

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

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31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Introduction

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Working through *31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity* will help you become more like Jesus and equip you to help others do the same. You were born again to reproduce spiritually. It's your God-ordained purpose. No other life achievement is as fulfilling.

You'll be reading a topic every week at your meetings, for example, Assurance of Salvation, discussing it, and applying its truth to your own life. Between meetings you'll be reading a chapter a day in the New Testament beginning with Matthew. You'll record what you're learning and applying in the Devotional Journal which begins on page 129. Each meeting you'll share briefly what God has been teaching you through your devotional reading. That will help you stay accountable to spend time daily reading and applying God's word to your life.

Becoming more like Jesus requires...

Life

Corn grows but pictures of corn don't. You received spiritual life from God when you repented of your sins and received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." (1 John 5:12)

The Bible



God speaks to and nourishes you through the Bible. It's part of every healthy Christian's daily diet. It's written, not to inform but to transform you. With each topic you'll ask yourself, "What is God's Message (GM) to me?"

Time

A zucchini can mature and bear fruit in 37 days. Christian maturity takes much longer. You can

influence others for Christ from the beginning, but maturity requires at least two years. One mark of a mature disciple is the ability to apply God's word wisely to life's daily decisions. Another is making other disciples.

Application



Jesus said, "But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand" (Matthew 7:26). In each lesson you'll ask yourself, "What's My Action Plan (MAP) to respond to God's message to me (GM)?" You need someone to hold you accountable to do it. That's why this book is called *31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity*. When you hold others accountable and they do the same for you, you all benefit.

Sacrifice

As a disciple of Christ, you can't afford to dedicate your life to achieving some earthly goal. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23). One of the most difficult decisions you'll make (and the most rewarding) every day is to die to your own desires. Nothing less frees you up to live by Jesus' agenda rather than your own.

God

The Apostle Paul wrote, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6). God works in your life to make you grow and equips you to help others grow.

People

God uses more mature believers to teach and model the truth for you, so you can eventually do the same for others. "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy

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2:2). You need a more mature believer to meet with you regularly to discuss and model these lessons and help you grow and reproduce spiritually. Before you finish this book, you also need to begin to be that someone for others. I suggest working through this material in a small group of 4-9 called a discipleship pod.

Discipleship Pods

What's a Pod?

A pod is a group of 4-9 disciples of Jesus committed to be honest with, encourage, challenge, and hold each other accountable to grow more like Jesus in who they are and what they do. The pod leader is the chief discipler who with the Apostle Paul says, "Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Realistically, not everything in the leader's life is yet worth imitating. The part that's like Jesus is the part to copy. That makes being a spiritual model for others achievable. Leaders don't have to be perfect to bless others.

Expectations

Jesus focused his ministry on making disciples. Since you're imitating Him, the expectation is that you'll start your own pod in six to twelve months. Disciples make other disciples because that's what Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19).

Perhaps you can't see yourself leading a pod. By yourself, you're right, but you're not by yourself! God will do it through you, and others in your pod who are leading their own pods can also help. You'll discover that discipling others is God's spiritual fertilizer to accelerate your own spiritual development. It's very much like maturing more quickly once you become a parent and are responsible for someone else!

Attendance at pod meetings is a priority. The pod will meet every week for 60-90 minutes at a mutually agreed upon place and time. After

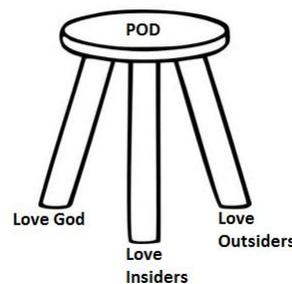
your group has completed studying the topics in *31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity*, it will meet less frequently, perhaps every other week or once a month.

The new focus will become sharing GMs and MAPs with one another from your own devotional times and holding one another accountable to follow through. Your original pod will also be a resource to address challenges that arise as you disciple those in your own pod.

Mission

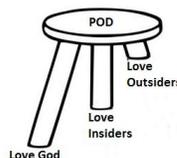
Mission is a key part of every pod. Part of making disciples is reaching out to show God's love in practical ways to those who are still outside God's Kingdom. Discipleship is the power plant for outreach. We're seeking to become like Jesus in who we are and what we do. Jesus said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Jesus wants to continue His relational mission of seeking and saving the lost through us. We hold one another accountable to do that through specific MAPs which we implement both as a group and as individuals.

Balance



Healthy believers, pods and churches demonstrate a balance among loving God, loving insiders (other believers) and loving outsiders (not-yet-believers).

There are six ways to be imbalanced. Each of us tends to be weak in at least one of the three dimensions. Being unbalanced greatly diminishes the flow of God's power through us. Part of our



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purpose is to help one another find the balance and stability that maximizes God's ability to use us.

Spiritual Health Inventory

0 = rarely/not at all; 1 = sometimes; 2 = usually; 3 = almost always/always

Please respond to each statement honestly with the number that best describes you (0, 1, 2, or 3)

___ I look forward to reading the Bible daily.

___ I look forward to spending time with God in prayer daily.

___ I daily deny myself by offering God my body to use as He desires.

___ I forgive, pray for, and ask God to bless those who have hurt me.

___ I spend at least four hours each week feeding my spiritual life and serving God by serving others.

___ Using my gifts and abilities to serve God through a specific ministry in my church gives me joy.

___ I generously and cheerfully support the Lord's work financially.

___ I daily allow God to love others through me.

___ Each week I could write at least one way I loved my neighbor as myself.

___ Each week I could write at least one way I loved another believer as Jesus loves me.

___ I promote the gospel by praying for the salvation of lost persons by name, living a Christ-centered life, praising God enthusiastically in our worship service, giving

financially to support evangelism, and being prepared to share my hope in Christ with others who ask about it.

___ I look forward to and attend the worship service every week.

___ Weekly, I actively participate in at least 1 small group (includes Sunday school)

___ Gratitude motivates me to serve God.

___ I feel a deep need for God's grace every day.

___ I balance speaking the truth and speaking it with love.

___ I give regularly to meet the needs of the poor.

___ I am helping one or more other people become more like Jesus.

___ Total score

Average Discipleship Index = total score divided by 18

My Average Discipleship Index =

Don't be discouraged by your scores on this inventory. The purpose is to take a snapshot of your spiritual health before you work through *31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity*. You'll take the same inventory after completing the book.

The hope is that you'll see considerable progress. Discipleship isn't about learning spiritual truth to raise your spiritual IQ. It's about changing your behavior so that more and more you're living in a way that pleases God and doing it for the right reasons.

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Assurance of Salvation

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Know So Faith Is Vital

Many people have no hope for life beyond the grave. They think this life is it, and the best they can do is enjoy it before it's gone forever. God's truth-twisting opposition markets that idea. There is life beyond your death certificate, and you can KNOW you have it!

Assurance of salvation frees you to forget about yourself and give yourself to others. Instead of worrying about your own eternal destiny, you can be unshackled from fear of God's judgment to be an instrument through whom God can bring spiritual healing to others. **Do you KNOW you are going to heaven when you die? Is it arrogant to have a know-so faith? Why?**

Know So Faith's Foundation

Assurance of salvation is built on the foundation of trust in God's character and promises, not on your feelings. Feelings rise and fall like the stock market with changing circumstances. You can't depend on them.

In Revelation 3:20 Jesus promises to come into your life if you invite Him to enter it. He didn't add any other conditions. He didn't say He might come into your life or He would think about coming into your life. He promised that if you open the door of your life to Him, He WILL come in. Trust Him. Faith takes Jesus at His word. He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Grace and truth came through Him (John 1:17). He can't lie. Lying to you would ruin His entire reputation! He has more to lose than you do!

Eternal Life Is....

When Jesus comes into your life, He brings eternal life with Him. John 5:24 describes that life as a present possession. The one who hears Jesus' words and believes in His promise to forgive those who repent and believe the gospel HAS eternal life.

Eternal life is more than endless existence. It's a spiritual heart transplant from Jesus which brings a higher quality of life than you've ever known. "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). When Jesus loves, He's just being Himself. His life in you enables you to be like Him.

Fact-Based Faith

Imagine I take my car to a service station with about a gallon left in my gas tank. I become distracted and put ten gallons of gasoline in the trunk. It could happen! I once almost sprayed for athlete's foot under my arm pits one sleepy morning! The gasoline in my trunk can't fuel the engine. I just wasted more than thirty dollars.

The engine in this illustration represents the facts (God's character and promises). The gasoline in my gas tank stands for trust in God's character and promises. The fuel in the trunk represents trusting my feelings which won't get me anywhere. The one gallon left in my tank is more beneficial than the ten in my trunk. This illustration shows the foolishness of trusting in my feelings which change like the weather. God's character and promises have no expiration date. Faith believes God's promises and ACTS on them. Trust God's character and promises, not whether you feel like He's in your life at any given moment. Jesus promised to come in. He did.

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A Trustworthy Object of Faith

In April 1977 I went ice fishing at Cormorant Lake in Minnesota. It was about a 50-mile drive from my home in Fargo, North Dakota. When I arrived, I saw a two-foot ring of water between the shoreline and the ice on the lake. First, I was disappointed. Then I was mad. Then I was stupid! I had come so far; I didn't want to go back without fishing at all. I didn't know how trustworthy the ice was. I took a leap of faith onto the ice and rejoiced that it held my weight. About 100-feet from shore the ice was 37-inches thick!

That 37-inch-thick ice represents the trustworthiness of God's character and promises. If you have enough faith to venture onto it, it will support you. On the other hand, great faith in ¼-inch-thick ice won't prevent you from breaking through it. It's not how much faith you have, but where you place the faith you have. Is it in a trustworthy object or not? Faith is the foundation for knowing that Jesus is living within you, for without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). **What makes living by faith so difficult?**

Know So Faith Is God's Will

A know so faith isn't arrogant because 1 John 5:13 says that God wants you to know you have eternal life. A know so faith is clearly His will for you. He doesn't want you to settle for anything less.

Five Vital Signs of Jesus' Life in You

The unique quality of the Jesus life within you reveals itself by several vital signs. The first is the Holy Spirit's presence in your life (1 John 4:13). The Holy Spirit testifies with your human spirit that you're God's child (Romans 8:16). Do you have a new voice within you that assures you that you belong to God? Every follower of Jesus hears the same voice.

Another mark of the new birth is believing that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 5:1). Believing means going beyond agreeing with the historical facts of Jesus' identity to trusting His death, burial, and resurrection instead of your own goodness to make you 100% acceptable to God.

Another mark of belonging to God's family is obeying Jesus' commands (1 John 2:3). The commands we obey shape our lives for better or worse. My life is different from yours because my parents issued different commands than yours did. I belong to them and live according to their values so as not to bring disgrace on the family name. Jesus' commands shape us to become like Him. When we WANT to become like Jesus, obeying Him isn't hard. Believers prove their relationship with God is authentic by loving other believers (1 John 3:14). Choosing to benefit others by self-sacrificial giving is its defining characteristic. Love reveals itself primarily through the actions, not the feelings, it initiates.

The fifth mark of being God's child is doing what is right (1 John 3:10). The Judge of all the earth does what is right (Genesis 18:25). So do His children as they increasingly follow their new made in heaven internal moral compass.

How has your life changed in the following areas since you trusted Jesus as your Forgiver and Leader?

- Interest in the Bible.
- Forgiving others
- Prayer life
- Guilt removed
- Spending time with other believers
- Serving others
- Telling others about Jesus
- Loving others
- Encouraging others through your words
- Victory over sin
- Other changes

How do you know that Jesus is in your life and you have eternal life now?

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If you aren't sure, but would like to be, you must **repent** (Be willing to turn from sin and self-centered living to God) and **believe** that Jesus Christ, God's Son, died on Calvary's cross in your place, was buried, and rose again the third day.

Believing in Jesus means receiving Him. Ask Him to forgive your sins and come into your life to be your Forgiver and Leader. The following is a prayer you could use:

Lord Jesus, thank You for dying on the cross in my place and taking my sin, death, and judgment upon Yourself. I open the door of my life to You. I want You to come into my life and take control. Thank You for forgiving my sins and making me a child of God. Make me like You. Amen.



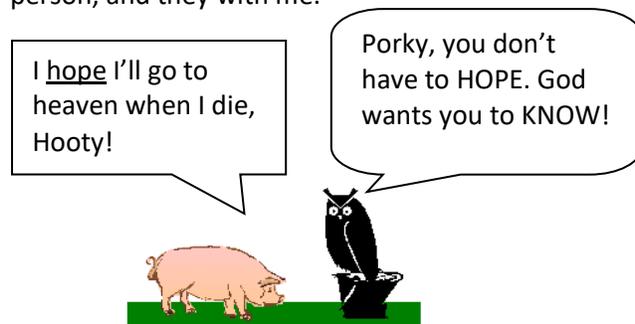
What's God's message to you in this lesson. What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes?

Scripture Memory

Revelation 3:20—Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.



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God-Shaped Living

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Share your progress carrying out your “Assurance of Salvation” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

God-Shaped Rhythms

Olympic athletes input thousands of hours of preparation for sometimes mere seconds of gold-medal performance. To win the prize they channel years of time, money, and energy toward one all-consuming goal. If you watch them any day of the year, you’ll see gold-medal-shaped living.

Unless we intentionally organize our life rhythms around God, when He asks us on Judgment Day what we’ve accomplished for the Kingdom, we’ll be like the third grader, who when asked what he learned that day, predictably said, “Nothing.”

Allowing God to shape our lives is the ultimate act of worship. Do you allow God to shape how you use your time? The intent of the Old and New Testaments and life forever with God can be summarized as God-shaped living. Allowing God to shape your life will disrupt your existing routines. You can’t become more like Jesus while doing what you’ve always done! To become better, you must do something different. You’ll be tempted to look for an easier way and talk yourself into thinking you don’t really have to change very much. Really? **Discuss how a relationship with God has shaped your life’s rhythms (both successes and failures).**

Weekly Rhythms

We need life rhythms with a God-shaped balance. A sustainable weekly rhythm includes at least one day of rest. The Ten Commandments forbid being a workaholic (remember the Sabbath day...) right along with forbidding adultery and stealing (Exodus 20:1-17). Rest is defined by what energizes and recharges you while honoring God. If you’re an extravert, you’ll probably spend at least some God-shaped rest time with many people. If you’re an introvert, it will be alone or with just a few people. **How does your relationship with God shape your weekly rhythms (successes and failures)?**

Be patient with yourself. It’ll take time to make your daily and weekly life rhythms more God-centered. That will include balancing your time with God, your family, fellow-believers, and not-yet-believers. **Share which legs of the three-legged footstool of your life need attention (loving God, loving believers, and loving not-yet-believers) to bring your life into better balance.**

Daily Rhythms

You’ll probably have to discipline yourself to go to bed and get up earlier to create space for God to speak into your life daily. My daily rhythm includes getting up early enough to make room for about 40 minutes in God’s Word and prayer. I get up earlier than I used to and go to bed earlier. If you’re not a morning person, you’ll have to discipline yourself to spend time with God when you’re alert at some other time of the day.

King David prayed every morning (Psalm 5:3). He cried out for help to the Lord, his King and God, and expected his prayers to be answered. Daniel risked his life to pray to God (Daniel 6: 7-10). His fear of the Lord freed him from all other fears.

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David sought God's face (Psalm 27:8). What does that mean? Psalm 27:9 describes its opposite: hiding and turning away in anger from Him, rejecting or forsaking Him.

Seek God as earnestly as a thirsty person seeks water in the desert (Psalm 63:1). Seek Him with all your heart and soul, and you will find Him (Deuteronomy 4:29). Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (James 4:8). God promises he will never forsake those who seek Him (Psalm 9:10). He will bless them (Psalm 119:2a).

A grape branch must remain attached to the vine to bear fruit. You must maintain vital contact with Jesus through your devotional life to be spiritually fruitful. Jesus chose a solitary place for prayer (Mark 1:35). **What benefits and challenges have you experienced related to regularly spending devotional time with God in a solitary place?**

How can you encourage one another to maintain this vital discipline?

Practical Considerations

Discuss what time of day you're most alert and best able to seek God earnestly and where you can meet with Him without being interrupted.

What to Do

Read your daily Scripture portion. A study Bible such as *The Life Application Bible* will help you understand the background of the passage, its meaning, and how to apply it. Write down in the Devotional Journal in the back of this book what impresses you most and a personal application. Pray about all that concerns you (Philippians 4:6-7).



What's God's message to you in this lesson? What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make changes God prompts.

Scripture Memory

John 15:5— "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.



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Being the Church

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Share your progress carrying out your “God-Shaped Living” action plan.

Share one God-message from your personal devotional times since your group last met.

Going to Church or Being the Church?

I remember once pretending to be sick when I was a child so I wouldn't have to go to church. Within a day or two, I BECAME sick! Was it a coincidence? Was God teaching me a lesson? Let's just say I only did that ONCE!

GOING to church isn't the same thing as BEING the church. Fans of Jesus go to church, but Jesus isn't looking for fans. He's gathering followers. Followers of Jesus ARE the church, the hands, and feet of Christ on earth 24/7.

On the surface fans and followers seem to have the same attitudes toward attending worship services. Both groups consistently look forward to attending the worship service every week. I discovered that through doing a Spiritual Health Inventory. Looking forward to attending worship services is NOT a good predictor of whether you are living as the hands and feet of Jesus every day. Being the church is a lot more than attending worship services regularly.

If you're a new believer and have never or rarely gone to church, attending worship services regularly suggests you are making significant progress. I say “suggests” because God knows what you do AND why you do it. Doing the right thing for the right reason is always a challenge. Not every sermon ever preached was delivered to glorify Jesus and draw others to Him. It can be a tool to enhance the preacher's glory. Why you go to worship

services is at least as important as the fact that you go. King David rejoiced in being able to go to the Lord's house (Psalm 122:1). It wasn't a duty, but a joy! Today the Lord lives in His church—not in a building, but in His followers. When we meet with other believers, we meet God in a way we don't when we worship Him privately. In God's presence is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). Worshipping Jesus will bring you joy! Jesus promised in Matthew 18:20 that wherever two or three come together in His name, He is with them.

Share a time when worshiping Jesus by being the church brought you joy.

Believers will worship God eternally as a group. Now is a good time for God's will regarding worship to be done on earth as it will one day be done in heaven. Through our worship services we exalt, honor and praise God for who He is. He deserves more praise than we can possibly generate! We will consider worship again later in a future lesson.

What about the Hypocrites in the Church?

A hypocrite is like a politician who cuts down an oak tree, stands on the stump and gives a speech about conservation. Hypocrites in the church are those who aren't themselves on Sunday. The synagogue in the first century had them also (Matthew 23:2-3, 13).

The synagogue was a Jewish institution for the reading and teaching of the Holy Scriptures. Church worship is patterned after synagogue worship. The hypocrites in the synagogue did not keep Jesus away from its services. He attended synagogue services regularly (Luke 4:16). **Why do you think some hypocrites enjoy going to church? Consider the prestige that comes with personal power and position in the church and other wrong motivations for attending. With what improper motivations do you wrestle?**

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Many say they don't attend church because of the hypocrites there who are just pretending they're dedicated to God. Every church has its share of people for whom Christianity is just a one- or two-hour-a-week-assignment. Refusing to attend worship services because of them is like refusing to enjoy tomatoes from a garden because the garden has weeds. Where there are gardens there are weeds. Where there are Christians, there are also hypocrites. Some of the hypocrites are trying not to be, while others don't care.

If we contrast what we know as believers with what we practice, we'd have to say hypocrisy is universal. We talk the faith better than we live it. That's no reason to quit or to isolate ourselves but to press on so our lives become progressively less hypocritical. When dealing with hypocrites in the church, consider looking in the mirror and trying to reduce the population by one!

The Church Is Alive!

The church isn't a building with pews, theater seats or folding chairs where a few perform, and many criticize. It is a living organism created by God—the body of which Christ is head. Being the church is about living interdependently with other believers and dependently on Christ, the head of the church. You can't call yourself a football player unless you're part of a team. Football is a team sport. You shouldn't call yourself a Christian unless you're part of Christ's church. Christianity isn't an individual endeavor. As the members of a football team depend on one another to carry out assigned roles for the team to be successful, so it is with the body of Christ, the church.

In two words Christian fellowship summarizes interdependence among believers and dependence on God. It is the flow of Christ's life among members of his body and between the head and the body.

You need the other members of the church and the other members need you (1 Corinthians 12:17-21). You are like an index finger. The hand (church) can't function properly without you and you can't function properly apart from your designated place in the hand (church). The hand is home. Both the hand and the index finger need a vital connection to the head (Christ)

Connect to God and Others at Church

Christian fellowship means sharing together. As a believer you share with other believers the life of Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, cleansing from sin, commitment to follow Him, membership in His body and much more than Aunt Hattie's sweet potato supreme at the potluck.

Fellowship implies union and oneness. The marriage relationship pictures it. As two become one in a marriage ceremony, all believers become one through the Holy Spirit's baptizing them into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). As a result of that baptism you also have fellowship with the Father and with Jesus Christ, His Son (1 John 1:3). God's life in all its fullness is flowing simultaneously through the bonds of relationships between God and believers and among believers.

Channels of Life

What did church life look like for the first 3,000 Christians baptized into the church? What did it mean to BE the church? They dedicated themselves not only to fellowship, but also to the apostles' teaching to the breaking of bread (Lord's Supper) and to prayer (Acts 2:42). All these were channels for the flow of God's life.

Ephesians 4 describes the flow of God's life in the church and its purpose. Being the church includes your being completely humble, gentle, and patient, and your bearing with other believers in love (v. 2). It includes your concerted effort to maintain the unity of the

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Spirit (v. 3) and use the grace-gifts Christ has apportioned to do works of service that build up the church, Christ's body (vv. 7-12), and express His fullness to the world (v. 13).

The church reflects Christ more accurately than you can by yourself. The church is like a car, and you, its tire. You find your purpose mounted on a wheel on the car, and the car needs you to run properly. Don't try to live the Christian life alone. You must work together with other believers. You can accomplish more together than you can imagine according to the power that is at work in all of you (Ephesians 3:20).

The Word of God equips you to carry God's life to others. It is living and active (Hebrews 4:12). As you input it into your life, it changes the way you think (Romans 12:2) so your relationships become increasingly healthy and filled full of God's life. The church teaches and preaches God's word to build your spiritual muscles and prepare you for works of service (1 Peter 2:2, Ephesians 4:12).

Love Flows through the Church

In a word, love summarizes the flow of life between God and you, between you and other believers, you and your neighbors and you and your enemies. This love is demonstrated as you use your spiritual gift(s) (1 Corinthians 12:4-5), serve others (John 13:14-16), and spur one another on to ever increasing love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).

Love flowing between and among believers is the distinguishing mark of Jesus' followers (John 13:34-35). That is why as a believer you must not give up meeting together with other believers (Hebrews 10:25). You can love other believers only as you associate with and relate to them. Being the church is one way to advertise your allegiance to Jesus to others who don't believe in Him (Matthew 10:32).

Going to church is different from being the church. Jesus' fans go to church. His followers

are the church. The fans are like insulation and the followers like copper wire. God's current-life flows through the wires, not the insulation that covers the wires. You want God's life to flow through you, don't you? I know I do. Be the church!

"I can be a good Christian without going to church." Agree or disagree and defend your position.

What's wrong with going to church but not being the church?

If you have one, share a personal story about transitioning from going to church to being the church.

Share which church activities you attend are helping you connect with God and other believers in the most life-transforming way (worship service, Sunday school, small group, ministry team, etc).



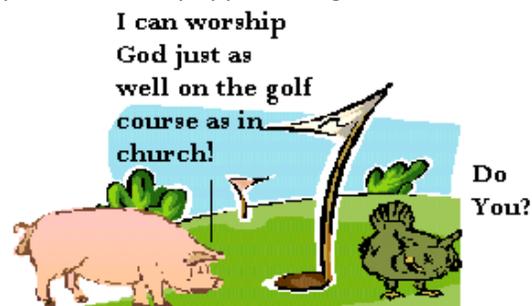
What's God's message to you in this lesson? What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes

Scripture Memory

Hebrews 10:25 - not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.



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Jesus Christ Is Lord

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Share your progress carrying out your "Being the Church" action plan

Share one God-message from your personal devotional times since your group last met.

God with Skin

A young boy came to his parents' bedroom in the middle of the night. A nightmare had terrified him. His father assured him that God was with him to protect him. The boy's response— "I know, but right now I need someone with skin on." That's exactly who Jesus is— God with skin on!

Few people today question that Jesus was a man, but many doubt He was God. In the early church it was exactly the opposite. Some spiritual leaders who spawned false teaching didn't think Jesus was both fully God and fully man. Cerinthus taught incorrectly that Christ came on Jesus at His baptism and left Him at the crucifixion. Jesus was a mere man. Wrong!

Jesus Christ is more than just a great man and a great teacher. In Greek mythology beings that were half man and half God were called demigods. One parent was a god and the other was a human being. Jesus wasn't a demigod. His conception was a miracle. Mary was a human being and the Holy Spirit was responsible for her conception. Jesus wasn't 50-50 man and God. He was 100-100 man and God. He is fully God as well as fully man. He is God with skin. To learn more about what God is like, look at the accounts of Jesus in the Gospels.

Jesus Is LORD

James Gandolfini starred in the TV show, *The Sopranos*. In a 2009 appearance on "Inside the Actor's Studio," James Lipton asked Gandolfini, "If heaven exists, what would you like to hear

God say at the pearly gates?" Gandolfini's response--"Take over for a while, I'll be right back."¹ It's a novel wish, but it isn't going to happen!

At His birth Jesus was called Savior, Christ, and the Lord (Luke 2:11). He is the Word. The Word was God (John 1:1), and the Word became flesh (John 1:14). Since He is the Word made flesh, He is both God and man. Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples, describes Him as "My Lord and my God!" when he saw the crucifixion-wounds (John 20:28).

Jesus claimed the ability to do something only the LORD can do—forgive sin (Mark 2:7-11). He claimed the same title as the LORD of Psalm 23:1--shepherd. In John 10:11 He claimed to be the good shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. The clear conclusion is that Jesus is LORD (Yahweh of the Old Testament).

Some doubters insist Jesus never claimed to be God, but his followers who wrote about Him put those words in His mouth. John's Gospel clearly describes Jesus' opponents' understanding of His claims. They tried to kill Him because they thought He was breaking the Sabbath and was claiming a unique relationship with the Father, making Himself God's equal" (John 5:18). In John 10:31 the Jews tried to stone Jesus because He claimed to be God (John 10:30-33). You can't believe in God without believing in His Son. God hasn't left that option open to you. (John 5:23).

Jesus Is the Perfect Man

Do you know anyone who has never done anything wrong? If you think so, you should talk to his/her spouse or best friends. We would be hard pressed to identify a single sinless day in our lives. If you think differently, you need to reevaluate your definition of sin.

By contrast John lived with Jesus as a disciple for more than three years and didn't observe a single sin in His life in all that time (1 John 3:5). Peter agreed that Jesus was sinless (1 Peter

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2:22). You wouldn't have to follow me around for fifteen minutes to find evidence that I am a sinner. There is an old joke that a man went to heaven and discovered there were sin meters for everyone on earth there. A little needle would click forward every time a person committed a sin. When the departed saint asked to see the sin meter of one of his best friends on earth, the response was, "O, yeah, his sin meter is something of a joke up here. We use it as a fan." Jesus' sin meter, if there were such a thing, would have never moved.

Jesus Is God's Show and Tell

A kindergarten teacher gave her class a "show and tell" assignment. All students were to share something that represented their religion. The first student was Jewish and shared a Star of David. The second was Catholic and brought a Rosary. The third was Church of God and brought a casserole! Yes, the Church of God is known for its potluck dinners!

Jesus came and brought us God the Father. He didn't just tell us about God, He showed us what God is like. Knowing Him means knowing the Father (John 8:19). Believing in Him means believing in the Father (John 12:44). Honoring Him means honoring the Father (John 5:23). Hating Him means hating the Father (John 15:23). Seeing Him means seeing the Father (John 14:9). Welcoming Him means welcoming the Father (Mark 9:37).

Jesus Is #1

Years ago, during the Cold War with the Soviet Union I remember reading that the Russian media covered a contest pitting the Soviets against the United States which the USA won. Here's the description: "The Soviets finished second and the United States finished next to last." Humans are concerned about who is #1. Who has the best car, dog, house, etc.? Whatever the endeavor, we try to figure out who is the best. We want to be #1. We want to be the best at something. It's our way of

proving our worth and making our mark on earth.

We're often so preoccupied with trying to be #1, we don't give proper worship to the One who is #1. At any one moment the spotlight can be on our accomplishments or on Jesus, but not both. In subtle and not so subtle ways many of us spend much of our life trying to steal the glory that should be His alone. Perhaps you can add that to your list of sins today! It's made my list more days than I'd like to admit.

Colossians 1:15-18 describes Jesus' #1 status three different ways. He is the image of God, like a reflection of Him in a mirror. He perfectly reveals what God is like. He is the firstborn (first in rank) over all creation because He made it to do His will and give Him glory. He is the head of the church (the collection of all believers, past, present, and future). He is its Leader and source of its life. He has first place in EVERYTHING (Colossians 1:18).

Instead of saying, "We're #1," we should say, "Jesus is #1." In Philippians 2:10-11 every knee bowing before Jesus in worship accompanies confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord. Calling Jesus Lord implies that you do what he says (Luke 6:46). You owe Jesus complete obedience. He is your ultimate boss with authority over every area of your life.

What insights have you gained from studying the Lordship of Jesus?

Discuss the relationships you especially need to submit to Jesus' control where He is seldom or never in control now and how those relationships will be better when Jesus controls them:

with friends	...brothers/sisters
...spouse	...coworkers
...parents/guardians	...boss
... neighbors	...relatives
...other Christians	...money
... unbelievers	

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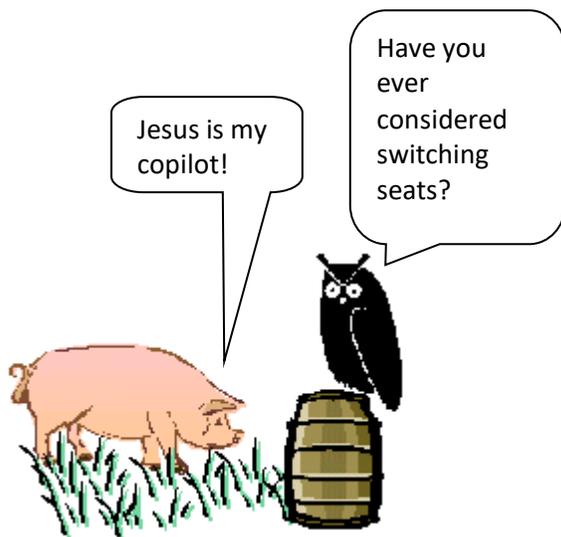
What's God's message to you in this lesson? What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes.

Scripture Memory

Colossians 1:18 - And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.



<http://www.hlntv.com/article/2013/06/20/james-gandolfini-inside-actors-studio>

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Obedience

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.



Share your progress carrying out your “Jesus Christ Is Lord” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

Keep It Simple

A relationship with God isn’t complicated. You don’t have to dig a hole 1000-feet deep with a teaspoon or climb a ladder 49 miles into the atmosphere to stay on His good side. You need to know what He has said, believe it, and do it. Don’t bother exploring other options.

Rule #1

Rule #1 of the Christian life is that God’s will takes priority over your own and everyone else’s. Sometimes you will hate that rule! It will take a while to adjust to it. Don’t try to rationalize your way around it. Your situation isn’t special. There are no loopholes in Rule #1. There is no higher authority to which you can appeal.

It’s hard to follow rule #1 because it challenges your willful desire to be in charge. To obey God, you must die to your own agenda (Luke 9:23). That’s not hard until you want to go shopping or fishing or whatever, and God wants you to do something else. It was hard when God wanted me to leave my position as an Aquatic Biologist with the Pennsylvania Fish Commission (my perfect job) and enter full-time vocational ministry. I knew I’d never have any peace until I obeyed. **Share a situation where following rule #1 would be especially difficult for you.**

Priority #1

Obedience to God is more important than any other claim on your life. Imagine an elderly woman at Penn State’s football game with Michigan. Every seat in Beaver Stadium is filled except the one beside her. Someone asks her whose seat it is. She says that she and her late husband have been season ticket holders for 35 years, and the seat belonged to him. She is asked why she didn’t ask a friend or relative to come with her. She says, “Are you kidding! They’re all at the funeral.” We need that kind of commitment to God. The result of such obedience is eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:9). **What priorities in your life need to be placed under priority #1?**

Belief and Obedience Are Siamese Twins

God has chosen you and all other believers for obedience to Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:2). Peter describes the righteous as obedient children (1 Peter 1:14). Believing children are obedient children. True repentance produces obedience. That’s why Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Whomever you obey defines who your father is. It’s either God or Satan (John 8:31-47). Not being a slave to anyone isn’t an option. You can’t live however you want. Many are tragically deceived. They think they’re calling the tune when they’re marching in lockstep with millions of others to the beat of Satan’s drums. You serve either sin or obedience (Romans 6:16). Those who really believe in Jesus as Forgiver and Leader evidence that belief by their obedience. Belief and obedience are forever connected.

Sometimes in Scripture we find the word obedience when we would expect the word belief. Hebrews 5:8-9 speak of Jesus: “Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and once made perfect, he became

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the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” John 3:36 (1984, NIV) says, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” The Greek word translated in the NIV as “rejects” means, one who is not subject to, is being stubborn toward, resists, or disobeys the Son. Belief and obedience are forever connected as are unbelief and disobedience. **Can one who doesn’t obey God honestly claim to believe in God? Why?**

Stay Out of Sin’s Jaws!

A four-year-old eats foolishness sandwiches and becomes what he eats! When my grandchildren were 4-years-old, they already thought they know more than one 60 years older than they! They don’t have a clue what is best for them. That’s why they have parents and grandparents to issue commands to them so they can disobey them! Listening to Daddy makes life go much better for them.

Listening to Father will make your life go a lot better. My grandchildren’s behavior is a parable of your relationship with God. God knows it all. He wants what’s best for you. Obedience is the path that leads to that destination. God made salmon to swim freely in sparkling rivers and vast oceans. In the mouth of a grizzly bear, however, they’re helpless. You’re like a salmon, God’s kingdom like water, and sin like the bear. God designed you for the freedom of the sea of His kingdom, not the jaws of sin. The choice is yours. You were created to be obedient to God. Without obedience, there’s no joy, freedom, safety, or peace in life! **How does obeying God restrict you? How does it benefit you?**

Submission’s Seven-Pack

Submit to Your Parents

The Bible requires obedience to parents. “Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Ephesians 6:1). If you are still living

under your parents’ roof, you don’t have to like following their directives. You just must follow them if doing so doesn’t conflict with obeying God. Your parents gave you life and thereafter have done their best to shape it. They aren’t all knowing. They make mistakes. They know some things about life out of many, and what they know, they know in part. However, they have significantly more wisdom than you!

Hopefully, they’ve learned from their own mistakes in life and the mistakes of others. They’re trying to protect you from unnecessary pain. You can choose to walk through a briar patch they tell you to avoid, but you won’t emerge without cuts and bleeding. Over the long haul, obeying them will minimize your pain. As you get older, you’ll likely give your own children much the same advice they gave you! They learned it from their parents who learned it from their mother and father, etc. It is a wisdom stored (too often ignored) and then passed on through many generations. Ignoring it will leave scars! **Share a personal scar disobedience has inflicted.**

Submit to Your Teachers

Do you enjoy being corrected? Do you like to be told you’re wrong? Why? At least a part of you, along with the rest of humanity, instinctively resists correction and discipline (Proverbs 5:12-13), like a cowlick that doesn’t submit to brush or comb. Correction is the gnat in the eye of your pride. Discipline raises a “yield” sign in the face of your self-will. It is hard to receive, even if you believe the teacher wants the best for you. **How is the “rebellion reflex” really your enemy in the process of becoming more like Jesus?**

Submit to Your Husband

I potentially offended about half of humanity with the previous four words. Many women hate the S-word. Some wives think submission is the equivalent of being bridled and ridden by their husband. Not so. The wife’s responsibility

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is to submit to her husband (Ephesians 5:22). The husband's responsibility is to love his wife as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:21-25). Christ's self-sacrifice for the church was total! A wife shouldn't complain about yielding her rights to one who sacrifices himself totally for her. A husband who isn't sacrificing himself for his wife totally shouldn't expect her to yield her rights to him. If he isn't obeying God, why should he expect her to obey?

God describes marriage as an earthly partnership created to reflect a divine union of Christ and His church. Christ and His church submit their rights to benefit each other. So do husband and wife. The question is no longer, "What's best for me, but what's best for us?" The husband is the head of the wife. Someone must be in charge. It's God's design. He knows what He's doing. The husband's role isn't higher or better than the wife's, simply different. He is her self-sacrificing servant-leader who is blessed by God to be a blessing to her. **If you are/have been married, talk about the struggles of making marriage a true partnership.**

Submit to Other Believers

Paul commands you to submit to other believers (Ephesians 5:21). The Christian life isn't about demanding your rights, but of voluntarily giving them a lower priority than the rights of others. Their rights are more important than yours, but of course, from their point of view, if they are following Jesus, your rights are more important than theirs!

Let me share two illustrations of mutual submission. Have you ever stopped at a four-way-stop-sign and signaled another person to go? At times that person will signal back that you should go. That is an illustration of submitting to one another. Sometimes when I'm exercising by climbing and descending the stairs, I develop a pain in my knee. Only my knee hurts, but the whole body stops exercising in deference to the needs of the

throbbing knee. **Suppose someone is sitting in your usual seat when you enter the sanctuary. How will you respond?**

Submit to Your Employer

Obey your employer as you would obey Christ (Ephesians 6:5). Be responsible and demonstrate trustworthiness whether someone is watching you or not. Don't just show up and go through the motions. Give of your best to the Master. He is always looking. His name is Jesus. You represent and are working for Him. Work sincerely and enthusiastically to glorify Him.

Your boss is an underboss. He isn't your ultimate supervisor. More than once persons have uttered words that they wouldn't want a pastor to hear before they found out I was a pastor. After they discovered that fact, they often apologize profusely. My usual comment is, "You don't have to worry about me, it's my boss you have to worry about." **How does working for Christ transform your work?**

Submit to Government Officials

Submit to rulers and authorities that God has placed over you. (Titus 3:1). If you resist them, you're resisting Him and will be subject to His judgment (Romans 13:1-2). Obey them unless doing so would cause you to disobey God (Acts 5:29). Being a responsible Christian includes being a responsible citizen which includes voting, obeying the laws of the land, serving on juries if chosen, working to benefit the community, etc. **How has following Jesus made you a better citizen?**

Submit to Your Spiritual Leaders

Obey and submit to your spiritual leaders because they must give account of their watch over you (Hebrews 13:17). Their role is to equip you for works of service to build up the church (Ephesians 4:12). You discourage and drain them when you resist their efforts. You

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encourage and energize them when you submit to and cooperate with them and thus make their work easier.

If the demands of any of these seven “bosses” conflict with God’s commands, you must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). When I told my boss I would be resigning from my employment with the Pennsylvania Fish Commission, he suggested I should continue to work for the PFC and do ministry in my spare time. That was not what God wanted me to do. I ended up resigning. **Share an experience when the will of one of the seven bosses was contrary to God’s will for your life.**

Obedience Demonstrates Love

Obedying Jesus’ commands demonstrates that you love Him (John 14:21, 15:14) and that you have come to know Him (1 John 2:3). There are other reasons for obeying. It is better to follow Jesus for the wrong reason than not to follow. It is best to follow him because you love Him.

When Jesus told me to leave my job as an aquatic biologist to enter full-time Christian service, my primary motivation in obeying was to experience peace. I knew I’d never have it if I remained where He didn’t want me to be. My motivation was still selfish. I did it so I could feel better and less conflicted. I was beginning to move in the right direction, but not for the right reason. **Share a time when you did the “right thing” for the wrong reason.**

Obedience Pays Dividends

Benefits of doing what Jesus commands include remaining in His love and experiencing His complete joy (John 15:10-11). I remember sharing my faith with others when I was part of Campus Crusade for Christ’s ministry at Penn State University in the mid 1970s. I would typically feel great fear and trepidation anticipating the experience. A bathroom break was usually necessary. After the experience I would be overflowing with joy because I had

publicly identified myself with Jesus. Whether the person to whom I spoke was receptive or not did not affect the amount of joy I felt.

God rewards obedience. He promises you will receive anything you ask (1 John 3:22). That’s because the obedient ask for things that please God.

God often rewards the obedient with a prolonged, prosperous, satisfying life (Proverbs 3:1-2). Jesus promised that kind of life (John 10:10). Without obedience you won’t ever experience it.

The disobedient and self-absorbed often dig their own early grave with their foolish decisions. I typed the word “celebrities” into Google to check its spelling and was greeted by the response “celebrities with herpes.” I rest my case! Many celebrities who outwardly seem to have it all, inwardly live conflicted, tumultuous lives. Obedience, on the other hand, brings stability, safety and far more satisfaction than being famous (Matthew 7:24-27). Celebrities, if they knew you, would envy you!

As a healthy body results from exercising and eating properly, peace, righteousness, and blessing result from obedience (Isaiah 48:18, Luke 11:28). The Father loves those who obey Him. He and Jesus will make their home with them (John 14:23). You really get to know well those who live with you! When the Father and Son live with you, you will live forever (1 John 2:17)!

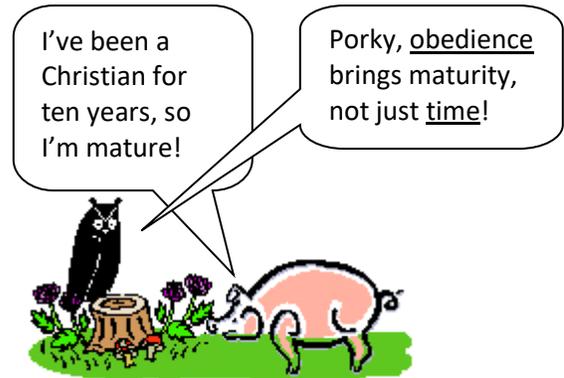
Persevering obedience is the path to a life that makes a difference for eternity, a life that produces a spiritual crop (Luke 8:15). Your decision to follow Jesus will often be tested. Don’t turn back. God can and will use your life in 1000 different ways to bring spiritual life and growth to others. Twenty thousand years from now, nothing else will matter. Only what’s done for Christ will last. **Share specific instances this past week where obeying Jesus has brought you personal blessing.**

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Put Your Heart into It!

Outward conformity to God's commands is important but not enough (Matthew 22:37). Unlike my launch into full-time Christian work, where the search for personal peace motivated me, God is satisfied only when love for Him is the fuel in your obedience tank. Love shows its face through wholehearted service (Ephesians 6:7) and gratitude-stoked living for Jesus who died for you (2 Corinthians 5:15).

I was once interviewed by a newspaper reporter. He asked me why I like coaching track and field throwing events. My response was that I like to help others be the best throwers they can be and to see the joy in their eyes when they throw a personal best. It isn't about me. It is about helping others prosper. My heart is in it. I come away from practices energized, not drained. That's the way it is with Christian service and obedience when our heart is in it.



Application

Following Jesus requires obedience. Share how you have structured your life to be obedient in the following areas: regular prayer and Bible reading, giving your time, talents and treasures to further God's kingdom, commitment to a discipleship group, regularly attending worship services, serving others, submitting your will to God's will, and promoting/proclaiming the gospel.



What's God's message to you in this lesson? What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes.

Scripture Memory

John 14:15 - If you love me, keep my commands.

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Reading Scripture

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.



Share your progress carrying out your “Obedience” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

Ignorance Isn't Bliss

Sin is a camouflaged prison cell invisible to the naked eye. Most prisoners don't realize they're confined. They think they're calling the shots when they're not. They're a slave to the things that control them.

Many think God's ways are too restricting and prefer their “freedom.” They aren't willing to exchange their cigarettes, drugs, sexually immoral lifestyles, etc. for God's ways. Their “freedom” to indulge in things like cocaine and heroin becomes the worst kind of slavery where too much is never enough.

Some of the things that control us are socially acceptable. Do you have separation anxiety when you don't know where your smart phone is? Is the need to constantly be electronically connected any less of an addiction than being hooked on smoking or taking drugs? **Are those who are controlled by something -- anything really -- in control of their own lives? Why?**

Reading and applying the Bible to your life is the hacksaw that cuts away, one by one, the jailhouse bars of sin that you've not even recognized as confining you or just accepted as an inescapable part of life (John 8:32). Being set totally free should be your goal. Don't expect it to be easy. Some bars seem like they're made of soap. You'll cut through them very quickly. Others seem to be made of titanium. Years of sawing will hardly even scratch them. **Why do you think applying is underlined above?** It will

take years to appreciate fully how much these bars have limited you. You are like a Bengal tiger, born and raised in a cage. You can't even imagine life in the spacious places for which God created you. Jesus came to spring you from your cage so you might experience life to the full -- pedal to the metal, fully satisfying, overflowing with vim, vigor, and vitality (John 10:10).

Read or Bleed!

Ignore God's Word and you're a possum in Satan's headlights. Bump-bump. Roadkill for sure! Make no mistake about it— if he can't talk you into abandoning the faith, he wants you to be totally ineffective. **Why shouldn't it surprise us that many other activities compete with making spending regular time in God's Word a priority?**

Satan is both powerful and subtle -- like a roaring lion, on one hand (1 Peter 5:8), and an angel of light on the other (2 Corinthians 11:14). Lions prefer easy prey -- the young, weak, sick, and isolated. If you isolate yourself from other believers, you're sticking your chin up and inviting Satan, the roaring lion, to go for your throat. Satan masquerades as an angel of light. While contradicting God's Word, he tries to give wickedness a righteous sheen.

To defeat the devil, you must spend time reading, studying, and applying God's Word to your life. Begin with at least ten minutes each day and gradually increase. Start with Matthew. Record your observations and personal applications in the Devotional Journal at the end of this book. Set a goal of reading through the New Testament within the next twelve months. Then spend the following twelve months completing the Old Testament beginning with Genesis. **How do you feel about the consistency of your personal time in God's Word.**

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A Guide Dog for the Blind

A blind man trusts his guide dog's eyes and judgment. Living the Christian life is similar. You must learn to see life through God's eyes and trust His judgment. Proverbs 3:5 commands you not to trust your own understanding but in all your ways to acknowledge God who will then direct you. **How is this related to living by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7)?**

God directs you through His word. Consistently reading and applying it transforms your life by changing the way you think. It renews your mind (Romans 12:2). It trains you to see life from His point of view. Nothing is hidden from His eyes (Hebrews 4:13) and His judgment is vastly superior to yours. He has all the facts all the time and knows how every circumstance everywhere relates to His purpose for your life.

Lie Detecting

Lies are the devil's nuclear weapons. John 8:44 describes him as having no truth in him and as the father of lies. He often camouflages his untruths as half-truths and even 90% truths to inject more poison than a pure lie could. Daily you swallow them like pills ground up and mixed with applesauce. They go down so easily. Few of them are obvious. Some of the things you believe are not true. The challenge is to separate fact from fiction. God's Word in you will detect lies and frustrate Satan's destructive plans. **What lies from the devil have you detected since you became a believer?**

Liquid Truth

Truth used to correspond to reality. Now we're told truth is relative. Supposedly, it no longer always applies to all people. Like milk, it takes the shape of its container.

We're told that one hundred different persons' definitions of love are all true, even if they contradict one another. Truth is whatever you want it to be. Limits are out. "Freedom" is in. Chaos rides "freedom's" passenger seat! **How**

does the notion of "relative truth" threaten God's absolute moral standards?

The God-Standard

Truth has departed from the reality-standard, but God hasn't and He's the Judge! For now people can play word games and twist the truth into whatever shape is convenient. They can ignore or redefine reality as they like, but they can't escape it or the consequences of their actions. Calling black white and wrong right doesn't make it so. On Judgment Day all will have to explain every careless word (Matthew 12:36). Everything hidden will be uncovered before God's eyes to whom all must give account (Hebrews 4:13). No one will tell *Him* that truth is relative! To Him relative truth is stupid.

Abe Lincoln often asked audiences how many legs a dog had if one called its tail a leg. After most answered incorrectly (five), Abe told them it had four legs. He said, "Calling a tail a leg doesn't make it one."

Father Knows Best

A commercial said that wearing seat belts in Pennsylvania isn't just a good idea—it's the law. Studying God's Word is more than just a good idea. God puts His stamp of approval on the one who studies His Word to properly understand it (2 Timothy 2:15). I've recommended the Life Application Bible to many. The notes are not inspired by God like the biblical text is, but biblical scholars who wrote them can consistently help you understand and apply what you're reading. I've read this Bible for my personal devotions since about 1990. **What helps do you use to increase your understanding and application of God's Word?**

Programming 101

Your brain is like a computer with a virus. It doesn't run according to the manufacturer's

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specifications. It never did. No one naturally imitates Jesus very well. His life alone was unaffected by the “sin bug” (1 Peter 2:22).

When you repented and received Jesus into your life, the Manufacturer downloaded an antivirus program into your “computer.” That’s the new birth. It enables you to read and understand God’s truth. Your mind needs to be renewed (Romans 12:2). How does that happen? According to 1 Peter 2:2, you are to *crave* pure spiritual milk. May your defining passion be the same as the psalmist who wrote, “Oh, how I love your law... (Psalm 119:97). The law is an Old Testament term for God’s word. **How are wisdom and a defining passion for God’s Word connected?**

Some Assembly Required

Renewing your mind isn’t automatic or easy. It takes a lot of time and effort to think, feel, and act more like Jesus. God’s part is to work in you to enable you to will and act according to His purposes (Philippians 2:13).

Your part is to program your mind with and act upon one transforming God-truth after another after another. Jesus said that those who practice His teachings prove they are His disciples (John 8:31).

A Bible-Study Marathon

Spiritual maturity is a life-long journey. You need to learn and be reminded of God’s truth daily. A practical way is to set aside at least ten minutes a day to read and align your life with the Bible. **What is the best time for you and where is the best place?**

Practical Suggestions

Some Bibles are easier to understand than others. *The King James Version* was published in 1611. Its elevated language is both beautiful and difficult. Not everyone agrees on a grade-level designation for various translations or how

grade level should be calculated. Christianbook.com has published a Bible Translation by Grade Level Chart on its website. The *King James Version* is listed as grade level 12, *The New International Version*, 7-8, *The New Living Translation*, 6 and *The Message* is 4-5. The Bible isn’t a magical book. Reading a chapter each day *won’t* keep the devil away! He reads more than that himself trying to figure out what God is going to do next! He is always happy to share his misinterpretation of Scripture. Only Scripture you understand and apply will make you more like Jesus. Simpler is better.

Consider purchasing a study Bible. It will help you digest a lot more soul food. I’ve already told you that I’ve used *The Life Application Bible* for years.

A Bible dictionary and concordance deepen your study. You can purchase them in a Christian bookstore or access them online. Search biblical words at www.biblegateway.com and access a Bible dictionary at www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/

A Bible dictionary provides historical and cultural backgrounds that will help you understand what you’re reading. It explains Bible people, places, things, books, and customs.

A concordance lists all occurrences of a biblical word. For example, a complete concordance lists 362 places “peace” or a form of peace such as “peaceful” occurs in the Bible (book, chapter, and verse). That helps you understand the teaching of the whole Bible about peace. I use www.biblegateway.com for this purpose.

Nine Principles to Interpret Scripture

1. *Let the Bible explain itself.* Matthew 7:7-8 doesn’t guarantee getting everything you ask from God. Other passages, such as James 4:3, describe conditions for answered prayer.

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2. *Consider literary forms.* Jesus is the door (John 10:9), but don't expect a knob and hinges.

3. *Look for only one meaning* (the original intention of the author), *but many applications.*

4. *Understanding grammar and historical background are two keys to accurate interpretation.*

5. *Interpret unclear passages in the light of clear ones.* Ephesians 2:8-10 describes how good deeds relate to salvation better than James 2:24 does.

6. *Research what words meant to the biblical authors.* Two resources to help: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament* by Merrill F. Unger and Williams White, Jr. and *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* by W. E. Vine. You can access Vine's work online.

7. *Proverbs express general principles, not moral absolutes.* Proverbs 3:16 promises long life to the wise, but some wise persons die young.

8. *Parables teach one main point.* Luke 15: 3-7 teaches that God cares about lost people.

9. *Pray for the Holy Spirit to teach you.*



What's God's message to you in this lesson?

What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes

Scripture Memory—1 Peter 2:2 - Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Prayer

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.



Share your progress carrying out your “Reading Scripture” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

You’re in the Army Now!

During Operation Desert Storm in the early 1990s, Iraq was overwhelmed by the Coalition Forces’ ability to strike targets with uncanny accuracy. Special Operations Forces had moved undetected deep behind Iraqi lines. They provided bombing coordinates with hand-held lasers pointed at targets that missiles then homed in on and destroyed. Today’s guiding systems are more sophisticated. Desert Storm technology reminds us that through folded-hand, laser prayers, we can direct God’s missiles against the enemy. But first we must know the enemy. **From what internal and external sources do you expect to experience resistance to your commitment to follow Jesus?**

Your struggle is against the forces of Satan (Ephesians 6:12), your sinful nature (Galatians 5:17) and the world system (1 John 5:4). The sinful nature is that part of you that loves to have its own way in everything. The world system is the system of values organized against and hostile to God’s values.

Satan laughs when you fight against him trusting in your own resources instead of God’s. It’s no contest. Apart from a trusting connection with Jesus Christ, you can’t do anything that will make an eternal difference (John 15:5). Nothing! Through that connection you can do everything He asks you to do (Philippians 4:13). Everything! To win spiritual battles, you must learn to pray.

Who Needs to Pray?

According to Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18, and 1 Timothy 2:8, everyone needs to pray. **What changes have you seen in your prayer life since you’ve decided to follow Jesus?**

Two Way Communication

Prayer is talking *with* God about everything. He’s your best friend. The more you communicate with Him, the closer your relationship will be. Give God a chance to speak. Many days He’ll let the Bible do all His talking. Sometimes, though, He speaks directly.

Often this takes the form of a persistent impression consistent with God’s character. That’s how I knew God wanted me to serve in full-time Christian ministry. The persistent impression wouldn’t go away even though I wanted it too in the worst way! My wanting it to go away demonstrated that I didn’t fully trust God. If I did, I would’ve trusted that He knew better than I what was best for me consistent with His plan for my life.

Hearing God’s voice shouldn’t seem strange. Not everyone has known his/her earthly father, but those who do, know his voice. Similarly, you follow Jesus because you know His voice (John 10:4). Allow some quiet moments during prayer for God to speak to you in a still small voice. That’s how you’ll know what God’s message for you is in each of these lessons and in your devotional time.

Vending Machine in the Sky

Many people think prayer is asking God for things. Period. You put your money into the prayer machine (time spent praying), push the button (make your request) and get what you want (kerplunk!). That’s not a balanced prayer life!

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Give me, give me prayers often ask for unnecessary and harmful things that, like a spider's web capturing a fly, can entangle and imprison us. A give me, give me prayer life is unbalanced. It's like a guy with 18-inch biceps who has legs so weak he can't walk. One-dimensional prayer doesn't develop your relationship with God!

It's okay to ask God for things, but you need wisdom to ask what's best for you. What values drive your requests – our culture's values or God's? Put every request on the hot seat and ask yourself, "Why am I asking for this?" God wants to give you what you ask for when you ask for the right stuff with the right motives. That connects to prayer's purpose.

Prayer is about Changing Yourself

Prayer is more about changing you than changing God's mind about something you want. If allowed, some children would eat only junk food. Candy tastes better than broccoli! Someone needs to train them to eat a balanced diet. **What are the long-term consequences of eating only junk food? What are the long-term consequences of praying selfishly?** Prayer helps you get what you need. *What you need most is to become more like Jesus!* **Discuss how your prayer life would change if your consistent focus were to become more like Jesus.**

Base Prayer on God's Word

The basic ingredients of a growing, healthy relationship with another person are found in a growing relationship with God. Mutual trust and ongoing two-way communication are essential.

The most effective prayers are based on God's words to us. Why? The wise see the world from God's point of view. The better we know God's words, the better we can ask for what pleases Him. When I was a teenager, I knew better than to ask my dad for a Corvette. He believed cars

are a practical way to get from one place to another and that's it. He wouldn't buy a Corvette for himself, and he wouldn't buy one for me either. By knowing his values, I knew what to ask for and what not to ask for.

Ask for What Your Father Wants to Give You

We learn wisdom by hearing "no" a lot when we ask for things. Sometimes we want things that aren't good for us. Some of us would make a meal of cake and pie if we could. Make mine Pineapple upside down cake and cherry pie!

God sometimes has to say "no" to protect us from foolish whims. On the other hand, we get almost everything we ask for when our parents/guardians really want us to have it. If we ask mom to pass the broccoli, it's almost sure to happen. The same principle applies when asking for things from our heavenly Father. Like broccoli, God's will often isn't flashy or cool, but it's always best for us.

The Bible tells you how God thinks, what He wants, what pleases Him, what He likes and doesn't like, etc. Knowing the Bible helps you know what to ask for and what not to ask for in most situations. To know what God wants, you must spend time reading His revelation to you. We call it the Bible!

If you're not spending at least 10 minutes a day in prayer and Bible reading, you haven't designated a regular place and time to meet with God. **Am I right?** You need to schedule time with God daily. Eventually your communication will become more spontaneous and happen continually throughout the day, but scheduling time for it is the place to start. **When is the best time for you? Where is a place where you can be alone and undisturbed?** My challenge to you is to aim for at least 10 minutes with God every day. Soon you'll want to spend more time than that. If you don't spend time with God, you won't understand the world the way it really is.

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PRAYER Time

Prayer's primary motivation is to become more like Jesus. The acrostic PRAYER will help you develop a balanced prayer life. PRAYER represents: **P**raise, **R**ely, **A**dmit, **Y**ield, **E**xpress thanks, and **R**equest.

Praise

Praise is words or deeds that honor and exalt God for who He is and what He's done. Knowledge of both comes from the Bible. Jesus is God's all-sufficient sacrifice for sin. Praising Him is your appropriate response for His crazy love rescue operation (Hebrews 13:15). It's not too soon to practice for the life to come! The servants of God in heaven say "Hallelujah" which means "Praise ye Jehovah" or "Praise the Lord" (Revelation 19:6). Like a gushing Old Faithful geyser fired by gratitude, His praise should always be on your lips (Psalm 34:1). **Share one way God's glorious grace has touched your life (Ephesians 1:6). After everyone has shared, turn your testimonies into prayers of praise by telling Him what you just told everyone else.**

Rely

You trust your auto mechanic to fix your car. The Greek word translated faith means trust or reliance. It includes dependence upon Jesus, His teachings, and His finished work on the cross. It describes a commitment to believe God no matter what. Sitting on a chair is an illustration. You trust the chair won't break and demonstrate that reliance by sitting on it.

Prayer without faith won't please God (Hebrews 11:6). I personally trust in Jesus' desire to do for me what's best more than in my wisdom to ask for what's best. The result is I don't always believe my request will be granted. I am OK with that. If I don't get what I ask for, it will be something better.

In Matthew 8:13 Jesus told a centurion it will be done to him as he believed it would. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer (Matthew 21:22). Of course, Matthew 21:22 isn't a blank check to obtain luxury cars, executive positions, etc. It is qualified by other verses on prayer.

Have you ever played the game in which one person falls backwards and the other person catches him/her? The one falling backwards demonstrates trust in the catcher. **Share a time when you trusted in God to do for you something no one else could do.**

Admit

I remember many years ago the first time my brother, my dentist, asked me whether I flossed my teeth. I didn't, and it evidently showed. Admitting my negligence was the first step toward having healthier teeth and gums. The second step was to do something about it. My brother says, "You don't have to floss all your teeth. Just the ones you want to keep!" Without that uncomfortable admission of negligence and the formation of a new habit, I wouldn't have any teeth to floss today.

We must acknowledge the sins of which we're guilty. When we're guilty of offending God, we must confess it (Leviticus 5:5). When we confess our sins, God promises to forgive them and purify us from unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). **Why is confession an important part of the process of God's molding you to become more like Jesus?**

When we wrong another person, we must confess it and make restitution (Numbers 5:6-7). Zacchaeus promised to pay back four times what he had taken from anyone (Luke 19:8). Restitution involves paying back persons for damaged or stolen property or physical injury they sustained. Restitution ranged from 20% more than was taken (Leviticus 6:1-7) to five times what was taken (Exodus 22:1). Owe no

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man anything except the debt of love (Romans 13:8).

From God's perspective you need to pay back those you've hurt more than you took from them. I once lost an old scale used to weigh fish belonging to Forest Weist. While I was weighing a Northern Pike from Gouin Reservoir in Quebec, the fish flopped off the scale's hook. For each action there is an equal but opposite reaction. The scale demonstrated that law by shooting off my finger over the edge of the boat and into the lake while I stood there with my mouth open. The Pike's mouth was open too! I bought Forest a new scale to replace the one I lost. **Share a time when you confessed a wrong to someone you hurt intentionally or unintentionally. Were you forgiven? How did that affect your relationship with that person?**

Yield

Prayer demonstrates your dependence on God. He's God. You aren't. He knows what's best for you. You don't. Surrender to Him and His purposes for your life. Life will go better for you if you do. If you're proud and insist on your own way, God will oppose you (James 4:6). You don't want that!

Have you ever observed an auto wreck that occurred because someone who was supposed to yield didn't? Violation of right-of-way rules is the second most common cause of auto accidents, next to excessive speed. It accounts for about 20% of all fatal and injury collisions in California.

If you refuse to yield to God, the result could be a "wreck" that injures or kills you. Disobedience brings with it a whole constellation of undesirable consequences including injury, disease, guilt, shame, fractured relationships, broken families, ruined health, etc. Sinful folly inevitably brings great pain (Psalm 38). What part of "thou shalt not" don't you understand? **Why is it wise to yield to God's ways instead of following your own?**

God wants total surrender. That includes your will (Matthew 26:39), mind (Colossians 3:2), kingdom (Matthew 6:33), body (Romans 12:1), understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6), ways and thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9) and control of your life (Ephesians 5:18). **How are trust in God and surrender to God connected?**

Express Thanks

Thanksgiving means expressing gratitude to God for what he has done. One of the best measuring sticks of your spiritual maturity is how grateful you are to God for all He has done for you. More is better!

One of my seminary professors said that in the New Testament doctrine is grace and ethics is gratitude. Something is wrong with any professing Christian who deviates from that pattern. God's love for us awakens rebound love and gratitude and a desire to please Him. One of the marks of spiritual health is overflowing thankfulness (Colossians 2:6-7).

Enter God's presence with thanksgiving (Psalm 100:4). Thank Him for His goodness (Psalm 106:1). Thank Him for everything (Ephesians 5:20). Give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18). **Share at least five blessings today for which you are thankful to God.**

Request

Too often prayer requests flow from "stinking thinking." I want something so I ask God to give it to me now. Sometimes I've been like a four-year-old who eats one bite of dinner and then asks for candy.

Making wise requests has more to do with a desire to follow Jesus than how much education I have. I remember an individual whom I'll call Greg (not his real name) who was not close to God and not an educated person. He was lying in a hospital bed suffering a serious medical issue. When I talked to Him about the Lord, he

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professed that he wanted to follow Jesus and admitted he had been a fool for living as he had. When Greg got out of the hospital and recovered, guess how he lived –just the way he had before he went to the hospital. He didn't learn a thing from his experience. He was still far from God even though God had spared his life.

By contrast, Dr. Kenneth Kantzer described himself as knowing some things out of many and knowing those things only in part. He had a PhD from Harvard University, was the editor of *Christianity Today*, President of the Evangelical Theological Society and Academic Dean of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. His extensive education didn't make him proud or foolish. Before Dr. Kantzer spoke, someone once introduced him with a glowing tribute. He said, "I trust the Lord will forgive him for what he said and will also forgive me if I'm foolish enough to believe it." Dr. Kantzer was both smart and wise. Wisdom is skill in godly living. Dr. Kantzer personified that wisdom. A wise life is like a God-directed symphony. You make your best prayer requests with God's Spirit guiding you.

Wisdom to ask for what you really need comes from God (James 1:5). He graciously grants it to all who ask Him for it. Ask God to supply your needs (petitions) and others' needs (supplication). God will give you what you ask for if you ask with the right motive. If He doesn't, He will give you something better.

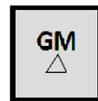
Paul asked that the way would be open for him to visit the Christians in Rome (Romans 1:10). God said wait. About three years after his written prayer, he arrived in Rome as a prisoner. On another occasion he asked God to remove the thorn in the flesh that tormented him (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). God said no. He gave Paul something better. He promised that His strength would be made perfect in Paul's weakness (the thorn, 2 Corinthians 12:9).

Paul urged that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone (1 Timothy 2:1). He commanded you to keep on praying for other believers (Ephesians 6:18).

Along with your other concerns please pray regularly for:

1. The salvation of at least three acquaintances who don't know Jesus in a personal way.
2. The purity, protection, and effectiveness of your pastor and the spiritual leaders of your church.

How many minutes will you spend in prayer daily? Where will you go to pray?



What's God's message to you in this lesson? What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes.

Scripture Memory

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. Matthew 21:22



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Forgiveness

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Share your progress carrying out your "Prayer" action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

Prosecutors Withholding Information

John Thompson spent 14 years in a windowless, six-by-nine-foot death row cell in a Louisiana prison. He was mere weeks from a lethal injection when a bloody scrap of cloth proved he wasn't the murderer. Prosecutors had concealed the evidence that could've set him free. The blood taken from the crime scene was not his blood type. He was acquitted at a new murder trial and set free.¹

Satan, the prosecutor, tries to withhold the evidence that God has done everything necessary to forgive you. He wants to keep you ignorant. He blinds the minds of unbelievers, so they don't understand the good news of Christ is relevant to their lives (2 Corinthians 4:4). He stifles the verbal witness of believers by stirring up their insecurities.

Costly Forgiveness

Your forgiveness wasn't purchased at a going out of business, save two hundred people for one dollar special. Jesus experienced an excruciating death on the cross to remove your personal sins and rose to prove you're forgiven. Bloody strips of cloth in a garden tomb about 2000 years ago prove sin's penalty has already been paid.

The Law of Moses required the shedding of blood for forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). Sin is dead serious! It's a personal affront to a holy God. It's the creature defying his/her Creator.

Forgiveness isn't cheap. Saying, "I'm sorry!" doesn't cover it.

The blood of the Old Testament sacrifices represented one life sacrificed for another. Yet the blood from the death of bulls and goats can't take away sin permanently (Hebrews 10:4). Animal blood was a temporary solution pointing to a permanent solution that was yet to come. The blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross, the willing giving of His life for yours, is the basis of your forgiveness and eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:11-12, Ephesians 1:7). **How does reflecting on the price of your forgiveness affect you?**

Undeserved Forgiveness

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). You don't deserve eternal life. Unlike John Thompson, you're guilty. You've offended God thousands of times. We all have. In Thompson's case the innocent was declared guilty. The good news is that through faith in Jesus' sacrifice, guilty sinners deserving eternal separation from God are now declared forgiven. Forgiveness is God's gift to you. Grateful, loving service is your gift to Him and how you worship Him best (Romans 12:1). By forgiving you, God let go of hard feelings and any effort to get even with you. You're not going to get what you deserve. Your destiny is to enjoy forever the new heaven and the new earth! **How are forgiving offenses and forgetting they happened different?**

Just Forgiveness

A holy, righteous God can forgive your sins and still be just because Jesus took your place on the cross. Your sins don't go unpunished. God didn't say, "Let's just act like you never offended me!" Jesus died in your place for your benefit. He paid the just penalty your sin deserves. Through trust in His sacrifice for you, the consequences of your sins are separated from you as far as the east is from the west

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(Psalm 103:12). God is not so unjust to demand that the same sins be paid for twice—once by Jesus and again by you (1 John 1:9). Those who refuse to trust in Jesus' payment for their sins, must pay it themselves. What a colossal offense it is to reject Jesus' sacrifice and consider it valueless. It's as illogical as rejecting a check for a billion dollars that someone walks 3000 miles barefoot through wildfires and broken glass to present you.

Purpose-Driven Forgiveness

As a result of Jesus' death in your place, you've been made holy (Hebrews 10:10). To rephrase the telephone company's message, "The person you used to be is no longer in service." You have a new assignment. You've been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13). You have a new King! You have a new agenda—God's plan for your life.

Being made holy is not like driving your grime- and salt-encrusted car through a car wash on a winter day. The car emerges clean, and you drive off to the next event on your agenda. Instead, the grime- and salt-covered car represents your life. The water represents Jesus' blood that washes away your sin. The owner of the car wash represents Jesus who cleans you up, gets in your car and drives for the rest of your life. You're no longer in charge. You never were! You just thought so when you marched to the beat of the captain of the kingdom of darkness.

You're now set apart from sin for God's use (the root meaning of being holy). Your forgiveness and cleansing don't depend on how many good things you've done (Ephesians 2:9) or your ability to keep God's law (Galatians 2:16), but on God's undeserved favor you have received by faith (Ephesians 2:8). **How is being holy like being on call to God 24/7 365 days a year?**

Conditional Forgiveness

God's forgiveness of sin is not automatic or universal. All sinners can be forgiven (2 Peter 3:9), but not all are forgiven. Forgiveness is conditional on repentance, (deciding to go God's way instead of your own, Luke 3:3), belief in Jesus' death in your place (Acts 13:38-39) and confession of your sins (1 John 1:9). Confession means calling your out-of-bounds behavior what God does (sin) and your confessed sin what God does (forgiven). It includes removing the welcome mat to that sin. **Agree or disagree: A loving God wouldn't send anyone to hell. A holy God wouldn't receive anyone into heaven. Why do you agree or disagree?**

Passed on Forgiveness

I have given some Middletown Track and Field athletes "pass it on" throwing shoes or a pass it on discus I no longer needed. They get a lot of pass it on advice I've learned from my personal throwing experience. "Pass it on" applies to forgiveness. Because God has forgiven you, you are under obligation to pass that forgiveness on to others (Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13). God's forgiving you depends on your forgiving others who have offended you (Matthew 6:14-15).

I am assuming you want God to forgive you every time you sin, without limit. **Is that correct?** If you want that to happen, you must forgive those who sin against you every time without limit as well (Matthew 18:21-22). God is using even their offenses against you to work for your good (Genesis 50:20, Romans 8:28). Pass on the same undeserved forgiveness you've received from God to others. **Why is passing on God's forgiveness to others so difficult?**

Why Forgiving Others Isn't Asking Too Much

The parable in Matthew 18:23-35 concerns forgiveness. Your sins are represented by the

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man who owed 10,000 talents (150,000 years' wages) to the king. Today that would be about 6 billion dollars based on an annual salary of \$40,000.00. You couldn't possibly repay your debt. Those who sin against you are illustrated by the man who owed 100 days' pay to a fellow servant. Today that would be about \$16,000.00. This parable teaches that the sins of others against us are nothing compared to the sins that God has forgiven us. It is appropriate that most of us can't comprehend how big 6 billion is (our offenses against God) while \$16,000.00 seems like a lot of money!

According to Colossians 2:13, God made you spiritually alive in Christ when He forgave you. In Psalm 32:1-2 the forgiven person is described as blessed (fully satisfied). When God has forgiven us much, our natural response is to love Him much (Luke 7:47). That's the intended result of Jesus' coming to earth to save you from your sins (Matthew 1:21). **How is gratitude for God's forgiveness the spring that feeds the rivers of Christ-like living and forgiving?**

Set Free from Sin to Serve God

Rasputin, a Russian monk, lived very immorally because he thought that the more he sinned, the more forgiveness he'd experience. That's stinking thinking! Jesus died for you that you might live a new life for him no longer a slave to sin (Romans 6:1-4).

Consider which of the following sins in your life need to be confessed, repented of, forgiven, and cleansed. Confess each one and claim God's forgiveness using 1 John 1:9. Share several areas of struggle with one another. Be real!

- I worry
- I don't thank God for my food
- I take all the credit when I do something good for God
- I fail to serve God because of feelings of inferiority
- I don't witness for Christ with my life

- I don't witness with my mouth
- I complain, find fault, argue
- I have a critical spirit
- I participate in unholy sex acts
- I eat poorly or don't exercise
- I think of myself as better than others
- I use filthy language or tell off-color jokes
- I participate in yoga, séances, psychic hotline, horoscopes.
- I don't pay my debts on time
- I use shady business or income tax practices
- I attend church infrequently
- I'm not attentive during worship services
- I neglect family devotions
- I pray infrequently
- I lie
- I lust after members of the opposite sex
- I lust after persons of the same sex
- I feed my mind with sexually oriented material
- I engage in fornication, adultery, or perversion
- I underpay others
- I shortchange my employer
- I steal
- I waste time
- I put off doing things
- I read cheap books or watch TV trash.
- I withhold from God his due from my income
- I act holy in public and otherwise in private
- I listen to or pass on gossip
- I read the Bible infrequently

From whom are you withholding forgiveness? How are you going to make things right with those persons?



What's God's message to you in this lesson? What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?

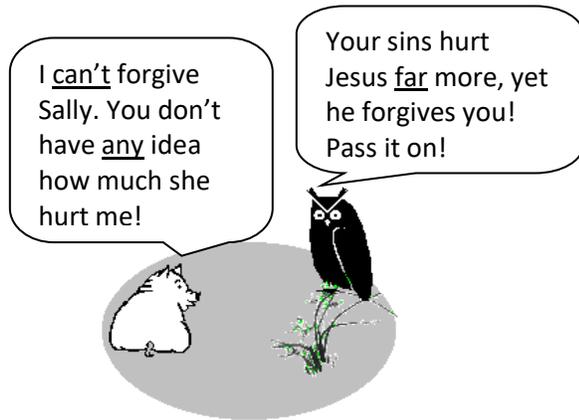
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Share your action plan to make those changes

Scripture Memory

1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.



1. <http://reason.com/archives/2011/05/23/death-row-deliverance>

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Scripture Memorization during the First Century

Between the ages of 6 and 10 Jewish boys during the first century memorized the first five books of the Old Testament. That's more than 5,800 verses. Superior students memorized the entire Old Testament by the age of 14. Wow! That puts us to shame, doesn't it? The Jews were people of the Book. These memorization feats demonstrated how highly they valued God's revelation.

Scripture Memorization during the Twenty-First Century

First century Jews didn't carry a copy of God's Word as you do today. The printing press wouldn't be invented for about 1400 years. If they wanted ready access to God's Word, they had to memorize it.

Before the 1990s the argument could have been made that since you don't always have a Bible with you, memorizing Scripture enables you to have access to God's Word instantly. Since the advent of cell phones with Bible downloads, that argument is less persuasive now. What benefit is it to have God's Word in your heart rather than on your hip?

Access vs. Impact

The reason to memorize God's Word isn't so much to give you ready access to it, but to increase its impact on your life. Memorizing Scripture strengthens your grasp on God's Word

significantly. It enables you to be marinated in the Word to tenderize your heart and flavor you with Christlikeness. **What two or three people have impacted you the most? Are they people you admire but haven't met or people you spend a lot of time with regularly? How does that principle relate to the impact of God's Word on your life?**

Potential Benefit vs. Actual Benefit

Scripture memorization shouldn't be an end. It doesn't prove spiritual superiority. It's a means to an end. Memorizing God's Word without thinking hard about it will do you little good. Thinking about what God's Word means, how it applies to your life and putting shoe leather on it transforms you little by little to become more like Jesus. **Why do you think people resist applying God's Word to their lives?**

Way off Track despite GPS

In August 2013, I participated in the State Games of America competition in track and field. It was held at the new facilities of Bishop McDevitt High School, 1 Crusader Way, Harrisburg, PA 17111. The address was too new to find with GPS. Athletes trying to locate the school using that address would have been way off track despite having GPS.

The Sadducees ended up way off track despite having God's Positioning System, the Bible. They rejected all but the first five books of it, and they didn't pay close enough attention to those books. Memorizing Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy didn't get them where they needed to go. Jesus identified the problem as not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God (Mark 12:24). **Do people who don't use turn signals really know how to drive? Why? How is it possible to have Scripture memorized and still not know it?**

Memorizing the Scriptures isn't the same as knowing them and knowing the power of the

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

God who inspired their writing. How ironic that the Sadducees memorized God's word but resisted the Word, God's Son, when He was in their midst. Jesus told them there was no excuse for not believing in the resurrection of the dead. He referred to Exodus 3:6 as proof that the dead rise. Long after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had died, God told Moses, that He is (present tense) their God. The Sadducees had memorized the words of Exodus 3:6 without considering they refuted their belief that there was no resurrection. Memorizing Scripture isn't enough.

Ponder Power

Memorizing Scripture focuses your thoughts on a verse to a far greater extent than merely reading it. Unless your memory is a lot better than mine, you're going to spend considerable time pondering a verse as you try to memorize it and every time you review it. Why is that significant? What you think about shapes your life for better or worse. "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things" (Philippians 4:8). **How many of the "whatever" adjectives in Philippians 4:8 describe God's Word?**

Unleashing the Power

The Holy Spirit uses God's Word in your heart in a way He can't use it on your hip. The Navigator Hand illustrates that getting an increasingly firm grasp on God's Word progresses from hearing it to reading it, to studying it, to memorizing it and finally to meditating on it. When you do all five, you're gripping the Word like a vise. Meditation followed by obedience unleashes the Word's transforming power. Meditating on God's Word is the gasoline-air mixture and obedience is the spark plug that unleashes God's power through you.

What if you saw your surgeon in the operating room reading *Surgery for Dummies*? How would you feel? When she operates, you expect her to know what to do without consulting a medical book. Memorizing key Bible verses gives you confidence. My assurance of salvation is linked to 1 John 5:11-13. Doubts about it are quickly treated with a single dose of 1 John 5:11-13. The doubts quickly disappear. I know what God said about assurance and I believe Him.

Memorizing Internalizes God's Word

One day I was sharing a gospel tract with an individual I had just met. Shortly after I began reading the booklet to him, he asked if he could see it. He took it and put it in his pocket, and said, "Now, tell me about it." He thought that would throw me for a loop. It didn't. I had it memorized. Many times, the only resource to minister to others is the Word of God in our hearts.

I Can't Memorize

I've heard many persons claim they cannot memorize Scripture. What they usually mean is they can't do it easily. If you know your telephone number, address, Social Security number and the names of your children or friends, you can memorize. It may not be easy, but you can. Often the problem is the assumption that it's not worth the effort. You have power to memorize that you may not have tapped. Philippians 4:13 says that I can do everything through Jesus who gives me strength. **Does "everything" include memorizing Scripture? Why?**

My Personal Journey

As a young Christian, I memorized verses using the Navigators' Topical Memory System. About 35 years of neglect followed those early years. I took up Scripture memory again about 2005 and have continued working on Dr. Waylon Moore's 100 verses to memorize.

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Memorization was much harder at 55 than at 20, but persistence and ongoing review made it doable. It took me about five years to learn all 100 verses. Now I review about seven verses every morning. That gets me through all 100 verses every two weeks and keeps them fresh in my mind. I often quote these verses when I'm preaching or teaching.

Imitate the Master

Why would you want to memorize Scripture when all you must do is open the Bible and read it? Memorizing God's Word benefits you several ways. Applying that memorized Word to your life is like an internal moral vacuum cleaner. It helps you become more like Jesus by removing sin and stinking thinking from your life (Psalm 119:9,11).

It makes a lot of sense to imitate the One who alone was without sin. Jesus remained "undefeated" in every battle with sin through 33 years of His earthly life. When He was tempted, He fought it by quoting God's Word as the ultimate authority (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). He put up a no vacancy sign for anything that contradicted that Word. He didn't consider other alternatives. **How has listening to voices other than God's got you into trouble?**

Jesus wasn't carrying indexed Old Testament scrolls when Satan tempted Him in the desert. He had memorized what was written. He didn't come pre-programmed with God's Word. He had to work at memorizing it, just like we do. It took diligent effort.

Four-Purpose Words

Memorized Scripture is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). It teaches you how to live in a way that brings a smile to God's face. It lets you know when your life is out of whack. It shows you how to get back to God-honoring living. It builds your spiritual fitness

and equips you to choose and do what God defines as right.

Seal the Leaks

Many basketballs leak air. Some I've owned needed to be re-inflated before every use. We're like leaky basketballs. God's Word goes into our ears every Sunday through Bible teaching and preaching. Perhaps we read it daily as well. How much do we remember one day later? Memorization enables total recall. It seals the leak. As a result of God's Word dwelling in us richly, we are equipped to teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and to sing gratitude-motivated songs to God (Colossians 3:16). **Why is spontaneously singing to God a good sign that all is well with your soul?**

Scripture Memory Perks

Memorized Scripture is a hope factory. God provides the Bible to encourage you and foster a never quit attitude that fills you with the bright light of unfading hope (Romans 15:4). That hope transforms how you view today and tomorrow. Telling others where you find hope is a key connecting point in leading them to faith in Christ (1 Peter 3:15). **Share a time when the Scriptures ignited hope within you.**

Memorized Scripture is a faith factory. Faith comes by hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). The memorized word of Christ is like a minuteman missile that can be launched without delay to build your faith and the faith of others right now where you are. **Share a time when the Scriptures ignited your faith.**

Memorized Scripture is a light factory. God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path (Psalm 119:105). We have a nightlight in our home that shines constantly. It has no switch. God's Word in our heart is like that. The brighter the light, the easier it is to see God's will for our lives. Memorized Scripture enables

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God to turn up the intensity, like a three-way lamp. **Share a time when the Scriptures directed you.**

Memorized Scripture is a peace factory. The experiences of a “bad” day can disturb our sleep. Sometimes we rehash the cutting, critical words of others over and over long into the night. By contrast, God’s Words have an entirely different effect. They are sweeter than honey to our mouth (Psalm 119:103). The shortest path to peace on such nights is from God’s Word in our heart to His Word in our mouth. “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors (Matthew 6:12),” stored in our heart, tells us to forgive to find peace and rest. **Share a time when the Scriptures brought you peace.**

Memorized Scripture is a prayer factory. John 15:7 says that if we remain in Jesus and His words remain in us, we can ask whatever we want, and it will be granted. Having God’s promises committed to memory, enables us to pray with greater boldness and faith. **Share a time when the Scriptures empowered your prayer life.**

Memorized Scripture is a wisdom factory (Proverbs 15:23). Good ideas are no substitute for God’s ideas. It’s gratifying to know your advice helped someone. It’s far better to know that advice is grounded in the Word of One who sees and knows it all. The righteous person speaks wise and just words because God’s Words are at home in his/her heart (Psalm 37:30-31). **Share a time when the Scriptures provided wisdom that helped someone else.**

Memorized Scripture is a thought factory. Your thinking shapes your life. Those who endlessly fret about their problems wear themselves out and worry themselves sick. Those who are always thinking about money never have enough. Those who are obsessed with sex are never satisfied. God has a better plan. Memorizing Scriptures enables you to think about whatever is true, noble, right, pure,

lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8). That makes all the difference in the world! **How is God helping you remove the stink from your stinking thinking?**

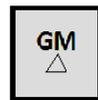
How to Memorize Scripture

Memorizing Scripture is God’s will for your life. Deuteronomy 6:6-7, 11:18 say that God’s Words need to find a home in your heart. It isn’t a suggestion. It’s a command. If God commands you to hide His Word in your heart, it’s obviously His will. You can memorize it for sure. How do I know? Because God promises that if you know His will and pray according to it, His answer is always yes (1 John 5:14-15). With God’s help, you can memorize!

When memorizing, reading the verses around the one you want to memorize helps you understand its context.

Break the verse down into small parts. The punctuation marks divide the verse into memory units. Read aloud the reference, the phrase before the first punctuation mark, and then repeat the reference. Continue in this way until you have mastered the whole verse.

Review daily for 30 days and weekly after that.



What’s God’s message to you in this lesson? What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?

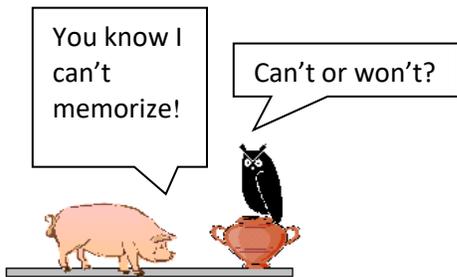
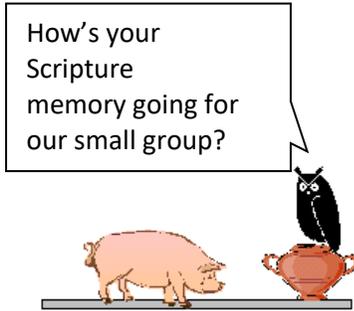
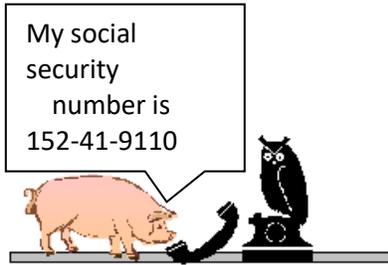


Share your action plan to make those changes:

Scripture Memory

How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you (Psalm 119:9,11).

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Holy Spirit

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Share your progress carrying out your “Scripture Memory” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

Notice I didn’t say, “What is the Holy Spirit?” The Holy Spirit is not the Force that is with you of the Star Wars movies. He isn’t a thing. He’s the Third Person of the Trinity. One God consists of three co-equal, co-eternal Persons in fellowship together. The Holy Spirit is God, as are the Father and the Son, but the Holy Spirit is not identical to the Father or the Son.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word translated “Spirit” literally means breath or wind. It describes God’s power at work. I remember the fear/awe I felt as a child on Friday, October 15, 1954, when Hurricane Hazel with its 100 mph gusts passed through Middletown, PA and bent the trees like I hadn’t seen before or since. That’s nothing compared to the Holy Spirit’s power. Psalm 33:6 tells us the Lord made the heavens by His words and the starry host by His breath. The Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in the creation of the physical world (Genesis 1:1-2).

The Holy Spirit was the power behind your new birth (John 3:5-8). He’s the source of your spiritual life. He made your dead-as-a-rock spirit dynamically, eternally alive in Christ. This life is a gift from God, not a reward for your exceptional goodness. By His grace, you received what you didn’t deserve! **How is the Holy Spirit like spiritual breath from God moment by moment?**

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament the Spirit imparted extraordinary powers to individuals. He granted wisdom to some to make priestly garments for Aaron (Exodus 28:3) and to Bezalel to construct a portable worship center for Israel (Exodus 31:2-4). He gave powers to those who judged Israel including Othniel (Judges 3:10), Gideon (Judges 6:34), and Samson (Judges 14:5-6). He bestowed on Daniel the ability to interpret dreams (Daniel 5:11-12). **What do these verses suggest about the multi-purpose power that is available to you to do God’s will?**

We see a gradual shift during the ten centuries over which the Old Testament was written. Early on the Holy Spirit is an outward gift to give power to accomplish a special purpose such as making priestly garments and the Tabernacle. Later He is needed for inward moral purity (Psalm 51:10-11).

Joel 2:28-32 predicts the Spirit will be poured out some future day on all kinds of people. In Acts 2:17-21 Peter insists Joel’s prophecy is fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1).

The Holy Spirit’s Work in Jesus’ Life

In Luke 1:35 the power of the Most High refers to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary and was responsible for her child being called the Son of God. The text doesn’t tell us how it happened. In like fashion the Holy Spirit, the power of the Most High, brings you new birth without any explanation of how it happens (John 3:5-8).

The Holy Spirit was at work in Jesus’ birth (Matthew 1:18), baptism (Matthew 3:16), temptation in the desert (Matthew 4:1) and public ministry (Luke 4:18). He depended on the Spirit’s power to complete his earthly assignment. **What does Jesus’ dependence on the Spirit suggest about your need for the Spirit’s power for your earthly assignments?**

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The Holy Spirit in the New Testament

The Apostle John recorded Jesus' words that the Spirit would enable believers to do greater things than He did (John 14:12). That seems impossible! How could they? Resurrecting others seems hard to top, but the Apostle Peter raised Dorcas (Acts 9:40) and the Apostle Paul raised Eutycus (Acts 20:7-12).

Greater works refers to the number of lives Jesus would touch through His ever-expanding body, the church. Peter, the disciple who denied Jesus, brought more believers into God's kingdom on the Day of Pentecost than Jesus did during his entire ministry (Acts 2:41). Jesus' church took His words far beyond the borders of Palestine to the ends of the earth. Today Jesus' rule in the hearts of people extends to every nation of the world. The Jesus Film Project estimated in 2020 that between 1979 and 2020, 572 million had indicated decisions to follow Christ after film showings (<https://www.jesusfilm.org/about/learn-more/statistics.html>). **How do you see yourself best contributing to these greater works?**

In John 14:16 Jesus says the Father will send another "Counselor" to earth who will be with believers forever. There are two Greek words for "another." One means another of the same kind, and the other means another of a different sort. Jesus says the Father will send another Counselor of the same kind. That's the Holy Spirit. This same Greek word used in John 14:16 to describe the Spirit is used in 1 John 2:1 to describe Jesus. The Holy Spirit is a different Person than Jesus, but He guides, strengthens and comforts just as Jesus did when he walked on earth -- from the inside rather than the outside.

Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). He's full of grace and truth (John 1:14). It shouldn't surprise us that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17, 15:26).

What's truth? Truth is that which conforms to reality. $2 + 2 = 4$. No other answer will do. Unbelievers sometimes accuse believers of living in a dream world and magical thinking. They couldn't be more wrong. This is your Father's world. Living according to truth is seeing the world as Father does. It's the unbeliever who is living in a dream world. For example, he sees himself as basically a good person. God's truth says, "There is no one righteous, not even one...there is no one who does good, not even one." (Romans 3:10, 12). The truest thing about us is what God's word says about us. **In your society, who defines truth? What's the result of that kind of relativism (Judges 17:6)?**

Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would help them remember what He taught them (John 14:26). That would be invaluable for those of them who would write the New Testament. **How does believing that promise help you moment-by-moment as you pursue God-honoring living?**

The Holy Spirit testifies about Christ (John 15:26) and so must believers (John 15:27). In a future chapter you'll write your faith story. It will include what your life was like before you received Christ, how you received Him, and the difference He has made in your life. Effective witness is a divine-human partnership. Apart from the supporting witness of the Holy Spirit, your words will make no impact. Your words are the nails and He's the nail gun. On the other hand, apart from your witness to Christ, the Holy Spirit's witness is greatly limited. It's like a nail gun without nails.

The Holy Spirit is coming because Christ is going away (John 16:7). On earth Jesus was limited by space and time. He couldn't be everywhere simultaneously. If He was in Capernaum, He couldn't be in Jerusalem. That was about to change. After Jesus departed from His disciples, He would send the Holy Spirit to take His place. The Spirit isn't limited by space and time. He could be simultaneously present in New York

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City; Casper, Wyoming; Zurich, Switzerland; Nairobi, Kenya; and everywhere else in the world. Jesus was with them on earth during His ministry. In the future He'd be in them through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). Vincent Bugliosi, a prosecuting attorney tried 106 felony cases and only lost one. ¹You wouldn't want to face him in court! The Holy Spirit is like an everywhere present prosecuting attorney who brings people to a conviction that they're guilty of sin and helpless before the Holy God of the Universe. **When did you first sense this conviction of sin?** Faith in Jesus' death, burial and resurrection is the solution to your sin problem.

We humans sometimes struggle to identify root causes. The 5 Whys is a problem-solving process developed in a Toyota plant in Japan to identify root causes by asking why five times. ²My toe hurts. Why? I stubbed it on a brick. Why? My wife left it in the middle of the basement. Why? Etc. What's the root cause of sin? You don't have to ask why five times to identify it. John 16:9 describes it as unbelief, a total rejection of God's one and only solution to the problem of man's separation from God. Faith (belief, trust) pleases God (Hebrews 11:6). Unbelief incurs His judgment. The Holy Spirit convicts believers as well as unbelievers. **Worry is a sin. How is unbelief its root cause?**

Jesus is no longer on earth to convict the world of righteousness. That job now belongs to the Holy Spirit. You're not righteous. Have you noticed? Jesus is. The Father's reception of Him into heaven 40 days after His resurrection proves it. Nothing less than 100 percent righteousness will due. Through faith in His death, burial, and resurrection, you can have it. It's a gift from God. Faith in Jesus is the solution to your need for righteousness.

When your sin is exposed and evaluated by the blinding light of Jesus' righteousness, condemnation knocks on your door with a badge on its chest. All who follow in the self-seeking, rebellious footsteps of the prince of this world (Satan) will reap his sure, fixed, and permanent condemnation (John 16:11). Faith in Jesus is the only solution to the problem of eternal condemnation. There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). **How did you feel when you first believed this promise?**

The Holy Spirit guides into all truth (John 16:13). While Jesus walked on earth, His disciples were not ready to hear everything He had to tell them. The Holy Spirit would add to the revelation they had already received. They would understand Jesus better after He ascended, and the Holy Spirit had come than while Jesus was still with them. Some of them would write these revelations including things to come in what we know as the New Testament. (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit performs His ministry behind the curtain with the goal of keeping the spotlight on Jesus on the stage (John 16:14). He doesn't bring attention to Himself. Jesus' name, not His is on the marquee. **How is the Holy Spirit's backstage ministry an appropriate picture of how you should serve Christ?**

1 John 5:12 says that because you have the Son (Christ), you have life. According to Romans 8:9, because you belong to Christ, you have the Spirit of Christ. You demonstrate you are God's child by being led by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:14). You know you belong to God because His Spirit bears witness with your spirit (Romans 8:16).

You received the Spirit the very moment you opened the door of your life to Jesus. However, His presence doesn't guarantee His control. You must surrender the driver's seat of your life to Him moment by moment. That's the theme of the next lesson.

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The Holy Spirit enables your life to be spiritually significant. He sets you apart for His work (Acts 13:2) and guides you in it (Acts 16:6-7). He empowers you to be His witness (Acts 1:8). He helps you pray by interceding for you with groans words can't express (Romans 8:26-27).

He has given you at least one spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). He inspired the men who wrote the Bible (2 Peter 1:21) and helps you understand it. When He controls you, you express the Jesus-like character traits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Symbols and the Holy Spirit

Many symbols represent the Holy Spirit including living water (John 7:37-39), oil (Luke 4:18), wind (John 3:8), fire (Acts 2:3-4), a dove (Matthew 3:16), and a seal (Ephesians 1:13). Water is necessary for life on earth. Only the Holy Spirit can meet the deep needs of your soul. Oil in biblical times was used as a cosmetic, medicine, food, and fuel for lighting. Abundant oil represented prosperity. Wind signifies God's power. Fire symbolizes His glory and holiness and His desire to make you pure and holy. A dove portrays the energy through which God's work is carried out, even as the Spirit hovered over the waters at creation (Genesis 1:1-2). A seal was the mark of ownership kings placed upon documents.

How can you apply these symbols to what the Spirit wants to do in your life?

The Holy Spirit is the engine of your spiritual life! "Ladies and Gentlemen, start your engines!"

Daily do the following:

1. Before you read the Bible, ask the Holy Spirit to teach you.
2. Ask Him to reveal and guide you in His purposes for the day.

3. Surrender your life to His control.



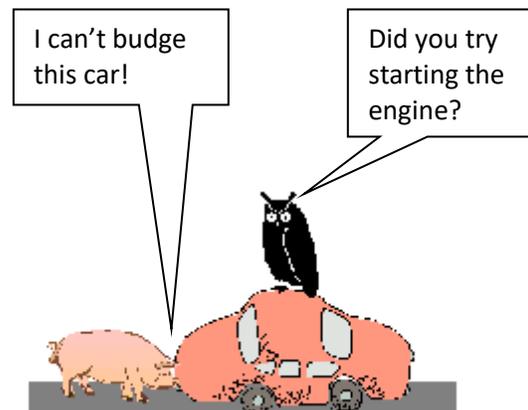
What's God's message to you in this lesson? What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes.

Scripture Memory

Acts 1:8 - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.



1. (www.thenation.com/node/22710).
2. (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5_Whys).

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Filled with the Spirit

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Share your progress carrying out your “Holy Spirit” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

Monopoly

Walking in the Spirit means being empowered by the Holy Spirit to live for and be like Jesus. This can happen only if you deny your own selfish desires and yield your mind and body to the Spirit of Christ who lives within you. Dwight L. Moody, a famous evangelist, was scheduled to hold meetings in England. An elderly English pastor wondered what an uneducated, inexperienced preacher like Moody could do that they couldn't. He asked, “Does he think he has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit.” A wiser pastor replied, “No, but the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr. Moody.”¹ **What do you think the wise pastor meant?**

Filled with the Right Stuff?

Mr. Moody believed that when you are emptied of pride, selfishness, ambition, and everything contrary to God's law (the little stuff), the Holy Spirit fills every corner of your heart. Fill a peanut butter jar with golf balls. Is the jar full? Now put pebbles in the jar. They fill in between the golf balls. Is the jar full? Now put sand in the jar. It fills in between the pebbles. Is the jar full? Now pour water into the jar until it overflows. The water fills the spaces between the sand grains. Now it's full! The peanut butter jar represents your life. The golf balls represent giving the Spirit His rightful place in the driver's seat of your life. The small stuff represents all the details of daily life. **What happens if you fill your life with all the small stuff first? What's the solution?**

Tattletale Priorities

You must overcome major distractions to do God's will consistently. What you count and measure and what you think about repeatedly when you're free to think about anything reveals your priorities. At one time I thought about fishing a lot. I used to count how many fish I caught every year. While I lived in Huntingdon and later Bedford County, Pennsylvania, from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s I counted about 30,000 of them. One day I realized that God was not going to ask me at the Judgment, “Jack, how many fish did you catch?” There's nothing wrong with fishing or counting fish. There's something wrong with becoming preoccupied with fishing. My thought-life was too filled up with small stuff. Did I mention I was a pastor at the time? **What things in life do you count and measure? What are the Holy Spirit's chief rivals in your life for your thoughts, energy, and passion? What must change for the Holy Spirit to have a monopoly on you?**

Sherpa for the Clueless

The Sherpas serve as guides for those who are attempting to scale Mt. Everest. God has gifted us with our own internal “Sherpa.” Walking in the Spirit includes living with the Holy Spirit as your guide. A guide leads you through strange territory. I drove through Ottawa, Canada, in 1984 following a man who knew the city's roads. Of the three times I've been in Ottawa, it was the only time I didn't get lost! That was B.G.P.S. (before GPS!). If you're not yet a mature believer, living to please Jesus is very unfamiliar territory! You need a lot of help and God provides it. You have a Sherpa.

Competing Drill Sergeants

The Holy Spirit not only guides, He also calls the cadence. Sometimes when my grandkids and I are walking together, they lag behind. Sometimes they run ahead of Grandpa. That's getting easier to do with every passing year! I'm

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the guide, but they often move at their own pace. Galatians 5:25 says, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. In the military a drill sergeant calls cadence to get the whole squadron in step. There's a competing drill sergeant, the voice of your sinful desires. Obeying it, forces you out of step with the Spirit. The question isn't whether you're marching in cadence. Whose cadence are you following? Imagine a church where everyone is marching in step with the Holy Spirit. It's a beautiful thing. You don't want to be the exception. Following the cadence of the Holy Spirit is a moment-by-moment choice.

Wanting What You Didn't Used to Want

When you're walking in the Spirit, your desires change. Many pregnant women suddenly crave pickles! My father hated liver until he had to eat it twice in one day while he was in the military. After that he liked it.

When you're walking in the Spirit, new desires come to roost in you. One is the desire for God's Word. **How does your daily use of time demonstrate a craving for God's Word (1 Peter 2:2)?** Another new desire is to see others come to know Jesus too.

Doing What You Didn't Used to Do

Today we hear a lot about unintended consequences. Sometimes unintended consequences are positive, sometime negative, and sometimes a combination of both. By contrast the intended consequences of living in the Spirit are purely positive. They include meeting the righteous requirements of the law (Romans 8:4), not gratifying sinful desires (Galatians 5:16), doing good works (Ephesians 2:10) and demonstrating love (Ephesians 5:2). **Share some things you do now that you didn't used to do before you met Christ.**

We'll Leave the Light on for You!

"We'll leave the light on for you," is the memorable slogan of Motel 6. It would also make a great slogan for a church! Walking in the Spirit is the same as walking in the light. Both are the same as following Jesus, the light of the world and the light of life. (John 8:12). Jesus' life in you lights your way (John 1:4) and enables you to light the way for others (Matthew 5:14). When you're walking in the light, you can both see clearly and be seen by others. The light illuminates both the ground and your face. You become a son of light (John 12:36). One of the purposes of the power the Spirit gives is for witnessing (Acts 1:8). You were born again to reproduce spiritually. **For whose salvation are you praying regularly?**

Fill It Up with High-Test

Those who walk in the Spirit, walk in the truth (3 John 4). Walking in the truth means living according to two ultimate realities. God is worthy of your worship, love, and service. Your neighbor, created in His image, deserves the same love you show yourself. That's how Jesus lived. Imitate Him (1 John 2:6). You can do that by being filled with both the Word (Colossians 3:15-17) and the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-21). **Describe what you're doing now to funnel God's Word into your life. How can you increase the size of the funnel?**

The Spirit whittles you with His Word and shapes how you think and live. "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Psalm 119:105). The Spirit empowers you like a wind-filled sail moves a sailboat, giving you both power and direction. You need to be filled richly with both the Word and the Spirit.

The original Greek in Ephesians 5:18 emphasizes that Christians are to keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit as a way of life. The evidence of that filling is the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control

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(Galatians 5:22-23). In John 15 Jesus illustrates the Spirit-filled life by a grape vine and its branches. The key is to remain in Him in a trusting, obedient relationship (John 15:5) and the result is much fruit. **What fruit do you see in the lives of others in your small group?**

Trying vs. Trusting

Many Christians try to live for Christ in their own strength. Such efforts lead only to frustration, discouragement, and burnout. Imagine a wick that is cut from a candle and lit. It will burn up in a short period of time. On the other hand, a wick on a candle doesn't burn up if the supply of wax lasts. The Holy Spirit is the fuel that allows you to burn on for Christ without being consumed. Are you living moment by moment in dependence on His power?

Requirements for Filling

There are several requirements to be filled with the Spirit. Olympic athletes have a vision of themselves on the medals platform that shapes daily living. They sacrifice attending social gatherings, certain food and drink, and every lesser priority for a moment of Olympic glory. They want it badly. We must want the Holy Spirit's control. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled (Matthew 5:6). God won't strong arm the steering wheel of life out of your control. You must decide to yield it.

You must confess any sins the Holy Spirit reveals. God doesn't use a dirty cup to pour His living water out to bless others. Once you confess those sins that contaminate you, God promises to forgive and purify you (1 John 1:9).

You are filled with the Holy Spirit by faith alone based on Hebrews 11:6 because without it, you can't please God. God's command and promise are like a target and our faith like an arrow. According to Ephesians 5:18, God's will is for you to be filled with the Holy Spirit. According to 1 John 5:14-15, when you pray according to

God's will, He promises to hear and grant your request. In other words, when you ask God to help you do what He wants, He always does.

When you pray for God to fill you with His Spirit, you can know He will because He always keeps His promises. He's forever trustworthy (Psalm 19:7). Don't depend on feelings to gauge whether you're filled with the Spirit. Rather, depend on God's trustworthiness to fulfill His promises. His promise is a much stronger foundation for your faith than whether you feel like God is controlling you at any given moment.

When you are convicted of sin, you must confess it before God's Spirit can once again fill you.

Would you like for the Holy Spirit to fill you right now? If so, claim that filling by the following prayer:

Lord, I present my body, soul, and spirit to You now. I want You to think with my mind, love with my heart, and bless others through the strength You will give me today. By faith I claim the control and power of Your Spirit right now. Thank you for it in Jesus' Name. Amen.



What's God's message to you in this lesson?

What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?

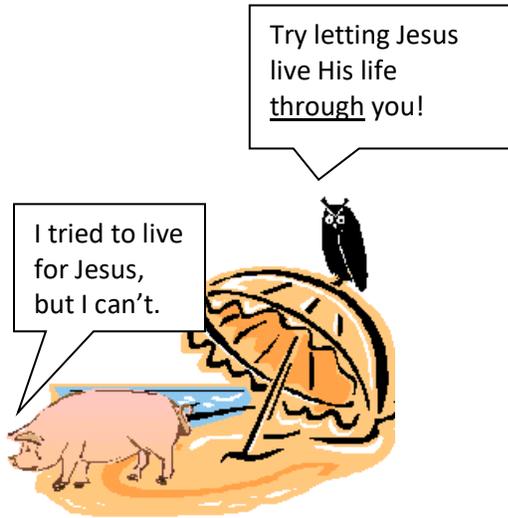


Share your action plan to make those changes:

Scripture Memory

Ephesians 5:18 - Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity



1. (www.sermoncentral.com/.../the-holy-spirit-what-he-gives-to-every-christ...)

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Flesh and Spirit

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.



Share your progress carrying out your “Walking in the Spirit” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

What Is Flesh?

Flesh isn't the gunk in your trunk or the stuff that hides your bones. In this lesson “flesh” refers to that part of you that seeks your own will and satisfaction in everything. You naturally want the biggest cookie on the plate, the best parking spot, and the front of the line! Your flesh is addicted to selfishness, full of pride, competitive and totally unaware that God has a problem with your living that way. **How does this self-seeking aspect of humanity help explain the contentious political scene in the United States?**

What is Spirit?

Spirit, as used here, doesn't refer to the non-physical part of you that's eternal. “Spirit” means living by faith under the conscious control of the Holy Spirit. Spirit life revolves around loving God and others. Flesh and Spirit represent two different approaches to achieving satisfaction —the first by getting and the second by giving. They correspond to two kinds of happiness.

Two Kinds of Happiness

In the Health and Science section of *The Week* published September 13, 2013, an article connected our genes to true happiness. It said, “Human beings appear to be genetically engineered to be happiest and healthiest when we spend a lot of time selflessly helping others

– and unhealthy when we're mostly devoted to self-gratification.”

Two Happiness-Outcomes

A study was done at the University of North Carolina on 80 volunteers from whom blood samples were drawn. The researchers discovered that those whose lives had much pleasure, but little purpose, had high levels of inflammation. Inflammation in turn is linked to cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and a weaker response to infection.

The cost of self-indulgent happiness is diminished physical health over the long haul. On the other hand, the genes of those whose happiness was gained by meeting the needs of and connecting with others produced less inflammation and stronger immunity against disease. In the article Steven Cole, a co-author, wrote that there are two kinds of happiness, and “our genes can tell the difference.”

Happiness and God's Image

If human beings appear to be genetically engineered to be happiest and healthiest when helping others, who is the Engineer? Why are we made that way?

This genetically controlled happiness is a dimension of being made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). God's life could've been totally self-involved. He could've spent endless ages playing pool with the stars or alternately creating and destroying the Universe every three seconds just to amuse Himself.

That isn't the God of the Bible. He isn't self-indulgent. He loves by giving self-sacrificially to meet the needs of His creation. The cross of Christ is its highest expression. When God gives, He's just being Himself. **How does this distinction between healthy happiness and unhealthy happiness apply to you?**

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Designed to Love Others

God commands you to love Him with all you've got and to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:36-40). He's designed you to find maximum fulfillment when you live that way! It's the closest you'll come to discovering the Fountain of Youth. Giving of yourself to meet the needs of others not only slows the aging process, it makes you feel good doing it! **When you've blessed others by ministering to their needs, how have you been blessed at the same time?**

Unselect Your Default Mode

Without a conscious commitment to life in the Spirit, selfishness automatically determines your reactions. It's as natural as breathing. Your default setting is doing what you want to do when you want to do it. One of my grandchildren, who was five at the time, was sitting in the back seat playing with the electric window as we were traveling. Up-down-up-down-up-down. Multiple requests to stop had the most temporary of effects—15 seconds at most of obedience. Then up-down-up-down continued.

The Holy Spirit wants authority over the button that, among other things, controls what and how much you eat, what you say when you're angry, what books/magazines you read, what images you view on the computer, and what you think about when you're free to think about anything. You must decide to yield that button to Him many times daily. **When someone hurts or offends you or something doesn't go as you desire, is your first knee-jerk reaction godly or ungodly? Explain.**

Don't Listen to the Scammer

Your flesh can't please God because it naturally argues with Him about everything. It acts like it knows better than your Creator what's best for you. What a scam artist! The flesh is the major wire within you through which the current of

sin flows with no resistance. It doesn't and can't submit to God's law (Romans 8:7). It's hopelessly addicted to defying Him. Living according to the flesh's GPS instructions results in ultimate, eternal separation from God and the life that can be found only in Him (Romans 8:12-13). Jesus came to set you free from knee-jerk defiance. When the scammer begins talking to you, just hang up!

Listen to Your Infinitely Wise Counselor

The Spirit sets you free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2). When He controls your mind, you experience life and peace (Romans 8:6). It's foolish to listen to a scammer when you can listen to a Counselor who knows you through and through, wants what's best for you and knows the path God has appointed you to walk. If you call yourself a child of God, following the Spirit's leading isn't optional (Romans 8:14).

A Wrestling Match ... with Yourself

Before your new birth, your selfish nature faced no opposition. It always got its way. But now an impressive competitor inside you has weighed in. Rippling with supernatural muscle, this new nature, coached and empowered by the Holy Spirit, is designed to glorify King Jesus. Your flesh isn't happy, and it doesn't fight fairly. It gouges, scratches, bites, pulls hair and hits below the belt. There's something you need to know about it, however.

It's dead. I know it doesn't seem like it, but it is. The truest thing about you is what God's Word says about you. This is where living by faith appears. Without faith you can't please God (Hebrews 11:6). Your old self was crucified with Christ. When He died, so did it (Romans 6:6). God's plan is for the new nature to win every match by forfeit, because the flesh, contrary to appearances, is dead. By faith, count yourself dead to sin, but alive to God as an instrument through whom Jesus can live (Romans 6:11).

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Jesus' death on the cross frees you to choose to live for Him. Before you received Him, you were a slave to the demands of your selfish nature. Since you are born again, put your old way of life behind you and let Christ live through you (Galatians 2:20). What you "accomplished" before that new birth doesn't matter now. That self-focused life is to be over. Its victories and defeats are equally unimportant. Remind it when it tries to scam you-- "Hey, Mr. Flesh, you're dead!" Seek first God's Kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33). **Talk about your personal battle between your first reaction to negative circumstances and a godly reaction.**

Flesh-Speak

Some professing believers are bilingual. They talk like Christians on Sundays and like the unbelieving world the rest of the week. They live like a believer for an hour or two a week and like an unbeliever the rest of the time. They're fluent in flesh-speak.

The flesh-life is remarkably similar in all cultures and places that humans live. When people go their own way and do their own thing, the same stuff happens over and over and all over. From the spring of the flesh-life all the following flow: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery (indulgence in harmful or immoral pleasures), idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord (quarreling), jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions (disagreements that bring strife), factions (small, united groups within a larger one), envy, drunkenness and orgies (wild drunken parties). Paul makes it clear that people who live that way have no life-changing connection with God (Galatians 5:19-21) and won't spend eternity with Him. Those who sow to please their selfish nature reap destruction (Galatians 6:8).

Hatred and discord appear in Galatians 5 as works of the flesh even though you might not consider them major moral failures. Hatred is harboring hostility in your heart against another person and discord is the quarreling that results

from it. These "minor" sins prevent entrance into God's kingdom. A way of life characterized by them demonstrates a lack of connection with Christ, the source of eternal life. The goal of the Christian life isn't just to avoid falling into obvious "sewers" of sin. God's plan is for you to become like Jesus through yielding to the Holy Spirit's control.

Spirit-Life

The result of the Holy Spirit's control is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). In the transition from flesh-life to Spirit-life, you need a wardrobe change. Discard the stinky underwear you wore in the past and put on garments perfumed with the sweet fragrance of Christ. The stinky underwear that has to go includes sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed which is idolatry, anger, rage, malice (desire to harm others), slander (a false statement made to hurt another person's reputation), filthy language and lying (Colossians 3:5-9). Put on the garments of the Spirit-life with their sweet, complex fragrance of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with each other, forgiveness, and love (Colossians 3:12-14).

Walking in the Spirit provides wholeness and a healthier life with joy springing from loving service to others; supportive friends in the church; a better relationship with God, others and yourself; peace of mind; an experience of God's love; power to do all God asks; assurance of salvation and the fulfillment that comes from carrying out your purpose of helping others know and grow in Christ (1 Timothy 4:8).

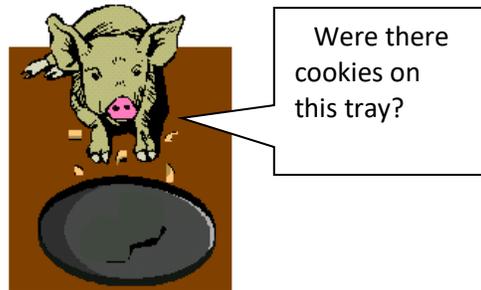
Inventory Your Life

The shelves in your refrigerator, freezer, and pantry are stocked with provisions for your physical body—milk, eggs, bread, cans, and packages of all sorts. By contrast, you are to stockpile no resources for your self-seeking

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nature (Romans 13:14). **What practical steps could you take to make no provision for the flesh with respect to:**

- a. Alcohol abuse
- b. Sexual lust
- c. Uncontrolled spending
- d. Gambling
- e. Oversleeping and missing church
- f. Reading material
- g. Television viewing
- h. Music and entertainment



Self-centered, fleshly characteristics include being self-indulgent, disrespectful, lazy, undependable, worried, impatient, deceitful, rebellious, hypocritical, fearful, unforgiving, impulsive, judgmental, apathetic, unreliable, underachieving, proud, unfaithful, callous, partial, indifferent, covetous, harsh, angry, stingy, insensitive, unthankful and self-centered. Spirit-filled persons are self-controlled, reverent, dependable, truthful, obedient, sincere, forgiving, wise, discerning, orderly, humble, responsible, loyal, sensitive, compassionate, gentle, meek, contented, grateful, alert, hospitable, generous, joyfully enduring and patient. **Circle three fleshly characteristics you will work on eliminating from your life.**



What's God's message to you in this lesson? What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Write your action plan to make those changes:

Scripture Memory

Galatians 5:22-23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

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The World System

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.



Share your progress carrying out your “Flesh and Spirit” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

What Is the World System?

The world system refers to the organized forces that encourage rebellion against God’s kingdom values of faith, love, holiness, and goodness. Imagine an indulgent mother feeding an infant in a highchair. The infant is morbidly obese but doesn’t realize it. The world system is the indulgent mother. The infant is the flesh. The world system supplies everything the rebellious flesh longs for that ultimately brings about its own destruction.

The world system fosters faith in someone or something other than God and nurtures values that compete with His. It doesn’t matter what or who His competitor is. You can trust in yourself, in the goodness of mankind, in scientific theories, in your doctor’s treatment plan, in the American dream, or whatever and you will feel not the slightest contrary breeze from the world system. As soon as you decide to trust in God and seek first His Kingdom and righteousness, out of nowhere hurricane-force resistance arises. That’s why American society is tolerant of everything and everyone except Christians who are serious about their faith.

Who Controls the World System?

Satan is the brain of the world system. He is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). He blinds the minds of unbelievers and actively resists their movement toward faith in Jesus. He does this through the rulers of this age (1 Corinthians 2:6, 8). These rulers are persons who are influential in science, sports, music, education,

fashion, politics, journalism, art, literature, and religion. Their agenda directly opposes God’s.

Even as the Christian is characterized by love (1 John 3:14), the world is known for hate (1 John 3:13). Those controlled by the world don’t listen to spiritual truth (1 John 4:5-6). It’s foolishness to them and they don’t understand it (1 Corinthians 2:14). They live only for the here and now, for what they can see, hear, smell, taste, and touch.

What is Worldliness?

The desire for pleasure isn’t worldliness. You experience pleasure when the natural drives God created are satisfied. An ice-cold glass of water on a hot day brings pleasure. So does a plate of spaghetti after a hard day at work.

Problems multiply like bacteria when, in the pursuit of pleasure, you jump God’s wisely laid tracks. Slightly off track quickly becomes WAY off track.

Instead of pleasure being the by-product of seeking God, it becomes an end. The world system-flesh duo twists God’s good gifts and uses them in ways He never intended. Instead of seeking to glorify God, we seek personal glory. God has given us the gifts of food and drink, but our natural tendency is to eat way too much and drink to excess. God has given us the gift of medications, but many people abuse prescription drugs. God has given us the gift of speech, but we too often use words to inflict pain on others. God has given us the gift of sex, but many pursue its pleasures outside God’s established protective boundaries and question the validity of those boundaries. **What are some other good gifts from God that people twist and misuse?**

Worldliness means living contrary to God’s will for your life. That will can’t simply be encoded in a list of behaviors to avoid, like “Don’t smoke, drink, or swear....” Many Christians take pride in not smoking, swearing, or drinking alcoholic

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beverages, but they lack the love that should mark Jesus' followers. That's worldliness!

Living with Eternity in View

Your thoughts, conversations and behaviors define you. Do you measure yourself by a standard that changes every year or by one that never changes?

In Romans 12:2 the term used for "world" refers to all that's on this side of eternity. It's time-bound and consists of material things you can see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. The temptation is to conform to and love that which is passing and won't last. The one thing that's predictable about this year's styles is they'll be out of style next year! Don't let the world system shape your life. Choose to think, talk, and behave like Jesus (Romans 8:29). Live for eternity's values now!

The world system is opposed to God! Not only is it His enemy (James 4:4), but it's on the way to disappearing (1 John 2:17). Loving both it and God is like loving adultery and marital faithfulness at the same time! It can't be done.

Anything in the world can take God's place and become your defining passion. Your spending patterns, thought life, and activities calendar identify worldly influences.

Unpacking the World System

The world is an evil system manufactured by Satan with thousands of variations on the theme of rebellion against God. Only Route 1 will take you to Key West. There are thousands of roads that won't take you there. The glorious light of the gospel is that by grace through faith Jesus is the one way to God. The World system promotes any and every route OTHER than that one way.

John summarizes these wrong roads as a way of life characterized by the cravings of sinful man,

the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does (1 John 2:16).

The cravings of sinful man come wrapped with an independent spirit that doesn't need anyone else, including God. Preoccupation with self results in ignoring the needs of the hurting, looking down on others, sexism, racism, scorn for justice, etc.

The world puts out a welcome mat to your sinful cravings and actively feeds them. Like gaudy Las Vegas lit with beckoning neon signs, the world system solicits business from the flesh. It knows what sinful cravings desire, and it delivers.

Although you can temporarily satisfy those desires, there's no fulfillment from giving the sinful nature what it wants any more than giving a spoiled child what he wants will satisfy him. Tomorrow, if not before, he'll start wanting more. The world system's gaudy lights and hype promise way too much. At the end of lust's road lie only brokenness and despair. The lust-lane leads nowhere. The god of the world system is a liar (John 8:44) who deceives you to destroy you (John 10:10).

The lust of the eyes refers to the desire to have things. Some things are necessary for life. Wanting more, more, more, however, proves the world has you in its grip. Material things can't bring satisfaction. If the 50 shirts/blouses you own haven't satisfied you, why would you expect number 51 to do it?

The boastings of what he has and does (1 John 2:16), describe the desire to impress others by grace (athletic ability), place (position), and face (appearance). It includes an inflated sense of self-importance. It's pride on a ride. **If others thinking well of you is more important to you than God's glory or what's best for others, what do you think is wrong?**

How you define who you are says a lot about you. **What's wrong with defining yourself by**

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earned degrees, athletic or academic achievements, income, car, house, expensive toys, etc.?

Let's contrast a sampling of world system values (listed first) with corresponding biblical values:

1. People are basically good vs. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).
2. Truth is relative vs. God's Word is truth (John 17:17).
3. Man sets his own moral values vs. On judgment day all will have to give account of every careless word they've spoken (Matthew 12:36).
4. All religions lead to God vs. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus (John 14:6).
5. The Bible isn't relevant vs. All Scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).
6. Live for the moment vs. Set your hearts and minds on things above (Colossians 3:1-2).
7. Physical well-being and material possessions are the highest good vs. You can't serve God and Money (Matthew 6:24).
8. Life is meaningless vs. Jesus came that we might have life to the full (John 10:10).
9. God helps those who help themselves vs. Apart from me [Jesus] you can do nothing (John 15:5).
10. Brains, bucks, brawn, and beauty determine worth vs. God did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all (Romans 8:32) because of our worth to Him.
11. Great people are to be served by others vs. The one who wants to be first must be the servant of all (Mark 9:35).
12. Clothes make the man vs. God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).
13. Do your own thing vs. Obey what God commands (John 14:15).
14. Avoid suffering at all costs vs. Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ (1 Peter 4:13).
15. Take care of #1 vs. Seek first God's kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33).
16. Be like "Mike" vs. Be like God's Son (Romans 8:29).
17. Make money vs. Make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).
18. Win the lottery vs. Win the lost (Luke 15:4).
19. Ignore the poor vs. Remember the poor (Galatians 2:10).
20. Live it up vs. Bear much fruit (John 15:8, 16).
21. Be entertained vs. Do good works (Ephesians 2:10).
22. Hide your weaknesses vs. Confess your sins (1 John 1:9).
23. Government saves vs. Jesus saves (John 3:17).
24. Appearance determines destiny vs. Faith determines destiny (John 3:36).
25. Health is everything vs. God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).
26. Be self-sufficient vs. Depend on Jesus (John 15:5).
27. Pamper yourself vs. Deny yourself (Luke 9:23).

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28. Get even with those who hurt you vs. Forgive others (Ephesians 4:32).

29. Tolerance is the highest virtue vs. Hate what is evil (Romans 12:9).

Which world system principles just described still have the strongest influence on you?



What's God's message to you in this lesson? What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Write your action plan to make those changes:

Scripture Memory

1 John 2:16 - For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.



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Satan, the Enemy

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Share your progress carrying out your “The World System” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

The “god” Who Welcomes Unbelief

A survey by The Barna Group published April 10, 2009, revealed that 40% of professing Christians in the United States strongly agreed and 19% agreed somewhat that Satan is not a living being but a symbol of evil. **What do you think? Suppose you don’t believe Covid-19 exists. How might your belief adversely affect your health? Why does what you believe about Satan’s existence matter?**

Satan Is a Person

Satan is more than a symbol of evil. He is described by a personal pronoun in John 8:44 – he. He has personal characteristics, e.g. will in Isaiah 14:13-14 and knowledge in Job 1:9-10. He also performs acts associated with persons, e.g. in John 8:44 he is called a liar and a murderer.

Satan’s Agenda

Satan’s stated goal in Isaiah 14:14 is to be like the Most High. That means He wants to rule heaven and earth. Before human history began, he led a revolt of angels against God (Isaiah 14:12-15). His rebellion continues. Now he’s leading a revolt of human beings against God. **Where do you see obvious signs of this revolt in contemporary America?**

Satan sought Jesus’ worship (Matthew 4:8-10). He wants your worship and obedience and will give you things to get it. If you aren’t

worshipping God, you’re worshipping Satan already whether you know it or not. When you conform to this world, you’re conforming to the values of the god of this world instead of to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). Worship is declaring by your words and deeds the worth of one or more mastering influences. **What influences in your life are pushing you toward becoming more like Jesus? What influences are pushing you away?**

Satan’s Names Describe How He Operates

He is Satan, meaning adversary (Matthew 4:10). He opposes both God and man. That’s why you experience resistance as you seek to do God’s will. Seeking first God’s kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33) is like wading against the current of a rushing stream. **Where in life have you experienced resistance when you tried to live for Christ?**

He is the devil (Matthew 13:39). As such he slanders and accuses both God to man (Genesis 3:1-7) and man to God (Job 1:9). In Genesis 3:4-5 he questions God’s character, motives, truthfulness, and love. In Job 1:9-11 he slanders Job by telling God that the only reason Job serves Him is because of the material benefits it brings. **Share a time in your life when you questioned God’s character, motives, truthfulness, or love.**

He is the great monster (Ezekiel 29:3) represented by Pharaoh. This title describes both the devil’s power and his evil nature. He is what the dark figures were that had leading roles in your childhood nightmares.

He is the serpent (Genesis 3:1). As such, he is crooked and deceitful. On its website the First Church of Satan advertises Satan as a positive role model and describes its site as fun for the whole family! Oh, yes—about as fun as a traffic accident on the way to your wedding!

He is Beelzebub (Matthew 10:25). Literally the word means “Lord of the flies.” In Mark 3:22

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the name refers to the prince of demons. We don't know any more about the significance of the name.

He is Belial (2 Corinthians 6:15). This term refers to his worthlessness. Like a counterfeit 100-dollar bill, he promises much but delivers no value at all. By contrast those who put their hope in God never regret it (Isaiah 49:23). **Share a time when you put your hope in a material thing or a person and ended up disappointed.**

He is morning star and son of the dawn (Isaiah 14:12). As such he pretends to be an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). He is to be feared as a lion, even more as a serpent, and most of all as an angel of light. Good's chief enemy is that which appears good but isn't. Peanut butter that baits a mouse trap seems good to a hungry mouse. It looks good, smells good, tastes good... **WHACK. How does a baited mouse trap illustrate the devil's schemes?**

He is the evil one (Matthew 13:19). His character is wicked through and through, like an apple rotten to the core.

He is the tempter (Matthew 4:3). He suggests all the "benefits" of sin and downplays its cost. Many young people who've wanted to appear grown up have indulged in alcohol and marijuana at a party with other teens. They liked how it made them feel. Then they used more dangerous drugs such as cocaine or heroin. Many became hooked and couldn't think of anything other than getting their next fix for the rest of their lives, which ended prematurely. The drugs started as a servant to make them feel good but quickly became a tyrant that called all the shots. The "benefits" the tempter offers are never worth the cost.

He is the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is the inspiration behind all the religions that compete against the one and only way to a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Wikipedia estimates there are 4200 religions in the world. Christianity is

God's gracious reaching out to man. The other 4199 are man's futile inventions to reach out to God. With time that number will continue to grow. Their chief architect is the god of this age. It is often harder to reach a religious person entangled in one of the 4199 alternatives than one who professes no religious affiliation. **Why?**

The devil is the ruler of the kingdom of the air. (Ephesians 2:2). He is the leader of all who oppose God and the unholy spirit who energizes the rebel world. He is like the moon whose pull affects the ebb and flow of the tide of public opinion. Over time that opinion moves ever farther from God-centered morality. Perhaps coincidentally Satan dominates the "airways." Most radio and television programming messages promote his agenda.

He is the prince of this world (John 12:31). He influences human governments and wields power on earth. He wrote the scripts Marx, Stalin, Hitler, and many others obediently followed.

He is the accuser (Revelation 12:10). He continually accuses Christians before God. He also accuses you of your sins and tries to paralyze you with guilt. He says things like, "You did that again? You're a poor excuse for a Christian!" Many wilt under the pressure, agree with their accuser and move to the sidelines—off the playing field of expanding God's Kingdom. **What's wrong with giving up as a reaction to your sin?**

His Little Red Toolbox

Let's consider some of the tools of his trade: He lies to you (John 8:44), tempts you (Matthew 4:1), snatches away the Word from you (Matthew 13:19), blocks your ministry (1 Thessalonians 2:18), torments you (2 Corinthians 12:7), sifts you to try to separate you from Christ (Luke 22:31), masquerades as one who is on God's side (2 Corinthians 11:14), accuses you of sin (Revelation 12:10), tries to lead you astray (Revelation 12:9), strikes you

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with disease (Luke 13:10, 12, 16), enters into persons (John 13:27), and murders (John 8:44). He performs counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9) to lead you astray.

And in This Corner...

Jesus came to destroy the devil's work (1 John 3:8). He came to undo what the devil had done and frustrate his plans. He came to build a bridge back to fellowship with God. With every temptation dished out by the devil, Jesus provides you with a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13). His fight strategy is so brilliant that the only rounds the devil ever wins are those you give away through unbelief.

Jesus came to destroy him who has the power of death (Hebrews 2:14-15). Physical death has not been abolished, but Jesus took sin's stinger for you (1 Corinthians 15:55). Like a honeybee that has already stung and can't sting again, the devil no longer has power over you. Jesus came to free you from an oppressing fear of death. **How has that made a difference in your life?**

The Knockout

In the last days, the devil will be hurled to earth (Revelation 12:7-9). He will be locked and sealed in the Abyss for 1000 years (Revelation 20:1-3). After that he will deceive the nations and gather them for battle against the Lord's saints and city (Revelation 20:7-9). Then he will be thrown into and tormented in the lake of burning sulfur forever (Revelation 20:9-10).

Your Fight Strategy

Here's how you can overcome Satan's schemes:

1. Understand how he operates (2 Corinthians 2:11). Football coaches study their opponent's game films. They look for what other teams do in various situations and any trick plays. Then they prepare their own game plan. God's Word is the game film.

Study it. Satan's tendencies include undermining the church's witness by internal conflict, disunity, immorality, and false teaching. **Are any of these present in your church? Are you part of the problem? If so, how can you defend against his favorite plays in your church?**

2. Be self-controlled and alert. Satan's temptations usually present themselves as opportunities for "happiness." That's a laugh! He wants to make you happy as much as a fox wants to make chickens happy!

If you must justify a certain behavior, it's probably wrong! God isn't out to spoil your fun. He loves you and knows where the devil's opportunities for "happiness" lead. Alert drivers avoid accidents. Alert Christians identify the enemy's "happiness" traps coming toward them on the road of life and avoid them by exercising self-control.

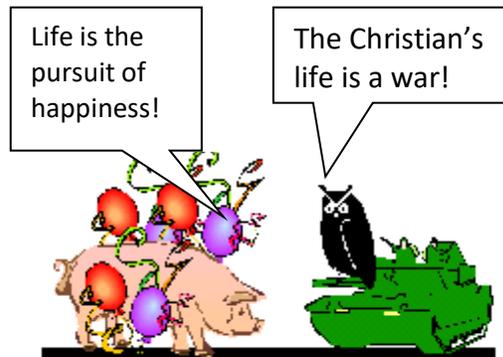
Self-control is both a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and the result of a disciplined life. Without it, the door of your life is unlocked and wide-open to the thief whose goal is to destroy you. (John 10:10). Several years ago, when one of my female throwers was asked by a male thrower who she liked, she said, "Coach Selcher." I was old enough to be her grandfather, but she was available. I acted like I didn't hear what she said and went on with coaching as usual. **Share a time when self-control preserved your Christian witness.**

3. Resist him. Stand firm in the faith (1 Peter 5:9). Treat Satan's happiness traps like you would an annoying telemarketer. My standard line: "We wouldn't be interested in that, thank you." I immediately hang up. I'm not trying to be rude. If I let a telemarketer or the devil keep talking, I'll regret it. So will you. Lexy Fowler, a sheep rancher, uses llamas to protect her sheep

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from coyotes. When llamas see a coyote, they walk straight toward it. Coyotes don't like such aggressive behavior. Neither does the enemy of the faith.

4. Don't slander him (2 Peter 2:10-11). Even angels don't do that. Enough said!
5. Put on the full armor of God and stand against his schemes (Ephesians 6:10-18). Full armor includes the belt of truth (v.14), breastplate of righteousness (v. 14), feet fitted with the gospel of peace (v. 15), the shield of faith (v. 16), the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, God's Word (v. 17). You're not wearing a track suit. You're dressed to fight, not to run. These verses make clear that life isn't a "what will make me happy" picnic. As Jesus' soldiers, we're part of an immense spiritual conflict. The prize is the souls of men. Everything else in life is small stuff. **How does a "living for the weekend" mentality contradict God's purpose for your life?**



What's God's message to you in this lesson? What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes:

Scripture Memory

Ephesians 6:10-11—Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Pride

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.



Share your progress carrying out your “Satan, the Enemy” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

What the Book Says about Pride

The word “pride” appears 63 times in the NIV. Fifty-two of those times, self-importance and self-glorifying are condemned. In the eleven times pride is viewed positively, it describes glorying in someone or something outside of oneself or of satisfaction in a job well done. The “proud” are condemned 43 of the 44 times the word appears in the NIV. Feeling good about something we or someone else accomplishes isn’t wrong. The problem is how easily and quickly we zip from permitted pride (my son had three hits in three trips to the plate!) to forbidden pride (my son is a better batter than your son!).

Pride Isn’t Your Friend

The bricks of almost every sin are molded from the clay of pride. The pride of our heart deceives us (Jeremiah 49:16). Patting ourselves on the back obscures our vision. It keeps us from seeing ourselves, others, and the world accurately. Pride leads us to conclude we know better than God what’s best for us. That’s dumber than a pail of nails! Pride hardens our heart (Daniel 5:20) and causes us to resist God’s rule in our lives. It breeds quarrels when two persons who both think they’re right try to prove it to each other (Proverbs 13:10). **In general, does society consider pride to be a good thing or a bad thing? Why?**

Pride Lives in your House!

Pride takes the shape of its human container. Even the sorriest excuse for a person (child abuser, serial killer, drug dealer, etc) is proud about something. We can be proud that we’ve risen to the top of the company or that we haven’t lowered ourselves to play the political games necessary to get there. Some are proud of their appearance, whereas others are proud of their warm, embracing personality despite ordinary looks. Some are proud that they’ve received all A’s on their report card, whereas others are proud they’re in the “in-group” at school despite average grades. We can be proud that we don’t have a single weed in our lawn or that we don’t obsess over it like our neighbor does. We can be proud that we’ve been voted the best teacher by our students or of our average rating because we don’t dish out high grades on demand. We can be proud of all the money we inherited or that we earned it all ourselves. Pride is universal. It lives in your house and walks in your shoes, but like the air all around you, you probably can’t see it!

High-Horsing around

Forbidden pride is an exaggerated sense of superiority because of what we do, are, or have. It’s both self-centered and self-sufficient. Here’s how a clever salesman closed hundreds of sales: "Let me show you something several of your neighbors said you couldn't afford." After that line, he just set the hook and reeled them in!

A proud person seeks praise, glory, and “worship” from others. Pride is God’s rival, and he hates it (Proverbs 6:16-17). **Why do you think He hates self-glorifying?**

Playing the ... er Game

Pride thrives on comparison. It isn’t enough to be a good shopper, baseball player, or whatever. One must be a *better* shopper, ballplayer, etc. than someone else. A woman confessed the sin of pride to her pastor. When she looked around the church at the other ladies, she couldn’t help feeling she was prettier

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than any of them. The pastor comforted her by telling her it wasn't a sin—just a mistake!

Too much of our lives has already been spent foolishly trying to exalt ourselves. For a time I tried that with a little white ball! At the University of Michigan, a guy named Dave and I defeated a very good doubles team in one game of table tennis. I was very proud. Then I reflected on the importance of pounding a celluloid ball better than someone else or even anyone else. Among the thousands of skills that humans have, it must rank near the bottom! I was reminded of the fleeting nature of human glory when about a week later one of the fellows we'd beaten crushed me 11-0 in a game of singles!

Pride on a Ride

In the early 1990s I was driving to Altoona to visit a parishioner in the hospital. I was mentally patting myself on the back for being physically quicker than most people and thought to myself, "That's why I've never had an auto accident." In an unforgettable way I soon discovered I was taking credit that belonged to God. Not five minutes later a car turned left across my lane while only a few feet in front of me. I couldn't avoid the accident. Crash!! Fortunately, no one was injured. A few days later the Lord connected the dots for me. That accident left a longer lasting impression on me than on my car.

Clearing Invisible Hurdles

Pride is the highest hurdle to clear on the way to becoming like Jesus. It's even more challenging because our own pride is almost invisible to us. It's the last thing we see in ourselves and the first thing we notice in others. It's a disease that makes everyone sick except the one who has it! A survey by *Discipleship Journal* published in the November-December 1992 issue ranked pride second to materialism as the greatest spiritual challenge for believers. Time hasn't diminished its downward pull. It's as much a problem now as it was then.

Humble servants bow to an adoring crowd. Before they know it, they are proud of their humility! Spiritual pride strikes again. Pride in how much we serve is worse than pride in how much we have. Those proud of their goodness are a lot more like Satan than they are like Jesus!

Humble Hamburgers Serve

A fast food chain once advertised "Have it your way" hamburgers. Jesus lived a "Father, have it your way" life. The humble person says, "Jesus, have it your way! I'll fit into your plans. I'll love others and help fulfill the Great Commission."

We are to clothe ourselves with humility toward one another because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5-6). Like hair in a drainpipe, pride clogs the lines through which God would pour out his grace. Proud people think they can make it on their own. They'd better. They're not going to get any help from God.

We are to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand (1 Peter 5:6). That means submitting to him as to a surgeon. God's hand works through our circumstances for our ultimate good. Today's pain brings eternal gain. **How does humility help us to deal with adversity?**

Humility doesn't mean thinking we're a worm. Humble people see themselves accurately and truly. They have neither an inflated nor an "I'm a zero" sense of identity. They consider what others think. They're quicker to give credit to others than take it themselves. They know their weaknesses and strengths and give God credit for the latter and readily share the former.

Humility is a profound sense that we're unworthy of God's gifts, love, and grace married to a grateful desire to live for Him. In brief it's serving, taking orders from, and fitting into the plans of God and other Christians.

Humility's Exhibit A

Jesus is gentle and humble in heart (Matthew 11:29)—the very opposite of pride. He

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demonstrated His humility by washing his disciples' feet, the job of a servant (John 13:5). Though Jesus was rich, for our sakes He became poor that we through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). He humbled Himself and became obedient to death on a cross (Philippians 2:8).

Humility's Perks

The benefits of humility:

1. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6, Proverbs 3:34). If we have any sense at all, we don't want the God of the universe resisting us!
2. With humility comes wisdom (Proverbs 11:2). Wisdom is skill in godly living. God's showing us His ways won't benefit us unless we're humble enough to follow His ways.
3. Pride starts quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice (Proverbs 13:10). This may come as a shock, but you're not always right! Wise people don't start with that assumption.
4. The Lord detests the proud of heart and they won't go unpunished (Proverbs 16:5). God's detesting the proud is at least as serious as His resisting them! I don't want Him to resist or detest me.
5. Humility comes before honor (Proverbs 18:12). God elevates and honors those who humble themselves. Jesus humbled Himself more than any one and God exalted Him to the highest place (Philippians 2:6-11).

Humility in Your Slippers

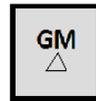
In what areas of life do you feel the greatest competence? How can you resist pride in those areas?

One guy calls only the prettiest girls for dates. Another shy fellow is afraid to call any girls at all. **Both are in the clutches of pride. How so?**

How is it possible to be proud while people think you're humble?

Why is trying to do your best a lot healthier approach than trying to be the best?

When others praise you, how can you keep your pride under control?



What's God's message to you in this lesson?

What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes:

Scripture Memory

Proverbs 3:34 - He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.



31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Enslaving Habits

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.



Share your progress carrying out your “Pride” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

The Face of Evil

Addiction is a symptom of an unhealthy connection with God. It’s probably the most wide-spread face of evil in the world today. Ironically, those who insist on controlling their own lives forfeit control to enslaving substitutes for God. God’s desires us to be free from sin’s addicting chains (Romans 6:6). Bondage is broken through knowing and living according to the truth (John 8:32).

The A, B, Cs of Addiction

Addicts are powerless to change some compulsive behavior. Life is out of control. Many people have multiple addictions. Addictive behavior fractures relationships, undermines jobs, wastes money, crushes self-esteem, and sends persons to jail. Shame and self-hatred invariably follow each round of excess. Many addicts deny any problem, and others want to stop but can’t. Addiction pulls people into its swirling drain, progressively siphoning off more and more money, time, and energy.

Your Defining Passion

Like a stone thrown into a pond, your life leaves ripples. Your influence can range from being a great blessing to being a horrible curse. In Exodus 20:5 we are forbidden to bow down to or worship other gods because the Lord our God is a jealous God, punishing our children for our sins to the third and fourth generations of those who hate him. God doesn’t tolerate rivals,

like addictions, in our life. An obituary described a man’s defining passions for hunting, fishing, and spending time in the outdoors. **What is your defining passion?**

If your passion isn’t loving and serving God and others, you’re leading others astray. **Do you agree? Why?**

Alcoholism, child abuse, and using God’s name in vain are examples of addictions often passed from one generation to the next. Our addictions always affect others.

The Bible on Addiction

In Titus 2:3 older women are encouraged to live reverently, not to slander, and not to be addicted to much wine. Paul wrote that everything is allowed for him, but he refused to be mastered by anything (1 Corinthians 6:12). **How does 1 Corinthians 6:12 apply to addiction?**

The body isn’t meant for sexual sin [or any other addiction] but for the Lord and the Lord for the body (1 Corinthians 6:13). A person is a slave to whatever has mastered him (2 Peter 2:19).

We are slaves to the one whom we obey. Slavery to sin leads to death. Slavery to obedience leads to righteousness (Romans 6:16-21). Escape from destructive habits is possible because the Roman Christians had been slaves to sin. (Romans 6:17-18)

Bad habits entangle us because we are weak in our natural selves (v. 19). This same verse gives a good description of addiction: offering the parts of our body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness.

Many biblical passages condemn alcohol abuse. Ephesians 5:18 commands not to be drunk with wine. The one who is led astray by wine or beer is not wise (Proverbs 20:1). The principle applies to any substance that controls our thinking or

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behavior. Medications prescribed by a doctor would seem to be an exception, although we must be careful. Many prescriptions can become addictive. Without this exception, even anesthesia wouldn't be permitted.

The Root Problem

We all have spiritual needs whose itch no addiction can scratch. We pursue significance, satisfaction, and security. God gave us those desires and they're right and good. Our sinful nature prods us to satisfy them outside of a relationship with God.

We're like a man looking for canned tuna in the dairy case. Our search invariably leads us to substitutes for God that never satisfy. They become our gods, not worthy of a capitol G. We depend on them like God designed us to depend on him. How do we get out of this mess?

Face Facts

The potential list of God-substitutes is huge. Life-controlling addictions include: the internet, video games, masturbation, pornography, tobacco, alcohol, heroin, shopping, TV, prescription drugs, speed, crack cocaine, gambling, Demerol, spending beyond our means, fishing, hunting, sports, relationships, sex, making money, food, exercise, work, self-injury, tanning, cell phone use and many more. Addiction snuggles up as a "friend" and traveling companion. Very quickly it commandeers the driver's seat. At first you choose to include it in your life. Then it makes decisions without consulting you. What do you do compulsively to feel good or dull the pain of life? What do you live for? What do you find hard to quit once you start? What entangles and controls you? What in life couldn't you do without? **What areas of your life came to mind as you read these questions?**

Face Pain

Wikipedia defines addiction as "excessive, repetitive use of pleasurable activities to cope with unmanageable internal conflict, pressure, and stress." Addictive behavior is a distraction from the pain of life.

Suffering is part of the fabric of life. God's Son suffered in your place for your benefit. His pain on the cross was so intense that He felt forsaken by God (Mark 15:34). If He hadn't faced crucifixion, you'd face the unending pain of God's wrath (John 3:36). **How does your present pain compare with Jesus' suffering?** A plane faces the wind during takeoff. We must face the pain. We can do it through Jesus' strength (Philippians 4:13). **What are some painful things in life that you have faced or need to face?**

Face Responsibility

Our culture excels in passing basketballs, footballs, and blame. The road to wholeness begins by acknowledging that we dug our own rut. We've lived to please our sinful nature and from it we've reaped destruction (Galatians 6:7-8). We, and no one else exchanged dependence on God for dependence on some "friend." We've rejected the wise, loving direction of the Lord of the universe for what? Our "friend" has stolen our money, monopolized our time, ruined our reputation and perhaps our health. We are left holding the pieces of an unsatisfying, insecure, and meaningless existence. It's time we own up to what we've done. If we confess our sins God will forgive and cleanse us (1 John 1:9).

Grasp Grace

The wonder of God's grace is that He makes broken rebels into something beautiful. How do we know? The Bible tells us so! At just the right time when we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6). That standard (being ungodly) is so low everybody qualifies! He

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didn't come to be a doctor for the righteous but for sinners (Mark 2:17). He doesn't remember all our excesses and condemn us for each one. There is no condemnation for those who trust in Christ (Romans 8:1). He encourages us to approach the throne of grace with confidence where we'll find mercy and grace in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16). He knows our "friends" and can deliver us from their chokehold!

Give Thanks

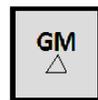
Bury "woe is me" thinking. That's not reality. It's a chosen, self-defeating mindset. On April 7, 2000, I couldn't start a lawnmower after about 50 exhausting pulls on the cord. What did I have to be thankful for? A lot! We had another mower I could use to finish cutting the grass on our bank and fuel to operate it. I had two legs to walk behind it, two feet that had never slipped under the mower deck when the blade was turning, two eyes to help guide it, two hands to steer it, etc. I think you get my drift. When you start counting your blessings, very soon you'll be in triple digits! Your "friend" has numbed your pain and blinded you to your blessings. Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Give In

Our desires to escape pain and control life entangled us in webs of addiction. We yielded control of our lives to our "friend." Our friend became the string and we the yo-yo. When he pushed or pulled, we jumped. We hate the feeling of being unable to change our compulsive behavior. We need a new string, a new best "Friend." He too wants control. He's no less demanding than our old friend, but His ways bring significance, satisfaction, and security beyond anything we've ever known. His invitation is to come unto Him and take His yoke upon us and learn from Him. He promises rest for our souls (Matthew 11:28-30).

Give Out

God created our life to be like a beautiful song played on a violin. A life of addiction has us sounding like a six-year-old's first practice session! Jesus restrings us and tunes us to His own perfect pitch. He sets us free from the bondage of our compulsions to work together with Him to set others free. God comforts us in our troubles so we can comfort others in theirs (2 Corinthians 1:4). That will be the most fulfilling work we ever do!



What's God's message to you in this lesson?

What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Write your action plan to make those changes:

Scripture Memory

1 Corinthians 6:12 – "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but I will not be mastered by anything.



31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Meditation

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Share your progress carrying out your “Enslaving Habits” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

Stop...Look...Listen

Too often we read the Bible like an ambulance races toward the scene of an accident—zooming past potentially life-changing verses like guard rails at 100 mph. We shape the words with our lips and tongues, but don’t allow them to shape us.

We read about peace in John 14:27 and love in 1 Corinthians 13, but don’t slow down enough to be fully possessed by either. A thunderstorm dumps an inch of rain in ten minutes. Most of it runs off. Slow, steady rain is much more beneficial. Likewise, God’s Word needs time to soak into the soil of our soul. Stop...Look...Listen!

Think

Thinking takes a lot of effort. Henry Ford said, “Thinking is hard work. It’s why so few people do it.” We too often trek the habit-worn trails of yesterday, thinking about the very same things in the very same ways so we don’t have to think today. Tomorrow we’ll do the same. In *The Strangest Secret* Earl Nightingale wrote, “We become what we think about.” We can’t grow up spiritually without thinking differently about God, ourselves, others, and the world. We can’t afford to put our mind in neutral when we read the Word of God.

Ponder Power

Meditation is a deliberate pondering of our ways and God’s ways. It is reflective thinking

about Scripture with the intent of applying it to daily living. The goal is intimacy with God and conformity to His ways.

The psalmist in Psalm 119 thinks hard about God’s precepts, ways, (v. 15); decrees (v. 16); name (v. 55); law (v. 97); statutes (v. 99); promises (v.148); works and mighty deeds (Psalm 77:12). He also meditates on his own ways (Psalm 119: 59).

You Can Do It!

Meditation isn’t a natural desire for most of us. We’d rather vegetate than meditate! That’s why TV is appealing. Getting help to meditate is just a prayer away. Meditating on God’s word and ways is His will. He promises to always answer our prayers with a yes when we pray according to His will (1 John 5:14-15).

Where?

To meditate, seek a quiet place where you can be alone to focus your whole being on your loving Creator, Lord, and Redeemer. Make meditation a regular part of your daily prayer time. If the location provides an inspiring view of God’s marvelous creation, that’s all the better.

Why?

Studying and meditating on the Scriptures is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). We need instructed how to live a God-pleasing life, scolded when we depart from it, pointed back to it, and practically equipped to live it. God’s word does it all. That word was written to teach us, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (Romans 15:4). Meditating on God’s word and obeying it makes us wiser than our enemies (Psalm 119:98), prosperous and successful (Joshua 1:8).

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How?

One way of meditating on Scripture is to visualize it. Hear the wind whistling during a storm, see the whitecaps, smell the storm-tossed sea, taste the bread and fish, and touch the rugged cross.

Dr. Waylon B. Moore suggests a five-step approach to meditation.¹

1. Understand the *perimeter* of the verse.
2. *Paraphrase* the verse.
3. *Pulverize* the verse.
4. *Personalize* the verse.
5. *Pray* the verse into your life.

The perimeter of the verse is its context. A verse's neighborhood colors its meaning. To understand how the small intestine works, we need to examine the other organs attached to it—its neighborhood. To understand 1 Peter 5:7, read verses 1-14. In summary they say that if we don't cast all our burdens on the Lord (v. 7), we'll be the main course on the devil's dinner plate (v. 8).

Paraphrasing a verse helps us think hard about what it's saying. When we put the verse in our own words, it often sparkles like a diamond. That's because we're paying closer attention to its message. Make your paraphrase about the same length as the verse. **Write and share your paraphrase of 1 Peter 5:7.**

Pulverizing the verse means looking at the individual words and groups of words that compose it. Read the verse over and over, emphasizing a different word each time. Let's practice with 1 Peter 5:7: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." Read the verse eleven times first emphasizing "cast" then "all", etc. **Which word is most meaningful to you? Why?**

Ask six questions of 1 Peter 5:7:

Who?

What?

When?

Where?

Why?

How?

Make the verse personal. Antibiotics only help us once they're out of the bottle and into our blood stream. **How does the promise of 1 Peter 5:7 apply to a specific problem or person you are struggling with right now?**

Praying the verse into your life means including yourself and your circumstances in a personalized version of the verse. For example: "Lord, you know how much I fear sharing my faith with others. I worry too much about what they might think and not enough about what You think. I know you care for me despite my "lockjaw." I'm rolling my fears and anxieties onto you right now. I don't want them back. Fill me with courage. I ask this in Jesus name. Amen."

Personalize 1 Peter 5:7.

The Benefits of Meditation

God's word is a guide to a successful, victorious, fulfilled life. That usually happens even though hardly anyone on earth knows our name. It's better for our name to be in the Book of Life than on all the marquees on earth. God's best for us isn't fame, fortune, and worldly applause, but a life saturated with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23), no matter what the circumstances.

Through meditation we pull from the garden of our lives the choking weeds of worldly ways of thinking and acting. When I first trusted in Christ, getting was more important than giving, speaking than listening, being served than serving. I thought these traits were adorable yellow flowers, but God's Word identified them as dandelions to be removed!

Meditation drills wells and channels the healing waters of God's word through us to bless

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

others. In that word, for example, we find forgiveness and purification for our sins (1 John 1:9); comfort in our troubles (2 Corinthians 1:4); inward renewal despite outward wasting away (2 Corinthians 4:16); and God's power made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Learn God's Ways

Meditating on God and His game plan for life will prosper us and make us spiritually fruitful (Psalm 1:3).

Describe an unforgettable meal you've eaten in the last year. How satisfied was your stomach afterwards? In Psalm 63:5-6 the psalmist describes the satisfaction of spiritual hunger. That is far more fulfilling than satisfying physical hunger. He achieves it by praising and thinking about the Lord.

We think about what we love. If we love the movies or bowling, we think about them frequently. The psalmist's defining passion was the law of the Lord (Psalm 1:2). Don't be discouraged if that isn't your defining passion yet. Start meditating on God's word and you'll be surprised how your passions will change.

Make specific plans to meditate on God's word. **Share where, when, and for how long each week you will meditate on God's word and ways.**



What's God's message to you in this lesson?

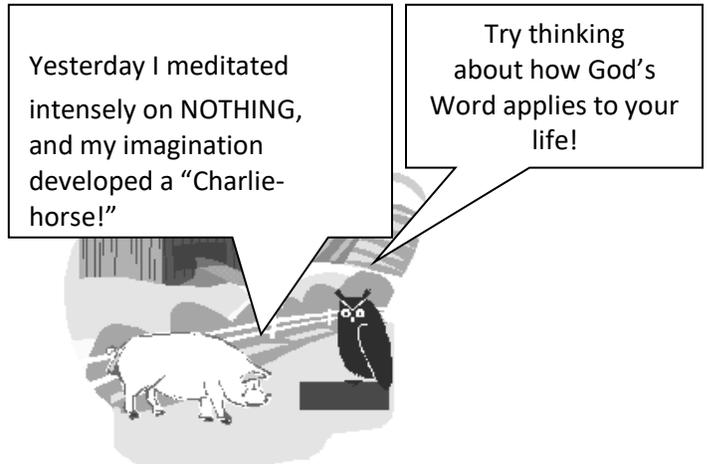
What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change? __



Share your action plan to make those changes.

Scripture Memory

Psalm 119:15-16 – I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.



Notes

1. Waylon B. Moore, *Living God's Word*, (Nashville, Tennessee: LifeWay, 1997), 40.

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Ten Words from Our Sponsor

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Share your progress carrying out your “Meditation” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

Healthy Relationships Make Life Fulfilling

The Christian faith is all about building healthy relationships. Exploring the Ten Commandments will help us build stronger relationships with God and others. God isn't a spoilsport who invented ten rotten regulations to ruin our fun. These “Ten Words from our Sponsor” define the essence of a fulfilling life characterized by healthy relationships with both God and others.

Relating to God

God Resents Competition for Our Affection

“You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). God shouldn't have to compete for our love. He's jealous. That means He alone deserves our worship, service, and love. He made us and our world. When He wants our worship, He doesn't want something that isn't His as we do when we're jealous. The IRS doesn't want all our money (yet!). They only want what we owe them. God only wants what is rightfully His—our worship. Worship means we treat Him alone as supremely worthy. **How does your life show God's supreme worth? What could others learn about His worth by watching you?**

Influences in life that can be God's rivals include superstitions; popularity; horoscopes/astrology; a sports, TV, movie or rock star; self-centered living; feeling good; physical/emotional or financial security; being happy; addiction;

personal appearance; desire for material things; status; power; work; sexual pleasure and recreation. **Which of these provide God with the greatest competition for your complete devotion?**

No Created Thing Adequately Represents God

You shall not make for yourself an idol... (Exodus 20:4). Any created thing totally misrepresents God when we use it as a substitute object of worship. He is spirit, and true worship must be genuine and true (John 4:24).

God doesn't look like a kindly grandfather with long, flowing, snow-white hair. We shouldn't picture him that way or worship any other misrepresentation. When I think of the exalted Christ, I picture how He was represented at a Sight & Sound presentation I attended. As awesome as He was portrayed there, it still falls short of describing Him with total accuracy. His ways and thoughts are as high above ours as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isaiah 55:9). The only accurate representation of God is Jesus Christ who is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15).

Treat God's Name with Honor

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God (Exodus 20:7). Using God's name lightly degrades and insults it. Frequently people use God's name to take an oath, and then lie. Many use His name carelessly as an exclamation (OMG), curse, or expression of anger. The Lord's Prayer contains the words, “Hallowed be your name” (Matthew 6:9). Hallowed means God's name should be set apart from common use and given highest regard. When I was a kid, we had special china that we used for holiday meals. It was set apart and never on the table for common everyday use. God's name is similar. It is never to be used lightly or unthinkingly when we aren't talking directly to Him or about Him.

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Less obvious misuses of His name are “going through the motions” worship and self-serving or unthinking prayer. Isaiah 29:13 describes insincere worship as coming near God with our mouth and honoring him with our lips while our heart remains far from Him. The third commandment forbids prayer that uses God’s name for some selfish, worthless purpose like “Lord, help us win this game.” A memorized prayer delivered without thought, gratitude or faith before meals doesn’t give God due respect.

We break the third commandment when we use exclamations like OMG, make promises using God’s name that we don’t intend to keep, curse others, express anger using God’s name, use God’s names in songs or prayers without thinking what we’re saying, or use prayer to try to force God to grant our selfish desires. **What specific changes do you need to make to treat God’s name with honor?**

Take a Break

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy (Exodus 20:8).

Being a workaholic is not an option for an obedient believer. The word translated Sabbath means “cease, rest.” The Jews observe it from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown as a day of rest, refreshment, and worship. The Sabbath celebrates God’s resting on the seventh day of creation and his deliverance of Israel out of Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15). The Sabbath emphasizes human dependence on God and his claim on our time and loyalty.

For early Christians, Sunday, the Lord’s Day, became increasingly important. It became a day of worship because of its association with Christ’s resurrection and appearances. Ceasing from work was not transferred from the Sabbath to the Lord’s Day.¹

Jesus, the Son of Man, is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). Let Him decide what is fitting for you on that day. Every day is set apart to Him. He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him (2 Corinthians 5:15).

There is room for differing applications of the Sabbath principle. Some spend Sunday with other Christians in worship, with family, and in prayer and Bible study. They don’t work, or even think or talk about it. Some worship regularly with other believers, but otherwise treat it as a day for chores or recreation. Setting aside a day of rest imitates God’s pattern during creation and benefits our body, soul, and spirit. There is no biblical reason, however, why our “take a break” day *must* be Sunday.

How you rest best is connected to whether you’re an extrovert or an introvert.² If you’re an extrovert, you find spending time with other people relaxing and you probably have a large number of hobbies that could serve as your break activities. If you’re an introvert, alone time, or time with just a few close friends is what recharges your batteries. You’ll probably focus on relatively few hobbies. **When during the week do you take a break from work? What do you do? How does the break benefit you?**

Relating to Others

Honor Dad and Mom

Honor your father and your mother (Exodus 20:12).

Parents, especially fathers, represent God to their children. When parents teach their children how to please God and demonstrate it with their own lives, they become powerful influences for good. However, such teaching bears fruit only if children submit to it.

Honoring our parents is always right, whether our relationship has been good or strained. Honoring our father and mother means obeying

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their rules and submitting to their authority as long as we live in their home. That assumes that doing so isn't illegal or immoral. When they can't care for themselves, we must make sure their needs for food, drink, clothing, and shelter are met.

When we honor, we show kindness and refrain from words or deeds that would embarrass our parents. Publicly ridiculing them is never appropriate.

What our peers consider "cool," culture portrays as in style, or our convenience desires, probably won't help us keep this commandment. God promises long life to all who honor Dad and Mom.

Is honoring your father and mother easy or difficult for you? Why?

Treat Human Life with Respect

You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13).

Not all killing is murder. Accidental or unplanned killing falls into a different category. Moreover, the sixth commandment doesn't forbid capital punishment, self-defense, or war. The prohibition is against killing someone for reasons that aren't legitimate.

God, who made us in His image and gave us life, is the only one authorized to take a life. **How do you think the commandment against murder applies to suicide? How does it apply to abortion? How does it apply to physician-assisted suicide for the terminally ill?**

In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus said that anyone who is angry with his brother and calls him a fool is in danger of the fire of hell. Boiling bitterness against another person can overflow and lead to murder. **Is wishing others were dead safer from God's judgment than murdering them?** The way we treat others is connected with how we think about them. **Do you have boiling bitterness against anyone?**

What changes do you need to make so you won't be "subject to judgment"?

Be Faithful to Your Spouse

You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14).

The seventh commandment prohibits sexual activity involving a married person and someone who isn't a spouse. The marriage relationship is between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24, Mark 10:7, Ephesians 5:31). Marital faithfulness includes both action and thought. Jesus expanded the definition of adultery to include the lustful look (Matthew 5:28). Both sexual fantasy and adultery fall short of God's right living standards.

Adultery violates a promise to be faithful to and to love one's spouse. Love doesn't act in ways that inflict fear, pain, doubt, and insecurity. Love sacrifices for the good of someone else. Unfaithfulness to one's spouse is like unfaithfulness to God because both include forsaking someone and turning to a substitute (Jeremiah 5:7).

Technology enables new forms of adultery. Cyber-sex with complete strangers over the internet, pornographic websites, magazines, and movies are all common. The best way to escape such temptations is to run— as from an angry swarm of 1000 hornets. Don't look back. Your life depends on it! Flee the evil desires of youth (2 Timothy 2:22). If you play too close to a fire, eventually you're going to get burned.

According to Jack Wellman in an article published October 1, 2012, the leading cause of divorce is ongoing adultery/pornography. He describes pornography accurately as committing adultery in one's heart.³ Both adultery and pornography destroy trust and undermine family stability. Proverbs 6:32 says that the one who commits adultery destroys himself. **How so?**

Don't Take Other Peoples' Stuff

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You shall not steal (Exodus 20: 15).

Stealing is taking what doesn't belong to us. It's using our neighbors *for* our benefit instead of loving our neighbors *for their benefit* (Matthew 22:39). Robbery's victims feel violated, insecure, afraid, angry, and weakened in their ability to trust others. I can vouch for those feelings as one who has been robbed at least five times. Twice someone took the license plate from my car while the car was in a church parking lot! Twice my credit card number was stolen in connection with ordering Christian books! The other time someone stole some of my fishing equipment.

Some believe the eighth commandment specifically prohibits kidnapping which frequently occurred in the ancient world. Today this would apply to a parent's kidnapping a child from the other parent or a parent with custody moving away from the other parent.

Knowingly buying stolen property violates this commandment. Robbery would decrease if thieves had no market for what they've stolen.

The right thing to do when we've found something someone has lost is to give it back, if that is possible (Deuteronomy 22:1). Based on this principle, the right thing to do in the following situations is:

- **A cashier gives you \$5.00 too much change.**
- **A waitress forgets to charge you for a dessert.**
- **You have pencils and pens in your house from the office that you aren't using to work at home.**

Academic cheating is representing someone else's work as our own. It includes sharing another's work, purchasing a term paper or test questions ahead of time, and paying someone else to do the work for us. Today between 75 and 98 percent of college students surveyed each year report having cheated in high school.⁴

Based on the eighth commandment how should we respond to the following:

- **Someone offers us a copy of the test so we can get an easy "A" without studying.**
- **We're tempted to shoplift for the thrill it gives.**
- **We're wasting time texting, talking on the phone with friends, on Facebook, etc. when we're being paid to work.**

Tell the Truth

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor (Exodus 20:16).

The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful (Proverbs 12:22). God is not a man, that he should lie... (Numbers 23:19). On the other hand, the devil is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

Testifying falsely against others causes them to be treated unjustly and might even result in their death. Even if they aren't convicted, their reputation might be seriously damaged.

God's standard is for us to deal with others as honestly as he does with us. If we don't, the termites of deceit will undermine our friendships, working relationships, marriage, and family. Truth is the epoxy of relationships.
Why is lying hurtful to relationships?

Share a time when you lied:

- **To protect yourself**
- **To shift the blame to another**
- **To avoid a difficult conversation**
- **To get what you want**
- **To be nice to others**
- **To hurt others**
- **To get attention**
- **To promote yourself**

Being honest means saying only what is true.
How is saying only what is true different from telling *everything* we believe to be true?

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Be Content with God

You shall not covet ... anything that belongs to your neighbor (Exodus 20:17).

The word translated “covet” means to desire or take pleasure in something. It’s used of both good and evil desires. Desiring things isn’t necessarily wrong. Wanting drives most of what we do. We desire food because we’re hungry. That’s how God designed us. Inappropriate desires, however, often master us. Wanting anything more strongly and single-mindedly than we want God signals an unhealthy relationship with that person, place, or thing.

The command not to covet prohibits desiring another’s spouse, money, property, or any other possession. When anything becomes more important to us than loving God and our neighbor, we’re guilty of idolatry (Colossians 3:5). When our defining passions are for God’s gifts instead of God Himself, those passions can rightfully be called covetous. Evil desires lead to sin. “But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death (James 1:14-15).

Coveting demonstrates discontentment with what God has provided for us. This in turn shows a lack of trust in his love.

Thieves want what belongs to others. By contrast love wants the best for others. It’s patient and kind. It does not envy or boast. It is not proud. It isn’t rude or self-seeking. It isn’t easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:4-5).

Our desires change as we allow the Holy Spirit to control us. “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Philippians 4:8).



What’s God’s message to you in this lesson?

What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?

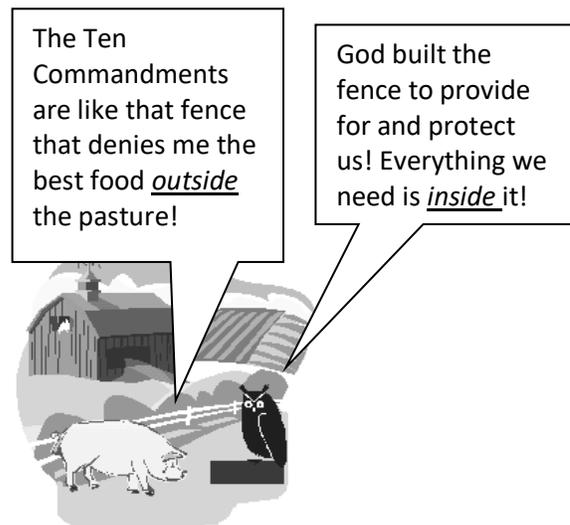


Share your action plan to make those changes.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 22:37-39 – Jesus replied:

“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”



Notes

1. Lincoln, A.T. *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: Edited by D.A. Carson. A Biblical and Theological Perspective.* Zondervan. 1982. P. 346.
2. Breen, Mike, and Steve Cockram. *Building a Discipling Culture.* 3 Dimension Ministries. 2011. P. 110.
3. <http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/primary-causes-for-divorce-a-christian-study/>
4. <http://www.stanford.edu/class/engr110/c/heating.html>.

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Worship

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.



Share your progress carrying out your “Ten Words from Our Sponsor” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

Music-Wars Miss the Point

Music-wars rage in the church. Traditionalists insist on organ and piano music while others opt for guitars, drums, electronic keyboards, and a worship team. Although music is the most talked-about aspect of worship today, we'll address a far more basic element—the nature of true worship.

True Worship Isn't about Us

The purpose of worship isn't to bless, entertain, heal or make us feel good. We don't attend a worship service to “get something.” *Worship is our whole personality giving glory to a holy God with our whole life.* It doesn't end at noon on Sunday morning. All of life is an act of worship. **How does that definition of worship change how you think about it?**

Worship Transforms Us

Our whole personality is involved in worship. According to William Temple, worship quickens the conscience by God's holiness, feeds the mind with his truth, cleanses the imagination by his beauty, opens the heart to his love, and devotes the will to his purpose. **Why can't we worship God and remain the same person?**

Revelation Precedes Worship

True worship begins with revelation and proceeds on to response and witness. God reveals Himself. If He didn't, we could worship

him no better than a first grader could do advanced calculus. I did a children's sermon in which I put several unusual items in a closed bag and asked the children to guess what was in the bag. No one guessed any of the items correctly. That illustrates that if God didn't reveal what's in the closed bag of who He is, we'd know little about Him. His creation reveals His power, intelligence, order, and beauty (Romans 1:20). Beyond that He'd be a complete mystery.

In Exodus 3 God speaks to Moses. He reveals that He is holy. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is concerned about the suffering of His people and will rescue them.

To Isaiah in Isaiah 6 He reveals that He sits on a throne, high and exalted. The train of His robe fills the temple. He is holy. The whole earth is full of His glory.

If God's revelation doesn't guide our worship, rules taught by men probably will (Matthew 15:9). **What are some things you've been taught about worship that might be rules taught by men?**

A magician pulls a previously hidden rabbit out of a hat so the audience can see it. Through prayer, Scripture reading, drama, art, preaching, hymns, praise choruses, special music, testimonies, or other forms, we learn who the invisible God is and what he's done. Worship begins with revelation but doesn't end there.

Worship Requires a Whole-Person Response

In Isaiah 6 Isaiah's intellectual response was understanding God's revelation. His emotional response was fear and trembling. His spiritual response was recognizing himself as a man of unclean lips (v. 5). The response of his will was to say, “Here am I. Send me!” (v. 8)

God's revelation led to service—not good feelings. The good feelings result from doing

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God's will. The nature of true worship is the same today. Revelation leads to response through prayer, song, and self-giving to God and our neighbor. We haven't really worshipped fully until we've given ourselves away to God and others! This is true and proper worship (Romans 12:1). True worship requires obeying and serving the One we say we worship. (John 4:23-24). **What kinds of worship are untrue and improper?**

Witness Transforms Our Relationships

Improving our relationships with other believers is an important response to revelation. Christians who love and forgive each other witness to a world that is watching.

Revelation also motivates individual witness. What we've seen, heard, and acted upon, we declare to others.

A Scriptural Sketch of Worship

The "Other Gods" Squad

God prohibits worshipping any other god (Exodus 34:14). Nevertheless, we're tempted to worship created things rather than the Creator, the work of our hands such as our house, electronic devices, car, "toys," church Bethel, etc. (Romans 1:25, Micah 5:13). **In what areas of life are you most likely to glory in what your hands have created, or you've purchased?**

God Is Worthy of Worship

In Exodus 32:8 we discover that part of worship is giving God credit for what He's done. Two more aspects of worship are bowing down to Him and offering Him sacrifices (2 Kings 17:36). **How do these three apply to our worship?**

Other dimensions of worship include singing praise to God (Psalm 66:4) and giving Him thanks (2 Chronicles 7:3). We praise God for who He is and thank Him for what He has done.

God is worthy of our worship because He made the heavens. He is surrounded by splendor, majesty, strength, and joy (1 Chronicles 16:23-27). We bow down and kneel before the Lord because He is our Maker (Psalm 95:6), He is holy (Psalm 99:5), loving and faithful (Psalm 138:2). **For what can you praise God today? For what can you thank Him? Be specific.**

Jesus Christ Is a Worship-Worthy Savior

Jesus was worshipped by the Magi (Matthew 2:11), His disciples (Matthew 14:33), the women who went to His tomb (Matthew 28:9), the eleven disciples (Matthew 28:17), the blind man he healed (John 9:38), and all God's angels (Hebrews 1:6). One day at His name every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). **How does your life demonstrate that He is Lord now?**

True Worshippers Obey and Serve Jesus

Not worshipping the Lord in Deuteronomy 8:19 is defined in the next verse as not obeying Him. In Daniel 3:18 worshipping the king's gods is associated with serving them. **What do these verses teach us about true worship?**

Worship Principles

Prepare

Consider the meaning behind worship rituals in your church:

Is the music in your church traditional, contemporary or a blend of both? Why?

Who usually prays publicly during worship services? Why?

Who reads the Scriptures? Why?

Does your church sing the doxology after the tithes and offerings are lifted? Why?

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What do the bread and cup of the Lord's Supper represent? How are they distributed to the congregation?

What is the significance of baptism?

Prepare to meet the King as diligently as you would the President. If an athlete doesn't warm up her muscles before an event, she can't do her best. Warm up for worship! Think about who God is and all He's done for you and then enter His presence with thanksgiving and praise.

Without a vital prayer life, regular time in the Scriptures, and a sincere effort to obey God outside the sanctuary, we're not equipped to worship him inside it. The worship fire burns brightest when each believer brings a torch already lit. The worship leader's task is blowing the wind of the Spirit on existing flames, not lighting wet wood!

Keep Your Eye on the Ball

Many times, while playing table tennis I've taken my eye off the ball and completely missed it. After doing so I usually scolded myself, "Keep your eye on the ball!" That principle also applies to worship.

Symbols or aids can be reminders of God or blinders. They can receive more honor than He does. The sanctuary is neither the church nor God's home. All believers together are *both*.

A church partially burns down. Rebuilding is impractical because of modern building codes. A large part of the congregation refuses to join the majority who vote to move and build in another location. They prefer to worship in the part of the building that remains. **Why do you think they did that?**

A two-church charge has a joint service once each month in alternating churches. Very few from the "away" church attend. **Why do you think this is so?**

A minister leaves a church to pastor another one nearby. Many from the first congregation also leave and go with him to the second. Others in the first church quit attending worship. **What is the problem?**

A pastor reads the New International Version of the Bible and a person in the congregation leaves the service in protest. To him the King James Version is the only acceptable one. **Is this person keeping his eye on the ball? Why?**

Be Enthusiastic

Is worship-enthusiasm in your church more like a ho-hum drive to a familiar place or like cheering a favorite sports team in the championship game? "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11). **Do you think our enthusiasm for true worship is a good indicator of our spiritual health? Why?**

When we're spiritually sick, we go through worship motions out of obligation or habit. Symptoms include singing words we don't mean, praying for things we don't believe we'll receive, and expressing love for God we don't feel. The Father seeks those who worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

True worship requires a willingness to serve, obey, and submit to the Lord. It's motivated by love, gratitude, and thanksgiving for who God is and all He's done.

Attitude is more important than architecture. A small country church of 30 worshipping God with a deep sense of gratitude pleases God far more than 2,000 people going through the motions in a multi-million-dollar state of the art sanctuary. How is more important than where.

Celebrate

Seventy percent of Israel's religious holidays were celebrations (Leviticus 23). Worship includes both joyful celebration and solemn

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reflection. Toward which side is the balance tipped in your life?

What can you do to strengthen the weaker of these two worship components?



What's God's message to you in this lesson?

What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Write your action plan to make those changes:

Scripture Memory

John 4:24 – God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.



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Idolatry

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.



Share your progress carrying out your “Worship” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

God Won't Settle for the Silver Medal

God insists on loyalty. Always has. Always will. He isn't satisfied to be among the fabulous five or top two favorite things in our lives. He won't share His throne with *any* rivals. He forbids having any other gods before Him or making an idol in the form of any created thing (Exodus 20:3-4).

His demands shouldn't seem strange. I know a man who delivered P-cola and wasn't permitted to drink C-cola. Seeing a P-driver down an ice-cold C isn't a good advertisement for P, is it? **What kind of advertisement is it when God's followers pay more attention to things and other people than to Him? How do you think He feels?**

Our “images,” purchases, thought life and use of time reveal God's rivals. They highlight our priorities. The images could be pictures hanging on our walls or pasted in an album. They might be coin collections, cars parked in our driveway, awards and trophies, mounted animals or fish, our place on the ladder of success, etc. The material things around us define what we value. I've filled four albums with pictures taken during my fishing trips. My checkbook and use of time also testify that fishing is important to me. The hard question is whether it's *too* important. **Identify God's rivals in your life based on your “images,” purchases, what you think about when you're free to think about anything and your use of time. What are the primary suspects?**

As you work through this lesson, you might discover you have more idols than you thought.

We can resist the attraction of idolatry by blocking its passageways into our lives.

Closing the Pleasure Passageway

God *isn't* against fun and feeling good. He created us with the capacity to enjoy Him and the things He has made. He richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment (1 Timothy 6:17). If we walk the path God sets before us, He will fill us with joy and eternal pleasures (Psalm 16:11). The issue isn't whether we'll experience pleasure or not. It's whether we'll walk the path God sets before us or our own. Will we trust His judgment, or live like we know better than He what will make us happy?

Idolatry strolls into our lives through the wide-open door of living for pleasure independently of God. We naturally put “things” on the throne intended for Him alone, and worship and serve them instead of Him. We ignore the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). We love His gifts instead of Him with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37). We naturally love pleasure more than we love God (2 Timothy 3:4).

Americans spend money like they love pleasure far more than they love God. Americans spent 646 billion on *just* outdoor recreation in 2010. That is more than five times as much as they gave to their churches in 2009.¹

Spending too much time pursuing pleasure decreases the time available to nurture one's own spiritual life or to minister to others. **What does spending more on recreation than on God say about a person's values?**

Name four things that give you the most enjoyment in life. Circle the number of each one on which you spend more time or money than you give to God.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

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We can overcome pleasure's attraction through the self-control the Holy Spirit provides (Galatians 5:23). We have God's promise that whenever we face temptation, He faithfully provides a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13). Expect Him to give you that way of escape and *look for it*. Close the pleasure passageway to idolatry by writing and implementing a strategy to prevent each of the previously circled pleasures from becoming *too* important.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Closing the Hero Passageway

Heroes come in two categories—faith heroes and other kinds of heroes. Striving to be like faith heroes moves us toward God, whereas trying to be like all others moves us away from Him. Hebrews 11 lists heroes who by their faith overcame life's obstacles including Abel (v. 4), Enoch (v. 5), Noah (v. 7), Abraham (v. 8), Isaac (v. 20), Jacob (v. 21), Joseph (v. 22), Moses' parents (v. 23), Moses (v. 24), the people (v. 29, 30), Rahab (v. 31), Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets (v. 32).

Heroes have an unreal aura about them. They embody our ideals. They are *already* what we'd like to be. Hero selection changes through time depending on age and gender and reveals what matters most to us. Our heroes are our dreams with skin on them.

David Gallahue, a professor at Indiana University studied the heroes of kids in grades three through six. He discovered that more than 50% looked up to sports stars. Their choices reflect the desire for glory and fame. He found that 43% of girls picked a teacher, parent, or coach, whereas only 18% of boys did.² Boys looked up to persons they'd never met more than their own dads who finished in fourth place. Arnold C. Cooper, a former professor at

Purdue University, said that successful entrepreneurs like Bill Gates are the heroes of many college students who envy his riches.

We become progressively more like whatever we worship. Few of us look up to moral heroes like the apostle Paul who challenged the Philippians to put into practice what they had learned or received or heard from or seen in him (Philippians 4:9). Instead we select friends or family members, historical figures, sports or media stars, political leaders, or teachers and coaches who have admirable but not necessarily godly qualities. Our choices are influenced more by our sinful cravings, the lust of our eyes and the boasting of what we have and do (1 John 2:16) than a desire to imitate someone like Paul (1 Corinthians 4:16). We'd rather "be like Mike" [Michael Jordan] than preach like Paul. The best defense against idolatry is to be an imitator of God (Ephesians 5:1) or to follow someone else who is following the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Hero-worship sprays gasoline on the fires of our self-centered dreams and suggests they're attainable and worthy of pursuit. We worship what we wish we were, with the unspoken hope that others will adore us when our dreams become reality. Like Satan, we want a portion of the glory that is God's alone. God said that He will not give His glory to another or His praise to idols (Isaiah 42:8).

Who have been/are your heroes? What do you admire about them? If you were exactly like them, would that make you happy? Why?

Closing the Earthly Goal Passageway

I spent years channeling my time and energy toward goals in academics and athletics. I achieved many of those goals, but fulfillment was as fleeting as a bolt of lightning and its soon forgotten rumbling, rolling thunder. I was a slave laboring endlessly in a "goal mine." Goals were my gods, demanding the best of my time, talents, thoughts, and finances. They controlled

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and empowered me. Goals aren't necessarily bad, but they are no substitute for the Holy Spirit's controlling and empowering ministry.

I was like a defensive football player fooled by a trap play. The offensive guard pulls from his position in the line and starts running toward the sideline. The defensive player follows him, looking for a running play to that side. Instead the tailback runs through the spot the defensive player just vacated. The defender unwittingly takes himself right out of the play. We take ourselves out of God's game when we give our lives to earthly goals.

During my last year of college at a retreat I attended, I heard Leroy Eims say that the easiest way to become ineffective for God is to *give your life to some earthly goal*. Those words penetrated my heart. I realized that I couldn't serve both God and earthly goals. I had to make a choice. We all do. God designed us to live for what will outlast us. Paul described this way of life as setting our hearts and minds on things above, not on earthly things (Colossians 3:1-2).

Explain how pursuing the following goals could interfere with becoming the person God wants us to be:

1. "My goal is to win more weekend fishing tournaments this summer than anyone else in the Sportsman's Club."
2. "I'm going to have the prettiest yard on the block."
3. "I'm determined to become part of the 'in group' at school."
4. "I'm committed to gathering the largest doll collection in Cumberland County."

The pastor asked the college student, "What do you want to be?"

The student replied, "I want to be an accountant."

The pastor responded, "You didn't understand me. That's what you want to *do*. What do you want to *be*?"

Closing the Insecurity Passageway

Idolatry enters our lives through our insecurities. The weakness of our faith gets us into trouble. Jesus said that everything is possible for him who believes (Mark 9:23). Is anything too hard for the Lord (Genesis 18:14)? The expected answer is, "No!" God can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to the power that is at work within us (Ephesians 3:20).

We compensate for our lack of trust in God by constructing our own "protective" walls. We might even try to seal the cracks with the mortar of superstition.

More than anything we trust money to protect us. Building contractors order a specific amount of brick to build a house. They know the size of the pile they need, and they don't order any more. By contrast, the extent of our insecurity is revealed by ongoing dissatisfaction with the size of our accumulated financial pile, no matter what its size.

Boston College's Center on Wealth and Philanthropy did a study to understand how the wealthy in America think and live. Most of those who responded to one study did not consider themselves financially secure. Their average net worth was 78 million. One man who professed to be a committed Christian said he wouldn't feel financially secure until he was worth 1 billion dollars. Of course, when he finally reached a billion, that probably wasn't enough!³ Money is a wonderful servant but a terrible master. Jesus said that we can't serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24).

Our heart is where our treasure is. If money is our treasure, we won't have to look far from there to find our heart.

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What “treasures” rival God’s place in your life?

Paul labels the greed to accumulate more and more as idolatry (Colossians 3:5). **If our happiness depends on continually buying and stockpiling more and more, what are we worshipping?**

Superstitions thrive in the soil of insecurity. The superstitious believe certain acts influence events without any direct connection to them. When Dion James was on a 16-game hitting streak for the Atlanta Braves in 1988, he didn’t wash his underwear! His teammates had mixed feelings when his hitting streak ended! Airlines hardly ever have a thirteenth row. **In what sense are superstitions idols?**



What’s God’s message to you in this lesson?

What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes:

Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 10:14 - Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.



Notes

1(http://www.asla.org/uploadedFiles/CMS/Government_Affairs/Federal_Government_Affairs/OIA_OutdoorRecEconomyReport2012.pdf;

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/01/your-money/01money.html?_r=0).

2. (www.englishuniversity.cz/fs/clanky/look_up_to.doc).

3. (<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/04/secret-fears-of-the-super-rich/308419/>)

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Baptism

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.



Share your progress carrying out your "Idolatry" action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

The Water That Confuses

Rev. Charles Foster of Elwood, IN, baptized many persons in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. One Sunday, his family and he traveled to a friend's home in the country. Later that afternoon while looking for his 4-year-old daughter, Susan, he found her conducting a "baptismal" service. Doing her best to imitate her father, she held a cat over a barrel of water and proclaimed: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and in the hole you go!"

Many who request baptism for themselves or their children don't understand it much better than Susan! Parents think it is insurance if their children die unexpectedly. Some denominations teach that it's essential for salvation and others that it isn't all that important. Some baptize children, whereas others baptize only professing believers. Some sprinkle, some pour, some totally immerse once, and others dunk three times. No wonder confusion reigns!

Water baptism *isn't* an indifferent matter. It isn't *essential* for salvation because the criminal on the cross was saved apart from baptism (Luke 23:39-43). Nevertheless, F.F. Bruce, a New Testament scholar, wrote, "The idea of an unbaptized Christian is simply not entertained in the New Testament."¹ The New Testament teaches that every Christian should be baptized.

The Nature of Pre-Christian Baptism

Water is associated with cleansing. No baths, no showers, no friends! There was a difference in the Old Testament between being dirty and being unclean. The first was a physical condition and the second a spiritual condition. A Jew who became ceremonially unclean was required to wash his clothes (Leviticus 11:25). For an Israelite, distinguishing between clean and unclean was a big deal. Why? Because God said, the Israelites were to be holy, because He is holy (Leviticus 20:26). Being holy required separating oneself from what God declared unclean.

The Law of Moses required priests to use washings following certain sacrifices. It also required individuals who were unclean because of touching a dead body or having an infectious disease to wash before they could offer sacrifices and worship God again (Numbers 19:1-22; Leviticus 14, 15, 16:24-28). Aaron spent hours preparing himself to meet God on the Day of Atonement. He had to bathe before putting on and taking off the sacred garments God designed for the priests to wear when making sacrifices on the Day of Atonement. Likewise, the one who took the scapegoat into the wilderness had to wash his clothes and body before he returned to his people.

Death was considered the strongest defilement because it was the result of sin. There's a difference between being defiled and being dirty. Washing was God's provision for those who were defiled and foreshadowed the benefits of Christ's sacrifice. Acts 15:9, speaking of the Gentiles, describes how Jesus' sacrifice was the basis of moral purity: "He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith." God's unfolding plan was to remove the defilement of sin from people. For God that was exceedingly costly. He spoke the Universe into existence without breaking a sweat but had to become a human being and shed His own blood to remove the

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defilement of sin. What was accomplished in the New Testament by grace through faith was foreshadowed in the Old Testament by grace through water.

Toward the beginning of the Christian era, the Jews began baptizing proselytes seven days after their circumcision. In this baptism, a Gentile was immersed naked in a pool of flowing water; when he rose from the pool, he was a true son of Israel. After their baptism, new converts were allowed access to the sacrifices in the Temple. The Jewish priests baptized only Gentiles, not other Jews.

John the Baptist's Ministry Was Unusual

Through the whole Old Testament era, priests baptized only Gentiles who wanted to follow Moses and the Jewish faith. In John 1:24-26 the Pharisees asked John the Baptist, "Who has given you the authority to baptize Jews, God's chosen people and treat them just like Gentiles since you aren't Christ, Elijah or the Prophet?" (John 1:25)

John's response was something like, "If you think my baptism is unusual, just wait! At least I use water. One is coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11). Those who receive Him will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Those who reject Him will be baptized with fire. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out with tongues of fire (Acts 2:3-4).

Each of us now has a choice between receiving the Spirit of Christ or burning like chaff with unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12). By submitting to John's baptism, people were making a public declaration that they were turning from sin and would henceforth live according to God's will (Matthew 3:6). John's baptism was a preparation for Christian baptism. It represented only repentance. Christian baptism represents repentance and belief in Jesus (Mark 1:15).

Jesus' Baptism

Jesus' baptism was far superior to John's and of a totally different order. The difference between John's baptism and Jesus' baptism is the difference between a lightning bug and a lightning bolt. John's baptism was a formal way for people to say to God, "I'm sorry for my sins." Jesus' baptism (Mark 1: 8) represents receiving new life through the gift of the Holy Spirit, a privileged position as God's children and heirs, forgiveness of sin and power to live as God desires.

If John's baptism was for repentance from sin, why was Jesus baptized when He was sinless? Perhaps He was baptized to show support for John's ministry – Repentance of sin was necessary. Most importantly, by being baptized He identified Himself with sinful mankind.

John's baptism showed that for humanity, sin is a problem because God's judgment is upon us. Without sin being a problem, there would have been no need for baptism. God's judgment was like a bolt of lightning that was coming to strike mankind. We deserve it. Jesus volunteered to be a lightning rod for us. Jesus, through baptism, publicly demonstrated His willingness to endure God's judgment in our place. That was His mission. He identified Himself with us through baptism. He stood with the guilty to bring the guilty to glory. Through baptism we publicly identify ourselves with Jesus, His church, and His rule.

Jesus at his baptism vicariously confessed the sin of the many by identifying with them. (2 Corinthians 5:21) - God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

Baptism and Salvation

Do we have to be baptized to be saved? Yes. Do we have to be baptized in water to be saved? No. The baptism that's essential is described in 1 Corinthians

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12:12-13: "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

The Importance of Water Baptism

Water baptism isn't necessary for salvation, but it's vitally important. Jesus commanded it in Matthew 28:18-20. In Luke 23:39-43, He promised paradise to the repentant unbaptized thief dying on a cross. The thief identified himself with Jesus "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." His very public words demonstrated his faith.

Baptism is a public identification with Jesus and His church. Don't make a rule out of the experience of the thief on the cross. It's the exception to the rule. In Galatians 3:27 and 1 Corinthians 1:13; 12:13 Paul takes for granted that every Christian must be baptized.

Who Should Be Baptized?

Those who believe in Jesus Christ should be baptized. It's a key part of the Great Commission: Then Jesus came to them and said, "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 of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20). Baptizing is part of making more and better disciples.

The Meaning of Baptism

A little boy asked Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in California, "When can I get advertised?" He meant "baptized" but he made the right point--baptism is advertising that you're a Christian. It's our public identification with Jesus and His church.

Out West, unbranded calves that roam at large are called "mavericks." They don't belong to anyone. A man claims them by putting his brand on them first at the annual round up. Our brand identifies us. Some of my hats and sweatshirts identify me as a Penn State fan and others as a fisherman. Baptism is the outward testimony of the internal brand of the Holy Spirit. Jesus has both purchased me and branded me as His own. Water baptism is my testimony that I belong to Him and His people. When the Jesus brand in my behavior is as obvious as the Penn State brand on my hat, I'll know I've made progress.

Baptism is my public profession that Jesus has purchased me. He died for me so that I could live for Him. He owns all who receive Him.

Some time back, a retired missionary dropped by a church. She had served faithfully in Africa, and one day, she happened upon a small baptismal service. A fellow missionary took three new converts to the center of a shallow river and dug a hole in the sand so there would be enough water for the baptism. Even then, the new believers were forced to sit in the sand so there would be enough water to cover them for the important ceremony.

The missionary telling the story saw what she'd expected. A few friends and family members gathered to watch, and the missionary in the river raised his hand, repeating familiar scriptures before baptizing the converts. When the first convert came up out of the water, he began an excited and joyful time of shouting. The quiet service was silent no more! The second convert did the same. The final convert also came up from the shallow water shouting for joy. Afterwards, the missionary watching the process asked about the unusual tradition. Why all the shouting?

"I haven't been able to completely communicate in this tribe's language," said the

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younger missionary. "They heard the scripture I gave them, but they didn't understand the symbolic nature of it. When I told them that they would be "buried with him through baptism into death ... and raised to walk in the newness of life" (Romans 6:4) they thought baptism would kill them! They chuckled as they heard the story, until the missionary froze them with her gaze. "Let me ask," she said. "If you thought baptism would kill you, would you get in the river?"

In baptism we identify with Jesus Christ. The ceremony of baptism doesn't save us. Faith in Christ's death and resurrection does. Baptism is the symbol of transformation that happens in the hearts of believers (Romans 6:3-5, Gal 3:27, Col. 2:12). Romans 6:4 says, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

Going under the water symbolizes our death to sin and coming out of the water to resurrection to the new life in Christ. Is that what you were thinking when you were baptized? Baptism is your public testimony that you've taken the step of renouncing your old life of self-centeredness, joined yourself to Christ, and begun to follow him in the fullness of strength which he provides.

The Mode of Baptism

A drunken man stumbled into a baptismal service on Sunday afternoon down by the river. He proceeds to walk into the water and stand next to the old country preacher. The minister noticed the old drunk and said, "Mister, are you ready to find Jesus?"

"The drunk looked back and said, "Yes, Preacher: I sure am." So, the minister dunked the fellow under the water and pulled him right back up.

"Have you found Jesus?" the preacher asked.

"No, I didn't!" said the drunk.

The preacher then dunked him under for quite a bit longer, lifted him up, and said, "Now, brother, have you found Jesus?"

"No, I haven't, Reverend."

The preacher held the man under for at least 30 seconds this time, pulled him out of the water, and said in exasperation, "Man, have you found Jesus yet?"

The old drunk wiped his eyes and said to the preacher, "Are you sure this is where he fell in?"

It appears that immersion was the mode of baptism at least the first 100 years of the faith. In the Middle of the second century pouring is named as an option for baptism if better options aren't available. Immersion was the practice recommended for general use. The earliest account of the mode of baptizing is in the Didache [**Did**-a-kay], which says, "Now concerning baptism, thus baptize ye: having first uttered all these things baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, in living water. But if thou hast not living water, baptize in other water; and if thou canst not in cold, then in warm. But if thou hast neither, pour water upon the head thrice in the name of the Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost." ²

Perhaps the most moving baptismal service I performed was not in a river, lake or baptistery. It was in the kitchen of a 90-year-old man named Joseph Larson Johnson. He came to know the Lord late in life and wanted to be baptized but was unable to go to the local river where we baptized. In his kitchen with his head over the sink I used a pitcher to pour water over his head. He cried and cried tears of joy after the baptism. Certain life experiences burn a lasting impression on the brain, and that is one of them for me. That's the only time I baptized anyone by pouring.

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A Serious Commitment

A notorious sinner got religion every revival meeting, and then soon fell away until the next one. After his fifth trip into the river, the preacher said, "You've been baptized so much the fish know your name!" His name might have been entered in a church record book, but not in the Book of Life. Baptism expresses a *serious* commitment to follow Jesus. Muslim youth converting to Christianity find that their faith is tolerated until they decide to be baptized. At that point, their family and friends officially cut them off.

Have you repented of your sins and trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?

If so, have you been baptized

If not, when will you be baptized?



**What's God's message to you in this lesson?
What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?**



Share your action plan to make those changes.

Memory Verse

Matthew 28:19 – Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.



Notes

1 Bruce, F.F. *Commentary on the Book of Acts*. NIC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962. p. 77.

2 <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/didache.htm>

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The Lord's Supper

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.



Share your progress carrying out your "Baptism" action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

A potluck I once attended was a kid's dream. Meat and vegetables were scarce. Almost everyone brought *desserts*—not that I'm complaining! Church potlucks have a reputation. One church advertised in its bulletin, "Thursday night - potluck supper. Prayer and medication to follow." I know the feeling! I've been to a few dinners that required plop, plop, fizz, fizz therapy, how about you? No matter how good its potlucks, the *best* meal any church offers is the Lord's Supper.

The Incredible Edible Story

The Lord's Supper reflects the whole gospel. It reminds us from whence we came, how we got where we are, our unity with and call to live for Christ, our oneness with other believers, and our future destiny. All are packaged in the bread and cup we take in remembrance of Jesus.

Rescuing Prodigal Mules

We were all born in Independence, Missouri—stubborn as mules, living for ourselves, actively rebelling against or passively ignoring our heavenly Father. We didn't tell Him what to do—well, maybe a little— and we expected Him to return the favor. We posted the door of our heart with our declaration of independence along with "No Trespassing" signs to discourage meddling deity from knocking. By all rights, God should have written us off and allowed us to reap the fruit of our foolishness. He didn't. His love for us remained unfailing (John 3:16).

In the Gospels we discover that Jesus doesn't reject sinners; He *eats* with them. Eating

together in the New Testament carried special significance. By eating with Matthew and His sinner-guests, Jesus made them feel at home (Luke 5:27-32). When the prodigal son returned, the father demonstrated his love by celebrating with a feast (Luke 15:23). **How is the story of the prodigal son also *your* story?**

The Passover Principle

The bread and cup explain how God could legally forgive rebels like us and call us out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9). The Lord's Supper was celebrated in connection with the Passover (Matthew 26:17-18). The animal sacrificed on that day was a lamb (Exodus 12:3). John the Baptist called Jesus the Lamb of God (John 1:29) who takes away the world's sin. When the Israelites applied the lamb's blood to their houses, they were delivered from God's judgment (Exodus 12:12-13). Both Jesus and the Passover lamb were sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5:7). **How does this "Passover Principle" apply to us today?**

Unwrapping God's Best Gift

God gives good and perfect gifts (James 1:17). His best gift released us from the penalty and power of sin, but it cost Him dearly— His Son's life. The bread and cup symbolize God's commitment to us. His gracious giving merits our best gifts in return. Isaiah 53:5 clarifies the symbolism behind the breaking of the bread as the bruising, crushing, and wounding of Jesus for our sins. The cup reminds us that God forgives our sins through the blood of the covenant (Matthew 26:28). The agreement (covenant) that God made with Israel was sealed with blood (Exodus 24:5-8). God sealed his salvation agreement through the blood of the covenant (Mark 14:24), the blood of His Son. **Why is salvation God's best gift?**

Got Bread!

God provides in Jesus a sin sacrifice and all the resources we need to overcome the downward

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pull of the world, flesh, and devil. He is the power and wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24). When we ingest food and drink, they become part of us. We are what we eat! Jesus is the bread of life (John 6:35). Through the Lord's Supper we identify with the One who gives life and is our life (Galatians 2:20). He is the bread from heaven that provides spiritual strength to do the Father's will. **Share a time you found strength in Jesus to do something you wouldn't volunteer to do on your own.**

Tombstone Territory

The Lord's Supper reminds us that not only did Christ die on the cross, but we also were crucified with him (Galatians 2:20). God's purpose was that we may live a new life and no longer be slaves to sin (Romans 6:4-6). 1 Peter 2:24 says the purpose of sharing in His death is that we would die to sins and live for righteousness.

Through baptism we identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. We committed ourselves to live a new life dedicated to doing His will. The Lord's Supper is a reaffirmation of that commitment. By participating in the Lord's Supper, we reassert our unity with Christ and His purposes.

Giving Thanks

The Lord's Supper is an opportunity to thank God. When Jesus instituted the Supper, He gave thanks for both the bread and cup (Matthew 26:26-27). The Lord's Supper is sometimes called the Eucharist. The name comes from "eucharisteo," which is the Greek word in Matthew 26 translated "to give thanks." Participating in the Lord's Supper reminds us of our forgiveness and renews the joy of our salvation.

Meditating on what Christ has delivered us from stirs flickering coals of gratitude into flame. Some of us would be in jail or dead if Christ hadn't rescued us. Marriages would be broken,

bodies abused, relationships destroyed. When we were all wrapped up in ourselves, we made small packages. Jesus is still in the process of setting us free from all that keeps us from being just like him. Give thanks! Life has meaning now. We have a purpose. We have a hope that burns in our hearts with an eternal flame. We can give thanks for the grace we've received in Jesus Christ; for being enriched by Him in our speaking and knowledge; for the spiritual gifts He has given; for His keeping us strong to the end; for fellowship with His Son; for His faithfulness (1 Corinthians 1:4-9). **For what else do you give thanks?**

Team Jesus

One day one of my brothers visited me. He suggested moving a computer to a spot at the other end of the living room. The amazing thing was that the same idea had occurred to me not five seconds before he voiced his thoughts. The relationships of Christian brothers and sisters should reflect oneness. "We" replaces "I" and "you." We cease to live independently of each other. Our lives intersect more than the hour we spend together in worship. Together we are part of God's household (1 Timothy 3:15). The cup of thanksgiving and bread are a participation in the blood and body of Christ. Eating one loaf together demonstrates that we are one body (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). The Greek word translated "participation" means common sharing. It describes the relational epoxy that bonds believers together. We are united not only with Christ, but also with other Christians. Jesus' friends become our best friends. We are Jesus' team!

To what extent does "oneness" accurately describe your church? What can you do to improve your relational ties with other believers?

God's Flight Plan

The Lord's Supper has past, present, and future aspects. It reminds us of Christ's sacrifice for

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our sins, our present communion with Him, and His future return. Our new life in Him is like an airline flight. Jesus shed His blood on the cross to purchase our ticket. He is the Lamb of God (John 1:29), without blemish or defect (1 Peter 1:19), who removes the world's sin. The ticket is so expensive *no one* can afford it, but *anyone* can receive it as a gift. Once inside the plane, we discover that our pilot bought our ticket. Although we can't see Him, His still small voice comforts us, especially during turbulence. He's flying us toward a perfect landing in eternity. On the way we befriend other passengers who are sharing the ride. The plane is so huge, we can't possibly know everyone, but we can love those who sit closest to us. Upon arrival, we'll see our pilot face to face and be His guests at the biggest celebration dinner ever. Those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb are blessed (Revelation 19:9). The bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper are reminders of the *price of our ticket*, the *presence* of our pilot and fellow passengers during the flight, and the *celebration yet to be*.

In Remembrance of Me

It is appropriate "to remember" what we as believers have in common. We've trusted in the same Jesus as our Savior. We share the same Holy Spirit. Together we are part of the church, the body of which Christ is the head. Together we die to living for self to live for Jesus. All of us receive new life and spiritual wholeness through our trust in Christ. We share the same destiny of living with and worshipping God forever. We share together in suffering for Christ this side of eternity. **With all this in common why do you think there isn't more unity in the church?**

Self-Examination

We need to examine ourselves for unconfessed sin (1 Corinthians 11:28) because eating the bread and drinking the cup in an unworthy manner brings God's judgment on us

(1 Corinthians 11:29). Unconfessed sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, slander, drunkenness, swindling, idleness, disobedience, and divisiveness all disqualify us from participation in the church and thus in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 11; Titus 3:10; Romans 16:17). We need to confess and repent of our sins to receive God's forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9). The Lord's Supper provides an opportunity.

Who May Participate?

Jesus gave the bread and cup to His disciples (Matthew 26:26-27). All the believers participated in the breaking of bread (Acts 2:41-47). The believers came together to break bread (Acts 20:7). Based on these verses, to participate in the Lord's Supper one must be a believer in Jesus Christ.

Application

Jesus became broken bread and poured out wine in the sense that He sacrificed His life for ours. **In what specific ways are you pouring out your life to make more and better disciples?**

What has following Christ cost you in recognition, praise, esteem, respect, comfort, and financial rewards you might otherwise have achieved?



What's God's message to you in this lesson?

What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?

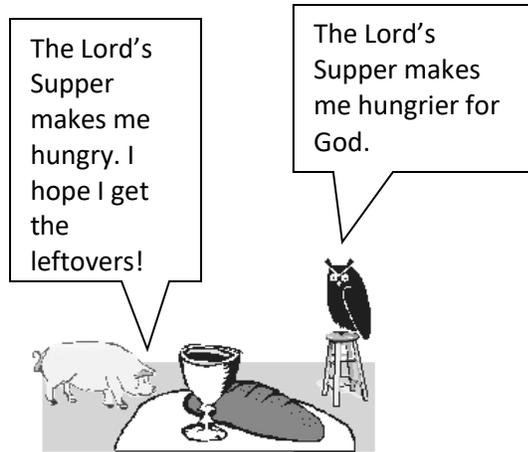


Share your action plan to make those changes:

Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 11:26 – For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

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31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Church Membership

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.



Share your progress carrying out your “Lord’s Supper” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

The Importance of Membership

Many professing Christians in the United States are more like triathletes than football players, treating Christianity as an individual rather than a team “sport.” Once a lady said to me, “I don’t have to go to church to be a Christian.” I handed her a Bible and asked, “Could you show me where the Bible says that?” She couldn’t. She would never have said, “My daughter doesn’t have to be on a team to be a basketball player.” For the obedient Christian, church attendance isn’t optional; neither is church membership. That one can be a Christian apart from belonging to a church team is a Satan-inspired lie.

The players on a winning football team are interdependent. The running back’s success depends on how well the blockers block. The receiver knows where and when the quarterback is going to throw. The kick returner understands where his teammates expect him to run. Average players working together can be a good team. Average Christians working together can be a great church.

Without the kind of team commitment reflected by joining the church, believers are like a wall of bricks that temporarily forms every Sunday, and then disassembles for another seven days or more. What happened to the team?

The bricks in many churches are self-ruling and not committed to one another. They attend

team meetings but skip the practices and games. They never learn to “play together.” The Bible knows nothing about a brand of Christianity practiced in isolation from other believers.

Many believe joining a church would unnecessarily restrict their freedom. By attending sporadically, remaining spectators, melting into a large church where no one will notice them, or by church hopping, they avoid committing their time, talents, and treasures. They have a warped view of freedom. They’re about as free as an amputated leg. Real freedom is the legs, arms, heart, lungs, etc of an Olympic sprinter all working together in complete harmony as she blasts down the track toward the finish line.

Biblical freedom is never a license to do what we want. It’s the power to obey as we ought. Unattached Christians are un-Christians--unconnected, undisciplined, unaccountable, and unfruitful.

A computer connected to the internet can accomplish a lot more than one that isn’t. the same is true of a Christian who is connected to a local church.

The Benefits of Membership

A Supporting Family

My father and I were lost in Ottawa, Canada (again!). We had wandered far from the right road and had no idea how to find it. We stopped at a store and purchased a city map. We discovered where we were and how to get back on the correct road again. That map restored our hope.

Church members have others in the membership to restore them when they get off the right track spiritually. If someone is caught in a sin, those who are spiritual are to restore him gently (Galatians 6:1). We fulfill the law of Christ by carrying each other’s burdens

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(Galatians 6:2). We also help one another attain spiritual maturity. From Christ the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:16).

Ministry Opportunities

Every believer receives the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7). God gives us all at least one spiritual gift to be used to build up the church. Pastoral ministry helped me explore my spiritual gifts. Because my ministry duties included preaching, teaching, counseling, visiting, leading, serving, administration, evangelizing, discipling, etc, I had many opportunities to test my passion and gifts. I found I was gifted in several but not all these areas. A few unexpected gifts emerged through this “learning by doing” discovery process. One of the best spiritual gifts tests is to try various ministries for which you have a passion and see which are most fulfilling and fruitful.

When we join the church, we enter an environment where we can experiment with various ministries to determine where we can serve most effectively. In most churches, some ministry opportunities are reserved for those who are church members. To fully unwrap our spiritual gifts, we need to be members of the church.

A Worshiping Family

Anyone can come to a worship service. Membership isn't required. But those who voluntarily commit themselves to membership are the pumping heart of the worshiping family of the church. Others can come and go as they please, but by joining the church we commit ourselves to worship God in a specific place together with others who have made a similar commitment. Further, we commit ourselves to increase the number of His committed worshipers in that place. We aren't satisfied with filling a building once a week but are

looking for those who will worship God 24/7 by being light and salt in our community and mutually supportive of each other. God has given us one another. “All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need” (Acts 2:44-45).

Accountability

Some nonmembers flit, like honeybees, from one church flower to the next, concerned only with meeting their own needs. They never get involved, and never become accountable to meet someone else's needs. **Who in your church is holding you accountable to grow as a believer and reach out to others?** Most don't progress far spiritually after receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord because few in the church really expect them to. Accountability helps us become more like the Savior. Dr. Thom Rainer found that members of effective evangelistic churches hold one another accountable for evangelism. Church membership should be the entrance into a relationship of accountability.

Being accountable to one another now prepares us for our “final exam.” According to Romans 3:19, the whole world is accountable to God. We have no excuse for our sin (John 15:22). We're responsible for the person we become and what we do. Being accountable to at least one other person helps us do better than we would if we weren't accountable. I didn't have a regular devotional time with God until someone held me accountable to do so.

Conflict Resolution

Becoming a church member provides a practical way to resolve conflicts with other believers. If you fish, your line at times develops knots no Boy Scout could identify. Conflict in relationships is what line tangles are to fishermen. Inevitable. Matthew 18:15-18 describes a three-step process to resolve such conflict:

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- 1) Go to the offending person privately and show him his fault. If he listens, the conflict is over.
- 2) If he doesn't listen, take one or two other Christians with you and repeat step one. If he listens, the conflict is resolved.
- 3) If he still doesn't listen, take the matter to the church.

A Spiritual Shepherd

In the November 2000 issue of *Reader's Digest*, Sharon Forgue described her 20th anniversary celebration in Hawaii with her husband. After an hour of swimming, everyone reentered the boat except Sharon and a handsome young man. The man followed her everywhere as she snorkeled for another 40 minutes. When she climbed back into the boat, so did he. She felt flattered and asked him why he stayed in the water so long. He told her, "I'm the lifeguard. I couldn't get out of the water until you did."

Church members are blessed with spiritual lifeguards—pastors and church leaders who watch over their souls, shepherd, and give direction. These leaders are to be obeyed because they keep watch as those who must give an account (Hebrews 13:17). We must respect them because they work hard among us and must hold them in the highest regard (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). Church members have "spiritual parents," whereas, nonmembers are spiritual orphans.

The Responsibilities of Membership

Six terms highlight the responsibilities of church members: believer, brother, saint, disciple-maker, citizen, and promoter.

1. Believer

Those who were added to the early church were set apart because they trusted or believed

in the Lord (Acts 5:14). Church members today need to trust Jesus in all the circumstances of life. **Describe several times in your life when believing in the Lord made a difference.**

2. Brother

Brother is a relationship-rich term. Joining the church brings us into a whole new world of responsibilities to other members. Brothers have fellowship with other believers (1 John 1:3,7); are all part of one body (Colossians 1:18); love one another deeply from the heart (1 Peter 1:22); build others up (Ephesians 4:29); spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24); teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16); carry each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2); encourage each other (1 Thessalonians 4:18); forgive each other (Ephesians 4:32); contend as one man for the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27); faithfully pray (Romans 12:12); serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13) and help the needy (1 Timothy 5:16).

Choose three of these "brother" responsibilities that you need to give more attention. Specifically, how can you become a better "brother" in each of these three areas?

3. Saint

A saint is holy, set apart, and consecrated to God, sharing in His purity, and separated from evil and its defilement. God's arm, (Isaiah 52:10), words (Jeremiah 23:9), promises (Psalm 105:42), name (Leviticus 20:3), and Spirit (Psalm 51:11) are all holy. The one who called us is holy, so we need to be holy in all we do (1 Peter 1:15).

"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices” (Colossians 3:5-9). **Identify two aspects of your earthly nature that still have a grip on you. How can you put these two to death?**

4. Disciple-Maker

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus’ disciples accept and practice His teachings. They walk in His steps. Disciple-makers seek to extend to every part of the earth and every people group Jesus’ influence on and reign over individuals. **How can you use 31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity to make disciples in your circle of influence?**

5. Citizen

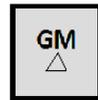
Church members are citizens of the kingdom with responsibilities to bind and loose (Matthew 16:19); assemble and encourage one another (Hebrews 10:25); tithe to the Lord (Leviticus 27:30); obey their leaders and submit to their authority (Hebrews 13:17); give to believers who have need (Acts 2:45); support financially those who preach the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:14); give generously (2 Corinthians 9:6) and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7) and provide clothes and daily food for needy brothers and sisters (Jas. 2:15-16). **Which citizenship responsibilities need your attention?**

6. Promoter

Like the servant’s assignment in Luke 14:23, our job is to fill the Father’s house (our church).

Accepting others as Christ accepted us is the key to unity in the church (Romans 15:6 -7).

How would you grade your promotion of your church during the last year? How could you improve? How would you grade your acceptance of others in the church during the last year? How could you improve?



What’s God’s message to you in this lesson?

What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes.

Memory Verse

John 15:8 – This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.



31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Personal Faith Story

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.



Share your progress carrying out your “Church Membership” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

Who? Me? A Testimony?

Perhaps you think you don’t have much of a spiritual story to tell. You weren’t that bad before you received Christ, you aren’t that good now, and it’s been a struggle! Compared to those who can recount deliverance from alcoholism, drug abuse, prostitution, gambling, etc., your spiritual experience seems as unexciting as watching water drip from a leaky faucet. Unlike Saul of Tarsus, you haven’t seen the risen Christ. You haven’t heard God speak in an audible voice or seen even a five-second mini-vision in black and white. You’re simply a “trust and obey” believer and at times feel decidedly inferior in even those two basics. Have you ever asked yourself, “Why would anyone be interested in my spiritual experience and because of it want to become a disciple of Christ?” **Do you ever feel like your spiritual story isn’t exciting? Explain.**

The Way We Were

Many of us have forgotten the relentless single-file march of an army of unsatisfying days lived out under sin’s merciless control. Nothing changes but the date. No peace. No purpose. No hope. No fulfillment in this world and no claim to the next. Life is like a daily chase after the butterfly of good feelings. Although occasionally it is captured, it always escapes through a hole in the net. Tomorrow it must be pursued all over again. Butterfly chasers aren’t

happy with life, but don’t realize Christ and His church promise the purpose they’ve longed for. **How does believing our story isn’t important add to the problem?**

Write for Insight

Each of us benefits from thinking long and hard about how God has been at work in our lives. We aren’t yet what we want to be, and our failures, like facial blemishes, are all too familiar. Nevertheless, we’ve probably moved farther from the spiritual starting line than we realize. **How would writing down your personal testimony prepare you to share it more clearly and often?**

Hold the Testimony

When we were living for ourselves, we were blind to most of our faults. Now, like kittens with their eyes open, we see ourselves more clearly, and that alone is significant progress. God has chosen to store His living water in imperfect vessels still under construction. We’re cracked and we leak, but God can still pour His living water through us to satisfy the spiritually thirsty. We’re a work in progress, and Jesus gets all the credit for any improvement. Our role isn’t to pretend we possess sinless perfection but to be transparent. Not only can’t people relate to Never Fail Fred or Faultless Freda, it simply isn’t true. Any one of us would be utterly humiliated if Hollywood made a movie based on *all* our thoughts during the last year. I wouldn’t attend the premiere! I doubt whether you would attend yours.

Your Story Matters

Your story will connect with the people who are like you. Persons who “aren’t that bad now,” and, for example, have never battled alcoholism, can relate to how Christ has worked in a “not so bad life” better than how he worked in the life of a converted alcoholic.

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One Theme and Three Sections

Your story can help open the eyes of not-yet-believers, but first you must write it. Before you can do that, you need to pray and reflect on how God has been at work in your life. The whole process will probably take at least several hours, but the blessings that can result are beyond calculation. Try to organize your thoughts around a single theme, such as how your purpose or values have changed.

To communicate your story effectively, organize it into three sections:

- 1) What your life was like before knowing Jesus personally.
- 2) Spell out how you came to know Christ, so others will know how to receive Him too.
- 3) Explain how receiving Christ has changed how you relate to God, others, and yourself.

A carefully prepared testimony can have more impact than the best music or sermon. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Valley Community Church, often pauses in the middle of a sermon for someone who has prepared ahead of time to share how the truth Rick is expounding has made a difference in his/her life. The testimony, like a hammer, drives Rick's point home!

I'm including my testimony to illustrate how you might organize your own. When you read it, look for the dominant theme.

"Spiritual things weren't always important to me. My parents took me to church three times a week for at least twelve years, but other things were more important.

Outside the church building, I rarely thought about God and never prayed voluntarily or read the Bible on my own. My purpose was to excel in sports and my studies to win the love and

acceptance of others. I set goals in both areas and sacrificed a lot to attain them but discovered that achieving them didn't bring lasting satisfaction. The thought of dying scared me and a cloud of guilt hung over me. I believed in heaven but had no assurance I'd go there when I died.

In my church I often heard that Jesus had died on a cross to pay the penalty for my moral and spiritual imperfections. I knew I wasn't perfect, but I didn't understand how Jesus' death solved the problem. I pictured His death as a down payment on my passage to heaven. I thought I had to make regular payments by the good things I did.

During the fall of 1968 because of hearing 1 John 5:11-12 quoted, I understood I didn't have to make any payments at all. Jesus had paid the penalty for my moral imperfections *in full*. Those verses say: "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." That evening in my dorm room, I trusted in Jesus' sacrifice *alone* to give me right standing with God and invited him into my life. That evening was a turning point. Because God loved and accepted me as I was, I *wanted* to do what pleased him. Little by little love displaced fear as a dominant motivator in my spiritual life.

My fear of death greatly diminished. God lifted the weight of guilt for my moral failures when I trusted Jesus' death as payment in full. I had assurance that I'd go to heaven because I knew I could trust Jesus to keep His promise to take me there.

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Your testimony is your spiritual autobiography. It's as unique as your fingerprints. To share it with others effectively you should memorize the major points.

In the mid 1970s at Penn State University I was sharing my personal spiritual story with two graduate students in their dormitory room. When I had minutes earlier requested permission to share the gospel with them, they refused. I then asked whether I could share how Christ had made a difference in my own life. Since that seemed safe to the two, they agreed. I told how for years I had lived under the slavery of setting goals, sacrificing to reach them, experiencing no lasting fulfillment, and then, starting the whole never-ending process again. I pointed to Jesus as the one who had set me free from that way of life. One of the students smiled, looked at his roommate who was fidgeting in his seat, and said, "He's talking about you!"

Your story can similarly impact others whose hearts the Holy Spirit has prepared. Not only will it influence *them* but sharing it will stoke your own spiritual fires by reminding *you* anew how much Christ has done.



What's God's message to you in this lesson?

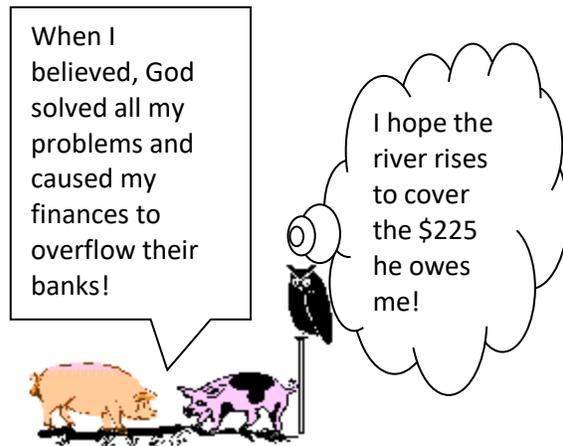
What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes.

Memory Verse

Romans 1:16 – For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.



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Witnessing

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Share your progress carrying out your “Personal Testimony” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

Preparing to Fish

Light attracts some fish. Jesus said, “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). **How does this verse describe how and why we should live?**

To shine our brightest, we must be clean, bold enough to stand for Jesus in the darkness, and connected to God’s infinitely great power supply.

Both we and light bulbs get dirty. Clean bulbs give maximum illumination. So do clean Christians. When our sins (our self-seeking words, attitudes, and actions) dim our light, God’s all-purpose cleanser is confession. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Confession includes agreeing with God that we’ve sinned, changing our attitude, and forsaking our sins. To maximize your shine for Jesus, confess your sins as soon and often as God convicts you.

Light bulbs must be bold enough to shine all alone in the darkness. Letting our light shine will *always* seem risky. Paul let his light shine because he wasn’t ashamed of the gospel (Romans 1:16). Christ’s love is our motivation to illuminate our surroundings with Christ’s light (2 Corinthians 5:14). Firemen leave their stations and lifeguards their chairs to rescue the perishing. No risk—no rescue.

Jesus left the safest spot in the universe to come to earth to seek and save what was lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus’ disciples are responsible to continue that mission (John 20:21). We can’t fulfill it while remaining in a *safe, comfortable* place. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people” (Matthew 4:19).

Light bulbs need a source of power and so do Christ’s witnesses. That source is the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). People come to faith in Christ by the Holy Spirit’s work (1 Corinthians 12:3, John 3:6-8) **Why is prayer vital for effective evangelism?**

According to Hebrews 11:6, we please God and experience His power through faith. That means trusting in His power and acting on His character and promises. When we’re controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, God will use us to seek and save the lost.

Fishing Styles

Not everyone fishes alike. Some use fly casting equipment, whereas others use spinning, spin casting, bait casting outfits or cane poles. Not everyone evangelizes the same way either. Scripture models at least 6 ways to reach people:

Direct Method - In Acts 2, Peter’s preaching was as subtle as a sledgehammer! Some people respond best to the gospel when they’re confronted courageously and directly with their sin and need to repent. Direct evangelists explain the gospel and challenge others to receive Christ as Forgiver and Leader *now*. God may have equipped you with the personality, gifts, and desire to use this approach.

Rational Method - In Acts 17 Paul reasoned with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks in Athens, “explaining and proving” Christ’s resurrection. Rational evangelists study the evidence for the resurrection and find answers to the questions skeptics commonly ask. Paul Little’s *Know Why You Believe* and Josh McDowell’s *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*,

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More Than a Carpenter and other books will equip you to defend the faith. Perhaps this style appeals to you.

Personal Experience Method - John 9 records Jesus' healing of a blind beggar. The Pharisees asked him what he thought about his healer. In verse 25 he said, "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" A personal experience evangelist tells the difference Jesus has made in his/her life. Many can share dramatic stories of personal transformation. Maybe that's you.

Relationship Method - Jesus delivered a man tormented by an unclean spirit and told him, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." (Mark 5:19). He told him to share his faith with those close to him. Relationship evangelism is based on living out the faith before unbelieving friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors. Before those individuals will listen to the words of the gospel, they must experience the love on which it's based.

Come and See Method - After a long conversation with Jesus the Samaritan woman became convinced that He was the Son of God. She left her water pots and ran into the city. She begged the people to come to the well and hear Jesus for themselves. They did, and many believed in Him (John 4:39). She was a "come and see" evangelist. She couldn't share the message effectively herself, but she invited those she knew to hear someone who could.

Servant Method - Dorcas impacted her city through kind deeds (Acts 9:36). She made clothing for the poor and gave it away in Christ's name. Through her actions she pointed persons to the God who filled her heart with love and could do the same for them. If you have gifts of mercy, helps, hospitality, giving or encouragement, this may be your style.

Which style appeals most to you?

Put a 1 before your primary fishing style and a 2 before your secondary style.

- Direct Method
- Rational Method
- Personal Experience Method
- Relationship Method
- Come and See Method
- Servant Method

Casting

Timing is critical to fishing *and* evangelistic effectiveness. Fish bite better during certain times and days than others. During times of stress, great problems, and upheaval, persons are more receptive to the gospel than when everything is going smoothly.

Many don't fish nearly as often as they'd like because of the difficult transition from the chores to the shores—they just don't get around to it. We don't evangelize as much as we'd like because it's hard to move from small talk to God talk.

Certain questions can help you bridge the conversation from the weather, sports, etc, to spiritual things. They include:

1. When you know someone is going through a tough time, ask, "*Do you feel a need to be closer to God?*" If the answer is "Yes," say, "Let me show you how you can be," and then share the gospel.
2. *Why do you think people feel so empty, even when they have so much?* Here's an opportunity to tell how Jesus has brought meaning to your life and filled up the empty spot by sharing your personal testimony.
3. *Do you ever wonder if there is an overall purpose and meaning in life? What do you think*

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it is? Here's another opportunity to share your personal testimony!

4. *Do you think faith in Jesus Christ spoils or enriches someone's life? Why? Ask, "May I share how faith has enriched my life?"* Share your personal testimony.

5. If they attend a church service with you or some other kind of outreach event, ask, "*What did you think of the message?*" After their response, ask, "*Have you made the wonderful discovery of knowing Christ personally?*" If the answer isn't, "Yes," ask, "*Would you like to?*" If the response is positive, share *Connecting with God*.

6. Talk about some need that has become obvious such as a lack of purpose, fear or loneliness and share how Christ has met that need in your life.

Evangelist Bill Faye introduces a presentation of the gospel by asking the following questions in sequence:

1. *Do you go to church anywhere?*

2. *Do you have any spiritual beliefs?* If he knows they do, he says, "*Tell me about your spiritual beliefs.*" No matter what they say, he doesn't argue.

3. *To you, who is Jesus?*

4. *Do you believe in heaven and hell?*

5. *If you died today, where would you go? Why?* This is an indirect, excellent question to determine if someone is trusting in his own goodness or in what Christ has done for him on the cross.

6. If the person believes God will let him into heaven based on his performance, ask, "*If what you believe isn't true, would you want to know it?*" If the reply is "Yes," share *Connecting with God*. If the answer is "No," say nothing. Quite likely his curiosity will lead him to ask

something like, "Well, aren't you going to tell me?"

Hooking and Reeling Them in

The essence of the gospel can be explained very briefly as two things to know and two things to do. The first thing we need to know is that we're sinners because we can't measure up to the standard Jesus set when He walked on earth. The second is that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and rose from the grave on the third day, showing God was satisfied with that payment.

The first thing to do is turn from our own self-centered path in life to go God's way. The second is to invite Jesus Christ into our life to be our personal Forgiver and Leader.

When you're sharing the gospel, just read "*Connecting with God*" to the individual. It's available at <https://www.freechristianleadershipresources.com>.

CONNECTING WITH GOD

1. MAN'S ORIGINAL CONDITION

 In the beginning man lived in perfect harmony with God and carried out His will flawlessly (Genesis 1-2).

2. SIN DESTROYED PERFECT HARMONY

Man and woman deliberately defied God's command and chose their own way. (Genesis 3).

SIN Is Living For MYSELF

Isaiah 53:6 - We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. SIN is a rebellious attitude against the Captain of our "ship":

No one tells
ME what to
do!

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity



SIN Is Universal

Romans 3:23 - For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.



is the moral  .
Every person on earth falls short of his standard.

3. BECAUSE OF SIN WE ARE:

Separated from God

Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear (Isaiah 59:1-2).

Spiritually Dead

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1).

Already Condemned

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:18).



Sin separates us from God

4. JESUS CHRIST IS GOD'S ONLY PROVISION FOR OUR SIN

Jesus Is God's Provision

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).



Died



Buried



Risen!

There's No Other Way

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).



JESUS IS THE  BACK TO PERFECT HARMONY WITH GOD.

5. WE RECEIVE GOD'S PROVISION [JESUS] BY REPENTANCE AND FAITH.

Mark 1:15 - "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

a. Repentance means turning from self-centered to God-centered living.



God, I'm willing to do what YOU want!

b. Faith means receiving Christ, God's provision for our sin.

- 1) To believe in Christ means to receive him.
- 2) "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).
- 3) Revelation 3:20 pictures receiving Christ: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Only you can open the door of your life to Jesus Christ.

Opening the door means:

1. Being willing to follow Jesus instead of your own selfish desires [Repent]. God gives the desire and ability to obey.
2. Believing that God forgives you, not because of how good you are, but because Jesus paid 100% of the penalty for your sins on the cross [Believe the gospel].

Have you opened the door of your life to Jesus in this way?

You can through the following prayer:

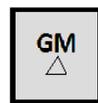
LORD JESUS, THANK YOU FOR DYING ON THE CROSS IN MY PLACE AND TAKING MY SIN, DEATH, AND JUDGMENT UPON YOURSELF. I OPEN THE DOOR OF MY LIFE TO YOU. I WANT YOU TO COME INTO MY LIFE AND TAKE CONTROL. THANK YOU FOR FORGIVING MY SINS AND MAKING ME A CHILD OF GOD. I WANT TO BE LIKE YOU. AMEN.

Does that prayer express your heart's desire? If it does, would you like to use it to invite Jesus to come into your life as your Forgiver and Leader?

The moment you open the door to Jesus you receive his life. You are born again. You can know that Jesus came into your life. What does he promise he will do in Revelation 3:20 if you open the door? You can take Jesus at his word. Nothing is more certain! Don't expect a wonderful feeling inside. God honors faith. Don't depend on feelings. In 1 John 5:11-12 God promises eternal life to all who have Jesus, the Son. If you have Jesus, you have eternal life. Take God's word for it!

CHRISTIAN GROWTH BASICS

1. Read the Bible daily. Begin with Matthew. Write briefly in a notebook what you've learned and will try to apply to your life (1 Peter 2:2).
2. Pray daily asking Jesus to control you and show you how to apply the Bible to your life to make you more like him. Pray about all your concerns (Philippians 4:6-7).
3. Every Sunday attend Sunday school and worship (Hebrews 10:24-25; Luke 4:16). Join a discipleship group in your church.
4. Share your time, talents, and treasures cheerfully. Jesus wants to serve others through you. Tell others how you received him and the difference he has made in your life.
5. Moment by moment yield to the control of the Holy Spirit of Christ who lives in you.



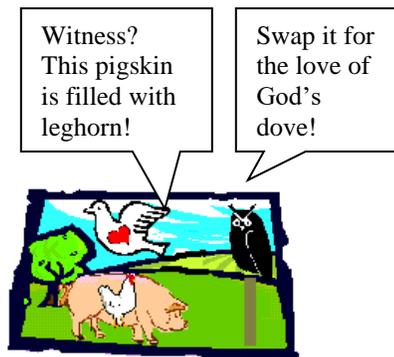
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Memory Verse

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Mentoring

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Share your progress carrying out your “Witnessing” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

Why Mentor?

Christian mentoring empowers other persons by sharing God-given resources to multiply workers for the spiritual harvest fields.¹ All believers have divinely granted assets that can help others serve Jesus better.

Christianity is best absorbed through imitation. A mentor is a model, but not a perfect one. Timothy witnessed Paul’s teaching, way of life, purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, and sufferings (2 Timothy 3:10-11). Jesus appointed twelve men that they might be with Him (Mark 3:14). By watching and imitating Him they learned how to apply faith and obedience to all of life. His life was their textbook. He challenged them to live their lives for the Father and showed them how.

The Impact of Mentoring

Andrew received no headlines. He and Barnabas were lesser lights of the Christian team, but, oh, how essential! Andrew brought Simon to Jesus (John 1:40-42) and Barnabas mentored Saul (Acts 11:25-26).

In the 1800s Edward Kimball led Dwight L. Moody to Christ and taught him in his Sunday school class. God used Moody to reach millions for Christ in North America and Europe. Moody influenced Reverend F. B. Meyer who touched Pastor J. Wilber Chapman who in turn influenced Billy Sunday. Sunday’s ministry produced a group of praying men in Charlotte,

North Carolina, who invited evangelist Mordecai Ham to speak at the crusade at which Billy Graham came to Christ. This “influence chain” can be traced back to Edward Kimball.² What does God want to do through you?

Swelling the Master’s Convoy

Knowing God’s Word isn’t our ultimate objective. Legions of demons could score 100% on a Bible content test, but their application is zero. We don’t want to imitate *them*! One of the goals of mentoring is to help believers establish disciplines that nourish faith and obedience. Jesus said that the wise person hears His words and puts them into practice (Matthew 7:24). The challenge is to transform typical Christians into committed ones. What are the characteristics of a committed Christian?

The Committed Christian Life

The Holy Spirit, responding to human faith, empowers the Christian life. Such faith reveals its presence by self-sacrificing, love-motivated living for God’s glory. The following disciplines characterize Jesus’ life on earth and those who are empowered by his Spirit. Mentors teach them through word and example. DISCIPLES summarizes them:

Devotions (regular Bible reading and prayer). John 15:7 describes this as remaining in Christ.

Invests time, talents, and treasures to further God’s kingdom. In 2 Corinthians 5:15 this is described as living for Christ. God will reward believers who are trustworthy (Luke 19:17) in the way they manage these resources. Those who give themselves first to the Lord will also give their resources to meet others’ needs (2 Corinthians 8:1-7).

Small group participant. In a small group, believers can love one another (John 13:34-35), eat together (Acts 2:46), praise God together

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

(Acts 2:47), and through it, teach and proclaim the good news (Acts 5:42).

Congregational Worship participant. We must not give up meeting together because this is a practical way to encourage one another (Hebrews 10:25).

Involved in loving ministry. God has given us a gift to be used to minister to others (1 Timothy 4:14).

Practical knowledge and application of Scriptures. Mature believers are well grounded in God's Word and can distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:14).

Living sacrifice. Giving God our bodies is our true and proper worship (Romans 12:1). In Luke 9:23 this is described as denying ourselves and taking up our cross daily.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit and prayer. The Holy Spirit gives power to be Christ's witnesses (Acts 1:8) and leads believers (Galatians 5:18). The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (James 5:16).

Shares Christ with others. Committed believers work in God's harvest field (Matthew 9:38).

Major on the Fundamentals

The fundamental faith builders are prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). The Bible provides nourishment, direction, and values. Disciples must hear (Romans 10:17), read (1 Timothy 4:13), study (2 Timothy 2:15), memorize (Psalm 119:11), meditate on (Psalm 1:2) and apply it (James 1:22). Teaching these disciplines is an important part of mentoring.

Prayer demonstrates our dependence on God. Its primary motivation isn't to *get* something, but to *become* more like Jesus. We must teach believers to play all the keys on the instrument of prayer, including exalting God for who he is and what he has done; trusting in Jesus, no

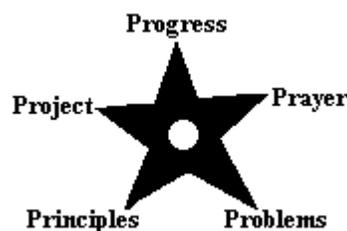
matter what; acknowledging their sins; surrendering to God and His purpose for their lives; thanking Him for what He has done; and asking Him to supply what we and others need.

Choosing Someone to Mentor

Unless you've discovered how to recycle your hours, you can only mentor one person at a time. That'll take about twelve months. Choose someone who is faithful, available, teachable, spiritually hungry, accountable, and open to change. Such a person does assigned tasks and studies the Scriptures on his/her own.

Mentoring is intensely relational. That's why men should mentor males, and women, other females. We don't need to add fuel to the fires of sexual temptation through the emotional closeness developed by mentoring someone of the opposite sex.

What to Do



The gist of mentoring is spending two hours a week with an individual emphasizing five areas. The first four (Progress, Principles, Problems, and Prayer) will consume an hour and the Project will consume another hour.

1. Progress – Check whether the assigned lesson has been completed, the assigned verses memorized, and at least five chapters/week read in the New Testament. Lead the way by doing all these yourself. Lovingly confront when assignments aren't completed. Cease mentoring those who won't do assignments. You can use the *31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity* material to mentor.

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

2. Principles – Communicate biblical principles through the following sequence:

1. *31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity* – Assign one lesson/week for 31 weeks. When you meet, answer any questions.

2. *Life's Ultimate Question* – Assign one lesson/week for six weeks. Answer any questions. This book is available at <https://www.freechristianleadershipresources.com>.

3. Problems – Listen to his/her problems and suggest biblical solutions. Don't try to project perfection. Be real. Everyone has problems. If you want him to share his, you must share yours. There are no whole people. Show how to glue God's promises to problems. Beware of fostering spiritual dependence.

4. Prayer - Prayer will bond you to the person you're mentoring. Over the twelve months of the mentoring relationship, as you pray together, you'll be demonstrating how to pray.

5. Practical Projects – Go together in witnessing, ministry, and encouraging others. This is the best way to develop ministry skills in another. The temptation is to tell others what they should do without showing them how. Show believers how to do something with their faith.

Use the Spiritual Journey Tracker to chart spiritual progress. Enter the date the person you're mentoring begins or completes each, as applicable. If there are items you as a mentor haven't completed, work on them while you mentor someone else. You can't lead others where you haven't been!

Spiritual Journey Tracker

___ Has assurance of salvation

___ Knows how to deal with his/her sin

___ Has been baptized

___ Participates in Lord's Supper & Feet-washing

___ Reads, applies the Scriptures, and prays at least 5 days/week

___ Memorizes and meditates on Scripture regularly

___ Regularly participates in a small group

___ Attends worship regularly

___ Knows how to be filled with the Holy Spirit

___ Demonstrates fruit of the Spirit

___ Has joined the church

___ Faithful steward of time, talents and treasures

___ Has shared the gospel with a non-Christian

___ Has shared 3-minute personal faith story with a non-Christian

___ Has led another person to faith in Christ

___ Has read the New Testament

___ Has read the Old Testament

___ Ministers to others based on passion, temperament, and spiritual gifts

___ Mentors someone else



What's God's message to you in this lesson?

What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?

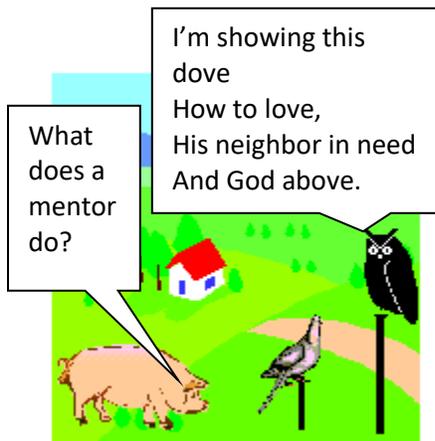
31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity



Share your action plan to make those changes.

Memory Verse

2 Timothy 2:2 - And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.



Literature Cited

1. Paul D. Stanley & J. Robert Clinton, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992), p. 115.
2. Waylon B. Moore, *Multiplying Disciples*, (Missions Unlimited, Tampa, Florida 1981), pp. 16-17.

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Spiritual Passion

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.



Share your progress carrying out your “Mentoring” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

Who Wants to Make a Difference?

Are you satisfied to live and die without leaving a ripple on the pond of life? I didn't think so! You want your life to count for something (unless you're very unusual), but it's unlikely your schoolwork or job will fulfill that desire. In fact, you probably don't even *like* your homework or job! We aren't talking *tolerate* here, we're talking *like*. **Has your job or schoolwork given you any sense of significance? Explain.**

A Vital Part of an Eternal Plan

God's game plan for history includes you. You are a starter on His team. You're probably not the quarterback, but you have an important role. On God's team the cheerleaders are as important as the “stars.” Their encouragement is responsible for many wins that would otherwise be losses. God has a purpose for everything and everyone. His lineup contains no designated pew potatoes, spectators, or critics. God is serious about receiving a return on the gifts He has given you (Matthew 25:14-30). **Do you have any idea what Jesus wants you to do now? What?**

God created geese for water, deer for forests (and suburban backyards!), groundhogs for fields (and gardens!), squirrels for trees (and bird feeders!), and hawks for the skies. He made you to extend his Kingdom on earth (Matthew 6:10). As He gave special skill, ability, and knowledge to Bezalel and Oholiab to build

the temple (Exodus 31:1-6), He has hardwired *you* with talents, desires, and abilities to build His church! He's depending on and expecting you to use them to serve Him.

Bodybuilding Equipment

Paul compares the church to the human body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Each part performs a necessary function. Coordinated effort brings maximum results. Sprinters wear spiked shoes on their feet but need ears to hear the starter's gun. Public speakers need a brain and tongue that function under pressure. Kidneys can't make a three-point shot with a basketball, but good luck to your hands if your kidneys haven't been filtering blood for the last two weeks!

You need to find your place in the body of Christ and *work together* with other believers. In the process you'll experience deep satisfaction (and sometimes frustration!). Hang in there.

You are part of God's “bodybuilding” equipment. He has resourced you with spiritual passion, spiritual gifts, and an appropriate temperament, so you can contribute to the health and growth of the church. These three complement each other. In this lesson you'll identify your spiritual passion. The next two lessons will help you discover your spiritual gifts and temperament.

Spiritual Passion Defined

Spiritual passion is a valuable guide to the “body-building” ministry to which God is calling you. Spiritual gift inventories are a recent development. For over 1900 years no such tools existed. The key has always been need and passion. Your ministry is where your desire to serve intersects the needs of the church and world. The key question is, **“What do you really want to do for Jesus?”** What makes the spiritual wind chimes of your heart sing? What drives you? What are you internally motivated to do? What excites you? What fulfills you? If

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your ministry is consistent with what gives you the most joy and what you're born to do, you'll experience rich fulfillment through it.

I experienced a strong desire to teach the Bible long before a spiritual gifts inventory told me I had the gift of teaching. An inventory measures our passion for specific areas of service. Ministry desire is from God and is present in every believer.

Passion-Driven Ministry

Many Christians carry the mistaken notion that whatever they want to do for Jesus couldn't *possibly* be what God wants. They think what He has in mind must be painful, obnoxious, distasteful, and the very last thing they want to do. According to this logic, if my passion is to teach elementary-aged kids in my church in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, God probably wants me to evangelize AIDS victims in southern Africa. Not so!

Our spiritual passion is like a flashing arrow pointing toward our ministry. "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." (Philippians 2:12-13). God constantly expends His unlimited energy to make you spiritually fruitful. He gives you the desire and ability to accomplish His will. He gives spiritual passion. Paul's passion was to present every man fully mature in Christ (Colossians 1:28). He wrote, "To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me" (Colossians 1:29).

Passion Points towards Your Ministry

Some persons prefer to work with people, some with things and others with information. A friend, who attended seminary with me, excelled in Hebrew and Greek. He spent a year as a pastoral intern in Idaho, and, in the

process, discovered his passion *wasn't* pastoral ministry. He prefers to work with information. In 1982 he joined Wycliffe. Since then he has translated much of the Scriptures into the language of the Quechua in Peru. He relates with people but primarily works with information. He is touching thousands for Christ in a ministry in which his desires and the world's needs meet.

Your passion might change as you mature. In 1995 my passion was discipleship. In the early 2000s another passion came alongside it—helping churches become healthier.

You may have a strong desire to work with infants, young children, Junior High, Senior High, young adults, adults, or the elderly. Perhaps you're highly motivated to help singles, couples, or young families. The church's task is to fulfill the Great Commission, motivated by love for God and others, and powered by prayer. Every ministry is a piece of the bigger picture of fulfilling the Great Commission. **What do you want to do more than anything for Jesus Christ that will help make more and better disciples?**

One practical way to discover your passion is to consider a list of all the ministries your church offers and a description of each. **If your church doesn't yet have such a list, developing one should be a priority.** In general, the list includes ministries of the word and practical service. Which ones are most attractive? God might be giving you a passion to begin a ministry that isn't yet on the list. Your pastor would probably love to hear about it. The following list was adapted from "New Providence Church of God Ministry Opportunities." **First, put a check in front of all that appeal to you, even though your church might not yet have these ministries. Second, review the ministries you've marked, and circle the four ministries of greatest interest.**

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Ministries

Christian Education: __ Nursery Attendant __
Preschool Teacher __ Elementary Teacher __
Middle School Teacher __ High School Teacher
__ Young Adult Teacher
__ Adult Teacher __ Teacher Training Instructor
__ Discipleship Training
__ Discipleship Training Coordinator
__ Mentoring Ministry __ Teach Home Bible
Studies for Believers __ Department Director
__ Christian Education Director __ Vacation
Bible School Teacher __ Vacation Bible School
Helper __ Vacation Bible School Director
__ Pioneer Club Worker (Youth Work) __
Pioneer Club Leader __ Camp Ministry
__ Library/Resource __ Help Place Others in
Ministry __ Children's Christmas/Easter
Program Director __ Children's
Christmas/Easter Program Worker __ Develop
Leaders in the Church

Worship: __ Song Leader __ Choir Leader (adult)
__ Choir Leader (children) __ Choir member __
Instrumentalist (__ Orchestra
__ Band __ Piano __ Organ __ Keyboard)
__ Vocalist (__ Worship Team __ Soloist)
__ Worship Leader __ Songwriter
__ Drama (__ Director __ Player
__ Scriptwriter __ Costumes) __ Public Scripture
Reading __ Public Prayer
__ Speaking/Preaching __ Usher
__ Worship intercessor (Praying during service
outside of sanctuary) __ Junior Church Director
__ Junior Church Worker __ Parking Lot Greeter
__ Inside Greeter __ Answer Newcomers'
Questions

Communications/Media: __ Artist __ Printing
__ Photographer __ Audiovisual Technician
__ Sound Technician __ Calligraphy
__ Preparing Teaching Aids __ Desktop
Publishing __ Reporter to Newspaper __ Send
Bulletins to Absentees __ Phone Absentees
__ Mail Cards

Building/Grounds: __ Custodial Services __
Lawn Care __ Color Plantings (Spring/Fall) __

Painting __ Carpentry __ Plumbing __
Electrical __ Mechanical __ Carpet Cleaning __
Roofing __ Locks/Security __ Snow Removal
__ Trim Shrubbery __ Weed

Outreach: __ Visitation (__ Hospital __
Prospective Members __ Nursing Home __
Prison __ Homebound __ Grieving) __ Feed
the hungry __ Evangelism (__ Individual __
Group) __ Evangelistic Home Bible Study (__
Host __ Leader) __ Counseling (__ Spiritual __
Psychological __ Grief __ Substance Abuse __
Financial __ Premarital __ Marriage) __
College Campus Ministry __ Benevolent
Ministry __ Missions __ Greeting Newcomers
__ Outreach to Singles __ Servant Evangelism
Project Coordinator __ Servant Evangelism
Participant __ Evangelism Training Coordinator
__ Evangelism Trainer __ Evangelistic Event
Coordinator __ Social visits to Church Visitors
__ Evangelistic visits to Church Visitors __
Coordinate Sports Ministry Outreach __
Organize Seeker Sunday School Classes/Small
Groups __ Coordinate "Defending the Faith"
Ministry __ Help Others Communicate Their
Personal Testimony Effectively __ *Alpha* Course
Coordinator __ *Alpha* Course Leader __ *Alpha*
Course Host __ Lead Recovery Group __ Youth
Outreach Leader __ Youth Outreach Worker __
Entertain unbelievers __ Show Evangelistic
Videos

Social and Hospitality: __ Social Program
Planner __ Banquet Coordinator __ Food
Preparation __ Cleanup after Church Dinners
__ Light Refreshment Service __ Decorating
__ Host for Guest Speakers __ Lodging for
Missionaries __ Retreat Planning __ Serve at
Hospitality Table
__ Sports Event Planner __ Provide
Transportation __ Coordinate funeral dinners

Youth Ministry: __ Lead Discussions __ Direct
Projects __ Direct Recreation __ Bible Quizzing
Coach

Intercession: __ Pray for the Lost by Name __
Pray for Church Leaders by Name __ Pray for

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Church Members by Name ___ Pray for New Believers by Name ___ Pray for Missionaries by Name

Other: _____

Now that you've reviewed the list of potential ministries, define your spiritual passion in 25 or fewer words:



What's God's message to you in this lesson?

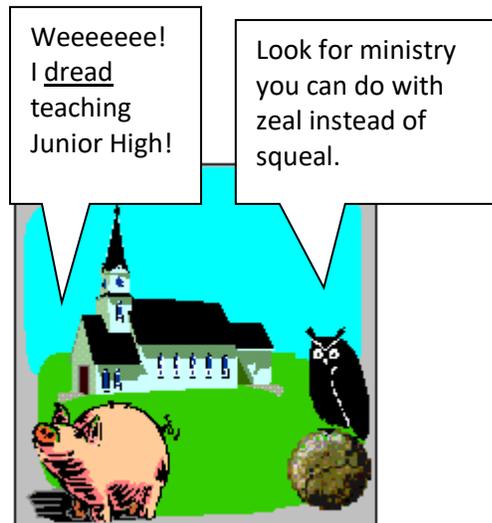
What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes.

Memory Verse

Romans 12:11 - Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.



31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Spiritual Gifts

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.



Share your progress carrying out your “Spiritual Passion” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

Getting the Drift of Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual gifts are God-given abilities to serve Him. The Holy Spirit distributes them to believers as He chooses (1 Corinthians 12:11). They’re different from the natural and acquired abilities that unbelievers also possess. Natural and acquired abilities in athletics, art, music, business, accounting, advertising, agriculture, architecture, computer science, cooking, electronics, engineering, auto repair, industrial arts, marketing, craftsmanship, medicine, and acting, among others, are also useful in God’s service. Christ died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again (2 Corinthians 5:15). God gives all believers gifts, abilities, and resources to be used to glorify Jesus Christ.

Interdependent Ministry

There’s no single spiritual gift that all believers possess. In 1 Corinthians 12:29-30 Paul asks, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?” The expected answer to each of these questions is, “No!” The distribution of spiritual gifts demonstrates that the parts of Christ’s body, the church, are interdependent.

Your Church Needs Your Gift(s)

Every part of the human body contributes to the well-being of the whole. No parts are unneeded. None are independent. The same

truth applies to the church. You have at least one spiritual gift to build up the body of Christ (1 Peter 4:10, 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11). Ministry is every believer’s business.

Jigsaw Ministry Placement

When putting a jigsaw puzzle together, we experiment to find the right fit. Lend a helping hand in many areas of service, especially in those in which you have the greatest interest. This is how you’ll discover the ministry that best fits your passions, gifts, and temperament.

Make the Most of Your Gift(s)

Don’t expect your gifts to bless the socks off others the first three minutes after they’re unwrapped. No one jumps into the water for the very first time and sets a world record in the 400-meter freestyle. God gives some infants Olympic-caliber swimming potential, but their first strokes would suggest otherwise. Discovering and developing your gifts is a process that takes time. It starts when you “get into the water.”

Fruitful ministry = God-given gifts & desire + Comfort-zone stretching faith + Training + Effort.

Primary and Supportive Gifts

The spiritual gifts mentioned in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 28 and Ephesians 4:11 can be divided into primary and supportive gifts. Primary gifts are prophecy, teaching, helps, giving, administration, encouragement, leadership, mercy, evangelism, shepherding, and hospitality. Supportive gifts include apostleship, discernment, faith, healing, interpretation, knowledge, miracles, tongues, and wisdom. The following test covers only primary gifts.

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Primary Gifts Definitions

Prophecy - The ability to declare God's Word clearly with power and conviction.

Teaching - The ability to understand God's Word, and feed others spiritually by explaining and applying it.

Helps - The ability to recognize and humbly and joyfully meet practical needs so that spiritual ministry can take place in and through those who are helped.

Giving - The desire and ability to give with joy and cheer more than 10% of income to further God's kingdom.

Administration - The ability to humbly exercise authority and to organize God's work.

Encouragement - The ability to comfort and encourage others and challenge them to act.

Leadership - The ability to set goals to fulfill God's mission for the local church.

Mercy - The desire and ability to serve others cheerfully through kind, loving deeds.

Evangelism - The ability to lead others to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord with unusual consistency.

Shepherding - The ability to lead, feed, and guard a group of believers.

Hospitality - The cheerful ability to provide a warm, accepting, loving home environment, perhaps including lodging and food, for believers who need it.

Measuring Your Ministry

Perhaps you already have a ministry. Does it fit your spiritual passion, gifts, and temperament? If it does, you should be growing in Christ, motivated to serve, seeing spiritual fruit, helping others grow in Christ, experiencing

fulfillment, feeling good about your contribution, and affirmed in your ministry by others. Do you feel like you're in the right place? __ Yes __ No

Finding Significance through Ministry

The following spiritual gifts inventory will help you who aren't presently involved in any ministry to find your niche. Powered by the Spirit of God, you can make a significant contribution. You might never become a familiar name in the larger Christian community, but your eternal impact can be greater than you'd ever imagine!

Spiritual Gifts Inventory

Circle the bullet at the beginning of each sentence that describes you. Then record the number of circled bullets in each group in the Spiritual Gifts Inventory Chart on p. 114-115.

Group 1 (Bullets Circled = __)

- People tell you that you "step on their toes" when you share the Word.
- You are open and honest about your shortcomings.
- You are persuasive.
- You are often blunt.
- You speak and act without fearing the consequences.
- You freely express your opinions.
- You are dominant in relationships.
- You confront others with the truth.
- You readily take the initiative in doing things.
- You relate the Scriptures to everyday life when you share them.

Group 2 (Bullets Circled = __)

- You research to determine if statements others make are true.
- You enjoy organizing details and facts.
- You decide based on facts.

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- When you don't know what a Scripture passage means, you're motivated to find the answer.
- You enjoy studying.
- When you teach the Scriptures, people tell you they are blessed.
- You are not influenced much by personal feelings or opinions.
- You are self-disciplined.
- You work at understanding God's Word, people, and the culture of those to whom you communicate the Word.
- You enjoy teaching and applying God's Word.

Group 3 (Bullets Circled = __)

- You excel at meeting the physical needs of people.
- You judge the value of service by the amount of appreciation received.
- You are a behind the scenes, small details person.
- You dislike public recognition.
- You are loyal.
- You are easygoing.
- You want to be liked and accepted by others.
- You are shy in public.
- You get involved in too many activities.
- You don't feel worthy to be a spiritual leader.

Group 4 (Bullets Circled = __)

- You invest money wisely.
- You don't want recognition for giving.
- You are sensitive to financial needs that others don't recognize.
- You aren't receptive to emotional appeals.
- You are conscientious.
- You give gifts that have lasting value.
- You have an emotional attachment to the work you support.
- You wrestle with how to respond to a multitude of appeals for money from many sources.
- You try to enlist others to join you in giving.

- You are willing to live on less so you can give more to further God's work.

Group 5 (Bullets Circled = __)

- You know how to subdivide the task into manageable parts.
- You excel at organizing, coordinating, and delegating work.
- You encourage, motivate, and inspire others to join the team to achieve the goal.
- You are a detail person.
- Your work is thorough and careful.
- You are calm and objective.
- You are good at seeing the big picture and how each part relates to the whole.
- You develop strategies to achieve goals.
- You are frustrated by disorganization.
- You mobilize resources to accomplish the goal.

Group 6 (Bullets Circled = __)

- You approach truth logically.
- You want others to decide now.
- You can relate to those unlike you.
- You are tolerant.
- You feel for those who are hurting.
- You emphasize the positive.
- You have a strong faith.
- You are committed to helping people become fully devoted disciples by showing the necessary steps.
- You get pleasure from supporting the weak and stabilizing the unstable.
- You challenge and rebuke others, so they'll grow spiritually.

Group 7 (Bullets Circled = __)

- You are motivated to set goals.
- You can "see" what things will be like when the goal is accomplished.
- Others look to you for input about a matter before they decide.
- You can make others want to reach a goal.
- You intentionally set an example for others to follow.
- You influence others to be all God created them to be.

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- You have confidence.
- You use common sense.
- You are a practical person.
- You keep pursuing the goal even when others disagree with or oppose you.

Group 8 (Bullets Circled = __)

- You enjoy visiting those in nursing homes, helping the homeless, working in a foodbank, etc.
- You are patient.
- You put up with a lot from others.
- You are not very decisive or firm.
- You show your love to others by giving them things to meet their needs.
- You have a faith that stabilizes your life.
- You attract the emotionally and spiritually hurting and meet their needs.
- You thrive on deep friendships.
- You don't have a very good self-image.
- You desperately want to remove other people's hurts.

Group 9 (Bullets Circled = __)

- You excel at leading people to open the door of their heart to Jesus.
- You frequently share with others the difference Jesus has made in your life.
- You are burdened by the plight of lost people.
- You relate well to others.
- You are good at sensing the spiritual condition of others after a brief conversation about spiritual things.
- You can share the gospel clearly.
- You are confident that sharing the gospel will provide a solution to people's problems.
- You develop relationships with unchurched persons.
- You have a desire to see new believers become part of a local church.
- You are interested in finding answers to the questions critics of the faith ask.

Group 10 (Bullets Circled = __)

- The spiritual progress of others energizes you.
- You are usually calm.
- You hurt with the hurting.
- You put up with the quirks of others.
- You desire a close spiritual relationship with others.
- You often give in to what others want.
- You desire to model the truth.
- You usually have patience with others while they are developing spiritually.
- You often deny yourself to help others.
- You get upset at the attempt of cults to lead astray those to whom you minister.

Group 11 (Bullets Circled = __)

- Providing food and shelter for someone in need energizes you.
- You see visitors as sent by the Lord.
- You see your home as a center for ministry.
- It's easy for you to talk to strangers.
- You are blessed by ministering to those who can't return the favor.
- You feel comfortable around all kinds of people.
- New people in the church are attracted to you.
- You are more concerned with using your home to bless than to impress others.
- You make a special effort to talk with people who are alone.
- You can make strangers feel comfortable around you.

Spiritual Gifts Inventory Chart

Record the total number of circled bullets in each group. Then place numbers 1-3 after the three highest scoring gifts.

Group 1 _____ (Prophecy)

Group 2 _____ (Teaching)

Group 3 _____ (Helps)

Group 4 _____ (Giving)

Group 5 _____ (Administration)

Group 6 _____ (Encouragement)

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Group 7 _____ (Leadership)

Group 8 _____ (Mercy)

Group 9 _____ (Evangelism)

Group 10 _____ (Shepherding)

Group 11 _____ (Hospitality)

My spiritual gifts are:

1.

2.

3.



What's God's message to you in this lesson?

What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes.

Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 12:7 – Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.



31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Temperament

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Share your progress carrying out your “Spiritual Gifts” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

Tuned to Touch Lives

God designed your temperament to harmonize with your spiritual passion and spiritual gifts. Someone whose ministry is confrontational evangelism takes the initiative in sharing the gospel with others. He/she also takes the initiative in completing other kinds of tasks not related to evangelism, because that’s characteristic of the personality God gave him/her. Some believers have a heart to love, respond to, and serve unbelievers and point them toward the One who placed that love in their hearts. They love to serve people, period. God wired them with that nature.

Interdependent Temperaments

No personality type is superior to another. All types are necessary to accomplish God’s work in your church. Each of us has influencing strengths and weaknesses based on our temperament and revealed by how we relate to tasks and people. A “people-person” isn’t very fulfilled doing detail-oriented administrative tasks behind a desk all by herself. A task-oriented individual might enjoy that same job. We maximize our influence on others for Christ when our ministry environment fits the strengths of our temperament. God doesn’t require those He’s gifted to pitch baseballs to kick footballs! Your temperament fits your ministry!

As we shall see, Directors are gifted at formulating your church’s mission and goals. Promoters excel at pulling people together to

accomplish the mission and goals. Helpers respond to Directors and Promoters to do the work necessary to fulfill the mission and achieve the goals. Perfecters make sure everything is done right.

Discovering Your Temperament

Here’s how to determine your temperament. In each group of four descriptions, put a **3** in front of the characteristic that **best** describes you, a **2** in front of the next best description of you, etc., down to a **0** in front of the one that is the **least accurate** description of you. Each group of four descriptions will have exactly one **3**, one **2**, one **1** and one **0**. Answer based on how you see yourself **at work** or **at school**. If you don’t work outside the home or go to school, answer based on how you see yourself **at church**. For example, Joe Smith fills out the first group of four descriptions as follows:

- 1 a. Take the lead in beginning tasks
- 0 b. Take the lead in meeting people
- 2 c. Respond to people
- 3 d. Help others complete tasks

Joe **MOST** likes helping others complete tasks, so he put a 3 in front of “d” He hates taking the lead in meeting people, so he put a 0 in front of “b” because that is **LEAST** like him. Joe also likes to respond to people but not quite as much as he enjoys helping others complete tasks, so he marked “c” as a 2. He dislikes taking the lead in beginning tasks but is more likely to do that than to take the lead in meeting people, so he marked “a” with a 1.

Number each of the 16 groups of four items from the one that describes you **best** (3) down to the one that is **least** like you (0). Each of the 16 groups of four should have one 3, one 2, one 1, and one 0.

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Group 1

- a. Take the lead in beginning tasks
- b. Take the lead in meeting people
- c. Respond to people
- d. Help others complete tasks

Group 2

- a. Love a challenge
- b. Like public recognition
- c. Calm
- d. Strive for perfection

Group 3

- a. Get results
- b. Seek others' approval
- c. Relaxed
- d. Make and follow the rules

Group 4

- a. Enjoy arguing
- b. Friendly
- c. Good listener
- d. Say things just right

Group 5

- a. Play to win
- b. Fun-Loving
- c. Patient
- d. Remember information

Group 6

- a. Work on many projects at once
- b. Fear losing face/social approval
- c. Excellent at completing projects
- d. Can figure out complex problems

Group 7

- a. Brave
- b. Persuasive
- c. Helpful
- d. Detail-Oriented

Group 8

- a. Take chances
- b. Make friends easily
- c. Give in
- d. Expect best of myself and others

Group 9

- a. Speak freely
- b. Look on bright side
- c. Logical
- d. Like planning/organizing

Group 10

- a. Determined
- b. Outgoing
- c. Steady
- d. Safety-Conscious

Group 11

- a. Poor listener
- b. Care-Free
- c. Family-Oriented
- d. Precise

Group 12

- a. Quick temper
- b. Talkative
- c. Loyal
- d. Shy

Group 13

- a. Like to change things
- b. Likeable
- c. Think before speaking
- d. Avoid risks

Group 14

- a. Want control
- b. Disorganized
- c. Hard on myself
- d. Want many explanations

Group 15

- a. Do it my way
- b. Lose things
- c. Want peace
- d. Want to be right

Group 16

- a. Speak before thinking
- b. Like to dream
- c. Hard to say, "No."
- d. Fear criticism of my work

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Adding Your Scores

Add up the totals of all the a's (in Groups 1 through 16), all the b's, c's, and d's and record them in the **Temperament Analysis Sums Chart** that follows. The total of the a's, b's, c's, and ds added together, should be **96**. If not, check your addition.

Temperament Analysis Sums Chart

1. Total of a's in Groups 1-16 _____
 2. Total of b's in Groups 1-16 _____
 3. Total of c's in Groups 1-16 _____
 4. Total of d's in Groups 1-16 _____
- Grand Total _____

If Grand Total isn't 96, recount.

Record the sums that correspond to each temperament name. The highest total is your dominant temperament, the next highest is your second strongest, etc.

- ___ Director (a's)
___ Promoter (b's)
___ Helper (c's)
___ Perfecter (d's)

Check (x) your dominant temperament. If two are tied for the highest, check both.

Director ___ Promoter ___ Helper ___ Perfecter ___

Temperament Strengths/Weaknesses

Exploring the strengths and weakness of your dominant and secondary temperaments will help you understand yourself better and point you toward the ministry that God has designed for you. Studying the descriptions of temperaments unlike your own will improve your understanding of and relationships with others. Just because people aren't like you doesn't mean there's something wrong with them!

Only some of the strengths or weaknesses that follow under a description of your dominant temperament will fit you. That's because your personality is a combination of usually two and

sometimes three major temperament parts in varying proportions. The description of your dominant temperament should fit you better than any of the others, but strengths and weaknesses of other temperaments may also fit. To get a more complete picture of how you're wired, **underline any strength or weakness that applies to you in the following descriptions.**

Directors

Strengths

Directors are take-charge individuals who excel at starting tasks. They love challenges and want to be in the middle of the action. They thrive on accomplishing what no one else can. Like a coyote locking its eyes on a rabbit, they pursue a goal until they achieve it.

Directors lead boldly. Their decisions aren't influenced by their emotions or fear of possible consequences. If you need a job accomplished, assign it to a Director, and it will get done. The Apostle Paul had the temperament of a Director.

Directors take risks that "play-it-safe" temperaments wouldn't even consider. They can play a valuable role in leading the church to step out in faith into risky ministries that are beyond the comfort zones of other temperaments.

Weaknesses

Directors quickly become impatient when life isn't going their way. They hate wasted time and probably get upset when they miss one panel of a revolving door!

Directors aren't in touch with the feelings of others because productivity has a higher priority. In their single-minded, pedal to the metal focus on their goal, they run over the "rabbits" and "opossums" with whom they work or whom they supervise. The office is

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strewn with “road-kill.” Their bottom line is results, and they’re pushy to get them. Directors are a lot more productive than they are popular, but that doesn’t bother them.

Directors are poor listeners. Since they hate wasting time, they want others to get directly to the point. When communicating with Directors, start with the bottom line, and then, only fill in those details they request.

In conflict situations Directors push the control pedal to the floor. They insist that things be done their way, and that they be done now.

Directors would be more effective if they focused on patiently listening to and supporting people, worked at being less controlling, and gave people a higher priority than productivity.

Promoters

Strengths

Promoters excel at inspiring and influencing people and getting them involved. They make super salespersons. They lean heavily on their verbal skills to accomplish this. One church took teenagers to a movie, *Left Behind*. The majority of the 26 teenagers who attended came because of the invitation of one of the youth leaders who is a Promoter.

Promoters are warm, outgoing, and personable. They like to have fun and rush from one exciting activity to the next. People naturally are attracted to them. They make friends easily.

Church planters who are Promoters or Directors see their churches grow by their fifth anniversary to twice the attendance of those planted by Helpers or Perfecters. Why? Perhaps, because Directors take the initiative with tasks and Promoters with people, whereas Helpers respond to people and Perfecters respond to tasks. Taking the initiative pays big dividends in church planting.

Promoters’ emotions swing more widely than any other temperament type, running from

peak to valley to peak. They tend to be good speakers because of their verbal skills coupled with their passion and enthusiasm for the subject. They enjoy being on stage, in the spotlight, and in front of people. They stir the emotions of their audience. They value public recognition and approval. The Apostle Peter was a Promoter.

Weaknesses

Promoters tend to make snap decisions without considering all the facts or consequences. Peter denied Jesus without considering the impact on the remainder of his life. Promoters’ decisions, based more on intuition than facts, sometimes get them and others into trouble.

Promoters tend to be overly optimistic. They see a silver lining in every approaching cloud, even if it’s a funnel cloud!

Follow through can be a problem. They don’t always do what they so enthusiastically recommend to others. They start projects with great enthusiasm, but often don’t finish. Uncompleted projects in and around their homes bear testimony to this characteristic.

At times they use their considerable verbal skills to manipulate and take advantage of others. Some Promoters are adept at using words to paint a picture of reality that benefits them.

The response of Promoters in conflict is predictable. Like cornered animals, they attack. Verbal bullets are fired in a machine-gun barrage at the source of the irritation.

Promoters would be more effective if they focused on results, facts, possible consequences of their decisions and follow through.

Helpers

Strengths

Helpers build relationships and get along well with others. Having close relationships with others is important to their emotional health.

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They value peace and harmony. They're loyal to the core. When things aren't going well in a church, and people begin to leave, Helpers will stay until the bitter end.

Helpers are the best communicators of the four temperament types because they *listen* as well as they talk. They make great counselors.

Expressed appreciation motivates Helpers to keep on serving. If you're a Helper, you already know that. If you're not, make sure that the Helpers in your church know that you appreciate them. Don't drag them in front of the congregation for public recognition. Promoters love that, but Helpers don't. Send cards, give them a call, or tell them privately how much you appreciate them. That will keep their motors humming!

Helpers are dependable, steady, and reliable. Emotionally they live on the plains, with few emotional peaks or valleys. Abraham was a Helper.

Helpers ask others for input before they make decisions. This leadership style can be a strength or weakness depending on how quickly the decision needs to be made. On one hand, people affected by a decision feel they have some say. On the other hand, a Helper's desire for peace and harmony often prevents his making a decision that would benefit the majority, because it would upset a few people.

Weaknesses

Helpers aren't comfortable initiating tasks or relationships with people. Although they would make a faithful friend for unchurched persons who are looking for friends, they rarely risk the first step to form the relationship.

Helpers are very resistant to change because of the security old ways and forms provide. They faithfully support the status quo in churches. It is difficult to convince them why, for example, a change in musical style in the church would help to reach more people. If the music was

good enough for Great Grandpa Smith, it's good enough for them!

In conflict situations, to promote peace and harmony, Helpers give in. Those who serve on church councils vote for a proposal even though they really don't favor it. The vote is unanimous. They don't voice their opposition at the meeting but might in the parking lot. Their "yes" doesn't always mean "yes." They won't support the proposal with their time or money.

Helpers are hard on themselves and often have low self-images and little self-confidence. They hate to disappoint, so they don't say no to requests. As a result, they often serve in too many areas to do an adequate job in any one of them. Meanwhile, resentment smolders because they don't like the jobs they agreed to take, and perhaps, because they don't feel very appreciated in those roles.

They'd be more effective if they cared less about what others think of them, didn't cave in during conflict, learned to say no to others' requests, and initiated more.

Perfecters

Strengths

Perfecters love details and facts. They're solemn, thoughtful, thorough, organized, and accurate. Their strong motivation to do things right is the distinguishing characteristic of this temperament. If they don't have time to do a job properly, they won't do it at all. They're extremely careful and safety conscious. They work hard and don't quit when the going gets tough. Engineers, surgeons, and pilots typically are Perfecters. Moses is a biblical example.

Perfecters value making and keeping rules. They drive in the right-hand lane and would be embarrassed to dust to receive a speeding ticket.

Perfecters respond to tasks. They aren't people-persons. Their social skills are often

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underdeveloped. They walk past others without saying hello because their mind is turning over how to do some task perfectly.

To encourage Perfecters, praise their **work**, not them. That will motivate them to keep serving with all their heart.

Weaknesses

Like the other three temperaments, the weakness of Perfecters is their strength out of control. Perfecters waste time trying to make everything perfect. The volume of their work is limited by their fear of making mistakes. They need a mountain of evidence before they decide. Of all temperaments, they're most sensitive to criticism.

Perfecters avoid conflict. The problems they ignore often fester and become more serious.

Perfecters are critical of themselves and others. They are difficult to live with because their expectations are so high. Their child or spouse often feels that pleasing them is impossible. Perfecters take great pains in everything and give them to others!

Perfecters would be more effective if they emphasized doing right things as much as doing things right, made decisions before every possibility of error was eliminated, risked more, and worked harder on building relationships.

What have you learned about yourself from this lesson?

What have you learned about others?



What's God's message to you in this lesson?

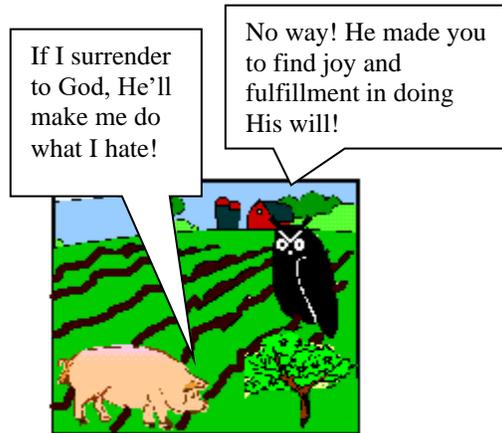
What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes.

Memory Verse

Isaiah 64:8 – Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.



31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Stewardship

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Share your progress carrying out your “Temperament” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

Reading a Borrowed Book

In February 2001, I borrowed a book from a co-worker. He told me I could read it, but he wanted it back when I was finished. Typically, when I read my own books, I underline important ideas. By contrast, I didn’t make a single mark in the borrowed book, because he’d entrusted it into my care. It was his, not mine. I was merely a steward of it while I was reading it.

Living a Borrowed Life

In the first century a steward cared for the material goods, property, or children that belonged to a superior. He could use them, if he chose, for his own benefit. If called upon, however, he had to explain how he’d carried out his duties. His continuing employment depended on his faithfulness (Luke 16:1-13).

Jesus speaks as a superior in Luke 12:42 and implies that you’re managing His resources while He’s absent. He didn’t purchase you to just eat, drink, be merry, and play with your toys until He calls you home! You represent *Him*. Wow!

You belong to the Lord (Romans 14:8). You don’t hold the “title” to yourself. You were bought at a price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) -- the blood of Jesus (Revelation 5:9). The intended result of God’s purchase is that you’ll live for Him (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). **Share ways that huge idea could radically alter your 24/7 life.**

Who’s the Boss?

Wise managers settle the ownership issue. Until Jesus’ name is on the title deed of your life, you have *no* chance of being a faithful steward. You and everything you have comes from Him. The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it (Psalm 24:1). Since *everything* is His, you’ll have to give account of its use to Him. **Based on how you spent your time, money, energy, and abilities this last week, whose name was on the title deed most of the time?**

Mine __ **Jesus’** __

Stewardship with Zip

The Parable of the Bags of Gold, Matthew 25:14-30, illustrates both good and bad stewardship. A man going on a journey entrusts bags of gold to three servants. The first receives five; the second receives two; the third receives one. Each receives money according to his ability (v. 15). God expects more from those who have been given more. The biblical principle: “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:48). **How does this principle apply to the stewardship of your time, talents, and treasures?**

Each bag contains the modern equivalent of \$360,000.00!¹ It isn’t a Christmas present. The giver expects a return on his investment. The giver of these bags of gold represents Jesus (v. 14). The servants represent us.

The man going on a journey returns after a long absence. His servants give an accounting of their stewardship. The first two are equally faithful even though one had received five bags and the other two. Each has doubled the number of bags of gold he initially received. Each receives the same words of praise. Both are called good and faithful servants and put in charge of many things (Matthew 25:21, 23). Both are invited to share their master’s

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happiness. **Based on this parable, how will those who are faithful stewards of all God has given be rewarded?**

Sinking Stewardship

The third servant returns to his master what he's been given. He doesn't add to it at all. Hego successfully protected it against loss and probably thinks he did a commendable job. His master isn't pleased because he expects a return on his investment (Matthew 25:26-27). The servant is punished. He loses the bag of gold he has been given and is thrown into the darkness where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:28-30). **Based on this parable, what does God expect from you?**

Facets of Stewardship

God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). You are a steward of all the gifts He's given you. Some day you'll have to explain how you've managed each one. Many believers think stewardship concerns only dollar signs. It's much bigger than that. You're responsible to manage faithfully your *whole life* including:

Spiritual gift(s) (1 Peter 4:10-11)--You're responsible to manage the spiritual gifts you listed on p. 114-115, which are

Within the next two weeks ask you pastor how you can use your spiritual gifts to minister to others.

Gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:4) -- Suppose your intelligent cousin tells you how to cure all kinds of cancer shortly before he dies in an auto accident. The news of that cure is too good to keep to yourself! The gospel is the only cure for sin. It's selfish to keep it to yourself and tell no one even though you know many with the disease will foolishly choose not to take it! Prepare to share the message as effectively as possible. That includes developing your

personal testimony. Look for opportunities to share the difference Christ has made in your life with your unchurched or unbelieving friends, relatives, and neighbors. You will benefit from reading books such as *How to Give Away Your Faith* by Paul Little and *More than a Carpenter* by Josh McDowell.

Words (Matthew 12:36) -- Well-chosen words build up; careless words tear down. To stop the flow of "razor-edge" words, you need to think differently about people whom you cut with those words. Praying every day for God to bless them will change your attitude toward them and the way you speak to them.

Think about the situations in which you most often speak words and display attitudes that don't represent Jesus accurately. **Specifically, how can you increase your wise words and decrease your foolish ones in these situations?**

Giving (2 Corinthians 8:7) -- Giving is one way to thank God for His grace. Matthew 25:35-36 describes various types of giving including food, drink, clothing, hospitality, medicine, time, and money (Mark 12:41-44).

One way to meet needs in the aforementioned areas is to support a child through an organization like World Vision. Another is to participate in relief efforts in areas of the world touched by natural disasters. A third is to give to local projects that meet basic human needs. A fourth is to meet the basic needs of those who are part of your church fellowship.

How to Give

1. Proportionately. The freewill offering was to be given in proportion to the Lord's blessings (Deuteronomy 16:10). The Lord expects much from those who've been given much (Luke 12:48). Jesus commended a poor widow for giving all she had to live on (Luke 21:1-4). Sacrificial giving, not the size of the gift, impresses Jesus

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2. **Cheerfully.** God doesn't want you to give reluctantly or under compulsion. He loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).
3. **Generously.** The generous giver realizes that everything he has comes from God's hand (1 Chronicles 29:14). The one who sows generously will reap generously (2 Corinthians 9:6).
4. **Regularly.** Supporting the ministry of your church isn't like going to the movies where you only pay when you attend. Paul told the Corinthian believers to set aside on the first day of every week a sum of money in keeping with their incomes (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Blessings of Giving

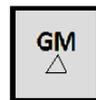
- God promises that faithful managers of material resources will reap generously. He will always bless them abundantly so that at all times and in all things, they will have all they need and be able to abound in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:6, 8). **How would you put that promise in your own words?**
- God awards credit for giving (Philippians 4:17) and presumably rewards those who do so.
- A generous person will prosper and be refreshed and blessed (Proverbs 11:25, 22:9).
- God promises those who give him 10% of their income that He'll pour out so much blessing that they won't have room enough for it (Malachi 3:10).
- By the same measure you use to give, it will be measured to you (Luke 6:38). If you give cents, you'll receive cents. If

you give dollars, you'll receive dollars, etc.

- God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

Share your plan to be a good steward of the resources God has entrusted to you:

1. **Spiritual Gifts -**
2. **Gospel -**
3. **Words -**
4. **Giving -**



What's God's message to you in this lesson?

What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes.

Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 4:2 – Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.



1. www.ask.com
> [Q&A](#) > [Society](#) > [Religion and Spirituality](#)

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Love

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Share your progress carrying out your “Stewardship” action plan.

Share one God-message from your devotional time since we last met.

The Greatest of These

1 Corinthians 13, the “love chapter,” concludes, “And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.” Biblical love isn’t a feeling or an emotion, as much as a *decision*, whatever the cost, to live to benefit others.

Retiring to “Motherhood”

Elizabeth was a seamstress who had never married. She worked in the capital city of her state in a store that sold top of the line fashions for women. She was within a year of retirement. Then the unexpected happened. Her youngest brother’s wife died from complications from surgery at the age of 37. Her brother was left with five young children.

Elizabeth’s decision was as swift as her skilled hand with a needle. With only one year remaining before she could retire, kick back, and enjoy the fruit of her many years of labor, she made a very costly decision. She didn’t wait for her brother to ask (which he was going to do). Elizabeth packed up her belongings and moved into his home to help raise his five children and care for her elderly mother who was living with her brother.

Her second career was *far* more difficult than her first—but much more fulfilling. She wasn’t a very skilled cook initially, but she learned by trial and error in the kitchen of the home she had often visited on weekends. Without any prior experience, she suddenly assumed

responsibility for five children ages one, three, two sevens, and thirteen, and for her 86-year-old mother. All this at the age of 64!

She didn’t just give up her job for these children. She daily poured out her love sacrificially by expending her energy and time even though the kids were too immature to grasp the price she was paying. She suffered through their frequent fights, impudence, defiance, and childish ways, because she loved them. There were many days when she probably felt like repacking her things and moving back to a less stressful life. She didn’t. For more than 20 years she gave those boys the best of her time, talents, and energy. Before she died, she arranged for her extremely modest financial resources to be divided among them. Amazingly, at the end of her life, she didn’t feel spent, used, and taken advantage of. She would have done it all over again. I write these words with tears, for I’m one of the five.

Elizabeth’s life demonstrates the costly love to which Jesus has called every believer. Often, we do a better job of talking love than showing it. We’re like the fourth-grade class that sent a letter to their teacher who was at home recovering from surgery. The card read, “Your fourth-grade class wishes you a speedy recovery—by a vote of 15 to 14.”

Gospel in a Word

Why is loving others so important? Jesus summarized in 24 words the 951 pages of the Old Testament resting on my desk (Matthew 22:35-40). He said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.... Love your neighbor as yourself.”

God loves *you*, so— love Him and others. It’s not complicated. That’s your purpose! The principle is second grade simple. Practicing it consistently is rocket-science hard. Loving others as a way of life, even when they offend, criticize, and hurt us, is contrary to the way we

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run our affairs as CEO of our own lives. As a boy my payback principle was, “If you hit me once, I’ll hit you *at least* twice, and both punches will be harder than yours.” Returning *love* for punches (physical and verbal) is so contrary to my nature that it’s impossible unless I allow God to love others through me. For that to happen, I must surrender my will and plans to His. **How consistently do you love others who’ve hurt you? What’s the secret of whatever success you’ve experienced?**

More like the Master

When God loves us, He’s just being Himself. He provides the resources we need to love as He does! He promises to carry to completion the good work He started in us (Philippians 1:6) and to continue to work in us to will and act to fulfill His good purpose (Philippians 2:13).

Jesus told us to love others as He loves us (John 13:34) and to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). His love-standard is attainable. It requires stretching, but we can do it. Loving others is clearly His will. He commanded it. Stephen was loving his enemies when he said, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:59, 60).

We can obey it by claiming the promise of 1 John 5:14-15. If, by faith, we ask God to enable us to love others as He does, He will. He keeps His promises! His plan is to make us just like Jesus (Romans 8:29) as His Spirit controls us and loves others through us. The fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22).

After the Civil War began, sugar became scarce. Some persons boiled down the juices pressed from watermelons to make syrups and sugars. When it comes to love, substitution is popular. Human love is tinged with self-interest, is shallow, and easily extinguished. It’s conditional and fixed on some admirable quality in the one loved. **What happens when we try to substitute human love for divine love?**

Misdirected Love

A temptation we face daily is directing our love toward things that enslave rather than free us. Misdirected love causes more damage than misdirected bullets. Under its control, we waste our lives feeding a Heinz 57 variety of addictive substitutes for God. We’re shaped by what we love.

Contrary to Jesus’ command to love God and others first, we love to be honored and thought important (Matthew 23:6). We love the things money can buy (Luke 16:19-25). We love praise (John 12:43). We love ourselves and money (2 Timothy 3:2). We love pleasure (2 Timothy 3:4).

The greatest miracle God does in us isn’t giving us faith to heal the sick or raise the dead. It’s transforming us into persons who consistently love like Jesus!

Actions Demonstrate Love

Fearing the Lord, walking in all His ways, serving Him enthusiastically and observing His commands are all associated with love in Deuteronomy 10:12-13.

Agree or disagree: Every sin is a failure to love either God or man, and probably both. Defend your answer.

Go with the Flow

What does God’s love look like as it flows through us? It motivates us to:

- cover others’ wrongs (Proverbs 10:12).
- discipline our children (Proverbs 13:24)
- give God our best (Malachi 1:6-11)
- pray for our persecutors (Matthew 5:44-45)
- get personally involved in helping others become “clean” (Luke 5:13)
- practice forgiving and giving instead of judging/condemning (Luke 6:37-38)
- meet the needs of the hurting (Luke 10:27-37)

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- love other believers as Jesus does (John 13:34-35)
- obey Jesus' commands (John 14:21)
- lay down our lives for our friends (John 15:12-13)
- feed Jesus' sheep (John 21:15-17)
- sincerely hate evil and cling to good (Romans 12:9)
- be patient, kind, not envious, boastful, or proud (1 Corinthians 13:4)
- not be rude, self-seeking or easily angered (1 Corinthians 13:5)
- take no delight in evil but rejoice with the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6)
- unflinchingly protect, trust, hope and persevere (1 Corinthians 13:7)
- never fail (1 Corinthians 13:8)
- sacrifice for our wives and feed and care for them as our own body (Ephesians 5:25-29)
- entertain strangers (Hebrews 13:2)
- remember prisoners and the mistreated (Hebrews 13:3)
- honor marriage vows (Hebrews 13:4)
- stay free from the "cling" of things (Hebrews 13:5).

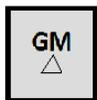
so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."



Practical Application

As you reflect on the dimensions of love, which three will you pick to work on now?

Develop a practical strategy for each of the three.



What's God's message to you in this lesson?

What underlying attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?



Share your action plan to make those changes.

Memory Verse

John 13:34-35 – "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you,

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Spiritual Health Inventory

These free Christian leadership resources may be duplicated but not sold.

0 = rarely/not at all; 1 = sometimes; 2 = usually; 3 = almost always/always

Please respond to each statement honestly with the number that best describes you (0, 1, 2, or 3)

___ I look forward to reading the Bible daily.

___ I look forward to spending time with God in prayer daily.

___ I daily deny myself by offering God my body to use as He desires.

___ I forgive, pray for, and ask God to bless those who have hurt me.

___ I spend at least four hours each week feeding my spiritual life and serving God by serving others.

___ Using my gifts and abilities to serve God through a specific ministry in my church gives me joy.

___ I generously and cheerfully support the Lord's work financially.

___ I daily allow God to love others through me.

___ Each week I could write at least one way I loved my neighbor as myself.

___ Each week I could write at least one way I loved another believer as Jesus loves me.

___ I promote the gospel by praying for the salvation of lost persons by name, living a Christ-centered life, praising God enthusiastically in our worship service, giving financially to support evangelism, and being prepared to share my hope in Christ with others

who ask about it.

___ I look forward to and attend the worship service every week.

___ Weekly, I actively participate in at least 1 small group (includes Sunday school)

___ Gratitude motivates me to serve God.

___ I feel a deep need for God's grace every day.

___ I balance speaking the truth and speaking it with love.

___ I give regularly to meet the needs of the poor.

___ I am helping one or more other people become more like Jesus.

___ Total score

Average Discipleship Index = total score divided by 18

My Average Discipleship Index =

My Average Discipleship Index at the beginning of this book was =

Final Challenge: You can make an eternal difference in others' lives by starting your own 31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity group. Who will you invite to join it?

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Devotional Journal

Matthew 8

For each chapter write any questions you have, what most impressed you, and things you need to apply to your life (speech, thought-life, actions, attitudes and relationships).

Matthew 9

Matthew 1

Matthew 10

Matthew 2

Matthew 11

Matthew 3

Matthew 12

Matthew 4

Matthew 13

Matthew 5

Matthew 14

Matthew 6

Matthew 15

Matthew 7

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Matthew 16

Matthew 23

Matthew 17

Matthew 24

Matthew 18

Matthew 25

Matthew 19

Matthew 26

Matthew 20

Matthew 27

Matthew 21

Matthew 28

Matthew 22

Mark 1

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Mark 2

Mark 9

Mark 3

Mark 10

Mark 4

Mark 11

Mark 5

Mark 12

Mark 6

Mark 13

Mark 7

Mark 14

Mark 8

Mark 15

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Mark 16

Luke 7

Luke 1

Luke 8

Luke 2

Luke 9

Luke 3

Luke 10

Luke 4

Luke 11

Luke 5

Luke 12

Luke 6

Luke 13

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Luke 14

Luke 21

Luke 15

Luke 22

Luke 16

Luke 23

Luke 17

Luke 24

Luke 18

John 1

Luke 19

John 2

Luke 20

John 3

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John 4

John 11

John 5

John 12

John 6

John 13

John 7

John 14

John 8

John 15

John 9

John 16

John 10

John 17

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

John 18

Acts 4

John 19

Acts 5

John 20

Acts 6

John 21

Acts 7

Acts 1

Acts 8

Acts 2

Acts 9

Acts 3

Acts 10

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Acts 11

Acts 18

Acts 12

Acts 19

Acts 13

Acts 20

Acts 14

Acts 21

Acts 15

Acts 22

Acts 16

Acts 23

Acts 17

Acts 24

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Acts 25

Romans 4

Acts 26

Romans 5

Acts 27

Romans 6

Acts 28

Romans 7

Romans 1

Romans 8

Romans 2

Romans 9

Romans 3

Romans 10

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Romans 11

1 Corinthians 2

Romans 12

1 Corinthians 3

Romans 13

1 Corinthians 4

Romans 14

1 Corinthians 5

Romans 15

1 Corinthians 6

Romans 16

1 Corinthians 7

1 Corinthians 1

1 Corinthians 8

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

1 Corinthians 9

1 Corinthians 16

1 Corinthians 10

2 Corinthians 1

1 Corinthians 11

2 Corinthians 2

1 Corinthians 12

2 Corinthians 3

1 Corinthians 13

2 Corinthians 4

1 Corinthians 14

2 Corinthians 5

1 Corinthians 15

2 Corinthians 6

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

2 Corinthians 7

Galatians 1

2 Corinthians 8

Galatians 2

2 Corinthians 9

Galatians 3

2 Corinthians 10

Galatians 4

2 Corinthians 11

Galatians 5

2 Corinthians 12

Galatians 6

2 Corinthians 13

Ephesians 1

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Ephesians 2

Philippians 3

Ephesians 3

Philippians 4

Ephesians 4

Colossians 1

Ephesians 5

Colossians 2

Ephesians 6

Colossians 3

Philippians 1

Colossians 4

Philippians 2

1 Thessalonians 1

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

1 Thessalonians 2

1 Timothy 1

1 Thessalonians 3

1 Timothy 2

1 Thessalonians 4

1 Timothy 3

1 Thessalonians 5

1 Timothy 4

2 Thessalonians 1

1 Timothy 5

2 Thessalonians 2

1 Timothy 6

2 Thessalonians 3

2 Timothy 1

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

2 Timothy 2

Hebrews 1

2 Timothy 3

Hebrews 2

2 Timothy 4

Hebrews 3

Titus 1

Hebrews 4

Titus 2

Hebrews 5

Titus 3

Hebrews 6

Philemon

Hebrews 7

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

Hebrews 8

James 2

Hebrews 9

James 3

Hebrews 10

James 4

Hebrews 11

James 5

Hebrews 12

1 Peter 1

Hebrews 13

1 Peter 2

James 1

1 Peter 3

31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

1 Peter 4

1 John 3

1 Peter 5

1 John 4

2 Peter 1

1 John 5

2 Peter 2

2 John

2 Peter 3

3 John

1 John 1

Jude

1 John 2

Revelation 1

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Revelation 2

Revelation 9

Revelation 3

Revelation 10

Revelation 4

Revelation 11

Revelation 5

Revelation 12

Revelation 6

Revelation 13

Revelation 7

Revelation 14

Revelation 8

Revelation 15

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Revelation 16

Revelation 17

Revelation 18

Revelation 19

Revelation 20

Revelation 21

Revelation 22