fun of him. They will say, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish!’

No one could accuse Jesus of minimizing the cost of discipleship. Although Jesus never did this, we, in our overzealous attempt to win people to Christ, sometimes give the impression that following Christ will make your life easier. If you have followed Christ for any amount of time, then you know that this is not entirely the case.

It’s kind of like getting married. When we set out on the road to marital bliss, few of us envision that suffering is part of the journey. Furthermore, if we could see into the future and knew that marriage involved suffering, how many people would ever take the plunge? Yet, in truth, every marriage involves suffering in one form or the other. It is the price we pay for love’s sake. It is no different when we are following our Heavenly Bridegroom—the One who loved us enough to die to make us His bride.

In this lesson, we are going to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about the cost of being a true follower of Christ. So, one of the first questions we will address is this: If we are following Jesus—where exactly are we going? It is not the easy road, and Jesus never promised it would be (Mark 8:31-38, 10:28-30). But it’s the only road that will lead us home to heaven. Our aim in this lesson is to offer encouragement and help us remember that pure joy awaits us on the other side of suffering. Because Jesus is worth it!

The Cost of Discipleship

It’s confession time. Maybe it was naivety, but when I was a babe in Christ, I got the notion that this world should be like heaven and that being a Christian would somehow insulate me from suffering. Well, I did not get this idyllic doctrine from the Bible—that’s for sure. I assumed that Jesus came into my life to make me happy. Yet, His ultimate goal for us is not just happiness, but holiness. I was never discipled, so how was I supposed to know that I was appointed not only to believe on Jesus but also to suffer with Him (Romans 8:17)? I suppose a chasm exists between the knowledge of such things and reality.

Experience, they say, is the best teacher. After following the Lord Jesus for almost thirty years now, suffice it to say, I know better! And while my trials, troubles, and sufferings don’t even come close to the Lord Jesus’, Paul’s, or the heroes of the faith, they are, nonetheless, personal and painful to me—as I am sure yours are to you. I will share some personal examples in our next lesson, but here, we are talking about suffering for Christ.

Leading up to Luke 9 and Luke 12, we learn that large crowds were flocking to Jesus. They wanted to be healed. They wanted to be fed. They wanted to see what miracles He would perform next. They thought the Messiah would come to set up His kingdom on earth and set them free from the tyranny of Rome. In other words, He came to fix all their problems and make them healthy, wealthy, and happy. However, He had an altogether different agenda. Holding nothing back, He told them all exactly *why* He came. He said, and I will paraphrase here, I came to bear your grief and carry your sorrows—I am going to suffer persecution, rejection, and death. Simply put—came to this earth to suffer and die. I am going to the cross. Now, after He clarified where He was headed, He turned to them and basically asked, who wants to go with me? The crowds chose comfort instead of Christ (John 6:60-69).

In John 6:66, we see a mass exodus as the crowds departed and no longer followed Christ, leaving Him alone with just His few faithful men. On several occasions, He reiterated His mission statement, but they were slow to get it. They didn’t want to get it; it was not what they wanted to hear.

John 12:24-26

I tell you the solemn truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it produces much grain. The one who loves his life destroys it, and the one who hates his life in this world guards it for eternal life. If anyone wants to serve me, he must follow me, and where I am, my servant will be too. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

It would appear that Jesus was trying to dissuade people from following Him, doesn’t it? But He was just letting them know the cost of discipleship. To be His disciple requires death—death to sin, self-rule, and love for the world. In the following passage, Paul describes it as the crucified life.

Galatians 2:20 (KJV)

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian, apparently didn’t entertain any illusions about what Jesus meant. He wrote, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.” As someone has fitly put it, “The ‘tongue’ in his mouth, matched up with the ‘tongue’ in his shoes.” Bonhoeffer practiced what he preached. His talk matched up with his walk—he followed Christ and was executed for his faith. By the way, the name Christian means a follower of Christ. And likewise, the Greek word for follow means to be in the same way with or to follow as a disciple. To the mind of a lost person, it defies common sense to follow a leader whose mission is to suffer and die! Indeed, the road is *narrow,* and only a *few* follow Him. Here is the million-dollar question: Are you one of the few?

In Webster’s Dictionary, one definition for the word *passion* is “The suffering of Christ on the cross.” This is where Mel Gibson got the title for his movie *The Passion*. The movie was quite realistic to be sure. However, there is no way anyone could adequately portray the magnitude of suffering Jesus endured. In fact, the word excruciating is derived from the Latin word crux or cross.

Seven-hundred-fifty years before the Lord Jesus came to earth, God showed the prophet Isaiah the real “passion of the Christ” and the excruciating pain of a Suffering Servant. For this reason, Isaiah called Jesus “A Man of Sorrows” (Isaiah 53:1-12). It bears noting that Isaiah was rejected and suffered a martyr’s death by being sawed in half (Isaiah 6:1-13). But no one, not Isaiah, the disciples or anyone else has ever experienced more sorrow and suffering than the Lord Jesus. And lest we forget, as He walked this sin-cursed earth, He was as much man as He was God. He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, and so He is intimately acquainted with our sufferings. Thus, Jesus has become our faithful and merciful High Priest (Hebrews 2:10-18, 4:15-16).

Hebrews 2:10

For it was fitting for him, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

The word translated as afflictions, trouble, or tribulation in Greek is tibia. This word is rooted in another Greek word—thlipsis. The following descriptive words come from the two: to crowd or put pressure on, to afflict, give anguish, burden, persecution, tribulation, trouble, suffering or afflictions. As you look over this list, do any of these words apply to your current station of life?

How does Jesus’ teaching compare with what is often peddled today as the gospel? Some have termed these “easy believe-ism,” or “prosperity gospels.” You know, the ones that by-pass the cross of Christ and only preach of crowns without cost. This gospel bears no resemblance to the gospel that Jesus and Paul preached—quite the contrary. How do you explain this concept to our brothers and sisters who have lost their jobs, homes, and loved ones?

Furthermore, the fires of persecution are aflame all over this world today. I highly recommend the book and documentary by Rik Ripken titled *The Insanity of God.* It’s a real wake-up call to the church. Yet, most of us are clueless to the plight of our brothers and sisters in Christ who are even now being martyred for the gospel and the Word of God. They are being starved, imprisoned, raped, and beheaded for their faith. One of many recent examples was the beheading of twenty-one Egyptian Coptic Christians who refused to deny Christ. Their executioners called them “people of the cross.” Ask their grief-stricken mothers and widows if this world is really their best life? But you see, that is not the end of their story. Did you know that these martyred saints are in the Bible? The names witness, and martyr are the same word in Greek. The word is *martus*, and you will find this word in the following passages: Acts 1:8, 22:20; Revelation 17:6.

* Take a moment to read John 11:25, 15:18-21; Luke 10:4-9; 1 Corinthians 15:20-27; Revelation 6:9-11, 14:13, 20:4, 21:1-9. What do these passages have to say about them? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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There are two credible ministries that help the universal persecuted church: The Voice of the Martyrs and Open Door Ministries. My family supports them both. When I read about my brothers and sisters who are suffering, and I begin to pray for them, it gets my eyes off myself. My problems seem trite. (This is Biblical; read Isaiah 58.)

For the lost person, here and now *is* their best life. Living in this sin-cursed world is all the heaven they will ever experience. Satan gives the best at first and saves the worst for last. Just the opposite for God’s children. Our temporary residence in this world is all the hell we are ever going to know. Not only has our Lord saved the best for last, but our best life will last forever! Our eternal hope and future home is a place where there is no sin, no suffering, no death, no crying, or pain. The more we suffer here, the more we long for home, and we become increasingly uncomfortable with the darkness that is so prevalent in the here and now. Therefore, suffering cures us of being enamored with the world, and it is an instrument God uses for our sanctification (1 Peter 4:1-6).

Paul Earned His Ph.D. in Suffering

Acts 9:15-16

But the Lord said to him, “Go, because this man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.

What goes around, they say, comes around. Remember that prior to His encounter with Christ, Paul had been used as an instrument of the devil to inflict great suffering on the church. It’s not surprising then that from the moment of Paul’s conversion, Jesus would enlist Read about this in Acts 9:1-16).Suffering, for the sake of the gospel, was a hallmark throughout Paul’s ministry. He neither bragged nor whined about it—he just stated it as fact. The reason he suffered was so that the Gentiles would hear the gospel. Although, he never lost his love or zeal for the souls of his own people—the Jews (Romans 9:1-3).

At the end of his three years with the saints at Ephesus, the Holy Spirit reminded Paul that imprisonment and afflictions were coming at every turn. Nevertheless, he could not be detoured because he was resolved to finish the race. Looking forward to the joy to come when he reached the finish line surely must have helped him to keep his eyes on the prize (Hebrews 12:1-2; Philippians 3:12-14).

Acts 20:22-24

And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem without knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit warns me in town after town that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. But I do not consider my life worth anything to myself, so that I may finish my task and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God’s grace.

Around AD 56, Paul had just concluded his three-year ministry in Ephesus when he wrote the following synopsis listing some of the things he had endured for the sake of the gospel. To simply say his life was hard would be a colossal understatement. Read 2 Corinthians 6:4-10.

Then, Paul recounts a very strange, almost unspeakable encounter he had when he was “caught up to paradise” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Maybe this is when the divine mysteries were revealed to him. However, when a mortal man is allowed such an awe-inspiring privilege, you can be assured it will come at a cost. For Paul, it was a humbling thorn in his flesh. Some say it was his sight. This makes sense when you think of it. This was the second time his human eyes were allowed to see a heavenly vision (Acts 9:1-19). As Paul learned, s

It was approximately five or six years later, while he was under house arrest in Rome, that Paul wrote his letters to the beloved saints in Ephesus and to the church at Philippi. Don’t forget he was incarcerated (Ephesians 3:13, 4:1). But Paul gladly accepted his lot. In fact, he rejoiced to “share in Christ’s suffering.” Instead of these things making him bitter, they made him more like Jesus. You see, Paul discovered a secret. With every trial, he came to know Jesus more and gained an even deeper intimacy with his Lord (Philippians 3:7-11).

Through a prophet named Agabus, the Lord showed Paul how his earthly journey was going to end, and it wasn’t in a blaze of glory—at least not by man’s estimation (Acts 21:11). As Paul drew near the finish line, his circumstances worsened considerably. Timothy, his spiritual son, was the pastor of the church at Ephesus at the time. Meanwhile, the evil and barbaric Emperor Nero had Paul chained like an animal in a cold damp cell in Rome. Only Luke was with him at the end. It is interesting that as Paul was close to the end of his life, he wanted three things: his cloak, his parchments (his Bible), and, lastly, he wanted to see his dear son Timothy. Last words are always the most important. What was on Paul’s mind? He wants Timothy to join him in suffering for the gospel. Paul counted the cost. It is traditionally believed that Paul was beheaded by Nero around May or June of AD 68, and on June ninth, Nero committed suicide. Paul’s suffering came to an end; his killer’s eternal torment had just commenced. Read 2 Timothy 3:10-12.

There are several things we can learn from observing Paul’s life. The first is that the gospel must be preached, regardless of the cost. Second, is the reality that life, even the Christian life, is full of difficulties. This should come as no surprise because the Lord Jesus promised us that in this world we would have troubles (John 16:33). And although we may sorrow now, our sorrows will be turned into endless joy when we get home (John 6:20-22). For Jesus is the prize that awaits those who endure until the end, and that is all that really matters.

And so, the question that begs to be asked is this: Is it worth it to live the crucified life as a follower of Christ? This is what Paul told the Corinthians, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). If we were to ask Paul that question, I believe he would answer unequivocally – yes, Jesus was worth it all!

One of five missionaries martyred while bringing the gospel to the Waodani Indians in Ecuador was Jim Elliot. His following journal entry is perhaps the most quoted call to missions in our day. He wrote, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”

As we wrap up this lesson, I want to share a personal story. Once, while preparing to take a training trip with Catalyst Missions to Bolivia, my spiritual mother and ministry partner Joney Caudill and I had a real conundrum. Because of her age and my auto-immune disease, neither of us could take the necessary yellow fever shot. Traveling to the border of Bolivia and Brazil and being close to the tributaries of the Amazon river was a risk. After much prayer and the purchase of every mosquito repellent we could get our hands on, we got the green light from the Lord. Some might say we were being foolish: it was too risky an expedition for grandmothers who were seventy and fifty-four years of age. But at the end of the day, we chose to follow Jesus by fishing for men and women and making disciples of the nations. The Great Commission is the command, and we both know by experience and by His promises that He will never leave nor forsake us. We are no fools to take a risk. We don’t own our lives—Jesus does! So, we keep our eyes on the prize of gaining that which we cannot lose.

If I had to choose between an entire lifetime of health, wealth, and problem-free living without Jesus and a life of storms, sorrows, and suffering as His follower, the choice is simple. There is no rival. Just give me Jesus. He is my life, and, yes, He is worth it!

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Acts 2:42, 9:15-16, 14:19-22, 19:23-41, 20:22-27, 21:11; 1 Timothy 1:3,10, 4:6,13, 6:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:1-26, 3:10, 4:2-4; Titus 1:9; 2 Corinthians 4:8-11; Philippians 1:12-14

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. A fter reading the following list of passages, make a list of everything God’s Word tells us about the cost of being a true follower of Christ. Luke 9:22-26, 57-59, 14:25-34, 16:9-13, 17:33, 18:28-33; John 6:60-66; Matthew 8:19-20, 10:16-39, 19:29; John 15:18-21, 16:1-4; 1 John 4:1-6; Mark 8:31-38, 10:28-30; 1 Peter 2:24-25; 2 Corinthians 1:5-11, 5:21; Hebrews 12:1-13, 13:12-14; James 1:2-4; Revelation 21:1-9 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Now answer this question: Did you find any place in these passages that exempts anyone who is part of the body of Christ from suffering?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Did you find two different categories of followers? If not, what is inferred here? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. In John 16:33, Jesus makes two promises. What are they?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Jesus’ sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:1-12. Make a list of the kinds of people Jesus called “Blessed.” \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. The apostle Peter wrote 1st and 2nd Peter to the churches who were suffering horrific persecution. Read through 1 Peter chapters 1-5. From this text, what are some truths we can apply to our situations when we are suffering for the sake of the gospel? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Hebrews 12:1-3 and answer the following questions. Who are the great crowd of witnesses? What was the joy set before Jesus that gave Him endurance in suffering? Other than the cross, what else did He endure so that we will not grow weary and lose heart?

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1. Read Philippians 2:20-22. How did Paul describe Timothy? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. After reading the following passages, state why Paul endured all this suffering. Ephesians 3:13; Romans 1:16-18; 2 Timothy 2:3-12\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. In light of the reality that everyone but Luke abandoned Paul, now read about Onesiphorus in Acts 19; 2 Timothy 1:15-18, 2 Timothy 4:19. What can we learn from Onesiphorus that we should emulate? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Romans 8:17 and 1 Corinthians 12:26. The Greek word for suffer here is sumpascho, which means to sympathize or suffer with—specifically persecution. When was the last time you suffered with someone this way? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Has anyone ever suffered with you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Why is it so important to have close spiritual relationships in our life for times like these?

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Memory Verse

Luke 9:23-24

Then he said to them all, “If anyone wants to become my follower, he must deny

himself, take up his crossdaily, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life

will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it.



**The Seasons of Storms, Sorrows, and Suffering**

Key Passage

Philippians 1:29-30

Introduction

I

n the book of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon so aptly described the rhythms of life when he said, “There is a season for everything.” Along with blessings come trials, and joy is often intermingled with deep sorrow. “Even in laughter the heart may sorrow, and the end of mirth may be grief” (Proverbs 14:13). The good, the bad, and the ugly are all fragments that make up the mosaics of our lives. Yet, even though we know this in our head, we resist the seasons of trials when they come; but come they will. It is just part of the human experience. Moses must have been in one of “these seasons” himself when he wrote this prayer, “The length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:1 NIV). So there you have it—the sum total of our earthly existence.

Now that you know the heavy theme we will be tackling, you may be saying, “I think I might just skip this lesson and go do some laundry!” Now granted, suffering may not be anyone’s favorite topic, but it is, however, everyone’s reality because no one gets a pass from heartaches, pains, sufferings, and sorrows. With that being said, I really hope you will see this through to the end because this might be the most personally relevant lesson yet. The extent to which we grasp this will greatly affect how we weather the inevitable storms and sorrows of life. Read Acts 14:21-22.

The Rude Awakening

Romans 8:17-18 (KJV)

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with [him], that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

It is easier to write a lesson on life’s storms when you are not right in the middle of one of these painful seasons. For this reason, it has been a real challenge to find a good time to write, what is in my opinion, a crucial doctrine in the life of a Christian.

Now, at this very moment, my husband and I are having a reprieve from work and the cares of the world. We are at the beach, one of my favorite places on earth, and we just happen to be celebrating thirty years of marriage. It is early in the morning, and Art is asleep. I am outside on the patio of our rented condominium with my Bible open and coffee in hand. I am all alone with my Lord Jesus; it just doesn’t get much better than that! It is a rainy day, and the usually calm, glassy ocean is alive with white caps. In the near distance, thunder follows an incredible display of lighting. Instead of slowly lapping on the shore, the waves are crashing in one right after the other, obscuring the usual parade of dolphins that swim along the gulf coast. I am relatively confident that this storm will soon pass, and the sun will come out. I will have the joy of walking along the abandoned beach and talking to the Lord about whatever is on my mind at the moment. For now, all is calm, and I am so far removed from some of the greatest storms and sorrows of my life that I can speak of them without being hurt all over again.

Sometimes it is helpful to look back just long enough to learn the lessons from the past and see the faithfulness of God. But it is not good to live there. For when we camp-out in the past, grief can make us become self-centered, and our hurts can become idols. The Lord gave me the following verses that have helped move me beyond grief and lift my head to look up from the ashes. When my gaze is fixed on Jesus, He keeps me from sinking further into despair. He gives me the one thing that none of us can live without: hope. That hope is Jesus; He is the health of my countenance and the lifter of my head. Besides that, our hope is not in the past; it is before us. Read Isaiah 43:18-19.

Philippians 3:12-14

Not that I have already attained this – that is, I have not already been perfected – but I strive to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have attained this. Instead I am single-minded: Forgetting the things that are behind and reaching out for the things that are ahead, with this goal in mind, I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** 1 Peter 1:3-16; Psalm 39:7, 42:5, 43:5; Romans 15:13; James 1:2, 2:4-12

Faith Tested by Fire

1 Peter 1:3-7

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, that is, into an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. It is reserved in heaven for you, who by God’s power are protected through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. This brings you great joy, although you may have to suffer for a short time in various trials. Such trials show the proven character of your faith, which is much more valuable than gold – gold that is tested by fire, even though it is passing away – and will bring praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

You know, it’s been said that we are either coming out of a storm, we are in one now, or one is just over the horizon. Life’s storms come in a variety of forms. They can manifest as illness, deaths, broken relationships, loss of jobs or income, rebellious children, or even natural disasters. And when they hit, they will expose the kind of foundation our lives are built upon. They test our faith. Anything or anyone we trust in other than the Lord Jesus Christ will prove to be sinking sand, and every life built on sinking sand will ultimately collapse. Have you noticed how quickly our faith falters when adversity strikes and how our lack of faith is amplified during these events?

Storms usually hit us unexpectedly, and they seem to come at the most inconvenient times. They wreck all of our well-made plans bringing life suddenly to a screeching halt. Sometimes, just when you think it cannot possibly get worse—it does. On some level, we have all experienced this. Still, other events are so catastrophic that they seem to split our lives in two. You might even characterize these kinds of traumas in terms of “before this or after that.” In addition to a few of my own painful experiences, I have observed this phenomenon up close and personally in the lives of others.

As I share some personal examples, I want to be as transparent as possible, but at the same time, I must also be mindful of others. I apologize if I don’t give specifics. My goal, however, is to be real. I cannot present to you a picture-perfect example of how to suffer. But I can share with you a few coping mechanisms and hard-won lessons I learned while suffering through some trials. You will be happy to know; I won’t be sharing them all! These are the “classrooms,” if you will, where I learned the doctrine of storms, sorrows, and suffering.

The day started out like any other. I got up, made coffee, did a little housework, and sat down at my dining room table to study a lesson I was to teach my Sunday school class. The picture on the Sunday school book was a man hanging upside down, and the name of the lesson was “When Life Suddenly Turns Upside Down.” And then, without warning, it hit me. The letters were moving on the page and so was the upside-down man. I struggled to focus. Then the next indication that something was not right was nausea. I stood up to walk to the bathroom. It was like I was on a rocking boat, and I clung to the wall to stay upright. I called Art at work and asked him to please come home to help me. When he got there, I could not even stand. We went straight to the doctor who diagnosed me with vertigo. The medicine he gave me did not help. And then came the high fever. To make a long story short, I ended up in the hospital for several days. After much testing, we found out it was an infection in the middle of my brain where the brainstem connects to the inner ear. Thankfully, within a month, the infection was gone, and I was back upright. Life was normal again, at least for the time being. Thankfully, this health crisis was short lived. All things considered, this was an easy trial.

Deuteronomy 33:27

The everlasting God is a refuge, and underneath you are his eternal arms; he has driven out enemies before you, and has said, “Destroy!”.

When my children were little, and storms threatened, I would make them sleep downstairs with me. If the storm was bad enough, we would grab the essentials: flashlights, pillows, and a Bible. And then we would hunker down in the closet. A few years back we had a rash of tornadoes that left a path of destruction over several southern states. My husband was seven hours away from home when he called to ask for help to navigate through the tornadoes. Simultaneously, the news reporters were telling us, “Take cover, NOW!” The sky had become as black as midnight, and a tornado was coming straight for our small community.

My sons were eighteen and twenty at the time. And would you believe—they would not get into the closet with me! At this point, none of us knew how destructive this storm was or how many lives were being lost. This “mother hen” was having a fit of fear and frustration. How dare my grown babies refuse to get under my “wings of protection” in the closet! You see, as a mom, not only do I not want to suffer, I want to keep my children from suffering. But in reality, it is just one in the same because our hearts are so bound to them. I might add, as a recovering control freak—they have always thought I overreact. With a phone in hand, I was telling Art about the tornado about to hit us, when I heard a terrifying sound on the other end of the line. A drunk driver hit my husband’s car. I could hear the sound of the impact and squealing tires. My blood pressure goes up just remembering that night. As you might imagine, I forgot all about the tornado. I think I stopped breathing until Art’s car came to a stop and I heard he was all right. Praise the Lord, he was not hurt. The tornado missed our house, and only the Lord knows if that wreck kept Art out of the path of a deadly tornado. We dodged these bullets.

Our family survived these storms, but then, only two months later, came the record-breaking floods. When the waters overflowed the banks of the Mississippi River, the flood waters reached our small town just north of Memphis. Once again, I needed to hear from God. So I got out my Bible. When I am paralyzed with fear, I often find my voice in the Psalm. There is hardly a human emotion that is not expressed there. The Psalms are packed full of powerful prayers to cry out to the Lord in every circumstance. The following are a few examples.

Psalm 56:3-4

When I am afraid, I trust in you. In God—I boast in his promise —in God I trust, I am not afraid. What can mere men do to me?

Psalm 29:9-11

The Lord’s shout bends the large trees and strips the leaves from the forests. Everyone in his temple says, “Majestic!” The Lord sits enthroned over the engulfing waters, the LORD sits enthroned as the eternal king. The Lord gives his people strength; the Lord grants his people security.

Psalm 46:1-3

God is our strong refuge; he is truly our helper in times of trouble. For this reason, we do not fear when the earth shakes, and the mountains tumble into the depths of the sea, when its waves crash and foam, and the mountains shake before the surging sea. (Selah)

From the Mountain Top into a Deep Pit

The year 2001 was a very tragic year for the United States of America. Many lives were forever changed by the events of September 11. Yet, that horrible day seemed like a blip on my Richter scale with all that was shaking in the world around me. When you are in the midst of your own storm, it is difficult to see beyond your own pain because you kind of go into a survival mode. The physical, relational, spiritual, and emotional sufferings of that year were unprecedented.

But looking back, I can see the blessings that were birthed out of all this pain. I can truthfully tell you that the blessings far surpassed any suffering I had to endure. All of my painful trials were, in reality, valuable life lessons. Yet, admittedly, when you are caught in the vortex, struggling to regain your equilibrium, you cannot imagine how anything good could possibly come of it. With that said, I want to major on the good and minimalize the bad. And if possible, I’ll do my best to make these long stories short.

It all started towards the end of 2000. First, was the beginning of my parents’ divorce and the inevitable drama that followed. It does not matter if you are eight or thirty-eight when your parents divorce; it’s very much like a death in the family. The difference is that wounded people are still walking around trying to function. If you have been there, then you know what I am talking about.

After the divorce proceedings began, I received a diagnosis of cervical cancer. One of my coping mechanisms is to go into denial—that was impossible in this situation. One thing is for sure, when life is going well, we tend to drift away from God. Seeking Him is not a high priority. But all that changes when things like this happen. Thankfully, I had enough history with the Lord to know that if I was going to survive, I had better cling tightly to God’s Word. And so, before I went under the surgeon’s knife, I got a little black book and wrote down a list of passages to meditate on right up to the moment they put me under anesthesia. I have quoted one of these passages below: Isaiah 43:1-5. These verses subdued my fears and fortified my faith.

Because God will not revoke a single promise He has made, we can bank on the fact that He will always keep His Word. My black book of verses has become my “go to bank” when I am fearful. Did you know that God has given us 365 “fear not” passages in the Bible? That is one for every day of the year! And most of the “fear nots” are followed by these words— “Because*, I am with you.*” Why is this so important to know? Because, when we are hurt and afraid is when we so often feel most alone.

Isaiah 43:1-5

Now, this is what the Lord says, the one who created you, O Jacob, and formed you, O Israel: “Don’t be afraid, for I will protect you. I call you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I am with you; when you pass through the streams, they will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not harm you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, our deliverer. I have handed over Egypt as a ransom price, Ethiopia and Saba in place of you. Since you are precious and special in my sight, and I love you, I will hand over people in place of you, nations in place of your life. Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. From the east I will bring your descendants; from the west I will gather you.

Now back to my story. When God answered my prayers and saved my husband, I was on the mountaintop. I earnestly prayed Philippians 3:7-11 and shortly thereafter, Art and I were baptized together. Little did I know, this was just a prelude to what would be another baptism - a baptism by fire. Just three days later I went from the mountaintop into the deepest, darkest valley of my life. Virtually everything that gave me security was removed and I felt as if I were standing on the edge of a cliff as the wind pushed me toward the edge. I was filled with anxiety, even to the point of needing medication. I have had bouts of depression throughout my life. Depression runs in my family. However, this season was unparalleled to anything I had ever faced. The devil assaulted me with every lie in his arsenal. I knew them well. Lies such as, “You’re unlovable, and your life is useless. No one cares about you, and you deserve everything that’s happened to you. Why don’t you just end it?” Satan tried to tempt Jesus—who is God—to kill Himself (Matthew 4:1-12). Don’t think for a moment that he would not use the same tactic on us.

Even though the salvation of both my husband and my father was the eternal good that came out of it all, were it not for God’s abundant grace and mercy, I seriously doubt I would have made it through that year. And honestly, at my lowest point, I despaired of life and just begged the Lord to please take me home. I had had enough of this place, and I wanted to be in heaven with Him! Suffice it to say, this request was not granted.

A few months into my very bad, horrible year, I went to camp with our church youth group. When I got on the church van to leave, I was in tears. On the first day of camp, I wrote in my prayer journal, “*Where are you, Lord? Have you forsaken me?”* I was alone in my pain because, in spite of the fact that I was active in church, I did not know what it meant to have real spiritual relationships. No one else knew the deep sorrow of my heart—but God knew. The last night of camp, we were in an open-air pavilion when a man walked up out of the darkness and asked our youth pastor, Ron, to pray for him and his son. His wife had abandoned them. Ron prayed for him. And as he stepped out to leave, I felt drawn to him like a moth to a flame. But, as I approached the man, the youth gathered around him. I stood listening as he spoke to them. To my surprise, the man stopped, locked eyes with mine, and he said to me: “You know what I am talking about don’t you?” I did not say a word; I just nodded my head. Then, as if the Lord Himself had walked up into the darkness to answer my question “Where are you?”, the man said: “God wants you to know that when you are broken, the way you are broken now, He has never been closer to you.” I felt months of pent-up pain and emotions about to erupt, so I took off running to get as far away from everyone as I could. I believe one of the most cathartic things we can do is to get alone with Jesus and cry our eyes out to the only one who really does understand. The Psalmist wrote that the Lord has kept our tears in a bottle and recorded them on a scroll (Psalm 56:8). When I read that, I was imagining how full my bottle must be.

You may question the ability of God to speak personally to us through others. So,If God can speak through a donkey, then He can speak through a broken man or broken woman (Numbers 22:21-39). Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice.” When we hear the Word of God, there is no doubt God speaking. Listen to this: “*The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds*.”(Psalm34:18-19).

Don’t Suffer in Silence

* Do you think that “suffering in silence” is Biblical? Does it help or hurt? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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* Read Romans 12:10-15 and Galatians 6:2, 9-10 and answer the following questions. What are some ways you can apply these passages in situations like I have just described? What are some ways that others have ministered grace towards you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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* Now it is your turn. Have you ever felt that you were being assaulted by Satan’s lies? If so, what were the circumstances?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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For those who desire to help the hurting, here are a few tips. When someone’s heart is shattered, quoting verses to them or offering pithy little sayings pose little consolation, especially if you have not walked in their shoes. Perhaps it would be best to be quiet and just listen.

Psalm 37:39-40

But the Lord delivers the godly; he protects them in times of trouble. The Lord helps them and rescues them; he rescues them from evil men and delivers them, for they seek his protection.

You may ask, “So where was God when I was in pain?” He was right there with me. I just couldn’t see Him for the darkness. As Jacob said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it” (Genesis 28:16 NASB). Do you suppose that tears open our eyes to see God as He truly is? At the end of Job’s suffering, he proclaimed, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you” (Job 42:5).

**DIGGING DEEPER:** 2 Timothy 3:12; Romans 8:17-22; Philippians 1:29, 3:10, 4:4-6; 1 Peter 3:10-18, 4:13, 5:7; 2 Corinthians 1:5, 4:7-11, 6:4-10, 7:5, 11:23-28; Colossians 1:24; Luke 9:21-26; 1 Thessalonians 3:2-4; Acts 9:15-16, 14:19-22, 16:22, 19:11-41, 20:17-24, 22:38; Psalm 23:4, 56:13, 138:7-8; Daniel 3:8-30, 6:10-24; Job 42:1-6

Why Suffering?

I don’t fully understand the ways of the Lord, nor can I give you the answer as to why God allowed your suffering or mine. God is not obligated to explain Himself to us. Just ask Job. But I submit what we can know Biblically. For the child of God, suffering always has a purpose. One such purpose is the refining influence it has on our lives. Another reason for suffering is that God can use your situation to help others who are hurting. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7**.** However, when trials come, we must not be hasty, like the friends of Job, to jump to the conclusion that God is punishing us. That may be the case because God disciplines those who He loves (Hebrews 12:1-11).

But the dilemma that we must grapple with is the issue of God’s sovereignty. At the end of the day, we have a decision to make. Are we going to trust God and believe His Word or not? And if the answer is yes, then we must believe that He rules over the affairs, even the details, of our lives - including our pains and suffering.

* Read the following passages and then answer these questions. Is suffering always a sign that God is angry at you or that you are being punished for sin? Luke 13:1-5; John 9:1-4; Acts 7:51-60; Job 1:1-22, 4:1-9, 8:20; Psalm 34:15-19, 36:6-7, 37:25 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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* Read Psalm 119:71; Job 22:21-25 and Mark 4:41 and answer this question: What are some good things that can come from afflictions? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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* Job did not understand why he was suffering the loss of everything. His wife and three friends did not help; they added to his pain with words. What can we learn from their poor examples when we see disaster and tragedy strike in someone’s life? How should we respond in a way that will help them and not hurt them? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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A Note to Those Who Are Suffering

Nahum 1:7

The Lord is good—indeed, he is a fortress in time of distress, and he protects those who seek refuge in him.

Maybe this lesson hits close to home. Perhaps some fiery trial has consumed your hopes and dreams, and you realize that you don’t have a leg of faith upon which you can stand. Are you sitting among the ashes of what was your life, wondering if God exists and if he loves you? Are you wondering why would He let this happen to you? What are we to do when all that makes us feel safe and secure is removed from us? You are not the first to ask these questions. They are echoed in a Psalm of David where he asks, “When the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do” (Psalm 11:3). And then there is Job. Read Job 10:1-9 and see if his words ring true with you; I know they did for me.

My friend, while I may be as much of stranger to you as that man at the youth group camp was to me, I want to be the voice of truth that you need to hear today. I only wish I could look into your tear-filled eyes and tell you this. Please understand this: God does not stand aloof, untouched, or unmoved when we suffer (Matthew 9:35-36; John 11:1-44). I know how the enemy is trying to isolate you from God and others by telling you that no one cares. But the truth is, God was there with you when it happened, and He has felt your pain. And while you might not know Him and His matchless love, He knows you intimately (Psalm 139:1-16).

Even now, in your brokenness and sorrow, the Lord Jesus is saying, “I AM HERE…I LOVE YOU…I SUFFERED AND DIED TO SAVE YOU…I AM ALIVE…I OFFER YOU LIFE, HOPE, AND A FUTURE!” Although your circumstances may not change, in Christ, you will find real love, joy, and peace that can sustain you. And then, one glorious day, when this night of weeping is over, eclipsed in everlasting light, the nail-scared hands of Jesus will wipe away every tear! In the meantime, God has given you some great and precious promises to cling to. They have been deposited into your account, and whenever you should need them you can make a withdrawal.

Romans 8:15-18

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit that we are God’s children. And if children, then heirs (namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs with Christ)—if indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that our present sufferings cannot even be compared to the glory that will be revealed to us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. Have you ever seen a righteous person suffer unjustly? How did they respond?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4. What did Paul tell the saints in Thessalonica about suffering?

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1. Jesus said, “The rain falls on the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). What did He mean by this? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Chances are, it is raining in your life even now. If so, will you describe your situation?\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Can you describe a time when you went into a survival mode and the reason for this? \_\_\_\_\_

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1. When we have been hurt, we have a greater propensity to protect ourselves. Is it possible to protect ourselves and deny ourselves at the same time? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Have you personally experienced abandonment at a time of your greatest need? If so, did you run from God? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verse

Philippians 1:29-30

For it has been granted to you not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him, since you are encountering the same conflict that you saw me face and now hear that I am facing.



**Spiritual Warfare —**

**Not Being** **Blind to the Fight**

Key Passage

Ephesians 6:10-12

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Introduction

henever I am busy about my own agenda and the cares of this world, I hardly even notice any spiritual opposition. That is—I am no threat to the kingdom of darkness. In truth, I am defeated already. But when I set my heart on God’s kingdom and His Work, the realities of the spiritual war going on in our midst become very evident. This has been the case as I have struggled, month after month, to write and rewrite this lesson. Apparently, the enemy has taken notice, and he has employed every tool in his arsenal to distract, discourage, and stop me from finishing this chapter. This is a real and personal war, and I am thrust, ready or not, into hand to hand combat with the forces of evil. The devil knows what a powerful weapon God’s Word is in the fight against him. While the forces of darkness know it, most of the church is either unengaged or is oblivious to the fight.

Most believers fall into one of two categories when we are talking about the spiritual realms. People in the first category, while aware of the unseen spiritual world, have a misplaced focus or incorrect understanding of it. Many people see the devil around every corner and are inclined to place the responsibility for all their sins at Satan’s door. They say, “the devil made me do it.” They may forget about the protection afforded by the victorious Lord Jesus and become overly fearful and anxious. Conversely, they may spend all of their time talking to, reading about, and thinking about angels. Yes, Jesus sends angels to watch over us, and we must be thankful for this and pray to Jesus for their assistance. But we must always keep our eyes on Jesus, first and foremost. As Paul reminded us in the first chapter of Ephesians, it is Jesus who has dominion over all.

Ephesians 1:20-21

This power he exercised in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.

People in the second category lie at the other end of the spectrum when it comes to their views on the spiritual realms. Those in this group deny that the devil exists or totally dismiss the reality of the spiritual battle that rages all around us. In some cases, this is a reaction to people in the first category. In the United States where “materialism” is a powerful cultural influence, even in the church, people try to avoid the appearance of recognizing any influence outside of the purely natural. In the extreme, some even deny the activities of the Holy Spirit. When we are living in the midst of a spiritual battle, the consequences of not having a clear understanding of the battle we are fighting can be dire, indeed. To avoid these extremes, we are going to allow the Word of God to dictate our doctrine on spiritual warfare. In his message on the subject titled “The Powerlessness of the Excluded Middle Worldview,” Wade Trimmer, referring to a commentary by Paul Hiebert, writes:

If the people of God are to recover their effectiveness in setting captives free and pulling down demonic strongholds, then we must reinstate the middle level into our worldview and realize that there is an invisible, but real world engaged in an invisible, but very real war. All persons since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden have been born into a battle zone and into a battle—the Conflict of the Ages— the Battle of the Two Seeds. To become a Christian isn’t to quit fighting, but to change sides! It’s to discover whom the real enemy is and that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God.

On this side of paradise lost, we are born in the domain of the kingdom of darkness, and in one way or another, we are suffering because of it. For those who have received Jesus as Lord, we’ve been rescued from that kingdom and transferred into God’s kingdom. We are still *in* the world but no longer *of* the world. And this is a critical point. King Jesus has already won the battle at the cross where He made a public spectacle of the forces of evil and disarmed them (Colossians 1:13, 2:13-15). The “macro” battle is won. Yet the enemy is not content to simply walk away from the battlefield. He is using the time he has remaining in this world—what we know as our present, everyday world—to wreak as much havoc as is possible and take down as many souls as is possible. This is a battleground, and we have a persistent and cunning foe. So, while it is true that the battle against evil is won and all believers will one day arrive safely into the arms of Jesus, we are challenged to live out His victory in our everyday lives. To stand our ground takes courage, confidence, conviction, and comrades. The aim of this lesson is to help us become aware of the unseen world around us and be prepared to fight and to win.

Three Formidable Enemies

1 John 4:4-6

You are from God, little children, and have conquered them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world’s perspective and the world listens to them. We are from God; the person who knows God listens to us, but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit.

There are three formidable enemies with whom we must contend: the world, the flesh, and, the master-mind of this unholy trinity, the devil (1 John 5:18-19). In Greek, his name is diabolos—the origin of the word diabolical. And that what he is. He’s devious, diabolical, methodical, and relentless. The Greek word that is translated into English as scheme, wiles, or methods is methodei. It means to lie in wait like a snake in the grass (Ephesians 6:11).

His evil intent was evident in Eden. He lured Adam and Eve into his trap by tempting them to disbelieve and disobey God. He’s been slithering around ever since, looking to kill, steal, and destroy. Where ever these evils exist, you can be sure that the devil and his cohort of demons have left their calling card (Ephesians 6:11-12). He’s had a lot of time to hone his skills. Even as I write this, I have just encountered a poor soul that he is using the same tactics on. Through one of his false teachers, he’s twisting God’s Word and causing her to doubt the account in the garden and, thus, the Bible!

* Stop and read John 10:1-18; Hebrews 2:14-18; Ephesians 1:19-23, and 1 John 3:7-10. Note the contrasts between Jesus and our foe. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Three Kinds of Temptations

Before we go any further, we would do well to study the temptation of Christ. Stop and read Matthew 4:1-11. Notice how the devil used the same temptations he employed on Adam and Eve. All temptations basically boil down to three areas: *pleasures*—the lust of the flesh, *possessions*—the lust of the eyes, and, lastly, *pride* (Genesis 3:1-19). Naturally, he will use the same ploys against us.

Working in concert with the other two in the unholy trinity, Satan will use every strategy at his disposal to cause us to revert to our old sinful habits. Therefore, we must learn to trust the still, small voice of our Father in heaven and let God’s truth drown out the hissing of the serpent’s seduction. Because He was tempted but did not fall into sin, Jesus can sympathize with us as a merciful High Priest (Hebrews 2:18; 1 Corinthians 10:13). The Lord Jesus will always provide us a way of escape, but we must learn to look for it!

1 Corinthians 10:12-13

So let the one who thinks he is standing be careful that he does not fall. No trial has overtaken you that is not faced by others. And God is faithful: He will not let you be tried beyond what you are able to bear, but with the trial will also provide a way out so that you may be able to endure it.

* From the following passage, find the three specific temptations and then make a list of one personal example of each one. Read 1 John 2:15-21. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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2 Corinthians 11:3

But I am afraid that just as the serpent deceived Eve by his treachery, your minds may be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

The battlefield is in our minds, specifically, our carnal minds. It works like this: We have a seemingly random thought such as, “I have had a bad day, or I am lonely. I deserve to .” You fill in the blank. Customarily, you would not even fall for it, but because you are tired, your defenses are down. Whatever your sin nature is prone to revert to, that is an area you are vulnerable. The vulnerabilities that lead us away from the Shepherd of our souls and back into our old carnal life in the world—that is where he will attack.

Romans 13:12-14

The night has advanced toward dawn; the day is near. So, then we must lay aside the works of darkness, and put on the weapons of light. Let us live decently as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in discord and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to arouse its desires.

Here are just a few things the enemy uses to tempt our flesh: insecurities, fear, ignorance, deceptions, pride, distractions, confusion, delusions, discouragement, disputes, an offense, and sinful anger. However, one of his most effective ploys of all is unforgiveness. An especially effective tool, unforgiveness gives the enemy an open door to come in and wreak havoc on our lives. The next lesson in this book, “A Cure for The Poison of Bitterness,” will shed light on this.

* From the list above, can you identify any methods the enemy is currently using on you? If so, explain. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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The helmet of salvation guards our minds from the fiery darts or lies that are hurled at us. We must know the Word of God so that we can identify the twisted lies of the enemy. Arrows are thoughts, false perceptions, and speculations. In her book *Fiery Darts*, Janet Lane gives the three R’s of fighting fiery darts:

1. Replace the fiery dart (with a Truth thought)[. http://fierydarts.wordpress.com](http://fierydarts.wordpress.com/)

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Ephesians 2:3; 1 John 2:15-17; Galatians 5:1, 19-21; 2 Corinthians 5:19; John 17:5-18; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15; Colossians 1:9-13; Acts, 13:10, 17:11; 1 Peter 1:13-16, 5:6-11; Deuteronomy 1:29-31, 3:22; Psalm 97:9-10; Acts 13:10; Revelation 12:9, 20:10

Preparation and Determination

1 Peter 5:8-9

Be sober and alert. Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour. Resist him, strong in your faith, because you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are enduring the same kinds of suffering.

The believers Peter wrote to in the passage above were suffering under the ruthless and barbaric attacks of Nero. Remember, the devil has children too (John 6:70-71; Matthew 13:36-42). Peter affirms that the devil is responsible for devouring God’s people. The language he uses is quite appropriate because there’s little doubt who motivated Nero to feed Christians to the lions. The one who hated them is the same one who is still seeking to destroy God’s children. For this reason, we need to be ready and alert to his assaults. When we are attacked by people, we must remember that we are not fighting people. The devil just uses people as his pawns. He hates us because he hates Jesus!

Ephesians 6:13-18

For this reason, take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand. Stand firm therefore, by fastening the belt of truth around your waist, by putting on the breastplate of righteousness, by fitting your feet with the preparation that comes from the good news of peace, and in all of this, by taking up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With every prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and to this end be alert, with all perseverance and requests for all the saints.

How are we to prepare for spiritual battle? Well, just like a police officer would wear special boots and a bulletproof vest, the Lord has procured spiritual battle gear so that we can be dressed for success. But we must not wait until we are engaged in a battle to put His armor on!

As we look at each piece of our armor, notice how the Word of God is the thread that holds all the pieces together. This begins with the belt of truth, and God’s Word *is* truth (John 17:17). Next, there is the breastplate of righteousness. What is that? It is the righteousness of Christ that is imparted to those who have been saved. Furthermore, the breastplate helps us do what is right when the enemy comes against us. Once again, it’s the Word of God that brings salvation and righteousness (1 Peter 1:2-25; Romans 8:5-10).

The next piece of armor is the gospel that brings peace between God and sinners. To paraphrase Paul’s words, “How beautiful are the feet of people who carry the good news” (Romans 10:14-18). Our feet must always be ready to share the good news (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). Are your feet ready to take the gospel to the ends of the earth? The gospel lessons at the beginning of this book are your tools. Our last article of armor is the shield of faith, and faith comes from hearing the Word of God. Do you see how important the Bible is? The shield is intended to protect us from fiery darts that come from the pit of hell.

* Shield of faith. After reading the following passages, make a list of everything you gleaned from them about faith. Romans 8:11, 10:17; John 6:63; 1 Timothy 6:12 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**DIGGING DEEPER:** Acts 17:11; 2 Peter 3:14-18; 2 Corinthians 4:2-6; Deuteronomy 4:2-6; Proverbs 30:5-6; Revelation 22:18-20; John 14:6, 17:17; Revelation 19:7-9; Romans 8:5-11, 10:15-18; John 17:9-21; 2 Timothy 2:1-4; Proverbs 16:7

Two Offensive Weapons

2 Corinthians 6:7b

…by the power of God, with weapons of righteousness both for the right hand and for the left.

The Lord has placed two “weapons of righteousness” in our hands to go on the offense against the evil one. The Word of God is one, and prayer is the other. The two are closely connected. (Read John 15:7-8; James 1:21-25, and Proverbs 28:9.) They are a powerful combination to the person who is living in obedience to God.

“The pen,” it’s been said, “is sharper than the sword.” When it comes to spiritual battles, the book penned by the Holy Spirit *is* the Sword (Ephesians 5:1-18). Let’s look back at Matthew 4:1-4 and observe the strategy Jesus employed to combat Satan. The Sword that Jesus used is the citing of *specific scriptures— “*It is written…” To be able to wield this weapon, we must be yielded to the Spirit or under His control. When we are, we can have full assurance and confidence in the battle.

James 4:6-10

But he gives greater grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.” So submit to God. But resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and make your hearts pure, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn, and weep. Turn your laughter into mourning and your joy into despair. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.”

* Read 1 John 2:12-14 and explain how the young men overcame the evil one.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Prayer is vital in every aspect of the Christian life. That cannot be stressed often enough. But it is especially important in Spiritual battle. To illustrate, let’s look at an Old Testament account that represents two key elements of prayer. It is found in 2 Kings 6. To summarize, God’s prophet Elisha was under attack from a marauding band of Arameans. Elisha’s attendant (or disciple) was petrified with fear when he saw this great army surrounding them. “What are we going to do?” cried the servant. The following scripture describes what happened.

2 Kings 6:16-18

He replied, “Don’t be afraid, for our side outnumbers them.” Then Elisha prayed, “O Lord, open his eyes so he can see.” The Lord opened the servant’s eyes and he saw that the hill was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. As they approached him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, “Strike these people with blindness.” The Lord struck them with blindness as Elisha requested.

You can read more in 2 Kings 6:8-23, but, for now, there are several things I want to point out. First, when we feel outnumbered and the enemy seems as “giants” surrounding us, we need to have a heavenly perspective. Again, we are not fighting flesh and blood but rulers and principalities of evil in the invisible world. This takes spiritual vision. That is what Elisha prayed for his servant. When God granted this request, the servant saw that the enemy was greatly outnumbered by God’s heavenly host of angels, the Commander of which is Jesus! He is bigger and more powerful than the opposing side. Secondly, prayer was key to seeing the invisible. Perhaps Paul had this in mind when he prayed for the saints in Ephesus. Stop and read Ephesians 1:17-21.

The Lord Himself is With Us in the Battle

1 John 4:4-5

You are from God, little children, and have conquered them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world’s perspective and the world listens to them.

Wrapping up this lesson on spiritual warfare, there is one final thing to consider. The Lord has not left us to fight the enemy alone. Knowing that this age-old battle would be fierce, and His children needed protection, Jesus employed the weapon of prayer and interceded for us. The prayer is found in John 17. And He is still praying for us (Hebrews 7:23-25). Not only did He pray specifically for our protection, He taught us to pray for deliverance from the evil one (John 17:13-21; Matthew 6:16-22). Until our life purposes are complete, we are going to be fighting this battle. Here is the good news. We belong to Jesus, and He has all power and authority. Therefore, our victory is secured. He is with us and for us until His Kingdom comes.

Romans 8:35-39

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we encounter death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us! For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In the laws of warfare found in Deuteronomy 20:1-18, Moses gives these words of encouragement: “Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.” Because our God is with us, we can face our foes with courage and confidence (Psalm 23:4, 138:7-8). Even when we feel powerless in the battle, God’s strength is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. Review the following list and see if you can identify the methods the enemy has used on you? His methods are temptations of flesh, offense, sinful anger, unforgiveness, disputes, insecurities, fear, ignorance or deceptions, pride, distractions, confusion, delusions, and discouragement. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read John 6:63. What is the sword of the Spirit? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Think about times of defeat. What weapons or armor were missing? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Who prepared you for this daily battle?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Is this person missing in your walk of faith?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Have you been taught to pray?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Read Luke 11:1-3 and Matthew 6:16-22. Who teaches others to pray? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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2. Read Deuteronomy 4:7, Psalm 145:18, and James 4:6-10. From these passages, what is the connection between humbling ourselves in prayer and our awareness of God’s presence in spiritual battle? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. In Psalm 18, David paints a vivid mental picture of God doing battle on his behalf. Take a moment and read Psalm 18:1-49. Make note of every title that David gives to the Lord, who delivered him from the hands of his enemies. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Now read Psalm 142 and 143. What actions did David take that we should emulate when we are in spiritual warfare? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What can we learn from the following passages about our weakness verses God’s strength? Romans 8:26; Philippians 4:13; Exodus 15:2; Psalm 24:8, 28:7, 37:39, 46:1; Isaiah 40:21-41

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1. Read Luke 10:1-21 and make a list of things you can learn about spiritual battle from this account.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verses

Ephesians 6:10-11

Finally, be strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Clothe

yourselves with the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand against

the schemes of the devil.

1 Peter 5:8-9

Be sober and alert. Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour.  Resist him, strong in your faith, because you know that

Your brothers and sisters throughout the world are enduring the same kinds of

suffering.



**Cure for the Poison of Bitterness**

Key Passage

Ephesians 4:31-32

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Introduction

hen was the last time you were really hurt by someone? Do you know what I’m talking about? I am talking about the kind of offense that replays like a broken record in your mind. It skips to the part where you were cut like a knife by someone’s words or deeds. The offense becomes almost an obsession. Let’s be honest about it—this kind of wound ignites our emotions and leaves us secretly fantasizing about getting even, even if it’s just passive aggression. When this happens, and you indulge your flesh, anger turns into bitterness. This bitterness grows roots, and these roots will choke the life out of you. If left unchecked, it will move from repression to depression, and finally, expression. The Psalmist graphically depicted what bitterness looks like when it is expressed: *“*When my heart was grieved, and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you” (Psalm 73:21-22 NIV). These words describe a person who is so full of unresolved anger and bitterness that they act like a wild beast! In fact, they are acting like the devil.

Twice in my life, I have been the target of such a person. In both cases, obviously, I was just one of many unfortunate people who got caught in their crosshairs. Anger, unforgiveness, and bitterness might start with a single offense, but they spread like gangrene until they defile every relationship in that person’s life. If you or someone you know fits that description, then the Biblical truth we are about to learn might even save your life. In this lesson, we’ll grapple with this subject until we find the antidote for the deadly sin of unforgiveness.

The Consequences of Unforgiveness

Perhaps the best object lesson that Jesus gave on forgiveness is depicted in the parable of the unforgiving servant. (Stop and read Matthew 18:21-35.) If you believe the Bible and take God at His Word, this parable and its implications should put the fear of God in your heart. To say that this story doesn’t end well for the unforgiving servant would be a great understatement! What person in their right mind would want God to turn them over to the demons to be tormented? If all that was not bad enough, God will make them pay back every penny that they owe. Definition: they will lose everything!

For the child of God, the most self-destructive sin is not something obvious like substance abuse. Although, often people who deal with unresolved conflicts will “self-medicate” with alcohol or drugs. These don’t alleviate their pain, they only exacerbate it. Furthermore, when people are under the influence, it magnifies the ugliness that’s in their heart. What’s in the well, as they say, is what comes up in the bucket. The most harmful sin to a child of God is unforgiveness—the root of which is pride. Like poison to the soul, unresolved anger pierces our own heart, and it invites God’s discipline (Psalm 107:10-20).

A lost person is incapable of forgiving anyone. They balk at the thought of forgiving those who hurt them, screaming and asserting their right to be mad and get even. Worldly reasoning says, “I’m the one who was wronged. Why do I need to repent?” When a person refuses to forgive others, their actions reveal that they have never received the forgiveness of God in the first place. You can’t give away what you do not possess. Forgiveness is not a hard thing to do—it’s impossible! Only God in you can do it. If we don’t forgive others, God will not forgive us (Luke 13:1-5, Matthew 3:8-12).

The Greek word translated into English as bitterness, gall, or anger can also be translated as *poison*. It makes sense, does it not? Our souls live within our body, and, naturally, what effects one will affect the other. Additionally, it is a well-documented fact that the mental anguish caused by unresolved anger and unforgiveness can lead to all kinds of life-threatening ailments.

Proverbs 14:30

A Tranquil spirit revives the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones.

God, the Great Physician, diagnoses our sickness with His Word and offers the antidote. We are incapable of healing ourselves of the poison of bitterness and forgiving others without Christ Jesus.

* From the list of these passages, make note of everything you can learn about bitterness and anger. Acts 8:23; Ephesians 4:26-31; Hebrews 12:15; Matthew 5:22, 27:34; John 7:23; Colossians 3:8 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Ephesians 4:26b-27

…Do not let the sun go down on the cause of your anger. Do not give the devil an opportunity.

When we refuse to forgive, we leave the door wide open, giving the enemy legal right to come into our lives and destroy us. How are we to overcome in these situations? To take back surrendered ground, we must repent of unforgiveness. Once we do this, we will still struggle trying not to think about what happened. As Paul told the Corinthians, we must take every thought captive to the obedience of God’s Word (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Here are a few specific Scriptures to get you started: Romans 12:20-21; 1 Peter 3:8-17; Matthew 5:38-48. The Bible is clear—we overcome evil with good.

* Read Hebrews 12:2-29 and make a list of ways Jesus dealt with opposition from sinful men and how He deals with His children. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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* For those who heed God’s discipline, what are the end results? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**DIGGING DEEPER:** James 1:21-25, 2:8-13, 5:15-16, 19-20; Proverbs 4:20-27; Isaiah 48:17-19; Psalm 50:7-13; Romans 8:5-17, 12:14-21; Philippians 2:13; Ephesians 4:25-32; Hebrews 10:26-30, 12:2-15; Colossians 2:11-14, 3:8-9, 12-15; Matthew 5:21-22, 38-48, 6:12-15, 18:22-35; Luke 6:27-37, 12:4-5

A Costly Cure

Matthew 5:21-22

“You have heard that it was said to an older generation, ‘Do not murder,’ and

‘whoever murders will be subjected to judgment.’ But I say to you that anyone who is angry with a brother will be subjected to judgment. And whoever insults a brother will be brought before the council, and whoever says ‘Fool’ will be sent to fiery hell.

We have already seen that the Greek word for bitterness is the exact word rendered as poison. Now let’s look at the Old Testament word for bitterness. In Hebrew, it is *marah,* and here are some of the descriptive words used to define it: *bitter, angry, chafed, discontented, and heavy*. In the passage above, Jesus equated being angry at your brother with murder! Unforgiveness that stems from unresolved anger and bitterness is indeed a heavy load to bear. Someone once compared unforgiveness to the barbaric ancient Roman practice of strapping a dead person to a prisoner as punishment. The dead body not only weighed the prisoner down, but it infected them with gangrene. That is what unforgiveness is like. You carry the person who hurt you around on your back until it finally kills you. It is just that deadly!

To use another analogy, imagine being bitten by a snake and having its poisonous venom moving quickly towards your heart. Someone comes along and offers you the antidote. Would you refuse it? Of course not! This analogy is not so farfetched. In fact, there is a story in the Old Testament that parallels the cure for bitterness. It’s found in Numbers 21:1-9. Jesus referred to this account in His dialog with Nicodemus John 3:1-18.

* Now read another account that points us to the cure for bitterness. It’s found in Exodus 15:22-26. See if you can discover the similarities in this story to the cure for bitterness. List them here:

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Now for the comparison. Another tree was cut down to make a cross. Do you remember what they offered to Him to drink as He hung there on that tree? It was a cup of bitterness and gall. He died so that we may be forgiven, and then He rose again to give us new life and make our bitterness sweet (Colossians 2:11-14; 2 Corinthians 4:7-11).

The costly remedy for the poison of bitterness was purchased with the blood of Jesus. When He was dying in our place, He cried out, “Father forgive them” (Luke 23:34). When we mentally visit that tree and see our sins on Jesus, including bitterness, anger, and unforgiveness, how can we not forgive others?

I encourage you to make a list of the ones who have wronged you and the things they did to hurt you. Take your catalog of others’ *sins* against you to the cross of Christ. Now think about your own canceled sin debt. Can you honestly say there is a comparison to what your sins did to Jesus? What has it cost you to hold this person in bondage to the debt they owe you? Is it worth it? If we will humble ourselves before God and forgive, as we have been forgiven, He will heal us (Exodus 15:23-26; Psalm 107:10-20). We are never more Christ-like than we forgive others (Hebrews 9:22, 10:17-18; 1 John 1:7-10; Romans 5:6-11).

Steps Towards Conflict Resolution

Hebrews 12:14-15 (NASB)

Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the LORD. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness spring up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.

I know firsthand that forgiveness is easier said than done, and I can scarcely claim to have mastered it. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could forgive just once and then be done with it? It is simply not so. It’s a life-long struggle. The greatest spiritual battle I have ever faced came after facing hurt and betrayal. After years of teaching Bible studies on forgiveness, here I was at the crossroads. I finally dropped to my knees and confessed to the Lord that it was impossible. I could not forgive the ones who hurt me. But then the Lord reminded me of two scriptures. The first one was Luke 5:21: “Who can forgive sin but God alone?” The second was Philippians 2:13: “For it is God who works in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure.” I can’t forgive, but God, who lives *in me,* can. As this Truth sank into my soul, bitterness finally began to melt away, and forgiveness ushered in healing. Then came the peace of God. And that, my friend, is not possible apart from making peace with God through repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10).

In his message on forgiveness, my pastor, David Lawrence, clarifies what *forgiveness is not.* He said forgiveness is not: 1. approval of the offense 2. excusing the offense 3. justifying the offense 4. reconciling with the offender 5. forgetting the offense 6. pretending we’re not hurt!

When we are faced with an offense, confrontation is never pleasant. But, it is necessary. In Matthew 18:15-20, which precedes the parable of the unmerciful servant, Jesus tells us how to go about resolving conflicts with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

For instance, once, while working through a very intense situation where all parties were hurt and offended, I learned a thing or two. What made this situation even more distressing was that we were believers who dearly loved one another. But there are always two sides of a story. After hearing their viewpoint and prayerfully contemplating this dilemma, I sent an email. Here is an excerpt of it.

Here is the situation we are facing: First, I don’t believe that any of us would purposely hurt one another. Love does no wrong to its neighbor (Romans 13:9- 10). Nevertheless, although it was not our intent to offend each other, we did. Now we have a choice to make. If we will not let go of these offenses and truly forgive each other, we are giving the devil the legal right to wreak havoc in our lives. In other words, to kill, steal from, and destroy us. Surely, neither of us wants that!

This is a test. Will we collectively bow the knee to King Jesus and forgive one another, as He has forgiven us, or will we invite the Lord to allow our enemy as a tool to discipline us (Hebrews 12)? If God be for us, who can be against us, but if God be against us because we refuse to repent and obey Him, we are asking for pain and heartache. God is in the business of making us holy—just like Jesus. Jesus made intercession for us sinners from the cross, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

As for me, I don’t look at all like Jesus. I don’t love like Him, forgive like Him, and I am not patient or longsuffering like Him. Far too often I respond to conflicts in my sinful nature, just as I did here. I admit it, I own it, and, yes, I am guilty of many sins. How innumerable are the sins that God has forgiven me? I shudder to think of it!

If I refuse to forgive you of my “perceived offenses,” then my prayer, according to Matthew 6:5-15, is this: “Don’t forgive me, Father, treat me mercilessly—just as I treat those who have sinned against me. So, go right ahead Father, turn me over to the evil one and let the torment begin!” You see, I am asking for it! I need God’s mercy—not His judgment! I choose life! I ask you to please forgive me for hurting you, just as I am asking the Lord for forgiveness.

God’s ways are perfect. Do you know what? When each of us bowed to the authority of God’s Word and forgave one another, reconciliation happened, the enemy was defeated, and, most importantly, God was glorified. Love won!

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Acts 3:19, 2:20; 2 Corinthians 2:11, 7:9-12, 10:3-6, 11:3-16; Hebrews 12:4-17; Revelation 3:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:13-15; 1 John 3:7-13, 4:14; John 8:44-45; Galatians 4:29; Matthew 7:16-22, 13:36-43; Psalm 34:12-19, 85:10; Proverbs 12:20-21; 1 Peter 3:8-12

Here is the bottom line to this lesson: Many people are sick emotionally, mentally, and physically because of bitterness. We ought not to dismiss or underestimate the destructive power it has over our lives. Bitterness and its counterpart, the pride of unforgiveness, are the mortal enemies of every child of God. He desires to heal us, but we must take His antidote.

The peace of God is found in the person of Christ, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:2, 6-7). There can be no *peace of God* without first *making peace with God* through confession, repentance, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 1:9-12). When we do, this is “well–pleasing” to the Lord. To those who please Him, He makes this promise: “If a man’s ways are pleasing to the LORD; He will make even his enemies be at peace with him” (Proverbs 16:7).

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Luke 1:77-79, 2:14; 2 Peter 3:13-14; Romans 8:6-10; Colossians 1:19-23; John 14:27, 16:33; Ephesians 2:14; Hebrews 12:2-6; Isaiah 53:3-11; 1 Corinthians 13:4 -7

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. Who (on earth) has peace? With whom is God well pleased? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Exodus 15:26 and list the instructions given that will bring healing. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. List some steps to restitution. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Is unforgiveness sin? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. How will God treat a person who will not forgive others?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Can a person be saved if God does not forgive their sins? Give passages and explain.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verses

Ephesians 4:31-32

You must put away every kind of bitterness, anger, wrath, quarreling, and evil, slanderous talk. Instead, be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.

Hebrews 2:14-15

Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness, for without it no one will see the Lord.

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God, that no one be like a

bitter root springing up and causing trouble, and through it many become defiled.



Phase Five —Be Fruitful and Multiply

Ephesians 4:11-16

It was He who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God – a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ’s full stature. So we are no longer to be children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes. But practicing the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head. From Him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. As each one does its part, the body grows in love.

The Main Goals for Phase Five:

* Equip believers to share the vision of Biblical disciple-making.
* Show them God’s design and purpose in their salvation.
* Ensure that the investment you have made in them will produce multiplication in the lives of others.

Phase Five Lessons:

* Who Are Your “Yous”?
* God’s Workmanship
* Work that Satisfies
* Cast the Vision: God’s Great Commission
* The Five Phases of Spiritual Growth
* Models of Multiplying Discipleship

If we have achieved our goals in *Strand of Pearls*, by the time you reach Phase Five, through the power of the Holy Spirit, you have led people to the Lord Jesus, established them in their identity in Christ, grounded them in God’s Word, and helped them find healing in some areas of brokenness. No small accomplishments! Now it is time to commission them to go and make disciples of all nations.

The Lord’s last command is about multiplication, not addition. He did not say, “Go and make *a* disciple.” The only way that *a* disciple turns into *many* disciples, is by using Jesus’ approach. In this last phase, we are going to carefully examine Jesus’ last marching orders and employ His strategy. We hope to spell out His method and mandate to spread His name and fame to the multitudes.

There are few men who have done more to inspire obedience to the Great Commission than Herb Hodges and Robert Coleman. For those who are serious about following Jesus and making disciples, the books *Tally Ho the Fox!* by Herb Hodges and *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert Coleman are essential resources. Both are available in many languages.

Before you embark on this final phase, here are a few words of instruction. It has been said, people do not plan to fail. They fail because they don’t plan. The purpose of this booklet is to give you a simple plan to follow as you make disciples. I have observed that without being consistent and organized in imparting truth into the lives of others, they will not know how to follow you. It’s as if you scatter the seed of God’s Word, but never plant it. Inevitably, the seeds fall by the wayside. Instead of investing God’s Truth, you expend it, and the whole process grinds to a screeching halt.

Here is another important aspect to keep in mind. Disciple-making, by Jesus’ standard, has two key components: life and Truth. This takes time and commitment on the part of all involved. The Great Commission is not about education or simply teaching the Bible. It is about building relationships. And, in the framework of these relationships, you’re not only teaching the Word of God but, together, learning to integrate God’s truths into your lives. This requires love, patience, and acceptance. That means making sure you are faithfully handling each biblical lesson while teaching them in the framework of their own unique culture. Once again, go at their own pace and move forward when they have comprehended the main points and are able to grasp how this truth correlates with their daily lives. Lastly, remember that your aim is to help your disciple grow in the grace of God, study the Bible for herself, and, ultimately, leave you, follow Jesus, and go make disciples of all nations.



**Who Are Your “Yous”?**

Key Passage

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

T

Introduction

o be a true follower of Jesus requires that we die to our agenda and take up His. The question we must ask ourselves is “What was His agenda, and what did He do that we must emulate?” In this lesson, we will take a closer look at His three-year public ministry. You may say “He did a lot of things in those three years,” and that is true. However, as we are about to see, the task that the Father gave Him to do was to invest His life building people till they reached spiritual adulthood. But more specifically, He invested His life in twelve ordinary men. Read Mark 3:13-19. They were His yous, and they were His work! This is the meaning of the title of this lesson.

Where I Am, There My Servant Will Be

John 12:24-26

I tell you the solemn truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it produces much grain. The one who loves his life destroys it, and the one who hates his life in this world guards it for eternal life. If anyone wants to serve me, he must follow me, and where I am, my servant will be too. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

Any good parent will put their child’s well-being above their own. That is what being a disciple- maker is like. It’s like being a spiritual parent. If we are to make disciples the way that Jesus did, we will have to take on the role of a servant. This requires dying daily to self and living for the growth and benefit of others.

2 Corinthians 12:15

Now I will most gladly spend and be spent for your lives! If I love you more, am I to be loved less?

If we never grow up spiritually to the point that we can care for others, then the people in our homes, as well as our churches, will be stunted in the growth process. By the way, discipling relationships must start in our homes. This was modeled for us by a grandmother named Lois and her daughter Eunice. Their “you,” was a young man in the faith named Timothy. And Timothy, in turn, became Paul’s primary disciple—his *you* (2 Timothy 1:1-5; Acts 16:1-5). Where are the Godly examples to follow in parenting our physical and spiritual children?

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8

…although we could have imposed our weight as apostles of Christ; instead we became little children among you. Like a nursing mother caring for her own children, with such affection for you we were happy to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Matthew 28:18-20; John 4:34, 6:29, 9:4, 10:25,32, 14:10-12, 17:1-4, 18, 19:30, 20:21; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

The *Me* Life Vs. The *You* Life

1 Thessalonians 3:5-9

So when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter somehow tempted you and our toil had proven useless. But now Timothy has come to us from you and given us the good news of your faith and love and that you always think of us with affection and long to see us just as we also long to see you! So in all our distress and affliction, we were reassured about you, brothers and sisters, through your faith. For now we are alive again, if you stand firm in the Lord. For how can we thank God enough for you, for all the joy we feel because of you before our God?

In his exposition of 1 Thessalonians 3:8, Herb Hodges pointed out that there is one word in this text that commands major emphasis. He said, in Greek, it is like the Holy Spirit screams—*YOU*! From his lesson, I learned that there are two lifestyles that we can live: the Savior’s lifestyle or Satan’s. Yet even Christians can vacillate between the two. It’s part of the daily battle we face in choosing to follow Christ or fall back into the old patterns of our sin nature. That is why we must get up every day and choose whom we will live for.

• Satan’s self-centered life.

This is called the *outside*-*in* lifestyle or the lifestyle that is all about *me*. This person can never be happy or get enough. Everything she gets is for self-use, and, in the end, this life implodes into self. This is the only life a sinner can live. It is impossible to follow Jesus and live the self-centered life!

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Philippians 2:19-22; Romans 12:9-12

Luke 22:24-27

A dispute also started among them over which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. So Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ Not so with you; instead the one who is greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is seated at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is seated at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”

• The Savior’s life.

In 1 Thessalonians 1-3, Paul and two of his disciples, Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy, used one word fifty times. You guessed it; the word is *you*! Clearly, they lived the Saviors’ lifestyle. To live this way takes humility, and “humility,” someone has said, “is not thinking less of yourself; it’s not thinking of yourself at all!”

Philippians 2:3-8

Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself. Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well. You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had, who though he existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature. He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross!

To follow Jesus’ example, we live an *inside*-*out* lifestyle. What do we mean? A person who lives inside-out realizes that everything they have belongs to the Lord—we are merely stewards of His property. Therefore, everything in our life (our time, energy, wisdom, and resources) are used for the growth and benefit of *others*. Do you know the primary difference between merely doing Bible studies and disciple-making? Most people study to benefit themselves. But a disciple- maker studies and gathers truth to give it away to others. And when we follow Jesus’ strategy, His Truth is multiplied to a multitude of others. This kind of lifestyle explodes the gospel all over the world.

Mark 10:44-45

“…and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Luke 9:22-23, 26-27, 14:25-35; Galatians 2:20; John 13:12-17, 34-35; Mark 10:44- 45; Romans 12:9-16

Am I Someone’s *You*?

Titus 2:3-5

Older women likewise are to exhibit behavior fitting for those who are holy, not slandering, not slaves to excessive drinking, but teaching what is good. In this way they will train the younger women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, pure, fulfilling their duties at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the message of God may not be discredited.

By the time most of us come to understand what Jesus meant by “make disciples,” we wonder, “How am I going to do that? I have never been discipled!” The simple answer to that question is this: you must first be someone’s disciple (their you), then you can have disciples (your yous). To find someone to disciple you, you should pray about it and ask the Lord to provide you with a spiritual mother. Look for a woman who has an authentic walk with Jesus—someone you deem worthy of following. Ask her if she would teach you how to live God’s Word. Make yourself available to her. This includes whatever you can do to serve her. The important thing is that you are spending time together in God’s Word. You may have to be creative about the other aspects of spending time together. The bottom line is this: if you want to be a leader, you must be sure of where you are going. If you are not going anywhere, how is someone supposed to follow you? The Great Commission is about mobility! If you are going to follow someone, make sure she knows what she is doing. All this requires forethought and being intentional.

Just remember what we learned about priorities in the lesson on good works. The three ministries of a woman are these: we work up—worship God, we work in—care for our husbands and families, and, lastly, we work out—in discipling relationships. In just a moment we will discuss what this looks like. But the main thing to keep in mind is this: discipling is a lifestyle, not a program. It is who we are; therefore, it is what we do.

How Do I Know Who to Invest in?

Philippians 2:19-22

Now I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be encouraged by hearing news about you. For there is no one here like him who will readily demonstrate his deep concern for you. Others are busy with their own concerns, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know his qualifications, that like a son working with his father, he served with me in advancing the gospel.

You may be thinking, “How do I know who I should disciple?” Once again, seek the Lord in prayer. That’s how Jesus selected His twelve. Look for women who are eager to learn and grow in the Lord and those who have a humble and teachable spirit (1 Peter 2:2). They need to understand that you expect a certain level of commitment and that they must be faithful to spend time with you in the Word of God. (You will find a simple commitment form in the appendix of this book.)

2 Timothy 2:1-2

***So you, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And entrust what you heard me say in the presence of many others as witnesses to faithful people who will be competent to teach others as well.***

Furthermore, you cannot have a spiritual relationship without the Bible, and obedience to God’s Word is a marker of true faith (John 7:37). If they will not follow His instructions, then it’s highly unlikely that they will follow yours. After you have identified the person the Lord has told you to invest in, think strategically about how you can invite this person into your home and into your life. What does this look like?

At this season of life, this is what it looks like for me. Six women and I meet for about three hours a week to pray and study the Word of God. In addition to our study time, we keep a constant prayer chain going. But that’s not all! We go to the doctor with each other, meet for lunch, exercise, work, cook, clean, and keep grandbabies while we study the Bible. Sometimes we go to the hospital and pray for others, go to the mall to shop or get our nails done, and as we go, *we share the gospel.* We go to church, into the prisons, on mission trips, to get our cars fixed, see movies, and we even go to funerals. The key element to all these activities is this: we do all these things *together. Read John 3:22.*

Because of this, discipling takes place as we go and wherever we go. Instead of adding more to our very busy schedules, we are inviting people to join us in our daily routine. You can only invest in as many people as you can bring into your heart and home. You must see them as an extension of your own family—as if God has entrusted a few of His own children into your care. If you cannot let a woman see how you walk with God in all areas of your life, she will not know how to follow you. It is vital that she not only hear the truth but learn by your example how to live the truth. This requires transparency, accountability, and an investment of your life. It will not happen quickly, and it is not always easy to enter a relationship with another person and carry their burdens. But it is the most rewarding thing you will ever do with your life. I can testify to the fact that your life will be blessed more than you can ever imagine.

I heard about a woman whose aging mother lives several hours away. Even though she cannot be there to care for her mother as often as she would like, she is comforted by this fact: her mother has several “daughters” (not by birth) who come and care for her. Do you know how she obtained these other daughters? She was a teacher who brought these younger women into her home, her heart, and her life. Likewise, spiritual relationships will reap lifelong dividends, but keep this in mind: *If it is not a spiritual relationship, then it is not discipleship* (1 Thessalonians 2:5-20).

The motivation for obedience to the last command to make disciples is the greatest command, “*love the Lord your God*” and to “*love your neighbor as you love yourself.*” Without love, our teaching will be without power. Likewise, our love for Him will empower our love for them.

**DIGGING DEEPER**: Matthew 19:18-19, 22:36-40, 28:18-20; Luke 6:12, 16:8, 10:25-27; Galatians 5:13- 14; 1 Thessalonians 2:5-20; Judges 7:17; Ephesians 5:18-21; Titus 2:5-15; Mark 3:13-16; Philippians 3:17, 4:19; 1 Corinthians 4:16; 1 Peter 5:3

Ideally, we will always have women in the body of Christ pouring their lives into us. And we will always have some “yous” to pass Truth onto. It all boils down to this: our lives will either be invested, or they’ll be spent. You will live for yourself or others. So, what’s it going to be? The only thing you can invest in that can bring dividends that will last for eternity is people! These people will be your crown of rejoicing when you stand before the Lord. They are your “yous”!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. What lifestyle are you living, the Savior’s or Satan’s? Give explanation for your answer. \_\_\_\_

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1. Who invested *their life* and *God’s truth* into you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Looking back over the three ministries, who are your yous in each of the three? Prioritize your list. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What would it look like for someone to do life with you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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2. Where do you go, and what kind of things do you do in your everyday life? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Can you think of anyone you could bring into your life to do these things with? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verse



**God’s Workmanship**

Key Passage

Ephesians 2:10

**Introduction**

I

n 1647, a group of English and Scottish theologians and laymen gathered to draft a unified doctrinal statement of faith called the Westminster Shorter Catechism. It begins with this question: “What is the chief end of man?” Their answer was that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. I suppose that many people, regrettably, will wander aimlessly through life without ever knowing the reason for their existence or what they were created for. Tragically, without Christ, they never will. A few people I love very much fall into that category, and it breaks my heart. It ought not be so, but even those who are in Christ grapple with finding their purpose. Life is too short and precious to waste, don’t you agree?

What does it really mean to glorify God and enjoy Him in the here and now? When you discover the “good work” that God has planned for you, it will satisfy your soul as nothing else can. And as you accomplish this work, it will reflect the One who is doing the work in you. That will bring glory to God.

Matthew 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its flavor, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled on by people. You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill cannot be hidden. People do not light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so that they can see your good deeds and give honor to your Father in heaven.

Let it be written on our epitaphs what was written of King David in Acts 13:36: “For David, after he had served God’s purpose in his own generation, died…” In this lesson, we will attempt to find the keys that will unlock this mystery and answer these age-old questions.

God’s Poem

Every time I uncover a new truth in the Word of God, I want to look at it from every single angle. And so, the theme of this lesson will be work: the work of God the Father, the work assigned to God the Son, and, lastly, the good work God has planned for each of us. Before we talk about work though, I want to talk about rest and relaxation. Rest is Biblical, you know (Genesis 2:1-2; Exodus 34:21).

While my family was on vacation at the beach a few years ago, some of us stayed up most of the night to watch a rare meteor shower. As the heavens declared the glory of the Lord, we applauded at every streak of light that flashed across the sky. It was spectacular! My son Ethan, an artist like his daddy, said, “Every artist puts a piece of himself into his work.” And what an incredible artist is the maker of the heavens and the earth. The song that so fittingly reverberates in the soul at moments like these is the old Swedish hymn “How Great Thou Art.” The song was inspired by a poem written by Reverend Carl Gustav Boberg in 1885.

* Read Hebrews 1:1-13, John 1:1-10, and Colossians 1:15-20. Then, make a detailed list describing the work of Christ Jesus at creation. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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When you read the Psalms of David, you can almost envision him as a young shepherd boy sleeping under the stars at night. Being awestruck with wonder at the handiwork of God, David could not help but worship his creator (Psalm 8:1).

* Take a moment and read the account of creation in Genesis chapters one and two, making note of the stated purpose of each thing God spoke into being. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Beholding a meteor shower was great, but it could not have compared to having the great privilege of witnessing the births of my three granddaughters. How we wept with joy when they drew their first breath of air, and we marveled at their tiny bodies knit together by the hands of the Lord Jesus. Just to think that every single molecule was planned and purposed for a specific job. “His works,” the Psalmist said, “are wonderful” (Psalm 139:13-16). Indeed, they are. It baffles me that anyone can look at a newborn baby and not see the glory of God.

Even the angels, also part of creation, were appointed with the task of singing joyfully as God laid the earth’s foundation (Job 38:1-41). Truly, His beauty and majesty are stamped into the DNA of all of creation. Yet of all creation, Adam and Eve were the crowning jewels, for only they were made in His image. The Bible says that God *formed* Adam from the dust like a potter forms clay in his hands. But when He created Eve, the Bible says that He *made* her from the rib of Adam. The Hebrew word for made or fashioned is *banah,* and the word means *to build, builder, to make or obtain children* (Genesis 1:25-2:1-22). Part of God’s plan for Adam and Eve was to be fruitful and multiply. Naturally, that would involve physically bearing children and building a family. However, this command to be fruitful and multiply had much greater significance. Likewise, the “good work” God has planned for every one of His children is akin to being fruitful and multiplying. Only, in our case, it involves bearing spiritual offspring who will multiply and fill the earth with His name and His fame (Psalm 115:1-18; 78:1-7).

Is It Good Work If It’s Not God’s Work?

Ephesians 2:10

For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them.

What do you think of when you hear the word workmanship? For me, the first thing that comes to mind is a product of a skilled craftsman or the work of one’s hands. In the key passage for this lesson, God is the Skilled Craftsman and we are the work of His hands—His masterpiece. Or you might even say, we are His poem. In fact, the English word poem is derived from the Greek word for workmanship—poiema. Before the foundation of the world, the Lord wrote out a “good work-order” for each one of His children. In eternity past we were commissioned and skilled for a particular job. In God’s grand story, each of us is a line in that poem. When the work is complete, it will be a magnificent masterpiece reflecting His creativity and glory.

God not only thinks about us, but He has made plans for us (Jeremiah 29:11-15). He chose us *in Christ* before the foundations of the world. But that’s not all; He has predetermined the exact time and place that we would live (Acts 17:22-29). And furthermore, He also planned the good work we would do! Now I ask you: “Is God in the details of your life?” You better believe that He is (Romans 8:28-29).

It would behoove us, however, to remember that salvation is *not of works,* but of faith. And when Jesus was asked what “works” we must do to have eternal life, He answered, and I will paraphrase: The only work you must do to be saved is to believe in Me. Before we can do any “good works,” our *first work* is to believe in Jesus. Please don’t get these two confused.

John 6:27-29

Do not work for the food that disappears, but for the food that remains to eternal life—the food which the Son of Man will give to you. For God the Father has put his seal of approval on him.” So then they said to him, “What must we do to accomplish the deeds God requires?” Jesus replied, “This is the deed God requires—to believe in the one whom he sent.”

We are saved by grace through faith—it is a gift of God. He does not love us because of *anything* we have done. He loves us because we have believed in the *finished work* that Christ has already done on our behalf. We are not saved *by* our good works, but we are saved *for* good works. Do you see the difference?

* Do you think that sometimes we are working for God to earn His love? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Could it also be true that some people stay busy to keep from dealing with life’s problems? Explain: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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* Examine your motives for working for God by asking yourself: “Why do I do what I do?” Be honest, the Lord already knows. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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In light of these truths, we continually need to be reminded to keep the main thing—the main thing. What is the main thing God wants from you and me? He wants our worship, and isn’t He worthy of it? Furthermore, worship of God should always precede trying to work for God. Our first priority must be our relationship with Christ, and this necessitates having a daily quiet time with Him. If we will seek Him first, He has promised that “all these things will be added to us as well” (Matthew 6:30- 33). I can personally testify that He means just what He says.

Jesus gave us a litmus test to discover if we are doing His good work. It is found in Matthew 11:28-30. He said that His yoke is easy, and His burden is light. When there is a lack of peace in your spirit about something, you may need to stope and inquire of the Lord, to be sure you are in the center of His will and not operating in the flesh. You will know whose yoke you are wearing by the load you are bearing. The task is not overwhelming when Jesus is with you bearing the load. Quite the opposite when we are carrying it alone. For instance, take the account of Martha and Mary from Luke 10:38-42. Let’s stop and read this now.

Jesus used an interesting word when addressing grumpy and overworked Martha. He was pointing out to her (and us) the necessity of keeping the main thing—the main thing. She really only needed to do one work. Her sister Mary was busy doing it. The Greek word Jesus chose was *chereia,* and it means *employment, business, necessary and useful.* (In just a moment we will look at another word that relates to this word.) So here is the one thing most needed in the life of every saint: to be His disciple we must sit at His feet and learn from His Word. That is the first *business* of every Christian. While Martha was working in the kitchen, her sister Mary was at the feet of Jesus. So, I suppose you could say our first work each day is to worship. If seeking Him first is not our priority, everything else we do will be vain, empty, fruitless work.

Realistically, though, we cannot just stay at His feet all day long. Surely, when we are done, there are many other jobs for us to do. So how can we be sure what good works God has chosen for us to do on any given day? It is simple—we must ask Him! Then, through reading and meditating on His Word, God will inform us of what He has planned for us to do that day.

* Read Proverbs 3:5-7, and then fill in the blanks. If I don’t consult with God to get His guidance, my only option is to lean on my own , and I operate in the , and I settle for good and forfeit God’s best.
* A good morning prayer is found in Psalm 90:10-17. It’s a prayer of Moses. Beginning with verse ten, rephrase Moses’ words into a prayer of your own. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**DIGGING DEEPER:** Matthew 6:29-33, 28:18-20; John 15:1-16; Acts 13:2-4, 17:22-26; James 1:5, 4:13- 15; Psalm 25:12; Proverbs 3:5-6; Jeremiah 10:21-23

The Business of Every Christian

In his message entitled *What is a Christian*? Herb Hodges says, “The word Christian has become a much misused, abused, and confused term today.” He goes on to qualify the meaning of being called Christians. He said, “To be a Christian, means that you are *spiritually busy* for Jesus Christ.” It is your vocation. He gave this illustration:

One night in early manhood, Augustine had a dream. In his dream, he approached the gate of heaven and was met by a gatekeeper. ‘Who and what are you?’ the gatekeeper asked. My name is Augustine, he replied, and I am a Christian. ‘No, you are not a Christian, the gatekeeper answered. In this place, we do not judge people by their words, but by their actions. You are not a Christian; you are a Ciceronian, because you spend most of your time studying Cicero, you are a Ciceronian.’ Augustine awakened from this sobering dream and determined to devote his life to Jesus Christ, and spend his time studying Christ and His truth.

Seldom do you meet a believer who calls themselves a disciple of Christ, but that was what they were called some 273 times in the New Testament. Now compare that to the name Christian, used only three times in the Bible. The disciples were first called Christians in Acts 11:26. After the disciples had been taught by Paul and Barnabas for a year, the unbelievers saw the lives of the disciples and what they were doing, and they gave them a new name: Christians. The text says, “The disciples were first *called* Christians at Antioch.” Mind you, this was the name that was given to the disciples by the unbelievers. It was a name of derision.

This was kin to the old English practice of naming a person by their occupation. The family names Baker or Goldsmith would be examples of this. My married name is Porter; a porter’s job was to keep the gate or in some cases one who carried the bags for the passengers on a train or in a hotel. My maiden name is Page; a page is one whose job it is to deliver a message. Both occupations are the jobs of a servant. The point is this: no one in Antioch was called a Christian unless they were doing the work of Christ. They had to earn the title. Their business was Christ’s business. What was His occupation?

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Genesis 1-3; Titus 2:3-14; Ephesians 1:4, 2:6-10, 4:1-19-32, 5:19; Colossians 1:15-21, 3:10; Proverbs 3:3-8; Jeremiah 29:11-15; Psalm 139:13-16, 90:14-17; 1 Peter 4:8-10; Romans 12:4-16; 1 Corinthians 3:1-16, 12:1-27, 14:3-5; Philippians 4:13

Jesus’ Work Was Building Twelve Men

By examining the gospel accounts, it becomes obvious that everything Jesus did was planned and purposeful. He was busy doing the work assigned to Him by the Father. We cannot begin to know our purpose and vocation until we understand the work of the Lord Jesus. We were created in Him, by Him, and for Him, and His work is our work. His mission is our mission.

This is how Jesus made disciples. After consulting His Father in prayer, He selected twelve men and called them to be with Him. They were His work! Don’t miss this all-important aspect of His strategy. He personally and intentionally spent nine-tenths of His three years of public ministry making disciples out of twelve ordinary, uneducated men (Acts 4:12-13). This amounted to about twenty-six thousand hours. Jesus was interested in numbers. Our English word math comes from the Greek word matheteuo (make disciples). However, mere addition was not His intent; multiplication was. The return on His three-year investment into the twelve resulted in multitudes of souls being reached. So, do not be discouraged by investing in just a few; God will multiply them. No matter how few in number, if they will be faithful to start pouring these same truths into other small groups, then multitudes will be reached for Christ.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** John 1:19-40, 3:22, 5:36, 14:1-15, 17:4-26; Mark 3:13-19, 6:7-12, 9:2; Matthew 17:1; Luke 9:28

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. What do most believers call themselves?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Why is divine power given to believers (Colossians 1:27-29; Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:18-20)?

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1. Read Matthew 4:15-20. What does it mean to follow Jesus, and what will we be doing if we are following Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Think in terms of what you are currently busy working at. What jobs are essential and what are the non-essentials? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Make a list of your personal areas of work. Who are the people that fall into these categories? Prioritize that list. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Now make a list of the things you do on a daily basis. Will you ask the Lord if you are doing His work, or is it your work? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Do these activities fit in the practical plan for your life at this moment? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Do these things hurt or hinder your priority relationships, including neglecting the Lord as your “first love”? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Define the following statement as it pertains to the Church of Jesus Christ. It is a scientific fact—a cell that does not multiply will die. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verses

Ephesians 2:10

For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them.



Work that Satisfies

Key Passage

John 4:34

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Introduction

ome eighteen years ago, the Lord used John 4:31-38 to confirm the specific calling in my life. So, this passage is very precious to me. Although it took a while for me to learn what disciple-making is all about, my calling is the practical application of God’s Great Commission in the lives of women.

In the narrative of Jesus’ encounter with the Woman at the Well, there is an important lesson for Jesus’ disciples (including those who are living today). In the lesson titled “The Well Who Came to the Woman,” we learned that Jesus and His disciples had walked seventy-five miles and were weary, thirsty, and hungry. The disciples went to Samaria to get bread to fill their bellies. Jesus, on the other hand, went there to get something far more valuable—the spiritually empty woman. Once He had found her, she immediately went to work to lead others to Christ. She essentially became the first female evangelist. Those she led to Jesus then declared Him to be “the Savior of the world!”

But, that’s not the part of the story that I want to focus on. The second illustration in this account is even more personally applicable to us today as His disciples. What food was Jesus referring to when He said: “I have food to eat that you know nothing about”?

Think about this. God’s love, in Greek, is Agape. The definition of this word is short and sweet— it means a love feast or a banquet of love. I would like to suggest that the “food” that satisfied Jesus was the love of His Father. Jesus’ *food* was to do the will of His Father. When He was busy with His Father’s business, He was eating that love feast.

Song of Songs 2:4 (KJV)

He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.

Now let’s be more specific. What was the work of the Lord Jesus? It was the work of fishing for men and women and making disciples. How do we know this? We know this by studying the Lord’s Prayer, found in John 17. You may be thinking, “Isn’t the Lord’s Prayer found in Luke 11?” Well—no. That is the model prayer. The Lord’s Prayer is recorded in John 17.

John 17:1-6

When Jesus had finished saying these things, he looked upward to heaven and said, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, so that your Son may glorify you—just as you have given him authority over all humanity, so that he may give eternal life to everyone you have given him. Now this is eternal life—that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent. I glorified you on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me at your side with the glory I had with you before the world was created. I have revealed your name to the men you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have obeyed your word.”

In one of his many messages, Herb Hodges brought to my attention one statement in the Lord’s prayer that is key to understanding the work Jesus was sent to do. In John 17:4, Jesus said to the Father, “I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.” This word “finished” in Greek is *teleiotes*. He used the same word as well in John 4:34. It should look familiar because it is kin to the word spoken from the cross when Jesus said, “It is *finished!”* In Greek, the word is telos. However, here He was speaking of the work of redemption. So, what was the “work” Jesus had finished before He went to the cross? In this detailed prayer, the main subject of the conversation Jesus had with the Father was His disciples. The work He had finished was the making or building of His disciples.

Three “Good Works” of a Woman

Surely it was a woman who came up with the adage, “Man may work from dusk till dawn, but a woman’s work is never done.” Can I get a witness? Most of us are bombarded daily with work that must be done. What makes matters worse is that other people have their own ideas of what work we should do. Part of the problem for a lot of us is that we are addicted to our cell phones, and, therefore, we are at the bidding-call of anyone and everyone. Granted, some of these calls are truly urgent. For instance, in the last month, I have received three urgent phone calls. One was that my daughter had a miscarriage and needed me to take care of her other two children. Then there was the call that my brother was in the emergency room in critical condition, and this was followed by the call that my mother was having a heart attack.

If you are a people pleaser, you will allow others to dictate your schedule so that you are so busy doing good things that there is no time to do God’s things. This is especially true for those of us who have a reputation as being a “work-horse.” It’s been said that “Grace can’t be earned, but faith is not lazy” (James 2:14-26). If you happen to be a woman who has a “Martha personality,” laziness is not your problem—busyness is. The question we need to ask ourselves is this: “If what I am busy doing is not the work God has planned for me, then is it really good?” Even good work can be sinful if it’s not God’s work for me. What is more, it’s possible that I could be doing work that God planned for someone else to do!

So how can we know what is God’s work and what is not? At the end of the day, it all boils down to this: biblically speaking, there are three categories of “good works” that every saint in Christ can be certain is their personal responsibility. And they are as follows: work up—worship God, work within—our own families, and work out—fish for men and women in the world and make disciples of all nations.

• Work Up

Acts 2:39

For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself.

As the above passage indicates, the first call of God is a call to come to Jesus as His disciple (Mark 3:13-14; John 3:22). Simply put, He wants to spend time with you in an intimate relationship. It’s more than just communication; it’s about communion and worship. But cultivating this kind of relationship requires having a daily time of communion with God in prayer and His Word. Worship should always precede work. Without seeking Him first, not only do we not know what works we should do, but we will lack the strength to do them. Too many of us are running around trying to serve others in our own strength, and we end up burnt-out. How can we exhibit all the fruits of the Spirit such as love, joy, peace, and patience unless we are being filled with the Spirit? And furthermore, these fruits will validate the message of Christ that we wish to proclaim.

• Work Within

Who are the priority relationships in your life? The majority of our time and energy needs to be invested into the precious lives of those whom God has entrusted to our care. It’s our job. For example, if we are married, this relationship should trump all others. And if God has blessed you with children, after your husband, they are your primary work. David Lawrence, my pastor, once said, “Everybody wants to change the world, but no one wants to change diapers. But the world is changed one diaper at a time.” Naturally, our work within will change in each season of life. For instance, when you are caring for aging parents or when your children have grown and “left the nest,” then this would be a great time to bring a few younger women into your life and model for them what it looks like to live for others. We should see them as an extension of our ministry to Christ. As Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, “And the King will answer them, I assure you: whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” If you are single, try to find a godly woman to disciple you. Ideally, all of us will have someone in our life—like a Paul—who will pour into us. And then we need a person into whom we can reinvest God’s truth just as Paul did for Timothy.

To quote Roy (Soup) Campbell, a disciple-maker with spiritual offspring scattered around the globe, “The light that shines the farthest away will shine the brightest at home.” Soup and his wife Linda live amid a community riddled by poverty, crime, and gangs. Their home base is the inner-city of Memphis, Tennessee. Living what they faithfully teach, they and their disciples are bringing the light of the gospel to their home and community. Wasn’t that Jesus’ intent in the first place?

Before we move to our last work, let’s not forget one important fact. If we get our priorities out of order, we will find ourselves ineffective or unproductive in all the other areas of our lives as well.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Titus 2:1-14; Ephesians 5:22-24; Philippians 1:6; Colossians 1:10, 3:12-24; 1 Timothy 2:9-15, 5:3-16, 6:18; 2 Timothy 3:10; 1 Corinthians 7:1-40; 1 Peter 5:7; Proverbs 16:3; Ecclesiastes 2:17-26, 9:7-10

• Work Out

John 14:10-12 (KJV)

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I [am] in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater [works] than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

Obviously, we are not Jesus! However, as Jesus stated in John 14:10-12, we will be doing the same work He did. And what He did was fish for men and make disciples. In the previous lesson, we talked about the heavens declaring the glory of the Lord (Psalm 19). Well, this passage is also quoted in the New Testament in Romans 10. Only this time, the passage is attributed to those who go all over the world preaching the good news (Romans 10:9-21). Now we are the ones declaring God’s glory by sharing the gospel. To quote another Psalm, “Not to us, O Lord, not to us! But to your name bring honor, for the sake of your loyal love and faithfulness” (Psalm 115:1). What is the purpose for my life, and what is the chief end of man (or woman)? The answer is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever. By working within the three priority areas (up…within…and out) we will bring glory to God, and in turn, find that His work truly does bring satisfaction to our soul.

If you are not sure about what this entails, then look back over the section titled “Jesus’ Work Was the Building of Twelve Men.” For the sake of clarification, fishing for men and making disciples is a lifestyle, not a program. Because of this, discipling takes place as we go and wherever we go. Instead of adding more to our very busy schedules, we are inviting people to join us in our daily routine. If you cannot let a few other women see how you walk with God in all areas of your life, how are they to know how to follow you? Not only do they need to hear the truth, they need to learn by your example how to live the truth. This requires transparency and accountability. It is an investment of your life. But if it is not a spiritual relationship, then it is not discipleship. You can’t have a spiritual relationship without the Word of God (John 6:63). The Bible is the instrument that prepares us for good works and informs us what that work is (2 Timothy 3:17). I can testify to the fact that in this process, you will grow in your personal relationship with Christ, and your life will be blessed more than you can ever imagine.

Finally, as we conclude, let’s remember where we started. When we are doing God’s work, in collaboration with the Holy Spirit, the load becomes lighter. We are co-workers with Christ. And “His yoke is easy, and His burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). He is not obligated to disburse His power in our lives to do whatever we want. It’s given to energize His work. One day our works will be tested, and the only works that will survive the Judgment Seat of Christ are the “good works” ordained for each of us before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 2:10).

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Matthew 4:19, 19:18-19, 22:36-40; 1 Corinthians 3:5-15; 2 Corinthians 5:13, 6:2; Romans 10:19-20; John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8

Colossians 3:23-24

Whatever you are doing, work at it with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not for people, because you know that you will receive your inheritance from the Lord as the reward. Serve the Lord Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. How are you currently serving God at home, at church, and in the workplace?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Do you feel stressed or drained physically when you do this work?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. When you are busy at this task, do you feel energized and at peace with God and others?

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1. Describe a time when you found that two are better than one in getting a job done (Ecclesiastes \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. If I continue directing my own paths, then one day all my work will be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in the judgment \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What is the chief end of man? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Explain how our work might bring glory to God. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verse

### John 4:34

***Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work.***



Cast the Vision: God’s Great Commission

Key Passage

Matthew 28:16-20

Introduction

t the Last Supper, the Lord Jesus arranged an appointment with His disciples. He told them that after His death and resurrection, they were to meet Him at a specific location—a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 26:26-32). This meeting was so important, in fact, that even after His resurrection, He sent an angel and two women to remind them: “Don’t forget the meeting” (Matthew 28:5-16). They walked seventy-five miles from Jerusalem to Galilee to receive what would be His last will and testament.

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Matthew 28:16-20 is called the Great Commission, and within this commission, we find Jesus’ plan, strategy, and mandate in the words “make disciples.” Yet, somewhere along the way, the Church has lost the art of Biblical disciple-making. To discover the Lord’s strategy, we must take a closer look at Jesus’ parting words, “Go make disciples of all nations.”

His Last Command

There are four commissions found in the New Testament and several in the Old Testament. However, the most strategic is found in Matthew 28:18-20. God’s plan to reach the people from every nation on earth is encapsulated within the Greek word *matheteuo*. The King James Bible translated the word as “teach all nations.” However, this word is more accurately translated in newer translations as “make disciples.” As you can see, the word teach is found twice in the text, yet the second appearance of the word is altogether different. The Greek word for teach is didasko, and the full definition is to learn *or* to teach. A discipling concept is also found in the second word for teach in the Great Commission. According to this definition, the Truth we learn has been entrusted to us so that we can teach others (Psalm 78:1-7).

In the Great Commission, there are four action words: go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. Only one is imperative - the command to “make disciples.” If we are to participate in the fulfillment of this command, we must first understand exactly what Jesus meant when He said, “Go make disciples.” In his book *Tally Ho The Fox!*, Herb Hodges asks a convicting question:

So, what is the difference between the Christianity that produced the Book of Acts and our kind of Christianity? At the risk of over-simplification, it is my measured opinion that the only basic difference between ‘their Christianity’ and ‘ours’ is one of strategy. Their strategy showed an apparent disregard for building institutions and majored almost exclusively on building individuals. Their strategy was one of explosion (outward) instead of implosion (inward).

If you have spent any amount of time actively involved in a church, then you most likely know that this is true: twenty percent of the members do all the work, while the other eighty percent half- heartedly bless the rest of us with a weekly visit. Every believer who claims to follow Christ must carefully consider two questions. Number one is “Who was Jesus commanding when He said to make disciples?” And number two is “If I am a Christian, does this command apply to me?” If you are anything like the noble Bereans in the book of Acts 17:11, you will examine the scriptures for yourself, and the Word of God will clarify these questions.

A clue embedded within the word “co-mission,” is that God has coworkers. He calls them disciples. He did not say, “Some of you go evangelize the nations.” He did not say, “Some of you go make converts.” He did *not s*ay, “Go and build buildings.” He said, “*Go and turn people into disciples.”* It was never His intent that just a few in the body of Christ would enter His labor force while everyone else sat on their hands and watched them work. But, if we are honest, isn’t that what we have done? Furthermore, is it realistic to think a handful of foreign missionaries can make disciples of all nations? It is not possible unless *every believer from every ethnic* group is equipped and mobilized with the strategy of Jesus. It begins in our own Jerusalem, but if we follow His plan from our home base we reach the world (Acts 1:8).

It is time for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ to leave the building with the good news and build “the Church” by making disciples who will reproduce. Kingdom building is people building. There is no other plan. This is the mission.

His Pattern to Model

John 12:26

If anyone wants to serve me, he must follow me, and where I am, my servant will be too. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

A disciple could be defined as one who sits at the feet of another person in order to learn from that person. In the business world, we call this a mentee, intern, or apprentice. But the most accurate comparison would be a student teacher. The disciples and the apostle Peter referred to it as spiritual parenting, but Jesus called it *disciple-making.*

Where can you find disciple-making in the Bible? The concept is everywhere. Here are just a few examples. Moses discipled Joshua, and yet the process was thwarted because although Joshua lived 110 years, he failed to make even one disciple (Joshua 1:1-9). Additionally, the parents, especially the fathers, failed to heed the command given by Moses in Deuteronomy 6 to teach their children. The tragic consequences of this were that the whole nation of Israel was plunged into the dark days of the Judges. And then we see the process in the life of the prophet Isaiah. You can read about his disciples in Isaiah 8. Isaiah foretold of another disciple-maker—John the Baptist. However, the clearest picture is modeled for us by the Lord Jesus and His relationship with the Father and then with His twelve. Not only was the Lord a disciple- maker, but He also was the disciple of His Father. How do we know that? He told us that He said and did exactly what He saw His Father do, demonstrating His submission to the Father.

This is how Jesus made disciples. After consulting His Father in prayer, He selected twelve men and concentrated all His time and effort into them (Mark 3:13-14). Don’t miss this aspect of His strategy: He personally and intentionally spent ninety percent of His three years of public ministry investing in twelve ordinary, uneducated men (Acts 4:13-19). This amounted to about twenty-six thousand hours.

Our English word math comes from the Greek word matheteuo (make disciples). However, mere addition was not His intent; multiplication was. The return on His three-year investment into the twelve resulted in multitudes of souls being reached.

A Spiritual Relationship

Programs, no matter how good they may be, cannot make disciples. People make disciples. When a person is born again into the family of God, the work of discipling has just begun. You don’t make disciples simply by enrolling someone in a twelve-week Bible study. And, furthermore, disciples can’t be mass produced. Many believers (including me) have remained in spiritual infancy or childhood even though they have known the Lord Jesus for many years. Why is this? It is because we have misunderstood the Great Commission. The aim of this lesson and this ministry is to change that.

Let’s be clear about what is involved when a person enters a discipling relationship. We are not proposing adding another religious activity to your life; we are proposing that you bring a person or two along with you as you live out the Christian life. You are to show by example what it means to be a true follower of Jesus. Make no mistake about it, you cannot make a disciple quickly. It takes time. In the case of the Jesus’ disciples—a three-year period of time.

What does it really mean to be a disciple-maker? A disciple-maker is a lifelong learner and follower of Christ—a disciple themselves. This person is not a perfect person; they, as all believers, are in the process of sanctification. And as maturing, Godly leaders they must be intentional about investing both their life and God’s truth into the lives of a few other people. Within the context of these healthy relationships in the family of God, they grow in their relationship with the Lord, pray and study the scriptures together, and learn how to apply God’s Truths to every area of their lives. Disciple- making is to be in an accountable, transparent relationship where a mature Christian walks alongside a growing disciple to teach them and encourage them to grow in their spiritual life. While relating to others from a distance is much less demanding personally and emotionally, to really be effective in bringing children of God into spiritual maturity, we must make disciples the way Jesus built His twelve.

As a spiritual parent, you see the potential in the ones you disciple and build them up until they can see who they are in Christ (1 Thessalonians 2:7-11). By following Jesus’ strategy, the ones we disciple will become vital links to reach future generations. When the process is complete, the disciple will invest the truth that you have taught them into the lives of others, hence, the reproduction (2 Timothy 2:2).

Luke 6:40

A disciple is not greater than his teacher, but everyone when fully trained will be like his teacher.

His Plan Was to Multiply

Luke, the only Gentile writer of the Bible, wrote His gospel to win the soul of another Gentile. His name was Theophilus. Acts, Luke’s second letter, was really a discipling manual for Theophilus.

This personal letter from one Gentile to another contains the entire recorded history of the disciples’ obedience to the Great Commission.

For two hundred years, God’s plan of multiplication worked. In fact, it escalated so rapidly that by Acts 17, they had reached the known world. This is amazing when you think of all the obstacles they had to overcome in fulfillment of their mission. They had no planes, trains, automobiles, internet, televisions, or telephones. What means of communication did they have? The plan was simple, tell-a- person and then build-a-person (by making disciples). It worked because they followed the Master’s plan. When they did, His power and presence were evident as they went about sharing the gospel and then building those who had received the Lord. When any person was fully built (or raised to maturity), they became reproducing disciple-makers.

After two hundred years of multiplication and church growth, something happened. As is always the case, Satan had a strategy to thwart the advance of the Kingdom of God. Around the third century, Constantine, the first Roman Emperor *to profess* Christianity, began a massive building program. He erected church buildings on the site of every important location in Christendom. What looked like a very noble cause became an instrument in the hands of evil one to stop the multiplication. The believers stopped going everywhere to tell-a-person. Now they came into these extravagant buildings to sit and hear-a-person (priests and well-educated speakers). They were told, “you are not important enough or smart enough to be used by God.” They stopped making disciples. The workforce was no longer being equipped to “go and tell-a-person.” As a result, the majority of people who made up the church were “benched” or “pewed,” if you will. In other words, they were put out of commission. Whose plan are you on—the come and sit to “hear-a-person,” or “as you go, tell-a-person”?

Does this mean that God is anti-church buildings? I don’t think so. Yet, when the focus becomes bricks and mortar instead of building the body of Christ (people), the multiplication stops. What, then, are the buildings for? The buildings are to be the base for the mission of the Church—not the place of the mission (Ephesians 4:1-16). By the way, the church may consist of a home, a shade tree, or a movie theater—it doesn’t really matter. What does matter is that people are being built to be lifelong *reproducing* followers of Christ.

God’s Vision is Global

The following verse has been called the Great Commission of the Old Testament. The goal of the Lord is that His Name, fame, and salvation would reach the ends of the earth. Reade Isaiah 49:5-6.

Spiritual vision is seeing things from God’s point of view—what He sees, and how He sees. “Where there is no vision the People perish” (Proverbs 29:18 KJV). What is on God’s heart? His heart is for the souls of men, women, and children from every nation. This is God’s plan to bring the light of the gospel to the ends of this earth. For those who catch the vision and obey God’s last command, an incredible promise is made. Just as the Holy Spirit was working with and through the early church, He will be with us in this endeavor. His power and authority will ensure the mission will be a success. Any “disciple-making” that does not include equipping other ethnic groups falls short of Jesus’ mandate.

The greatest command to “love the Lord with all our hearts” is the motivation that moves us to obedience to the last command: “Go make disciples of all nations.” For Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Do you love Him?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. What is the only command in the Great Commission? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Acts 14:21-28 and identify the words *evangelized* and *make disciples*. In your own words, describe the difference in evangelizing and making disciples.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. In Acts 14:28 and Acts 11:25-26, how much time was invested in making disciples?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. How many hours did Jesus invest in the making of His disciples? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Have you ever heard of a pyramid scheme? Do you see any similarities in disciple-making?

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1. Do you think the Lord intends for His Children to *retire from service* when they reach a certain age?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What would it look like for someone to do life with you?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Honestly answer this question: Is the work I am presently doing in service for the Lord on a regular basis bringing anyone to a saving faith in Christ Jesus?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What are you doing to reach other ethnic groups for Christ? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Genesis 12:1-3 and Acts 13:47 and answer this question: What is the end goal of our salvation? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Am I really building another person to be a true lifelong follower of Christ?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Have you caught the vision of the Great Commission? If so, are you ready to obey His last command? How and where will you begin?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verse

Matthew 28:16-20

So the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain Jesus had designated. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came up and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”



The Five Phases of Spiritual Growth

Key Passage

Ephesians 4:11-12

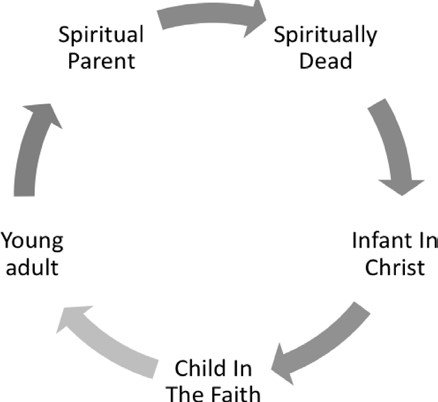
Introduction

erhaps you have noticed that there is a common thread that runs throughout the Bible; it is the theme of home and family. This is not a coincidence. The family is the first institution God established. Any society is only as healthy as the families that make up that society. For instance, as seen in our key passage, the Father is very concerned with the growth and spiritual health of *His family*. A healthy family is made up of a mother and a father who are well equipped to care for their children. So it is with God’s children, and, clearly, Paul recognized how important this is. For instance, to the saints at Thessalonica, he was like a nursing mother, as well as a spiritual father. And then there are the apostles John and Peter who wrote of the concept of spiritual birth and infants needing milk to grow up in the faith.

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When we’re born physically, there is a natural growth process, and the same is true when we are born spiritually. Whether it be physical, educational, mental, or spiritual, we are either moving forward growing and learning, or we are regressing. But we never stay in the same place. It does not matter if we call this equipping the saints, building the body, parenting God’s children, or making disciples; all this falls under the umbrella of the growth and health of the church.

As we work our way through the five phases of spiritual growth, notice the numerous references to birth, infancy, children, young adults, and, finally, spiritual parents. You may be surprised at the number of similarities. Now it’s time to find out where we are in the five phases of spiritual growth. Let’s look at the growth chart.



**Phase 1:**

Spiritually Dead

Ephesians 2:1-5

And although you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you formerly lived according to this world’s present path, according to the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the ruler of the spirit that is now energizing the sons of disobedience, among whom all of us also formerly lived out our lives in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath even as the rest…But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even though we were dead in transgressions, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you are saved!

All of humanities problems can be traced back to the fall in the Garden of Eden. We’ve got a sin problem. By birth, by nature, and by choice, we are all sinners. And this brings us to our second dilemma. Because we are born sinners, we are spiritually dead and separated from God. What is more, if we remain in this condition (only physically born) we will be eternally lost. To alter this sad state requires a miraculous birth—a *spiritual birth* (John 3:1-20).

John 3:3-7

Jesus replied, “I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother’s womb and be born a second time, can he?” Jesus answered, “I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must all be born from above.’

How does a person who is spiritually dead come to life? Or how can a person be born spiritually? If you are inquisitive about these matters, you’re in good company with Nicodemus, the Bible teacher. Just as a natural birth begins with a seed, so does a spiritual birth. The life-giving “seed” is the Word of God!

1 Peter 1:23-25

You have been born anew, not from perishable but from imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. For all fleshis like grass and all its glory like the flower of the grass; the grass withers and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word that was proclaimed to you.

Peter here is quoting the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 40:8). When all is said and all is done, there are two things that will last forever: the Word of God and the souls of men. And consequently, it is the Word of God that brings salvation to the souls of men. (See an Old Testament parallel in Ezekiel 37.) People must hear the gospel to be born again. But who is going to tell them? Disciple-making is a natural venue for the advance of the gospel message.

1 John 5:11-12

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. The one who has the Son has this eternal life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have this eternal life.

**Phase 2:**

Infant in Christ

1 Peter 2:2-3

And yearn like newborn infants for pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up to salvation, if you have experienced the Lord’s kindness.

Once a person has experienced a miraculous birth, spiritually speaking, they cannot do anything for themselves. Just as a baby needs to be cared for, so does a new believer. They desperately need someone to feed them the Word of God. In an ideal world, this person would be a parent, but we don’t live in an ideal world. Sadly, so few of us have been discipled that there is hardly anyone equipped to nurse God’s babies! And if they are not fed, the prospect of them growing up to maturity is slim. If they are going to grow and thrive, they must be cared for by adults who are themselves spiritually healthy. Translation: *they need to be discipled*. Furthermore, an infant in Christ cannot be cared for just a few hours a week. Babies are full-time work!

Healing for the Broken

Ephesians 4:11-13

It was he who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God – a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ’s full stature.

Notice the word *equip* in our key passage. The original Greek word can also be translated as *restore* or to *mend what is broken.* When one woman is discipling another, this is a crucial step. Without addressing these issues on the front end, it will be quite difficult to help her grow to maturity. Have you ever torn the ligaments in your leg or broken a bone? If you have, then you know that to walk again you must first mend what is broken. We have already addressed the fact that we are all broken in one way or another. Even when we are born again into the family of God, we bring a lot of baggage with us. We may be dealing with issues like depression, bitterness, or past wounds. Personally, my spiritual growth was stunted for almost twenty years after I became a Christian. I have dealt with some of these issues like depression myself. The spiritual application is this: if these broken places are never dealt with, then our spiritual growth will be stunted.

The heavenly Father’s plan to care for His children’s needs is within the family of God. This necessitates staying connected to the body of Christ because He lives, works, and moves within His body. So here is a question: When we say that we must be connected to a local body of believers, do we mean attending a once or twice a week gathering? Although that is what I have always been taught, I now, know better.

**Phase 3:**

Child in the Faith

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8

Although we could have imposed our weight as apostles of Christ; instead we became little children among you. Like a nursing mother caring for her own children, with such affection for you we were happy to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

I love being a grandmother. Naomi, my first grandchild, has just turned three, and her sister, Ada, is one and a half. It is amazing how fast they grow and change. When I look at Ada, Naomi looks more and more like a little girl. And yet they both are children who are totally dependent on adults to care for and protect them. The same can be said of someone who is a child in their faith. And like a child, they will most likely be self-centered. I observe this even in my granddaughters, cherubs, as my husband likes to call them. It’s funny how quick they can go from being cherubs one moment to acting like the devil the next. This is not surprising because, after all, they have inherited our sin nature.

What if no one ever teaches them that selfishness is a sin and that the world does not revolve around them? It quite unrealistic to expect them to simply morph into kind and generous adults, isn’t it?

When children speak and act as children, it’s cute. But when they have reached the teenage years and they are still acting as children, something is wrong. Just look at what happens to believers who never grow up (see 1 Corinthians 13:11-12).

1 Corinthians 3:1-4

So, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but instead as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready. In fact, you are still not ready, for you are still influenced by the flesh. For since there is still jealousy and dissension among you, are you not influenced by the flesh and behaving like unregenerate people? For whenever someone says, “I am with Paul,” or “I am with Apollos,” are you not merely human?

The goal of God the Father for each one of His children is that we grow up to maturity as healthy, reproducing adults. But this will never happen unless we are well nourished.

When was the last time you kept a child and they ask you for broccoli, salad, and whole grains? It’s not going to happen. They are perfectly content with a diet of sweets and junk food. Here is another question. Do you feed a child one meal a week? That would be absurd! Let’s look at this from a spiritual perspective. Too many believers remain spiritual children because they are malnourished. Of course, they are unhealthy when they are living off the junk food of the world all week. The only spiritual nourishment they get is a Sunday morning meal consisting of whatever their pastor is serving up! Honestly, how long do you think a person would live if they ate only one or two meals per week? Likewise, the believer who only eats the “Bread of Life” occasionally, will remain disconnected from the Lord, and they’ll never grow up in the faith (John 15:1-16).

How sad that so many believers never even get a taste of the nutrition found in the meat of God’s Word. Can we be honest? Life, even at its best, can be difficult. What do these half-starved folks do when the realities of life come crashing in on them? When a child in the faith is not discipled, life’s inevitable storms have the potential to derail them spiritually. But that’s not all. A babe or child in Christ is susceptible to all kinds of false teaching. Therefore, it is vital that they become well-grounded in sound doctrine at the beginning of their journey. For this reason, we will study the foundational doctrines of the faith in the chapter called “Promised to One Husband” based on 2 Corinthians 11:1- 15. On the flip-side, when a child in the faith remains connected with a spiritual parent who can feed them, they will not be blown off course when trials come. For one thing, they are not alone to face these difficulties. Secondly, they will know how to take hold of God’s promises and find encouragement, strength, and real help whenever they need it (Matthew 4:4; Romans 15:4). Additionally, a believer who is well fed and living off “Every Word that comes from the mouth of God,” will become the source of spiritual food for a multitude of starving souls.

2 John 1:1-4

From the elder, to an elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth (and not

I alone, but also all those who know the truth), because of the truth that resides in us and will be with us forever. Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Son of the Father, in truth and love. I rejoiced greatly because I have found some of your children living according to the truth, just as the Father commanded us.

**Phase 4:**

Young Adult

2 Timothy 2:1-2

So you, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And entrust what you heard me say in the presence of many others as witnesses to faithful people who will be competent to teach others as well.

One example of a young adult is found in Acts 18 with Priscilla, Aquila, and a Jew they met in Ephesus. His name was Apollos. Although this man was powerful in his knowledge of the Scriptures, some of his doctrine needed correcting. He still had much to learn. Priscilla and Aquila took him home and taught him. The buildings that the early church met in were family homes. Here they “lived the gospel” before Apollos. This “at home” approach to discipling resulted in all the Jews and Greeks who lived in Asia Minor hearing the Word of the Lord. Here, then, is the ultimate outcome of true Biblical disciple-making: The Gospel is multiplied, and God’s name and fame will reach the ends of the earth (Acts 18:18-28; Matthew 28:16-18).

This brings to light an important principle of disciple-making. The core meaning of being a disciple of Christ is to be one who learns from others. To cease to learn is to cease to grow, and it is a lifelong process. Furthermore, if you become nothing more than one who contains truth, and never passes it on to others, you will lose it. To do so is to become like the Dead Sea—taking in but never giving out. Priscilla and Aquila were faithful stewards of the truth they had received. They invested in Apollos, and because he was humble and teachable, the return on their investment was multiplied! Theoretically speaking, by the time we become parents, we should know intrinsically how to nurture our children. Isn’t that the way we were wired? But looking at society, we wonder, “If we are born with the instinct to nurture our young, then something has gone terribly haywire!” The tragic consequences of the fall remain. It’s been said that the father is the head of the home, but the mother is the heart. What happens in the home when the “head” (the father) is missing, and the “heart” (the mother) is broken? Chaos ensues, and that house comes crashing down. The children from these broken homes will grow up and become just like their parents, thus, perpetuating the cycle.

Now in the physical realm, when we reach young adulthood, we have the capability to reproduce. But what happens when a person has reached the age where they can reproduce physically, but emotionally they are still a child? It happens every day. Children having children is not healthy. It is the same in the spiritual realm. This unhealthy pattern must be broken within the body of Christ. His remedy to fix this dysfunction is through spiritual adults parenting the children in His family!

As we have seen in Paul’s example, this takes place within the framework of spiritual relationships. Furthermore, you cannot have a spiritual relationship without these two key components: The Word of God and a life-on-life connection with a more mature believer.

This is What is Missing

When our church began to reexamine the Biblical mandate to make disciples, our pastor got a group of us together. There were eighteen of us in all. These were the church leaders, deacons, teachers, and two pastors. Our pastor asked us this question, “When you were saved, did you have anyone come along beside you and disciple you?” Would you believe that out of eighteen, only one of us was discipled? But even this relationship was for a short period of time. After years of church service, we had not even seen someone make disciples! The bottom line is this: we have not made disciples—not by Jesus’ mandate, model, and methodology.

Stop and read Titus 2:3-5. I asked a group of older women if they had ever been discipled by women like those described in Titus 2. Had they ever been taught how to truly love their husbands and children in a Biblical way? Out of the twelve senior saints, only one said that she had—her mother had taught her. This is incredibly sad to me. The writer of the book of Hebrews describes the condition of most of the professing church.

Hebrews 5:11-14

On this topic we have much to say and it is difficult to explain, since you have become sluggish in hearing. For though you should in fact be teachers by this time, you need someone to teach you the beginning elements of God’s utterances. You have gone back to needing milk, not solid food. For everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced in the message of righteousness, because he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, whose perceptions are trained by practice to discern both good and evil.

Here we find an important principle that we don’t want to miss. Our own spiritual growth process is thwarted if we never learn to give away God’s Truth. In fact, we lose it. But when we give it away by teaching others, then the Lord will entrust us with the richer meat of His Word (Matthew 13:10-23).

**Phase 5:**

Spiritual Parent

1 Thessalonians 2:9-12

For you recall, brothers and sisters our toil and drudgery: By working night and day so as not to impose a burden on any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and so is God, as to how holy and righteous and blameless our conduct was toward you who believe. As you know, we treated each one of you as a father treats his own children, exhorting and encouraging you and insisting that you live in a way worthy of God who calls you to his own kingdom and his glory.

If we are to follow Jesus’ strategy, we must first understand what disciple-making really is. A spiritual parent is someone who has been through the previous cycles, matured in their faith, and is now ready to help others along the way. While making disciples happens as you go through your everyday life, it does not happen by accident. Jesus intentionally spent three years investing His life and truths into a small group of men. Disciple-making takes time.

Spiritual Child Abuse

1 John 2:12-14

I am writing to you, little children, that your sins have been forgiven because of his name. I am writing to you, fathers, that you have known him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young people, that you have conquered the evil one. I have written to you, children, that you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, that you have known him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young people, that you are strong, and the word of God resides in you, and you have conquered the evil one.

After a person has been led by the kindness of the Lord to repentance and salvation, they are infants in Christ. With proper nourishment, the infant becomes a child. With all the descriptive words chosen by the Holy Spirit to describe conversion as a “new birth,” why do we not understand the needs of a child in Christ? We simply cannot grow up in the faith unless someone who is well fed on the Word of God cares enough to feed us! How do you think the heavenly Father feels about a church body that neglects His children?

There is a world full of people who never grew emotionally because they did not have healthy parents to invest their lives into them. The result is an entire society affected by abandonment. Now take this analogy and apply it to babies in Christ. Unless God brings a spiritual parent into our life, we could remain infants, or, at best, self-centered children in the faith. Consequently, with precious few exceptions, people grow up and emulate what they know, passing down a cycle of brokenness to their own children. Many who are born again into the body of Christ have already had a lifetime of brokenness that will take real effort and hands-on care from loving spiritual parents to mend. This is the only possible way to break generational dysfunction.

Biblical Examples to Emulate

2 Timothy 3:14-15

You, however, must continue in the things you have learned and are confident about. You know who taught you and how from infancy you have known the holy writings, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Many people in our modern world have never actually seen the Christian life lived out. That is why doing life together with those you disciple is so important. People need to see that the scriptures are not just a philosophy but, instead, a guide for every daily interaction. Do not just tell them—show them.

Philippians 3:17

Be imitators of me, brothers and sisters, and watch carefully those who are living this way, just as you have us as an example.

1 Corinthians 11:1

“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”

Despite the scarcity of men and women in the church who understand the concept of making disciples, the Lord has not left us without Biblical examples to emulate. My two favorite spiritual mothers are Lois (the grandmother) and Eunice (the mother) of Timothy. Timothy’s father was not a believer. However, from the time of his physical birth, his mother and grandmother invested God’s Word into him. By the time Paul became the spiritual father of Timothy, he had already been well fed spiritually by Lois and Eunice. The Word of God made Timothy wise unto salvation, and then he grew from infancy and childhood into young adulthood in Christ.

Proverbs 6:20-23

My child, guard the commands of your father and do not forsake the instruction of your mother. Bind them on your heart continually; fasten them around your neck. When you walk about, they will guide you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; when you wake up, they will talk to you. For the commandments are like a lamp, instruction is like a light, and rebukes of discipline are like the road leading to life.

Fruitful in Old-Age

Psalm 92:12-15

The godly grow like a palm tree; they grow high like a cedar in Lebanon. Planted in the Lord’s house, they grow in the courts of our God. They bear fruit even when they are old; they are filled with vitality and have many leaves. So they proclaim that the Lord, my protector, is just and never unfair.

When it comes to spiritual growth, we are not talking necessarily about physical age but spiritual maturity. For all the reasons mentioned previously, many believers never grow up spiritually. So, if age is not the criterion to gauge spiritual parenthood, then what is? Well first, this person is a lifelong learner and follower of Christ. They are not super Christians, nor perfect people; they are in the life- long process of sanctification. I heard of a woman who is in her late nineties who is still bringing young women into her home weekly to disciple them. She is still yielding fruit in her old age, and long after she is gone, her godly influence will be impacting generations.

A spiritual parent is one who is willing to share their struggles and their victories with others in the family of God. This person lives dependent on Christ, knowing full well that apart from Him they can do nothing. They stay connected to Him through abiding in God’s Word and the life-giving relationships they have within the family of God. In the context of spiritual relationships, this parent will have children in the faith with them all their lives as they impart an abundance of Biblical wisdom. By following the pattern Jesus left for them, they will be fishing for men and women and teaching those who are with them to do the same. This person will be bearing spiritual offspring, not only in their lifetime but long after they have gone home to heaven. Their spiritual descendants will be well equipped and reproduce God’s truth into multitudes. There are three factors that determine fruitfulness. Abiding in the Lord Jesus and obeying His last and greatest commandment to make disciples are the first two. Lastly, your fruitfulness will depend on the faithfulness of those in whom you have invested. Don’t you think it is unrealistic to depend on just a few of us to care for all God’s children? That is precisely the point. God intends that all His children bear spiritual children. He chose us and commanded us to be fruitful and multiply (John 15:16).

Here is the bottom line of this lesson: When your life on earth has ended and your body is returned to the dust from which it came, how much truth will die with you? How many generations will reap the spiritual benefits of what you have sown?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. As you look at the five phases, can you identify where you are?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Make a list of characteristics or markers for each of those five phases. (Example: a child in the faith is self-centered.)

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Spiritual Parent \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Read Hebrews chapter 5:11-14. After we have heard the word of God and been taught, what does this passage say we should be doing?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. In your own words describe why the Word of God is important in each stage of spiritual life.

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1. Can you think of any obstacles that have hindered your spiritual growth?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Who are the individuals who have helped you the most to grow in the knowledge of God?

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1. From Ephesians 4:11, what did we learn about the word “equip?” \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Why do you think areas of brokenness that are not addressed Biblically might hinder someone’s growth?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Describe a family dynamic that you have observed where you have seen what happens when children fail to thrive and grow in the following areas: physically, emotionally, socially, or spiritually. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Precisely, how does God intend for us to grow up and be built up? See Ephesians 4:16.

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1. Keeping in mind that you can only lead some else to the level you have yourself have attained, who are the people around you that you could disciple?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. From the following list of passages, make a list of discipling principles: Acts 16:1-5; 2 Timothy 1:2- 5, 2:1-3, 3:14-17; 1 Corinthians 14:20; 2 Corinthians 12:14-15; Galatians 4:19; Psalm 78:1-7; John 15:16; Isaiah 54:1-13.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verse

Ephesians 4:11-12

It was He who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God – a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ’s full stature.



Models of Multiplying Discipleship

Key Passage

2 Timothy 2:1-26

I

Introduction

t is a scientific fact—a cell that does not reproduce will die. Think about it. When the members of a family cease to procreate, the family name and lineage dies. It is no different in the spiritual realm. A church that stops reproducing will die. A Christian who goes to the grave never having reproduced another Christian will not be a part of carrying on God’s family name. It dies with them. It is not our name that God is interested in; it is His! The life-giving message that ensures this happens is found in Jesus’ words: Make Disciples.

In this lesson, we will describe what a reproducing discipler and a disciple look like. Then, we will examine some principles that govern the lives of those whose efforts result in many offspring for the kingdom of God.

An Example of a Fruitful Discipler

Luke 6:40 (KJV)

The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.

In addition to the Great Commission, 2 Timothy 2:1-2 should be the mantra of every serious disciple-maker. This passage gives us a model to emulate. Multiplication, by God’s design and formula, always begins with at least two key individuals. Good examples are Paul and Timothy. By observing them, we will discover some key components that go into reproducing disciple-making.

The first thing to note about Paul is that he was **relational and transparent**. In the context of a true paternal relationship, Paul invested two things into his primary disciple—his life and God’s Word. Paul had an eternal perspective. He knew that the souls of men and the Word of God will last forever (1 Peter 1:21-22; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18). It’s been said that some Christians are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good. Paul would disagree. Until we realize that life here and now is temporary, we can do this earth no lasting good. A disciple-maker **has an eternal worldview** (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

**Sound doctrine** mattered to Paul. If you are going to obey the Great Commission, then you must know and be able to communicate sound doctrine (1 Timothy 2:3-6; 2 Timothy 1:13). That’s what the lesson entitled “Promised to One Husband” is for. At times, you may need to correct a disciple’s doctrine, or their lifestyle may need **reproof** (2 Timothy 4:2; 2 Timothy 3:16; Matthew 16:23). It is not going to go well if you try to reprove someone that you have no relationship with.

2 Timothy 2:24-25

And the Lord’s slave must not engage in heated disputes but be kind toward all, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance and then knowledge of the truth.

In his message “How Vital is Vision,” Herb Hodges said: “You cannot be what you do not see.” But, “If you can see it—you can be it.” In other words, you become like the person that you behold. The discipler must have a **committed devotional life** of prayer and Bible study (Luke 11:1-2; Matthew 17:1-20). The disciple needs to see how the Word of God is lived out in your life (1 John 1:4, 14). Paul **inspired and encouraged** Timothy by explaining that because Christ was in him, he could disciple others (2 Timothy 2:2). Another example is found in Deuteronomy 31:7-8 when Moses handed off the baton to his disciple Joshua.

We see all the above in the life of Paul; however, none of this would have made any lasting effect if he had not **persevered** until the end of his life. He, selflessly, lived to see Christ Jesus formed in the lives of those he discipled (Galatians 4:19; Matthew 26:56; Matthew 28:30).

Eight Features of a Fruitful Disciple

2 Timothy 2:1-7

So you, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And entrust what you heard me say in the presence of many others as witnesses to faithful people who will be competent to teach others as well. Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one in military service gets entangled in matters of everyday life; otherwise he will not please the one who recruited him. Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he will not be crowned as the winner unless he competes according to the rules. The farmer who works hard ought to have the first share of the crops. Think about what I am saying and the Lord will give you understanding of all this.

Now let’s turn our attention to Timothy and see what a fruitful disciple looks like. In the above passage, Paul uses eight terms that depict a fruitful disciple. Each of these attributes is clearly seen in Timothy. Paul was instructing Timothy to look for these kinds of people to disciple. Paul wanted to ensure that his investment in Timothy would maximize generational reproduction.

1. 2 Timothy 2:1: The first important term we see here is *child*. Timothy was Paul’s spiritual son (Acts 16:1-3). **Children naturally emulate their parents**. The best example we have, of course, is Jesus and His Father (John 5:19-20, 30).
2. 2 Timothy 2:2: It all begins with a man who has a deep commitment to the Lord Jesus and another man who is **committed to spending time** learning from someone wiser in the faith. This is where truth is transferred and where a disciple gets the lessons to pass on to their future disciples. In this passage, we see at least four generations. The key words here are *entrust*, *faithful men* (and *women*), *teach,* and *others*. Simply put, we have not made disciples unless our disciples are making other disciples!

2 Timothy 3:10-13 (KJV) TODO

But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

1. 2 Timothy 2:3-4: Like a **soldier** in God’s army, a disciple has entered a battle for the souls of men and women. And battle necessitates enduring some form of **suffering**. Before we go into battle, we must consider the cost of being a true follower of Christ (John 10:27-28). Your life will be either invested or spent. Are you spending precious time on things that will not last, or are you investing in what is eternal?
2. 2 Timothy 2:5: Any **athlete** that is worth his weight in gold knows that to win, she must play by the rules. The same is true if we are going to be disciples of Christ. We must learn to play by God’s rules—translation: we must be taught to obey *all* that Jesus has commanded us. And His last command was to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:1-5; Philippians 2:15-17; Philippians 3:17-19).
3. 2 Timothy 2:6: A disciple is like a **farmer** or **hard-working laborer** in God’s field. Like a sharecropper, they are actively involved in sowing the gospel “seed” and harvesting. It involves labor (Matthew 13:23; John 4:34-38, 15:16).

2 Timothy 2:15

Make every effort to present yourself before God as a proven worker who does not need to be ashamed, teaching the message of truth accurately.

1. 2 Timothy 2:15: Before you can become a **teacher of God’s Word**, you must first be a student or a disciple. For this reason, we have included the lesson “The Basics of Bible Study.” A good student will take notes and then study for themselves, just like the Bereans in Acts 11:17. (Also see Hebrews 5:11-14.)
2. 2 Timothy 2:24-25: A disciple is like **a vessel.** A vessel is a simple household object that is useful to the owner if it is clean, filled, and prepared for every good thing for which its owner sees fit (2 Timothy 2:20-21, 3:16-17).
3. 2 Timothy 2:24-25: Before salvation, we were slaves to sin. But now we are **servants of Christ** (Galatians 5:1). What is the stated purpose of God in setting His people free from slavery in Egypt? He said, “Let My people go.” Why? So that they may serve (worship Me). We were saved to serve!

**DIGGING DEEPER:** 2 Timothy 1:8; Exodus 9:3; John 4:21-25; Isaiah 43:10-12, 49:5-6; Acts 1:8

The Difference Between Multiplication and Addition

If you were to take a poll of most Christians and ask them what the Great Commission is, they would most likely say that it is evangelism. To evangelize is to add converts. However, to make disciples is to multiply. You can evangelize, but this does not mean you have obeyed the Great Commission. And yet, you will never be a true disciple-maker without evangelizing *with* your disciples (Acts 14:21, 28). Jesus did not say make *a* disciple. He said, “Go.” By that, He meant as you go (and wherever you go) about your daily life—make disciples of all nations. You do this with someone. Furthermore, we have not made disciples unless the ones we disciple reproduce.

Jesus did not say go and make *a* disciple. That is addition. He said go and make *disciples.* If an evangelist could win one thousand converts per day and the world’s population did not increase, it would take fifteen thousand years to win the world for Christ. Or to look at it another way, if you win one person per day for sixteen years, then you could reach 5,846 souls. Impressive, isn’t it? But how many people have this kind of impact? Furthermore, without truly discipling them, you would never even know if they were genuine conversions. But, if you disciple only two people per year to spiritual maturity and they and do the same thing, at the end of sixteen years you could impact 65, 536 souls. This is the kind of multiplication that we can expect if we follow Jesus’ plan.

To use another analogy: would you rather have a thousand dollars a day for one month or a penny a day, doubled, for the same thirty-one days? It is hard to believe that a penny a day, doubled, for a month ends up being more than a thousand dollars a day, but it does.

Here is how it works: Day 1 = 1 cent; Day 5 = 16 cents; Day 10 = $5.12; and Day 15 = $163.84. At the half-way point of the month, we only have $327.67 for multiplication compared with $15,000.00 for addition. The multiplication method is slow getting started, but it is still the right choice. By day twenty you would have $5,242.88 with the multiplication method, and when you reach day thirty- one, the grand total of the exponential growth of a penny a day—doubled is $10,737,418.24! We are not talking about pennies in the case of making disciples but multitudes of precious souls from every nation! This is the difference in spending your time and investing your time.

Our math of addition has not reached one-third of the world’s population even though statistics show professing Christians have increased tenfold in the last two hundred years. Incidentally, fifty- seven percent of those professing Christians live in Asia, Africa, or Latin America.

Seven Practices of Multiplying Disciple-Makers

2 Timothy 2:19-21

However, God’s solid foundation remains standing, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from evil.” Now in a wealthy home there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also ones made of wood and of clay, and some are for honorable use, but others for ignoble use. So if someone cleanses himself of such behavior, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart, useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

Borrowing from a list found on the Verge Network’s website, we will look at seven habits of highly effective disciple-makers.

1. If you desire to make disciples, then you must first be a disciple of Jesus and be willing to take up His yoke, follow Him, fish for men and women, and make disciples. (Matthew 4:19, 6:25-34, 11:28-29, 28:18-20). **Jesus will have the first and central place in every aspect of your life** (Colossians 1:18).
2. Paul used **God’s strategy to identify those who would ensure reproduction**. Like Timothy, they must be faithful men and women (2 Timothy 2:2). Just as a parent nurtures a child until they grow up into full adulthood, so it is in disciple-making. When they reach adulthood, the process starts over with the next generation of faithful men and women. You can’t feed a baby whole food. Multiplication only takes place when you have spiritually mature adults. This happens after you have moved the disciple past infancy and childhood to young adulthood in the faith.
3. **A true disciple-maker is also a soul winner.** As you go (and wherever you go), you will be sowing the gospel seed or fishing for souls (Mark 1:17; Matthew 13:23; John 15:16). You
4. can spend your whole life evangelizing and never obey the last command of the Lord Jesus: make disciples. However, you will never make a disciple without making an evangelist out of them. It is a part of making them a true follower of Christ. If we are following Christ, we will be fishing for men and women.
5. To really be effective in building multiplying disciple-makers, you must understand that this is **not just a program or weekly meeting. It is a way of life.** It is the way Jesus did life—bonding with His disciples (Mark 3:12-15).
6. Timothy yoked to F.A.T. = Faithful, Available, Teachable Men/Women x multitudes of others to infinity! The words multiply, and multitude come from the same Greek word. **The simple pattern of disciple-making that Jesus and Paul employed was that they heard, studied for themselves, and then taught the very same truths.** Once a disciple is equipped, then he commits the same truths to faithful men (women) who are qualified to pass them on to others (at the very least, four generations). The words entrust, commit, appointed, and deposit come from the Greek word Tithetmi. Stop and read: **Psalm 78:3-8.**
7. If you are going to do life with someone, then **your home will be a hub of hospitality** (1 Timothy 3:2; Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 4:8-9). It is the place where you live a gospel-centered life, and so use worldly wealth—our homes—as leverage for the Kingdom of God (Titus 2).
8. You will never be truly effective in disciple-making until you realize how utterly dependent **you are on the upon the Holy Spirit** (Isaiah 11:1-5; Luke 4:1-5; Romans 8:5-6, 11-14, 26- 27; 2 Corinthians 1:9). His role is not optional; it is vital!

Without developing these seven essential habits, you will never produce the kind of multiplication that God designed. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “A truly Righteous person lives for the next generation.” “Disciple-making,” said Herb Hodges, “if properly done, both forces and guarantees that kind of righteousness.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. Is there a difference between evangelism and disciple-making? If so, what is the difference?

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1. What are the seven habits that all multiplying disciple-makers have in common? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. In 2 Timothy 2:17, 20-21 and Ephesians 5:18, 25-26, what does God use to wash His vessels and prepare them for the “good work” He has planned for us?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What did you learn from this lesson that you can implement now in obedience to the Great Commission?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. List five key ingredients to successful disciple-making: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, what does a truly righteous person do? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What key passages define this kind of righteousness? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Memory Verse

2 Timothy 2:2

And entrust what you heard me say in the presence of many others as witnesses to faithful people who will be competent to teach others as well.



Commitment to Discipling Relationship

* Today’s date:

* My signature signifies my commitment to you in an open, transparent, accountable relationship in which we learn and grow up in Christ together.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* Your Signature signifies your commitment to this discipling relationship.

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I fully understand that we plan to meet on a weekly or bi-weekly basis on this day of the week: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for the purpose of Bible study and prayer. Because this is not just a program but a relationship, we will also strive to find other times we can “do life” together by exercising, working, cooking, shopping, or having lunch together etc. (John 3:22).



Spiritual Growth Survey

* How long have you been a believer?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* How did you come to faith? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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* My life before Christ was: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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* My new life with Christ is: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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The Following questions describe the transformations that have taken place in your life from the time of your new birth. You may mark yes, no, S-for sometimes or U-for unsure.

1. When I first became a Christian, I had a mature Christian disciple me.

If so, who was the person, and what amount of time did they invest in your spiritual growth?

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From this person/people I learned the following: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ My relationship with God impacts how I live, where I spend my time, and how I use my resources. I am fully aware of where my time and money are invested (or spent).
2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Has there ever been a time when you were more devoted to God than you are now?

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1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ I have dealt with the wounds of my past and am free from their effect because the I know the sins of my past are forgiven.
2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ I am convicted by the Holy Spirit of specific areas where I need further growth and equipping. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ I am secure in God’s love for me and in the fact that I am a loved child of God. I understand that I do not have to perform to earn this love.
4. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I can see evidence that I am a “new creation” being fashioned into the image of Christ. (See 2 Corinthians 5:17)
5. \_\_\_\_\_I use a journal to record prayers, thoughts, feelings, experiences, dreams, and dialogue with God.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ I have been taught how to study the Bible.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ I read Scripture daily. I use a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ as a guide in my Bible study.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ I meditate upon what I am reading and how it applies to me. (See Psalms 1:1-5)
9. \_\_\_\_\_ I set aside time each day to pray and focus my attention on God. I regularly pursue Him through times of quietness, study, reflection, worship, fellowship, etc. (See Matthew 6:33, Luke 10:36-39)
10. \_\_\_\_\_ I learned how to pray by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (See Luke 11:1-10)
11. \_\_\_\_\_ Because of all that God has taught me, I have a true desire to give away to others what God has invested in me. (See Colossians 3:17; Matthew 25:31-46; 1 Peter 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:1-2)
12. \_\_\_\_\_ I know (by experience) that I am unable to live the Christian life apart from abiding in relationship with the Lord Jesus. (See John 15:1-16)
13. \_\_\_\_\_ I understand the role of the Holy Spirit in my life.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ I continue to develop sensitivity to God’s presence in my life. I recognize His voice and His leading (both through His Word and His Spirit). (See John 16:7-15; Titus 3:4-7; 1 John 4:7-13; Ephesians 1:13-14, 4:1-32; Acts 2:38)
15. \_\_\_\_\_ I have no problem openly confessing my failures and struggles to God and others in my life. (See Micah 6:8; 1 Peter 5:6) I know He is willing to forgive and transform, deliver, and heal me. (See 1 John 1:6-11; Acts 2:38, 3:19)
16. \_\_\_\_\_ I welcome being held accountable to these trusted people.
17. \_\_\_\_\_ I willingly seek input from others whom I deem more mature in the faith in areas where I need help.
18. \_\_\_\_\_ My closest friends are not those who focus on the negative, gossip, criticize, or seek the harm of others.
19. \_\_\_\_\_ My family background is one that encourages my love for God and personal holiness because most of my family members are devoted Christ followers.
20. \_\_\_\_\_ I am free from trying to win the approval and acceptance of other people, even those who are closest to me (such as spouse and children).
21. \_\_\_\_\_ I have learned what it means to “take every thought captive” and make them obedient to God’s truth that is clearly revealed by His Word and His Spirit.
22. \_\_\_\_\_ I have been well equipped to “fight” battles in my thinking, circumstances, and relationships. I am learning to stand strong in my faith.
23. \_\_\_\_\_ I step out in faith and obedience when God reveals actions He wants me to take.
24. \_\_\_\_\_ I have completely surrendered to the will of God, even if it costs me time, money, relationships, reputation, status, comfort, or convenience.
25. \_\_\_\_\_ I am firm in what I believe about myself and God, but I also know I have much more to learn.
26. \_\_\_\_\_ I enjoy reading books on spiritual growth, emotional development, relational health, and general life skills.
27. \_\_\_\_\_ I have a genuine desire to know what God’s plan and purpose for my life is.
28. \_\_\_\_\_ These are areas I have not been healed or delivered from. I would like to address the following from a Biblical perspective: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. \_\_\_\_\_ I have struggled with having assurance of my salvation. (See 1 John 5:10-15)
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I would like to learn how to study the Bible. (See 2 Timothy 2:15)
3. \_\_\_\_\_ I would like to learn how to have a quiet time with God in His Word.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ I am not fully aware of the role of the Holy Spirit in my everyday life.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ I am surrounded by people who tear me down, mock my core beliefs, or try to hold me in bondage through unhealthy patterns of relationship such as, manipulation, co-dependency, control, or enabling.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ My obedience to the Lord is primarily motivated by guilt or fear. (See 1 John 2:3-4)
7. \_\_\_\_\_ I tell others about Jesus on a regular basis.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Are you interested in learning more about Biblical discipleship, or beginning a discipling relationship? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your honest answers to these questions. They will help you and I determine areas that we can grow together in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Keep in mind, there are no right or wrong answers. If you would like to get an idea of where you might fall within the 5 phases of disciple-making, see the following. Remember all of us start at phase number one. In the first 32 questions: if you had the following number of yes answers: 0-4 you may be at phase one; 5-8 you may be at phase two; 9-16 you may be at phase three; 17-16 you may be at phase four; 25-32 you may be at phase five.

Afterthoughts

W

ell done! You have joined in a growing movement of women from many nations who are being equipped to carry the gospel and disciple other women. Perhaps you have

just completed the first two modules of Catalyst Women’s Training. Or you have been discipled by someone who has. Either way, the goal is that these truths don’t stop with you!

You have been equipped with a reproducible lesson plan. Now it’s time to invite a few other women to your home to study these lessons with you. This is the best environment to discuss God’s Word and how it relates to the issues of your life. The body of Christ grows and thrives in community. I pray that these lessons have been beneficial in the furtherance of your spiritual growth and served to equip you to disciple others.

Now that you have completed Strand of Pearls, I am excited to tell you about our new series titled The Profound Mystery of Christ and His Bride. These twelve-week Bible studies are the lessons that comprise modules three through six of our Catalyst Women’s Training. They will give you from one to two year’s worth of lessons to add to your discipling curriculum. May the Lord richly bless the work of your hands and use your efforts to expand His kingdom to the ends of the earth!

References and Resources

* Catalyst Missions - catalystmissions.org
* Herb Hodges’ book, *Tally Ho The Fox!* - Spiritual Life Ministries - herbhodges.com
* Wade Trimmer Training for Reigning Institute of Disciple Making - tridm.org
* Cheri Holcomb ITCT Disciple Making Ministries - inthecrossties@hotmail.com
* Charles Brock The Good News for You [- www.churchgrowthinternational.com](http://www.churchgrowthinternational.com/)
* La Limye Ministries Children’s Home - LaLimye.com
* The Voice of the Martyrs [- www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com/)
* Andre Houssney Horizons International- engagingislam.org
* International Justice Mission ijm.org

About the Author

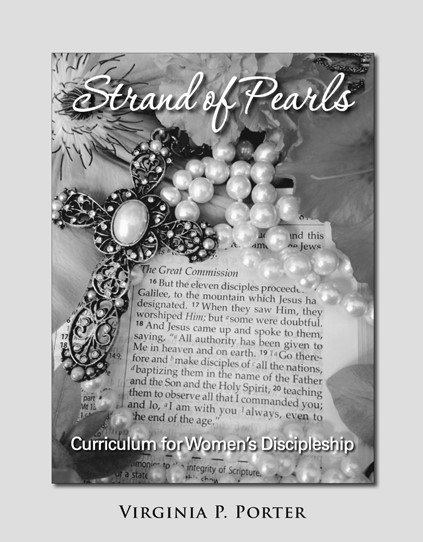
V

irginia (Ginny) Porter is first and foremost a disciple of Jesus Christ and a disciple-maker with a passion for fulfilling the Great Commission. In her twenty-five years in women’s ministry, she has filled the roles of Bible teacher, women’s conference speaker, and missionary to Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Bolivia. She is currently the Women’s Discipleship Coordinator for Catalyst Missions. After spending many decades sitting at the feet of Jesus and journaling the truths He engraved on her heart, she has taken these lessons and composed a series of reproducible discipling Bible studies for women. Ginny has been married to Art for over thirty years, and the two make their home in Memphis, Tennessee. She is the mother of three grown children and the grandmother to three precious grandchildren.



**For more information on Catalyst Missions, go to catalystmissions.org.**

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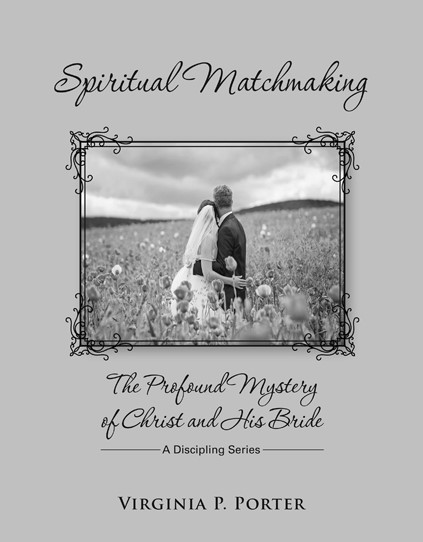
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