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# 31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

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## **Introduction**

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.

Working through *31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity* will help us become more like Jesus and equip us to help others do the same. We were born again to reproduce spiritually.

It is our God-ordained purpose. No other life achievement is as fulfilling.

We will be reading a topic weekly at your meetings, for example, Assurance of Salvation, discussing it, and applying its truth to our lives. Between meetings, we will be reading a chapter a day in the New Testament beginning with Matthew.

I suggest writing what you are learning in a Devotional Journal. At each meeting, we share what we learned through our devotional reading. That helps us be accountable for daily reading and applying God's word.

Becoming more like Jesus requires...

## **Life**

Corn grows but pictures of corn do not. We received spiritual life from God when we repented of our sins and received Jesus Christ as our 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)

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### The Bible



God speaks to and nourishes us through the Bible. It is part of every healthy Christian's daily diet.

It is written, not to inform but to transform you. With each topic, we'll ask ourselves, "What is God's Message (GM) to me?"

### Time

A zucchini can mature and bear fruit in 37 days. Christian maturity takes much longer. We can influence others for Christ immediately, 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, we'll ask ourselves, "What is My Action Plan (MAP) to respond to God's message to me (GM)?" Someone should hold us accountable for doing it.

That is why this book is called *31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity*. When we hold others accountable, and they do the same for us, we all benefit.

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### **Sacrifice**

As disciples of Christ, we cannot afford to dedicate our lives 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 we’ll make (and the most rewarding) every day is to die to our desires. Nothing less frees us up to live by Jesus’ agenda rather than our 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 us to make us grow and help others do the same.

### **People**

God uses more mature believers to teach and model the truth to us, so we 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 2:2).

We need a more mature believer to meet us regularly to discuss and model these lessons and help us grow and reproduce spiritually. Before we finish this book, we 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 is a Pod?**

A pod is a group of 4–9 disciples of Jesus committed to being honest with, encouraging, challenging, and holding 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).

Not everything in the leader’s life is worth imitating. We copy the part that is like Jesus. That makes being a spiritual model for others achievable. Leaders do not have to be perfect to bless others.

#### **Expectations**

Jesus focused his ministry on making disciples. Since we are imitating Him, the expectation is that we’ll start our pod in six to twelve months. Disciples make other disciples because that is what Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19).

Perhaps we cannot see ourselves leading a pod. By ourselves, we are right, but we are not by ourselves! God will do it through us. Others in our pod who are leading pods can also help.

We’ll discover that discipling others is God’s spiritual fertilizer to accelerate our spiritual development. It is like maturing more quickly once we become a parent and are responsible for someone else!

Attendance at pod meetings is a priority. The pod meets weekly for 60–90 minutes at an agreed-upon place and time.

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

The new focus is sharing GMs and MAPs from our devotional times and holding one another accountable to follow through. Our original pod will also be a resource to address challenges that arise as we disciple those in our pod.

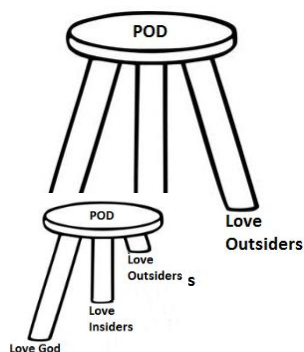
### **Mission**

The mission is a key part of every pod. Part of making disciples is reaching out to demonstrate God's love to those still outside His Kingdom.

Discipleship is the power plant for outreach. We seek 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. We tend to be weak in at least one of the three dimensions.

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Being unbalanced greatly diminishes the flow of God's power through us. Part of our 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.



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\_\_\_ 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 people 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 (including 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 =

Do not 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*. We'll take the same inventory after completing the book.

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The hope is that we'll see considerable progress. Discipleship is not about raising our spiritual truth IQ. It is about increasingly living in a way that pleases God.

### **1. 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 is gone forever. God's truth-twisting opposition markets that idea. Life continues beyond our death certificate, and we can KNOW you have it!

Assurance of salvation frees us to forget about ourselves and give ourselves to others. Instead of worrying about our eternal destiny, we 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 say yes? Why?**

#### **Know So Faith's Foundation**

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

In Revelation 3:20 Jesus promises to come into our life if we invite Him to enter it. He did not add any other conditions. He did not say He

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*might* come into our lives or He would think about coming into our lives.

He promised that if we open the door of our 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 cannot lie.

Lying to you would ruin His entire reputation! He has more to lose than we do!

### **Eternal Life Is....**

When Jesus comes into our life, He brings eternal life with Him. John 5:24 describes that life as a present possession. Those who hear Jesus' words and believe in His promise to forgive those who repent and believe the gospel HAVE eternal life.

Eternal life is more than an endless existence. It is a spiritual heart transplant from Jesus.

It brings a higher quality of life than we have 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 is just being Himself. His life in us enables us to be like Him.

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### **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 almost sprayed for athlete's foot under my armpits one sleepy morning!

The gasoline in my trunk cannot fuel the engine. I wasted my money.

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 will not 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 in God's promises and ACTS on them. Trust God's character and promises, not in our feelings. Jesus promised to come in. He did.

### **A Trustworthy Object of Faith**

In April 1977 I went ice fishing at Cormorant Lake in Minnesota. It was about a 50-mile drive. When I arrived, I saw a two-foot ring of water between the shoreline and the ice on the lake.

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First, I was disappointed. Then I was mad. Then I was stupid! I had come so far; I did not want to go back without fishing.

I did not 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. With enough faith to venture onto it, it will support us.

On the other hand, great faith in ¼-inch-thick ice will not prevent us from breaking through it. It is not how much faith we have, but where we place it.

Is it in a trustworthy object? Faith is the foundation for knowing Jesus is living within us. 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 is not arrogant because 1 John 5:13 says God wants us to know we have eternal life. A know-so faith is His will for us. He does not want us to settle for anything less.

### **Five Vital Signs of Jesus' Life in You**

The unique quality of Jesus' life within us reveals itself by several vital signs. The first sign is the Holy Spirit's presence in our life (1 John 4:13).

The Holy Spirit testifies with our human spirit that we are God's child (Romans 8:16). Do we have a new voice within that assures us that we belong to God? Every follower of Jesus hears the same voice.

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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 our goodness to make us 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 parents issued unique commands. Yours did the same. I belong to them and live according to their values so as not to bring disgrace to the family name.

Jesus' commands shape us to become like Him. When we WANT to become like Jesus, obeying Him is not 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

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- 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?**

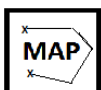
If you *are not* sure but would like to be, you must **repent** (Be willing to turn from sin and self-centered living to God) and **believe** that Jesus Christ, God's Son, died on Calvary's cross in *your* place, was buried, and rose again the third day.

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.



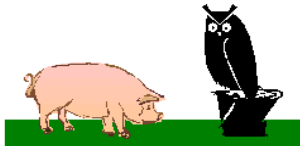
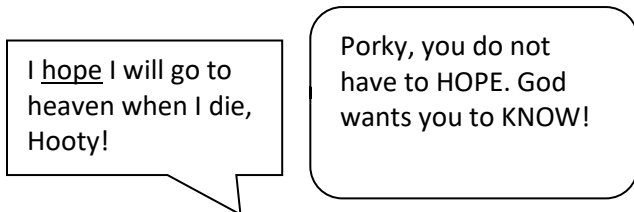
**What is God's message to you in this lesson? What attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?**



**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.



## 2. God-Shaped Living

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**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. They channel years of time, money, and energy to win the prize. Their pursuit of the gold medal shapes how they live.



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Unless we intentionally organize our life rhythms around God, when He asks us on Judgment Day what we have accomplished for the Kingdom, we will 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 we allow God to shape how we use our 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 our lives will disrupt our existing routines. We cannot become more like Jesus while doing what we have always done! To become better, we must do something different.

We will be tempted to look for an easier way and talk ourselves into thinking we do not 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).

We define rest as what energizes and recharges us while honoring God. If we are extroverts, we will spend at least some God-shaped rest time with many people. If we are introverts, we recharge best alone or with just a few people. **How does your relationship with God shape your weekly rhythms (successes and failures)?**

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Be patient. Making our daily and weekly life rhythms more God-centered takes time. That will include balancing our time with God, our 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

We will probably have to discipline ourselves to go to bed and get up earlier to create space for God to speak into our lives 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 we are not morning people, we must discipline ourselves to spend time with God when we are 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 answers to his prayers.

Daniel risked his life to pray to God (Daniel 6: 7–10). His fear of the Lord freed him from all other fears.

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.

Let us seek God as earnestly as a thirsty person seeks water in the desert (Psalm 63:1). Let us seek Him with all our heart and soul, and we will find Him (Deuteronomy 4:29).

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Let us draw near to God and He will draw near to us (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 remains attached to the vine to bear fruit. To be spiritually fruitful, we must maintain vital contact with Jesus through our devotional life. 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?**

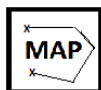
**When are you most alert and best able to seek God earnestly? Where can you meet with Him without interruption?**

### **What to Do**

We read our daily Scripture portion. A study Bible such as *The Life Application Bible* helps us understand the passage's background, meaning, and how to apply it. We write down in a devotional journal what impresses us most and a personal application. We pray about all that concerns us (Philippians 4:6–7).



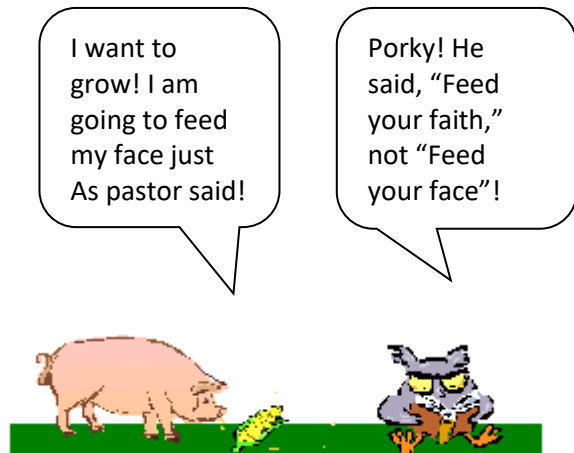
**What is God's message to you in this lesson? What attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?**



**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.



### 3. Being the Church

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**Share your progress carrying out your "God-Shaped Living" action plan.**

**Share one God message from your 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 would not have to go to church. Within a day or two, I BECAME sick! Was it a coincidence? Was God teaching me a lesson? Let us say I only did that ONCE!

GOING to church is not the same thing as BEING the church. Fans of Jesus go to church, but Jesus is not looking for fans.

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He is 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.

Looking forward to attending worship services is NOT a good predictor of whether we are Jesus' followers or just His fans. Fans and followers both look forward to worship services. Being the church is a lot more than attending worship services regularly.

If we are new believers and have never or rarely gone to church, attending worship services regularly suggests we are making significant progress. I say "suggests" because God knows what we do AND why we do it.

Doing the right thing for the right reason is always a challenge. Not every sermon ever delivered glorified Jesus and drew others to Him. A sermon can be a tool to enhance the preacher's glory.

Why we go to worship services is at least as important as the fact that we go. King David rejoiced in being able to go to the Lord's house (Psalm 122:1). It was not 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 do not when we worship Him privately.

In God's presence is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). Worshipping Jesus will bring us 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.

We exalt, honor, and praise God for who He is through our worship services. He deserves more praise than we can generate! We will consider worship 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 not 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? Prestige comes with personal power and position in the church. With what improper motivations do you wrestle?**

Many say they do not attend church because of the hypocrites there who are just pretending they are 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

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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 do not care.

If we contrast what we know as believers with what we practice, we'd have to say hypocrisy is universal. We talk about the faith better than we live it.

That is 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 is not 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 the head.

Being the church is about living interdependently with other believers and dependently on Christ, the head of the church.

We cannot call ourselves a football player unless We are part of a team. Football is a team sport.

We should not call ourselves Christians unless we are part of Christ's church. Christianity is not an individual endeavor. Football players depend on one another to perform assigned roles for the team to be successful. The body of Christ, the church is no different.

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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.

We need the other church members, and they need us (1 Corinthians 12:17–21). We are like an index finger.

The hand (church) cannot function properly without us and we cannot function properly apart from our 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. As believers we share Christ's life with other believers, 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 we 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?



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They dedicated themselves to fellowship, the apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread (Lord's Supper), and 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 being completely humble, gentle, and patient, and bearing with other believers in love (v. 2).

It includes our concerted effort to maintain the unity of the 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 we can by ourselves. The church is like a car, and we, its tire. We find our purpose mounted on a wheel, and the automobile needs us to run properly.

We should not try to live the Christian life alone. We must work with other believers. We can accomplish more together than we can imagine according to the power at work in all of us (Ephesians 3:20).

The Word of God equips us to carry God's life to others. It is living and active (Hebrews 4:12).

Inputting God's word changes how we think (Romans 12:2) so our relationships become increasingly healthy and full of God's life. The church teaches and preaches God's word to build our spiritual muscles and prepare us for works of service (1 Peter 2:2, Ephesians 4:12).

### **Love Flows through the Church**

Love summarizes the flow of life between us and God, other believers, neighbors, and enemies. We demonstrate this love as we use our

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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 believers must meet with other believers (Hebrews 10:25).

We can love other believers only as we associate with and relate to them. Being the church is one way to advertise our allegiance to Jesus to others who do not 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 are like copper wire. God's current life flows through the wires, not the insulation that covers the wires.

We want God's life to flow through us. I know I do. Let us be the church!

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

**What is 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 is God’s message to you in this lesson? What 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.



## 4. Jesus Christ Is Lord

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**Share your progress carrying out your “Being the Church” action plan**

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

### **God with Skin**

A young boy came to his mother and father's 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 is 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 teachings did not 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 demigods. One parent was a god and the other was a human being.

Jesus was not a demigod. His conception was a miracle. Mary was a human, but the Holy Spirit was responsible for her conception.

Jesus is fully God as well as fully man. He is God with skin. To learn more about what God is like, we can look at the accounts of Jesus in the Gospels.

### **Jesus Is the 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 will be right back."<sup>1</sup> It is a novel wish, but it is not 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). The Word became flesh (John 1:14).

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Since He is the Word made flesh, He is 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 the 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).

We cannot believe in God without believing in His Son. God has not left that option open to us. (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 we think differently, we need to reevaluate our definition of sin.

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By contrast, John lived with Jesus as a disciple for more than three years and did not observe a single sin in His life in all that time (1 John 3:5). Peter agreed that Jesus was sinless (1 Peter 2:22). Following me around for fifteen minutes would provide 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. A little needle would click forward every time a person sinned. When the departed saint asked to see the sin meter of one of his best friends on earth, he heard, "O, yes, his sin meter is 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 from the 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 did not 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).

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### **Jesus Is #1**

Years ago, during the Cold War with the Soviet Union, I read that the Russian media covered a contest pitting the Soviets against the United States which the USA won. Here is 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 is our way of proving our worth and making our mark on earth.

Trying to be #1 preoccupies us so we do not give proper worship to the One who is #1. At any moment, the spotlight can be on our accomplishments or Jesus, but not both.

In subtle and not-so-subtle ways we spend much of our life trying to steal the glory that should be His alone. We can add that to our list of sins today! It has made my list more days than I would like to admit.

Colossians 1:15–18 describes Jesus’ #1 status in three 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 the source of its life. He has first place in EVERYTHING (Colossians 1:18).

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Instead of saying, “We are #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 we do what he says (Luke 6:46).

We owe Jesus complete obedience. He is our ultimate boss with authority over every area of our lives.

**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



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



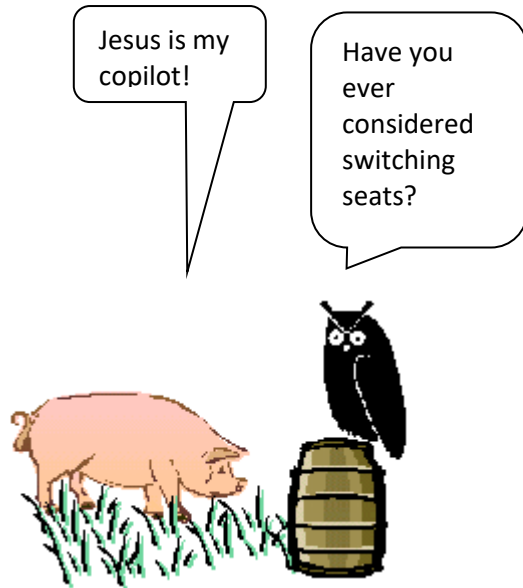
**Share your action plan to make those changes.  
Scripture Memory**



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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.



[1http://www.hlntv.com/article/2013/06/20/james-gandolfini-inside-actors-studio](http://www.hlntv.com/article/2013/06/20/james-gandolfini-inside-actors-studio)

### 5. Obedience

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



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

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

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### **Keep It Simple**

A relationship with God is not complicated. We do not have to dig a hole one thousand feet deep with a teaspoon or climb a ladder 49 miles into the atmosphere to stay on His good side. We need to know what He has said, believe it, and do it. We should not bother exploring other options.

### **Rule #1**

Rule #1 of the Christian life is that God's will takes priority over ours and everyone else's. Sometimes we will hate that rule! It will take a while to adjust to it.

We cannot rationalize our way around it. Our situation is not special. There are no loopholes in Rule #1. There is no higher authority for appeal.

It is hard to follow rule #1 because it challenges our willful desire to be in charge. To obey God, we must die to our agenda (Luke 9:23). That is not hard until we want to go shopping, fishing, or whatever, and God wants us 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 would never have any peace until I obeyed. **Share a situation where following rule #1 would be especially difficult.**

### **Priority #1**

Obedience to God is more important than any other claim in our lives.

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Imagine an elderly woman at Penn State's football game with Michigan. People fill every seat in Beaver Stadium except the one beside her. Someone asks whose seat it is.

She says she and her late husband have been season ticket holders for 35 years, and the seat belonged to him. Why did she not ask a friend or relative to join her? She says, "Are you kidding! They are all at the funeral."

We need that kind of commitment to God. The result of such obedience is eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:9). **What things are more important to you than they should be?**

Belief and Obedience Are Siamese Twins

God has chosen us 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 is 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 is either God or Satan (John 8:31–47).

Not being a slave to anyone is not an option. We cannot live however we want.

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Many are tragically deceived. They think they are calling the tune when they are marching in lockstep with millions of others to the beat of Satan's drums. We serve either sin or obedience (Romans 6:16).

Those who believe in Jesus as Forgiver and Leader evidence that belief by their obedience. God forever connects belief and obedience.

Sometimes in Scripture, we find the word obedience when we would expect the word belief. Hebrews 5:8–9 speaks of Jesus: "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and once made perfect, he became 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 stubborn toward, resists, or disobeys the Son. God connects belief with obedience and unbelief with disobedience. **Can one who does not obey God honestly claim to believe in God? Why?**

Stay Out of Sin's Jaws!

**A four-year-old eats foolish sandwiches and becomes what he eats! When my grandchildren were 4 years old, they already thought they knew more than one 60 years older than they! They do not have a clue what is best for them.**

**That is why they have parents and grandparents to issue commands so they can disobey them! Listening to Daddy makes life go much better for them.**

**Listening to Father will make our lives go a lot better. My grandchildren's behavior is a parable of our relationship with God.**

**God knows it all. He wants What is best for us. 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 are helpless. We are like a salmon, God's kingdom like water, and sin like the bear.**

**God designed us for the freedom of the sea of His kingdom, not the jaws of sin. The choice is ours. God created us to be obedient to Him. Apart from obedience, there is 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 we are under our parents' roof, we do not have to enjoy following their rules. But we do have to follow them if they do not conflict with obeying God.

Our parents gave us life and have done their best to shape it. They are not all-knowing. They make mistakes. They know some things about life out of many, and they know only in part. However, they have significantly more wisdom than we do!

Hopefully, they have learned from their mistakes in life and the mistakes of others. They are trying to protect us from unnecessary pain.

We can choose to walk through a briar patch they tell us to avoid, but we will not emerge without cuts and bleeding. Over the long haul, obeying them will minimize our pain.

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When we are older, we will give our children much the same advice our parents gave us! They learned it from their parents who learned it from their mother and father, etc.

It is a wisdom stored (too often ignored) and passed on through many generations. Ignoring it leaves scars! **Share a personal scar disobedience has inflicted.**

### **Submit to Your Teachers**

**Do you enjoy correction? Do you like someone saying you are wrong? Why?** We instinctively resist correction and discipline (Proverbs 5:12–13), like a cowlick that does not submit to brush or comb.

Correction is the gnat in the eye of our pride. Discipline raises a “yield” sign in the face of our self-will. It is hard to receive, even if we believe the teacher wants the best for us. **How is the “rebellion reflex” really your enemy in 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 like their husbands bridling and riding them. Not so.

Wives are to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22). Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:21–25).

Christ’s self-sacrifice for the church was total! A wife should not complain about yielding her rights to one who sacrifices himself totally for her. A husband not sacrificing himself for his wife should not expect her to yield to him. If he is not obeying God, why should she?

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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 spouses.

The question is no longer, “What is best for me, but What is best for us?”

The husband is the head of the wife. Someone must be in charge. It is God’s design. He knows what He is doing. The husband’s role is not higher or better than the wife’s. He is her self-sacrificing servant-leader. God blesses him to be a blessing to her. **If you are/have been married, share the struggles of making marriage a true partnership.**

### **Submit to Other Believers**

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

Let me share two illustrations of mutual submission. Have you ever stopped at a four-way stop 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 am 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**

We must obey our employer as we would obey Christ (Ephesians 6:5). We must be responsible and demonstrate trustworthiness even if no one is watching. We should not just show up and go through the motions.

We must give our best to the Master. He is always looking. His name is Jesus. We represent and are working for Him. We work sincerely and enthusiastically to glorify Him.

Our boss is not our ultimate supervisor. More than once people have uttered profanity before they found out I was a pastor. After they discovered that fact, they often apologize profusely. My usual comment is, "You do not have to worry about me, It is my boss you have to worry about." **How does working for Christ transform your work?**

### **Submit to Government Officials**

We must submit to rulers and authorities that God has placed over us. (Titus 3:1). If we resist them, we are resisting Him and will be subject to His judgment (Romans 13:1–2). We must obey them unless doing so would cause us 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**



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We must obey and submit to our spiritual leaders because they must give an account of their watch over us (Hebrews 13:17). Their role is to equip us for works of service to build up the church (Ephesians 4:12). We discourage and drain them when we resist them. We encourage and energize them when we submit to and cooperate with them and make their work easier.

If the demands of any of these seven “bosses” conflict with God’s commands, we 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 resigned. **Share an experience when the will of one of the seven bosses was contrary to God’s will for your life.**

### **Obedience Demonstrates Love**

Obeying Jesus’ commands demonstrates that we love Him (John 14:21, 15:14) and 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 we 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 would never have it if I remained where He did not 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 when you did the “right thing” for the wrong reason.**

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### **Obedience Pays Dividends**

The 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 overflow with joy because I had publicly identified myself with Jesus. My level of joy did not depend on whether the person was receptive or not.

God rewards obedience. He promises to answer our prayers (1 John 3:22) because the obedient ask for things that please Him.

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, we will not 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. “Celebrities with herpes” appeared in the search results. I rest my case!

Many celebrities who outwardly have it all, inwardly live conflicted, tumultuous lives. Obedience brings stability, safety, and more satisfaction than being famous (Matthew 7:24–27). Celebrities, if they knew us, would envy us!

As a healthy body results from exercising and eating properly, peace, righteousness, and blessing result from obedience (Isaiah 48:18, Luke

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11:28). The Father loves those who obey Him. He and Jesus make their home with them (John 14:23). We know best those who live with us! We will live forever when the Father and Son live with us (1 John 2:17)!

Persevering obedience is the path to a life that has influence for eternity and produces a spiritual crop (Luke 8:15). Our decision to follow Jesus will often be tested. We must not turn back.

God can and will use our lives in one thousand ways to bring spiritual life and growth to others. Twenty thousand years from now, nothing else will matter. Only what we do for Christ will last. Share specific instances this past week where obeying Jesus has brought personal blessings.

### **Let Us Put Our Hearts 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 fuels our obedience. Love shows its face through wholehearted service (Ephesians 6:7) and gratitude-stoked living for Jesus who died for us (2 Corinthians 5:15).

A newspaper reporter interviewed me. 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 is not about me. It is about helping others prosper. My heart is in it. I come away from practices energized, not drained. That is how it is with Christian service and obedience when our hearts are in it.

### **Application**

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



## 6. Reading Scripture

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



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

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

### Ignorance Is not Bliss

Sin is a prison cell invisible to the naked eye. Most prisoners do not realize their imprisonment. They think they are in charge when they are not. They are a slave to the things that control them.

Many think God’s ways are too restricting and prefer their “freedom.” They are not 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 do not know where your smartphone is? Is the need for constant electronic connection any better than smoking or drug addiction?** If something controls us, we are not in control of our lives? Why?

Reading and *applying* the Bible to our lives is the hacksaw that cuts away, one by one, the jailhouse bars of sin that we have not even recognized as confining us or just accepted as an inescapable part of life (John 8:32). Being set free should be our goal. We should not expect it to be easy.

Some bars seem like soap. We will cut through them very quickly. Others seem like titanium. Years of sawing hardly scratches them.

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It will take years to appreciate fully how much these bars have limited us. We are like a Bengal tiger, born and raised in a cage. We cannot imagine life in the spacious places God created for us. Jesus came to spring us from our cage so we 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 we are a possum in Satan's headlights. Bump-bump. Roadkill for sure! He wants us to be as ineffective as possible if we do not abandon the faith. What other activities compete with your spending regular time in God's Word?

Satan is powerful and subtle -- like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8) and an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). Lions prefer easy prey -- the young, weak, sick, and isolated.

If we isolate ourselves from other believers, we are sticking our chin up and inviting Satan, the roaring lion, to go for our throat. Satan masquerades as an angel of light. While contradicting God's Word, he tries to give wickedness a righteous sheen.

We defeat the devil by reading, studying, and applying God's Word. We should begin with at least ten minutes each day and gradually increase.

**We should start with Matthew. We record our observations and personal applications in a devotional journal. Reading the New Testament within the next twelve months is the goal. Then we should spend the following twelve months completing the Old Testament beginning with Genesis.** How do you feel about the consistency of your time in God's Word?

### **A Guide Dog for the Blind**

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

God directs us through His word. Consistently reading and applying it changes our thinking. It renews our minds (Romans 12:2). It trains us to see life from His point of view.

God sees everything (Hebrews 4:13) and His judgment is vastly superior to ours. He always has all the facts and knows how every circumstance everywhere relates to His purpose for our lives.

### **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 we swallow them like pills ground up and mixed with applesauce. They go down so easily. Few of them are obvious. Not everything we believe is true. The challenge is to separate fact from fiction. God's Word in us 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 our culture tells us the truth is relative. It no longer always applies to all people. Like milk, it takes the shape of its container.

It tells us that one hundred different people's definitions of love are *all* true, even if they contradict one another. Truth is whatever we want it to be. Limits are out. "Freedom" is in. Chaos rides "freedom's" passenger seat! **How does "relative truth" threaten God's absolute moral standards?**

### **The God-Standard**

Truth has departed from the reality standard, but God has not and He is the Judge! People can play word games and conveniently twist the truth. They can ignore or redefine reality as they like, but they cannot escape it or the consequences of their actions. Calling black white and wrong right does not make it so.

On Judgment Day all will have to explain every careless word (Matthew 12:36). God, to Whom we are accountable, knows everyone's secrets (Hebrews 4:13). No one will tell *Him* that truth is relative! To Him the concept of 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 does not make it one."

### **Father Knows Best**

**A commercial said that wearing seat belts in Pennsylvania is not just a good idea—It is the law. Studying God's Word is more than just a clever idea. God puts His stamp of approval on the one who studies His Word to understand it correctly (2 Timothy 2:15).**



I have recommended the Life Application Bible to many. God did not inspire the notes, but biblical scholars who wrote them can consistently help you understand and apply what you are reading. I have read this Bible for my devotions since about 1990. **What help do you use to increase your understanding and application of God's Word?**

### **Programming 101**

Our brains are like a computer with a virus. They do not run according to the manufacturer's specifications. They never did. No one naturally imitates Jesus very well. His life alone was unaffected by the "sin bug" (1 Peter 2:22).

When we repented and received Jesus into our lives, the Manufacturer downloaded an antivirus program into our "computer." That is the new birth. It enables us to read and understand God's truth.

God wants to renew our minds (Romans 12:2). How does that happen? According to 1 Peter 2:2, we are to *crave* pure spiritual milk. May our 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 our minds is not 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 us to enable us to will and act according to His purposes (Philippians 2:13).

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Our part is to program our minds with and act upon God's transforming truth. 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. We need to read God's truth *daily*. A practical way is to set aside at least ten minutes daily to read the Bible and align our lives with it. **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* appeared in 1611. Its elevated language is both beautiful and difficult.

Not everyone agrees on a grade-level designation for various translations or how to calculate grade level. Christianbook.com has published a Bible Translation by Grade Level Chart on its website.

*The King James Version* is grade level twelve, *The New International Version*, seven to eight, *The New Living Translation*, six, and *The Message* four to five.

The Bible is not a magical book. Reading a chapter each day *will not* keep the devil away! He reads more than that himself trying to figure out God's plan! He is always happy to share his misinterpretation of Scripture.

Only the Scripture we understand and *apply* will make us more like Jesus. Simpler is better.

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We should consider purchasing a study Bible. It will help us digest a lot more soul food. I have already told you I have used *The Life Application Bible* for years.

A Bible dictionary and concordance deepen our study. We can purchase them in a Christian bookstore or access them online. Search biblical words at [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) and access a Bible dictionary at [www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/](http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/)

A Bible dictionary provides historical and cultural backgrounds to help us understand the Bible. It explains the Bible's people, places, things, books, and customs.

A concordance lists all occurrences of a biblical word. For example, a complete concordance lists 362 places where “peace” or a form of peace such as “peaceful” occurs in the NLT translation of the Bible (book, chapter, and verse).

The number varies depending on the translation we use. Studying all occurrences of a word helps us understand the teaching of the whole Bible about it. I use [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) for this purpose.

### **Nine Principles to Interpret Scripture**

1. *Let the Bible explain itself.* Matthew 7:7–8 does not guarantee getting everything we ask from God. Other passages, such as James 4:3, describe conditions for answered prayer.

2. *Consider literary forms.* Jesus is the door (John 10:9), but we should not expect a knob and hinges.

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3. *We should look for only one meaning (the author's intended meaning), but many applications.*

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

5. *We 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.

6. *We 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 people 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 is God's message to you in this lesson?**

**What 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.



### 7. Prayer

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



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

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

### **You are in the Army Now!**

During Operation Desert Storm in the early 1990s, the Coalition Forces’ ability to strike targets with uncanny accuracy overwhelmed Iraq. Special Operations Forces had moved undetected deep behind Iraqi lines.

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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 laser prayers 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?**

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

Satan laughs when we fight against him trusting in our resources instead of God's. It is no contest. Apart from a trusting connection with Jesus Christ, we cannot do *anything* to make an eternal difference (John 15:5). Nothing!

Through that connection, we can do everything He asks us to do (Philippians 4:13). Everything! To win spiritual battles, we 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 following Jesus brought to your prayer life?**

### **Two Way Communication**

Prayer is talking *with* God about everything. He is our best friend. The more we communicate with Him, the closer our relationship will be. Let

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us give God a chance to speak. Many days He will 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 is how I knew God wanted me to serve in full-time Christian ministry. The persistent impression would not go away even though I wanted it to in the worst way!

My wanting it to go away demonstrated that I did not fully trust God. If I did, I would have trusted that He knew better than I what was best for me consistent with His plan for my life.

Hearing God's voice should not seem strange. Not everyone has known his/her earthly father, but those who do, know his voice. Similarly, we follow Jesus because we know His voice (John 10:4).

Let us add some quiet moments during prayer for God to whisper to us. That is how we know God's message in these lessons and our devotional time.

### **Vending Machine in the Sky**

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

Give me prayers often ask for unnecessary and harmful things that, like a spider's web capturing a fly, can entangle and imprison us. Request-dominated prayers are not healthy. They are like a guy with 18-inch biceps but legs so weak he cannot walk. One-dimensional prayer does not develop our relationship with God!

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It is okay to ask God for things, but we need wisdom to ask What is best for us. What values drive our requests – our culture’s values or God’s? is

We should put every request on the hot seat and ask ourselves, “Why am I asking for this?” God wants to give us what we ask for when we ask for the right stuff with the right motives. That connects to prayer’s purpose.

### **Prayer is about Changing Us**

Prayer is more about changing us than changing God’s mind about something we 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? Of praying selfishly?**

Prayer helps us get what we need. What we 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**

A growing relationship with God contains the basic ingredients of a healthy relationship with another person. 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.

As a teenager, I never asked my dad for a Corvette. He believed cars are a practical way to get from one place to another, and that is it. He would not buy a Corvette for himself, and he would not 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” to our requests. Sometimes we want things that are not 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 says “no” to protect us from foolish whims. On the other hand, we get everything we ask for when our parents/guardians want us to have it. If we ask Mom to pass the broccoli, it will happen.

The same principle applies when asking for things from our heavenly Father. God’s will might not be flashy or cool, but It is always best for us.

The Bible tells us how God thinks, what He wants, what pleases Him, what He likes and does not like, etc. Knowing the Bible helps us make wiser requests. We learn what God wants by spending time reading His revelation to us. We call it the Bible!

Are we spending at least 10 minutes daily in prayer and Bible reading? To do so, we must designate a regular place and time to meet with God.

We need to schedule time with God daily. Eventually, our 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?**

## 31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

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My challenge is to aim for at least 10 minutes with God daily. Soon we will want to spend more time. If we do not spend time with God, we will not understand the world as it is.

### **PRAYER Time**

Prayer's primary motivation is to become more like Jesus. The acrostic PRAYER will help us 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 has done. Knowledge of both comes from the Bible. Jesus is God's all-sufficient sacrifice for sin. Praising Him is our appropriate response for His crazy love rescue operation (Hebrews 13:15).

It is 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 our 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**

We trust our auto mechanic to fix our 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's promises no matter what. Sitting on a chair is an illustration. We trust the chair will not break and demonstrate that reliance by sitting on it.

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Prayer without faith will not please God (Hebrews 11:6). We trust in Jesus' desire to do for us what is best more than in our wisdom to ask for what is best.

The result is we are OK with God not granting our request. We know we will receive something better.

In Matthew 8:13 Jesus told a centurion He would heal his servant because he believed it would happen. Believing, we will receive whatever we ask for in prayer (Matthew 21:22). That is not a blank check to obtain luxury cars, executive positions, etc. Other verses on prayer qualify it.

Have we ever played a game in which one person falls backward and the other person catches him/her? The one falling backward demonstrates trust in the catcher. **Share when you trusted God to do 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 did not, and it 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 just have to floss the teeth you want to keep!" Without that uncomfortable admission of negligence and the formation of a new habit, I would not have any teeth to floss today.

We must acknowledge the sins of which we are guilty. When we are guilty of offending God, we must confess it (Leviticus 5:5). When we

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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 people for damaged or stolen property or physical injury they sustained. Restitution ranged from 20% more than someone took (Leviticus 6:1–7) to five times it (Exodus 22:1). We should owe no man anything except the debt of love (Romans 13:8).

From God's perspective, we need to pay back those we have hurt more than we took from them. I once lost an old scale used to weigh fish belonging to a fishing guide.

A Northern Pike flopped off the scale's hook while I weighed it. The scale shot off my finger into the lake while I stood mouth agape. The Pike's mouth was open too! I bought the guide 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 our dependence on God. He is God. We are not. He knows What is best for you. We do not.

Let us surrender to Him and His purposes for our lives. Life will go better for us if we do. If we are proud and insist on our way, God will oppose us (James 4:6). We do not want that!

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Many auto wrecks occur because someone failed to yield. 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 we refuse to yield to God, the result could be a “wreck” that injures or kills us. Disobedience brings with it a 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” do not we understand? **Why is it wise to yield to God’s ways instead of following your own?**

God wants total surrender. That includes our 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 our lives (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 our spiritual maturity is increasing gratitude to God for all He does for us. 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. We gratefully desire to please Him. One of the marks of spiritual health is overflowing thankfulness (Colossians 2:6-7).

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We should enter God's presence with thanksgiving (Psalm 100:4). We thank Him for His goodness (Psalm 106:1). We thank Him for everything (Ephesians 5:20). We 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 have 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 we have. An individual I will call Greg (not his real name) was not close to God or an educated person. He was lying in a hospital bed suffering a serious medical issue. When I talked to Him about the Lord, he 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 did not 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 did not make him proud or foolish. Before Dr. Kantzer spoke, someone once introduced him with a glowing tribute.

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He said, "I trust the Lord will forgive him for what he said and will also forgive me if I am foolish enough to believe it."

Dr. Kantzer was both smart and wise. Wisdom is a skill in godly living. Dr. Kantzer personified that wisdom. A wise life is like a God-directed symphony. We make our best prayer requests with God's Spirit guiding us.

God gives us wisdom (James 1:5). He graciously grants it to all who ask Him for it.

We ask God to supply our needs (petitions) and others' needs (supplication). God will grant our request if we ask with the right motives. If He does not, He will give us 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 to perfect His strength in Paul's weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

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

Along with our other concerns Let us pray regularly for:

1. The salvation of at least three acquaintances who do not know Jesus in a personal way.

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2. The purity, protection, and effectiveness of our pastor and the spiritual leaders of our church.

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



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





### 8. 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 was not the murderer. Prosecutors had concealed the evidence that could have set him free. The blood taken from the crime scene was not his blood type. He had a new murder trial and was set free.<sup>1</sup>

Satan, the prosecutor, tries to withhold the evidence that God has done everything necessary to forgive us. He wants to keep us ignorant. He blinds the minds of unbelievers, so they do not 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

God did not purchase our forgiveness at a going out of business, save two hundred people for one dollar special. Jesus experienced an excruciating death on the cross to remove our sins and rose to prove God forgave us. Bloody strips of cloth in a garden tomb about two thousand years ago prove Jesus paid sin’s penalty.

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The Law of Moses required the shedding of blood for forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). Sin is serious! It is a personal affront to a holy God. It is the creature defying his/her Creator. Forgiveness is not cheap. Saying, "I am sorry!" does not 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 cannot take away sin permanently (Hebrews 10:4). Animal blood was a temporary solution pointing to a future permanent solution. The blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross, the willing giving of His life for ours, is the basis of our 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). We do not deserve eternal life. Unlike John Thompson, We are guilty. We have offended God thousands of times.

The good news is that through faith in Jesus' sacrifice, God declares guilty sinners deserving eternal separation from God forgiven. Forgiveness is God's gift to us. Grateful, loving service is our gift to Him and how we worship Him best (Romans 12:1).

By forgiving us, God let go of hard feelings and any effort to get even with us. We are not going to get what we deserve. Our destiny is to enjoy forever the new heaven and the new earth! **How is forgiving offenses different from forgetting they happened?**

### **Just Forgiveness**

A holy, righteous God can forgive our sins and be just because Jesus took our place on the cross. Our sins do not go unpunished. God did not say, “Let us just pretend you never offended me!”

Jesus died in our place for our benefit. He paid the just penalty our sins deserve. Through trust in His sacrifice for us, He separates the consequences of our sins from us as far as the East is from the West (Psalm 103:12). God is not so unjust to demand two payments for the same sins—by Jesus and again by us (1 John 1:9).

Those who refuse to trust in Jesus’ payment for their sins, must pay it themselves. Rejecting Jesus’ sacrifice and considering it valueless is a colossal offense. It is as illogical as rejecting a check for a billion dollars that someone walks three thousand miles barefoot through wildfires and broken glass to present us.

### **Purpose-Driven Forgiveness**

As a result of Jesus’ death in our place, God made us holy (Hebrews 10:10). To rephrase the telephone company’s message, “The person we used to be is no longer in service.”

We have a new assignment. God has transferred us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13). We have a new King! We have a new agenda—God’s plan for our lives.

God making us holy is *not* like driving our grime- and salt-encrusted car through a car wash on a winter day. It emerges clean, and we drive off to the next event on our agenda.

Instead, the grime- and salt-covered car represents our life. The water represents Jesus’ blood that washes away our sins. The car wash’s

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owner represents Jesus who cleans us up, gets in our car, and drives it for the rest of our lives.

We are no longer in charge. We never were! We just thought so when we marched to the beat of the captain of the kingdom of darkness.

We are now set apart from sin for God's use (the root meaning of being holy). Our forgiveness and cleansing do not depend on how many good things we have done (Ephesians 2:9) or our ability to keep God's law (Galatians 2:16), but God's undeserved favor we 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. God can forgive all sinners (2 Peter 3:9), but not all are forgiven. Forgiveness is conditional on repentance, (deciding to go God's way instead of our own, Luke 3:3), belief in Jesus' death in our place (Acts 13:38–39), and confession of our 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 would not send anyone to hell. A holy God would not receive anyone into heaven. Why do you agree or disagree?**

### **Passed on Forgiveness**

I have given Middletown Track and Field athletes "pass it on" throwing shoes or a pass-it-on discus no longer needed. They get a lot of pass-it-on advice I have learned from my personal throwing experience.

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“Pass it on” applies to forgiveness. We must pass God’s forgiveness on to others (Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13). God’s forgiving us depends on forgiving others who have offended us (Matthew 6:14–15).

I am assuming we want God to forgive us every time we sin, without limit. **Is that correct?** If so, we must similarly forgive those who sin against us (Matthew 18:21–22).

God uses even their offenses against us to work for our good (Genesis 50:20, Romans 8:28). We must pass on the same undeserved forgiveness we have received from God to others. **Why is passing on God’s forgiveness to others so difficult?**

### **Why Forgiving Others Is Not Asking Too Much**

The parable in Matthew 18:23–35 concerns forgiveness. The man who owed 10,000 talents to the king represents our sin debt. Today that would be about six billion dollars based on an annual salary of \$40,000.00. We cannot repay our debt.

The man who owed a fellow servant one hundred days’ pay illustrates those who sin against us. Today that would be about \$16,000.00 The sins of others against us are nothing compared to the sins that God has forgiven us. It is appropriate that most of us cannot comprehend how big six billion is (our offenses against God) while \$16,000.00 seems like a lot of money!

God made us spiritually alive in Christ when He forgave us (Colossians 2:13).

Psalm 32:1–2 describes the forgiven person as blessed (fully satisfied). When God has forgiven us much, our natural response is to love Him much (Luke 7:47). That is the intended result of Jesus’ coming to earth to save us from our 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 immorally because he thought the more he sinned, the more forgiveness he would experience. That is stinking thinking! Jesus died for us that we might live a new life for him no longer a slave to sin (Romans 6:1-4).

**Which of the following sins do you need to confess and repent of? Confess each one and claim God's forgiveness using 1 John 1:9. Share several areas of struggle. Be real!**

- I worry
- I do not 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 do not witness for Christ with my life
- I do not witness with my mouth
- I complain, find fault, argue
- I have a critical spirit
- I participate in unholy sex acts
- I eat poorly or do not exercise
- I think of myself as better than others
- I use filthy language or tell off-color jokes
- I participate in yoga, séances, psychic hotlines, horoscopes.
- I do not pay my debts on time
- I use shady business or income tax practices
- I attend church infrequently
- I am not attentive during worship services
- I neglect family devotions
- I pray infrequently

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- I lie
- I lust after members of a different sex
- I lust after people 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?**



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



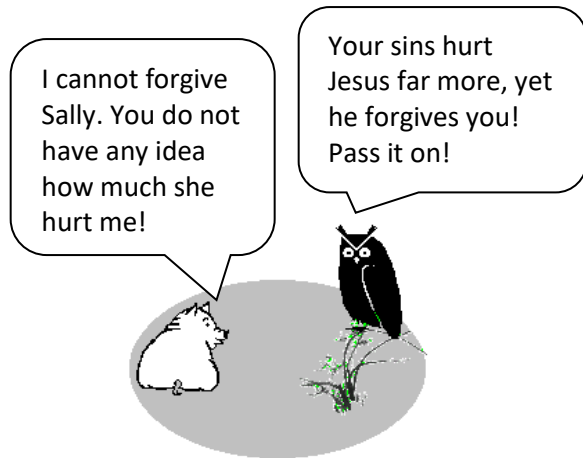
**Share your action plan to make those changes**

### **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.

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

### 9. Scripture Memory

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**Share your progress carrying out your “Forgiveness” action plan.**

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

### Scripture Memorization during the First Century

Between the ages of six and ten Jewish boys during the first century memorized the first five books of the Old Testament. That is more than 5,800 verses. Superior students memorized the entire Old Testament by the age of fourteen. Wow! That puts us to shame. 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 did not carry a copy of God's Word as we do today. The printing press was not yet invented. If they wanted ready access to God's Word, they had to memorize it.

Before the 1990s, only memorizing Scripture enabled instant access to God's Word. Now we have cell phones with Bible downloads. What benefit is God's Word in our hearts rather than on our phones?

### **Access vs. Impact**

Memorizing God's Word increases its impact on our lives. It strengthens our grasp of God's Word significantly. It enables the Word to marinate and tenderize our hearts and flavor us with Christlikeness.

**What two or three people have impacted you the most? Are they people you admire but have not met or people you see regularly? How does that principle relate to the impact of God's Word on your life?**

### **Potential Benefit vs. Actual Benefit**

Scripture memorization should not be an end. It does not prove spiritual superiority. It is a means to an end.

Memorizing God's Word without meditating on it will do you little good. Thinking about what God's Word means, and how it applies to our lives, and putting shoe leather on it gradually transforms us to be more like Jesus. **Why do you think people resist applying God's Word to their lives?**

### **Way off the Track despite the GPS**

In August 2013, I participated in the State Games of America competition in track and field 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 the 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 did not pay close enough attention to those books.

Memorizing Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy did not 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 do not use turn signals know how to drive? Why? How is it possible to have Scripture memorized and still not know it?**

Memorizing the Scriptures is no substitute for understanding them and the power of the 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.

## 31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

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The Sadducees had memorized the words of Exodus 3:6 without considering they refuted their belief that there was no resurrection. Memorizing Scripture is not enough.

### **Ponder Power**

Memorizing Scripture focuses our thoughts on a verse more than merely reading it. Unless your memory is much better than mine, you will ponder a verse as you memorize it. We will do the same when we review it. Why is that significant?

What we think about shapes our lives 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 “whatever” adjectives in Philippians 4:8 describe God’s Word?**

### **Unleashing the Power**

The Holy Spirit uses God’s Word in our hearts in a way He cannot use it on our phones. The Navigator Hand illustrates getting an increasingly firm grasp on God’s Word. It tightens as we progress from hearing it to reading it, studying it, memorizing it, and finally meditating on it. Doing all five, we are 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 us.

How would we feel if we saw our surgeon in the operating room reading *Surgery for Dummies*? When she operates, we expect her to know what to do without consulting a medical book. Memorizing key

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Bible verses gives us confidence. My assurance of salvation springs from 1 John 5:11–13. Doubts are quickly treated One dose of it treats doubts. 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 it to him, he asked if he could see it. He took it, put it in his pocket, and said, “Now, tell me about it.”

He thought that would throw me for a loop. It did not. I had it memorized. Many times, the only resource to minister to others is the Word of God in our hearts.

### **I Cannot Memorize**

I have heard people claim they cannot memorize Scripture. They mean they cannot do it easily. If we know our telephone number, address, Social Security number, and our children's and friends' names, we can memorize Scripture. It may be hard, but we can do it.

Often the assumption is that It is not worth the effort. We have the power to memorize that we may not have tapped. Philippians 4:13 says we can do everything through Jesus who gives us strength. **Does “everything” include memorizing Scripture? Why?**

### **My Scripture Memory Journey**

As a young Christian, I memorized verses using the Navigators’ Topical Memory System. Then I neglected Scripture memory for about 35 years. I returned to it in about 2005 and have continued working on Dr. Waylon Moore’s one hundred verses to memorize.

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Memorization was harder at 55 than at 20, but persistence and ongoing review made it doable. It took me about five years to learn all one hundred verses.

Now I review about seven verses every morning. That gets me through all one hundred verses every two weeks and keeps them fresh in my mind. I often quote them when I am preaching or teaching.

### **Imitate the Master**

Why would we *want* to memorize Scripture when we can just read the Bible? Memorizing God's Word benefits us in several ways. Applying that memorized Word to our lives is like an internal moral vacuum cleaner. It helps us become more like Jesus by removing sin and stinking thinking from our lives (Psalm 119:9,11).

It makes 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.

He fought temptation 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 did not consider other alternatives. **How has listening to voices other than God's voice got you into trouble?**

Jesus was not carrying indexed Old Testament scrolls when Satan tempted Him in the desert. He had memorized God's Word as a boy. He did not come pre-programmed with it. Learning it took diligent effort.

### **Four-Purpose Words**

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Memorized Scripture is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). It teaches us how to live in a way that brings a smile to God's face.

It lets us know when our lives are out of order. It shows us how to get back to God-honoring living. It builds our spiritual fitness and equips us to choose and do what God defines as right.

### **Seal the Leaks**

Many basketballs leak air. Some I have owned needed to be re-inflated before every use.

We are like leaky basketballs. God's Word enters our ears every Sunday through Bible teaching and preaching. We read it daily as well. How much do we *remember* one day later?

Memorization enables total recall. It seals the leak. God's Word dwelling in us richly equips us 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's Word encourages us and fosters a never-quit attitude that fills us with the bright light of unfading hope (Romans 15:4). That hope transforms how we view today and tomorrow. Telling others where we found 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.**

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Memorized Scripture is a faith factory. Faith comes by hearing the message and we hear the message through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). The memorized word of Christ is like a minuteman missile we can launch without delay to build our faith and the faith of others right now where we 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 hearts is like that. The brighter the light, the easier it is to see God's will for our lives. Memorized Scripture enables 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 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 hearts to His Word in our mouths. "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 God will grant it. God's promises committed to memory enable us to pray with greater boldness and faith. **Share a time when the Scriptures empowered your prayer life.**

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Memorized Scripture is a wisdom factory (Proverbs 15:23). Clever ideas are no substitute for God's ideas. It is gratifying to know our advice helped someone. It is far better to know we are grounding it in the words of One who sees and knows everything. Righteous people speak wise and just words because God's Words are at home in their hearts (Psalm 37:30–31). **Share a time when the Scriptures provided wisdom that helped someone else.**

Memorized Scripture is a thought factory. Our thinking shapes our lives. 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 us 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 our lives. Deuteronomy 6:6–7, 11:18 says God's Words need to find a home in our hearts. It is not a suggestion. It is a command.

God's command and will are that we hide His Word in our hearts. We can memorize it for sure. How do I know? Because God promises that if we know His will and pray according to it, His answer is always yes (1 John 5:14–15). With God's help, we can memorize!

Reading the verses around the one we want to memorize helps us understand its context.



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We should break the verse down into small parts. The punctuation marks divide the verse into memory units. We read aloud the reference, the phrase before the first punctuation mark, and then repeat the reference. We continue in this way until we have mastered the whole verse.

We review daily for 30 days and weekly after that.



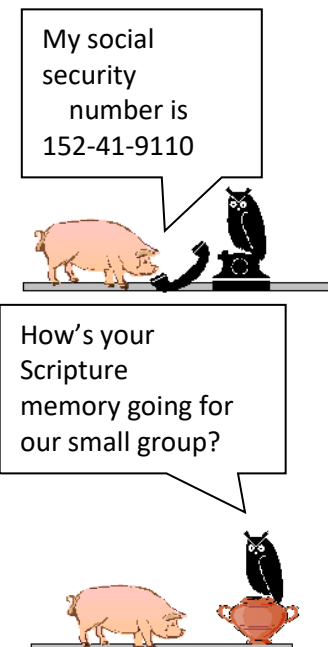
**What is God's message to you in this lesson? What attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?**

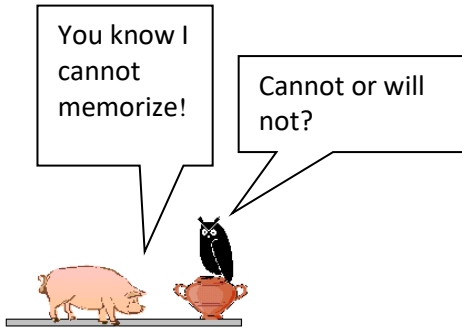


**Share your action plan to make those changes:**

### 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).





### 10. Holy Spirit

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**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 did not say, “*What* is the Holy Spirit?” The Holy Spirit is not like the Force in the Star Wars movies. He is not a thing. He is the Third Person of the Trinity.

One God consists of three co-equal, co-eternal People 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” means breath or wind. It describes God’s power at work.

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I remember the fear/awe I felt as a child on Friday, October 15, 1954, when Hurricane Hazel with its one hundred mph gusts passed through Middletown, PA, and bent trees like I hadn't seen before or since. That is 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 creating the physical world (Genesis 1:1–2).

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

### **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 available to you to do God's will?**

We see a gradual shift during the ten centuries over which people wrote the Old Testament. Early on the Holy Spirit is an outward gift to give power to accomplish a special purpose such as making priestly

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garments and the Tabernacle. Later He bestows inward moral purity (Psalm 51:10–11).

Joel 2:28–32 predicts God will pour the Spirit on all kinds of people. In Acts 2:17–21, Peter insists the day of Pentecost fulfilled Joel's prophecy (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 God's calling her child the Son of God. The text does not tell us how it happened.

In like fashion the Holy Spirit, the power of the Most High, mysteriously brings our new births (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?**

### **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 is hard to beat, but the Apostle Peter raised Dorcas (Acts 9:40) and the Apostle Paul raised Eutychus (Acts 20:7–12).

Greater works refer to the number of lives Jesus would touch through His ever-expanding body, the church. Peter, the disciple who denied

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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 peoples' hearts extends to every nation. The Jesus Film Project estimated that between 1979 and 2020, 572 million followed Christ after film showings (<https://www.jesusfilm.org/about/learn-more/statistics.html>). **How can you best contribute 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 a Counselor like Him. That is the Holy Spirit.

This same Greek word describes the Spirit in John 14:16 and Jesus in 1 John 2:1. The Holy Spirit is different from 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 is full of grace and truth (John 1:14). It should not surprise us that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17, 15:26).

What is 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 could not be more wrong. This is our Father's world. Living according to truth is seeing the world as Father does.

Unbelievers are living in a dream world. For example, they see themselves as good people. God's truth says, "There is no one

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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 is 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), which was invaluable for New Testament authors. **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). That involves thinking about and writing our faith stories. It includes describing our lives before we received Christ, how we received Him, and the difference He has made in our lives.

Effective witness is a divine-human partnership. Apart from the supporting witness of the Holy Spirit, our words will make no impact. Our words are the nails and He is the nail gun. We limit the Holy Spirit's witness when we do not witness for Christ. It is like a nail gun without nails.

The Holy Spirit is coming because Christ is going away (John 16:7). On earth time and space limited Jesus. He could not be everywhere simultaneously. If He was in Capernaum, He could not be in Jerusalem. That was about to change.

After Jesus departed from His disciples, He sent the Holy Spirit to take His place. The Spirit could be simultaneously present in New York City; Casper, Wyoming; Zurich, Switzerland; Nairobi, Kenya; and everywhere else. Jesus was with them on earth during His ministry. In the future, He would be in them through the Holy Spirit.

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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.<sup>1</sup> We would not want to face him in court! The Holy Spirit is like an everywhere-present prosecuting attorney who brings people to a conviction that they are 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 our sin problem's solution.

We sometimes struggle to identify root causes. The Five Whys is a problem-solving process. People developed it in a Toyota plant in Japan to identify root causes by asking why five times.<sup>2</sup> My toe hurts. Why? I stubbed it on a brick. Why? My wife left it in the middle of the basement. Why? Etc.

What is the root cause of sin? We do not have to ask why five times to identify it. John 16:9 describes it as unbelief, a total rejection of God's 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. We are not righteous. Have we noticed? Jesus is. The Father's reception of Him into heaven 40 days after His resurrection proves it.

Nothing less than 100 percent righteousness avails. We can have it through faith in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. It is a gift from God. Faith in Jesus is the solution to our need for righteousness.

When the blinding light of Jesus' righteousness exposes and evaluates our sin, condemnation knocks on our door with a badge on its chest. All who follow in the self-seeking, rebellious footsteps of the prince of this

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world (Satan) will reap his sure, fixed, and permanent condemnation (John 16:11).

Faith in Jesus is the only deliverer from eternal condemnation. God will not condemn those 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 would write Holy Spirit revelations in what we know as the New Testament. (John 16:13).

The Holy Spirit performs His ministry behind the curtain to keep the spotlight on Jesus on the stage (John 16:14). He does not 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 we have the Son (Christ), we have life. Because we belong to Christ, we have the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9). When the Spirit of God leads us, we demonstrate we are God's child (Romans 8:14). We know we belong to God because His Spirit bears witness with our spirits (Romans 8:16).

We received the Spirit the very moment we opened the door of our lives to Jesus. However, His presence does not guarantee His control. We must surrender the driver's seat of our lives to Him continuously. That is the theme of the next lesson.



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The Holy Spirit enables our lives to be spiritually significant. He sets us apart for His work (Acts 13:2) and guides us in it (Acts 16:6–7). He empowers us to be His witness (Acts 1:8). He helps us pray by interceding for us with groans words cannot express (Romans 8:26–27).

He has given us at least one spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:1–11). He inspired the men who wrote the Bible (2 Peter 1:21). He helps us understand it. When He controls us, we 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. Only the Holy Spirit can meet the deep needs of our souls. People used oil in biblical times as a cosmetic, medicine, food, and fuel for lighting. Abundant oil represented prosperity.

The wind signifies God’s power. Fire symbolizes His glory, holiness, and desire to make us pure and holy.

A dove portrays the energy through which God carries out His work, 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 our spiritual lives! “Ladies and Gentlemen, start your engines!”

### We should daily do the following:

- Ask the Holy Spirit to teach us before we read the Bible.
- Ask Him to reveal and guide us in His purposes for the day.
- Surrender our lives to His control.



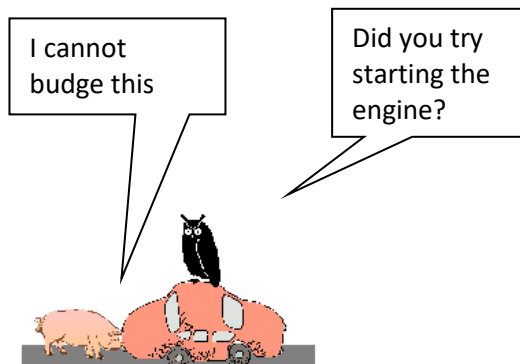
**What is God's message to you in this lesson? What attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?**



**Share your action plan to make those changes.**

### Scripture Memory

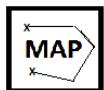
Acts 1:8 - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.



1. ([www.thenation.com/node/22710](http://www.thenation.com/node/22710)).
2. ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5\\_Whys](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5_Whys)).

### 11. 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 the Holy Spirit empowers us to live for and be like Jesus. This can happen only if we deny our selfish desires and yield our minds and bodies to the Spirit of Christ who lives within us.

Dwight L. Moody, a famous evangelist, scheduled meetings in England. An elderly English pastor wondered what an uneducated, inexperienced preacher like Moody had going for him. 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.”<sup>1</sup> **What do you think the wise pastor meant?**

#### Filled with the Right Stuff

Mr. Moody believed the Holy Spirit fills every corner of our hearts when we empty ourselves of pride, selfishness, ambition, and everything contrary to God’s law (the little stuff).

Fill a peanut butter jar with golf balls. Is the jar full? Now put pebbles in the jar. Then 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 is full!

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The peanut butter jar represents our lives. The golf balls represent giving the Spirit His rightful place in the driver's seat of our lives. The small stuff represents all the details of daily life. **What happens if you fill your life with all the small stuff first? What is the solution?**

### **Tattletale Priorities**

We must overcome major distractions to do God's will consistently. What we count, measure, and think about repeatedly when we are free to think about anything reveals our 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 would not ask me at the Judgment, "Jack, how many fish did you catch?" There is nothing wrong with fishing or counting fish. There is something wrong with becoming preoccupied with fishing.

I filled my mind too much 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 guide those who are attempting to scale Mt. Everest. God has gifted us with our own internal "Sherpa." Walking in the Spirit

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includes living with the Holy Spirit as our guide. A guide leads us through strange territory.

I drove through Ottawa, Canada, in 1984 following a man who knew the city's roads. Of the three times I have been in Ottawa, it was the *only* time I did not get lost! That was before GPS.

If we are not yet mature believers, living to please Jesus is unfamiliar territory. God provides the help we need. We have a Sherpa.

### **Competing Drill Sergeants**

The Holy Spirit both guides and calls the cadence. Sometimes when my grandkids and I were walking together, they lagged. Sometimes they ran ahead of me. That is getting easier with every passing year! I was the guide, but they often moved 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 is a competing drill sergeant, the voice of our sinful desires. Obeying that voice forces us out of step with the Spirit. The question is not whether we are marching in cadence. Whose cadence are we following?

Imagine a church where everyone is marching in step with the Holy Spirit. It is a beautiful thing. We do not want to be the exception. Following the cadence of the Holy Spirit is a continuing choice.

### **Wanting What You Did Not Used to Want**

Many pregnant women suddenly crave pickles! My father disliked liver until he had to eat it twice in one day while he was in the military. After that he liked it. When we are walking in the Spirit, our desires change.

When we are walking in the Spirit, new desires roost in us. 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.

### **Doing What You Did not Used to Do**

Today we hear a lot about unintended consequences. Unintended consequences can be positive, negative, or 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 did not do before you met Christ.**

### **We will Leave the Light on for You!**

"We will 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 us lights our way (John 1:4) and us to light the way for others (Matthew 5:14). When we are walking in the light, we can see

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clearly and others can see us. The light illuminates both the ground and our faces. We become a son of light (John 12:36).

One purpose of the Holy Spirit's power is for witnessing (Acts 1:8). We 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). They live according to two ultimate realities. God is worthy of their worship, love, and service. Their neighbor, created in His image, deserves the same love they show themselves.

That is how Jesus lived. Imitate Him (1 John 2:6). We can do that when both the Word (Colossians 3:15–17) and the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18–21) fill us. **Describe what you are doing to funnel God's Word into your life. How can you increase the size of the funnel?**

The Spirit whittles us with His Word. He shapes how we think and live. "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Psalm 119:105).

The Spirit empowers us like a wind-filled sail moves a sailboat. He gives power and direction when the Word and the Spirit fill us. The original Greek in Ephesians 5:18 emphasizes that Christians are to allow the Holy Spirit to *keep* filling them 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 (Galatians 5:22–23).

In John 15 Jesus illustrates the Spirit-filled life by a grape vine and its branches. Remaining in Him in a trusting, obedient relationship (John 15:5) yields 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 strength. Such efforts lead only to frustration, discouragement, and burnout.

Imagine we cut a wick from a candle and light it. It will burn up quickly. On the other hand, a wick on a candle does not burn up if the supply of wax lasts. The Holy Spirit is the fuel that allows us to burn on for Christ without our being consumed. Are we living continuously in dependence on His power?

### **Requirements for Filling**

There are several requirements for the Holy Spirit to fill us. 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. God fills those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6). He will not strong-arm the steering wheel of life out of our control. We must surrender it.

We must confess any sins the Holy Spirit reveals. God does not use a dirty cup to pour His living water out to bless others. God promises to forgive and purify us once we confess the sins that contaminate us. (1 John 1:9).

God fills us with the Holy Spirit by faith alone based on Hebrews 11:6. Without it, we cannot please God. God's command and promise are like a target and our faith is like an arrow.



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According to Ephesians 5:18, God's will is to fill us with the Holy Spirit. According to 1 John 5:14–15, when we pray according to God's will, He promises to hear and grant our request. In other words, when we ask God to help us do what He wants, He always does.

When we pray for God to fill us with His Spirit, we know He will because He keeps His promises. He is forever trustworthy (Psalm 19:7). We do not depend on our feelings to gauge whether the Spirit is filling us.

Rather, we depend on God's trustworthiness to fulfill His promises. His promises are a much stronger foundation for our faith than whether we feel God's control.

When the Spirit convicts us of sin, we must confess it before He can again fill us.

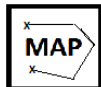
Would you like for the Holy Spirit to fill you right now? If so, claim that filling by the following prayer:

**Lord, I present my body, soul, and spirit to You. I want You to think with my mind, love through 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 is God's message to you in this lesson?**

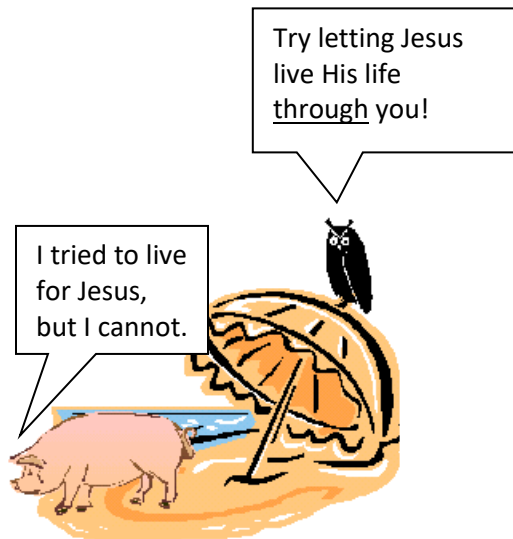
**What attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?**



**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.



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

## 12. Flesh and Spirit

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



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 is not the gunk in our trunk or the stuff that hides our bones. In this lesson “flesh” refers to that part of us that seeks our will and satisfaction in everything.

We naturally want the biggest cookie on the plate, the best parking spot, and the front of the line! Our flesh is addicted to selfishness, full of pride, competitive, and clueless that God has a problem with 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 does not refer to the non-physical part of us that is 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**

The Health and Science section of *The Week* published September 13, 2013, connected our genes to true happiness. It said, “Humans appear to be genetically engineered to be happiest and healthiest when we spend a lot of time selflessly helping others – and unhealthy when we are mostly devoted to self-gratification.”

### **Two Happiness-Outcomes**

A study at the University of North Carolina on eighty volunteers discovered that those whose lives had much pleasure, but little purpose, had elevated levels of inflammation. Inflammation in turn links to cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and a weaker response to infection. Self-indulgent happiness diminishes physical health over the long haul.

On the other hand, the genes of those who gained happiness 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 someone genetically engineered human beings to be happiest and healthiest when helping others, who is the Engineer? Why did He make us that way?

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

The God of the Bible is not 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 is just being Himself. **How does this distinction between healthy happiness and unhealthy happiness apply to you?**

### **Designed to Love Others**

God commands us to love Him with all we have and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:36–40). He designed us to find maximum fulfillment when we live that way!

It is the closest we will come to discovering the Fountain of Youth. Meeting the needs of others slows the aging process and makes us feel good! **How has God blessed you when you have ministered to others' needs?**

### **Unselecting Our Default Mode**

Without a conscious commitment to life in the Spirit, selfishness automatically determines our reactions. It is as natural as breathing. Our default setting is doing what we want when we want.

My five-year-old grandchild sat in the car's back seat playing with the electric window. Up-down-up-down-up-down. Multiple requests to stop had the most temporary effect—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 we eat, what we say when we are angry, what books/magazines we read, what images we view on the computer, and what we think about when we are free to think about anything. We must yield that button to Him many times daily. **Is your automatic reaction godly or ungodly when someone hurts or offends you or something does not go as you desire? Explain.**

### **Let Us Mute the Scammer**

Our flesh cannot please God because it naturally argues with Him about everything. It acts like it knows better than our Creator What is best for us. What a fraud!

The flesh is the major wire within us through which the current of sin flows with no resistance. It cannot submit to God's law (Romans 8:7). It is hopelessly addicted to defying Him.

Living according to the flesh's GPS instructions results in ultimate, eternal separation from God and the life we can find only in Him (Romans 8:12–13). Jesus came to set us free from unthinking defiance. When the scammer begins talking to us, Let us hang up!

### **Listen to Your Infinitely Wise Counselor**

The Spirit sets us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2). When He controls our mind, we experience life and peace (Romans 8:6).

Why should we listen to a scammer? We can listen to a Counselor. He knows us through and through, wants What is best for us, and knows the path God has appointed us to walk. Following the Spirit's leading is not optional if we are children of God.

### **A Wrestling Match ... with Ourselves**

Before our new birth, our selfish nature faced no opposition. It always got its way. But now an impressive competitor inside us has weighed in. God designed the new nature, rippling with supernatural muscle, Holy Spirit-coached and empowered, to glorify King Jesus.

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Our flesh is not happy, and it does not fight fairly. It gouges, scratches, bites, pulls hair, and hits below the belt. There is something we need to know about it, however.

It is dead. I know it does not seem like it, but it is. The truest thing about us is what God's Word says about us. This is where living by faith appears. Without faith, we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6).

God crucified our old self 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, we count ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God as instruments through whom Jesus can live (Romans 6:11).

Jesus' death on the cross frees us to live for Him. Before we received Him, we were a slave to the demands of our selfish nature. Since we are born again, we put our old way of life behind us and let Christ live through us (Galatians 2:20).

What we "accomplished" before that new birth does not 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 are dead!" Let us seek God's Kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33) as our highest priority. **How does your first reaction to negative circumstances differ from 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

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like a believer for an hour or two a week and like an unbeliever the rest of the time. They are fluent in flesh-speak.

The flesh-life is remarkably similar in all cultures and places. When people go their way and do their thing, the same stuff happens all over.

From the spring of the flesh life the following flow: sexual immorality, impurity, indulgence in harmful or immoral pleasures, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, quarreling, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, disagreements that bring strife, small, united groups within a larger one, envy, drunkenness, and wild drunken parties.

People who live that way have no life-changing connection with God (Galatians 5:19–21) and will not spend eternity with Him. Those who sow to please their selfish nature reap destruction (Galatians 6:8).

Hatred and discord in Galatians 5 are works of the flesh even though we might not consider them major moral failures. Hatred is harboring hostility in our hearts 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 is not to be satisfied as long as we avoid falling into obvious “sewers” of sin. God’s plan is for us to become like Jesus through yielding to the Holy Spirit’s control.

### **Spirit Life**

The Holy Spirit’s control produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). We need a wardrobe change to transition from flesh life to Spirit life.



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We discard the stinky underwear we wore in the past and put on garments perfumed with the sweet fragrance of Christ.

The stinky underwear includes sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed which is idolatry, anger, rage, the desire to harm others, making false statements to hurt another person's reputation, filthy language, and lying (Colossians 3:5–9).

We 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 ourselves; 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 our purpose of helping others know and grow in Christ (1 Timothy 4:8).

### **Self-Inventory**

We stock the shelves in our refrigerators, freezers, and pantries with provisions for our physical bodies—milk, eggs, bread, cans, and assorted packages. By contrast, we are to stockpile no resources for our self-seeking natures (Romans 13:14). **What practical steps could you take to make no provision for the flesh concerning:**

- **Alcohol abuse**
- **Sexual lust**
- **Uncontrolled spending**
- **Gambling**
- **Oversleeping and missing church**
- **Reading material**

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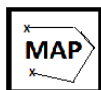
- **Television viewing**
- **Music and entertainment**

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 people are self-controlled, dependable, truthful, obedient, sincere, forgiving, wise, discerning, orderly, humble, responsible, loyal, sensitive, compassionate, gentle, meek, contented, grateful, alert, hospitable, generous, joyfully enduring, and patient. **Choose a fleshly characteristic to eliminate from your life.**



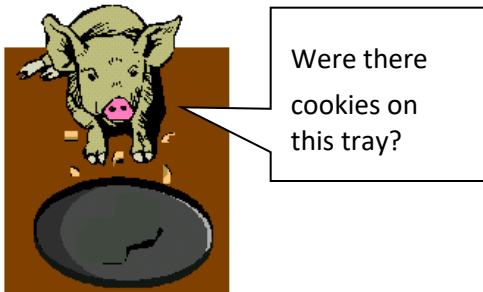
**What is God's message to you in this lesson? What attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?**



**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, <sup>23</sup>gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.



### 13. The World System

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**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 does not realize it.

The world system is the indulgent mother. The infant is the flesh. The world system supplies the rebellious flesh’s longings that destroy us.

The world system fosters faith in someone or something other than God and nurtures values that compete with His. It does not matter what or who His competitor is.

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We can trust in ourselves, in the goodness of mankind, in scientific theories, in our doctor's treatment plan, or the American dream and not feel the slightest contrary breeze from the world system. But when we trust in God and seek His Kingdom and righteousness, out of nowhere hurricane-force resistance arises. Secular society tolerates 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 influence science, sports, music, education, fashion, politics, journalism, art, literature, and religion. Their agenda directly opposes God's.

Even as love characterizes Christians (1 John 3:14), the world is known for hate (1 John 3:13). Those it controls do not listen to spiritual truth (1 John 4:5–6). It is foolish to them and they do not 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 is not worldliness. We experience it when the natural drives God created are satisfied. An ice-cold glass of water on a sweltering day brings pleasure. So does a plate of spaghetti after an exhausting day at work.

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Problems multiply like bacteria when we jump God's wisely laid tracks to pursue pleasure. 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 glorifying God, we seek personal glory. God has given us the gifts of food and drink, but we eat and drink too much. God has given us the gift of medications, but we abuse prescription drugs. God has given us the gift of speech, but we use it to inflict pain on others. God has given us the gift of sex, but we pursue its pleasures outside God's protective boundaries and question the validity of those boundaries.

**What are some other good gifts from God that we twist and misuse?**

Worldliness means living contrary to God's will. We cannot encode His will in a list of behaviors to avoid, like "Do not smoke, drink, or swear...." Many Christians take pride in not smoking, swearing, or drinking alcoholic beverages, but they lack the love that should mark Jesus' followers. That is worldliness!

### **Living with Eternity in View**

Our thoughts, conversations, and behaviors define us. Do we measure ourselves by a standard that changes every year or by one that never changes?

In Romans 12:2, "world" refers to everything on this side of eternity. It is time-bound and consists of material things we can see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. The temptation is to conform to and love what is passing and will not last. The one thing that is predictable about this year's styles is that they will be out of style next year! Let us not allow

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the world system to shape our lives. Let us think, talk, and behave like Jesus (Romans 8:29). Let us live for eternity's values now!

The world system opposes God! Not only is it His enemy (James 4:4), but It is on the way to disappearing (1 John 2:17). Loving it and God is like loving adultery and marital faithfulness! We cannot do it.

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

### **Unpacking the World System**

The world is an evil system Satan manufactured with thousands of ways to rebel against God. Only Route 1 will take us to Key West. Thousands of roads will not take us there. The glorious light of the gospel is that by grace through faith, Jesus is the one way to God. The World system promotes 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 does not need anyone else, including God. Preoccupation with ourselves results in ignoring the needs of the hurting, looking down on others, sexism, racism, scorn for justice, etc.

The world welcomes our 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.

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Although we can temporarily satisfy those desires, there is no lasting satisfaction from giving the sinful nature what it wants. It is like trying to satisfy spoiled children by giving them what they want. Tomorrow, if not before, they will demand more.

The world system's neon 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 us to destroy us (John 10:10).

The lust of the eyes is the desire to have things. Some things are necessary for life. Wanting more, more, more, however, proves the world has us in its grip. Material things cannot bring satisfaction. If our fifty shirts/blouses do not satisfy us, why would we 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). Behind it is pride on a ride and an inflated sense of self-importance. **If others thinking well of you is more important to you than God's glory or What is best for others, what do you think is wrong?**

How we define who we are says a lot about us. **What is wrong with defining ourselves by earned degrees, athletic or academic achievements, income, car, house, expensive toys, etc.?**

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

1. People are good or For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).
2. Truth is relative or God's Word is truth (John 17:17).

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3. Man sets his moral values or On judgment day all will have to give account of every careless word they have spoken (Matthew 12:36).
4. All religions lead to God or No one comes to the Father except through Jesus (John 14:6).
5. The Bible does not relate to life today or All Scriptures are useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).
6. Live for the moment or Set your hearts and minds on things above (Colossians 3:1–2).
7. Physical well-being and material possessions are the highest good or You cannot serve God and Money (Matthew 6:24).
8. Life is meaningless or Jesus came to give us life to the full (John 10:10).
9. God helps those who help themselves or Apart from me [Jesus] we can do nothing (John 15:5).
10. Brains, bucks, brawn, and beauty determine worth or God did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all (Romans 8:32) because of our worth.
11. Others serve great people or The one who wants to be first must be the servant of all (Mark 9:35).
12. Clothes make the man or God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).
13. Do our thing or Obey God's commands (John 14:15).



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14. Avoid suffering at all costs or Rejoice that we participate in the sufferings of Christ (1 Peter 4:13).
15. Take care of #1 or Seek first God's kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33).
16. Imitate "Mike" or God's Son (Romans 8:29).
17. Make money or Make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).
18. Win the lottery or Win the lost (Luke 15:4).
19. Ignore the poor or Remember the poor (Galatians 2:10).
20. Live it up or Bear much fruit (John 15:8, 16).
21. Entertain ourselves or Do good works (Ephesians 2:10).
22. Hide our weaknesses or Confess our sins (1 John 1:9).
23. Government saves or Jesus saves (John 3:17).
24. Appearance determines destiny or Faith determines destiny (John 3:36).
25. Health is everything or God makes His power perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).
26. Be self-sufficient or Depend on Jesus (John 15:5).
27. Pamper yourself or Deny yourself (Luke 9:23).
28. Get even with those who hurt us or Forgive others (Ephesians 4:32).

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

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



**What is God's message to you in this lesson? What 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.



### 14. Satan, the Enemy

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**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 we do not believe Covid-19 exists. **How might our beliefs adversely affect our health? Why do our beliefs about Satan’s existence matter?**

### **Satan Is a Person**

Satan is more than a symbol of evil. John 8:44 describes him as 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 people, e.g., the Apostle John calls him a liar and a murderer (John 8:44).

### **Satan’s Agenda**

Satan’s 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 is leading a revolt of human beings against God. **Where do you see obvious signs of this revolt in society?**

Satan sought Jesus’ worship (Matthew 4:8–10). He wants our worship and obedience and will give us things for it. If we are not worshipping God, we are worshipping Satan already whether we know it or not.

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When we conform to this world, we are 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 our 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 is why we experience resistance when we 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. **What resistance have you experienced 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 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 like the dark figures 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 our wedding!

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He is Beelzebub (Matthew 10:25). The word means “Lord of the flies. “In Mark 3:22 the name refers to the prince of demons. That is all we know 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. By contrast, those who put their hope in God never regret it (Isaiah 49:23). **Share a time when you placed hope in a material thing or a person and ended up disappointed.**

He is the morning star and son of the dawn (Isaiah 14:12). As such he pretends to be an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

We should fear him 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 is not.

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). He is thoroughly wicked, 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 have wanted to appear grown-up have indulged in alcohol and marijuana at a party with other teens. They liked how it made them feel.

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Then they used more dangerous drugs. Many became hooked and could not 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 who 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 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. He is 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. Coincidentally, Satan dominates the “airways.” Most media 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.

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He is the accuser (Revelation 12:10). He continually accuses Christians before God. He also accuses us of our sins and tries to paralyze us with guilt.

He says things like, “You did that *again*? You are a poor excuse for a Christian!” Many professing Christians agree with their accuser and move to the sidelines—off the playing field of expanding God’s Kingdom. **What is wrong with giving up as a reaction to your sin?**

### **His Little Red Toolbox**

Let us consider some of the tools of his trade: He lies to us (John 8:44), tempts us (Matthew 4:1), snatches away the Word from us (Matthew 13:19), blocks our ministry (1 Thessalonians 2:18), torments us (2 Corinthians 12:7), sifts us to try to separate us from Christ (Luke 22:31).

He masquerades as one who is on God’s side (2 Corinthians 11:14), accuses us of sin (Revelation 12:10), tries to lead us astray (Revelation 12:9), strikes us with disease (Luke 13:10, 12, 16), enters into people (John 13:27), and murders (John 8:44). He performs counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9) to lead us astray.

### **And in This Corner...**

Jesus came to destroy the devil’s work (1 John 3:8), undo it, and frustrate his plans. He came to build a bridge back to fellowship with God.

With every temptation the devil dishes out, Jesus provides us with a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13). His fight strategy is so brilliant that the only rounds the devil ever wins are those we give away through unbelief.

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Jesus came to destroy him who has the power of death (Hebrews 2:14–15). God has not abolished physical death, but Jesus took sin's sting for us (1 Corinthians 15:55).

Like a honeybee that has already stung and cannot sting again, the devil no longer has power over us. Jesus came to free us from an oppressing fear of death. **How has that influenced your life?**

### **The Knockout**

In the last days, God will hurl the devil to earth (Revelation 12:7–9). God will seal and lock him in the Abyss for one thousand years (Revelation 20:1–3). Then he will deceive the nations and gather them for battle against the Lord's saints and city (Revelation 20:7–9). Then God will throw him into and torment him in the lake of burning sulfur forever (Revelation 20:9–10).

### **Our Fight Strategy**

Here is how we can overcome Satan's schemes:

- We must 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 game plan.

God's Word is the game film. We must study it. Satan's tendencies include undermining the church's witness by internal conflict, disunity, immorality, and false teaching. **Are any of his strategies visible in your church? Are you part of the problem? If so, how can you defend against his favorite plays in your church?**



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- We must be self-controlled and alert. Satan’s temptations usually present themselves as opportunities for “happiness.” That is a laugh! He wants to make us happy like a fox seeks a chicken’s best interests!

If we must justify a certain behavior, It is wrong! God is not out to spoil our fun. He loves us and knows where 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 exercise 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 wide open to the thief whose goal is to destroy us. (John 10:10).

Several years ago, a boy thrower asked one of my female throwers who she liked. She said, “Coach Selcher.” I was old enough to be her grandfather, but she was available. I acted like I did not hear what she said and coached as usual. **Share a time when self-control preserved your Christian witness.**

- Let us resist him and stand firm in the faith (1 Peter 5:9). We must treat Satan’s happiness traps like an annoying telemarketer. My standard line: “We would not be interested in that, thank you.” I immediately hang up.

I am not trying to be rude. If I let a telemarketer or the devil keep talking, I will regret it.

Lexy Fowler, a sheep rancher, uses llamas to protect her sheep from coyotes. When llamas see a coyote, they walk straight

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toward it. Coyotes do not like such aggressive behavior. Neither does the enemy of the faith.

- We should not slander him (2 Peter 2:10–11). Even angels do not do that. Enough said!
- We must 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).

We are not wearing a tracksuit. We dress to fight, not to run. Life is not a “what will make me happy” picnic. As Jesus’ soldiers, we are engaged in 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 is God’s message to you in this lesson? What 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.

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### 15. Pride

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**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 sixty-three times in the NIV. Fifty-two of those times condemn self-importance and self-glorying. The Scriptures condemn the “proud” forty-three of the forty-four times the word appears in the NIV.

In the eleven times, the Scriptures view pride positively, it describes glorying in someone or something outside oneself or satisfaction in a job well done.

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Feeling good about something we or someone else accomplishes is not 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 Is Not Our Friend**

The clay of pride forms every brick of sin. 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 that we know better than God What is best for us. That is dumber than a bucket of nails! Pride hardens our hearts (Daniel 5:20) and causes us to resist God's rule. It breeds quarrels when two people who think they are right try to prove it to each other (Proverbs 13:10). **Does society consider pride a good or terrible thing? Why?**

### **Pride Lives in Our 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 have risen to the top of the company or that we have not 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 they have received all A's on their report card, whereas others are proud they are in the "in-group" at school despite average grades.

We can be proud that we do not have a single weed in our lawn or do not obsess over it as our neighbor does. We can be proud that our

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students voted us the best teacher or the average rating they gave because we do not dish out high grades on demand.

We can be proud of all the money we inherited or earned ourselves. Pride is universal. It lives in our house and walks in our shoes, but like the air all around us, we cannot see it!

### **High-Horsing around**

Forbidden pride is an exaggerated sense of superiority because of what we do, are, or have. It is self-centered and self-sufficient. Here is how a clever salesman closed hundreds of sales: "Let me show you something several of your neighbors said you could not afford." After that line, he just 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-glorying?**

### **Playing the Comparison Game**

Pride thrives on comparison. It is not satisfied with being 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. Looking around the church, she could not help feeling prettier than any of the other ladies. The pastor comforted her by telling her it was not a sin—just a mistake!

We have already spent too much of our lives 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 an excellent 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

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humans have, it must rank near the bottom! I remembered the fleeting nature of human glory about a week later when one of the fellows we had beaten crushed me 11-0 in a game!

### **Pride on a Ride**

In the early 1990s, I was driving to Altoona to visit a parishioner in the hospital. I was mentally congratulating myself for being physically quicker than most people. I thought, "That is why I have never had an auto accident."

I soon discovered I was taking credit that belonged to God. Not five minutes later a car turned left across my lane. I could not avoid the accident. Crash!! Fortunately, the accident did not injure anyone. 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 becoming like Jesus. It is challenging because it is almost invisible to us. It is the last thing we see in ourselves and the first we notice in others. It is 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 has not diminished its downward pull. It is 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 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. Humble people say, “Jesus, have it your way! We will fit into your plans. We will love others and help fulfill the Great Commission.”

We must 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 are not going to get any help from God.

We are to humble ourselves under God’s mighty hand (1 Peter 5:6). We submit to him as our surgeon. His operating 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 *does not* mean thinking we are a worm. Humble people see themselves accurately and truly. They have neither an inflated nor an “I am a zero” sense of identity.

They consider what others think. They are quicker to give credit to others than take it themselves. They know their weaknesses and strengths. They give God credit for the latter and readily share the former.

Humility is a profound sense that we are unworthy of God’s gifts, love, and grace married to a grateful desire to live for Him. In brief, It is 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 opposite of pride. He demonstrated His humility by washing his disciples’ feet, the

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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, we do not want the God of the universe resisting us!
2. With humility comes wisdom (Proverbs 11:2). Wisdom is a skill in godly living. God's showing us His ways will not benefit us unless we are humble enough to follow them.
3. Pride starts quarrels, but those who take advice are wise (Proverbs 13:10). This may shock us, but we are not always right! Wise people do not start with that assumption.
4. The Lord detests those with proud hearts. They will not go unpunished (Proverbs 16:5). God's detesting the proud is at least as serious as His resisting them! I do not want Him resisting or detesting me.
5. Humility comes before honor (Proverbs 18:12). God elevates and honors those who humble themselves. Jesus humbled Himself more than anyone, 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?**



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

**How is it possible to be proud while people think we are humble?**

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

**When others praise us, how can we keep our pride under control?**



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

**What 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.



## 16. Enslaving Habits

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**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 is the most widespread face of evil in the world today.

Ironically, those who insist on controlling their lives forfeit control to enslaving substitutes for God. God desires us to be free from sin’s addicting chains (Romans 6:6). We escape bondage through knowing and living according to the truth (John 8:32).

### **The A, B, and 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, threatens jobs, wastes money, crushes self-esteem, and sends people to jail.

Shame and self-hatred invariably follow each round of excess. Many addicts deny any problem, and others want to stop but cannot. Addiction pulls people into its swirling drain, progressively siphoning off more money, time, and energy.

### **Our Defining Passion**

Like a stone thrown into a pond, our lives leave ripples. We can be a great blessing or a horrible curse.

Exodus 20:5 forbids bowing down to or worshiping other gods because the Lord our God is a jealous God, punishing our children for our sins to

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the third and fourth generations of those who hate him. God does not tolerate rivals, like addictions, in our lives.

An obituary described a man's defining passions for hunting, fishing, and time in the outdoors. **What is your defining passion?** If it is not loving and serving God and others, we are 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, the Apostle Paul encourages older women to live reverently, not to slander, and not to be addicted to much wine. He refused to let anything master him (1 Corinthians 6:12). **How does 1 Corinthians 6:12 apply to addiction?**

The body is not 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)

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

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Many biblical passages condemn alcohol abuse. Ephesians 5:18 commands us not to be drunk with wine. The one whom wine or beer leads astray is not wise (Proverbs 20:1).

The principle applies to any substance that controls our thinking or behavior. Physician-prescribed medications are an exception, although we must be careful. They can become addictive. Without this exception, even anesthesia would not 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 are right and good. Our sinful nature prods us to satisfy them outside of a relationship with God.

We are like a man looking for canned tuna in the dairy case. Our search invariably leads to substitutes for God that will not satisfy us. They become our gods, not worthy of a capital G. We depend on them and not God. 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, we choose to include it in our lives. Then it makes decisions without consulting us.

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What do you do compulsively to feel good or dull the pain of life? For what do you live? What do you find hard to quit once you start? What entangles and controls you? What in life could you not 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 our place for our benefit. His pain on the cross was so intense that He felt forsaken by God (Mark 15:34).

If He had not faced crucifixion, we would face the unending pain of God's wrath (John 3:36). **How does your 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 painful things have you faced? What do you 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 rut. We have lived to please our sinful nature and from it, we have reaped destruction (Galatians 6:7-8).

We, and no one else exchanged dependence on God for dependence on some "friend." For what have We rejected the wise, loving direction

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of the Lord of the universe? Our “friend” has stolen our money, monopolized our time, and ruined our reputation and health.

We hold the pieces of an unsatisfying, insecure, and meaningless existence. It is time we own up to what we have done. God will forgive and cleanse us if we confess our sins (1 John 1:9).

### **Grasp Grace**

God’s grace 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!

Jesus did not come to be a doctor for the righteous but for sinners (Mark 2:17). He does not remember and condemn us for all our excesses. God will not condemn those who trust in Christ (Romans 8:1).

God encourages us to approach the throne of grace confidently. We will 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**

“Woe is me” thinking is a chosen, self-defeating mindset. On April 7, 2000, I could not start a lawnmower after about fifty exhausting pulls on the cord. Why did I have to be thankful?

We had another mower 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.

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When we count our blessings, we will soon be in triple digits! Our “friend” has numbed our pain and blinded us to our 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.” It became the string and we the yo-yo. When it 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 is no less demanding than our old friend.

But His ways bring significance, satisfaction, and security beyond anything we have ever known. He invites us to come to Him, take His yoke upon us, and learn from Him. He promises rest for our souls (Matthew 11:28–30).

### **Give Out**

God created our lives to be like beautiful songs 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 perfect pitch. He sets us free from our compulsions to collaborate 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 is God’s message to you in this lesson?**

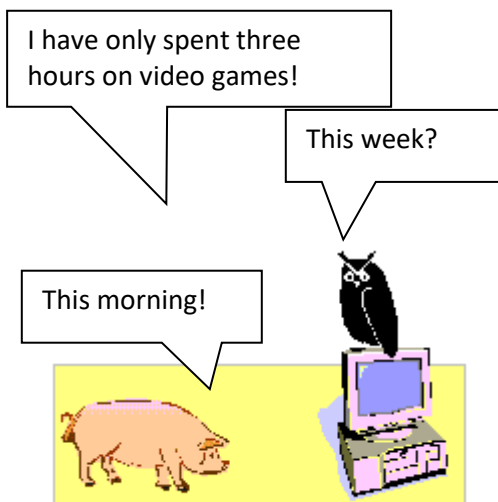
**What attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?**



**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.



## 17. Meditation

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**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**

#### **The Benefits of Meditation**

God's word guides us to a successful, victorious, fulfilling life. That usually happens even though hardly anyone on earth knows our name.

Our name in the Book of Life surpasses its being on all the marquees on earth. God's best for us is not 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 the circumstances.

Through meditation, we pull the choking weeds of worldly thinking and acting from the gardens of our lives. When I first trusted in Christ, getting was more important than giving, speaking more important than listening, people serving me than serving others. I thought these traits were adorable yellow flowers, but God's Word identified them as dandelions I must remove.

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

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**Describe an unforgettable meal. How satisfied was your stomach?** 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). We should not despair if God's word is not our defining passion yet. If we start meditating on it, we will be surprised how our passions will change.

We must 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 is God's message to you in this lesson?**

**What attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change? \_\_**



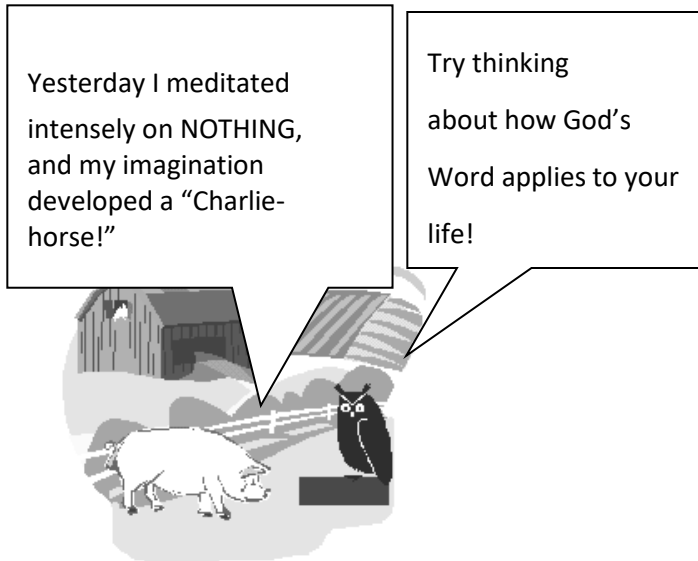
**Share your action plan to make those changes.**

### 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.

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### Notes

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

## 18. Ten Words from Our Sponsor

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**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 about building healthy relationships. Exploring the Ten Commandments will help us build stronger relationships with God and others.

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God is not 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 should not have to compete for our love. He is jealous. That means He alone deserves our worship, service, and love. He made us and our world.

When He wants our worship, He does not want something that is not His as we do when we are jealous. The IRS does not ask for all our money (yet!). They only want what we owe them. God 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; sports, TV, movie/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. **What competes with God for your complete devotion?**

#### **No Created Thing Adequately Represents God**

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

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God does not look like a kindly grandfather with long, flowing, snow-white hair. We should not picture him that way or worship any other misrepresentation.

When I think of the exalted Christ, I picture how a Sight & Sound presentation I attended represented Him. As impressively as it portrayed Him, it still falls short. His ways and thoughts are as high above ours as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isaiah 55:9). Jesus Christ, the image of the invisible God, is the only accurate representation of 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. 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 regarded highly.

When I was a kid, we had special China for holiday meals. It was set apart and never on the table for common everyday use. God's name is similar. We should never use it lightly or unthinkingly when we are not talking directly to Him or about Him.

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 mouths and honoring him with our lips while our hearts remain far from Him.

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The Third Commandment forbids using God's name for selfish purposes such as "Lord, help us win this game." A memorized prayer delivered without thought, gratitude, or faith before meals does not give God due respect.

We break the Third Commandment when we use exclamations like OMG, make promises using God's name that we do not intend to keep, curse others, express anger using God's name, use His name in songs or prayers without thinking what we are saying, or use prayer to try to force God to grant our selfish desires. **What 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 obedient believers. 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). It 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. God did not transfer ceasing from work from the Sabbath to the Lord's Day. <sup>1</sup>

Jesus, the Son of Man, is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). Let Him decide what we should do on that day. Every day is set apart for Him.

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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 of us will spend Sundays with other Christians in worship and with our families. Some will pray and do Bible study. Some will not work, or even think or talk about it.

Some of us will 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. That "take a break" day *does not have* to be a Sunday.

We can connect how we rest best with whether we are extroverts or introverts.<sup>2</sup> If we are extroverts, we find spending time with other people relaxing. We have many hobbies that could serve as our break activities.

If we are introverts, alone time, or time with just a few close friends recharges our batteries. We will 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 lives, they become powerful influences for good. However, such teaching bears fruit only if children submit to it.

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Honoring our parents is always right, whether our relationship has been good or strained. Honoring our father and mother means obeying their rules and submitting to their authority as long as we live in their home. That assumes that doing so is not illegal or immoral.

When they can no longer care for themselves, we must make necessary arrangements to meet their food, drink, clothing, and shelter needs.

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, will not 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 does not forbid capital punishment, self-defense, or war. The prohibition is against killing someone for illegitimate reasons.

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?**



## 31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

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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?**

How we treat others is connected with how we think about them. **Do you have boiling bitterness against anyone? What changes do you need so you are not “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 is not 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 does not 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. Cybersex with strangers over the internet, pornographic websites, magazines, and movies are all common.

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The best way to escape such temptations is to run— as from an angry swarm of 1000 hornets. Do not look back. Your life depends on it! Flee the evil desires of youth (2 Timothy 2:22). Eventually, playing too close to a fire will burn us.

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.<sup>3</sup> Both adultery and pornography destroy trust and undermine family stability. Proverbs 6:32 says that the one who commits adultery destroys himself. **How so?**

### **Do Not Take Other Peoples' Stuff**

**You shall not steal (Exodus 20: 15).**

Stealing is taking what does not belong to us. It is using our neighbors *for* our benefit instead of loving neighbors *for their benefit* (Matthew 22:39). Robbery victims feel violated, insecure, afraid, angry, and weakened in their ability to trust others.

I can vouch for those feelings as one robbed at least five times. Twice someone took the license plate from my car while the car was in a church parking lot! Twice someone stole my credit card 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 applies to a parent's kidnapping a child from the other parent or a parent with custody moving away from the other parent.

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Knowingly buying stolen property violates this commandment. Robbery would decrease if thieves had no market for stolen goods.

The right thing to do when we have found something someone has lost is to return it 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 are not using to work at home.**

Academic cheating is representing someone else's work as ours. 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.<sup>4</sup>

Based on the Eighth Commandment, how should we respond to the following:

- **Someone offers us a test copy to get an easy "A" without studying.**
- **The thrill of shoplifting tempts us.**
- **We are wasting time at work texting and talking with friends on the phone, on Facebook, etc.**

### **Tell the Truth**

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

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The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in truthful people (Proverbs 12:22). God does not 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 treats them unjustly and might even result in their death. It might seriously damage their reputations.

God's standard is for us to deal with others as honestly as He does with us. If we do not, the termites of deceit will undermine our friendships, working relationships, marriages, and families. 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**

Honesty means saying only what is true. **How is saying only what is true different from telling *everything* we believe is true?**

**Be Content with God**

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

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The word translated “covet” means to desire or take pleasure in something. It refers to both good and evil desires. Desiring things is not necessarily wrong. Our wants drive most of what we do.

We desire food because we are hungry. That is how God designed us. Inappropriate desires, however, often master us. Wanting anything more than God signals an unhealthy relationship with that person, place, or thing.

The command not to covet prohibits desiring another’s spouse, money, property, or possessions. When anything becomes more important to us than loving God and our neighbor, we are guilty of idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

We are covetous when our defining passions are for God’s gifts instead of God. Evil desires lead to sin. Our evil desires drag us away, entice, and tempt us. Our evil desires birth sin which leads to death (James 1:14–15).

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

Thieves want what belongs to others. By contrast, love wants the best for others. It is patient and kind. It does not envy or boast. It is not proud. It is not rude or self-seeking. It does not become angry easily 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).

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

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

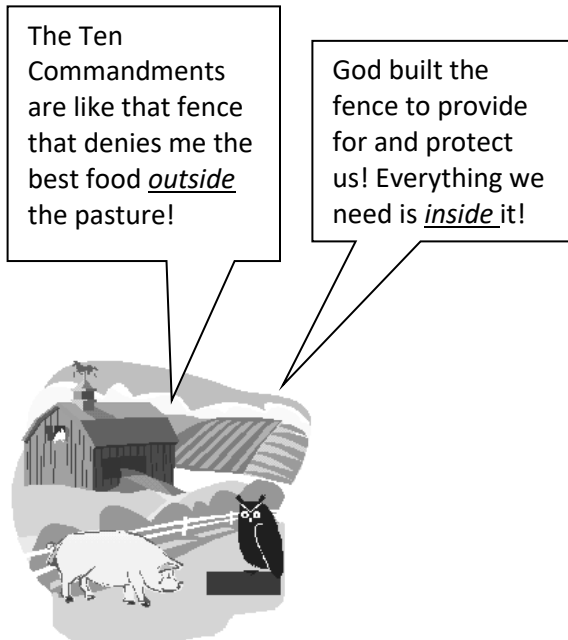


**Share your action plan to make those changes.**

### 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/cheating.html>.

### 19. Worship

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**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 will address a far more basic element—the nature of true worship.

#### **True Worship Is Not About Us**

The purpose of worship is not to bless, entertain, heal, or make us feel good. We do not attend a worship service to “get something.” Worship is giving glory to a holy God with our whole life. It does not 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 should 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 cannot we worship God and remain the same?**

### **Revelation Precedes Worship**

True worship begins with revelation and proceeds on to response and witness. God reveals Himself. If He did not, 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 it. No one named any of the items in the bag.

If God did not reveal what is in the closed bag of who He is, we would know little about Him. His creation reveals His power, intelligence, order, and beauty (Romans 1:20). Beyond that, He would 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.



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If God's revelation does not guide our worship, rules taught by men will (Matthew 15:9). **What are some things the church has taught you about worshiping that might be rules taught by men?**

A magician pulls a previously hidden rabbit out of a hat so the audience can see it. We learn who the invisible God is and what He has done through prayer, Scripture reading, drama, art, preaching, hymns, praise choruses, special music, testimonies, or other forms. Worship begins with revelation but does not 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. Doing God's will provides good feelings. 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 have not worshipped fully until we have given ourselves away to God and others! This is true and proper worship (Romans 12:1). True worship requires obeying and serving God. (John 4:23–24). **What worship is untrue and improper?**

### **Worship Transforms Our Relationships**

Improving our relationships with other believers is an important response to revelation. We witness in a watching world when we love and forgive each other.

Revelation also motivates individual witnessing. We tell others what we have seen, heard, and acted upon.

### **A Scriptural Sketch of Worship**

#### **The “Other Gods” Squad**

God prohibits worshipping any other god (Exodus 34:14). Nevertheless, created things, the work of our hands such as our house, electronic devices, car, “toys,” church bethel, etc. tempt us to worship them rather than the Creator (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 have purchased?**

#### **God Is Worthy of Worship**

In Exodus 32:8 we discover that part of worship is giving God credit for what He has done. Two additional aspects of worshiping God are bowing down to 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. Splendor, majesty, strength, and joy surround Him (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**

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) all worshipped Jesus.

One day at His name every knee will bow in heaven, on and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). **How does your life demonstrate that Jesus is Lord?**

### **True Worshippers Obey and Serve Jesus**

Deuteronomy 8:20 defines Not worshipping the Lord 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**

Let us consider the meaning behind worship rituals in our churches:

**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 it receives the tithes and offerings? Why?**

**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?**

Let us prepare to meet the King as diligently as we would to meet the President. Athletes cannot do their best if they do not warm up their muscles before events. Warm up for worship! Let us contemplate who God is and all He has done for us and 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 are not ready 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**

While playing table tennis, I often took 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 burnt down. Rebuilding was impractical because of modern building codes. Part of the congregation refused to join the majority who voted to move and build in another location. They

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preferred to worship in the remaining building. **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 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 our churches more like a ho-hum drive to a familiar place or 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). **Is our enthusiasm for true worship a good indicator of our spiritual health? Why?**

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

True worship requires a willingness to serve, obey, and submit to the Lord. Love, gratitude, and thanksgiving for who God is and all He has done motivate it.

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Attitude is more important than architecture. A small country church of thirty worshipping God with a deep sense of gratitude pleases God more than two thousand people going through the motions in a multi-million-dollar state-of-the-art sanctuary. How we worship is more important than where.

### Celebrate

Seventy percent of Israel's religious holidays were celebrations (Leviticus 23). Worship includes both joyful celebration and solemn reflection. **Toward which side is the balance tipped in your life?**

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

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

**What 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.



### 20. Idolatry

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



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

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

#### **God Will not Settle for the Silver Medal**

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

His demands should not seem strange. I know a man whose job was to deliver P-cola. His employer did not permit him to drink C-cola. Seeing a P-driver down an ice-cold C is not a good advertisement for P. **What kind of advertisement is it when God’s followers pay more attention to things and other people than 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

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hanging on our walls or pasted into 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 have 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 is *too* important.

**Identify God’s rivals based on your “images,” purchases, thoughts, and time use. What are the primary suspects?**

As we work through this lesson, we might discover we have more idols than we thought. We can resist the attraction of idolatry by blocking its passageways into our lives.

### **Closing the Pleasure Passageway**

God *is not* 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 is not whether we will experience pleasure or not. Will we walk the path God sets before us? 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.



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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. They spent 646 billion on outdoor recreation in 2010. That is more than five times as much as they gave to their churches in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

Pursuing pleasure decreases the time available to nurture our spiritual lives or to minister to others. **What does spending more on recreation than on God say about our 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.

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).

We should expect Him to give us that way of escape and *look for it*. **Write and implement 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 would 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.<sup>2</sup>

Boys looked up to people they had never met. Their dads 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 practice what they had learned, received, heard from, or seen in him (Philippians 4:9).

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We select friends or family members, historical figures, sports or media stars, political leaders, or teachers and coaches with admirable but not necessarily godly qualities. Sinful cravings, the lust of our eyes, and the boasting of what we have and do (1 John 2:16) influence our choices more than a desire to imitate someone like Paul (1 Corinthians 4:16).

We would rather “be like Mike” [Michael Jordan] than preach like Paul. The best defense against idolatry is to imitate 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. It suggests they are 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 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 them, 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. They demanded the best of my time, talents, thoughts, and finances. They controlled and empowered me. Goals are not necessarily bad. But they are no substitute for the Holy Spirit’s controlling and empowering ministry.

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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.

The tailback runs through the spot the defensive player just vacated. The defender unwittingly takes himself out of the play. We take ourselves out of God's game when we give our lives to earthly goals.

I attended a Christian retreat during my last year of college. I heard Leroy Eims say that the easiest way to become ineffective for God is *to give our lives to earthly goals*. Those words penetrated my heart.

I realized I could not 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 earthly things (Colossians 3:1–2).

**How could pursuing the following goals 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 want the prettiest yard on the block."
3. "I am determined to become part of the 'in-group' at school."
4. "I am 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."

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The pastor responded, “You did not understand me. That is 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 “protective” walls. We might even try to seal the cracks with the mortar of superstition.

We trust money most to protect us. Building contractors order a specific amount of brick to build a house. They know how many they need and do not order more. By contrast, we reveal the extent of our insecurity by ongoing dissatisfaction with the size of our accumulated financial pile, no matter its size.

Boston College’s Center on Wealth and Philanthropy studied how the wealthy in America think and live. Most of those who responded did not consider themselves financially secure. Their average net worth was seventy-eight million dollars.

One man who professed to be a committed Christian said he would not feel financially secure until he was worth one billion dollars. Of course, when he finally reached a billion, that was not enough!<sup>3</sup> Money is a wonderful servant but a terrible master. Jesus said we cannot serve God and money (Matthew 6:24).

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Our heart is where our treasure is. If money is our treasure, we will not have to look far from there to find our heart.

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

Paul labels greed to accumulate increasingly more as idolatry (Colossians 3:5). **If our happiness depends on continually buying and stockpiling 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 did not wash his underwear! His teammates had mixed feelings when his hitting streak ended! Airlines hardly ever have a thirteenth row. **Are superstitions idols? Why?**



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

**What 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.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](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/01/your-money/01money.html?_r=0) ).
2. ([www.englishuniversity.cz/fs/clanky/look\\_up\\_to.doc](http://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/>)

## 21. Baptism

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**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 people 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 water barrel 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 do not understand it much better than Susan! Parents think it is insurance if

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their children die unexpectedly. Some denominations teach that it is essential for salvation. Others teach that it is not that important.

Some baptize children, whereas others baptize only professing believers. Some sprinkle, some pour, some immerse once, and others dunk three times. No wonder confusion reigns!

Water baptism *is not* an indifferent matter. It is not *essential* for salvation because God saved the criminal on the cross apart from baptism (Luke 23:39–43). Yet, according to F.F. Bruce, a New Testament scholar, “The idea of an unbaptized Christian is simply not entertained in the New Testament.”<sup>1</sup> The New Testament teaches that baptism is the norm for Christians.

### **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 was a spiritual condition. The Law required a Jew who became ceremonially unclean to wash his clothes (Leviticus 11:25).

For an Israelite, distinguishing between clean and unclean was important. 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).



### **The Importance of Water Baptism**

Water baptism is not necessary for salvation, but it is 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 the 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. We should not make a rule based on the thief on the cross. It is the exception to the rule. In Galatians 3:27 and 1 Corinthians 1:13; 12:13 Paul takes for granted that baptism is for every Christian.

### **For Whom Is Baptism?**

Baptism is important for all who believe in Jesus Christ. It is a key part of the Great Commission: Jesus said He had all authority in heaven and on earth. His disciples were to go and make disciples of all nations.

They were to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They were to teach them to obey everything He had commanded His original disciples. Jesus promised He would always be with them to the 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 we are a Christian. It is our public identification with Jesus and His church.

Out West, people call unbranded calves that roam at large “mavericks.” They do not belong to anyone. A man claims them by putting his brand on them first at the annual round-up.

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Our brand identifies us. Some hats and sweatshirts I wear 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 will know I have made progress.

Through baptism, we Christians publicly confess that Jesus has purchased us. He died for us so that we could live for Him. He owns all who receive Him.

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 missionary forced the new believers 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 expected. A few friends and family members gathered to watch. The missionary in the river raised his hand, repeating familiar scriptures before baptizing the converts.

The first convert came out of the water shouting with excitement and joy. The quiet service was silent no more! The second convert did the same. The third convert also came up from the shallow water shouting for joy. Afterward, the watching missionary asked about the unusual tradition. Why all the shouting?

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"I haven't been able to communicate completely in this tribe's language," said the young missionary. "They heard the scripture but did not understand baptism was symbolic. 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!

The people in the local church chuckled as they heard the story. Then 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 does not 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 that God buried us with him through baptism into death so that, as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we also 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. **Were you thinking that during your baptism? What were you thinking?**

Baptism is our public testimony that we have renounced our old life of self-centeredness, joined ourselves to Christ, and begun to follow him in the fullness of strength He provides.

### **The Mode of Baptism**

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

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

"Have you found Jesus?" the preacher asked.

"No, I did not!" said the drunk.

The preacher then dunked him under for quite a bit longer, lifted him, 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, "Are you sure this is where he fell in?"

Immersion was the mode of baptism for at least the first hundred years of the faith. In the mid-second century pouring became an option for baptism if better options were not available. Immersion was the recommended practice.

The earliest account of the mode of baptizing is in the Didache, 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."<sup>2</sup>

The most moving baptismal service I performed was in the kitchen of a 90-year-old man. He came to know the Lord late in

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life and requested baptism. He was unable to go to the local river for it.

I used a pitcher to pour water over his head in his kitchen with his head over the sink. For a long time, he cried tears of joy after the baptism. Certain life experiences impress us, and that is one of them for me. That is the only time I baptized anyone by pouring.

### **A Serious Commitment**

A notorious sinner got religion at every revival meeting. Then 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!" Someone might have entered his name in a church record book, but it was not in the Book of Life.

Baptism expresses a *serious* commitment to follow Jesus. Some Muslim youth converting to Christianity find their parents tolerate their faith until baptism. At that point, their family and friends officially cut them off.

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

**If so, have you sought baptism?**

**If not, when will you?**



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

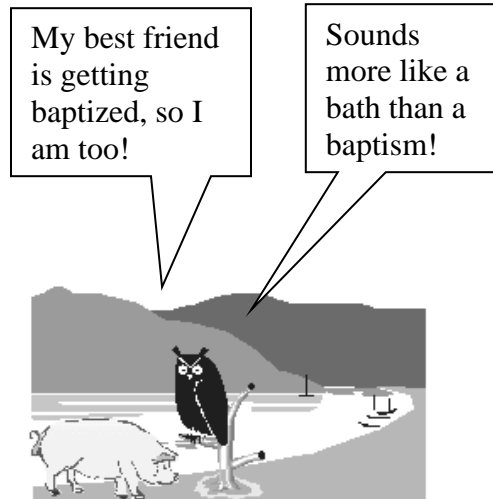
**What attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?**



**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.



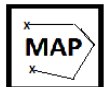
### Notes

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>

## 22. The Lord's Supper

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



Share your progress with your “Baptism” action plan.

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

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A potluck I once attended was a kid's dream. Meat and vegetables were scarce. Most people brought *desserts*—not that I am 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 have been to a few dinners that required plop, plop, fizz, fizz therapy, how about you? Potlucks are good, but 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. The bread and cup we take in remembrance of Jesus symbolize them all.

### **Rescuing Prodigal Mules**

We were born in Independence, Missouri— stubborn as mules, living for ourselves, actively rebelling against or passively ignoring our heavenly Father. We did not tell Him what to do—well, a little— and expected Him to return the favor. We posted the door of our hearts with our Declaration of Independence and "No Trespassing" signs to discourage God from knocking.

By all rights, He should have written us off and allowed us to reap the fruit of our foolishness. He did not. His love for us remained unending (John 3:16).

In the Gospels, Jesus *ate* with sinners. 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 connected 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. The Israelites applying the lamb's blood to their houses delivered them from God's judgment (Exodus 12:12–13). God provided Jesus and the Passover lamb as sacrifices (1 Corinthians 5:7).

**How does this “Passover Principle” apply 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). Blood sealed the agreement (covenant) that God made with Israel (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 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



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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 would not 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 did too (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 sinning and live for righteousness.

We identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection through baptism. We committed ourselves to live a new life dedicated to doing His will. The Lord's Supper is a reaffirmation of that commitment. We reassert our unity with Christ and His purposes by participating in the Lord's Supper.

### **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). We sometimes call the Lord's Supper the Eucharist. The name comes from the Greek word in Matthew 26 translated as "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 had not rescued us. Marriages would be broken, bodies abused, and relationships destroyed.

When we were all wrapped up in ourselves, we made small packages. Jesus is freeing us from all that keeps us from being just like him. Let us

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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 have received in Jesus Christ. He enriches our speaking and knowledge. He gives us spiritual gifts. He keeps us strong to the end. We fellowship with Him. We rejoice in 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 represent our 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 as “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 our sins, 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 discovered that our pilot bought our ticket. Although we cannot see Him, His still small voice comforts us, especially during turbulence. He is flying us toward a perfect landing in eternity.

On the way, we befriend other passengers who are sharing the ride. The plane is huge. We cannot know everyone but we can love those closest to us.

Upon arrival, we will see our pilot face to face and are His guests at the biggest celebration dinner ever. Those God invites 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 have trusted in the same Jesus as our Savior. We share the same Holy Spirit. We are all part of the church—the body of which Christ is the head. We are not living for ourselves but for Jesus.

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We all 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 in suffering for Christ on this side of eternity. **With all this in common, why is there not more unity in the church?**

### **Self-Examination**

We must 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 to 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 must confess our sins and repent 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 on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Based on these verses, we must be believers in Jesus Christ to participate in the Lord's Supper.

### **Application**

Jesus became broken bread and poured out wine. 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 is God’s message to you in this lesson?**

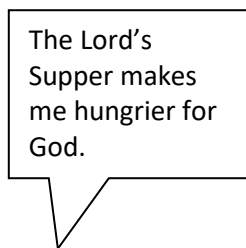
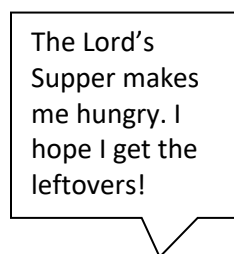
**What attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?**



**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.



## 23. Church Membership

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**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 told me, “I do not 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 could not. She would never have said, “My daughter does not have to be on a team to be a basketball player.”

For the obedient Christian, church attendance and membership are not optional. 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 restrict their freedom. By attending sporadically, remaining spectators, melting into a large

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gathering 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 are about as free as an amputated leg. Real freedom is the legs, arms, heart, lungs, etc. of Olympic sprinters all working together in complete harmony as they blast down the track toward the finish line.

Biblical freedom is never a license to do what we want. It is the power to obey as we ought. Unattached Christians are *un*-Christians—unconnected, undisciplined, unaccountable, and unfruitful.

A computer with an internet connection can accomplish more than one that is not. The same is true of Christians connected to a local church.

### **The Benefits of Membership**

#### **A Supporting Family**

My father did not know where we were in Ottawa, Canada. We had wandered far from the right road. We purchased a city map at a store. We discovered how to get back on the right road. That map restored our hope.

When we get off the right track spiritually, others in the church can guide us back. Spiritual people can gently restore those caught in a sin (Galatians 6:1). We fulfill the law of Christ by carrying each other's burdens (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 works (Ephesians 4:16).

### **Ministry Opportunities**

Every believer receives the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7). God gives believers at least one spiritual gift to build up the church.

The 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 evaluate my passion and gifts.

I had gifts in several but not all these areas. A few unexpected gifts emerged through this “learning by doing” discovery process. One of the best ways to discover our spiritual gifts is to try various ministries and see which are most fulfilling and fruitful.

When we join the church, we can experiment with various ministries to determine where we can serve most effectively. In most churches, leaders reserve some ministry opportunities for church members. To fully unwrap our spiritual gifts, we need to be members.

### **A Worshiping Family**

Anyone can come to a worship service. Membership is not an issue. 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 with others who have made a similar commitment.

Further, we commit ourselves to increasing the number of His committed worshipers in that place. We are not satisfied with filling a



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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 needs. They never get involved. They are not accountable for meeting someone else’s needs.

**To whom are you responsible to grow spiritually and reach out to others?**

Most do not progress far spiritually after receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord because few in the church 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.

Accountability to one another prepares us for our “final exam.” The entire world is accountable to God according to Romans 3:19. We have no excuse for our sins (John 15:22). We are responsible for the person we become and what we do.

Accountability to at least one other person helps us do better than we would without it. I had no regular devotional time with God until someone held me accountable for it.

### **Conflict Resolution**

Becoming a church member provides a practical way to resolve conflicts with other believers. If you fish, your line 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:

- 1) Go to the offending people privately and show them their fault. If they listen, the conflict is over.
- 2) If they do not listen, take one or two other Christians with you and repeat step one. If they listen, you have solved the problem.
- 3) If they do not listen, take the matter to the church.

### **A Spiritual Shepherd**

In the November 2000 issue of *Reader's Digest*, Sharon Forgue described her 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in Hawaii with her husband. Everyone swam for an hour. All except Sharon and a handsome young man then reentered the boat.

The man followed her everywhere as she snorkeled for another 40 minutes. When she climbed back into the boat, so did he. She was flattered and asked why he stayed in the water so long. He told her, "I am the lifeguard. I could not get out of the water until you did."

Spiritual lifeguards bless church members—pastors and leaders who watch over their souls, shepherd, and give direction. We must obey these leaders because they watch over us as those who must give an account (Hebrews 13:17).

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We must respect them and hold them in the highest regard because they work hard among us (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/sister, saint, disciple-maker, citizen, and promoter.

#### **1. Believer**

Those added to the early church were set apart because they trusted or believed in the Lord (Acts 5:14). Church members today must trust Jesus in all circumstances. **Describe several times when your belief in the Lord made a difference.**

#### **2. Brother/Sister**

Brother or sister is a relationship-rich term. Joining the church brings us into a whole new world of responsibilities to other members. Brothers and sisters 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) and spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).

They 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/sister” responsibilities that you need to give more attention to. Specifically, how can you become a better “brother/sister”?**

### 3. Saint

Saints are holy, set apart, and consecrated to God. We share in His purity. We separate ourselves 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. Because God is holy, we must be holy also (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 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 our 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).

As Jesus’ disciples, we accept and practice His teachings. We walk in His steps. We 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**

As church members, we 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 our leaders and submit to their authority (Hebrews 13:17) and give to believers who have need (Acts 2:45).

We 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? How could you improve?**



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

**What 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.



## 24. Personal Faith Story

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**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?**

Do we believe we have a spiritual story worth telling? We were not that bad before we received Christ, we are not that good now, and It has been a struggle! Compared to those who can recount deliverance from alcoholism, drug abuse, prostitution, gambling, etc., our spiritual experience seems as unexciting as watching water drip from a leaky faucet.

Unlike Saul of Tarsus, we have not seen the risen Christ. We have not heard God speak audibly or seen a five-second mini-vision in black and white. We are “trust and obey” believers and feel inferior in those two basics.

Have we ever asked ourselves, “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 is not exciting? Explain.**

### **The Way We Were**

We have forgotten the relentless single-file march of an army of unsatisfying days lived out under sin’s merciless control. Nothing changed but the date. We had no peace, purpose, hope, or fulfillment and no claim to the next world.

For many, life is like a daily chase after the butterfly of good feelings. Although occasionally, they capture them, they always escape through a hole in the net. Tomorrow we must pursue them all over again. Something is missing for Butterfly chasers but they do not know what. They do not realize Christ and His church promise the purpose for which they long. **Believing our story is not important hinders others from experiencing a fulfilling way of life. How?**

### **Write for Insight**

Each of us benefits from thinking long and hard about how God has been at work in our lives. We are not yet what we want to be, and our failures, like facial blemishes, are all too familiar. Nevertheless, we have moved farther from the spiritual starting line than we realize. **How would writing down your 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 considerable progress. God has chosen to store His living water in imperfect vessels still under construction. We are leaky vessels, but God can still channel His living water through us to satisfy the spiritually thirsty.

We are a work in progress, and Jesus gets all the credit for any improvement. Our role is not to pretend we possess sinless perfection but to be transparent. People cannot relate to Never Fail Fred or Faultless Freda anyway.

If Hollywood had made a movie based on *all* our thoughts during the last year, I would not have attended the premiere! Would you attend yours?

### **Our Story Matters**

Our stories are about people God is still working on. We are not beautiful swans yet. But we are not the ugly ducklings we once were. Our stories connect with people who are like us.



## 31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity

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People who “are not 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.

### **One Theme and Three Sections**

Our story can help open the eyes of not-yet-believers, but first, we must write it. Before we can do that, we must pray and reflect on how God has worked in our lives.

The process will take at least several hours, but the blessings that can result are beyond calculation. We should organize our thoughts around a single theme, such as how our purpose or values have changed.

To communicate our story effectively, we should organize it into three sections:

- 1) We describe what our life was like before knowing Jesus personally.
- 2) We should spell out how we came to know Christ, so others know how to receive Him too.
- 3) We explain how receiving Christ has improved how we relate to God, others, and ourselves.

A carefully prepared testimony has 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 to share how the truth Rick is expounding influenced his/her life. The testimony, like a hammer, drives Rick’s point home!

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My testimony follows. Look for the dominant theme.

“Spiritual things were not 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 sanctuary, I rarely thought about God and never prayed voluntarily or read the Bible.

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 achieving them did not 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 would go there when I died.

In my church, I often heard that Jesus had died on the cross to pay the penalty for my moral and spiritual imperfections. I knew I was not perfect, but I did not 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 through the good things I did.

During the fall of 1968, hearing 1 John 5:11-12 quoted, I understood I did not have to make any payments. 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.”

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That evening in my dorm room, I trusted in Jesus' sacrifice *alone* to give me the 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. Love gradually displaced fear as a dominant motivator in my spiritual life.

My fear of death diminished. God lifted the weight of guilt for my moral failures when I trusted Jesus' death as payment in full. I knew I would go to heaven when I died because I could trust Jesus to keep His promise to take me there.

The new life I received would not allow me to relate to God or others in the same old ways. I remember feeling a twinge of conscience after talking negatively about people who were not present—something I had done repeatedly for years without thinking twice about it.

God convinced me that my language needed some attention. My words (& % @ # !) were a symptom of the anger and desire for control that swirled within me. Gradually I saw improvement.

Little by little God's love for and acceptance of me freed me to love and accept others. I gradually developed a powerful desire to serve others that I did not have before the fall of 1968.

My goal became to know Jesus better and help others know Him too. Working toward that goal brought fulfillment I had not experienced when I did my own thing."

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The central theme of my testimony is how my life purpose and values changed through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now It is your turn. Organize and write your thoughts.

Describe your life before you met Christ. What was important to you? What motivated you? What were your goals? What problems did you face? What place did self-interest occupy in your plans and decisions? Organize your thoughts around a single theme.

Clearly describe how you received Christ so others can receive Him. The basic content you need to communicate is that to become a Christian you need to know that you are a sinner and that Christ died for your sins. You had to turn from going your way to His way and invite Him into your life as your Forgiver and Leader.

How has your life changed since receiving Christ? What is important to you? What motivates you? What are your goals and problems? How do you deal with them? How do you live for Christ, etc.?

Your testimony is your spiritual autobiography. It is 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 shared my spiritual story with two graduate students. Minutes earlier I had requested permission to share the gospel with them. They refused. I then asked whether I could share how Christ had influenced my life.

Since that seemed safe to them, 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 never-ending process again.

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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 is 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 spiritual fires by reminding *you* anew how much Christ has done.



**What is God’s message to you in this lesson?  
What 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.



### 25. Witnessing

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**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.

Light bulbs get dirty. So do we. 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 have sinned, changing our attitude, and forsaking our sins. To maximize our shine for Jesus, we must confess our sins as soon and often as God convicts us.

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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 was not ashamed of the gospel (Romans 1:16).

Christ's love is our motivation to illuminate our surroundings with His 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 seek and save lost people (Luke 19:10). Jesus' disciples are responsible for continuing that mission (John 20:21). We cannot 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 through 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 the Holy Spirit controls and empowers us, 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 six ways to reach people:

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**Direct Method** - In Acts 2, Peter's preaching was as subtle as a sledgehammer! Some people respond best to the gospel when evangelists confront them with their sins and the need to repent.

Direct evangelists explain the gospel and challenge others to receive Christ as their Forgiver and Leader. 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, More Than a Carpenter*, and other books equip us to defend the faith. Does this style appeal 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!" Personal experience evangelists tell the difference Jesus has made in their lives. Many can share dramatic stories of personal transformation. Is that you?

**Relationship Method** - Jesus delivered a man tormented by an unclean spirit and told him to go home to his people and tell them what the Lord has done for him, and His mercy upon him (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 is based.



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**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 could not share the message effectively but 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 people to the God who filled her heart with love and could do the same for them. This may be your style if you have gifts of mercy, helps, hospitality, giving, or encouragement.

### **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, people are more receptive to the gospel than when everything goes smoothly.

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Many do not fish as often as they'd like because of the difficult transition from the chores to the shores—they do not get around to it.

We do not evangelize as much as we would like to. One reason is the difficulty of moving from small talk to God talk.

Certain questions can help us bridge the conversation from the weather, sports, etc., to spiritual things. They include:

1. When you know someone is going through tough times, ask, "*Would you like to be closer to God?*" If the answer is "Yes," say, "Let me show you how you can be," and then we can share "Connecting with God."

2. *Why do you think people feel so empty, even when they have so much?* Here is an opportunity to tell how Jesus has brought meaning to our lives and filled our empty spots by sharing our testimony.

3. *Do you think there is a purpose and meaning in life? What do you think it is?* Here is another opportunity to share our 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?*" We share our testimony.

5. If they attend a church service with you or another 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 is not, "Yes," ask, "*Would you like to?*" If the response is positive, we can share "Connecting with God."

6. We can talk about an obvious need in their lives such as a lack of purpose, fear, or loneliness, and share how Christ has met that need in our life.

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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 does not 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 indirect question reveals whether people trust their goodness or what Christ has done for them on the cross.

6. If people believe God will let them into heaven based on their performance, ask, "If what you believe is not true, would you want to know it?"

If "Yes," share *Connecting with God*. If "No," say nothing. Their curiosity could lead them to ask, "Well, are you not going to tell me?"

### **Hooking and Reeling Them in**

We can explain the gospel briefly as two things to know and two things to do.

The first thing we need to know is that we are sinners because we cannot measure up to the standard Jesus set when He walked on earth. We are not as good as He was, and He is God's goodness standard.

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The second thing to know 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 to turn from self-centered living to follow Jesus.

The second is to invite Jesus Christ into our lives to be our personal Forgiver and Leader and occupy the driver's seat of our lives.

To share the gospel, we read "*Connecting with God.*"

### 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 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 way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. SIN is a rebellious attitude against the Captain of our "ship":



*SIN Is Universal*

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Romans 3:23 - For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Jesus is the moral measuring stick.  
Every person on earth falls short of His moral and spiritual standards.

### **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**

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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 is 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 am willing to do what You want!

#### **b. Faith means receiving Christ, God’s provision for our sins.**

- To believe in Christ means to receive him.
- “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).

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- 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.”

**Only you can open the door of your life to Jesus Christ.**

**Opening the door means:**

- Being willing to follow Jesus instead of your selfish desires [Repent]. God gives us the desire and ability to obey.
- 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 by using 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 to do in Revelation 3:20 if you open the door? You can take Jesus at his word. Nothing is more certain!

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Do not expect a wonderful feeling inside. God honors faith. Do not 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 everlasting 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 have 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.



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

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

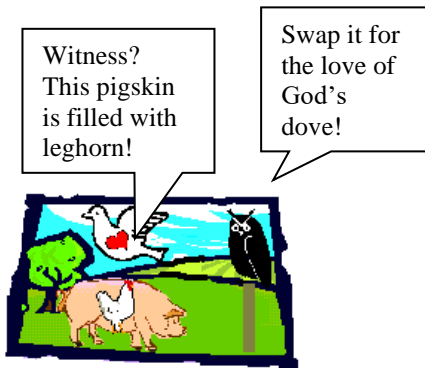


**Share your action plan to make those changes.**



### Memory Verse

Matthew 4:19 – “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”



## 26. Mentoring

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**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 people by sharing God-given resources to multiply workers for the spiritual harvest fields.<sup>1</sup> All believers have divinely granted assets that can help others serve Jesus better.

Christianity is best communicated through modeling. A mentor is a model, but not a perfect one. Timothy witnessed Paul’s teaching, way

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of life, purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecution, and suffering (2 Timothy 3:10–11).

Jesus appointed twelve men to 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 for the Father and showed them how.

### **The Impact of Mentoring**

Andrew received no headlines. He and Barnabas were lesser but essential lights of the Christian team. 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 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. We can trace this "influence chain" back to Edward Kimball.<sup>2</sup> What does God want to do through us?

### **Swelling the Master's Convoy**

Knowing God's Word is not our ultimate objective. Legions of demons could score 100% on a Bible content test, but their application is zero. We do not want to imitate *them*!

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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 transforming apathetic 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 describe Jesus and those His Spirit empowers. Mentors teach them through words and examples.

"DISCIPLES" summarizes these disciplines:

**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. 2 Corinthians 5:15 describes this as living for Christ. God will reward believers who faithfully manage these resources (Luke 19:17). Those who give themselves first to the Lord share 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 (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).

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**Immersed in loving ministry.** God has given us at least one gift 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). Luke 9:23 describes this 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.

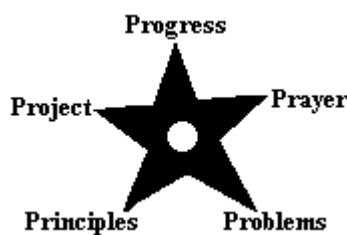
Prayer demonstrates our dependence on God. Its primary motivation is to *become* more like Jesus. We must teach believers to play all the keys on the instrument of prayer, including exalting God for who he is and what he has done; trusting in Jesus, no matter what; acknowledging their sins; surrendering 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 we have discovered how to recycle our hours, we can only mentor one person at a time. That will take about twelve months. We should choose someone faithful, available, teachable, spiritually hungry, accountable, and open to change. Such a person does assigned tasks and studies the Scriptures.

Mentoring is intensely relational. That is why men should mentor males, and women, other females. We do not 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) consume an hour and the Project consumes another hour.

- **Progress** – We should check whether the person mentored has completed the assigned lesson, memorized the assigned verses, and read at least five chapters/week in the New Testament.

We must lead the way by doing all these ourselves. We should lovingly confront them when they do not complete the assignments. We cease mentoring those who refuse to do assignments.

**Principles** – We can communicate biblical principles through *31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity* – We should assign one lesson/week for 31 weeks. When we meet, we answer any questions. (<https://www.christiangrowthresources.com/31-steps->

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toward-spiritual-maturity) or *His Power for Your Weakness* (<https://www.christiangrowthresources.com/his-power-for-your-weakness>) by assigning seven lessons each week.

- **Problems** – We listen to his/her problems and suggest biblical solutions. We do not have to project perfection. We must be real. Everyone has problems. If we want them to share theirs, we must share ours. There are no whole people. We show how to glue God’s promises to problems. We must beware of fostering spiritual dependence.
- **Prayer** - Prayer bonds us to the people we are mentoring. As we pray together, we are demonstrating how to pray.
- **Practical Projects** – We should do practical ministry projects together. 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. We must show believers how to do something with their faith.

We can use the Spiritual Journey Tracker to chart spiritual progress. We enter the date the person we are mentoring begins or completes each, as applicable. If there are items we as a mentor have not completed, we work on them while we mentor someone else. We cannot lead others where we have not been!

### Spiritual Journey Tracker

\_\_\_ Has assurance of salvation

\_\_\_ Knows how to deal with his/her sin

\_\_\_ Has been baptized

\_\_\_ Participates in Lord’s Supper

\_\_\_ Reads, applies the Scriptures, and prays at least 5 days/week

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- Memorizes and meditates on Scripture regularly
- Regularly participates in a small group
- Attends worship regularly
- Trusts the Holy Spirit to empower the Christian life
- Demonstrates the 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 a 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 is God's message to you in this lesson?**

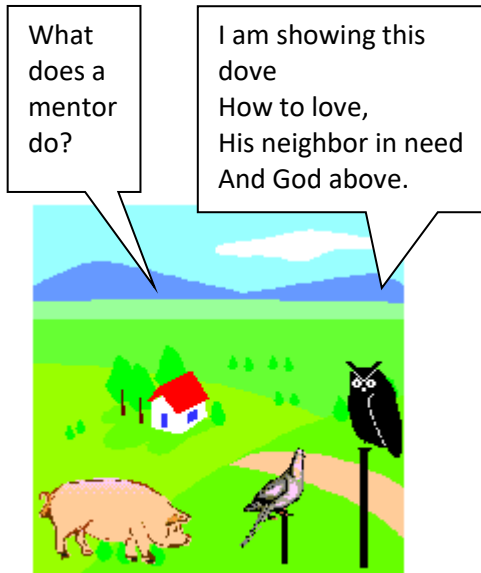
**What attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?**



**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.

## **27. Spiritual Passion**

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.





**Share your progress carrying out your “Mentoring” action plan.**

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

### **Who Wants to Have Influence?**

Are we satisfied to live and die without leaving a ripple on the pond of life? I did not think so! We want our lives to count for something, but our schoolwork or jobs do not fulfill that desire. We do not even *like* our homework or job! **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 us. We are starters on His team. Although we might not be the quarterback, we have a vital 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 us (Matthew 25:14–30). **Do you know what Jesus wants your primary ministry to be? 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 us 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 *us* with talents

and desires to build His church! He is depending on and expecting us 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 cannot make a three-point shot with a basketball, but good luck to our hands if our kidneys have not been filtering blood for the last two weeks!

We must find our place in the church and *work* with other believers. In the process, we will experience deep satisfaction (and sometimes frustration!). We must hang in there.

We are part of God’s “bodybuilding” equipment. He has resourced us with spiritual passion, spiritual gifts, and an appropriate temperament to contribute to the health and growth of the church. These three complement each other. In this lesson, we will identify our spiritual passion. The next two lessons will help us discover our spiritual gifts and temperament.

### **Spiritual Passion Defined**

Spiritual passion guides us to the “body-building” ministry God assigns us. Spiritual gift inventories are a recent development. For over 1900 years no such tools existed. The key has always been need and passion.

Our ministry is where our desires intersect the needs of the church and the world. The key question is, **“What do you want to do for Jesus?”**

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What makes the spiritual wind chimes of our hearts sing? What drives us? What are we internally motivated to do? What excites us? What fulfills us? If our ministry is consistent with what gives us the most joy and what we are born to do, we will experience rich fulfillment.

I wanted 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**

#### **Passion Points towards Our Ministry**

Some people prefer working 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 *was not* 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 an area of Peru.

He relates with people but primarily works with information. He is touching thousands for Christ in a ministry where his desires and the world's needs intersect.

Our passion might change as we mature. In 1995 my passion was discipleship. In the early 2000s, another passion came alongside it—helping churches become healthier.

We may have a persistent urge to minister to infants, young children, Junior High, Senior High, young adults, adults, or the elderly. Or singles, couples, or young families.

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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?**

To discover our passion consider our church's ministries list. Hopefully, the list includes a description of each one. In general, the list covers ministries of the word and practical service.

Which ones are most attractive? God might be giving us a passion to begin a ministry that is not yet on the list. The pastor would love to hear about it. The following list was adapted from "New Providence Church of God Ministry Opportunities." **First, check all ministries that appeal to you, even though your church might not yet have them. Second, review the ministries you have marked, and circle the four of greatest interest.**

### 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

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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

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**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

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**Intercession:** \_\_ Pray for the Lost by Name \_\_ Pray for Church Leaders by Name \_\_ Pray for Church Members by Name \_\_ Pray for New Believers by Name \_\_ Pray for Missionaries by Name

**Other:**

**Now that we have reviewed the list of potential ministries, define your spiritual passion in twenty-five or fewer words:**



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

**What 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.

Weeeeeee!  
I dread teaching Junior High!

Look for ministry you can do with  
zeal instead of squeal.



## 28. Spiritual Gifts

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**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 are 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 use to glorify Jesus Christ.

### **Interdependent Ministry**

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.



### **Our Church Needs Our 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.

We 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**

We experiment to find the right fit when putting a jigsaw puzzle together. We should lend a helping hand, especially in ministries in which we have the greatest interest. That is how to discover the ministry that best fits our passions, gifts, and temperament.

### **Making the Most of Our Gift(s)**

We should not expect our gifts to bless the socks off others the first three minutes after they are unwrapped. No one jumps into the water for the 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 our gifts is a process that takes time. It starts when we "get into the water."

**Fruitful ministry = God-given gifts & desire + Comfort-zone stretching faith + Training + Effort.**

### **Primary and Supportive Gifts**

We can divide the spiritual gifts mentioned in Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, 28, and Ephesians 4:11 into primary and

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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.

### **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, joyfully meet practical needs so that spiritual ministry happens in and through those helped.

**Giving** - The desire and ability to contribute 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.

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**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, including lodging and food, for believers who need it.

### Measuring Our Ministry

Does our present ministry fit our spiritual passion, gifts, and temperament? If it does, we should be growing in Christ, motivated to serve, seeing spiritual fruit, helping others grow in Christ, experiencing fulfillment, and others should affirm it. Do you feel like you are in the right place?  Yes  No

### Finding Significance through Ministry

The following spiritual gifts inventory will help us who are not presently involved in any ministry to find our niche. Powered by the Spirit of God, we can make a significant contribution. We might never become a familiar name in the larger Christian community, but our eternal impact can be greater than we 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.

#### Group 1 (Bullets Circled = \_\_\_)

- People say you “step on their toes” when you share the Word.
- You are open and honest about your shortcomings.

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- 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 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.
- Finding explanations for Scripture passages you do not understand motivates you.
- You enjoy studying.
- When you teach the Scriptures, people say you are blessing them.
- Personal feelings or opinions do not influence you much.
- 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 others to like and accept you.

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- You are shy in public.
- You get involved in too many activities.
- You do not feel worthy to be a spiritual leader.

### **Group 4 (Bullets Circled = \_\_\_\_)**

- You invest money wisely.
- You do not want recognition for giving.
- You are sensitive to financial needs that others do not recognize.
- You are not 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 many 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.

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### **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 to help them grow spiritually.

### **Group 7 (Bullets Circled = \_\_\_\_)**

- You want to set goals.
- You can “see” what things will be like when you accomplish your goal.
- 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.
- 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 food bank, etc.
- You are patient.

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- 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 do not have a 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 hearts to Jesus.
- You frequently share with others the difference Jesus has made in your life.
- The plight of lost people burdens you.
- You relate well to others.
- You are good at sensing the spiritual condition of others after a brief conversation about spiritual things.
- You can make a clear presentation of the gospel.
- You are confident that sharing the gospel helps solve people's problems.
- You develop relationships with unchurched people.
- You want to see new believers become part of a local church.
- You look for 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.

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- 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 is easy for you to talk to strangers.
- Ministering to those who cannot return the favor blesses you.
- You feel comfortable around all kinds of people.
- You attract new people in the church.
- 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.

Record the total number of circled bullets in each group. Then place numbers 1-3 after the three highest-scoring gifts.



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- Group 1 \_\_\_\_\_ (Prophecy)
- Group 2 \_\_\_\_\_ (Teaching)
- Group 3 \_\_\_\_\_ (Helps)
- Group 4 \_\_\_\_\_ (Giving)
- Group 5 \_\_\_\_\_ (Administration)
- Group 6 \_\_\_\_\_ (Encouragement)
- Group 7 \_\_\_\_\_ (Leadership)
- Group 8 \_\_\_\_\_ (Mercy)
- Group 9 \_\_\_\_\_ (Evangelism)
- Group 10 \_\_\_\_\_ (Shepherding)
- Group 11 \_\_\_\_\_ (Hospitality)

**My spiritual gifts are:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



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

**What 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.



### 29. Temperament

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**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 our temperament to harmonize with our spiritual passion and spiritual gifts. People whose ministry is confrontational evangelism take the initiative in sharing the gospel with others. They also take the initiative in completing other kinds of tasks not related to evangelism, because that is their personality.

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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. All types are necessary to accomplish God's work in our church. We have influencing strengths and weaknesses based on our temperament. How we relate to tasks and people reveals them.

Detail-oriented administrative tasks behind a desk do not fulfill a "people-person. 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 does not require introverts to be the life of the party. Our temperament fits our ministry!

As we shall see, God gifts Directors to formulate our 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 people do things right.

### **Discovering Your Temperament**

Here is 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.

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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 **school**. If you do not 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 marked “d” with a 3. He dislikes meeting new people; thus, he marked “b” with a 0. Taking the lead in meeting them is **LEAST** like him.

Joe also likes to respond to people but not as much as he enjoys helping others complete tasks, so he marked “c” with 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 the 16 groups of four items from the one that describes you **best** (3) to the one **least** like you (0). Each of the 16 groups of four should have one 3, one 2, one 1, and one 0.

### **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

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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 exactly 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 of losing face/social approval
- c. Excellent at completing projects
- d. Can figure out complex problems

### **Group 7**

- a. Brave
- b. Persuasive
- c. Helpful
- d. Meticulous

### **Group 8**

- a. Take chances
- b. Make friends easily
- c. Give in
- d. Expect the best of myself and others

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### **Group 9**

- a. Speak freely
- b. Look on the 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. Likable
- c. Think before speaking
- d. Avoid risks

### **Group 14**

- a. Want control
- b. Disorganized
- c. Hard on myself
- d. Want many explanations

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### 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

### Adding Your Scores

Add 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**. The total of the a's, b's, c's, and d's 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 the total is not 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)

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\_\_\_ Perfector (d's)

Check (x) your dominant temperament. If two tie for the highest, check both.

Director \_\_\_ Promoter \_\_\_ Helper \_\_\_ Perfector \_\_\_

### **Temperament Strengths/Weaknesses**

Let us explore the strengths and weaknesses of our dominant and secondary temperaments. That will help us understand ourselves better. It will point us toward the ministry that God has designed for us.

Studying the descriptions of other temperaments improves our understanding of and relationships with others. Just because people are not like us does not mean something is wrong with them!

Only some of the strengths or weaknesses that follow under a description of our dominant temperament will fit us. Our personality combines usually two and sometimes three major temperament parts in varying proportions.

The description of our dominant temperament should fit us better than any of the others, but the strengths and weaknesses of other temperaments may also fit. To get a clearer picture of how God wired us, **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.



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Directors lead boldly. Their emotions or fear of consequences do not influence their decisions. If we need a job accomplished, we should assign it to a Director. The Apostle Paul had the temperament of a Director.

Directors take risks that “play-it-safe” temperaments would not even consider. They can play a valuable role in leading the church to step out in faith into risky ministries beyond the comfort zones of other temperaments.

### **Director Weaknesses**

Directors quickly become impatient when life is not going their way. They hate wasted time. They get upset when they miss one panel of a revolving door!

Directors are not in touch with the feelings of others because productivity is 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 supervise. “Road-kill” all over the office!

Their bottom line is results. They are pushy to get them. They are more productive than popular, but that does not bother them.

Directors are poor listeners. They hate wasting time so they want others to get directly to the point. Communicate with Directors by starting with the bottom line. Fill in only the details they request.

In conflict situations, Directors push the control pedal to the floor. They insist on doing things their way immediately.

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Directors would be more effective if they patiently listened to and supported 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 salespeople. They lean heavily on their verbal skills to accomplish this.

One church took teenagers to a movie. Most of the teenagers who attended came because one of the youth leaders, a Promoter, invited them.

Promoters are warm, outgoing, and personable. They like to have fun and rush from one exciting activity to the next. They attract people. 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 Helpers or Perfecters plants. Why?

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 are good speakers because of their verbal skills, passion, and enthusiasm for the subject.

They enjoy being on stage, in front of people, and the spotlight. They stir the emotions of their audience. They value public recognition and approval. The Apostle Peter was a Promoter.

### **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 are overly optimistic. The world would be a better place if it conformed to their expectations. Unfortunately, it does not and never will.

Follow-through can be a problem. They do not always do what they so enthusiastically recommend to others. They start projects with great enthusiasm but often do not finish. Uncompleted projects in and around their homes bear testimony to this characteristic.

They can use their considerable verbal skills to manipulate and take advantage of others. Some use words to paint a picture of reality that benefits them.

In conflict, Promoters are like cornered animals. They attack. They fire verbal bullets in a machine-gun-like barrage at the source of the irritation.

Promoters would be more effective if they focused on results, facts, potential 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. They value peace and harmony.

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They are loyal to the core. When things are not going well in a church, and people begin to leave, Helpers stay until the end.

Helpers are the best communicators of the four temperament types because they *listen* as well as they talk. They make great counselors.

Expressing appreciation motivates Helpers. But, unlike Promoters, they do not like public recognition. We should send cards, give them a call, or tell them privately how much we appreciate them. That keeps their motors humming!

Helpers are dependable and steady. 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 we must decide.

People whom a decision affects feel they have some say. On the other hand, Helpers' desire for peace and harmony often prevents them from making a decision that would benefit the majority, because it would upset a few people.

### **Helpers Weaknesses**

Helpers are not comfortable initiating tasks or relationships with people. Although they would make a faithful friend for unchurched people looking for friends, they rarely risk the first step to form the relationship.

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Helpers resist change. They like 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 is good enough for them!

In conflict situations, to promote peace and harmony, Helpers give in. Helpers on church councils do not always favor what they approve. The vote might be unanimous, but some who voted for it will not support it with their time or money. They do not voice their opposition at the meeting but might in the parking lot. Their “yes” does not always mean “yes.”

Helpers are hard on themselves and often have low self-images and little self-confidence. They hate to disappoint, so they do not say no to requests.

As a result, they often serve in too many areas to do an adequate job in any one. Meanwhile, their resentment smolders. They do not like some of the jobs they agreed to take.

Helpers would be more effective if they cared less about what others think of them, did not cave in during conflict, learned to say no to others' requests, and initiated more.

### **Perfecters Strengths**

Perfecters love details and facts. They are solemn, thoughtful, thorough, organized, and accurate. Their strong motivation to do things right is *their* distinguishing characteristic. If they do not have time to do a job properly, they will not do it.

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They are careful and safety conscious. They work hard and do not 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 receive a speeding ticket.

Perfecters respond to tasks. They are not people-persons. Their social skills are often underdeveloped. They walk past others without saying hello. It could be because of their weak social skills or because they are contemplating how to do some tasks perfectly.

To encourage Perfecters, praise their *work*, not them. That will motivate them to keep serving with all their heart.

### **Perfector Weaknesses**

Like the other three temperaments, the weakness of Perfecters is their strength out of control. They waste time trying to make everything perfect.

The fear of making mistakes limits the volume of their work. They need a mountain of evidence before they decide. Of all temperaments, they are 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 pleasing them is impossible. Perfecters take great pains in everything and give them to others!

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Perfectionists would be more effective if they emphasized doing right things as much as doing things right, made decisions before eliminating every possibility of error, risked more, and worked harder on building relationships.

**What have you learned about yourself from this lesson?**

**What have you learned about others?**



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

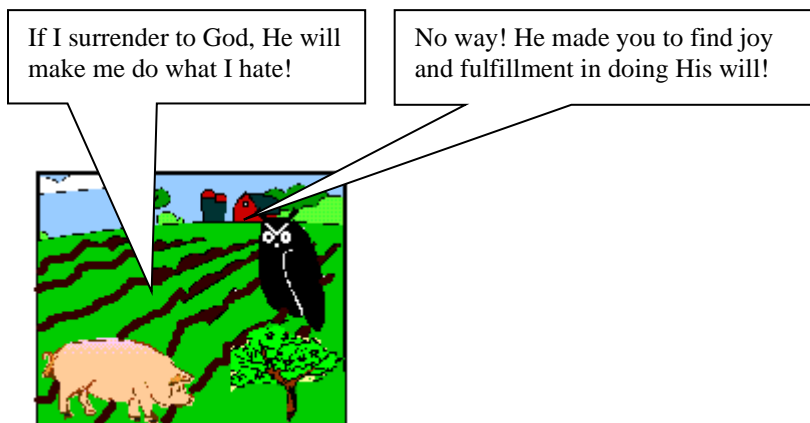
**What attitudes/thought patterns do you need to change?**



**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.



### 30. Stewardship

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**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. Typically, when I read a book, I underline important ideas. By contrast, I did not make a single mark in the borrowed book, because he would entrust it to 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 benefit. If called upon, however, he had to explain how he had performed his duties. His continuing employment depended on his faithfulness (Luke 16:1–13).

Jesus speaks as a superior in Luke 12:42 and implies we manage His resources while He is absent. He did not purchase us to eat, drink, be merry, and play with our toys until He calls us home! We represent *Him*. Wow!

We belong to the Lord (Romans 14:8). We do not hold the “title” to ourselves. God bought us at a price (1 Corinthians 6:19–20)—the blood of Jesus (Revelation 5:9). The intended result of His purchase is that we



will live for Him (2 Corinthians 5:14–15). **Share ways that *huge* idea could radically alter your 24/7 life.**

### **Who is the Boss?**

Wise managers settle the ownership issue. Until Jesus' name is on the title deed of our lives, we have *no* chance of being a faithful steward. We and everything we have come from Him. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, including people (Psalm 24:1). Since *everything* is His, we are accountable to Him for how we treat the earth and its people. **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 good and bad stewardship. A man was going on a journey. He entrusted bags of gold to three servants. The first received five; the second received two; the third received one. Each received money according to his ability (v. 15).

God expects more from those 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!<sup>1</sup> It is not a Christmas present. The giver expected a return on his investment. The giver of these bags of gold represents Jesus (v. 14). The servants represent us.

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The man going on a journey returned after a long absence. His servants gave an accounting of their stewardship. The first two were equally faithful even though one had received five bags and the other two. Each had doubled the number of bags of gold he initially received. Each received the same words of praise. He called both good and faithful servants and put them in charge of many things (Matthew 25:21, 23). He invited both to share his happiness. **Based on this parable, how will God reward those who are faithful stewards?**

### **Sinking Stewardship**

The third servant returned to his master what he had been given. He did not add to it at all. He successfully protected it against loss and thought he did a commendable job. His master expected a return on his investment and was not pleased (Matthew 25:26–27). The master punished the servant. He took the bag of gold and threw him into the darkness where there was 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). We are stewards of all the gifts He has given us. Some day we will have to explain how we have managed each one. Many believers think stewardship concerns only dollar signs. It is much bigger than that. We are responsible for managing faithfully our *whole* life including:

**Spiritual gift(s)** (1 Peter 4:10-11)--We are responsible for managing the spiritual gifts we previously listed, which are \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Within the next two weeks ask your pastor how you can use your spiritual gifts to minister to others.

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**Gospel** (1 Thessalonians 2:4) -- Suppose our intelligent cousin tells us how to cure all cancer shortly before he dies in an auto accident. The news of that cure is too good to keep to ourselves!

The gospel is the only cure for sin. It is selfish to keep it to ourselves and tell no one, even though we know many with the disease will foolishly choose not to take it!

We should prepare to share the message as effectively as possible. That includes developing our testimony. Let us look for opportunities to share how Christ has helped us with our unchurched or unbelieving friends, relatives, and neighbors. We 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, we need to think differently about people whom we cut with those words. Praying every day for God to bless them will change our attitude and how we speak to them.

Think about the situations in which we most often speak words and display attitudes that do not 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 several types of giving including food, drink, clothing, hospitality, medicine, time, and money (Mark 12:41–44).

One way to meet needs is to support a child through an organization like World Vision. Another is to participate in relief efforts in areas of

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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 our church fellowship.

### How to Give

- Proportionately. People gave the freewill offering in proportion to the Lord's blessings (Deuteronomy 16:10). The Lord expects much from those He gives 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
- Cheerfully. God does not want us to give reluctantly or under compulsion. He loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- Generously. Generous givers realize everything they have comes from God's hand (1 Chronicles 29:14). Those who sow generously will reap generously (2 Corinthians 9:6).
- Regularly. Supporting the ministry of our church is not like going to the movies where we only pay when we attend. The Corinthian believers were to set aside money weekly proportional to 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). **Put that promise in your own words.**
- God awards credit for giving (Philippians 4:17) and rewards those who give.

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- God prospers, refreshes, and blesses generous people (Proverbs 11:25, 22:9).
- God promises to pour so many blessings to those who give Him 10% of their income that they will not have room for it (Malachi 3:10).
- God measures our blessing by the same measure we use to give (Luke 6:38). If we give cents, we will receive cents. If we give dollars, He gives dollars, etc.
- God will meet all our 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 is God's message to you in this lesson?**

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



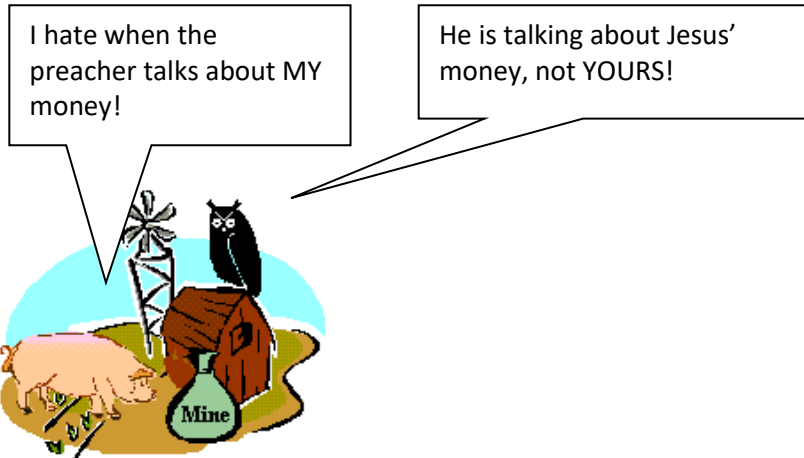
**Share your action plan to make those changes.**

### **Memory Verse**

1 Corinthians 4:2 – Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

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1. [www.ask.com](http://www.ask.com) › [Q&A](#) › [Society](#) › [Religion and Spirituality](#)

### 31. Love

You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.



**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 is not a feeling or an emotion, as much as a *decision*, whatever the cost, to do for others what we would have them do for us.

### 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.

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Then the unexpected happened. Her youngest brother's wife died from complications from surgery at the age of thirty-seven. Her brother remained behind to raise 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 did not wait for her brother to ask for help. Elizabeth packed up her belongings and moved into his home to help raise his five children and care for her elderly mother living with her brother.

Her second career was *far* more difficult and more fulfilling than her first. She was not a skilled cook initially. 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 her eighty-six-year-old mother. All this at the age of sixty-four!

She did not just give up her job for these children. She loved them sacrificially. She expended 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.

Many days she might have wanted to repack her things and return to a less stressful life. She did not, and she never suggested it was an option. She sacrificed her time, talents, and energy for those boys. She did it for twenty years.

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Two became dentists, one a pastor, coach, and writer, one a guidance counselor and coach, and one a college professor. She influenced them, and they have influenced millions of people. Who knows what would have happened without her?

Before she died, she arranged to divide her extremely modest financial resources among them. She did not feel spent, used, or taken advantage of. She said she would have done it all again. I write these words with tears. She was my Aunt Elizabeth.

Elizabeth's life demonstrates the costly love to which Jesus has called every believer. Often, we do a better job of talking about love than showing it.

We are 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 twenty-four 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 *us*, so— we must love Him and others. It is not complicated. That is our purpose! The principle is second-grade simple. Practicing it consistently is rocket science hard.

Loving others, even when they offend, criticize, and hurt us, is contrary to the way we run our affairs as CEOs of our own lives. My payback



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principle as a boy: “If you hit me once, I will hit you *at least* twice, and both punches will be harder than yours.”

Returning *love* for punches (physical and verbal) received is so contrary to our nature that it is impossible unless we allow God to love others through us. For that to happen, we must surrender our will and plans to His. **How consistently do you love others who have hurt you? What is the secret of whatever success you have experienced?**

### **More like the Master**

When God loves us, He is just being Himself. He provides the resources we need to love as He does! He promises to complete the 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 His will. He commanded it. Stephen loved 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! He plans 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 people boiled down watermelon juice to make syrups and sugars. When it comes to love, substitution is popular.

Self-interest pollutes human love. It is shallow and easily extinguished. It is 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. What we love shapes us.

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 is not giving us faith to heal the sick or raise the dead. It is transforming us into people 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.

**Why is every sin a failure to love both God and people?**

### **Go with the Flow**

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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)
- 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)
- 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).

### **Practical Application**

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**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 is God's message to you in this lesson?**

**What 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, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”



### Spiritual Health Inventory

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You may duplicate but not sell these free Christian leadership resources.

We took this Spiritual Healthy Inventory before our journey through this resource. Now, Let us try it again to measure our spiritual progress.

**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.

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\_\_\_ 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 people 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 one small group (including 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 =

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**Final Challenge: You can make an eternal difference in others' lives by leading a "31 Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity" group. Who will you invite to join it?**