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**Strand of Pearls**

**Women’s Discipleship**

**Strand of Pearls Women’s Discipleship**

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Scriptures used are from the NET Bible and the King James version of the Holy Bible.

See notations after each passage referenced.

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**The Author**

Mingled among cherished memories, and a few I would rather forget, there is a wedding theme woven throughout my life story. My husband and I had just gotten married when we decided to open a wedding boutique. So, for the first seven years of our marriage, my career was preparing brides for their weddings. Sound’s wonderful, does it not? Love, marriage, and happily ever after are the kinds of things little girls dream of, right? Yet something very important was missing. It was the One who created marriage in the first place–God who is the source of love! And, without love as the key ingredient, inevitably, dreams fall apart. So here I was, a broken woman, from a broken home, in a broken marriage, dressing brides for their most important day.

When I was

twenty-seven years old, I met the love of my life, the Lord Jesus Christ, and I became His bride. The next thirteen years were spent growing in intimacy with my Savior and persistently praying for my husband. After many painful trials and heartaches, Art also met the Lord Jesus. Finally, the two of us became one. By God’s grace, and His grace alone, Art and I have now been married for 30 years. The Lord has blessed us with three beautiful children, a son-in-law and a daughter-in-law that God handpicked for our children. But that’s not all, He has given us two of the sweetest granddaughters in the world. I can testify that God is the healer of broken lives. I am humbled and honored to have the joy of sharing with you, not only the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ but also bits and pieces of my life story as well.

Today, I am the Women’s Discipleship Coordinator for Catalyst Missions. My life is all about dressing the bride of Christ by making disciples, from my home to the nations (Matthew 28:18-20; Revelation 21:1-2). It’s all about spiritual relationship, so please invite a friend or two to join you!

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Introduction

**Matthew 28:18-20 (NET)**

***Then Jesus came up and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.  Therefore goand 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 youalways, to the end of the age.”***

**The Calling, Passion, and Vision of the Great Commission**

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 defining moment would greatly influence the direction of my life. In December of 1998, the Lord impressed three things very clearly to me through His Word. “Ginny, I want you to daily sit at my feet, 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.”

**What is Disciple Making?**

Only in the last few years have I come to fully understand what the Lord was telling me in 1998 when he said, “Teach your children and women my Word.” He was telling me: “Make Disciples.” Teaching large groups of women is not the command in the Great Commission. Throughout this book, I wish to clearly define this concept and share some of the lessons I have learned and used in discipling my children and other women. To make disciples is to invest your life and the truths of God’s Word into small groups of people. Mass production was never the intent of the Great Commission.

Making disciples is done through intentional, intimate, accountable and transparent *relationships,* very much the same as parenting. The raising of my children did not take place in a classroom setting for one to three hours a week. Making disciples begins in the home. If God’s truth does not transform my home life, then I have nothing to share with anyone else—much less the nations! Yet, Jesus has changed my life and home. How can I keep this treasure to myself?

**Strand of Pearls**

I am not alone in this movement of God. Others who seek to obey Him are also experiencing revival. God is connecting people who are in tune to His Spirit, and we are joining together in this endeavor of making disciples for Jesus. This *strand* of *pearls* is interwoven with women from all over the world and every walk of life. It is truly a taste of heaven! Time and paper do not allow me the room to mention everyone that God has added to this *strand.* But, each one is vital in this interdependent network of disciple makers. We are truly connected at the heart.

This is, in part, the lifestyle of disciple making. God is at work in the midst of very ordinary, yet unique women. Our life experiences and personalities are as varied and multifaceted as diamonds. Although God does not need us, He appointed every believer to make disciples. As Paul said in Romans 15:18, “For I will not dare to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.”

**Small Things**

What seems small and insignificant in the world’s eyes is often monumental in God's sight. For instance, when God chose a man named Zerubbabel to rebuild a smaller version of Solomon’s temple, God encouraged His servant with these words: “*For who has despised the day of small things”* (Zechariah 4:9-10).

Jesus modeled for us an incredibly simple blueprint for disciple making with His twelve. And this is it: He built a few people, and they became living temples of God. And just like the parable of the tiny mustard seed that grows into a large tree, each individual has the potential to produce multitudes of disciples in God‘s family tree (Matthew 13:31-32). In fact, Jesus chose and appointed us to bear Him much fruit (John 14:16). By investing your life in a few others and teaching them to do the same, the nations will be impacted with the gospel. God’s plan to reach the entire world is encapsulated in the words of His last command: “Make disciples of all nations!”

Believer, have you ever wondered why God saved you or what your life purpose is? Jesus never intended for us to waste our lives. His intent is that each of us invests our life into others through the process of disciple making. And so, we are ecstatic that you have joined us as we give you the tools to obey the Great Commission.

Section 1

Leader’s Guide

How to Use This Book

The purpose of this book is to equip women with a simple, reproducible plan to disciple other women. Our premise is that there are five stages 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.

There are two sections of this book, and the first section is for you: the leader. The Leader’s Guide is designed to explain the principles and methods of disciple making. It contains two pivotal lessons: “Cast the Vision: God’s Great Commission” and “The Five Stages of Spiritual Growth.” The second section of the book contains the lessons that compose the curriculum, and these lessons are, aptly, divided into groups which correspond to the five stages. 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 1 of the curriculum lessons.

**Getting started**

**Step One: Read the Leader’s Guide**

This Section is for you. These chapters will explain the rationale and methods of our discipling curriculum.

**Step Two: Choose your Bible**

Each and every lesson is rooted and grounded in the Word of God. Therefore, you need a Bible, or at least, a Bible app such as Bible.is. Just be sure to pick the translation that is easiest for you to use.

**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 a community of two, with the Holy Spirit joining you, can make 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 a better idea of where you are on your spiritual journey. These forms are in the appendix of this book.

After you have completed this and evaluated the results, determine 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. To ensure you have a good understanding of the strategy, we have included a summary of 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.
* Contemplate the questions in the "Think about These Things" section given at the end of each lesson. Be prepared to share your answers.
* This is key: you don't have to have every lesson memorized to start this process; you only have to be one lesson ahead of the ones you teach.
* Some of the lessons include personal testimonies, and so 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!

**Cast the Vision: God’s Great Commission**

**Key Passage**

**Matthew 28:16-20 (NET)**

***Sothe 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 youalways, to the end of the age.”***

* **Lesson**: Reexamine the Great Commission in light of Biblical texts and define God’s mandate and strategy to fill the earth, spiritually, through multiplication.
* **Key passages**: Matthew 26:32, 28:5-10, 16-20, Luke 24:44-49, Acts 1:8, Mark 16:15, 20, Psalm 67:2, Isaiah 49:6-7, 42:6, Acts 13:47-49
* **Writer**: Ginny Porter with notes from these books*: Tally Ho The Fox* by Herb Hodges and *Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert Coleman.

**Introduction**

At 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). So important was this meeting, 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 75 miles from Jerusalem to Galilee to receive what was, in essence, His last will and testament. 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.” And yet, somewhere along the way, the Church has lost the art of Biblical disciple making. Since two thousand years have passed and most of God’s workforce is unemployed in His mission, it is clear that this Great Commission has been woefully misunderstood. Consequently, the Great Commission has become the great omission. 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 word is altogether different. The Greek word for teach is didasko. Actually, the definition of the word 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 (Psalms 78:1-7).

In the great commission, there are four verbs: go, make disciples, baptize and teach. Yet only one of these verbs is imperative. It is the command "make disciples."   In order 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.

There is a clue embedded within the word “co-mmission.” God has co-workers in His mission, and 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!

**Digging Deeper:** Mark 10:45; Matthew 10:23:6-7; Luke 9:46-50, 22:24-27; Philippians 2: 3-11; 1 John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:16-20

**What is a Disciple?**

What exactly is a disciple? What does a disciple do, and how are they made? The name Christian (which means a follower of Christ) is found three times in the New Testament. On the other hand, the word disciple is used 263 times. So what is the difference in these two names? To be a Christian means to profess belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and to understand that salvation is a gift from God that cannot be earned. It requires acceptance of that gift. This is, no doubt, a critical step, and its importance should not be diminished. It is, however, a passive role. To be a disciple of Christ requires action on your part. It means to be a follower of Jesus and His example—to do the things He said to do for the benefit of His kingdom. A disciple makes disciples!

**Digging Deeper**: Matthew 12:46-50; John 15:7-8; Hebrews 5:11-14; 2 Peter 2:2; Luke 9: 22-27, 10:39-42; Psalm 78:1-8; 2 Timothy 2:2; 1 Corinthians 3:2, 14:20; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

**His Pattern to Model**

**John 12:26 (NET)**

***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 to learn from that person. In the business world we call this a mentee, intern, apprentice or, in short, a learner. 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). 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 chapter eight.  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 clearly demonstrated this by His submission to the Father. And furthermore, He said only what the Father told Him to say, and did exactly what He saw His Father do. Please note the spiritual relationship that Jesus had with His Father.

This is how Jesus made disciples. After consulting His Father in prayer, He selected 12 men and consecrated all His time and effort into them. Don’t miss this all-important aspect of His strategy: He personally and intentionally spent 9/10ths of His three years of public ministry investing in 12 ordinary, uneducated men. This amounted to about 26,000 hours. Make no mistake about it, Jesus is 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 12 resulted in multitudes of souls being reached. His plan to reach the masses was through building these twelve ordinary men.

**Digging Deeper**: Isaiah 8:1-16, 40:3-4; John 1:19-40, 3:22, 17:4-26; Mark 3:13-19, 6:7-12, 9:2; Matthew 17:1; Luke 9:28

**A Spiritual Relationship**

First and foremost, Disciple making is a spiritual relationship. It’s a way of life. More specifically, it was the way Jesus lived His life. The ultimate goal of making disciples is to become like Christ Jesus, and He was a disciple maker! Programs, no matter how good they may seem, do not make disciples. People make disciples, not programs.

When a person is born again into the family of God, the work of discipling has just begun. You cannot make disciples just by enrolling someone in a 12-week Bible study, and, furthermore, they can’t be mass produced. Are children raised by putting them in a classroom full of other students for a once a week lesson? No! The very same principle can be applied to God’s children. Yet sadly, many believers (me included) have remained in spiritual infancy or childhood even though they have known the Lord Jesus for many years. Why is this? We have not understood nor obeyed the Great Commission.

Let’s be clear about what is involved when a person enters into a discipling relationship. You are not adding another religious activity to your life—you are simply bringing a person or two along with you and doing life with them. This way they can see what the Christian life really looks like and 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.

So 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 life of another person. Within the context of these healthy relationships in the family of God, we grow together as we come to know the Lord more personally, learn to pray effectively, study the scriptures and apply them to our lives. Disciple making is to be in an accountable, transparent relationship where we intentionally walk alongside a growing disciple in order to encourage, teach, correct and challenge them to grow towards maturity in Christ. 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 Thess. 2:7-11). By following Jesus' strategy, not only will the truth of God’s Word will be deeply embedded in our lives, 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 (2 Timothy 2:2).

**Luke 6:40 (NET)**

***A disciple is not greater than his teacher, but everyone when fully trained  
will be like his teacher.***

**Digging Deeper:** Luke 24:44-49; John 14:1-21; Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:17-20; 2 Timothy 2:2; Isaiah 42:6; 45:11-14; 49:6-7; Psalm 67:2

**His plan was to multiply**

Luke, the only Gentile writer of the Bible, wrote the 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 is the entire recorded history of the disciples’ obedience to the Great Commission.

For 200 years God's plan of multiplication worked. This is pretty amazing when you think of all the obstacles they had to overcome in fulfillment of their mission. They had no planes, trains, automobiles, internet, Facebook, televisions or telephones. So what 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. As you read the following accounts in chronological order, observe God’s strategy at work as the gospel was multiplied. It is called exponential growth.

**Digging Deeper:** Acts 1:8, 15, 2:41, 47, 5:14, 42, 6:1, 7, 8:1, 4, 9:31, 13:47, 12:24, 14:21, 28, 16:5, 9-10, 17:6.

After 200 years of exponential multiplication of the church, something happened. As is always the case, Satan also has a strategy to counteract any advance in the Kingdom of God. The plan was set in motion when 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 the very instrument in the hands of evil one to stop the multiplication. You may be wondering how that was possible. The effect was this: all of the believers stopped going everywhere to tell-a-person. Now they came into these extravagant buildings to sit and hear-a-person (priests and only well-educated speakers). In essence, they were told—you are not important or smart or powerful enough to be used by God. They stopped making disciples. The workforce was no longer being equipped to “go and tell-a-person.” And so they were “benched” or “pewed,” if you will. In other words, the majority of people who made up the church were put out of “co-mission.”

Does this mean that God is anti-church buildings? I don’t think so. Yet, when the focus becomes the building and not building the church (people) to become the church, the multiplication stops. So what are the buildings for? The buildings that may consist of a home, a shade tree or a movie theater are to be the base for the mission of the Church—not the place of the mission (Ephesians 4:1-16). Whose plan are you on—the come and sit to “hear-a-person,” or “as you go, tell-a-person”?

**The Difference in Multiplication and Addition**

If you asked most Christians 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. Furthermore, 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). He did not say make *a* disciple. He said, “Go.” And He meant as you go (and wherever you go) about your daily life—make disciples of all nations. You do this with someone. And furthermore, we have not made disciples unless the ones we disciple reproduce.

If you could win one person every day to the Lord, at the end of 16 years you could reach 5846 souls. But if you disciple only two people per year and they do the same, in 16 years you could impact 65,536 souls. Impressive isn’t it? But how many people have this kind of impact?

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

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 20 you would have $5,242.88, and when you reach day 31 the grand total of expediential growth of a penny a day doubled for the same thirty-one days 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 200 years. By the way, 57% of those professing Christians live in Asia, Africa or Latin America.

**God’s Vision is Global**

Any “disciple making” that does not include equipping other ethnic groups falls short of Jesus’ mandate. The following verse has been called the Great Commission of the Old Testament. The goal of the Lord is that His salvation may reach the ends of the earth.

**Isaiah 49:5-6 (NET)**

***So now the Lord says, the one who formed me from birth to be his servant –***

***he did this to restore Jacob to himself, so that Israel might be gathered to him;***

***and I will be honored in the Lord’s sight, for my God is my source of strength –***

***he says, “Is it too insignificant a task for you to be my servant, to reestablish the tribes of Jacob, and restore the remnant of Israel?I will make you a light to the nations,so you can bring my deliverance to the remote regions of the earth.***

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. The people of the world will continue to perish unless God's people can catch His vision of Biblical disciple making and obey the last command of the Lord Jesus to *MAKE DISCIPLES*! 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.

Just before Jesus went to the cross and finished the *work of redemption*, He prayed the following prayer:“I have glorified you on the earth by completing the work you gave Me to do” (John 17:4). He used the exact same word in the above passage that He used on the cross: “It is finished.” What *work* had He just completed? If you read the content of this detailed conversation between Jesus and His Father, it becomes clear that His completed work was the building of His twelve disciples. Just before returning to heaven, He gave the twelve (and all His future disciples) His final marching orders: go make disciples! There were no instructions about how to make disciples because they knew exactly what He meant. They were to choose a few other people and bring them along as they lived life, and they were to teach them the very same things that they had learned.

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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. 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. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. In Acts 14:28, and Acts 11:25-26, how much time was invested in disciple making?\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. How many hours did Jesus invest in the making of His disciples?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Have you ever heard of a pyramid scheme? Do you see any similarities in disciple making?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you think the Lord intends for His Children to *retire from service* when they reach a certain age?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. What would it look like for someone to do life with you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. 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?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
9. What are you doing to reach other ethnic groups for Christ?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
10. Read Genesis 12:1-3 and Acts 13:47 and answer this question: What is the end goal of our salvation? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
11. Am I really building another person to be a true lifelong follower of Christ?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
12. Have you caught the vision of the Great Commission? If so are you ready to obey His last command?

**The Five Stages of Spiritual Growth**

**Key Passages**

**Ephesians 4:11-16 (NET)**

***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 tothe 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.***

* **Lesson**: Examine the spiritual growth process and determine a strategy to move

forward to maturity.

* **Key passages**: Ephesians 4***:***11-16; 1 Peter 1:23-25, 1 Peter 2:2-3; 2 Timothy 2:1-2; Hebrews 5:11-13
* **Writer**: Ginny Porter

**Introduction**

Perhaps 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. And, 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.

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 stages 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. So it’s time to find out where we are in the five stages of spiritual growth. Let’s take a look at the growth chart.

**Stage 1**

**Spiritually Dead**

**Ephesians 2:1-7 (NET)**

***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! – and he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, to demonstrate in the coming ages the surpassing wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.***

In the beginning of the study of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, we discovered that we have an enormous problem. In reality, it is the root cause of *all* our problems, and we can trace it all the way back to 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 (once 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 (NET)**

***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. For one thing, wouldn’t you agree that it takes something living to bring life to something that is dead? And 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 (NET)**

***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.***

Conversion or regeneration, as Peter said, is accomplished by the power of God’s Word. It is alive and active, accomplishing the resurrection of the spiritually dead. Peter quotes the prophet Isaiah who said, “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isaiah 40:8 King James Version). 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 (NET)**

***And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 5:12 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.***

**DIGGING DEEPER:**Matthew 4:19; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:15-20; Romans 1:16, 10:9-18; Acts 1:8, 20:20-21; 1 Peter 1:22-25; Hebrew 4:12-13; Romans 10:9-18

**Stage 2**

**Infant in Christ**

**1 Peter 2:2-3 (NET)**

***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, do we? 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*. And furthermore, we must not think an infant in Christ can be cared for just a few hours a week. Babies are full-time work!

**Healing for the Broken**

**Ephesians 4:11-13 (NET)**

***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.***

The Greek word for *equip* found in our key passagecomes from the word translated as *restore* or to “*mend what is broken*” (Ephesians 4:12). 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. For example, have you ever torn the ligaments in your leg (I have) or broken a bone? If you have, then you know that in order 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. For instance, we may be dealing with issues like depression, bitterness or past wounds. Personally, my spiritual growth was stunted for almost 20 years after I became a Christian. I have dealt with some of these issues myself, like depression. 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, now I know better.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Proverbs 4:20-22; Psalms 34:19, 42:11, 107:8-21; Jeremiah 8:8-22; Hebrews 5:11-6:2; 1Peter 2:2; 1 Corinthians 3:1-4, 15:1-22; Acts 8:18-22; 1 Timothy 1:1-11; Acts 2:14-36; Deut. 6:5-9; 2 Timothy 1:5, 3:14-17

**Stage 3**

**Child in the Faith**

**1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 (NET)**

***Although we could have imposed our weight as apostles of Christ; instead we becamelittle childrenamong you. Like a nursing mother caring for her own children, with such affection for youwe were happyto 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.

Now, what if no one ever teaches them that selfishness is a sin, and that “life does not revolve around you”? It quite unrealistic to expect them to simply morph into kind and generous adults, isn’t it?

**1 Corinthians 13:11-12 (NET)**

***When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. But when I became an adult,I set aside childish ways. For now we see in a mirror indirectly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I have been fully known.***

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 take a look at what happens to believers who never grow up.

**1 Corinthians 3:1-4 (NET)**

***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 and every 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 is 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 turn this around and 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. So 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 are well grounded early in sound doctrine! 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 of “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 (NET)**

***Fromthe elder, to an elect ladyand her children, whom I love in truth(and not I alone, but also all thosewho know the truth), because of the truth that resides in us and will be with us forever. Grace, mercy, andpeace 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.***

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Luke 1:80; 1 Timothy 4:12; 2 Timothy 1:5, 3:10-17; Titus 1:4-10, 2:1-15; 1 John 2:12-29, 3:1-24, 4:1-21, 5:21; John 1:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-13; John 15:1-16; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 3:1

**Stage 4**

**Young Adult**

**2 Timothy 2:1-2 (NET)**

***So you, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And entrust what you heard me sayin 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. As a side note, 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! Jesus called it disciple making, and he modeled it for us with His twelve disciples.

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**

**Titus 2:3-5 (NET)**

***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 messageof God may not be discredited.***

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. Even 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.

I asked a group of older women if they had ever been discipled by women like those described in Titus 2:1-14. Had they ever been taught how to truly love their husbands and children in a Biblical way? Out of the 12 senior saints, only one said her mother had taught her, but after her mother died she had no one. 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 (NET)**

***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 the more we give it away by teaching others, then the Lord will entrust us with the richer meat of His Word (Matthew 13:10-23).

**Stage 5**

**Spiritual Parent**

**1 Thessalonians 2:9-12 (NET)**

***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. This was the equivalent of approximately 36,000 hours (Mark 3:13-14). By this fact alone, we can see that disciple making takes time!

**Spiritual Child Abuse**

**1 John 2:12-14 (NET)**

***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, and 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! Contemplate some parallels between flawed humans and God the Eternal Father. If you dropped your precious baby off at the daycare and returned to find them wet, unfed and crying because of neglect or abuse, how would that make you feel? What would your reaction be? Would you recommend them to others? Would you place your children back into the negligent hands of the so-called caregivers? With this thought in mind, 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 results are 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.

# **Acts 20:28 (NET)**

***Watch out foryourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,to shepherd the church of Godthat he obtainedwith the blood of his own Son.***

**DIGGING DEEPER:** John 21:16-17; Romans 2:4-5; 2 Corinthians 7:9-10; Hebrews 5:11-14; 1 Peter 2:2; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Titus 2:1-14;1 Thessalonians 2:7-13

**Biblical Examples to Emulate**

**2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NET)**

***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.***

***Every scripture is inspired by Godand 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.***

Many people in our modern world have never actually seen the Christian life lived out. That is why doing life together with those who 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 (NET)**

***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 (NET)**

***“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”***

In spite of 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 at the spiritual breast of His mother and Grandmother. 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 (NET)**

***My child, guard the commands of your father and do not forsake the instruction of your mother. Bind themon your heart continually; fasten them around your neck. When you walk about,theywill guide you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; when you wake up, they will talkto you. For the commandmentsare 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 (NET)**

***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 90’s 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. As an added benefit, it is a proven fact, that when we stay mentally active, this can even slow down the aging process.

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. Of course, this would include continuing to learn and follow the lead of others who are following the Lord Jesus in obedience to the Great Commission. 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. And lastly, and this can’t be stressed enough, 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 of all God’s children? That is precisely the point. God intends that all of His children will bear spiritual children. He chose us and commanded us to be fruitful and multiply (John 15:16).

**Flowers for the King’s Daughter**

Before we end this lesson, I have a story to share with you. A few years ago, before I became a grandmother, God brought a beautiful young woman named Jamie into the family of faith that I am part of. Jamie was a wife and the mother of two little girls when she had a miscarriage and almost lost her life. Through this incident, she realized if she had died, she did not know where she would be. When she came to faith, I invited her over to my home so that I could get to know her. I discovered that she did not have a father for most of her life. He was imprisoned for acts he had committed against her and her sisters. Jamie’s mother lived in another part of the state and was undergoing radiation and chemo for stage four cancer. Shortly after Teagan was born, Jamie’s mother passed away. My heart went out to her, so we began the process of disciple making. I have learned new truths from every person that I have attempted to disciple. These are a few lessons that I learned from Jamie.

When Jamie found out she was pregnant again, this brought some fear because of the previous miscarriage. So we prayed. When it was time for the birth, she and her husband had no family at all to be there for them. Kirk and Donna Bishop, who were on staff at our church, were instrumental in bringing this family to the Lord. The day of delivery came and Jamie had to have an emergency cesarean section. Kirk and Donna were the only ones there to pray over them in this very frightening time. Praise the Lord, they came safely through this delivery. The next day, I was on my way to get some cheap flowers to take to Jamie at the hospital. I was thinking about my own daughter and what it would be like when she gives birth to her babies. I was thinking about how many people would be at the hospital to welcome this new life into the world. And then I was thinking about Jamie and Kyle as new believers in the family of God, yet all alone. At that moment, the Lord interrupted my thoughts. He spoke into my spirit, “If that was your daughter in the hospital, would you give her cheap flowers?” Ashamedly, the answer was no. Very clearly in my heart, the Lord spoke, “Jamie is *My* *daughter,* I give good gifts to My children, and I want her to have the best!” I turned around and went to the florist to have flowers made up for the “King’s Daughter.” When I carried the flowers into the room, there they were. It was just the three of them—the King’s daughter, Jamie, the King’s son, Kyle, and their newborn daughter. I told Jamie that I was just delivering the flowers that the “Heavenly Father” had ordered for her. You see, Jamie and Kyle, much like their newborn baby, both needed someone to mother and father them.

Don’t you think the Heavenly Father feels the same way about all of His children? Do you see the point? It is much like parenting. The body of Christ will grow and thrive if we in the same way we care for our own families, through spiritual relationships. Likewise, as mature believers, we will reproduce, ensuring that the gospel is passed from generation to generation. So, 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?

**DIGGING DEEPER:** 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; Psalms 78:1-7; John 15:16; Isaiah 54:1-13

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. As you look at the five stages, can you identify where you are? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Look back over the five stages and make a list of characteristics or markers for each of the five. (Example: a child in the faith is self-centered)

Spiritually Dead \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Infant \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Child \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Young Adult \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. In your own words describe why the Word of God is important in each stage of spiritual life. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Can you think of any obstacles that have hindered your spiritual growth? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Who are the individuals who have helped you the most to grow in the knowledge of God? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. From Ephesians 4:11, what did we learn about the word “Equip?” \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Why do you think areas of brokenness that are not addressed Biblically might hinder someone’s growth? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. 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. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. Precisely, how does God intend for us to grow up and be built up? See Ephesians 4:16. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
9. 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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Phase #1**

**1 Corinthians 15:1-5 (NET)**

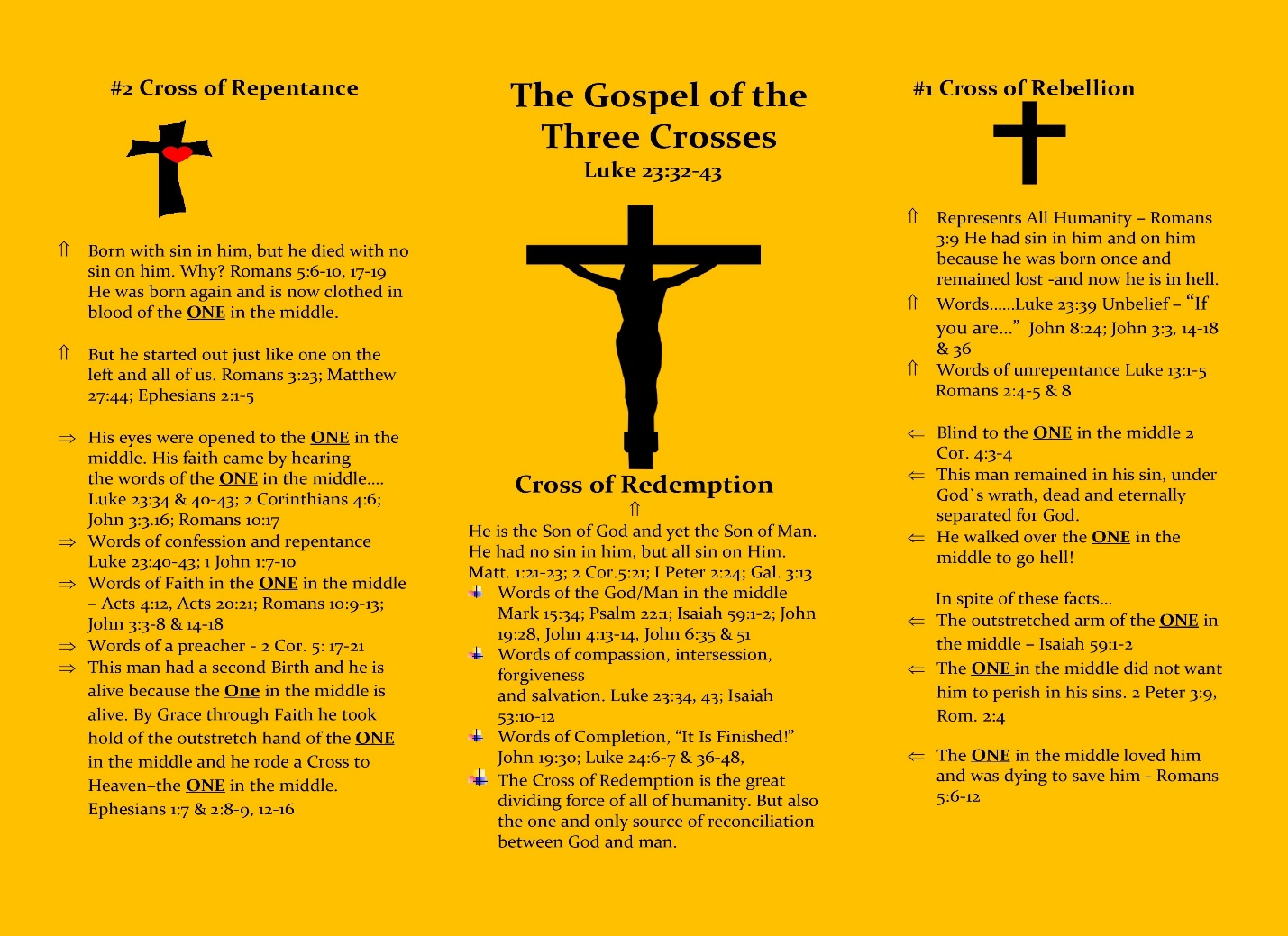
***Now I want to make clear for you,brothers and sisters,the gospel that I preached to you, that you received and on which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. For I passed on to you as of first importance what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

**Main Goals:**

* Lead people to Christ Jesus by sharing the Gospel with them.
* Gain assurance of salvation.
* Equip believers with Gospel messages.

**Additional Information:**

You can never assume anyone has heard the true Gospel, so don't skip this phase. If you have seven weeks to introduce the gospel, *The Good News for You* by Charles Brock is an excellent tool. You can order it at [www.churchgrowthinternational.com](http://www.churchgrowthinternational.com). Or contact them at [www.cpqa.org](http://www.cpqa.org).



**The Gospel of The Three Crosses**

**Key Passage**

**Luke 23:37-39 (NET)**

***Two other criminals were also led away to be executed with him. Sowhen they came to the place that is called “The Skull,”They crucifiedhim there, along with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [But Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”] Then they threw diceto divide his clothes. The people also stood there watching, but the rulers ridiculedhim, saying, “He saved others. Let him savehimself ifhe is the Christof God, his chosen one!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, “Ifyou are the king of the Jews, save yourself!” There was also an inscriptionover him, “This is the king of the Jews.” One of the criminals who was hanging there railed at him, saying, “Aren’tyou the Christ? Save yourself and us!”***

* **Lesson:** In this lesson, we will visit the scene of the passion of Christ and meet the two thieves who were crucified with Him. One is in hell, the other one is in heaven. What is the difference in the two?
* **Key passages**: Luke 23:37-43
* **Writer**: Ginny Porter

**Introduction**

My all-time favorite narrative is “The Gospel of the Three Crosses.” The message originated from one of Brother Herb Hodges’ lessons. But this is my adaptation of this treasured story, and every time I revisit it, the Lord opens my eyes to truths not previously discovered.

By way of introduction to this message, I would like to tell you about my third mission trip to Nicaragua. In many ways, it was by far the most difficult trip. We arrived in Bluefield, Nicaragua, only to miss a small boat that was to take us to the village of Pearl Lagoon. From that moment on, it was one spiritual battle after another. We arrived in Pearl lagoon in the middle of the night in pitch darkness. We had no electricity, no lights and no water. I spent the first night unable to breathe because of the heat and afraid to unlock the door to get air. So I prayed the scriptures all night long. By day number two, knowing that food does not keep when there is no power, I decided it was a good time to add fasting to my praying.

The first two trips were relatively uneventful; therefore, I was not prepared for all the difficulties we would face. Sometimes the attacks of the enemy are more covert, yet other times, there is no doubt of his frontal assault. This was one of those times. Even so, after this long night of prayer, I experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in my great weakness as we got to share “The Gospel of the Three Crosses” in each school in two villages. After that, I had the opportunity to teach the women from some of the churches the Biblical model of discipleship. Their hearts seemed very open and receptive to the Word of God. However, these were only the first two days of our trip. Then we traveled by small boat and small plane, and, finally, we reached Corn Island, Nicaragua.

**Spare Coffins**

Once on the Island, we were greeted by yet another power outage! I had planned to meet and teach the ladies while our youth pastor taught the young people. Monday through Thursday was my time with the ladies. On each of these days, someone died, and a funeral was held on the same day. On Monday, my plan to meet with the ladies was canceled due to the first funeral. But, God had another plan. After the funeral, a faithful disciple named Gwen rode up on her motorcycle and asked if I would like to come speak on her new radio station. I asked Doug, our youth pastor, if he wanted to go and speak, but he declined. I was wearing a dress and discovered you cannot ride a motorcycle side-saddle! I was smiling the whole time at the thought of this unexpected opportunity, and myself, in a dress, on a motorcycle! I must admit, it was fun. This was the second motorcycle ride of my life (my Daddy took me on the first ride). While on the slow ride around the island, Gwen told me how she had been traveling all over looking for opportunities to share the gospel since our first trip. The radio station was next to her house, and when she went inside to change shoes, I stepped outside to pray because my nerves were getting the best of me. I asked the Lord to calm me and help me to boldly proclaim the gospel. Between Gwen’s house and the station was her husband’s workshop, and out in front was a small coffin. Gwen said that was the spare coffin, and he had provided the one for the funeral she had just attended. I do not know how many spares he had, but three more would be needed before we left the island on Friday.

When it was time to speak on the radio, I was extremely nervous and shaking—so was my voice. To make matters worse, our team was in the mission house listening to the program and critiquing me. They said I got really loud when I quoted Jesus’ words from Luke 13:1-5: “UNLESS YOU REPENT YOU ALL WILL PERISH.” I was so loud, in fact, one of our team members said, “There has just been a mass exodus to Little Corn Island!” What he and I did not know was that the program was reaching Little Corn Island too. The good news proclaimed through the airwaves that day was Gospel of the Three Crosses.

On the morning of our last full day on the island, just as we were starting a lesson, we received some terrible news. A 26-year-old man had been violently murdered and mutilated.  Regrettably, we had walked passed this young man every day but never shared the gospel with him. We could not possibly know that would be his last moments before eternity began.  My hope is that this man somehow heard the message on the radio before it was too late.

My last ministry to the women on the island was to go with them to this young man’s funeral. Alba, the pastor’s wife, had to leave to find clothes in which to bury the young man.  She was so upset that she could not even make it to the funeral. The scene was surreal. We stood in the yard of this young man’s home only five hours after his death. His poor mother looked as if she was in complete shock. The “spare coffin” that held him was placed on an old, iron bed frame. I doubt she heard a word Eli said. We sang a few hymns, and Eli spoke a warning to all who would hear. In his Creole accent, he said, “The angel of death is moving all over the island,” and he gave a call to come to Jesus now before it was too late. What had this young man done that he died such a violent death? The same kind of question was posed to Jesus—I implore you to listen carefully to His response.

**Luke 13:1-5 (NET)**

***Nowthere were some present on that occasion who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. He answered them, “Do you think these Galileans were worse sinnersthan all the other Galileans, because they suffered these things?***  ***No, I tell you! But unless you repent, you will all perish as well! Or those eighteen who were killedwhen the tower in Siloam fell on them,do you think they were worse offenders than all the others who live in Jerusalem? No, I tell you! But unless you repentyou will all perish as well!”***

Please hear the words of the Lord Jesus: “UNLESS *YOU* REPENT *YOU* WILL *ALL* PERISH.” It does not matter if you attend church weekly, prayed a thousand prayers, or have been a good, moral, upstanding citizen. It does not matter if, like me, you have experienced baptism twice. Unless you repent—what did Jesus say would happen to you? It is not a suggestion; it is a command. And it’s also a requirement of salvation (Acts 17:30-3). Now, let’s look at Luke’s account of the passion of Christ and see if we can distinguish between the two thieves on either side of the cross of Christ.

**The Cross of Rebellion**

**Luke 23:37-39 (NET)**

***Two other criminals were also led away to be executed with him. Sowhen they came to the place that is called “The Skull,”They crucifiedhim there, along with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [But Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”] Then they threw diceto divide his clothes. The people also stood there watching, but the rulers ridiculedhim, saying, “He saved others. Let him savehimself ifhe is the Christof God, his chosen one!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, “Ifyou are the king of the Jews, save yourself!”***

***There was also an inscriptionover him, “This is the king of the Jews.” One of the criminals who was hanging there railed at him, saying, “Aren’tyou the Christ? Save yourself and us!”***

We know that the cross in the middle was prepared for a murderer (Luke 34:1-30). 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, all 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).

**2 Corinthians 7:10 (NET)**

***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 walk all over the One in the middle to enter hell in spite of the following incredible facts. 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.

**Romans 2:4-6 (NET)**

***Or do you have contempt for the wealth of his kindness, forbearance, and patience, and yet do not knowthat God’s kindness leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornnessand your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourselves in the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment is revealed!***

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. Greater love has no one than this: that he would lay down His life, not for his friends, but his enemies. Number three: Hanging just to the right of 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.” 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 59:1-2, 65:2). 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.

**Luke 13:23-29 (NET)**

***Someoneaskedhim, “Lord, will only a fewbe saved?” Sohe said to them, “Exert every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Oncethe head of the housegets upand shuts the door, then you will stand outside and start to knock on the door and beg him, ‘Lord,let us in!’ But he will answer you,‘I don’t know where you come from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ Buthe will reply,‘I don’t know where you come from! Go away from me, all you evildoers!’ There will be weeping and gnashing of teethwhen you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob,and all the prophets in the kingdom of Godbut you yourselves thrown out. Thenpeoplewill come from east and west, and from north and south, and take their places at the banquet tablein the kingdom of God.***

**DIGGING DEEPER:** John 3:16-20, 36; Romans 2:4, 5:6-12, 10:21; 2 Peter3:9; 1 Timothy 2:3-4

**The Cross of Repentance**

**Luke 23:40-43 (NET)**

***But the other rebuked him, saying, “Don’tyou 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 nothingwrong.” Thenhe said, “Jesus, remember mewhen you come in your kingdom.” And Jesussaid to him, “I tell you the truth, todayyou 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, and when he was placed on his cross, he was separated from God in his sins. Not only that, but 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 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 5:17-19 (NET)**

***So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away– look, what is newhas come! And all these things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and who has given us the ministry of reconciliation.***  ***In other words, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting people’s trespasses against them, and he has given usthe message of reconciliation.***

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 lovingkindness 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. His 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 the God on the cross in the middle.

**2 Corinthians 5:21 (NET)**

***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).

This man is eternally alive because Jesus rose from the grave. By grace through faith, this man 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 very 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. He is saved and home with the Good Shepherd (John 10:11).

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Luke 15:4-7, Acts, 4:12; Romans 10:8-13; 1 John 1:7-10, 3:5 Romans 6:23, Ephesians 1:7, 2:8-16

**The Center Cross of Redemption**

**1 Peter 1:18-19 (NET)**

***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 trustin 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. He, who knew no sin, became our sin, and at that moment His Father had to look away from His Son because His eyes are too holy to look on sin. Jesus bore the undiluted wrath of God in my place and in yours. Jesus had no sin in Him, but He had all sins on Him. As He hung suffering and separated from His Father who loved Him, He experienced the emptiness and loneliness that each of us is born into as sinners far away from God. The door to the kingdom of heaven was open to sinners by God on the center cross.

**Acts 20:20-21 (NET)**

***You know that I did not hold back from proclaiming to you anything that would be helpful, and from teaching you publiclyand from house to house, testifyingto both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus.***

The gospel has the power to save anyone who turns from sin in repentance and puts their faith in the One on whom God put 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.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Mark 1:14-16, 16:15; Matthew 4:19; Romans 10:9-18; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 2:12-14; 2 Corinthians 2:21; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 1:5, 3:5; Galatians 3:13

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. What did the two thieves have in common? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. From Acts 17:30-31, 20:20-21, and Acts 26:18-20, what does God command all men and women to do? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. In John 8:24, Jesus made a firm statement. What was it? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. What were the obvious changes in the man on the cross of repentance? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. 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.”
6. In Matthew 4:19, what did Jesus say we would be doing if we are following Him? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. Read Romans 10:9-18. From this passage, describe the person who is bringing the good news.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. From Acts 1:8, Romans 10:19 and Mark 16:15, what is the scope of our outreach with the gospel?

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**The Well Who Came to The Woman**

**Key Passages**

**John 4:3-8 (NET)**

***He left Judea and set out once more for Galilee. But he had to pass through Samaria. Now he came to a Samaritan towncalled Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, so Jesus, since he was tired from the journey, sat right down besidethe well. It was about noon. A Samaritan womancame to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me some waterto drink.” (For his disciples had gone off into the town to buy supplies.)***

* **Lesson**: In this lesson, we will discover God’s eternal plan to seek and save His sheep, which are in every ethnic group. Until He finds us, we are lost and empty, just like the woman at the well. The love of God in Christ is our greatest need, and when we are satisfied in Him, we will become true worshipers.
* **Key passages**: John 4:3-42
* **Writer**: Ginny Porter

**Introduction**

An in-depth study of this portion of Scripture has much to yield and numerous topical studies could be developed from the truth it contains. For example, politics and religion plays into the dialog, and so does racial reconciliation. Still, we could approach this as a history lesson on Israel’s past, specifically during the divided kingdom. Or it could be about geography and the importance of infrastructure and digging wells to supply life sustaining water. 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 back drop for the real story involving two main characters. The lessor of the two is a woman with a sordid past. Apparently, she was a glutton for heartache and rejection. Being 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, to her credit, 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 (we can only speculate why this might be). In any case, she must have been a very sad and lonely person—an empty well of a woman.

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

And so, you see, 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**

**John 4:3-8 (NET)**

***He left Judea and set out once more for Galilee. But he had to pass through Samaria. Now he came to a Samaritan towncalled Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, so Jesus, since he was tired from the journey, sat right down besidethe well. It was about noon. A Samaritan womancame to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me some waterto drink.” (For his disciples had gone off into the town to buy supplies.)***

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.” Nicodemus didn’t even realize he was in the presence of the King of God’s kingdom! But the apex of their conversation is found in John 3:16 were Jesus said: “God so loved *all* the people of the world, that gave His Only Son that whoever believed on Him would not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:1-17). The religious ruler had not an inkling that he was talking to his Messiah, and Jesus didn’t tell him. 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. While Samaria was halfway between Judea and Galilee, a devout Jew would normally walk seventy miles out of the way to stay out of Samaria. 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.”

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 7:9-10 (NET)**

***After these things, I looked, and here wasan 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.  They were shouting out in a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God,to the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”***

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 beMy 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 (NET)**

***I am the good shepherd. Iknow my ownand my own know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my lifeforthe sheep. I have other sheep that do not come fromthis sheepfold. I must bring them too, and they will listen to my voice,so thatthere will be one flock andone shepherd.***

**A Despised Woman**

**John 4:9-15 (NET)**

***So, the Samaritan woman said to him, “How can you – a Jew– ask me, a Samaritan woman, for waterto drink?” (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.)***

***Jesus answeredher, “If you had knownthe 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.” “Sir,”the woman said to him, “you have no bucket and the well is deep; where then do, you get thisliving water? Surely, you’re not greater than our ancestorJacob, are you? For he gave us this well and drank from it himself, along with his sons and his livestock.”* *Jesus replied,“Everyone who drinks some of this water will be thirsty again.  But whoever drinks some of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again,but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to drawwater.”***

Jesus and His disciples were traveling from Judea to Galilee, and by the time they reached Samaria they had already walked about 35 miles. Suffice it to say, they were hot, tired, thirsty and hungry. The disciples went to Samaria to buy food. But Jesus went to the well, not just to get water, but to give water. Speaking of water, here is a little trivia. Did you know that every drop of water on the earth has existed since creation? In fact, nearly three-fourths of the earth is made up of water. Similarly, up to 70 percent of the adult human body is made of water, and every single cell needs water to function. Without it, a person will perish in three to seven days. After experiencing heat exhaustion on my last three mission trips to Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Bolivia, I understand just how vital water is. Subsequently, knowing my propensity to get dehydrated, I keep a water bottle with me all the time, especially in these warmer climates. Simply put—water sustains life. Just as our bodies must have water to live physically, 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. And so, there, having crossed ethnic, social, religious and gender boundaries, was Jesus at the well, waiting on this woman. Hoping to avoid contact with the other women, she arrives 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, He knew a thing or two about how it felt to be despised and rejected (Luke 2:39; Isaiah 53:1-12). So, it was easy for Him to relate to her.

**1 Corinthians 1:27-29 (NET)**

***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 chosewhat 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, in addition to her jaded view of men in general, she must have been shocked when Jesus ask 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 who she was talking to. But Jesus knew her—He has always known her (Ephesians 1:1-6, 5:25-32). He knew her past, and, therefore, 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, prior to His passion, 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 naked on a cross, suffering the unimaginable horror of the undiluted wrath of God in our place. The cup represents the wrath of God. In this cup—please, don’t miss this point—were our sins. It was these sins that made Him ceremonially unclean, and that is why He cried out from the cross: “Father why have you forsaken me?” At that moment, our sins separated Jesus from the Father.

**John 19:34 (NET)**

***But one of the soldiers piercedhis side with a spear, and blood and waterflowed out immediately.***

**Digging Deeper:** Ephesians 3:16-19; Romans 5:6-17; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; Psalms 139:1-16; Zechariah 13:1

**Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places**

**John 4:16-18 (NET)**

***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: “Thou hast made us for thyself oh God and the hearts of men are restless until they find their rest in thee.” Inherent in all of us is a gnawing hunger and unquenchable thirst to be loved, and we haven’t a clue where to find it. 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 desperately desire. With a track record of five failed marriages, I can imagine that the woman at the well had given up on love altogether. No telling what lengths she had gone to trying to catch them and keep them. You know, there is something worse than being alone – it’s to be with someone who makes you feel all alone. Her beauty was probably long since faded by the time she met man number six; she was nothing more than a hollow shell.

**Jeremiah 17:13 (NET)**

***You are the one in whom Israel may find hope. All who leave you will suffer shame.***

***Those who turn away from youwill be consigned to the nether world.***

***For they have rejected you, the Lord, the fountain of life.***

Jesus was about to change everything in her life, but first He confronted her with her sin and idolatry. To properly access whether or not you might have idols in your life, ask yourself the following questions: Is there anything I love more, serve more, or trust more than God? If so, that thing or person is an idol and the thing about idols is that becomes the object of worship. Someone once said, “Our hearts are idol factories.” False worship, therefore, is a meaningless search to fill the God-shaped hole within us. Obviously, the woman in this account, in her quest for love, she made idols out of men and marriage. But people make lousy gods.

So, wasting no time, Jesus gets right to the heart of her problem. He tells her, “Go get your husband.” She responds, “I don’t have one.” Well, no she didn’t. He tells her that she has had five husbands and is now living with another man. By God’s standard, she was an adulteress with a capital A!

**Jeremiah 2:5, 13 (NET)**

***This is what the Lord says: “What fault could your ancestorshave possibly found in me***

***that they strayed so far from me?They paid allegiance toworthless idols, and so became worthless to me. “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 really don’t remember speaking that much about my business. But, I do remember what was on my heart, and that was making an appeal to Christian women to look for a man who truly loved Jesus. Because only a man in Christ could give her true love. This was personal to me because I was living this reality in my marriage at the time. My store manager, who desired to be married, and her single roommates were listening to the broadcast. I must have struck a nerve because she told me later that I made them cry.

In her book, Fiery Darts, Janet Warren Lane has two chapters devoted to this subject. Here is an excerpt:

We could do nothing better to prepare us to live life and love others, especially a future spouse successfully, by studying and applying the truths about love from the book written by the author of love! If we could get grounded in understanding true love because we have spent extended time in learning about true love from the source of true love, God, then we would enter relationships healthy, and complete individual. We would handle problems we encounter in those relationships from a healthier perspective. Having been taught to recognize genuine love we would avoid relationships that offered anything less.

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 (NET)**

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

**Digging Deeper:** Romans1:18-32, 2:4-5; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Luke 13:1-5; Acts 17:22-26; Mark 7:6-9; Matthew 7:13-23; John 6:63, 17:17; 1 John 1:1-3

**Reconciliation**

**John 4:21-30 (NET)**

***Jesus said to her, “Believe me, woman,a timeis coming when you will worshipthe Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.  You people worship what you do not know. We worship what we know, because salvation is from the Jews. But a timeis coming – and now is here – when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such people to behis 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.” Now at that very moment his disciples came back. They were shocked because he was speaking with a woman.***

***However, no one said, “What do you want?” or “Why are you speaking with her?”  Then the woman left her water jar, went off into the town and said to the people,“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Surely he can’t be the Messiah,can he?” So, they left the town and began comingto him.***

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 4:39-42 (NET)**

***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. They said to the woman, “No longer do we believe because of your words, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this onereally is the Savior of the world.”***

In conclusion, let’s make some personal applications. Who did Jesus plan to get when He got you? 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. Where are you in this story? Are you religious, but unsatisfied because you have no relationship with God?

Whatever you need, Jesus is. For He is the Great I Am. Come to Him and hear His voice saying, “I’ll be your Husband, your Everlasting Father, your Provider, the Health of your Countenance, your Comforter, Living Water, Bread of Life, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, The Narrow Road to life, The Way, The Truth and The Life.” If you will come to Him and drink, *“With joy you will draw waters from the wells of salvation*” (Isaiah 12:3). This is His invitation:

**John 7:37-38 (NET)**

***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 let the one who believes in me drink. Just as the scripture says, ‘From within himwill flow rivers of living water.’”***

**Digging Deeper**: Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-9, 43:6-12, 45:5-8 & 22-24, 49:6, 53:1-12, 54:4-10; Micah 5:2-5

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. Why is water so important to life? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Do wells spring up or flow down? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. The price of any item is set by one thing, do you know what it is? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Explain the analogy and significance of the cup that Jesus drank from.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. What is the difference in being religious and having a relationship with God? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. What does it mean to be a true worshiper? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. Read John 17:17-20. How can a person worship God in truth? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. 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. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
9. What “food” do you think was Jesus talking about in John 4:31-32? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
10. What do you think Jesus was pointing to when He said look at the fields, ripe for harvest? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Alabaster Box**

**Key Passages**

**Luke 7:41-48 (Net)**

***“A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed himfive 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.”  ThenJesussaid to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”***

* **Lesson**: This lesson is a contrast between those who are self-righteous, but lost, and those who are saved. Those who are clothed in Christ’s righteousness will live in gratitude and worship. These are evidence of grace. The recipients of grace wear the fragrance of Christ.
* **Key** **Passages**: Luke 7:36-50; Luke 5:20-25 & 31-32; Luke 13:1-5, 15; Luke 18:9-14
* **Writer:** Ginny Porter

**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, of all people, should have recognized who Jesus was. After all, they saw the Scriptures being fulfilled by Him with their own eyes. Yet, the sanctimonious Pharisees and lawyers spurned their Messiah (Luke1-34). Under the guise of curiosity, or hospitality, they wanted to hang around Jesus, not only to entrap Him, but ultimately, to kill Him. They hated Him that much. Self-righteous people still hate Him. By contrast, repentant sinners love Him. They are drawn to Jesus like a magnet. For they know that it’s His love, not condemnation, that led them to repentance (Romans 2:4). The problem for the teachers of the Law is that they did not think they needed to repent.

As we study this beautiful message of grace and forgiveness, we will analogize the distinctions between the self-righteous sinner and the forgiven sinner, between grace and the law, between repentance and empty religion. We will find that a heart filled with gratitude and worship is evidence that a person has been saved by God’s magnificent love.

**A Sinful Pharisee and A Sinful Woman**

**Luke 7:36-38 (NET)**

***Now one of the Phariseesasked Jesusto have dinner with him, sohe 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) diningat the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jarof perfumed oil. As she stood behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Shewiped them with her hair,kissed them, and anointedthem with the perfumed oil.***

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.That event took place just prior to Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection and the women 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 early in Jesus’ public ministry in the region of Galilee. Here Jesus was invited to the home of a Pharisee (a religious leader) whose name was Simon. While Pharisees were teachers of the Law, they also had the audacity to add 613 new laws to the Ten Commandments that God had given to Moses. By doing so, they subjugated God’s people to their extra rules and regulations—which, likely, they themselves had not kept. Even so, they were confident of their righteousness in God’s sight. Nothing could have been further from the truth. They chose to ignore the words of the prophet Isaiah who told us how God feels about self-righteousness.

**Isaiah 64:6 (NET)**

***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 this to Jesus who, not only kept all Ten Commandments, but summed them up in just two: love God and love people (Matthew 22:36-40). Loading the people down with 613 self-imposed rules was, in itself, a violation of the two commands of Jesus.

Although, some have speculated that the woman in Luke’s account was Mary Magdalene, it cannot be adequately substantiated. What we do know about the woman who entered Simon’s home was that she had the reputation of being a sinful woman—most likely a prostitute. There is little doubt that she had been used and abused by many men. If so, she had much in common with the empty woman who met Jesus at the well (John 4:1-20). In truth, having been born in sin and separated from the love of God, she had much in common with all of us (Ephesians 2:1-13).

For her to enter a Pharisee’s house was a scandalous act all by itself. And then she started to cry. I don’t know of a man who is comfortable in the presence of a woman who is crying. Then, by being close enough to wash His feet with her tears, she was infringing on Jesus’ personal space. She and Jesus were shattering who knows how many man-made rules. For sure, He was becoming unclean. But Jesus didn’t seem to mind at all.

Apparently, according to the customs of that time, virtuous women covered their hair in public (John 18:39; 1 Corinthians 8:7, 11:16). If this was the case, then 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. Curiously enough, these self-righteous men knew that she was a sinful woman. How did they know that? Perhaps they had been patrons of hers. Nevertheless, by Jesus’ standard, be it a physical act or lusting with their eyes, these men were adulterers at heart (Matthew 5:21-30, 7:1-5). And Jesus knew it.

He also knew this woman and stated plainly that she had committed many sins. Yet that was not what He saw when He looked at her. Sure, He knew what she was, and He also knew the deplorable treatment she had endured. Moreover, in three short years, 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.

Taking the posture of a servant, in total abandonment and worship, she took her expensive perfume and anointed the beautiful feet of Jesus, the feet that brought her the good news of salvation (Isaiah 52:7). Most likely the alabaster jar and the perfume were purchased with the wages earned from her sinful lifestyle. Her gift was very costly, perhaps one or more year’s wages. If possible, I encourage you to go to YouTube and hear this women’s story in song. It is titled Alabaster Box by CeCe Winans.

**Digging Deeper**: Luke 5:20-25 & 31-32; Luke 13:1-5, 15; Acts 17:21; Acts 20:21; Romans 2:4-5; 2 Corinthians 7:9-10

**A Parable of a Debtor**

**Luke 7:39-50 (Net)**

***Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this,he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet,he would know who and what kind of womanthis is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.” SoJesus 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 canceledthe 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.”  ThenJesussaid to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”***

***The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”***

Obviously, the woman was the only person who knew God was in the house. But Simon and the other sinners thought his guest was just a man, at best a teacher. And furthermore, by Simon’s estimation, Jesus was not much of a prophet either. Reading every heart in the room like a book, Jesus knew full-well who believed in Him and who did not. To the self-righteous Simon, perishing in his sin of unbelief, the fragrance of the woman’s worshiping was a stench to Simon’s nostrils (2 Corinthians 2:14-17). The Pharisee and his other guests remained blind to their own sins. But that is not all they were blind to. Blinded by their religious pride, they were unable to see that God incarnate was in their presence. The One being worshiped by this woman was none other than the long-awaited Messiah.

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. It does not matter 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, but, it requires humility to recognize that fact and to admit it. 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.”

There at the feet of the Lord Jesus, was a once powerless, ungodly woman who had been radically changed. She unashamedly displayed the divine influence of grace upon her heart for all to see. She had been forgiven much, therefore, she loved Him much. But don’t misunderstand, she was not forgiven because she loved Jesus. Rather, she loved Jesus because she was forgiven; she loved Him because He first loved her. A sinful woman became the bride of Christ. That is why she worshiped Him, and that is the ultimate goal of salvation.

**Philippians 2:6-11 (NET)**

***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!***

***As a result, God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,***

***so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow – in heaven and on earth and under the earth – and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.***

**Digging Deeper:** 1 John 4:4-21; John 2:24-25, 4:17-24, 8:23-28; Hebrews 4:12-13; Psalms 139:1-16; Matthew 1:21-23; Isaiah 52:1-53, 54:4-8, 61:1-5, 64:6; Romans 3:9-26, 6:17-23;

1 Peter 1:18-21, 2:9-25; Hosea 2:1-3:3

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. Read 1 Corinthians 8:3; John 13:1-17, 14:12-15. How does God know who loves Him?

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1. Is your life marked by gratitude or grumbling? Gratitude is evidence of what? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Read James 4:6-7; 1 Peter 5:5; Proverbs 3:34; 29:23 and write down how God feels about the proud? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Can a proud person be saved? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Can a person be saved and not forgiven? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Where on earth does God live? (Isaiah 66:1-2) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Read the following verses and make a list of everything these passages say about the ones who have believed on Christ. (1 Peter 2:1-10) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Perishing in The Pew**

**Key Passages**

**Matthew 7:13-27 (NET)**

***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.***

***“Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves. You will recognize them by their fruit. Grapes are not gatheredfrom 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. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven – only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast***

***out demons and do many powerful deeds? Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!’Everyonewho hears these words of mine and does them is likea wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, but it did not collapse because it had been founded on rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, and it collapsed; it was utterly destroyed!***

* **Lesson**: People can be members of a church and yet remain lost. Their names might be on the church roll, but not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.
* **Key Passages:** Matthew 7:13-29; Revelation 3:17-20
* **Writer:** Ginny Porter

**Introduction**

Most of us just assume that people who attend a church are saved. But is that really the correct criteria to assess ones’ salvation? As a lost person, I thought it was. There are churches of all denominations that are full of misguided people who are trusting in church affiliations, reformations, confirmation, dedications and family relations as their ticket to heaven. But tragically, some who think they are going to heaven when they die are in for a rude awakening.

As I tell Yuki, my sister in Christ from China, just because we eat at her family’s Chinese restaurant, it doesn’t make us Chinese. Likewise, going to a church building and having your name on the roll, does not mean that you’re a Christian. Bottom line is: church attendance does not equal salvation.

My husband, my father and I were all church members, yet we were lost and empty until the Lord quickened our dead spirits. In fact, because of Biblical ignorance, it took me sixteen years to discover that my moment of rebirth took place when I was twenty-six years old and not when I was baptized at twelve. No one ever challenged me to evaluate my spiritual condition. Like so many people, because I had this experience as a child, I was confused about what happened when I was twelve. I’m not dogmatic about this, but I liken that event to a *conception* of my faith. I guess you could say, I was in the womb of God for about fourteen years before I was born spiritually. At any rate, God doesn’t have grandchildren—He only has children who are birthed into His family by the Holy Spirit.

**2 Peter 1:10 (NET)**

***Therefore, brothers and sisters,***[*37*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Peter+1) ***make every effort to be sure of your calling and election.***[*38*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Peter+1)***For by doing this***[*39*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Peter+1) ***you will never***[*40*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Peter+1) ***stumble into sin.***

**A Road That Makes All the Difference**

I had been saved for a few years when I wrote my first Bible study. Based on Matthew 7:13-27 (printed above). I titled it A Road Less Traveled. The title was borrowed from Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken.” This poem was the one I selected for the senior quote in my high school yearbook. Although, at the time of my graduation, the poem had an entirely different meaning for me. The reality was, I was traveling my own path of destruction and going my own way on the wide road. But, it certainly was not the road less traveled.

**Isaiah 53:6 (NET)**

***All of us had wandered off like sheep; each of us had strayed off on his own path, but the***

***Lord caused the sin of all of us to attack him.***

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.

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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.” A fitting title.

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 which 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.

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’s painting was never completed. He stopped short of painting the people on the wide 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 are naked, but they don’t know it because the reflection in the gates of hell shows them wearing their Sunday best. But like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, they are naked. They are not dressed in the blood of Christ and His righteousness.

Suppose, if you will, an artist is 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 looks into 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. This is the exact condition of the Church of Laodicea in Revelation 3.

The longer I live, the more I realize the Bible is true—every single word of it. We reap what we sow, we reap later than we sow and we reap much more than we sow. The devil never gives you a true picture of what is at the end of his road. Unless the Lord intervenes with a divine road-block, we will stay on the wide road, separated from God, in the domain of the one who comes to steal, kill and destroy. This road abruptly ends, and then we will live our worst nightmares for all eternity.

Now, back to Art’s story. Recounting the day of his salvation, He 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, 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?” Well, now the answers are clear—he was blind, but God opened his eyes. Until God leads us to the cross, and we see the Lord Jesus dying in our place, we are blind to the fact that we are lost. Furthermore, this revelation is a work of God and a gift of amazing grace (Ezekiel 36:22-29).

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Isaiah 42:7, 59:1-5, 61:1-3; Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 4:18-19, 6:43-47, 8:21; Acts 4:10-12; 5:31; 20:20-21; John 3:1-18, 14:1-6; Titus 2:11-14, 3:3-7; Ephesians 2:11-14; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2; James 2:19; Romans 1:21; Revelation 2:1-22

**The Wide and Narrow Roads**

True 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.”* How few? Well, if you take the parable of the Sower and Jesus words to the seven churches in Revelation, out of 100 people who hear the Word of God, only 25 are saved. 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. Can you imagine thinking you are on the road that leads to life until the day you meet your Maker, the Lord Jesus, and hear him say, “…I never knew you”.

So how is this possible? First of all, the road that leads to life is narrow, difficult and lonely. There is a cost to follow Jesus. It requires death -- death to sin, self-rule and love for the world. The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood exactly what Jesus meant. He said, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.” Bonhoeffer was executed for his faith. As someone has fitly put it, “The “tongue” in his shoes, matched up with the “tongue” in his mouth.” And secondly, as Jesus warned us, there will be many false teachers who preach false gospels, thus insuring that those on death road remain there. The definition of the Greek word Christian is follower of Christ. Indeed, the road is *narrow* and *few* follow Him because the cost is too high and so they choose comfort instead of a cross (Galatians 2:20). One of many paradoxical truths in the Bible is this: if we desire to live we must die. This is the cost of discipleship.

But it is also true that for the lost person, here and now *is* their best life. For them, living in this sin cursed world is truly all the heaven they will ever experience. But just like the rich man who was on that wide road, all his riches could not buy him a ticket out of hell (Luke 16:19-31). By the way, this was not a parable, but a true glimpse of reality.

You see, Satan gives the best at first and saves the worst for last. He says “Do what makes you happy. Enjoy yourself!” For example, one moment of indulging in adultery or fornication is pleasurable for a season. But that is as good as it’s going to get. The consequences that will inevitably follow such sins are anything but momentary. They can lead to sexually transmitted diseases, babies conceived only to be aborted or raised by a single mother, broken marriages. Not to mention the years of shame and regret. Perhaps for you this is not theory but your reality. If so, then please know that in Christ you can have a new reality, on the narrow road that leads to life.

**Ephesians 5:3-9 (NET)**

***Butamong you there must not be either sexual immorality, impurity of any kind,or greed, as these are not fitting for the saints. Neither should there be vulgar speech, foolish talk, or coarse jesting – all of which are out of character – but rather thanksgiving. For you can be confident of this one thing: that no person who is immoral, impure, or greedy (such a person is an idolater) has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.***

***Let nobody deceive you with empty words, for because of these things God’s wrath comes on the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them, for you were at one time darkness, but now you arelight in the Lord. Walk as children of the light – for the fruit of the light consists inall goodness, righteousness, and truth.***

**Digging Deeper**: Matthew 13:36-42; Luke 9:22-26, 14:25-33, 16:13; John 15:18-25, 16:1-4, 33; Acts 8:9-23; Isaiah 35:5-10

**Jesus is Not in The Building**

**Revelation 3:14-20 (NET)**

***“Tothe angel of the church in Laodicea write the following:***

***“This is the solemn pronouncement ofthe 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 goingto vomit you out of my mouth!  Because you say, “I am rich and have acquired great wealth,and need nothing,” butdo 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 mewhite clothing so you can be clothed and your shameful nakedness will not be exposed, and buy eye salveto put on your eyes so you can see!  All those I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent!  Listen! I am standing at the door and knocking! If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into his home and share a meal with him, and he with me.***

Religious people can be lost in houses of worship because they are blinded to the fact they are sinners. In John MacArthur’s commentary on Revelation 3:16-20, he states: “In the Church of Laodicea, there was not one single true believer.” Jesus did not attend the church of Laodicea -- He was outside. For Christ to be in a church building, He must come in with His people. Saved people are the Church, not buildings! If you pay close attention to Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:13-27; Matthew 13:1-30, and his letters to the seven churches in Revelation, you will see how *few* are on the narrow road that leads to life. Many people who think they are saved are lost and spiritually bankrupt. This is a vivid description of Art and me before the Lord opened our eyes to see who we were and where we were spiritually.

**2 Corinthians 4:3-6 (NET)**

***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 gospelof Christ,who is the image of God.  For we do not proclaim ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said “Let light shine out of darkness,”is the one who shined in our hearts to give us the light of the glorious knowledge of God in the face of Christ.***

**Digging Deeper:** Revelation 3:16-20; Matthew 3:13-27; Matthew 13:1-30; Luke 5:18-32, 7:36-50; John 8:1-11

**The Cure – Repentance**

**Luke 15:3-10 (NET)**

***SoJesus told themthis parable:“Which one of you, if he has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, would not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go look forthe one that is lost until he finds it? Then******when he has found it, he places it on his shoulders, rejoicing. Returning home, he calls togetherhis friends and neighbors, telling them, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost.’  I tell you, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinnerwho repents than over ninety-nine righteous peoplewho have no need to repent.“Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one of them,does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search thoroughly until she finds it?  Thenwhen she has found it, she calls together herfriends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoicewith me, for I have found the cointhat I had lost.’  In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of God’s angelsover one sinner who repents.”***

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 in your sin and separated from the God who loves you. Thankfully, the Lord is not willing to leave you there. In Luke chapter fifteen, we find the Parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin and Lost Son. 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 perfect analogy to describe those who are lost in the House of God. Jesus came to seek and to save His lost sheep. And the Word of God represents the lamp.

Jesus stands as the Gate that leads to the narrow path of life. Through His Word, the lamp shine like a warning signal across the path of those who are on Death Road. Look closely at the parables. What is it 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 of your sins and put your faith in the One on whom God the Father put your sins. He knocks on the door of your heart. He desires to come into you to reign and rule as you King. When He does, He’ll write your name on the only roll that ultimately matters…the Lamb’s Book of Life.

**Digging Deeper:** John 1:11-14; 3:1-18;Acts 20:20-21;2 Peter 3:9; Luke 13:1-5, 24:47; 1Timothy 2:3-4; 2Timothy 2:19; Titus 1:6, 2:11-14; Revelation 13:8

**Revelation 21:22-27 (NET)**

***Now I saw no temple in the city, because the Lord God – the All-Powerful – and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because the glory of God lights it up, and its lamp is the Lamb.  The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their grandeurinto it. Its gates will never be closed during the day(andthere will be no night there). They will bring the grandeur and the wealthof the nationsinto it, butnothing ritually uncleanwill ever enter into it, nor anyone who does what is detestableor practices falsehood,but only those whose namesare written in 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 to Christ. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What will be at the end of the road for those who remain spiritually blind? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. From all that you have learned from this lesson, make a list of reasons why someone can be in church and yet remain lost. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Take a survey of other believers and ask them about their testimony and make a note of how many had spiritual experience, but later in life had a true conversion. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. What are some things that religious people put their faith in besides Christ? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Signs of Life**

**Key Passages**

**1 John 5:10-15 (NET)**

***(The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has testified concerning his Son.) And this is the testimony: Godhas given us eternal life,and this life is in his Son. The one who has the Sonhas this eternal life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have thiseternallife.***

***I have written these thingsto you who believein the name of the Son of God so thatyou may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have before him: thatwheneverwe 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.***

* **Lesson**: This lesson is a spiritual examination from the book of 1 John that will allow us to see if there is ample evidence of salvation. Unless you see the Biblical signs of life, then you cannot know that you are saved.
* **Key** **Passages**: 1 John 2:1-17, 3:14-22, 5:5-15
* **Writer:** Ginny Porter

**Introduction**

Have you ever experienced some symptoms that indicated that you may have a serious illness? Then you know that the only way to alleviate 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. In this lesson, we’ll be checking our “spiritual pulse” so to speak. Perhaps the best way to keep you honest as you examine your life, is to ask someone who knows you best to take this with you. This will require transparency and humility. Take it from wise King Solomon, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Proverbs 27:6 KJV). In other words, a real friend will tell you the truth.

**2 Corinthians 13:5-6 (NET)**

***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!***[*6*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+13) ***And I hope that you will realize that we have not failed the test!***

The carnality (or lack of fruit) in the lives of saints who lived in Corinth, evidently, cast some doubt in Paul’s mind about the validity of their confession of faith. Some things in their lives were apparently out of sync with the truth that Paul and others had taught them. So, as we see in the passage above, Paul admonishes them to test themselves. No matter where you are on your faith journey, spiritual checkups are not only Biblical, but they’re beneficial.

So, 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 a little edgy, please don’t close the book yet! Ignorance or denial come 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 circumstance surrounding the day of your second birthday is witness number one. Or you might call this a personal salvation experience. If, however, you’re like me, you may not have an actual date recorded. But that’s inconsequential because the next two witnesses are more reliable than that one 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. Moreover, 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 light of God’s Word—witness number two. Unlike a circus mirror that distorts things, the Bible is the only true mirror and judge of our hearts. His mirror will show us our true condition. By the way, the litmus test for salvation is the entire book of 1 John.

Finally, witness number three is a changed life. Yet this is not of your own doing. When you are born again by the Holy Spirit, He produces His fruit in you thus proving that you are no longer dead in sins, but alive in Christ.

**Do You Desire the Hearing of God’s Word?**

It doesn’t matter how long a person is saved, you never tire of hearing that Jesus loves you. As John put it in 1 John 4:16, we know and *rely on the love of God*. In the words of the familiar children’s song, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” When I need to hear from God, I go to the Bible, and He assures me that He loves me—no matter what.

There are two internet connections between the Lord and His bride. One is the Bible and the other is prayer. For the believer, these are not obligatory requirements; this is a 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.

**John 10:27-28 (NET)**

***My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give***[*67*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/John+10) ***them eternal life, and they will never perish;***[*68*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/John+10) ***no one will snatch***[*69*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/John+10) ***them from my hand.***

Now, on the other hand, spiritually dead people don’t have an appetite for spiritual things such as God’s Word. For further evidence, let’s look at the words hear, follow and obey. In Greek, they are as follows: hear—akouo, follow—Akolotho and obey Hupakouo. Clearly, they are 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.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Hebrews 4:12-14; 1 Peter 1:22-23; Matthew 4:4; 1 Peter 2:2; John 5:24-25, 6:63-68; 8:43-47; &51-53; 10:27;12:46-48; 15:7-8; 2 John 1:9

**Do You Obey God’s Word?**

Did you know that Jesus is referred to as Savior 24 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, thereby accepting Christ’s rule in every aspect of our lives. Jesus succinctly explained it this way: He said, “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). We touched on this in another lesson, but all of us live by a world view whereby we act on a set of beliefs. Therefore, if the Bible does not inform my world view and translate into my practical everyday life, then can I legitimately claim that Christ is the Lord of my life?

You see, at the very core of rebellion is a heart that declares, “No one is going to boss me around—not even God!” It’s like a person in a small dingy about to be crushed by a battleship yelling those famous last words to the captain of the large vessel, “No! You get out of *my* way!” The fool says in his heart, “There is no God—I’ll do what I please!” As C.S. Lewis so eloquently put it, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in hell chose it (2009).”

When we first come to faith in Christ, though, obedience may be more of a struggle than we anticipated, yet as we come to know and trust Him better, His love begins to disarm us. We understand that He truly desires what is best for us.

In short, Lordship of Christ is no more and no less than the unpretentious words spoken by Mary, the mother of Jesus, at a wedding in Cana. She said: “Whatever He says to you, do it” (John 2:1-8). Plainly put, at least on some level, obedience (not sinless perfection) will accompany true saving faith, and a heart that is yielded towards God is evidence of salvation.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Romans1:5-6, 8:7, 16:26-27; Hebrews 5:9; John 3:36, 14:15-26, 15:9-14, 16:8; 1 John 2:3-6, 3:22-23, 5:2-3; 1 John 3:1-11

**1 John 2:3-4 (NET)**

***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***.

**Love, the Birthmark of God’s Children**

**Ephesians 6:12 (NET)**

***Peace to the brothers and sisters,******and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.******Grace be******with all of those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.***

Mark this down and never forget it…love for God and love for others are the acid test of salvation. They are the tangible pieces of evidence and birthmarks of every child of God. Whereas, an absence of love, clearly indicates there is no relationship with God—who is Love!

May I give a brief personal testimony? The most obvious proof that the Lord had truly saved my husband was love. Just recently, I had one of those days when the enemy of my soul reminded me of one of the most hurtful rock-bottom times in my marriage. This situation afforded the devil the opportunity to hurl these memories right in my face making me relive them all over again. This bothered me for a few days. Then, my daily Bible verse from Faith Radio came in my email. It didn’t dawn on me until later that day what the Lord was trying to tell me. Like I said previously, the Lord knows me. He really does feel my pain and carries my heartaches. After all, He lives in me, and I live in Him!

Anyway, to make a long story short, the verse in my inbox was 2 Corinthians 5:17. *So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away*[*32*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) *– look, what is new*[*33*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) *has come.*[*34*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5)Later that day, Art and I found ourselves in a situation much like the one I just mentioned. That is when I knew why the Lord sent me that particular verse. He knew I needed to be reminded that He had truly changed my man. God replaced a calloused, stone-cold heart with His heart full of love, compassion and tenderness. That’s what He does when He saves us. In that still small voice, the Lord Jesus said to me, “Ginny… behold My new creation, the old Art is gone and the new Art replaced him.” Moments like this don’t happen every day, but when they do, I can’t help but fall deeper in love with Jesus. Could you blame me?

I hope you will stop and take your time to look up each of these passages and do some soul searching. Then ask yourself, “Do I really love God? Do I love others?”

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

**1 John 3:14 & 18-22 (NET)**

***We know that***[*47*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***we have crossed over***[*48*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***from death to life***[*49*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***because***[*50*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***we love our fellow Christians.***[*51*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***The one who does not love remains in death. Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue but in deed and truth.***[*64*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***And by this***[*65*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***we will know that we are of the truth and will convince***[*66*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***our conscience***[*67*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***in his presence,***[*68*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***that***[*69*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***if our conscience condemns***[*70*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***us, that***[*71*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***God is greater than our conscience and knows all things. Dear friends, if our conscience does not condemn us, we have confidence in the presence of God, and***[*72*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***whatever we ask we receive from him, because***[*73*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing to him.***

**Can God Get a Witness Out of You?**

**Acts 1:8 (NET)**

***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.”***

When we are saved, we’ve been called out of the darkness of sin and death (Colossians 1:13-14). You were saved for a purpose. In Acts 1:8, Jesus did not say some of you might become My witnesses. No, He said, when, the Spirit comes, you *will be My witnesses*. Implying that everyone who has the Holy Spirit will bear witness to Him. “The Gospel came to you because it was heading to someone else.” – Robby Gallaty on Twitter

Jesus said, “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-16). We live amidst multitudes who are dead, blind, enslaved and hopeless—just as we were. We were beggars who found a feast. God’s love in Greek is agape, and it is defined as a love feast or feast of charity. We are living among love-starved people. Once you have tasted God’s love feast, how can you hoard it? As C.H. Spurgeon said, *“Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you are not saved yourself. Be sure of that”* (1888).

**DIGGING DEEPER:** John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:9-18; 2 Corinthians 5:11-20; Isaiah 43:8-12

**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. And, consequently, when the Holy Spirit is subjected to sin, He becomes uncomfortable, and so does the Child He lives in.

Nevertheless, quite often believers will go through times when they feel that God is distant. I know I have. Usually, this is because I am struggling with sin in some area of my life. However, one indicator that a person is saved *from* their sins is that they have the desire to fight *against* sins that once enslaved them. Because 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)?

**John16:8 (NET)**

***And when he***[*16*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/John+16) ***comes, he will prove the world wrong***[*17*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/John+16) ***concerning sin and***[*18*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/John+16) ***righteousness and***[*19*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/John+16) ***judgment –.***

**God Disciplines His Own**

**Psalm 89:30-33 (NET)**

***If his sons reject my law and disobey my regulations, if they break***[***52***](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Psalms+89) ***my rules and do not keep my commandments, I will punish their rebellion by beating them with a club,***[***53***](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Psalms+89)

***their sin by inflicting them with bruises.*** [***54***](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Psalms+89)***But I will not remove***[***55***](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Psalms+89) ***my loyal love from him,***

***nor be unfaithful to my promise.***

The translation from the Net Bible in the above passage is not quite my favorite. But I add it to make a point. Not to put word’s in, nor take them out of God’s mouth, but I think we can safely say that this passage is not to be taken literally.

**Hebrew 12:6 (NET)**

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

Hebrews 12 clearly states that those who God loves, He disciplines. God does not “club” His children, or beat them black and blue, does He? Absolutely not! Then why did I include such a strange passage, you ask? Just to say this: 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. We are His. If you’re a parent, you know instinctively, what I mean.

For example, for the most part, my sons have made their momma proud. But there have been some occasions when I received that dreaded, humiliating phone call from the school where I was informed that the child I had given birth to had done something less than stellar. Sure, I was mad as a hornet, but not even for a millisecond did I stop loving them. We are made in God’s image, and when we have been placed in Christ, it’s a done deal; we are His for eternity. However, 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. And if He must to spank us all the way home to heaven (or take us home prematurely) that’s just what He will do.

The above passage is rendered in such a way, that it sounds like God will beat His children half to death to punish us. Other translations of this passage chose words that suggests He is speaking here of the Messiah (the Hebrew word for Christ). Yes, God has punished our sins when Jesus took our beating. He was crushed, wounded and beat black and blue. Then He said, “It is finished” (John 19:1-31). For this reason, God the Father will discipline us, but He will never take His love away from us because we are in His Beloved Son.

And so, if you are not corrected by God when you sin, this could be an indicator that you are not His. In speaking of the perfection of God’s Son Jesus, C.H. Spurgeon said, “*God had One Son without sin, but not a single child without the rod”* (1868).

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Isaiah 53:1-12; John 18:19-40, 19:11-30; Hebrews 12:5-11; Job 5:17-18; Proverbs 3:11-12; Revelation 3:19; Psalm 118:18; 2 Samuel 7:14-15

**When You Pray, Do You Get Any Response?**

**1 John 5:13-15 (NET)**

***I have written these things***[*32*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5)***to you who believe***[*33*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***in the name of the Son of God so that***[*34*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have before him: that***[*35*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***whenever***[*36*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know***[*37*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***that he hears us in regard to whatever we ask, then we know that we have the requests that we have asked from him.***

As we wrap up this lesson, let’s consider one final evidence of salvation—answered prayer. AccordingtoIsaiah59andotherpassages**,** 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 throughout 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 is one way we know He hears us and we are His.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Isaiah 59:1-3; Ephesians 3:12; John 14:11-17, 15:7-8, 16; Matthew 7:7-12; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Titus 3:3-11; 1 John 1:5-6; 10; 2:3-11; 29, 3:6-1; 13-24

**2 Peter 1:10 (NET)**

**Therefore, brothers and sisters, make every effort to be sure of your calling and election. For by doing this you will never stumble into sin. For thus an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be richly provided for you.**

**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? If so, then do you recognize why this could be? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Can you identify a moment when you began to care about other people’s souls? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. When was the last time you shared your testimony? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Can you describe a time in your life that God revealed specific sins that were unconfessed? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. List some recent answers to specific prayers. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. 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: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. 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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. If you were put on trial for being a Christian, do you think that there would be enough evidence to convict you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you struggle to surrender to the will of God when it costs you: time, money, relationships, reputation or convenience? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Phase #2**

**1 Peter 2:2-3 (NET)**

***Andyearn like newborn infants for pure, spiritual milk,so that by it you may grow up to salvation,if you have experiencedthe Lord’s kindness.***

***So as you come to him,a living stone rejected by men butchosen and pricelessin God’s sight, you yourselves, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood and to offerspiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***

**Main Goals:**

* Establishing new believers in the fundamentals of the faith.
* Help believers understand what it truly means to be a Christian.
* Help them find their new identity in Christ.

**Additional Information:**

 After you have completed the survey and at least some of the Gospel lessons, then start on phase number 2. This set of lessons are intended for those who have professed faith in Christ.  When a person receives the Gospel, then the work of disciple-making is just beginning.

## New Identity

### **Key Passages**

**Ephesians 1:1-5 (NET)**

***From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints [in Ephesus],the faithfulin Christ Jesus. Grace and peace to youfrom God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Blessed isthe God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessedus with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ.  For he chose us in Christbefore the foundation of the world that we may be holy and unblemishedin his sight in love. He did this by predestiningus to adoption as his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the pleasure of his will.***

* **Lesson:**  This lesson is intended to help believers learn their identity in Christ.
* **Key Passages**: Ephesians 1:1-5
* **Definitions:** from Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.
* **Writer:** Ginny Porter

**Introduction**

It’s alarming to think of all the evil inventions that are conceived in the hearts of man. But this is nothing new. Two-thousand years ago the Holy Spirit warned us through Paul’s letter to the Romans of just such a time as this.

**Romans 1:28-31 (NET)**

***And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God,God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what should not be done. They are filled with every kind of unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, malice. They are rife with envy, murder, strife, deceit, hostility. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, contrivers of all sorts of evil, disobedient to parents, senseless, covenant-breakers,heartless, ruthless. Although they fully know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but also approve of those who practice them.***

Thanks to the internet, there is a plethora of new criminal enterprises, not the least of which is identity theft. Have you been one of the unfortunate victims of this crime? If so, then you know that it robs you of security and leaves you feeling vulnerable, fearful and distrusting. This lesson is about another kind of travesty: when believers are robbed of their spiritual identity. Perhaps you have never been discipled, and you are not even aware of your identity in Christ. In this case, ignorance of who you are spiritually is not bliss - it’s emotional bondage. Its high time to take back what sin and the devil have taken from us and whole heartedly embrace the Truth, and when we do, the Truth will set us free.

### **Saints in Christ**

**Colossians 1:21-22 (NET)**

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

As was his custom, Paul 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? To get to the bottom of these important questions is to discover one spiritual blessing after another. The first blessing I would like for us to contemplate is this: although we were born sinners, if we’re in Christ, we are saints. And when we become saints, we are holy. If you fall into the following category, though, you may find the truths we will uncover intensely evocative and deeply personal.

In Ephesians 4:12, the word translated 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. Since so many of us have been affected by the subject matter we are about to address, only magnifies the immense need for this Truth. Because at the very core of disciple making, is learning how to apply the gospel message to the wounded soul. That’s exactly what this lesson is intended to do.

In over twenty years of experience in women’s ministry, nearly half of the women I meet in the Church have had their innocence robbed of them 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 prison, and in other countries, (especially third-world countries) the statistics are even higher. A staggering 85 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 1 in 6 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.

**Digging Deeper**: Matthew 5:22-28; Mark 7:21; Jeremiah 23:10-37; Revelation 2:18-29; 2

Peter 2:10-15; Galatians 5:19; 1 Corinthians 6:1-10; Hebrew 13:4

I recently sat next to a brother in Christ on a plane, and as we discussed this heinous problem, he wrote down his personal testimony. I sat in shock reading his painful life story. In chronological order, he listed one horror after another - the kind of things that no child should ever have to endure. As I realized the shame and pain he had suffered, the tears began to flow, and I was unable to speak for fear that my tears would become open sobs. Tragically, his story is not the exception… it has become the rule in a world spiraling toward hell.

The fastest growing global criminal enterprise today is not the buying and 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 21 to 27 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, as well as binding up the physical, emotional and physiological wounds of these victims. The Christian origination 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… believing 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 about how He feels about the perpetrators of this heinous treatment of women and children; the following passage should bring clarification.

**Matthew 18:5-14 (NET)**

***And whoever welcomesa 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. Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Itis necessary that stumbling blocks come, but woe to the person through whom they come.  If your hand or your foot causes you to sin,cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.  And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye than to havetwo eyes and be thrown into fiery hell.***

***“See that you do not disdain one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.***

***What do you think? If someoneowns a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go look for the one that went astray? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth,he will rejoice more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray.  In the same way, your Father in heaven is not willing that one of these little ones be lost.***

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, in Christ healing is possible.

* If you have personally suffered this way, have you believed the lie that you are somehow blemished for life or that you were “damaged goods?” \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Have you ever confided in a trusted friend about why you feel this way? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* If you are in Christ, these words apply to you. (Romans 8:1; John 3:16-18) Fill in the blank: “There is now no condemnation for those who are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”
* Do you think that opening up and sharing your story might bring cathartic relief and help others find healing in Christ? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

After living through the atrocities of war and concentration camps, Cory Ten Boom surely knew depression and despair, and yet she survived it all with her faith intact. This is one of her quotes: “There is no pit so deep, that God’s love is not deeper still.” If you, or someone close to you, has suffered these unspeakable traumas, then take heart. The love of God is deeper still, and the Great Physician still makes house calls!

**Luke 4:16-21 (NET)**

***NowJesuscame to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom.Hestood up to read,and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. Heunrolledthe scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointedme to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent meto proclaim release to the captives***

***and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the yearof 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.”***

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Psalms 72:1-12, 107:8-21; Jeremiah 8:20-22; Proverbs 4:20-23; Hebrews

4:12-13

Isn’t it time to take back what’s been robbed from us and discover our true identity? Those who are in Christ, are clean, pure, blameless and holy. Yes, you heard that correctly*. If you are a saint, then you are holy!* As you look at the following word search from Strong’s Concordance, you will see that the words holy and saint mean the same thing. In fact, they are translated from the exact same Greek word - Hagios.

**Zechariah 3:1-5 (NET)**

***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. Next you will find a list of Greek words and their definitions. Take a moment and look up some of the passages to see how they were used.

###### **WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* **Saint/Holy**: Strong’s #40 – Greek: Hagios -*most holy one, saint. Sacred, pure, morally blameless, consecrated.* See: Ephesians 1:1, 4, 13, 15, 18, 19, 2:19, 21; 4:12, 30; Romans 1:6-7
* **Sanctified**: Strong’s # 37-John 17:17,19; Ephesians 5:2; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 6:11; 1 Timothy 4:5; 1 Thessalonian 5:3
* **Pure:** Strong’s #53 – Hagnos from holy /saint*, clean, innocent, modest, perfect, chaste, clean, pure.*1 John 3:3; 1 Peter 2:9
* **Pure**: Strong’s #2513 Katharos*, clean clear, pure*. Hebrews 10:22
* **Cleansed**: Strong’s #2511/2513- Karharizo: *to cleanse, make clean, purge, purify, pure.* John 13:10-11
* **Blameless**: Strong’s # 298 Amometos–*unblamable.* 2 Peter 3:14
* **Blameless**: Strong’s # 410-*unaccused, irreproachable blameless*. 1 Corinthians 1:8,
* **Blameless**: Strong’s #274- Amemptos- *faultless, blameless, un-blamable*. 1 Thessalonians 5:23

**Psalms 103:1-5 (NET)**

***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 deliversyour 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.***

I don’t know about you, but given the sins of my past, it’s quite difficult to see myself as blameless, and yet that is what the Bible calls me. Although, at one time we were “guilty as sin,” but now we are clean and blameless in His sight. Do you think of yourself that way? My guess is not, because there is someone who loves to bring up our past to taunt us. Also called “the accuser of the brethren,” Satan loves to reminds us of our shameful past.

**Acts 10:15b (NET)**

***What God has made clean, you must not consider ritually unclean.***

Before conversion, Saul was the same man who had held the cloaks for the men who stoned saint Steven to death. And this was in addition to all the other Christians who he hunted down, persecuted and had killed! Just consider how Paul must have felt as the Holy Spirit inspired him to write these words, in light of the facts of his past. 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? Thankfully, precious few of the saints have the kind of painful past to deal with that Paul did. Nonetheless, our shameful past can haunt us just the same. Regardless of how dirty we may feel, that is not how God sees us. When God looks at us, He sees us in Jesus – the sinless One.

**Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NET)**

***I will sprinkle you with pure water and you will be clean from all your impurities. I will purify you from all your idols.  I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you; I will take the initiative and you will obey my statutes and carefully observe my regulations.***

**DIGGING DEEPER:** 1 Peter 1:14-17; 1 John 1:7; 2 Peter 3:14; 1 Corinthians 3:17; 6:9-20; 7:1215; Ephesians 5:25-27; Col. 1:19-22; Titus 2:11-15; 3:3-7

**1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NET)**

***Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive,and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Some of you once lived this way. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christand by the Spirit of our God.***

Spiritual songs are scriptures put to melody, such as a song by Kari Jobe titled “My Beloved.” It is based upon the words king Solomon wrote about his bride. If you are in Christ, then you are His bride. The following passage from Song of Solomon reminds us of how the Lord views us…. We are clean, spotless, pure and holy.

**Song of Songs 4:7 (NET)**

***You are altogether beautiful, my darling! There is no blemish in you!***

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. Would you describe yourself as a sinner or a saint? Explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Have you experienced the trauma of abuse? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. If so, have you struggled with any addictions that could have resulted from past wounds? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. If so, have you sought help through counseling? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Has God revealed to you any areas in your life that need further healing or deliverance? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you think some of our insecurities come from an unhealthy fear that God will treat us as our sins deserve, or perhaps that God cannot truly love us because of what we have done? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you feel like you must pay penitence for your past sin to earn God’s love? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. Read: Psalms 103:1-14. In verse 4, the Psalmist describes deliverance from the pit. Can you describe a “pit” that he Lord has delivered from? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Redeemed by Love

### **Key Passage**

**Ephesians 1:7 (NET)**

***In him we have redemption through his blood,the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.***

* **Lesson:** In this lesson, we will discover what it means to be redeemed**.**
* **Key Passages**: Ephesians 1:7
* **Writer:** Ginny Porter

### **Introduction**

Chances are, the word redemption is not a word you are familiar with. For those of us who live in suburban America, the only time we are likely to use that word is when we “redeem a coupon.” In case you don’t know what that means, it’s a piece of paper that is used to get a discounted price on an item. However, for the saints at Ephesus, the word redemption had great significance. The following commentary on Ephesians 1:7 from the (N.I.V.) Study Bible, sheds light on the customs in Ephesus (1 Timothy 6).

*Ephesians were familiar with the Greco-Roman practice of redemption: Slaves were freed by the payment of a ransom. Similarly, the ransom necessary to free sinners from the bondage of sin and the resulting curse imposed by the law was the death of Christ (called here “his blood”).*

One of the best novels I have ever read that paints a portrait of redemption is *Redeeming Love* by Francine Rivers. She was a very successful author of romance novels when she met the love of her life – the Lord Jesus. Like so many of us, she too had called herself a Christian before she was truly born–again. You can read her testimony recorded in the back cover of this novel. A masterful allegory on the book of Hosea, the story beautifully portrays the amazing grace of God towards His lost sinful humanity. (You may want to read through the first three chapters of Hosea.) The hero is a mirror image of the Lord Jesus. He passionately loves a bride who runs away from Him into the abusive arms of one man after another. Her lovers use, abuse and abandon her. Yet, even after she is sold into slavery to sin, he woos her, pursues her and ultimately gives up everything to buy her for Himself. While Rivers’ story is fiction, God’s story is not. And it’s His story that gives us eternal hope for our future, regardless of our past. In fact, the underlying theme of the Bible is God’s redeeming Love. Eugenia Price said it best, “In the deepest heart of everyone, God planted a longing for Himself as He is: A God of love.”

**Redeemed from a Sinful Past**

We live in the information age; and because of this, through the internet, there is an abundance of sites that afford us the opportunity to trace the steps of our family’s blood-line. Have you ever done a search of your ancestry to see where in the world your forefathers came from? If you have, then you probably found all sorts of interesting folks. There are some who you would be proud to hang their picture on your family’s hall of fame - while others you would rather keep hidden in the closet of shame. Nevertheless, every family has it’s proverbial “skeletons in the closets.” 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, because what your family “handed–down” to you was a life filled with pain and shame. If you don’t have a Godly heritage, please do not lose heart. As we are about to learn, in Christ, we have a new blood line, and in Him we’ve been given life to the full. Through the encouragement of Scripture there is hope for us all.

**1 Corinthians 1:26-31 (NET)**

***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 chosewhat 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. He is the reason you have a relationship with Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”***

I would like to do a quick review of the women listed in the earthly genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:3-6). For starters, you should know that women were hardly ever listed in the family tree. So, 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, and these are directed toward all kinds of people.

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 kind” of people.

Just look at the scandalous list of women chosen to be in the royal blood line of Jesus. 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 first born was Perez (Genius 38:1-30; Ruth 4:1-22). Now 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.

Incidentally, the line or cord that hung out her window in Hebrew means *hope*. Through her marriage, this former prostitute now 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 (Genius 19). But because Boaz chooses to redeem Ruth, she was promised 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, also 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 “a man after God’s own heart,” David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and then he got her pregnant, then killed her husband, and because of all this sin - their baby died (2 Samuel 11). Despite their checkered past, God had mercy on these adulterers. He gave them a son, wise King Solomon. While we read about his wedding in Psalms 45, the book of Hebrews attributes this passage of scripture to one of Solomon’s offspring… His name is the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:3-10).

Ironically, all of these women had a shameful past; yet, each one was chosen by God to be in the royal lineage of Jesus, right up to the Virgin Mary who would give birth to our Redeemer. Jesus’ earthly ancestry so 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! For those who have had a spiritual birth, they have an opportunity to begin a new legacy and leave a godly inheritance for their offspring. What God did for these women - He can do for you. How do I know this? He has done this for me.

Sometime has passed since I penned the above record of Jesus’ earthly lineage. Meanwhile, we have celebrated the wedding of my first-born son. My precious, beautiful and godly daughter-in-law, has been around this family of ours long enough to know about our shameful past. I will refrain from sharing the details, but trust me when I tell you, it’s not a lovely story. Jessica was forewarned of what she was getting herself into when she married into this family. At their rehearsal dinner, there was no shortage of tears as Jessica’s brother, followed by my husband, gave the couple encouraging words of wisdom and admonition. Amid this joyful, yet highly emotional moment, it became apparent to all of us that God was giving our two families a second chance, a do-over, and a fresh start. Jessica’s brother and my husband both said the same thing in different ways. In essence, what they said was this: “Ethan and Jessica, regardless of our family’s past, God is giving you the opportunity and responsibility to break the cycles of generational sin and start a godly legacy. The only reason this is even possible is that Christ Jesus is Lord of their lives. And if they will love the Lord their God and keep His commandments, then by God’s grace, there home will be built upon the Rock.

**Exodus 20:1-6 (KJV)**

***And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.***

***Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou***

***shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.***

###### **WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* **Redeem/ Redeemer** Strong’s #1350 Hebrew word Gaal: *to redeem; of oriental law of kinship; i.e. to be the next of kin and as such, to buy back a relative’s property, marry his widow, avenger, deliver, kinsfolk-man, purchase, ransom, redeemer, revenger.* See: Ruth 4:4,14; Psalm 103:4; Isaiah 43:14; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8.
* **Redeem** Strong’s #3085 #3804 from #3803 Greek word Lotrosis: *a ransoming redeemer; loosen with a redemption price; atonement.* See: Titus 2:14; Ephesians

1:7; 1 Peter 1:18; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:12.

* **Redeemed** Strong’s #59 Greek word Agorazo: *to go to the market place; to purchase; redeem; buy.* See:Revelation5:9.
* **Redeemed** Strong’s #629 Greek word Apolutrosis: *act of ransom in full; salvation; deliverance; redemption.* See: Ephesians 1:7 -14, 4:30; Colossians; 1:14; Hebrews 9:15.
* **Redeemed/Rescue** Strong’s # 1805 Greek word Exagorazo: *to buy up, i.e. ransom; to rescue from loss (improve opportunity) redeem.* See: Galatians 3:13, 4:5; Ephesians 5:16.

### **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, and yet you never thought much about it. To the casual reader, its’ just a simple clause. Yet when you approach it with prayerful consideration, digging just below the surface, you find a diamond. Case in point, is Ephesians 1:6. We are going to hold this jewel up to the light and be amazed with wonder at the riches the prisms reveal. Be prepared to be blessed… favored one!

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…*the Beloved.

But in King James, the word is accepted, however, some other translators choose 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 instead of half full, 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 - 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 key words: *pleased or well pleased.* Almost exclusively these words are used in reference to the Lord Jesus, with a few exceptions. In the following passages, they are they are applied to those who are in Christ. I will underline the words in the following passages. Ephesians 1:5 (KJV) “Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” Ephesians 1:9 (KJV) “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself.”

###### **WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* **Highly** **Favored**/ **Accepted:** The Greek word is charitoo. (It comes from the word grace.) It means to: *to grace, i.e. endue with special honor, make accepted, and be highly favored.*  As a side note: the words gift and forgiveness relate to both words.
* **Good Will/ Good Pleasure:** The Greek words areedudokia or eudokeo. Here are the definitions: *satisfaction, delight, kindness, purpose, desire, good pleasure, will, to think well of i.e. approve, to approbate, think good, be well pleased, be the good pleasure, and be willing.*

**DIGGGING 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, every time 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. And so, because of this, we are not just accepted by God, but, in Christ, we are highly favored and enormously blessed.

Remember that at Jesus birth, 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 rest” (Luke 2:13-14). In this instance, the words pleased and favored are the exact 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 please with Him*, the Father’s *favor* now rest “upon us.” It’s mind boggling - is it not? Now if you find these facts hard to comprehend, then just wait till you see what comes next!

In order to make some personal applications, perhaps we need to step aside for a moment to think through the implications of these wonders. Do you struggle with feeling insignificant? When you read the Bible, do you think about the people listed as super humans? Well - they were not. They were every bit as human and you and me, granted they lived in another time in history. Take Mary, the mother of Jesus, 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, don’t we? 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.* Just think of the implications of that. Albeit hard to believe… if you are in Christ, then you are as highly favored by God as the Virgin Mary!

**Isaiah 43:3-4 (NET)**

***For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,your deliverer.***

***I have handed over Egypt as a ransom price, Ethiopia and Seba 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.***

If this fact were not hard enough to embrace, then consider a further wonder. Mary carried the Son of God (her Creator) within her. Likewise, we also carry God the Holy Spirit in us. Although we are seldom cognizant of His presence. But what a difference it could make in our humdrum everyday lives if we lived fully aware that we carry God around with us. Yes, my friend, in Christ, we have been honored indeed! Once we were separated from God, yet now, not only is God with us, but, like the Virgin Mary, God is in us! And furthermore, because we are in His Beloved Son, the Father is well pleased to give us all things in and through Him. Don’t you think this truth could liberate the person who struggles with feeling of insignificance?

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

The value of anything is set by one criteria. 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. Dr. Adrian Rogers, put it this way, he said: “We are not loved because we are valuable; we are valuable because God loved 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, and held Him there, was His matchless love.

**1 Peter 1:18-19 (NET)**

***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.***

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 21:28-32; John 8:1-11; Luke 5:27-32; Colossians

1:14; Galatians 3:13, 4:5; Revelation 5:9; Read 1 Corinthians 15:10

**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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. From Exodus 20:1-6, what do you think is meant by the sins of the fathers being visited (KJV) upon the children to the third and fourth generation? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. When God said, He would show His love to a thousand generations, it was contingent upon two things. What are they? (Exodus 20:1-6) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Can you think of anyone who needs to hear this truth? Would you prayerfully consider sharing this with them? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. 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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. How could this lesson help someone dealing with feelings of worthlessness? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. The following is a case study that illustrates the principle in these lessons. Read the following accounts Genesis 36:1-5; Exodus 6:21-24; Numbers 16:1-40, 26:9-11,58.

What do you learn about the sons of Korah? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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

**Abba Father**

#### **Key Passages**

**Ephesians 1:3-7 (NET)**

***Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessedus with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ. For he chose us in Christbefore the foundation of the world that we may be holy and unblemishedin his sightin love. He did this by predestiningus to adoption as his sonsthrough Jesus Christ, according to the pleasureof his will –  to the praise of the glory of his grace that he has freely bestowed on us in his dearly loved Son. In him we have redemption through his blood,the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.***

* **Lesson:**  In this lesson we will get to know God as our Daddy
* **Key Passages**: John 1:1-18, 3:1-18, 6:45-65, 8:16-58, 10:25-38,14:1-26, 17:1-6
* **Definitions:** from Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.
* **Writer:** Ginny Porter

#### **Introduction**

Some have compared the first fourteen verses of the book of Ephesians to the Grand Canyon. Having had the joy of experiencing this wonder only once, I concur with this comparison. But here is the dilemma: The more I study, the more I am convinced that it is simply impossible to reach the bottom of the riches contained within these few verses because every vantage point surpasses the last. It is like standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon, looking out over its vastness, it takes your breath away, leaving you speechless. That is how I feel as I endeavor this daunting task of writing about my God and King…. He is simply indescribable. The great theologian, Thomas Aquinas, summarized man’s attempt to write about God this way, he said, “It feels like straw.” These are my sentiments exactly.

Even if it were possible for finite humans to explain or define God their Creator, that is not the point. Besides that, the goal for Bible study is not to define or explain God, but to know Him personally and to experience intimacy and fellowship with Him (2 Corinthians 13:14). Honestly, I could easily skip over this lesson and stick to subjects which are easier to grasp. And yet, compelled by that still small voice reverberating within me, I am reminded that He is the Author, Teacher and Translator of the Bible. It’s a little comforting to know that even Paul felt it necessary to include this prayer in his letter to the saints. He asked*, I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of him* (Ephesians 1:17). I’m praying this prayer in earnest, not only for each reader who picks up this study, but also for the one who is writing it!

##### **Three in One**

Although this foundational doctrine is found throughout the Bible, you will not find the word “Trinity” in the Scriptures. Yet, God has disclosed Himself in the Bible as three persons who coexist as One, hence the name Trinity (it means three). Each person of the Godhead has different, yet unique rolls. And to the degree that we understand each of their roles, will greatly affect our view of God. Notwithstanding, it’s a difficult concept to grasp, much less explain. It’s not surprising that there has been some confusion surrounding the Trinity. Even though I broach this subject with a little trepidation, we would be amiss to overlook this crucial doctrine. (We will look at this, and other essential doctrines, in detail in another lesson). There are really three ways to approach this complex subject. We can deny it, ignore it or minimize it. And yet, those who remain in ignorance because they refuse to let the Scriptures inform them will be held as culpable as the ones who erroneously deny the doctrine of the Trinity all together. Therefore, rather than ignoring or minimizing this truth we will simply let the Scripture speak for itself.

**Genesis 1:1-2 (NET)**

***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was without shape and empty, and darknesswas over the surface of the watery deep,but the Spirit of Godwas movingover the surfaceof the water.***

Right there in Genesis 1:1-2 is the Triune God - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Albeit, they are not so obvious unless you have some knowledge of Hebrew grammar. I’ll explain.

In Genesis one the Hebrew word for God is Elohim, and it’s used here in the plural form - referring to *God the Father and God the Son*. Now the puzzling thing is this, the verb *created* is singular. If you will take a moment to read each of the following passages you will see that there is no doubt that Jesus *is* Creator God. (John 1:1-10; Colossians 1:13-20; Hebrews 1:1-10) So now, in the second verse of the Bible, is the third person of the Trinity - God the Holy Spirit and He is “Hovering over the waters.” Since the Bible states that God is One, the question that begs to be asked is, why is the name Elohim plural? Clearly, God Creator and King is both Father, Son and Spirit! And all three persons of the Trinity took part in creation, including the creation of man. This is evident in Genesis 1:26 where it is written: *“*Let *us* make man in our image,” and then again in Genesis 11:7, “Let Us go down”. We find one more example is Isaiah’s commission where they asked, “Who will go for U*s?”* (Genesis 3:22; Isaiah 6:8). As a side note, in the Great Commission, the Lord Jesus told us to, “Go and make disciples of all nations and to baptize them in the name (not names) of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

**Ephesians 4:4-6 (NET)**

***There is one body and one Spirit, just as you too were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.***

This would be a good place to stop and insert some commentary on the subject from a Biblical scholar. In his message from Ephesians 4:1-6 entitled, The Lowly Walk, (page 131) John MacArthur makes this statement, and I’ll quote: *The basic doctrine of Judaism has always been, “The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!” (Deut. 6:4; see also 4:35; 32:39; Isaiah 45:14; 46:9), and God’s oneness is just as foundational to Christianity (see 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Eph. 4:3-6; James 2:19). Yet the New Testament also reveals the more complete truth that the one God is in three Persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; John 6:27; 20:28; Acts 5:3-4)*

Many learned people have tried to come up with analogies to explain the Trinity. And while these explanations may seem a bit over simplified, here are a few examples: Some say, “The Trinity is like H2O, no matter the form, be it steam, ice or liquid -- it’s still water.” And then there is this analogy, “The Trinity is like the sun - fire - light and heat.” And lastly, there is this example: Just as a man can be a father a son and a brother, the God and King of the universes can be Father, Son and Spirit, three but One in the same. Are you still struggling to grasp all of this? May I suggest that you do some research on your own. One trusted resource that I recommend is www.gotquestions.org. Additionally, there is a simple children’s book by Joanne Marxhausen that may be of benefit to help adults, as well as children, understand this concept. The book is entitled *3 in One: A Picture of God.*

**DIGGGING DEEPER**: Job 33:4; Isaiah 44:3,24, 45:18, 48:16-18; John 1:29-34; Luke

3:21-22, 9:28-36; Mark 1:19-11, 9:2-13; Matthew 3:13-17, 17:1-13

##### **The Father Chose the Bride for His Son**

Just the mention of the name father can conjure up a myriad of emotions - some good and some bad. Generally speaking, most of us base our concept of God as a Father on our experience with our earthly fathers. For those who were fortunate enough to be 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 could possibly evoke memories that are anything but pleasant. Maybe this describes you. If so, you may be thinking, “If God is anything like my father, then I want no part of Him!” And frankly, who could blame you? This thinking makes perfect sense if you don’t know God. If this is the situation that you most easily relate to, then your concept of God could be tainted by the wounds inflicted by your father. And regrettably, this has 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 their children.

The truth is, many us are quite familiar with difficult family dynamics. As already discussed, these are the effects of the fall and part of the curse. 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. There is a God - placed intrinsic need in all of us to know God our Father as He *really* is… a God of love, real, unending, soul healing love. So, 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 glum will be turned to gladness. With you may need to get your tissue box handy, not because of tears of sorrow, but tears of joy when you meet your *heavenly Father*.

**Jeremiah 8:20-22 (NET)**

***“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 peopleare being crushed.I go about crying and grieving. I am overwhelmed with dismay.******There is still medicinal ointmentavailable in Gilead!***

***There is still a physician there!Why then have my dear people***

***not been restored to health?***

Father is the first word in the Hebrew dictionary. And, as it just so happens, 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 the 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. As previously mentioned, Ethan, my first-born son, has recently left his father and I 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. At the time of this writing, both of my sons had just graduated from the University of Memphis and promptly left my “nest.” I’m officially an “empty nester.”

In another lesson, we will gain a better understanding of the implications of leaving and cleaving. But for now, let’s focus our attention on the one who ordained marriage in the first place - God the Father. As foreign as the custom may sound to us, in many cultures the father is the one who selects the bride for his son. The same can be said for the bride of Christ. God the Father chose us as the bride for His Son. Furthermore, the Father not only selected us for Jesus, but He is the One who draws us to Jesus (John 6:39-65; Ephesians 1:3-5). And it is through Jesus that we can have the same intimacy, familiarity and tender affection that exists between God the Father and God the Son. Nowhere is this relationship displayed more poignantly than the moment on the cross when Jesus, cried out in Aramaic, “Abba,” which is translated… *Daddy*.

**John 6:44-46 (NET)**

***No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him,and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes to me. (Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God – he has seen the Father.)***

The prophet Isaiah called Jesus, “The Everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:2-17). Incidentally, some seven-hundred and fifty years before Christ’s birth, the prophet described, in vivid details, the passion of Christ. In verse ten of this passage, what is the stated will of the Father?

**Isaiah 53:10-12 (NET)**

***Though the Lord desired to crush him and make him ill,***

***once restitution is made,he will see descendants and enjoy long life,***

***and the Lord’s purpose will be accomplished through him.***

***Having suffered, he will reflect on his work, he will be satisfied when he understands what he has done.“My servantwill acquit many,***

***for he carried their sins. So I will assign him a portion with the multitudes,***

***he will divide the spoils of victory with the powerful,because he willingly submittedto death and was numbered with the rebels, when he lifted up the sin of many and intervened on behalf of the rebels.”***

**Ephesians 1:5b (KJV)**

***“The good pleasure of His will.”***

###### **WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* **Pleasure:** Strong’s # 2107 Greek word Eduokia: *satisfaction, delight, kindness, wish, purpose, desire, good pleasure, will.* See: Eph. 1:5 &9 from # 2106 **Well Pleased:** See: Luke 3:22; Matthew 3:17, 12:18, 17:5; Mark 1:11
* **Will:** Strong’s #2307 Greek word Thelema: *a determination, i.e. act, choice, specific purpose, decree, volition, inclination, desire, pleasure, will.* See this used in: Eph. 1:5, 9, 11,

5:17, 6:6-7; John 6:38-40; 1 Peter 2:15, 3:17, 4:2-3, 4:19; 2 Peter 1:21

* **Chose**: Strong’s #1586 Greek word Eklegomi: *to select, make a choice, choose out, chosen.*

From #1588 eklektos: *select by implication, favorite, chose, elect.* See this used in: Ephesians 1:4; John 13:18, 15:16 -19; 1 Peter 2:4-9

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 - warts, 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; Colossians1:1-13; 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 3:14-19 (NET)**

***For this reason I kneelbefore the Father,fromwhom every familyin heaven and on the earth is named. I pray that according to the wealth of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner person, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, so that, because you have been rooted and grounded in love,  you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,and thus to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.***

Paul’s prayer, in the above passage, stands out like an artesian well in the midst of a desert wasteland. Like an oasis to the thirsty barren soul. At least, that’s how David described his thirst for the love of God in Psalms 42:1-3 and Psalms 63:1-8. The above prayer could possibly be the most meaningful prayer that one could ever pray for another individual. Because God’s Word is alive, living and active, these words have the potential to unleash a flood of miraculous healing power (Hebrews 4:12-13).

Additionally, there is something quite unique about this passage. 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.

Paul’s prayer is impressive, but it doesn’t even compare to the Lord’s Prayer, recorded in John 17:1-26. It was just before Jesus went to the cross that He had a conversation with the Father about those the Father had given to Him. In the prayer, we have a rare opportunity to know the specific request Jesus made on our behalf. This prayer is chockfull of truths too numerous to ponder in one chapter, so 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.” And…. “I have revealed you to those whom you have given me out of the world. They were yours: you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word” (John 17:3-6) (NIV). 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 knowing the Lord Jesus, because, as He said, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:1-6). And…. “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 withthe Father, has made God known (John 1:14-18).

**Romans 8:14-16 (NET)**

***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 toour 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 from Iran and one 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 hated by 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 with numerous differences. 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 - much less understand. For them, prayer is a religious duty, an obligation, and to refuse to pray is an offence 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 - not an obligation. But this is not so for a Muslim; they don’t even know who they are praying to.

At the 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 Aramaic - 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, so she secretly read the forbidden book. As she got older, one day she passed a Christian church and heard singing. 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.” That’s when she heard in Aramaic: “Our Father (Abba) who art in heaven, hollowed 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*.

In his book Engaging Islam, (page 84) Andrés’ father, Georges Houssney said, “Those in Christ see themselves as adopted children, whereas Muslims see themselves as slaves who have no choice but to perform their preordained duties.” Also, in his book he mentioned the story of Bilquis Sheikh, a Pakistani who was born in a Muslim noble family. She turned from the Qur’an and started reading the Bible. Like Maha, she too was overwhelmed when she learned that the Christians worship a God who is a loving Father. She was amazed that He actually desires an intimate relationship with His children, and that He is actively involved in their lives. You can read her story in her book titled *I Dared to Call Him Father*.

##### **Adopted to Himself**

**Psalms 68:5-6 (Net)**

***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 some 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 the orphaned child or women who have been deserted by their husbands. 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 these insidious thoughts, Satan will begin to replay the sorrowful record tormenting us and insuring that the wounds remain open and agonizing. He adds to the lyrics with words like, “Something is wrong with you…. No one loves you.” This can set you up for a lifetime of self-pity and victim mentality. 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, replacing it with His song of love. May He quiet and comfort you with His love as He sings over you (Isaiah 66:13).

**Zephaniah 3:14-18 (NET)**

***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. On that day they will say to Jerusalem,***

***“Don’t be afraid, Zion! Your hands must not be paralyzed from panic!***

***The Lord your God is in your midst; e is a warrior who can deliver.***

***He takes great delight in you;he renews you by his love;he shouts for joy over you.”***

***“As for those who grieve because they cannot attend the festivals –***

***I took them away from you; they became tribute and were a source of shame to you.***

Have you experienced adoption as an adoptee, or been an adoptive parent? If so, then you have first-hand knowledge of what it means to be selected. But before we delve into what it means to be chosen and adopted by God the Father, we must clarify a few things. Every one’s situation is unique. These points don’t apply to every person who is orphaned or abandoned, or those who have been widowed by the death of a spouse or orphaned by the death of a parent. There are situations when a parent will sacrificially give up their child because they could not feed them or care for them as they ought.

Such is the case of the two babies who were found in a mud hut in Ethiopia, still sucking on the breast of their dead mother. With her last breath, this woman was caring for her babies. These beautiful children are now part of my family. My cousin and her husband went to great expense to adopt them. They welcomed them into their hearts and home that is now comprised of *eight* multi-ethnic children. What a beautiful picture of God’s family they are. I’m just beginning to work with a young woman whose name is Ellen Humerickhouse. Ellen gave up everything to follow Christ and serve “the least of these” by opening La Limye’ Ministries Children’s Home in Haiti. From Ellen, as well as another ministry in Haiti that we support called One Door Ministries, I’ve heard many a story of mothers abandoning their babies simply because they had no food to feed them, and they could not bear to watch their children die of starvation. As a mother and grandmother, I cannot even imagine it, can you? In case you would like more information on these ministries, here are the links to their websites: <http://LaLimye.com/> [www.onedoorministries.org](http://www.onedoorministries.org/)

**Isaiah 49:13-19 (NET)**

***Shout for joy, O sky!Rejoice, O earth! Let the mountains give a joyful shout!***

***For the Lord consoles his people and shows compassion to theoppressed.***

***“Zion said, ‘The Lord has abandoned me, the sovereign masterhas forgotten me.’ Can a woman forget her baby who nurses at her breast? Can she withhold compassion from the child she has borne? Even if motherswere to forget, I could never forget you!***

***Look, I have inscribed your name on my palms; your walls are constantly before me. Your children hurry back, while those who destroyed and devastated you depart. Look all around you!All of them gather to you. As surely as I live,” says the Lord, “you will certainly wear all of them like jewelry; you will put them on as if you were a bride. Yes, your land lies in ruins; it is desolate and devastated.But now you will be too small to hold your residents, and those who devoured you will be far away.***

Think about this: 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 earthy father, but from your heavenly Father. That fact alone, makes you pretty special, don’t you think?

**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; Psalms 10:14, 27:10; 45:10-11; 8:5-6; 66:13; 103:13-17; 49:15-16; Deut. 10:18

##### **Joney’s Story**

One of my spiritual mothers in Christ is Joney Caudill. She has graciously agreed to open her heart and share with us her story of finding her true father. This is Joney’s story….

*Even when I type the word “father” it’s hard for me to bring to mind any image of my earthly father, because he died before I was three. Have you heard your mom or dad recount their first meeting? I haven’t. In fact, I know very little about their lives together. I was born in 1946, in Washington, D.C. I don’t know why my parents were in Washington or where they lived prior to that: I only know that they met in North Carolina. I think my father owned a business there and my mother worked for him. She was twenty-three and he was over forty-five. Their illicit relationship developed despite the fact that my father was a married man.*

*As a result, my parents lived a secret life, always careful to hide, not only their affair, but also my existence. My father had two families. Family number one, his “legitimate family,” lived in North Carolina, where he spent his weekends. Family two, lived in another state where he “worked” and lived his secret life. He kept up that lie until September, 1949, just before my third birthday, when suddenly, without warning, he was gone. He left that Friday afternoon and expected to return, as usual, on Sunday night. Sometime after arriving home, he suffered a major heart attack and died a short time later. The devil had come to collect his due! He was fifty-three. It’s been wisely said that sin always takes you further than you want to go, it keeps you longer than you want to stay, and it will cost you more than you want to pay. My parent’s selfish actions cost everyone. Like the devastation after an earthquake, shame and heartache tore gaping holes in not only me and my mother, but in my father’s legitimate family, as well. As for my mother and I, we were left nothing, not even his name. My parents were so ashamed, that they even changed their names on my birth certificate. As a mistress and an illegitimate child, we had no legal right to any inheritance; we were penniless.*

*Sadly, mother carried the guilt and shame of their sin for the rest of her life. She believed that she was past God’s mercy and it destroyed her, first emotionally, and then physically. Her perceived unworthiness and disgrace drove her to marry another abusive man which subsequently led her to abuse alcohol. Immersed in a self-punishing, victim mentality she stayed with my stepfather for 17 years and would have stayed longer, had she lived. She died at the age of 49. Cancer had consumed her liver, the result of years of alcohol abuse. Consequently, I am forever aware that, were it not for God’s grace and mercy, I would have continued my mother’s same sin pattern.*

*When I lost my father, somewhere deep in my little girl heart I felt abandoned. In those days, not much was known about the psychological effects abandonment has on children. But today, as many of us know all too well, the damage cannot be underestimated. It’s catastrophic! Wikipedia gives this very insightful information about abandoned children.*

*Abandoned child syndrome is a behavioral or psychological condition that results primarily from the loss of one or both parents or sexual abuse. (In my case, it would include both loss and sexual abuse) Abandonment may be physical (the parent is not present in the child's life) or emotional (the parent withholds affection, nurturing, or stimulation). (Ironically, my mother would often withhold affection as a way of punishing me.) Parents who leave their children, with or without good reason, can cause psychological damage to the child. This damage is reversible, but only with appropriate assistance. Abandonment experiences and boundary violations are in no way indictments of a child's innate goodness and value. Instead, they reveal the flawed thinking, false beliefs, and impaired behaviors of those who hurt them. Still, the wounds are struck deep in their young hearts and minds, and the very real pain can still be felt today. The causes of emotional injury need to be understood and accepted so they can heal. Until that occurs, the pain will stay with them, becoming a driving force in their adult lives.*

*You see, no human being could understand the emptiness left by my father. But God… my real Father knew, and He had a plan. Of course, it was years before I understood what was missing, and that I was looking for love and acceptance in all the wrong places. I didn’t know my heavenly Father - but He knew me. Furthermore, He had a plan for my life, and it was a good plan.*

**Jeremiah 31:3-4 (KJV**)

***“The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: Therefore, with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”***

*As strange as it may seem, God used all my painful past to draw me to Himself. It was later in life when I met my Heavenly Father and the truth of His love healed my afflicted soul. I am His, He chose me as the Bride for His Son. I am wanted, and He will never ever abandon me because I am in Christ. He took what the enemy of my soul intended for my destruction and turned it into beauty. My life today is completely the opposite of my mother’s, for one reason… the Lord Jesus Christ! If it weren’t for Jesus, I’m fairly certain, I would be the town drunk! But because He saved me, I can hold my head up and walk in His grace all the way home till I get to my Father’s house. And best of all, my children and grandchildren and great grandchildren will have a Christian legacy. Our study of the book of Ephesians has reminded me of how very blessed I am to be adopted by God my Father. His Word is personal and healing to me, and it can be for anyone who has suffered the sting of someone else’s sin. To the praise of His Glorious Name, I’ve been healed by the love of my Father!*

**Joel 2:25-26 (NET)**

***I will make up for the yearsthat the ‘arbeh-locustconsumed your crops –***

***the yeleq-locust, the hasil-locust, and the gazam-locust – my great armythat I sent against you. You will have plenty to eat, and your hunger will be fully satisfied;you will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has acted wondrously in your behalf. My people will never again be put to shame.***

Joney’s story is not that uncommon, is it? But you know what? There’s no such thing 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. And when they do, as Joney testified, God can use this hunger and thirst for love to point us to our heavenly Father.

**Isaiah 48:10 (KJV)**

***Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.***

C.S. Lewis wrote, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains.” 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:

**Psalms 45:10-11 (NET)**

***Listen, O princess!******Observe and pay attention!Forget your homeland and your family! Thenthe king will be attracted byyour beauty.***

***After all, he is your master! Submitto him!***

This Psalm was composed for the King on His wedding day. (Don’t forget, the Father gets to pick the bride for His Son.) Hebrews chapter one, ascribes this passage to the Lord Jesus, and if you are the bride of Christ, then I believe these words certainly can apply to you. As a fitting conclusion to this lesson, if possible, please go to YouTube and listen to this song by Chris Tomlin entitled: “Good Good Father.” I hope this lesson has properly introduced you to God who is the perfect Father. In fact, He is the Daddy of our dreams. We are not fatherless. We never have been - we just never Knew who He was. He loves us, knows us personally and intimately…. He’s a good Father, but even more…. He’s our *Daddy.*

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. What does the name Father mean to you, and how do you feel about God being a Father? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Were you, or anyone close to you, adopted? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. If so, then describe ways that this has impacted your or their lives. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. How does God feel about widows and orphans? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Read the following passages and then paraphrase a statement on each. (James 1:27; Psalms 68:5-6; Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 23:3) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Have you ever felt that you had to earn God’s love? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. If so, how do you relate to God when you sin? Do you hide from Him? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. Read Ephesians 1:4-5 (NIV) and fill in the blanks: “In \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ He predestined us to be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_as His sons through Jesus Christ.”
9. In the last words of the Old Testament, the Lord speaks to the issue of fathers and their children. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
10. Read Malachi 4:6 and write in your own words how the Father feels about fathers who leave their children and what He desire for the relationship between fathers and their children? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
11. When God said that He would show His love to a thousand generations, it was contingent upon two things. What are they? (Exodus 20:1-6) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
12. Can you think of anyone who needs to hear this truth? Would you prayerfully consider sharing this with them? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
13. 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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**Holy Habit of Quiet Time**

**Matthew 6:33-34 (NET)**

***But above all pursue his kingdomand 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.***

* **Lesson**: How to have a quiet time.
* **Key Passages**: Matthew 6:6,33; John 15:1-8; Psalms 119:10-16
* **Writer**: Ginny Porter \* from notes taken from a message by Dr. Adrian Rogers.
* **Hear the Word**: This lesson is available in audio and video form.

**Introduction**

If you were invited to Buckingham Palace for a private meeting with the queen of England, would you miss that opportunity? Of course not. Well, as God’s child, we have the honor of being invited to come daily, to a private, intimate meeting with the King of Heaven and earth! But, if we are honest, most of us don’t even avail ourselves of the privilege. This is perplexing.

The following quote by Karen Conlee, is not only though provoking, it’s convicting. (Downline Women’s Discipling Summit at Highpoint Church in Memphis, Tennessee on March 1, 2014.) “Why do I sin? – I don’t love God. Why don’t I love God? -- 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!”

There you have it. The sin of pride is what keeps us from spending time with Jesus. Unless we develop this essential spiritual discipline of quiet time with the Lord, we tend to drift towards empty religious rituals. But, that is not He desires. He wants us to experience a vibrant love relationship with Him (Mark 7:6-8). This is the first step to abiding in a life receiving relationship with Jesus (John 15:1-8). Yet, few new believers are taught how this works. So, in this lesson, we will learn some helpful tips to guide us as we seek to develop the holy habit of quiet time. This is His invitation.

**John 7:37-38 (NET)**

***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 let the one who believes in me drink. Just as the scripture says,****‘****From within himwill flow rivers of living water.’****”*

**Seek His Face…Not His Hands**

**Psalm 27:4 (NET)**

***I have asked the Lord for one thing – this is what I desire! I want to live in the Lord’s house all the days of my life, so I can gaze at the splendor of the Lord and contemplate in his temple.***

Most often we are prone to only seek God when we need something. That’s not necessarily a bad thing but that should not be the only time we seek Him.

**Three Key Elements of Quiet Time**

There are basically three key elements of quiet time. They are: time in the Word of God, worship and then prayer. The “ACTS” of prayer are: adoration, confession, thanksgiving and lastly, supplication.

These are the proper provisions for your quiet time. You will need a readable Bible, and use two translations if you have them. A great resource to use, to read or to hear, the Bible in many languages is the free app. called **Bible.is**. In addition, the **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.

These are some procedures for your quiet time 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 who is holy. Second, read the Bible first -perhaps a Proverb and read through a book of 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? Forth, write it down, and then pray about what He has said to you. Last, share with someone the truth you have learned.

**Word search:**

* **SEEK-**Greek: Zeteo-to ***seek specifically to worship God*** –*desire –enquire require, seek after.*
* **FIRST**-Greek: Proton-***firstly in time-order-place-importance***-*before-at the beginning-at the first.*
* **SEEK** Hebrew: Baqash –seek for –search out ***in worship or prayer***-strive-ask beg-desire enquire-request-require.

Actions speak louder than words, so when we seek Him first in priority we say to Him, “I love You. I need You. I know that I can do nothing without You”. As you read the following passages keep this thought in mind, the words *face* and *presence* are the same Hebrew word: Psalm 27:8; Exodus 33:14-23; Genesis 32:30.

**Digging Deeper:** Jeremiah 29:11-14; Psalms 10:4; Psalms 14:2; 53:2; John 4:22-23; 2 Chronicles 16:9; Hebrews 11:6; Isaiah 55:1-5; Matthew 11:28-30, 22:1-10; Revelation 22:17

**Digging Deeper:** Song of Songs 2:10-15; Psalm 90:14-17; Proverbs 8:17, 33-36; Lamentations 3:21-25

**When?**

The proper period will vary for each of us, and there is no need to be legalistic about it. but it is best to have some time at the first part of your day, because *Jesus is -- The FIRST -- The Beginning -- The Bright Morning Star!* As a matter of fact, Isaiah tells us that He wakens His disciples every morning with the ability to hear His voice. (Isaiah 50:4-5) *The Word of God is the lamp and light to guide us.* If we don’t come to Him first before we journey into each day, it will be as if we’re walking in the dark without a light. Should He not have the preeminent place in the life of every believer?

**Psalm 63:1-8 (HCSB)**

***Oh God you are MY God, earnestly/early will I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.***

**Digging Deeper:** Psalm1:2-3, 5:1-3; 119:105; Isaiah 50:4-5; Matthew 6:25-33; Jeremiah 10:21,23; Proverbs 3:5-10

**How?**

**Psalm 24:3-6 (HCSB)**

***Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in His holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not set his mind on what is false, and who has not sworn deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek Him. Who seek the face of the God of Jacob.***

From the Psalmist, we can learn much about what it looks like to get alone with God. In Psalms 24 David taught us to reverence the Lord. We are coming into the presence of the HOLY GOD. Therefore, we must come to him with clean hands and a pure heart. Our response to His holiness should be confession.

**Digging Deeper**: Psalms 15:1-13, 19:12-13, 51:1-13; Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:6-9; Luke 6:46-49

**Where?**

**Matthew 6:6 (NIV)**

***“But when you pray, go into your private room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.***

The proper place to meet with God is a quiet place, where you can be alone and you can focus your attention on Him. Guard this time well, and be aware of distractions that can interrupt this time. Solomon called the distractions (little foxes) in Song of Songs 2:10-16.

**Digging Deeper**: Song of Songs 2:10-16; Matthew 6:6; Mark 1:35

**What?**

These are the proper provisions for your quiet time. You will need a readable Bible, and use two translations if you have them. A great resource to use, to read or to hear, the Bible in many languages is the free app. called **Bible.is**. In addition, the **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! Did you know that you can remember about 20% of what you hear, and 40% of what you read, but, you can remember about 85% 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.

In George Muller’s message, *Food for the inner man, he said, “Now what is food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the Word of God; and here again, not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water passes through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering it over and applying it to our hearts.”*

In Luke 10:39-42 Jesus told Martha the one thing most needed in her life was what her sister Mary was doing. What was this one thing? She was sitting at Jesus feet, listening to His Word. In addition to Mary’s example, some very important lessons can be learned from the man who wrote the longest chapter in the Bible - Psalm 119. I encourage you to study this chapter, and if you do, you will find that 171 out of the 176 verses, are a declaration of praise and adoration of God’s Holy Word!

**Digging Deeper:** Luke 10:39-42; John 8:30-31; 15:7-8; Psalms 119:1-176

**How?**

**Psalm 119:10-16 (HCSB)**

***I have sought You with all my heart; don’t let me wander from your commands. I have treasured Your word in my heart so that I may not sin against You. LORD, may You be praised; teach me Your statutes. With my lips I proclaim all the judgments from Your mouth. I rejoice in the way revealed by your decrees as much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts and think about Your ways. I will delight in Your statutes; I will not forget Your Word.***

These are some procedures for your quiet time that may be of help as you learn to develop this essential spiritual discipline.

* **Be still and quiet.** Recognize you are in the presence of your***KING*.** (Psalm 46:10)
* **Read the Bible first.** Before you pray, let the King speak to you.
* **Meditate on the Word of God**. (Psalm 1:1-3; Joshua 1:8)
* **Ask these 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**?
* **Write it down,** and then pray about what He has said to you.
* **Share with someone** the truth you have learned.

**Digging Deeper:** Luke 6:46-49; Joshua; James 1:21-25; Romans 12:1-2

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. Let’s search our hearts and answer this question, “Why don’t I prioritize time alone with God?”
2. From the following passages, what does God seek as He looks upon the earth? (Psalm 53:2, 14:2; John 4:19-24.)
3. Psalms 27: 8 say, “…I will seek Your face.” What other Hebrew word means the same thing as seeking God’s face? (Hint: look under the sub-title Why.)
4. Will you ask someone to hold you accountable as you seek to make this a priority in you daily life?
5. Proper information comes from the Word of God. When you add to the knowledge of God’s Word, the practical application and *do it*, you will find it will become *life transformation*!

**Phase #3**

**John 15:4-5 (ESV)**

***Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.***

**Main Goals:**

* Establish essential spiritual disciplines.
* Teach them to abide in an intimate relationship with Jesus.

**Additional Information:**

The lessons in phase number 3 are intended for those who have assurance of their salvation. Both practical, and yet foundational, this phase will cover essential spiritual disciplines such as Bible Study and prayer.

**12 Things the Bible Says About the Bible**

**2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NET)**

***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. 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.***

* **Lesson:**  From this lesson we will learn how vitally important is the Word of God in the life of every believer and twelve things the Bible has to say about the Bible.
* **Key Passages** : Many
* **Definitions:** from Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.
* **Writer:** Ginny Porter
* **Hear the Word:** This lesson is available on audio titled: Building Your Life on The Solid Foundation of God’s Word.

**Introduction**

If you grew up in church, then you are well acquainted with the song, “Jesus loves me, this I know.” So how do I know God loves me? “***The Bible tells me so***.” (Galatians 2:20; 1 John 4:9-10; John 3:16; Romans 5:6-10) If you have never heard this song before, its lyrics come straight from the pages of the bestselling book of all times…the Holy Bible; I highly recommend it! As a matter of fact, there is no book in the world like the Bible. It is a life transforming book, and it is filled with inexhaustible power and wealth. However, the source of the power 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***! Let’s see what the Bible has to say about the Bible.

**1. Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit:**

***2 Peter 1:19-21 (NASB)***

***So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.***

For many people, the Bible is just another book written by men. However, if anyone will take the time to learn the historical facts, they will learn that this is no ordinary book. Written over a span of 1000 plus years, the sixty-six books of the Bible were recorded by the Holy Spirit on the hearts of approximately 49 different writers. Each one of these men, being inspired by God, took scrolls, most likely made out of papyrus paper, 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 ***WORDS*** of ***GOD.***

# ***2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)***

***All Scripture is God-breathed******and is useful for teaching,******rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God******may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.***

###### **WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* **God breathed:** Greek word Theopneustos- *divine breathed in, given by inspiration of God.* This word comes from the word **Spirit**: Pneuma*-to breathe, to blow, Holy Spirit, Christ’s Spirit, life, Spirit, Mind, and breath*.

**Note:** As you will see next, there are two Greek words translated as the *Word of God*. It is important to understand how and where the Holy Spirit inspired their use. **Logos** generally refers to ***Christ Jesus*** as the mouth of God. But, the word **Rhema** is ***a specific portion of the Bible***. If you look closely you will see how important the distinctions between these two words are. (You can hear the explanation of this on audio lessons titled, **Building Your Life on The Solid Foundation of God’s Word,** part one and part two.)

* **Word:** Greek word **Logos-***The divine expression –i.e. Christ-communication-utterance-mouth. See* used in the following passages: John 1: 1-14; 1 Peter 1: 23; Hebrew 4:12; John 8:31, 14:23; 1 John 1:1; Rev. 19:13
* **Word**: Greek word Rhema- *an utterance a specific a matter or topic command –Word*. See this used in the following verses: Matthew 4:4; Romans 10:8- 17; Ephesians 1:13, 5:26, 6:17; Hebrews 1:3; 11:3; John3:34, 6:63 & 68; John 15:7; 1Peter 1:25

***1 Thessalonians 2:13 (NASB)***

***For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also preforms its work in 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)

**2. In the Bible we “Behold our God”:**

***1 Samuel 3:19-21 (NASB)***

***Thus Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fail. All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, because the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.***

Of all the innumerable benefits of the written Word of God, the most important is this: the entire Bible is the revelation of God. All we can know or will ever know about God is contained between the pages of the Bible, and to know Him is eternal life! 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). In his book, The Truth War, John McArthur put it this way, “God has revealed Himself to humanity through Scripture and His Son–the Truth. Truth means nothing apart from God and His Word. Truth is the self-expression of God!” 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

**3. In the Bible we hear the voice of God:**

***Revelation 1:12-17 (NASB)***

***Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last.***

There are two internet connections between God and humanity, one is the Bible and the other is prayer. In the following passages, the two are closely linked together. (John 15:7-8 and Proverbs 28:9) Have you ever wondered if God still speaks to people? Yes He does speak, but only those who have spiritual ears can hear Him! (See our lesson titled, “She who Has Ears, Let Her Hear) Jesus said that His sheep would hear His voice, and interestingly enough, the Greek word for voice is phone.

If you carefully observe the text, found in John 6:66-70 you will see that the faithless, fickle crowds fell away from following Jesus; this proved they were not His in the first place. Then Jesus looked at His twelve disciples and said, in essence, “*Are you going to leave me too?” Simon Peter answered and said, “Lord who will we go to? You have the words of eternal life.”* Where else can we go to hear from God, and who else has the Words of Eternal Life?

**Digging Deeper:** Genesis 1:1-3; Proverbs 28:9; John 1:1-14, 6:44-70, 10:27-28, 15:7-8; Luke 24:27; Hebrews 1:1-13

**4. The Bible converts sinners:**

***1 Peter 1:23-25 (NIV)***

***For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word that was preached to you.***

The above passage reveals a powerful truth. The act of God in the regeneration of man is accomplished by the power of ***God’s******Word***. It’s is alive, living and active, accomplishing resurrection of the spiritually dead! We find this principle throughout the Old Testament as well.

***Psalm 19:7 (NASB)***

***The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.***

###### **WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* **Restoring**: Hebrew word Shuwb:-*restoring converting, repent, turn, convert, recover, restores, rescues, and fetch home again, feed, lie down, and make rejoice, return.* (Psalms 19:7, 23:3, 51:12, 119:159-160)
* **God’s Word:** Hebrew word most often used **is Dabar:**- *a word, a matter spoken of, act, advise, answer, book ,commandment, communication, counsel , effect, language, message, oracle, power, promise, provision, purpose, say, talk, thought, word, work.*

**Note:** The other words found in the Old Testament that refer to God’s Word are as follows: *Statues, Laws, (seen in the previous passage) Precepts, Commandments, Testimonies and ordinances.*

The apostle Peter fully understood the power of Word of God to bring eternal life to the souls of men and women. In 1 Peter1:23-25 he quotes Isaiah 40:8: “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the *Word of our God stands forever*.” (We will expound on this verse at the end of this lesson.)

Two things will last forever - the Word of God and the souls of mankind, and consequently it is the Word of God that brings about salvation. Most of our lessons will include audios, and or videos, because saving *Faith comes by Hearing the Word of God*. (Romans 10:9-18)

**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

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

***1Timothy 4:6 (NIV)***

***If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith \*WORD OF GOD and of the good teaching that you have followed. (\*emphasis mine)***

Without proper nourishment, we will not grow up to maturity – the goal of God the Father for each of His children. I believe many of His 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. How sad to 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 can 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 8:1-3 (NIV)***

***Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.***

**Digging Deeper:** 1 Peter 2:2;1Timothy 4:6; Matthew 4:4; Jeremiah 15:16; Hebrew 5:11-14; Psalm 119:103; Romans 15:4;1 Peter 2:2**;** Isaiah 55:1-3.

**6. The Bible is the offensive weapon in spiritual warfare:**

***Ephesians 6:13-17 (NASB)***

***Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousnessand having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. In addition to all, taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to 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 the offensive weapon, and it has divine power to overcome the enemy. One of our lessons is titled: Woman of God Prepared for Battle. I wrote this lesson specifically for one trip to Nicaragua, but little did I know just how much I would need this lesson personally! I have named this trip “Pure Joy” because of all the trials and fiery darts which hit us even before we left. (James 1:2-12)

For this trip, we purchased a video camera to tape our lessons. Alva, 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. At the very moment we began to read the Bible, we encountered all kinds of commotion and loud noises that were drowning out the Word of God. That is when I stopped and said to Alva, “This is precisely my point; the Devil wants to silence God’s Word!” We moved inside so we could finish our lesson. (*You can see this on the video on our web-page.*)

When a new believer is not discipled, their faith could be shipwrecked when the enemy begins to assault their life. Who would leave a defenseless child outside in a storm and expect them to defend themselves? We would call this child abuse. A person who is an infant in their faith does not even know she has an enemy, much less that she has the “Sword of the Spirit” (literally, a specific passage of Scripture) to defend herself. It takes someone who loves them enough to establish them in Biblical truth and prepare them for battle. The Lord expects those who know how to use the Sword of the Spirit in battle to teach these truths to 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 Corinthian 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:17; Matthew 4:1-11; 1 John 2:14

**7. The Bible is the medicine of the Great Physician:**

### ***Proverbs 4:20-23 (NASB)***

***My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.Do not let them depart from your sight; Keep them in the midst of your heart.For they are life to those who find them And health to all their body.Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.***

Like medicine, God’s Word brings healing. Sometimes that healing is through correction, and other times it is by bringing balm to heal our brokenness. But medicine will not help unless you take it! One word in particular found in Proverbs 4:20 is evidence to the fact that *God’s Word is medicine*…. It’s the word *Health*. In Hebrew the word is *Marpay* and this is the definition: *a cure, a remedy, a medicine.* One example of this healing is found in the lesson, The Health of My Countenance – dealing with depression.

***Psalm 107:15-22 (NIV)***

***Let them give thanks******to the******Lord******for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds******for mankind,for he breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron.Some became fools******through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction******because of their iniquities.They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death.Then they cried******to the******Lord******in their trouble, and he saved them******from their distress.He sent out his word******and healed them; he rescued******them from the grave.Let them give thanks******to the******Lord******for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds******for mankind.Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works******with songs of joy.***

**Digging Deeper:** Proverbs 4:20-22; Psalms 34:19, 42:11, 107:8-21; Jeremiah 8:8-22

1. **The Bible gives true wisdom and counsel:**

***Psalm 19:7-11 (NASB)***

***The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the dripping of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.***

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*! You may already be aware that we are living in the day of Facebook prophets, and for many people, this is their psychologist, their soapbox, their source of information and counsel. And unfortunately, 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 in “His book - the Bible.”

All the wisdom we will ever need is found in the Bible. It guides us in practical and profound ways. I’d like to interject a recent example of how l I found much needed counsel in the Word of God. I really should chronicle all the different diet plans I have tried and failed at. Recently I began to think to myself, “I must do something about this weight! What plan, approach, pill, and exercise partner can I get to help me?” If I had a dime for every time I have been in this exact place, I would be rich indeed! None of these plans have ever worked for very long. I would lose some weight, and then all my hard won pounds lost were quickly regained - along with a few more. So I began to dialog with the Lord about it, confessing all the emotional eating I’ve been doing, and then the wonderful counselor gave me His diet plan, custom made for my dilemma. It came in the form of a specific passage-a *Rhema*! I didn’t even have to open my Bible because this passage is hidden in my heart.

# ***Proverbs 3:1-8 (NIV)***

***My son,*** *do* ***not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart,  
for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. Let love and faithfulness******never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the******Lord******with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths******straight.Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the******Lord******and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.***

So here is the diet plan: for starters, don’t lean on my own plans, acknowledge that I need Him to show me the way. As I seek His counsel and listen for His guidance, I find that I know when, what, and how much to eat at each meal. He is making my steps straight, and I am having success bringing health to my body and nourishment to my bones. His plan works! Thank you Lord for your wonderful counsel!

**Digging Deeper:** Psalms 33:8; 119:24-50; Colossians 2:2-3; Isaiah 9:6

**9. The Bible continually cleans us:**

***Ephesians 5:25-27 (NASB)***

***So that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word that He might present to Himself the Church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.***

God continually washes our minds with the truth of His Word and sets us free from the sins that so easily entangle our lives. Ruth Ann Bridges describes this process. When she was converted at almost fifty years old, she began to meditate and memorize the Word of God. A non-believer in her family said, with negative connotations, “That sounds like brain washing.” She responded: “That is exactly what memorizing Scripture does; it is 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 (Greek-*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 (NASB)***

***It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; 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, 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

**10. 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.***

At the very core of disciple making is gaining Biblical knowledge. The Bible is the curriculum of the entire process. One of the lessons I have written for people, like myself, without formal education is titled, 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 wrote four books of the Bible, but even so, he set his heart to *study* the *Law of the Lord,* to *practice it* and to *teach it.* (Ezra 7:10)

***Colossians 3:16 (NIV)***

***Let the Word of God dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.***

**Digging Deeper:** Ezra 7:10; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrew 5:12-14

1. **The Bible is alive, living and active:**

***Hebrews 4:12-14 (NASB)***

***For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.***

***Cross references:***

The longest chapter of the Bible is Psalms 119. It is uncertain who penned this chapter, although David, Daniel, Jeremiah and Ezra have 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 life line 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!

One word in particular that is used in Psalms 119:50 encompasses all the other words we could use to describe the Holy Scriptures. It is the word *revived.* “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 Psalms 23, “He *restores* my soul.”

###### **WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* **Revive; Quicken or Life:** Hebrew word: ***Chayah***:-*To live-literally or fugitively, to revive-keep or make, alive, nourish, preserve, recover, repair, restore to life, save; life; and be whole.*

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

***Deuteronomy 32:46-47 (NASB)***

***And He said to them, “Take to heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life. And by this word you will prolong your days in the land, which 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 promise land, you can understand why God’s Word was life to them. (In1 Samuel 2: 12- 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-literally or fugitively, to revive-keep or make, alive, nourish, preserve, recover, repair, restore to life, save; life; 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; Psalms 119:50, 85:6; Proverbs 4:20-22; Deut. 32:46-47.

**12. The Word of God will *stand* forever:**

***Matthew 24:35 (NASB)***

***Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.***

Throughout the ages men have tried to destroy the Bible, and yet it is an indestructible document. It always will be 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 40:8-9 (NASB)***

***The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever. Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; Lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!”***

I hope you will bear with me as I unpack just one more descriptive word which is translated into English as “Stands.” The word is pregnant with meaning.

###### **WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* **Stand is the Hebrew word: Q*uwn*** This is only a partial definition and the root word means: *to rise; get up; help; to lift up; set up; establish; strengthen;-helps; holds; be clear; confirms; accomplishes; preforms; succeeds; makes good; makes new; makes sure; endures; makes to stand up; upholds.*

I urge you to stop and carefully consider each descriptive 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 so vividly describes what the Bible has to say about the Bible. I wonder, as you read this list, if you are in need of reviving, saving, nourishing, or repairing. May God take these words and cause your weary soul to rise up and soar!

The blessings for the person who will *live in*, *live on* and *live out* God’s Word are immeasurable! It is utterly 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 (NASB)***

***And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.***

**Think on These Things**

* 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; Psalms 1:1-3; James 1:21-23
  2. Be honest, what does the Bible mean to you? Are you living on every Word, or existing on crumbs once or twice a week?
  3. Do you understand why the Bible is so vitally important to the Spiritual life of every believer?
  4. Look back over the 12 points and make a list of where you see God’s Word at work in your life. Read 1Thessalonians 2:11-13
  5. What did you learn about the Bible that you did not know?
  6. Make a list of people who have impacted your life because they loved and lived God’s Word.
  7. When you die, will all that you know about God’s Word die with you?

***John 15:7-10 (NASB)***

***If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”***

**The Basics of Bible Study**

**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.***

* **Lesson**: In this lesson we will learn to study the Bible and be equipped to teach others.
* **Key passages**: Acts 17:2-11; Ezra 7:10; 2 Timothy 2:15; Luke 24:24-49; 2 Peter 1:18-21; Psalms 138:2
* **Writer**: Ginny Porter
* **Hear the Word**: This lesson is available on Audio.

**Introduction**

Written over a span of 1000 plus years, the sixty-six books that comprise the Bible were written and recorded by the Holy Spirit on the hearts of approximately 49 different writers. Each one of these men, being inspired by God, took scrolls and ink in hand and meticulously began to write. These were men who studied the Word of God and quoted one another(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 circumstances. The Bible does not contain the Word of God; it is the Word of God!

We study the Bible in order to know the God of the Bible, apply His truth to our lives and then make Him well known to the ends of the earth. Through study we gain insight, understanding and explanation of the unsearchable truths contained within the pages of Scriptures. As Jerry Bridges has said, “Reading gives us breadth, but study gives us depth.” Our lives will be transformed by having daily encounter with the ***Living Word of God…The LORD Jesus Christ***. As we begin to study, remember this: the Bible will always demand a response to what we learn.

**A Brief History Lesson**

Inevitably, someone will ask you this question: Where did we get the Bible? Perhaps you have had wondered this yourself, and so we will have a brief history lesson. The following is merely a synopsis of men God used to preserve and propagate His Word, and as the story unfolds, we gain fresh insight into the importance of Bible Study. The Old Testament was completed around 1406 BC and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament around 50 AD. The Syrian Christians produced a simple translation about 110 AD. This was followed by the Coptic Bible of the third century AD, the Gothic Bible in the fourth century, the Latin Vulgate Bible in 382 AD, just to name a few. I would like to fast forward in history and focus on two Greek monks named Cyril and Methodius. They left Thessalonica in 862 AD armed with the Great Commission. They took the gospel to the Slavic peoples of Central Europe. This area was known as Bohemia and Moravia and later as Czechoslovakia. Twenty years ago the Velvet Revolution took place and the country was split into Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The two monks who evangelized this part of the world insisted that the gospel be preached to all peoples each in their own native tongue. They translated the Bible into the Slavic language.

The following is merely a partial list of important people who are credited with translating the Bible. Englishman John Wycliffe (1320-1384 AD) was martyred for translating the Bible. Following in Wycliffe’s footsteps was reformer William Tyndale (1494-1536 AD). He was instrumental in translating the Bible into the English language. He was also martyred for the Word of God.

Prior to Wycliffe and Tyndale was a man named Jon Huss. He took his stand for the Bible and was burned alive at the stake in 1450 AD in the city of Prague by the Catholic Church. Why? He insisted that scripture was the final authority and that it should made available to all people. He sang as he was burning, and as he was dying he said that God would rise up a man who would see to it that the Bible would be widely translated.

Jon Huss 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 AD 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 Huss’s martyrdom, Martin Luther (1522-1534 AD) 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 these 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 on future generations if we don’t love the Truth and pass on God’s Word. We have just seen a list of men who were passionately devoted to God’s Word, so much so, that it cost them their lives. What do you think these men would say if they knew that today less than 2% of the populations of these 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; Hebrew 11:1-40

**Why Do You Study the Bible?**

***Ezra 7:10***

***For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.***

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, but our entire life is the class room.

Why do we study the Bible? The most obvious reason is to know God, but take a look at a Bible scholar whose name was Ezra. He was a man who knew the Word of God. Most Bible scholars believe he is the writer, not only of the book that bears his name, but also first and second Chronicles and the book of Nehemiah. He set his heart to study the Law of the Lord. 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 in order to put God’s Word into practice. He studied it so that he could teach it to others. As the apostle Paul told Timothy, his main disciple, “***All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NASB)***

So why do we learn to study the Bible? To help others to learn to study the Bible and be well equipped to teach others also! (2 Timothy 2:2) In the Following word search, see the definition for the word teach.

###### **WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* **Disciple or teach (KJV)** in Greek: matheteuo: **-** *to become a pupil; to disciple; i.e. enroll as a scholar; to be a disciple, instruct, and teach.*
* **Teach** in Greek: dadasko*: - to learn, to teach.*

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 in order 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 (NIV)***

***Let the Word of God dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude 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 (NIV)***

***You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.***

**Digging Deeper**: Matthew 28:16-20; Ezra 7:1-26; Nehemiah Chapters 7 and 8; Psalms 78:1-7

**How Are We to Study?**

***Acts 17:2-3, 11b (NASB)***

***And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.” 11b “…For they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether 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 a three year study 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. You may want to stop and list any questions that come to mind. These would be good starting points for more in-depth studies.

By paralleling and cross-referencing you will begin to see 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; 1Timothy 4:13, 15-16; Acts 17:2-11; Hebrew 5:12-14

**Observation and Interpretation**

***2 Peter 1:19-21 (NASB)***

***So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved 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: “*who wrote it, what does it say, when, where, and how was it written,* and finally*, why was it written*?

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.

**Digging Deeper:**

Read the following: (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

The following are terms used for the study of interpretation or explanation of the scriptures. The terms hermeneutics and exegesis have been used interchangeably. Herb Hodges described the word exegesis to me, and this is what he said, “Exegesis means to take by the hand and lead out from invisibility to visibility”.

###### **WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* **Hermeneutics’**:-the study of interpretation of written text. It can also be used for other forms of communication, including verbal. Jesus used this word in Luke 24:31, 32, 45, it is translated as: *opened their eyes* *or minds* and *explained.*

The word hermeneutics comes from the Greek word hermeneuo. It means to *translate, interpret, to explain thoroughly, and expound.*

Just before His ascension, Jesus did an exegesis of the entire Old Testament! ***He explained that… the entire Bible is about Him!*** Wouldn’t you have loved to be part of that Bible Study?

***Luke 24:25-49 (NASB)***

***And He said to them, O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Then beginning with the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in ALL the Scriptures. They said to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?” Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you: but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” AMEN.***

**Digging Deeper:** 2 Peter 1:19-21**;** Luke 4:14-21; John 5: 39-47; Matthew 5:17-19; Psalms 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 (NASB)***

***Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.***

Have you ever asked this question, “What is God saying to me through this passage, and how does it apply to my 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.*** And yet, without proper ***interpretation*** and ***understanding*** we cannot make ***application.*** If you will allow God’s Word to penetrate your heart, by applying it to your attitude and actions, your life will be transformed! The following questions will help you as you study.

**Think About These Things**

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 (NIV)***

***Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and 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 it with others!

It’s been wisely said, if you give someone a fish -- you will feed them for a day. But, teach them to fish -- and you will feed them for life! Likewise, it is wonderful to teach someone the Bible, but much better to teach them to study for themselves! However, if you t*each them to follow the Good Shepherd as a disciple, they will fish for men and multitudes of generations will eat!*

**Digging Deeper:**  Joshua 1:8; Psalms 1:1-3; Psalm 119:12-24; John 17:17; Psalms 119:97-103

**The Health of Your Countenance**

**Psalms 42:11 (KJV)**

***Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.***

#### **Introduction**

**Luke 4:17-21 (ESV)**

***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 liberty to the captives***

***and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat***

***down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”***

A dear friend posed a profound question to me recently: “Don’t you think the Lord desires to heal you of this pain? Haven’t you lived with this long enough?” A *real* friend will tell you the truth. In this lesson we will learn that depression, like all sickness, is a signal that something is wrong. We are frail in our humanity, and we all get sick sometimes. It is an effect of the fall, and when we are sick, even sick emotionally and mentally, the wise person will seek the help of a doctor of medicine. 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) May the Great Physician, Himself, use His Word as a balm and bring healing to every weary soul.

#### **People in the Bible Who Were Depressed**

The following is a partial list of people in the Bible who experienced various 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 (Gen. 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; Ex. 34:6-10; Micah 7:1).
* **Elisha:** 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 and self-centered piety 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).

“If you look at the world, you will be distressed. If you look within, you’ll be depressed. If you look at God you’ll be at rest.” – Corrie Ten boom

* **Cain:** He was depressed because He was angry and jealous of his brother (Gen. 4:2-9; 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 hewas 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 are we to when we suffer for doing what is right? (Matthew 5:10-12; 1 Peter 3:8-18)
* **Job:** 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; Psalms 107:1-22).
* **Jesus: I**n the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus agonized to the point of sweating blood.

Although he knew no sin, He was about to become sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

#### **Six Ways Jesus Fought Depression**

***Matthew 26:36-39 (HCSB)***

[***Then Jesu***](http://concordances.org/greek/5119.htm)[***s came wit***](http://concordances.org/greek/2064.htm)[***h them t***](http://concordances.org/greek/846.htm)[***o a place calle***](http://concordances.org/greek/5564.htm)[***d Gethsemane,***](http://concordances.org/greek/1068.htm) [***and He tol***](http://concordances.org/greek/2532.htm)[***d the disciples,***](http://concordances.org/greek/3588.htm) [***“Sit her***](http://concordances.org/greek/2523.htm)[***e whil***](http://concordances.org/greek/2193.htm)[***e I go over ther***](http://concordances.org/greek/565.htm)[***e and pray.***](http://concordances.org/greek/4336.htm)***”*** [***Taking along Pete***](http://concordances.org/greek/3880.htm)[***r and th***](http://concordances.org/greek/2532.htm)[***e two son***](http://concordances.org/greek/1417.htm)[***s of Zebedee,***](http://concordances.org/greek/2199.htm) [***He began to***](http://concordances.org/greek/756.htm) [***be sorrowful an***](http://concordances.org/greek/3076.htm)[***d deeply distressed.***](http://concordances.org/greek/85.htm) [***Then He sai***](http://concordances.org/greek/5119.htm)[***d to them,***](http://concordances.org/greek/846.htm) [***“My sou***](http://concordances.org/greek/3450.htm)[***l is swallowed up in***](http://concordances.org/greek/2076.htm)

[***sorrow — to the poin***](http://concordances.org/greek/4036.htm)[***t of death.***](http://concordances.org/greek/2288.htm) [***Remain her***](http://concordances.org/greek/3306.htm)[***e and stay awak***](http://concordances.org/greek/2532.htm)[***e with Me.***](http://concordances.org/greek/3326.htm)***”*** [***Going a little farther,***](http://concordances.org/greek/3397.htm) [***He fel***](http://concordances.org/greek/4098.htm)[***l facedown an***](http://concordances.org/greek/1909.htm)[***d prayed,***](http://concordances.org/greek/4336.htm) [***“My Father!***](http://concordances.org/greek/3450.htm) [***If it i***](http://concordances.org/greek/1487.htm)[***s possible,***](http://concordances.org/greek/1415.htm) [***let this cu***](http://concordances.org/greek/5124.htm)[***p pass fro***](http://concordances.org/greek/3928.htm)[***m Me.***](http://concordances.org/greek/1473.htm) [***Yet no***](http://concordances.org/greek/4133.htm)[***t as***](http://concordances.org/greek/5613.htm) [***I will,***](http://concordances.org/greek/1473.htm) [***but a***](http://concordances.org/greek/235.htm)[***s You***](http://concordances.org/greek/4771.htm) ***will.”***

The following quote is from a devotional by John Piper. (solidjoys.desiringgod.org)

There were several tactics in Jesus’ strategic battle against despondency. 1. He chose some close friends to be with him. ‘Taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee...’ (Matthew 26:37). 2. He opened his soul to them. He said to them, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death…’ (v.38). 3. He asked for their intercession and partnership in the battle. ‘Remain here, and watch with me’ (v. 38). 4. He poured out his heart to his Father in prayer. ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me’ (v. 39). 5. He rested his soul in the sovereign wisdom of God. ‘Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.’ (v. 39) 6. He fixed his eye on the glorious future grace that awaited him on the other side of the cross. ‘For the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God’ (Hebrews 12:2).

**Why Are You Cast Down, O My Soul?**

***Psalms 43:5 (HCSB)***

***Why am I so depressed? Why this turmoil within me? Put your hope in God, for I will still praise Him, my Savior and my God.***

No matter how many years we have been in Christ, we can still become down and depressed dealing with life in this sinful world. Yet when people who have not experienced depression, make statements like this, “Christians can’t be depressed.” or, “Those who are depressed don’t have faith,” it only adds to the pain of those who are suffering. Pastor and author Tom Nelson learned a great deal about this when he suffered through a season of depression. I highly recommend you listen to his insightful message entitled: “A Christian looks at Depression.” You can find this on YouTube. I have a family history of depression, and although it has taken some time to come to grips with this, I too have fought the battle with depression. For the most part, I have been unable to even identify what triggers it. So I have learned most of these lessons the hard way. Our bodies, fearfully and wonderfully made, are the earthly abode of our souls and spirits. The body soul and spirit are so interconnected that if one part is sick, all will be affected (1 Thessalonians 5:23; 3 John 2; Romans 6:12-19; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Did you know that *physical conditions* can be caused by *emotional sickness?*

As a personal example, 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 not only why I am depressed at times, but, also, He is teaching me *through Depression*. It’s ok to beweak, because in my weakness, I’m even more dependent upon His strength; when I am weak, He is strong. So I can be still and let him heal me (Psalms 46:1-11). The Lord Jesus is our Creator; He wrote the story of our lives. He alone knows where we are mentally, emotionally and physically even better than we know these things ourselves. When we are clueless about why we are depressed, Jesus knows exactly what is going on. He is, after all, the Wonderful Counselor; He is the Lord who heals all our diseases… even depression. We can cast all our cares on Him because He cares for us.

**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; Hebrew 4:12-13; John 2:24-25; 1 Peter 5:7

#### **The Medicine**

***Jeremiah 8:20-22 (NASB)***

***Harvest is past, summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the brokenness of the daughter of my people I am broken; I mourn, dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has not the health of the daughter of my people been restored?***

The above passage is a window in which we can see into the heart of God. Speaking through Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, He asked a rhetorical question: “Why has the health of my daughter not been restored?” Interestingly enough, 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 need as medicine.

***Proverbs 4:20-22 (NIV)***

***My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one’s whole body.***

#### **WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* **Restore/turning/repent/converting**: Hebrew word - shuwb: *restoring, converting, repent, turn, convert, recover, restores, rescue, fetch home again, feed, lie down, and make rejoice return.* (Psalms 19:7, 23:3, 51:12, 119:159-160)
* **Health**: Hebrew word - marpay: *Health; a cure; a remedy; a medicine.*
* **Life:** Hebrew word - chayah: *to live; to revive; keep alive; make alive; nourish; preserve; recover; restore to life; save life and be whole.*

The following are the two different Greek words translated Word**.**

* **Word**: Greek word - logos:*The divine expression – i.e. Christ; communication; utterance; mouth.* See the word logos used in the following verses: John 1: 1-14; 1

Peter 1: 23; Hebrew 4:12; John 8:31; 14:23; 1 John 1:1; Rev. 19:13

* **Word**: Greek word - rhema:*an utterance; a specific matter or topic; command; word.*

See the word rhema used in the following verses: Matt. 4:4; Romans 10:8, 17; Ephesians 1:13; 5:26; 6:17; Hebrews 1:3; 11:3; John 3:34; 6:63; &68; John 15:7; 1Peter

1:25.

***Deuteronomy 32:46-47***

**“Take to heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, (1 Sam.2; 12-29) even all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed, *IT IS YOUR LIFE.”***

**Digging Deeper:** Matthew 4:23, 9:35; Luke 4:18-20; Exodus 15:26; Psalms 103:3, 147:3; Hosea 11:3

#### **Practical Helps for Depression**

1. **Go see your Doctor**! If he prescribes medicine for you to take, by all means *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 can lead to death; many lives have been lost to suicide. Please seek professional help!
2. **Seek Godly Biblical counsel**. (Jeremiah 8:7-22; Isaiah 8:16-20; Psalm 146;1-10)
3. **Help others**. It will get your mind off of yourself. (Isaiah 58:1-12)
4. **Take care of your temple** (your body). Take care of your body by eating healthy, exercising, setting outside in the sun, getting proper rest and being still before the Lord! (Psalms 46:111) Good, clean humor helps to lighten your mood, and laughing is good medicine.
5. **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 (Psalms 139:1-16, 107:9-11; Jeremiah 1:5-8). The Holy Spirit will take specific scriptures (Rhemas) and apply them as medicine to the specific situation you are facing. “In the darkness, God’s truth shines most clear.” – Corrie Ten Boon (Psalms 145:13-21)
6. **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; Psalms 51:1-17).
7. **Turn to God in Repentance**. (1 John 1:5-10; **Acts 2:38; 3:19-20**; 26:20; 2 Cor. 7:10; Romans 2:4-5; Luke 5:20-32, 13:1-5, 24:46-48)
8. **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)
9. **Remember what God has done** **for you in the past**. Count your many blessing (Psalms 42:111 (KJV).
10. **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; Psalm 145:1-21; Acts 2:25-28).

***Psalms 103:1-5 (ESV)***

***Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!***

***Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity,*** ***who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.***

After living through the horror of the war and concentration camps, Cory Ten Boon surely knew depression and despair, and yet she survived it all with her faith intact. This is one of her quotes: “There is no pit so deep, that God’s love is not deeper still.” 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 hope and prayer is that you will come to know the love of God, and that He may bring health to your countenance.

***Ephesians 3:14-19 (NIV)***

***For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.***

#### **Think on These Things**

Have you or someone you know ever struggled with depression? Do you think the illness of depression is looked upon differently than other illnesses? If so why? Do you think many people suffer through depression in silence because they are ashamed of it? Could you identify with any of the Biblical examples we have listed? From all we have learned, make a list of some root causes that could lead to depression. You may want to take a survey of people you know well and ask them if they have experienced depression. Make note of things that others can do to help someone through these times.

**Phase # 4**

**Ephesians 2:19-22 (ESV)**

***So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.***

**Main Goals:**

* Help them understand their place in the Family of God.
* Prepare them to serve the Body of Christ within the Church.
* Equip them to disciple others.

**Additional Information:**

To be formed into the image of the Lord Jesus, we must be connected to a local body of believers. The lessons in phase number 4 will help us understand the importance of fellowship and being a member of God’s Family (Psalm 68:5).

**Woman of God Prepared For Battle**

***Ephesians 6:10-12 (NASB)***

***Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.***

* **Lesson:** Being equipped to stand and overcome in spiritual warfare.
* **Key Passages**: Ephesians 6:10-12; 2 Cor. 2:11-14; 2 Cor. 11:1-15; 1 John 3:7-13
* **Writer**: Ginny Porter
* **Companion book**: Fiery Darts by Janet Lane

**Introduction**

During war times, everyone gets prepared and it is prudent to stay alert and ready to defend their family and home. In the spiritual realm, though, for the most part, we are not even cognizant of the battle that is being waged all around us. Most of us don’t even know who the enemy is, much less how he works.

Until we are rescued from the kingdom of darkness and placed *in Christ*, we are like defenseless sheep against the schemes of the evil-one. For those in *Christ,* the victory is already won. But make no mistake about it, we are in a war with a real and unseen enemy. We must be alert and made aware of who he is and his methods to destroy us. In this lesson, we will learn to take our stand upon the Word of God so that we can take back surrendered ground and claim the victory purchased for us by the Lord.

***1 Corinthians 15:57-58 (NIV)***

***But thanks are to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.58Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.***

**Know Your Enemy**

***1 Peter 5:8-9(NIV)***

***8Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.***

“*The goal of every Christian should be to learn the identity, plans and purposes of the devil and to stand firm against him!* ----Dr. David Jeremiah. I would like to add to Doctor Jeremiah’s quote. We need to know our God well, through His Word, and find our identity ***In Christ.***  As we become well-equipped soldiers, we can take our stand and win the daily battles. Let’s learn the tactics that are used against us.

***Psalm 138:7-8 (KJV)***

***“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you will revive me; You will stretch fourth your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand will save me. The LORD will perfect that which concerns me; your loving kindness, O LORD, is everlasting; do not forsake the works of your hands.”***

**Digging Deeper:** Col. 1:9-13; Acts 17:11; 1 Peter 1:13-16; 5:6-11; Deut. 1:29-31; 3:22; Psalms 97:9-10

**Word Search:**

* **DEVIL** #1228 DIABOLOS-FALSE ACCUSER, Satan, and slanderer. (1Peter5:8, Acts 13:10, Heb. 2:4; Rev. 12:9; 20:10)
* **Schemes/Devices**-#3540-Noema-thoughts; perception; purpose; intelligence. (2Cor.2:11)
* **Schemes/wiles** #3180-Methodeia- trickery-to lie in wait. (Eph. 6:11)

**Identify His Methods**

***2 Corinthians 2:10-1, 14 (NASB)***

***But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes. 14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.***

These are some of the methods that the enemy uses against us: temptations of flesh, offense, sinful anger, unforgiveness, disputes, insecurities, fear, ignorance or deceptions, pride, distractions, confusion, delusions and discouragement. In the previous list, can you identify the methods the enemy has used on you?

***2 Corinthians 11:3-5 (NIV)***

***But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.***

***For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.***

**Digging Deeper:** 1 Corinthians 7:2-5, Matthew 4:1-4, 7:7-14; James 1:19-25; **Ephesians 4:25-27;** James 4:1-11**;** 2 Corinthians 2: 10-11, 14-17, 11:3-4; 2 Timothy 2:3-4

**Identify His Messengers**

***1 John 3:7-13***

***Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work. 9No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. 10This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.11For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 12Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brothers were righteous. 13Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.***

***1 John 4:4-7 (NIV)***

***You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 5They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. 6We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.***

***2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (NASB)***

***For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.***

Although people are sometimes used as his instruments, we are not fighting people! We overcome evil with Good! (Luke 6:27-36; Romans 12:14-21; Matthew 5:43-44) Pastor David Lawrence tells us what ***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! What is forgiveness? Dr. Chuck Hannaford defines it, “*Forgiveness is an act of my will making use of God’s grace in order to cancel a debt owed me…forgiveness is a choice.”*

**Digging Deeper**: Acts 20:20; 2 Corinthians 2:11, 10:3-6, 11:3-16; 1 John 3:7-13, 4:14; John 8:44-45; Galatians 4:29; Matthew 7:16-22, 13:36-43

**Defensive Armor**



***Romans 13:11-14 (NIV)***

***And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh..***

***Ephesians 6:13-20 (NASB)***

***Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousnessand having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. 16in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17And take the helmet of salvation.***

* **Verse 14 Truth like a belt!** The breastplate of Righteousness helps us do what is right when the enemy comes against us. This is imparted righteousness. We must know the Word of God well in order to identify the twisted lies of the enemy.

**Digging Deeper:** Acts 17:11; 2 Peter 3:14-18; 2 Corinthians 4:2-6; Deuteronomy 4:2-6; Prov. 30:5-6; Revelations 22:18-20;[**2 Corinthians 2:13**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+2%3A11-14&version=NIV#en-NIV-28838) **:** [**2Co 7:6, 13; 8:6, 16, 23; 12:18; Gal 2:1, 3; Tit 1:4**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2Cor%207:6,%202Cor%207:13,%202Cor%208:6,%202Cor%208:16,%202Cor%208:23,%202Cor%2012:18,%20Gal%202:1,%20Gal%202:3,%20Titus%201:4&version=NIV)[**2 Corinthians 2:13**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+2%3A11-14&version=NIV#en-NIV-28838) **:** [**S Ac 16:9**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%2016:9&version=NIV)[**2 Corinthians 2:14**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+2%3A11-14&version=NIV#en-NIV-28839) **:** [**Ro 6:17; 7:25; 1Co 15:57; 2Co 9:15**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom%206:17,%20Rom%207:25,%201Cor%2015:57,%202Cor%209:15&version=NIV)[**2 Corinthians 2:14**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+2%3A11-14&version=NIV#en-NIV-28839) **: Eze 20:41; Eph 5:2; Php 4:18**[**2 Corinthians 2:14**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+2%3A11-14&version=NIV#en-NIV-28839) **:** [**S 2Co 8:7**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2Cor%208:7&version=NIV) John 14:6; 17:17; Revelation 19:7-9

* **Verse 15 Feet ready with the Gospel of Peace.** We must be at peace with God, reconciled to Him through repentance and faith in Christ Jesus. If our ways are pleasing to the Lord, our commander, then He will make our enemy be at peace with us. ***Do you have beautiful feet? Who prepared you with the gospel?***

**Digging Deeper**: Romans 1:1-10, 8:5-11, 10:15-18; John 17:9-21; 2Timothy 2: 1-4; Proverbs 16:7;2 Cor. 5:18-20

* **Verse 16 Shield of faith. Who is teaching you the Word of God?**

**Digging Deeper:** Romans 10:17; John 6:63; Romans 8:11 1 Tim. 6:12

* **Verse 18 Helmet of salvation** guards your mind-the battlefield. Where is your mind set? (Romans 8:5-11) **Arrows are thoughts, false perceptions, and speculations**. He will attack you with the following: past-Justification (1 Cor. 6:9-11), present-sanctification (2 Cor. 5:17; John 17:17; Ephesians 4:22-24), and future-glorification. He is already defeated, for we are In Christ!

**Digging Deeper:** Romans 5:1-11, 8:1-39, 12:1-2; Colossians 2:10-15

**Offensive Weapons of The Spirit**

***2 Corinthians 6:1-7 (NIV)***

***As God’s co-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. 2For he says, “In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you. I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.3We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. 4Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; 5in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; 6in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; 7in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left.***

***Ephesians 6:17b-20 (NASB)***

***The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.***

**Word of God**

***John 6:63 (NASB)***

***It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.***

The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. It is one of our two offensive weapons of righteousness. (You can view a video on our website that perfectly depicts how Satan wants to silence the Word of God.)

We must use the very same strategy as Jesus to combat our enemy. (Matthew 4:1-4) The Sword of the Spirit is the use of ***very*** ***specific scriptures***; truths that combat the lies. (See the **Word** **Search** below, to define the difference in the **two** words translated in Greek for ***Word*** of God.) In this spiritual battle, we must use spiritual weapons. (Ephesians 5:1-18) To be filled with the Spirit, we must be yielded to the Spirit and under His control. To be right with God, we must be living out His word in obedience. If I turn my face away from hearing God’s Word, He will turn his face away from me when I pray.

**Digging Deeper:** Proverbs 15:8 &29, 28:9; Isaiah 1:15, 59:1-3, 49:24-26, 54:13-17; Micah 3:4, 1 Peter 3:12, John 15:7-8

One personal example is the story of man threatening to kill my son. (You can hear this on the Audio CD) (Luke 6:27-36; Romans 12:14-21; Matthew 5:43-44) The door was open through anger and unforgiveness toward my husband, we were fighting. I was deceived by the devil. I was not wearing all my armor! (Eph. 4:17-32; James 1:19-25; Matthew 6:16-22)

To take back surrendered ground, you must confess and repent. Confession is my response to His Righteousness and my own sinfulness. I need to come clean when I see my sin in the mirror of His Word. (James 4:6-10, 1 John 1:9) He loves to keep his work in the dark. When we confess our sins to others, we are shedding light on the work of the Devil. To stand, you must first bow to Jesus in humble submission to His Lordship. Satan can only take the ground we give to him when we have failed to obey God’s Word! Some of us are living defeated lives because we have surrendered ground to the adversary by failing to bow to the authority of God. (2 Timothy 2:22-26; Luke 6:43-48)

**Word Search:**

* **WORD- Greek-LOGOS:** The divine expression –i.e. Christ-communication-utterance-mouth used in the following passages: John 1; 1-14 and 1 Peter 1: 23, Hebrew 4:12, John 8:31, 14:23, 1 John 1:1, Rev. 19:13
* **WORD- Greek- Rhema**: an utterance a specific a matter or topic command –Word. See this used in the following verses: **Matthew** **4**:**1**-**6**; Romans 10:8, 17; 1 Peter 1:26; Ephesians1:13; 5:26 & 6:1; Hebrews 1:3, 11:3; John3:34, 6:63 & 68; John 15:7; 1:25.
* **PRAY- Greek PROS-EUCHE or Prayer-PROS-EUCHOMAI**: Worship-oratory chapel-pray earnestly - pray to God i.e. supplicate, worship.
* **Worship- Greek is PROS-KUNEO**: to kiss like a dog licking his master’s hand-to fawn or crouch-to prostrate oneself in homage - do reverence to adore - WORSHIP. (John 4:20-24)
* **Continually-PROS-KARTEREO:** earnest toward-persevere, constantly diligent-attend assiduously to all the exercises or to a person - to adhere closely to (as a servitor) attend give self continually, continue with - wait on continually. (Acts 6:4) KJV

**The Power of Prayer**

***James 4:3-10 (NIV)***

***When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.4You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us,But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”7Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.***

There's a direct correlation to my humbling myself in prayer and my awareness of His presence in the midst of spiritual battle.

“Prayer is the greatest power on earth if it is practiced in the true fear of the LORD.”--- A. W. Tozer. When we pray, we not only come near to God, but He comes near to us!

***Deuteronomy 4:7 (NIV)***

***“What other Nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our GOD is NEAR US whenever we pray to him?”***

The Lord Jesus prayed for us and taught us to pray for deliverance from the evil one (John 17:13-21). The prayers that start in heaven will be powerful on earth!

***Psalms 145:18 (NIV)***

***“The LORD is Near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in TRUTH.”***

God’s Word is truth! Whose prayers are powerful? ***James 5:13-16 (NIV)Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.***

**Digging Deeper**: Romans 8:26-27; 31-39; 1Peter3:8-12; Proverbs 28:9; 15:8, 29; Isaiah 59:1-3

**Who Equips Us for Battle?**

***2 Timothy 2:1-4 (NASB)***

***You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.***

Do you know the song “Onward Christian Soldier”? A disciple is a soldier in a battle. The world in which we now are in, “but not of,” is a *battle ground*, not a *playground*. How can those who are infants in the faith protect themselves from evil? We must be taught to fight and to learn to stand our ground in the daily attacks. Timothy was the pastor of the church of Ephesus when Paul, his spiritual parent and disciple maker, wrote the two letters to him. Paul repeatedly admonished his dear son to *fight the good fight of the faith*.“*We cannot obey a multitude of God’s commands without being in regular, close fellowship with other believers. He has designed this world so that many of our needs get met ONLY through mutual interdependence.”* --- Charles Stanley

***Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NIV)***

***Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.***

**Digging** **Deeper**: 1 Timothy 1:18, 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:1-4, 4:7-8; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

One of the clearest gospel songs written in our day is “In Christ Alone.” It ends with these words: “No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from His hands, till He returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I stand.”

**Think About These Things**

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.
2. Think about times of defeat. What weapons or armor were missing?
3. Who prepared you for this daily battle?
4. Is this person missing in your walk of faith?
5. Have you been taught to pray?
6. Read: Luke 11:1-3 and Matthew 6:16-22. Who teaches others to pray?
7. Are you preparing someone else to stand?
8. For a more in-depth study on this subject, we recommend the book, **Fiery Darts**, by Janet lane. You can find her link on our resource page.

***Romans 8:35-39 (NIV)***

***35Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

**Who Are Your “Yous”?**

***1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 (HCSB)***

***For who is our hope, or joy, or crown of boasting in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy!***

* **Lesson: Part 1** Learning to follow Jesus and live for others.

**Part 2** Setting priorities and practical application.

* **Key passages:** 1 Thessalonians chapters 1-3; Mark 3:13-19; Titus 2:3-5
* **Hear:** This lesson is available to hear on audio.
* **Writer:** Ginny Porter from notes from Herb Hodges lessons.

**Introduction**

***Mark 3:13-19 (ESV)***

***And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot,and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.***

To be a true follower of Jesus requires that we die to our agenda and take up His. So 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 reach spiritual adulthood. But more specifically, 12 ordinary men. They were ***His you’s*** and they were ***His work***! Hence the title of this lesson. The most Christ-like thing we can do to serve Jesus is to follow Him and make disciples.

***“*Where I Am, There My Servant Will Be.”**

***John 12:24-26 (HCSB)***

***I assure you: Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by ITSELF. But if it dies, it produces a large crop. The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves ME, he must follow ME. Where I am, there My servant also will be. 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 to God’s family. If we are to make disciples just 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 (NASB)***

***“I will gladly spend and be spent for YOU!”***

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 then Timothy became Paul’s ***you***, his primary disciple. (2Timothy 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 (NASB)***

***But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very 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 Thess.2:7-12

**The *Me* Life Vs. The *You* Life**

***1 Thessalonians 3:5-10 (ESV)***

***For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—for this reason, brothers in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. For now, we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?***

Herb Hodges, in his exposition of 1 Thessalonians 3:8, said that there is one word in this passage that the Holy Spirit raises His voice for major emphasis. That word is *YOU*! From his lesson I learned that there are two lifestyles that we can live, the Savior’s lifestyle, or Satan’s. But if you have been a Christian for any length of time then you know that we can vacillate between the two. That is why, we must get up every day and choose who 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 (HSV)***

***A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.***

* **Savior’s life.**

In 1 Thessalonians chapters one through three, Paul and two of his disciples, Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy, used one word 50 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 2:1-8 (ESV)***

***So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, 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. For this reason, everything in our life, time, energy, wisdom, and resources are used for the growth and benefit of *others*. Do you know the primary difference in merely doing Bible studies and disciple making? Most people study to benefit themselves, but a disciple maker studies and gathers truth in order 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 (HCSB)***

***And whoever wants to be first among you must be a slave to all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life-a ransom for many.***

**Digging Deeper:**  Luke 9:22-23, 26-27, 14:25-35; Gal. 2:20; John 13:12-17, 34-35; Mark 10:44-45; Romans 12:9-16

**Practical Application for Women**

***Titus 2:3-5 (NASB)***

***Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the younger women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.***

**Our Ministry to the Lord**

Our first and foremost ministry is to our Savior - the Lord Jesus Christ. He desires that our relationship with Him be a divine romance, not empty religious rituals. In our lesson, Holy Habit - How to Have a Quiet Time, we learn what it looks like to nurture this relationship. One hundred percent of our lives belong to the Lord Jesus, and everything else falls under His ownership. Without this first ministry, everything else we do will be vain, empty, fruitless work. The next two ministries will be useless without private worship. However, private worship in no way excludes the necessity of corporate worship within a local body of believers. It greatly enhances it! How else are we to fulfill all the other “together ministries”?

**Digging Deeper:** Matthew 6:29-33; Luke 10:39-42; John 15:1-16; Acts 13:2-4

**Our Ministry to Our Family**

You may be wondering, exactly how does this work in a woman's busy life? Disciple making looks different at each stage of a woman’s life. For example, if you are attending a university or perhaps you are a single working woman, you will have more freedom to do life with other women. However, if you’re married with children then, by necessity, your discipling relationships will revolve around the needs of your husband and the care of your children. As your life, activities and responsibilities change, so will your discipling relationships.

For the woman who is married, her husband and marriage should take priority. If she has children, they are to follow a close second. Our family are the ones whom the Lord has entrusted to our care. For example, 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 home and model for them what this looks like to *live for others.*Before we look at our third and last ministry, please don’t forget this 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.

**Digging Deeper:** Titus 2:3-5; Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:12-24; 1 Timothy 2:9-15; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35

**Our Ministry in Discipling Relationships**



This brings me to our last ministry - discipling relationships with other women. Please understand this; it is a lifestyle, and 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!* 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 had entrusted a few of His own children into your care. If you cannot let her 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. With that being said, 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. It is our love for Him that empowers our love for them.

**Digging Deeper**: Matthew 19:18-19, 22:36-40; Luke 10:25-27; Galatians 5:13-14; 1 Thess. 2:5-20

**How Do I Know Who to Invest in?**

# ***Philippians 2:19-22 (NIV)***

***I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy******to you soon,******that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you.******I have no one else like him,******who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests,******not those of Jesus Christ.******But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.***

You may be thinking, “How am I to find someone to disciple me or is there someone whom I can disciple?” First, seek the Lord in prayer, because that is 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.

***2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV)***

***You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.***

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 3 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.*

***John 3:22 (NIV)***

***After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized.***

Our lives will either be invested, or they’ll be spent. 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”!

**Digging Deeper:** Matthew 28:18-20; Judges 7:17; Ephesians 5:18-21; Titus 2:5-15; Luke 6:12, 16:8; Acts 13:2-3; Mark 3:13-16; Philippians 3:17; 4:19; 1 Corinthians 4:16; 1 Peter 5:3

***1 Thessalonians 3:8-9 (HCSB)***

***“For now we live, if you stand firm in the LORD. How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience because of you before our God?”***

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. What lifestyle are you living, the Savior’s or Satan’s? Give explanation for your answer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Who invested *their life* and *God’s truth* into you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Looking back over the three ministries, who are your yous in each of the 3? Prioritize your list. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. What would it look like for someone to *do life* with you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Where do you go, and what kind of things do you do in your everyday life? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Can you think of anyone you could bring into your life to do these things with? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**"She Who Has Ears, Let Her Hear!”**

**Key Passage**

**Revelation 2:7 (KJV)**

***He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches; to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.***

* **Lesson:** The reception of the Word of God is determined by the condition of the heart.
* **Main Point**: If you truly hear God’s Word, you will become a sower of the Eternal Seed and multitudes of people will hear the Truth you have heard.
* **Key Passages**: Matthew chapter 13 and Luke chapter 8
* **Writer**: Ginny Porter \*from notes taken from Herb Hodges message, “At What Level Do You Listen?”

**Introduction**

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, and it’s also translated as obey. But the most important aspect of the word was this: they were to listen carefully and transfer exactly what they heard to the next generation. (Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Psalms 78:1-8, 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). The people refused to hear the message God sent through His prophet, and so approximately seven hundred and fifty years later, God spoke through His one and only Son the same message. (Hebrew 1:1-10; John 1:1-14) 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 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. (Matthew 12:46-50, Luke 8:1-21) 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, if you have ears… then hear the parable of the sower.

**The Soil, The Seed and The Sower**

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 this category hear God’s Word, but do not act upon them. Although they may call *Jesus Lord*, they don’t do what He says. The Macarthur’s Study Bible is more specific in the assessment of those who fit this description. The commentary on Luke 6:46-47 says, “*It is not sufficient to give lip service to Christ’s Lordship. Genuine faith produces obedience. A tree is known by its fruits.*” (Matthew 7:21-23)

**Luke 8:18-21 (NET)**

***So******listen******carefully,******for******whoever******has******will be given******more, but******whoever******does not******have,******even******what******he thinks******he has******will be taken******from******him.”***

***Now******Jesus’******mother******and******his******brothers******came******to******him,******but******they could******not******get near******him******because******of the crowd.****So****he was told,******“Your******mother******and******your******brothers******are standing******outside,******wanting******to see******you.”******But******he replied******to******them,******“My******mother******and******my******brothers******are******those******who hear******the word******of God******and******do******it.”***

* **Soil #1** (**Matthew 13:1-4)**  **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 wererocky. The seed fell on the soil, and got down in it, but there was no root because they were confused in their loyalty. 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 the Jesus sows His Eternal Seed (the Word) He expects to receive a harvest. For all His labor only about twenty-five percent of the soil will produce a crop. Jesus “weeded” out the uncommitted majority by telling them some hard truths about the cost of being His disciples. (Luke 9:18-27, 14:25-34)

**John 8:43-47 (NET)**

***Why******don’t******you understand******what I******am saying? It is because******you cannot******accept******my******teaching.******You******people******are******from******your father******the******devil,******and******you want******to do******what your******father******desires.******Hewas******a murderer******from******the beginning,******and******does******not******uphold******the******truth,******because there is******no******truth******in******him.******Whenever******he lies, he speaks******according to******his own******nature,****be****cause******he is******a liar******and******the father******of lies. But******because******I******am telling******you******the truth,******you do******not******believe******me.******Who******among******you******can prove******me******guilty******of any******sin?******If******I am telling******you******the truth,******why******don’t******you believe******me?******The one who******belongs to******God******listens and responds******to God’s******words.******You******don’t******listen and respond,******because******you******don’t******belong******to******God.”***

**Digging Deeper:** Matthew 12:46-50, 13:1-43; Luke 8:1-21, 6:46; 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 8:1-15 (NET)**

***Sometime******afterward******he******went on******through******towns******and******villages,******preaching******and******proclaiming the good news******of the kingdom******of God.******The******twelve******were with******him,******and******also some******women******who******had been healed******of******evil******spirits******anddisabilities:******Mary******(called******Magdalene), from******whom******seven******demons******had gone out,******and******Joanna******the wife******of Cuza******(Herod’s******household******manager),******Susanna,******and******many******others******who******provided******for them******out of******their******own resources. While a large******crowd******was gathering******and people were coming******to Jesus******from******one town******after another,******he spoke******to them******in******a parable: “A sower******went out******to sow******his seed.******And******as he sowed,******some******fell******along******the path******and******was trampled on,******and******the wild birds******devoured******it.*** ***Other******seed fell******on******rock,******and******when it came up,******it withered******because it had******no******moisture.*** ***Other******seed fell******among******the thorns, and******they grew up******with it******and choked******it. But******other seed fell******on******good******soil******and******grew,******and it produced******a hundred times******as much grain.”******As he said******this, he called out,******“The one who has******ears******to hear******had better listen!”******Then******his******disciples******asked******him******what******this******parable******meant.******He******said,******“You have been given******the opportunity to know******the secrets****of* ***the kingdom******of God,****but****for others******they are in******parables,******so******that******although they see******they may******not******see,******and******although they hear******they may******not******understand.******“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 only ***twenty–five percent*** of Jesus’ 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 following are notes from the Macarthur Study Bible on Luke 8:15, specifically the words…heard…hold and bear fruit. “*This constitutes evidence of true salvation. ‘Heard’ is a reference to understanding and believing (John 8:31, 47). ‘Hold’ refers to ongoing obedience (Luke 11:28, John 14:21-24). ‘Fruit’ is good works” (Matthew 7:16-20 and James 2:14-26).*

###### **WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* **Follow** in Greek Strong’s #190 *akoloutheo: as union; to be in the same way with, accompany,* ***specifically as a disciple;*** *- to follow, reach.* (Luke 6:40 and John 12:26)
* **Hear/listen** in GreekStrong’s #191 *akouo: to hear-give in the audience of, come into the ears, hear or harken-****understand****.*
* **Told/put forth/ or presented** in GreekStrong’s #3098 and #*5087 paratithemi: to place alongside, present, to deposit-as a trust for protection, commit to the keeping of.* (Matthew 13:24,31)

**Passages for Comparison**

(John 6:45) "It is written in the Prophets: They will all be taught by God." (Isaiah 54:13) "Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from Him comes to Me." (Luke 9:35) "This is My SON, My chosen ONE; listen to Him!" (John 10:27) "My sheep hear My voice and follow Me."

**Psalms 78:1-7 (NET)**

***Pay attention,******my people,******to my instruction! Listen******to the words******I speak!******I will sing******a song that imparts wisdom; I will make******insightful observations******about******the past.*** ***What******we have heard******and learned******– that which our ancestors******have told******us –******we will not******hide******from their******descendants. We will tell******the next******generation about the******Lord’s******praiseworthy acts,******about his strength******and the amazing things******he has******done.******He established******a rule******in Jacob; he set up******a law******in Israel.***

***He commanded******our ancestors to make his deeds known******to their descendants,******so that the next generation,******children******yet to be born, might******know******about them. They will grow up******and tell******their descendants******about them.******Then******they will place******their confidence******in God. They will not******forget******the works******of God, and they will obey******his commands.***

**Digging Deeper:** Matthew 13:36-43; Psalm 78:1-8; 1 Peter 1:22-25; Isaiah 6:8-10

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. As a result, they don’t plant, and 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, when anyone has ears to hear the Word of God, they understand what Jesus says and acts on what he has heard; these are true disciples of the LORD JESUS CHRIST.

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; Isaiah 60:1-5

***Matthew 13:43 (NASB)***

***Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s kingdom. Anyone who has ears should listen!***

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. Do you really know God, and do you hear His Word? Have you been born again? (1 Peter 1:23-2; John 3: 1-16) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Read Matthew 13:37-42 and answer the following question: What will ultimately happen to the weeds? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. When you hear the Word of God, is it an investment or is it expenditure? (Matthew 13:23-24; John 15:16) Are you a seed or a weed? (Matthew 13:36-37) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. What do you think Jesus meant when He said that the secrets of the kingdom of Heaven would be given to His disciples and not to the others? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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”? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. 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.) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. 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? (Matthew 13:8-12) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. What are you doing with all the Truth you have been given? (Luke 12:48) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
9. In Matthew 13:34-36, Jesus referenced Psalms 78:1-8. What are the first words of the Psalm? What are God’s people supposed to do with what they have *heard*? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
10. 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. Who are the “shiny ones” in the Kingdom? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Phase #5**

**Ephesians 4:11-16 (NET)**

***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 tothe 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.***

**Main Goals:**

* 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.

**Additional Information:**

To further cast the vision of reproducing-disciple-making, you could use the following books, Tally Ho The Fox by Herb Hodges and The Master Plan of Evangelism, by Robert Coleman. These books are required reading and essential resources for those who are serious about following Jesus and make disciples.

**Betrothed to One Husband**

**Key Passages**

**Ephesians 4:12-14 (NET)**

***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 tothe measure of Christ’s full stature. Sowe 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.***

**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 in Ephesus 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 live in ignorance about sound doctrine. 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 (NET)**

***Dear friends, although I have been eager to write to you about our common salvation, I now feel compelled instead to write to encourageyou 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 Masterand 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)? And so, the aim of this lesson is to equip believers with the essential doctrines (teachings) of the faith and help them learn to identify false teachers, prophets and heretics.

**1 Timothy 4:15-16 (NET)**

***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?**

**1 Timothy 1:18-20 (NET)**

***I put this chargebefore you, Timothy my child, in keeping with the prophecies once spoken about you, in order that with such encouragementyou may fight the good fight.  To do thisyou must hold firmly to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck in regard to the faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I handed over to Satanto be taught not to blaspheme.***

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 crucial that He designates this amount of Holy Writ to addressing 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 about their devotional, as well as, doctrinal purity.

**Acts 20:7-31 (NET)**

***For I did not hold back from announcingto you the whole purposeof 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 wolveswill come in among you, not sparing the flock.  Even from among your own group men will arise, teaching perversions of the truthto draw the disciples away after them.  Therefore be alert,remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warningeach one of you with tears.***

Not knowing if he would ever see them again this side of heaven, imagine how Paul must have felt as he bid farewell to the saints at Ephesus. 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 (NET)**

***As I urged you when I was leaving for Macedonia, stay on in Ephesusto instructcertain people not to spread false teachings, nor to occupy themselves with myths and interminable genealogies. Such things promote useless speculations rather than God’s redemptive planthat operates by faith. But the aim of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.Some have strayed from these and turned away to empty discussion. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not understand what they are saying or the things they insist on so confidently. But we know that the law is good if someone uses it legitimately, realizing that lawis not intended for a righteous person, but for lawless and rebellious people, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, sexually immoral people, practicing homosexuals,kidnappers, liars, perjurers – in fact, for any who live contrary to sound teaching.  This accords with the glorious gospel of the blessed Godthat was entrusted to me.***

Throughout the Bible, God is portrayed as the Husband of His people—it is one of His self-descriptions (Hosea 2:14-3:2; Isaiah 54:5). As we know, Paul unveiled a divine mystery that the church is, if fact, the bride of Christ. Therefore, it’s no surprise that he would choose this analogy in his rebuke of the saints in Corinth.

**2 Corinthians 11:2-4 (NET)**

***For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy, because I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a purevirgin to Christ. But I am afraid thatjust as the serpent deceived Eve by his treachery, your minds may be led astrayfrom 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!***

Unlike the Corinthian Church, the saints at Ephesus were so rooted in sound doctrine, they were the only Church that Paul did not rebuke for heresy. To underscore this fact, thirty years later, this church was still holding on to this teaching and is commended by the Lord Jesus for their stand upon the truth. But unfortunately, they had left their first love (Revelation 2:1-7). 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; Jude; 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

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**Heresies Throughout Church History**

**Jude 17-25 (NET)**

***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, maintainyourselves 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 mercyon 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 Satin. While these phonies (a nicer name than God calls them) may seem harmless, and their teaching sincere, nothing could be farther 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; they teach the doctrines of demons; 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 (NET)**

***O Timothy, protect what has been entrusted to you. Avoidthe profane chatter and absurditiesof 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 (NET)**

***I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the onewho called you by the grace of Christand are followinga differentgospel – not that there really is another gospel, butthere are some who are disturbing you and wantingto 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). 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 (Revelations 2:20; 1 John 2:15-16).

**Revelation 2:6 (KJV)**

***But you do have this going for you:You hate what the Nicolaitans practice – practices I also hate.***

In 325 AD., 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 (385-450 AD). 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 lead to the First Council of Constantinople in 381 AD. There the bishops gathered again to reaffirm the Nicene creed. To this day, as an affirmation of these beliefs, these creeds are read, and or taught in some denominations.

**Apostles Creed**

**“*I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and Jesus Christ his only Son our LORD; who was conceived by the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the father almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of Sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.***

**Two Examples**

**Matthew 7:15-20 (NET)**

***“Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves.You will recognize them by their fruit. Grapes are not gatheredfrom thorns or figs from thistles, are they?In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the badtree 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 perish 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 dabbled in the occult, founded the Mormon religion (otherwise known as the Latter-day Saints). Rooted in adultery, he practiced polygamy and married 28 women. Some of these “wives” were as young as 14 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 (NET)**

***And we all agree,our religion contains amazing revelation:Hewas 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 themselveswith deceiving spirits and demonic teachings, influenced by the hypocrisy of liarswhose 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 latter 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 spirt 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 (NET)**

***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 themselvesto Balaam’s error; hence, they will certainly perish in Korah’s rebellion. These men aredangerous 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.***

**Proverbs 30:5-6 (NET)**

***Every word of God is purified; he is like a shield for those who take refuge in him.***

***Do not add to his words, lest he reprove you, and prove you to be a liar.***

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 up-bringing 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.” 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 (NET)**

***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 describedin 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 Thess. 2:1-15; 2 Timothy 3:1-4; Hebrew 13:4; 1 Peter 1:23-25; 2 Peter 1:16-21, 2:1-22, 3:15-18; 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 (NET)**

***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 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 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. C.S. Lewis may be the most famous and prolific apologist of the twentieth century. But, today there are many highly respected Christians Apologist 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 1000 plus years, the sixty-six books of the Bible were recorded by the Holy Spirit on the hearts of approximately 49 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

1. **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. As one of the bishops who signed the Nicene Creed, Saint Nicholas stood his ground in opposing Arius, in defense of the doctrine of the Trinity.

**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

1. **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 filled what the scripture prophesied, that He is the Son of Man, and yet, He is 100 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). In his annual Christmas message, Herb Hodges recites a poem by Johnny Heart, the creator of the “B. C.” comic strip. It goes like this:

“It seems to me that since the ‘Fall’ — without even thinking it odd,

That man has had no trouble at all, believing that he can be God.

How he would do this I cannot conceive, Tho’ he certainly thinks he can;

And yet, he cannot bring himself to believe, That God can become . . . a man.”

**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

1. **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

1. **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

1. **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

1. **His Second Coming:**

We have approximately 8000 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 hearts 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; Psalms 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 (Roman 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, all of 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*, 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 (This might take some time.). Then, “You will know the Truth and the Truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. Do you believe in the inerrancy of the Bible? If not, on what basis do you form your beliefs? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Based on the following passages, why does correct doctrine matter? (1 Timothy 4:1-16; 6:20-21; 2 Corinthians. 11:1-15) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Read the following passages and answer this question: was correct doctrine important to the early church? Why or why not? (1 Corinthians 14:29; 1Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. What are some teachings that you once believed that you now know were untrue? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Read 1 John 4:1-21 and make a list of the things that can help us identify a false prophet. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Explain this statement: I will live what I believe even if what I believe is a lie. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. Why does correct doctrine matter? Read: (1 Timothy 4:1-16; 6:20-21; 2 Corinthians. 11:1-15) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**The Doctrine of Suffering**

**Key Passage**

**Luke 9:22-26 (NET)**

***… “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders,chief priests, and experts in the law,and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”Thenhe said to them all,******“If anyone wants to become my follower, he must denyhimself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it benefit a personif he gains the whole world but loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamedof me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that personwhen he comes in his glory and in the gloryof the Father and of the holy angels.***

* **Lesson:** In this lesson, we will learn that it is costly to follow Christ, but He is worth it.
* **Key Passages**: Luke 9:22-26, 14:28-30; Philippians 3:7-11; Isaiah 43:1-5
* **Writer**: Ginny Porter

**Introduction**

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

All this just to say, I am sure folks thought we were 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 rest is history. After seven year 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 (NET)**

***Whoever does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t sit downfirst and compute the costto see if he has enough money to complete it?  Otherwise,when he has laida foundation and is not able to finish the tower, all who see it will begin to make fun of him. They will say,‘This manbegan 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. Christ follower, is this the truth?

We can liken becoming a Christ follower to getting married. How many of us ever really considered that suffering was ahead of us on the road to marital bliss? 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 literally 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 a place of eternal happiness and bliss. 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. Furthermore, I assumed that Jesus came into my life to make me happy; I did not know His ultimate goal for my life was not just happiness, but holiness. Yet, without being discipled, 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)? And yet, I suppose a chasm exists between the knowledge of such things and reality.

Experience, so 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 said, 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. What would you have done if you were in that crowd? It’s a tough question. 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. I can relate.

**John 12:24-26 (NET)**

***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 producesmuch grain. The one who loves his lifedestroysit, and the one who hates his life in this world guards it for eternal life. If anyone wants to serve me, he must followme, 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? In truth, 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 commonsense 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 and 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 (NET)**

***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.***

Take a moment to look over the following word search and make a note of the descriptive words used here. As you do, see if any of these words are applicable to your current station of life.

**WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* Afflictions/Trouble or Tribulation: Strong’s #2346 in Greek is tibia-: *to crowd, afflict, suffer tribulation.* It comes from Strong’s #2347 in Greek – thlipsis: *Pressure, affliction, anguish, burden, persecution, tribulation, trouble, suffering, afflictions.*
* Suffer*:* Strong’s #3958 in Greek is pascho: - *to experience a sensation or impression (usually painful) feel, passion, suffer, vex.* (Luke 9:22, 17:25; 1 Corinthians 12:26)
* Suffer: Strong’s # 4841 in Greek is sumpascho: - *to experience pain jointly or of the same kind (specifically persecution; to “sympathize”) suffer with.* (Romans 8:17; 1 Corinthians 12:26)

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 21 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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

There are two credible ministries that help the universal persecuted church: 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 chapter 58).

For the lost person, here and now *is* their best life. In reality, for them, 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. Now, on the other hand, for the saints, 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 to go home. For when we have been saved from this wicked and perverse generation, 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 PHD in Suffering**

**Acts 9:15-16 (NET)**

***But the Lord said to him, “Go, because this man is my chosen instrumentto 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.”***

From the moment of Paul’s conversion, you might say, he was enrolled in the school of suffering. So, now we will follow Paul throughout the course of His education and see what we can glean from his experiences. Right off the bat, Jesus signed Paul up for this class. What goes around, they say, comes around, and we mustn’t forget that Paul had formally been used as an instrument of the devil to inflict great suffering on the church.

Sure enough, 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 Spirt 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 (Hebrew 12:1-2; Philippians 3:12-14).

**Acts 20:22-24 (NET)**

***And now,compelledby the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem*** ***without knowing what will happen to me there, exceptthat the Holy Spirit warnsme in town after townthatimprisonmentand persecutionsare waiting for me. But I do not consider my lifeworth anythingto myself, so thatI may finish my taskand the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good newsof God’s grace.***

Around 56 A.D., Paul had just concluded his 3-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.

**2 Corinthians 6:4-10 (NET)**

***But as God’s servants, we have commended ourselves in every way, with great endurance, in persecutions, in difficulties, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in riots, in troubles, in sleepless nights, in hunger, by purity, by knowledge, by patience, by benevolence, by the Holy Spirit, by genuine love, by truthful teaching, by the power of God, with weapons of righteousness both for the right hand and for the left, through glory and dishonor, through slander and praise; regarded as impostors, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well-known; as dying and yet – see! – we continue to live; as those who are scourgedand yet not executed; as sorrowful, but always rejoicing, as poor, but making many rich, as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.***

Then, Paul recounts a very strange, almost unspeakable, encounter he had when he was “caught up to paradise.” 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 since when you think of it. This was the second time his human eyes were allowed to see a heavenly vision. The first was when he was blinded by the Glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus (Acts 9:1-19). Here is the point – suffering humbles us. It reminds us of our dependence on God and our mortality.

**2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NET)**

***Even because of the extraordinary character of the revelations. Therefore,so that I would not become arrogant, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to troubleme – so that I would not become arrogant. I asked the Lord three times about this, that it would depart from me. But he said to me, “My grace is enoughfor you, for mypower is made perfectin weakness.”***

***So then, I will boast most gladlyabout my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside inme. Therefore, I am content withweaknesses, with insults, with troubles, with persecutions and difficultiesfor the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.***

It was approximately five or six years later, while he was on 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 (NET)**

***But these assets I have come to regard as liabilities because of Christ. More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things – indeed, I regard them as dung! – that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not because I have my own righteousness derived from the law, but because I have the righteousness that comes by way of Christ’s faithfulness– a righteousness from God that is in factbased on Christ’sfaithfulness. My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.***

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 68 A.D., and on June the ninth Nero committed suicide. Paul’s suffering came to an end; his killer’s eternal torment had just commenced.

**2 Timothy 3:10-12 (NET)**

***You, however,have followed my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, my faith, my patience, my love, my endurance, as well as the persecutions and sufferingsthat happened to me in Antioch, in Iconium, and in Lystra.I endured these persecutions and the Lord delivered me from them all. Now in fact all who want to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.***

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 for application. 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 choose to follow Jesus, 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 choses between an entire life time of health, wealth and problem-free living without Jesus and a life of storms, sorrows and suffering as His follower, the chose 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; 1Timothy 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. After 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; Hebrew 12:1-13, 13:12-14; James 1:2-4; Revelation 21:1-9 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Now answer this question: Did you find any place in these passages that exempt anyone who is part of the body of Christ from suffering? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Did you find two different categories of followers? If not, what is inferred here? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. In John 16:33, Jesus makes two promises. What are they? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Read Jesus’ sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:1-12. Make a list of the kinds of people Jesus called “Blessed.” \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. 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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. 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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. After reading the following passages, state why Paul endured all this suffering. Ephesians 3:13; Romans 1:16-18; 2 Timothy 2:3-12 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. 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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Look at the above Word Search and find the Greek word that means to sympathize or suffer with (1 Corinthians 12:26). When was the last time you suffered with someone this way? Has anyone ever suffered with you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Why is it so important to have close spiritual relationships in our life for times like these? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**The Seasons of**

**Storms, Sorrows and Suffering**

**Key Passage**

**Philippians 1:29-30 (NET)**

***For it has been granted to younot 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.***

* **Lesson:** This lesson is intended to prepare believers for the inevitable storms of life.
* **Key Passages**: 1 Peter 1:3-9; Philippians 1:29-30;
* **Writer**: Ginny Porter

**Introduction**

In 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.” (Psalms 90:10) (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 could possibly be the most personally applicable lesson yet. To the extent that we grasp this, will greatly affect how we weather the inevitable storms and sorrows of life.

**Acts 14:21-22 (NET)**

***After they had proclaimed the good news in that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium,******and to Antioch. They strengthenedthe souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continuein the faith, saying, “We must enter the kingdomof God through many persecutions.”***

**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 smack-dab 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 30 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 notgood 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.

**Isaiah 43:18-19 (NET)**

***“Don’t remember these earlier events; don’t recall these former events. “Look, I am about to do something new. Now it begins to happen! Do you not recognizeit? Yes, I will make a road in the desert and pathsin the wilderness.***

**Philippians 3:12-14 (NET)**

***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 Godin Christ Jesus.***

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

**Faith Tested by Fire**

**1 Peter 1:3-9 (NET)**

***Blessed bethe 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, intoan 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 sufferfor 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 praiseand glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Youhave not seen him, but you love him. Youdo not see him now but you believe in him, and so you rejoice*** ***with an indescribable and gloriousjoy, because you are attaining the goal of your faith – the salvation of your souls.***

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? What is more, our lack of faith is amplified during these events.

Now, storms usually hit us unexpectedly, and they seem to come at the most inconvenient times. Have you noticed how they wreck all of our “well made plans” bringing life suddenly to a screeching halt? And 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.

One is Kellee. Despite our fervent prayers for his healing, her husband, only 48 years old, suddenly died and went home to be with Jesus. She is still reeling from the shock and numb with pain and anger -- one of the stages of grief. It’s hard to think or see clearly when your eyes are swollen from crying. And for a woman who is fairly new in the faith, this is a hard pill to swallow. Yet, there is another kind of death that is equally as difficult to take. When your husband, after more than a decade together, decides he wants a divorce. Such is the case for another sister whose also part of our disciple group. And when one of us is hurt -- all of us hurt. That’s just the way it is when you form true spiritual relationships.

Little doubt, someone reading this can relate to these women. If so, then this lesson offers some relevant and practical truths that are going to minister comfort and hope to you. Now on the other hand, if you are presently experiencing a sabbatical from the storms, sorrows and suffering of life, you may want to keep this lesson handy because you’re going to need it sooner or later.

**Psalm 30:11 (NET)**

***Then you turned my lament into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and covered me with joy.***

As I share some personal examples, I wish 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, however, 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.” But 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. And all things considered, this was an easy trial.

**Deuteronomy 33:27 (NET)**

***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 these essentials: flashlights, pillows and Bible, and then we would hunker down in the closet. A few years back we had a rash of tornados 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 over react. With 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.

So 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, so often I find my voice in the Psalms. 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.

**Psalms 56:3-4 (NET)**

***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 mendo to me?***

**Psalms 29:1-11 (NET)**

***Acknowledge the Lord, you heavenly beings, acknowledge the Lord’s majesty and power! Acknowledge the majesty of the Lord’s reputation! Worship the Lord in holy attire! The Lord’s shout is heard over the water; the majestic God thunders, the Lord appears over the surging water. The Lord’s shout is powerful; the Lord’s shout is majestic. The Lord’s shout breaksthe cedars; the Lord shattersthe cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf and Sir ionlike a young ox. The Lord’s shout strikeswith flaming fire. The Lord’s shout shakesthe wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The Lord’s shout bendsthe large trees and stripsthe 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 giveshis people strength; the Lord grants his people security.***

**Psalm 46:1-11 (NET)**

***God is our strong refuge; he is truly our helper in times of trouble. For this reason, we do not fearwhen the earth shakes, and the mountains tumble into the depths of the sea, when its wavescrashand foam, and the mountains shakebefore the surging sea. (Selah) The river’s channels bring joy to the city of God, the special, holy dwelling place ofthe sovereign One. God lives within it, it cannot be moved. God rescues itat the break of dawn. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms are overthrown.Godgives a shout,the earth dissolves. The Lord who commands armies is on our side! The God of Jacobis our protector! (Selah) Come! Witness the exploitsof the Lord, who brings devastation to the earth! He brings an end to wars throughout the earth; he shatters the bow and breaksthe spear; he burnsthe shields with fire. He says, “Stop your striving and recognizethat I am God! I will be exalted*** ***over the nations! I will be exalted overthe earth!”***  ***The Lord who commands armies is on our side!The God of Jacob is our protector!***

**From the Mountain Top into a Deep Pit**

*Footnotes:*[*1 Peter 2:4*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30404) *Lit chosen; or elect*[*1 Peter 2:5*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30405) *Or allow yourselves to be built up; or build yourselves up*[*1 Peter 2:6*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30406) *Or a scripture*Of all the stormy trials of my life, none can compare to the year 2001. 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. “They who dive in the sea of affliction bring up rare pearls.”—C.H. Spurgeon. As this quote so beautifully puts it, all of my painful trials were, in reality, valuable life lessons … rare pearls indeed! 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.

**Isaiah 45:3 (NET)**

***I will give you hidden treasures, riches stashed away in secret places, so you may recognize that I am the Lord, the one who calls you by name, the God of Israel.***

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 8 or 38 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 good we tend to drift away from God, and 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. One of these passages, quoted below is 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 three hundred and sixty-five “fearnot” 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 (NET)**

***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 protectyou. I call you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I am with you; when you passthrough the streams, they will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not harmyou. 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 Sabain 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 mountain top. I stood in my church and earnestly prayed Philippians 3:7-11. This prayer was a prelude to the worst year of my life. That was on Saturday; the next day Art and I were baptized together. But, little did I know we had another baptism to endure, and for both of us it was a baptism by fire. Just three days later, on a Monday morning, I went from the mountain top into the deepest, darkest valley of my life.

In the *Daily Light Journal* by Anne Graham Lotz, I found a vivid description of my soul. The day was March 15, and the title was “Perfect through Suffering.”

***‘My soul is exceedingly* sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with me.’ He went a little farther and fell on *His face, and prayed, saying ‘O MY Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.’ And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood on the ground.***

***The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone- to take pity, but there was none; and comforters, but I found none. Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul.***

***He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.***

(Hebrews 2:10, Matthew26:38-39, Luke 22:44, Psalm 116:3, Psalm 69:20; Psalm 142:4, Isaiah 53:3)

The question Anne Graham Lotz asks is this: “How are you suffering today? How did God in Christ suffer in a similar way?” I had prayed to know him in his *sufferings* – I am now sure I did not really understand what I was asking of the Lord just three days earlier. At the bottom of the journal, she says, “God understands – in the flesh -- what it feels like to suffer physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.”

Even though the salvation of both my husband and my father is 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.

I will spare you the details of my suffering. But if you have suffered deep sorrow, and if you live long enough, you surely will, then you can relate. 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. Yet, then, to my surprise, the man stopped and locked eyes with mine, and said to me: “You know what I am taking about don’t you?” I did not say a word to the man; I just nodded my head. He began to speak as if the Lord Himself had walked up into the darkness to answer my question “Where are you?” Then he said these very words: “God wants you to know that when you are broken, the way you are broken now, He has never been closer to you.” I took off running to get as far away from everyone as I could because I wanted to open my mouth and let go of the pent up flood of emotions of my broken heart. As I ran, I began to weep. Sometimes, what we really need is to get alone with Jesus and cry our eyes out. It was the Psalmist who 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. But consider this, if God can speak through a donkey, then don’t you think He can speak through a broken man or broken woman? Now let’s test this story against God’s Word to see if it has any Biblical validity or if it is just my vain imagination. First off, Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice.” When we hear the Word of God, there is no doubt God speaking. To those who are crushed in spirit - *Psalms* *34*:*18*-*19* *The LORD is near to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. 19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.* *He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds.*

Surely you are aware that 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 to be 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 to others, isn’t it? You go into a survival mode. Virtually everything that gave me security was removed. I felt completely alone and 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!

To be brutally honest, I have had bouts of depression throughout my life. Actually, depression runs in my family. This season of my life, however, was unparalleled to anything I had ever faced before. The Devil assaulted me with every lie in his arsenal. I knew them well. 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?” Please don’t miss this: If Satan can tempt Jesus -- who is God -- to kill Himself, don’t think that he won’t use the same tactic on you, especially in your darkest moments. Why do you think there are so many suicides?

“Mental pain,” said C.S. Lewis, in his book entitled The Problem with Pain, “is less dramatic than physical pain, but it is more common and also more hard to bear. The frequent attempt to conceal mental pain increases the burden: it is easier to say “My tooth is aching” than to say “My heart is broken.” And so, here are a few tips for those who desire to help those who are hurting. 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. As I said, I was alone in my pain because no one knew what I was going through, and the few who did, either stayed away or inflicted more grief with their words. But, my lifelong friend Elaine was with me at the camp and watched me suffer. When I finally swallowed my pride and told her my story, she did something for me that that no one else had ever done, and it is hard to describe how it ministered to me. Would you like to know what it was? She wrapped her arms around my neck, and she wept for me and with me. She did not even realize that she was *living* the Word of God.

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

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

When we are suffering, we are prone to fall into depression. That is why I have written the following lesson entitled The Health of My Countenance. In this lesson are some very practical suggestions that may be of help in this area. (For a copy of this lesson, go to [www.catalystmissions.org](http://www.catalystmissions.org) and click on the link for women’s discipleship.)

**Psalm 37:39-40 (NET)**

***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; Psalms 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 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 purpose. One such purpose is the refining influence it has on our life. Another reason for suffering is that God can use your situation to help others who are hurting. Take Joni Earekson Tada for example. In her booklet, *Where’s The Miracle*? (page 22-25), she wrote of the benefits of suffering. As one who has lived in a wheel chair as a quadriplegic since 1967 and traveled the world ministering to hurting people, she is acutely aware of suffering. She writes, “God’s purpose in redeeming us is not to make our lives happy and healthy. God’s purpose in redeeming us is to make us more like Jesus. And often suffering is God’s choicest tool to do just that.”

**2 Corinthians 1:3-10 (NET)**

***Blessed isthe God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troublesso that we may be able to comfort those experiencing any troublewith the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferingsof Christoverflowtoward us, so also our comfort through Christ overflows to you. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort that you experience in your patient endurance of the same sufferings that we also suffer. And our hope for you is steadfast because we know that as you share inour sufferings, so also you will share inour comfort.***

***For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters , regarding the affliction that happened to us in the province of Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of living. Indeed, we felt as if the sentence of death had been passed against us, so that we would not trust in ourselvesbut in God who raises the dead. Hedelivered us from so great a risk of death, and he will deliver us. We have set our hope on thathe will deliver us yet again.***

In her book *In the Secret Place of the Most High*, Cynthia Heald describes the soul cleansing work of the Lord’s discipline and correction. But before we go there, I would like to add this disclaimer: When the Lord allows suffering into the lives of His children, we must not be hasty, like the friends of Job, to jump to the conclusion that our sorrows are the discipline of the Lord. Sometimes they are. And yes, God disciplines those who He loves (Hebrew 12:1-11). So, this quote is not a perfect illustration. However, the insight found in it about the end result of suffering is spot-on. Cynthia Heald quotes C. Jerdan and he said, “Sorrow accepted as Divine chastisement refines and sanctifies the soul. It stirs its tenderest emotions, and touches its richest cords. It draws the heart towards God himself, as its only Rest and Strength and Joy. The most beautiful human faces are not those which show merely the most regular features and the purest complexion; they are those saintly faces which have been beautified by chastisement- made perfect through sufferings.”

Nevertheless, we still grapple with the age-old question of why God allows pain and suffering, especially in the lives of His Children. This, I believe, is the very heart of the matter. Am I going to believe what the Bible says about Jesus? Does Jesus Christ have all power in heaven and on earth? Has the Father really placed all things under His feet? These are legitimate questions, and in my opinion, it is not necessarily wrong to ask them. Still, at the end of the day, we have a decision to make. Are we going to believe God? And if the answer is yes, then we must believe that He rules over the affairs, even the details, of our lives. And this includes our pains and suffering. Furthermore, when the world around us is on the brink of collapse, if we are going to survive with our mind and faith intact, we must be at peace with the One who commands the wind and the waves and they obey Him. Jesus *is* our peace (Job 22:21-25; Mark 4:41).

* 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; Psalms 34:15-19, 36:6-7, 37:25 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* Read the following passage and answer this question: What is one good thing that can come from afflictions? Psalms 119:71 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Job didnot 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? What How should we respond in a way that will help them and not hurt them? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**A Note to Those Who Are Suffering**

**Nahum 1:7 (NET)**

***The Lord is good– indeed,he is a fortressin time of distress,and he protectsthose 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 could 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” (Psalms 11:3). And then there is Job. See if his words ring true with you; I know they did for me.

**Job 10:1-9 (NET)**

***Iam wearyof my life; I will complain without restraint;I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God, ‘Do not condemnme; tell mewhy you are contendingwith me.’ Is it good for youto oppress, todespise the work of your hands, whileyou smile?***

***on the schemes of the wicked? Motivations of God “Do you have eyes of flesh,or do you seeas a human being sees? Are your days like the days of a mortal, or your years like the yearsof a mortal, thatyou must search outmy iniquity, and inquire about my sin, although you knowthat I am not guilty, and that there is no one who can deliverout of your hand? “Your hands have shapedme and made me, butnow you destroy me completely. Remember that you have made me as withthe clay; willyou return me to dust?***

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 (Psalms 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 (NET)**

***For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whomwe cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself bears witness toour 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 comparedto 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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4. What did Paul tell the saints in Thessalonica about suffering? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Jesus said, “The rain falls on the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). What did He mean by this? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Chances are, is it raining in your life even now. If so, will you describe your situation? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Can you describe a time when you went into a survival mode and the reason for this? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. 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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. Have you personally experienced abandonment at a time of your greatest need? If so, did you run to God or from God?

**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.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

I fully understand that we plan to meet on a weekly or bi- weekly bases on this day of the week: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ at this time\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* My life before Christ was: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* My new life with Christ is: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

**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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

From this person/people I learned the following: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
3. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I share my faith on a regular basis with others, including those in my home.

(See 2 Corinthians 5:17-20, Acts 1:8)

If not, why do you think you don’t? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I have experienced either victory over sin and addiction; or healing from brokenness or grief.
2. \_\_\_\_\_\_ 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.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ I am convicted by the Holy Spirit of specific areas where I need further growth and equipping. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ 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.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ I can see evidence that I am a “new creation” being fashioned into the image of Christ. (See 2 Corinthians 5:17)
6. \_\_\_\_\_ I use a journal to record prayers, thoughts, feelings, experiences, dreams, and dialogue with God.
7. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I have been taught how to study the Bible.
8. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I read Scripture daily. I use a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ as a guide in my Bible study.
9. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I meditate upon what I am reading and how it applies to me. (See Psalms 1:1-5)
10. \_\_\_\_\_\_ 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 6:63, Luke 10:36-39)
11. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I learned how to pray by\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. (See Luke 11:1-10)
12. \_\_\_\_\_\_ 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)
13. \_\_\_\_\_\_ 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)
14. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I understand the role of the Holy Spirit in my life. 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 &4:40; 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. \_\_\_\_\_\_ My closest friends are not those who focus on the negative, gossip, criticize, or seek the harm of others.
17. \_\_\_\_\_\_ My family background is one that encourages my love for God and personal holiness because most of my family members are devoted Christ followers.
18. \_\_\_\_\_\_ 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).
19. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I have learned what it means to “take every thought captive” and make them obedient to the truth that is clearly revealed by His Word and His Spirit.
20. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I step out in faith and obedience when God reveals actions He wants me to take.
21. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I have completely surrendered to the will of God, even if it costs me time, money, relationships, reputation, status, comfort, or convenience.
22. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I share failures, struggles, and areas of weakness with others.
23. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I welcome being held accountable to these trusted people.
24. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I am firm in what I believe about myself and God, but I also know I have much more to learn.
25. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I enjoy reading books on spiritual growth, emotional development, relational health, and general life skills.
26. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I have been well equipped to “fight” battles in my thinking, circumstances, and relationships. I am learning to stand strong in my faith.
27. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I willingly seek input from others whom I deem more mature in the faith in areas where I need help.
28. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I have a genuine desire to know what God’s plan and purpose for my life is.
29. \_\_\_\_\_\_ Are you interested in learning more about Biblical discipleship? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Or beginning a discipling relationship? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
30. \_\_\_\_\_\_ These are areas I have *not* been healed or delivered from. I would like to address the following from a Biblical perspective: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
31. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I have struggled with having assurance of my salvation. (See 1 John 5:10-15)
32. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to learn how to study the Bible. (See 2 Timothy 2:15)
33. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to learn how to have a quiet time with God in His Word.
34. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I am *not* fully aware of the role of the Holy Spirit in my everyday life.
35. \_\_\_\_\_\_ 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.
36. \_\_\_\_\_\_ My obedience to the Lord is primarily motivated by guilt or fear. (See 1 John 2:3-4)

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. After seeking the Lord in prayer about what He would have us do, we will begin this journey together.

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 stages of disciple making, see the following. Remember all of us start at stage number one. In the first 32 questions: if you had the following number of yes answers: 0-4 you may be at stage one; 5-8 you may be at stage two; 9-16 you may be at stage three; 17-16 you may be at stage four; 25-32 you may be at stage five.