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Author’s Notes

This discipleship curriculum is designed to be used either in a small group or as an individual. Our goal is to make powerful biblical concepts easy to grasp for the growing believer. The prayer of all of us here at Lifeline Ministries is that God will use this resource to challenge and guide you in your spiritual Journey. Whether you are a new Christian or a mature believer, I am confident that you will find these studies to be a source of true, practical growth in your walk with our Lord.

Many churches and individuals use this study as a part of their discipleship program. We revise it from time to time as we receive feedback from those who use it in order to strengthen the effectiveness of the teaching. We welcome your comments and suggestions as well. May God richly bless you as you grow in Him.

Because He lives!

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Contrary to academic and literary convention, all pronouns referring to God, His Word, or His Church will be capitalized.

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Rightly Dividing The
Word of
Truth

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The Word of Truth

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

The Bible is Our Foundation

What would Christians do without the Bible? What would keep us on course? Given man's tendency to go off on tangents, there would be no true anchor for our soul. Christianity could not stand without this rule of faith. We live in a time when great battles are being waged against the written Word of God. Our culture's mad rush toward immorality and "relative truth" simply cannot tolerate the absolutes of God's Word. Throughout time secular society has tried to disprove and discredit the Bible. Many have come to Christ as a result. Ironically, *the absolute failure of any detractor bring credible discredit to the Word is one of its greatest proofs.* It was written by God through many different men of various times and locations, and yet it all lines up perfectly. This would be impossible apart from divine inspiration. The prophecies of Jesus' coming and sacrifice were spoken all through the old testament and proven perfectly by His life, death, and resurrection. To anyone with ears to hear and eyes to see, the Bible is clearly God's Word. However, this is not a study on the authenticity of the Bible. It is assumed that you, the reader, have settled that in your own heart. If you do not believe that the Bible is God's absolute, authoritative, and inerrant Word, then please contact us and we will send you information dealing with that subject. The purpose of this study is to show how to rightly interpret and apply God's Word to everyday life as a Christian. With so much deception in the world today, it is absolutely vital that God's people are grounded in His Word.

You Can Understand God's Word!

Much has been said of the difficulty of understanding the Word of God. In truth, the only thing that makes it difficult to understand is the plethora of bad teaching in existence today. When read without preconceived doctrinal biases and denominational traditions the Bible is fairly easy to understand. It means what it says. Human intellectualism tries to go beyond what God has written and in so doing misses the simplicity of the message. While it is true that some elements of scripture need to be understood in light of the time and culture in which it was written, *every* principle applies today. Much of the misinterpretation results from a lack of knowledge of the Bible in its *entirety*. The tendency to pull out bits and pieces and try to form conclusions is a recipe for deception. A balanced understanding of God's written Word comes from a great deal of time spent reading it and meditating upon its truth.

There are those who say that you cannot understand the Bible without a firm grasp on the original languages in which it was written (Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic). Certainly studying in the original languages can bring a fuller understanding of what is meant by certain words and concepts. However, you *can* understand the Word of God in English. As far as knowing the original languages, you can easily learn how to use written and computer-based tools to do word studies in original languages. I enjoy looking back to the meanings in Hebrew or Greek lexicons but I also realize that these can be in error as well. They are still a man's opinion of what the Greek word meant. Greek and Hebrew courses are also based upon a man's opinion of what the Greek language of the time meant. Languages change over time. It's important to realize that while these elements and a strong understanding of Greek and Hebrew can make Bible study deeper and more interesting, they are not *required* to have a firm, full, and balanced grasp of God's Word. The greatest tool for the understanding of God's Word is the study of the whole, or context of the Bible itself.

Some hold the view that without a Bible college or seminary education you cannot really understand God's Word. While many people may have learned to grasp the Word more fully in these institutions, they can also lead people astray. Sadly, many of our Christian higher education institutions do not teach a literal creation and some do not even believe in a literal heaven or hell. Others do not believe that the Word of God is inerrant or absolute. These institutions certainly can't be trusted to teach proper Bible interpretation since they do not believe in the Bible itself. Many excuses are made for this but I firmly believe that if a college does not hold to the fundamental truth of God's Word they do more harm than good. Any college education is only as good as the college itself. The greatest tool that we have for proper Bible interpretation is the Holy Spirit of God. ***But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*** (John 14:26)

We live in a time when there are many philosophies being preached. It's sad that so many are on a quest for the meaning of life when God has already explained it to us in His Word. The Bible tells us that as we near Christ's return there will be many who run after fables. It is more important than ever to be grounded in the Word of God. 2 Timothy 4:1-4 says, ***I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*** There are a lot of itching ears out there and many of them are attached to faithful church attenders. Wave after wave of false doctrine assaults the true Church of the living God. What weapon can we use to fight against the deception? ***For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*** (Hebrews 4:12) Praise be to God for His unchanging and enduring Word!

We *can* understand God's Word. The greatest obstacles to proper interpretation are our own preconceived ideas and opinions. If we approach it as it is, the Word of God, then we can allow it to change us and guide us as we walk through this life. The Bible is our window into the character of God and His desires for us. If our goal is to draw near to Jesus and learn His ways, the Bible can take us there.

Balance is the Goal

Looking back to the early years of my ministry, I can see that I taught a rather legalistic doctrine. This was the result of the teaching that I had received as a young man that almost exclusively dealt with a small group of scriptures and a skewed view of holiness. This was done at the expense of any teaching on grace. Even after I studied the scriptures on grace I didn't really grasp it. I could recite the scriptures on grace and I could teach on grace, but I did not really understand grace until the Spirit of God revealed it to me and made it personal. All of a sudden I could see how all those scriptures worked *together*. At that point I could finally grasp the *concept* of grace. This is an example of why it's more important to have a *conceptual* knowledge of scripture than to have a *statistical* knowledge of scripture. One of my favorite subjects to teach is Bible overview, or Bible survey. We discuss who wrote the books of the Bible as well as why, where, and when. It's interesting and valuable. However, I have met many people who can tell you where and when the books were written, who wrote them, what rivers existed in the region, and yet still do not understand how grace works together with lordship. The point is that it is more important to grasp the concepts of salvation, grace, lordship, holiness, etc. and how all these things work together than it is to be able to recite Bible statistics. It is the concepts that apply immediately to our daily lives. I speak to many people who can tell me all about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They just can't tell me why He came and died or why His sacrifice was necessary for our salvation.

Balance is the key. It's easy to run off on a tangent and miss the balance of scripture. Virtually every cult in the world was started on a partial truth, or by emphasizing one truth at the exception of all others. We must be committed to the fullness of God's Word and remain open to change if we find ourselves to be in error. We cannot have a strong knowledge of biblical concepts without spending consistent and extensive time in God's Word. It doesn't take a genius, it just takes a firm resolve that there are no shortcuts to spiritual growth. God has given us a wealth of wisdom to draw from, we simply need to cherish it as the greatest resource on earth.

The Seven Deadly Sins of Bible Interpretation

Proper understanding of biblical truth begins with a right attitude in reading it. This section will cover a few of the common errors that cause many to go astray. These are systems of interpretation to guard against in our study of God's Word. No doubt as you read them you will think of times in your own life or in the life of others when you have seen these things take place.

#1 - Experience (or "lack of experience") interpretation - Experience is a unreliable and potentially dangerous reference for biblical truth. Many books are written that use only their stories of experiences with individuals to validate their doctrinal conclusions. The "deliverance movement" is a great example. Though the movement still has momentum today, much of that momentum has died in the church due to the obvious scriptural errors. The doctrine never came from the Bible, but rather from fictional novels and individual imaginations. Frank Peretti wrote "This Present Darkness" and "Piercing the Darkness". I read them both and they were great fiction with a valuable emphasis on prayer. I do not believe they were meant to pose as a doctrinal reference. Unfortunately they quickly became a movement of people who went so far as having what amounted to spiritual seances with demons to find out their entry points, their names, etc. Deliverance "ministers" were being paid hourly to do spiritual psychotherapy with people for an hour a week, conversing with demons. Suddenly there was a demon behind every bush who was responsible for everything. The troublesome thing for the movement however is that none of this has any basis in scripture. We were never told to ask demons for their life history or entry points, we are simply told to command them to get out in Jesus Name. One kind only comes out through fasting and prayer (Matt. 17:18-21). So with no scripture on their side the writers of the books on deliverance turned to experience after experience to validate their claims. They would list scores of people who had been helped through their systems. Many personal testimonies graced the pages. The problem is, you can go to a hypnotist or a medium who can also give you scores of personal testimonials. These experiences do not prove it is from God. What makes it difficult to discern is that as with many areas of false doctrine, there is a lot of truth tied in. Spiritual warfare is very real and demons are very real. However, the Bible lays out the ground rules for dealing with them. We cannot build a separate doctrine based upon personal experience instead of scripture.

The devil can do false signs and wonders. ***And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,*** (2 Thessalonians 2:8-9) So we can't even rely on "miracles" to testify to truth. They can be indicators of the presence and power of God, but they can also be tricks of the devil and games of the flesh. This is why we need the Word of God. It is the rule by which all of these things are judged.

Experience can be a wonderful thing but we cannot prove any point of doctrine or belief solely by experience. Our feelings vary with emotions and hormones.

An important principle to remember is, *If it's essential to the Christian life it will be clear in scripture.* Don't teach anything as absolute unless it is absolute in scripture.

What about the "lack of experience" interpretation? The cessationist groups are a prime example. They often say things like, "since I've never seen anyone healed God must not be healing today". Personally I have seen a great many people (including myself) miraculously healed, but even if I hadn't I would believe it because it is the teaching of scripture. This concept extends to spiritual gifts. Many churches teach

that the gifts of the Spirit were for the establishing of the early church and then disappeared. Why? Scripture never indicates anything to that effect. Why did God spend so much time in scripture teaching on spiritual gifts if they were not for the church today? A lack of experience does not overrule the Bible anymore than an experience does. This can lead to having a form of godliness but denying its power (2 Tim. 3:5).

So what about the revelation of the Holy Spirit to His people?, Prophecy, or a word of knowledge, are wonderful things. God speaks to and through His people. However, all prophecy must line up with God's Word. It should be tested ***Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*** (1 John 4:1). The reliability of personal prophecy is directly linked to the reliability of the prophet. God's Word is *always* true. In our day many are neglecting the written Word of God in favor of looking for a word of prophecy. God has given us many "words" already. Rejoice when He speaks to you but do not neglect the inspired Word that too often collects dust on the shelf.

#2 - Convenience interpretation, or selfish interpretation - Often people will interpret the Bible's teaching in regard to various issues in a way that best suits them and their situation. They will string together scriptures out of context to prove their point. They will work it together with human logic and denominational teaching to support their view. Here's an important point folks.....*you will never have to work hard at proving anything essential in the Christian life.* It will be obvious in scripture. Do not start your study of God's Word with a conclusion. This approach will almost always lead to error. It's easy to go to the Bible to try and prove our point, but we must be prepared to be proven wrong. *Start with questions and look to the Word for answers, not the other way around.* Don't try to use the Word to validate an experience or an opinion, use it to *test* an experience or an opinion.

#3 - Interpretation of assumption - "cleanliness is next to Godliness" is not in the Bible. Neither is "God helps those who help themselves". You would be surprised how many people think they are. Many people have preconceived notions about God and His Word and they interpret it in light of those notions. Have you ever heard a well meaning evangelist say, "Jesus doesn't send anyone to hell." That sounds great but what do you do with Matthew 25:41? ***Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:*** It's accurate that Jesus doesn't desire to send anyone to hell but the scripture says He *will*. Don't assume that because something is logical, or sounds good, that it must be in the Bible somewhere. People make that interpretation because it fits their view of Christ, not because it's what the Bible says.

Also, beware of interpreting scripture in regard to your preconceived idea of who God is, or who God ought to be. I have often heard, when discussing biblical concepts, people say that, "I couldn't even follow God if that was true." This is usually due to their idea of "fairness" or "what is right." We should be prepared to change our views if we find the Bible teaches differently than we believe currently. *Regardless of whether we like that truth personally at the time we discover it.* If Jesus is Lord then we will follow Him and trust His Word no matter what.

#4 - Denominational interpretation - This is where people just accept a teaching because it is what they were taught as a part of their denomination and tradition. We are all to some degree products of our teaching. We must be able to change our beliefs if we find they do not line up with the Word. Many times I have asked someone what they believed in regard to an issue of doctrine only to have them tell me they would call their pastor to find out. It's fine to get advice from a pastor. Often they can lead you to the right scriptures in the Bible and even help you figure it out. Too often however, they are simply reciting the denominational stance. If all denominational beliefs were right they would all be the same. *Therefore we must not suppose that because a group of good Christian of people have held a belief for many years that it is accurate.* Many denominational beliefs are unscriptural and some would even be laughable if so many people were not deceived by them. Once again, this is why we need the Word of God so desperately to be our absolute authority.

#5 - The “bits and pieces” interpretation - Often people will take sections of scripture out of context and try to come up with a conclusion. This is generally done to try and make the Bible agree with something they already believe. If one reads all the scriptures on grace and no others they would miss the fact that grace is not an excuse for sin. This can also happen innocently to someone who is new to the Lord and to His Word. Not knowing the Word in it's fullness can lead an eager Bible student to run off on the first scripture that jumps out at him. I remember driving a young man in his early twenties home from an event one night. He was newly saved and very passionate about his new-found faith in God. I could tell he was very troubled and I asked him why. He explained to me that he had not slept the night before. In his Bible reading he came upon 1 Corinthians 7:9 which says, ***But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.*** Incorrectly assuming that it meant those who were not married would burn in hell, he instantly called his girlfriend and proposed. When the woman he loved said she wasn't ready to marry him he panicked and called a string of ex-girlfriends and acquaintances in the middle of the night to propose. Upon being rejected by all of them he had spent that day in utter fear that Jesus would return before he found a wife. You cannot imagine the relief in this young man when I explained to him that in context 1 Corinthians 7:9 is talking about sexual desire and that it is better to marry than to remain in danger of falling into sexual sin, not to “burn in hell” as he had assumed. I had to admire a level of commitment that would cause a young man to marry someone he didn't even like in order to fulfill God's Word, but I'm sure glad none of those ladies said “yes” in the middle of the night! This may be an extreme example of the dangers of taking scripture out of context, but there are many errors that can come as a result of the “bits and pieces” method of interpretation.

#6 - The “skip a verse” interpretation - This is where you simply skip the verses you don't like. It's easy to make excuses like “there are many interpretations of that scripture”, “That was just for the time they were living in”, or “it can't really mean that! it just wouldn't be right”. Many people have pet doctrines and beliefs that hang by a spiritual thread. When they find a scripture that contradicts their view they say, “its just one scripture.” One scripture is all it takes (in context of course). They are *all* true. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us, ***All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.***

The Word of God is an all or nothing proposition. It is either all true or it's a complete farce. It is, of course, all true. If you do not believe the Word of God is absolute truth it will hold no weight in your life and you have no foundation on which to stand as a believer. If one reads the Bible without the conviction that it is from God Himself they will fall into great error. They will simply explain away any scripture that they find to be challenging at a personal level.

#7 - The “Liberal” interpretation - This is simply a method that allows people to believe whatever they like. They use all of the improper methods we just discussed to come up with a belief system that fits their lifestyle. There are people that say the Apostle Paul was an angry divorcee or a frustrated homosexual. They have no grounds for this, it just fits their politically correct position. They don't need grounds since they don't hold to the Bible as a source of absolute truth anyway. A liberal view of the Bible leads to poor reasoning. Often the one in error will use parts of scripture mixed with human logic to try and validate their foregone conclusions. If we are prone to interpret the Word in light of human logic we will inevitably fall into error. David Koresh of Waco, Texas cult fame believed he was “the sinful messiah”. The reasoning goes something like this: Jesus could not really relate to our struggle since He never actually sinned. Therefore God sent a second messiah (Koresh) who would experience sin so that he could truly relate to our struggle. To the person with no scriptural foundation I suppose this could sound logical. In truth, it is an abomination. It opens the way for a man to justify any and every sin. This is the danger of trying to make the Bible say what you want it to say.

Session Two

Bible (Per) Versions

It seems like everyone is writing a version of the Bible today. In fact, at the time of this writing, there are over 100 new versions of the Bible put forth each year. This should not surprise anyone as there is a lot of money in the publishing of new versions. Unfortunately many of these versions are inherently flawed. The motivation behind them is carnal in nature. Bible publication is big business these days. If the motivation is to sell Bibles, what motivates these changes? Most of the newer versions available today are “dynamic equivalence” translations as opposed to a literal approach at translation. This means that the translators would read a section of original texts, decide what they think it means in modern English, and then write it out. As far as I am concerned this reduces it to a commentary or a paraphrase. It is true that an individual can find Christ and grow to a degree by studying them, but shouldn't our goal be to use version taken from the best manuscripts with a literal approach to translation? A literal version is one that the original translators translated, as much as is possible, word for word from the Textus Receptus, or “Received Text” leaving the reader to make the conclusions. Examples are the KJV and the NKJV. This is a huge subject and I will leave it for another study. However, it should be clear to everyone that there is an assault on the Word of God today. Publishers have taken what were once sold as paraphrases and retitled them as actual translations. One example is the Living Bible, which a man wrote for his children. This was a noble effort and I suspect his intention was never for it to be sold as a Bible version. It contains all of his doctrinal biases. Unfortunately once the publisher owns the rights they can do whatever they want. The Living Bible is no longer sold as a paraphrase, but an actual Bible version. Even “The Message” by Eugene Peterson is often considered to be an actual Bible! These are simply one man's opinion on what the Bible teaches. They are no more reliable than a commentary. When “The Message” first came out it was clearly promoted as a paraphrase and I thought it was kind of clever. As a book about the Bible it is interesting, *as a Bible in itself it is frightening.*

Study Bibles can be a good resource as we grow in the Lord. However, many study Bibles contain a running commentary at the bottom of each page. These can bring an interesting slant and provoke healthy thought if taken for what they are, an opinion. Unfortunately I have met a number of people who spend more time reading the commentary section than the Scripture itself. We must be careful not to exalt the opinions of men. We are all to some degree a product of our teaching. This is why we must be careful about the source of that teaching. Anointed and gifted men and women of God can offer a lot of wisdom, but the Spirit-inspired Word of God is our greatest teacher and the only one that is right all of the time.

Guard Your Heart

We live in a day when you can go to a Christian book store and find a book on just about any doctrinal tangent you could imagine. You must not suppose that because it is in a Christian book store that it is accurate or even *Christian*. More prevalent than even these books, we now have the internet! While we can find wisdom there, one must be ready to sift through a mountain of craziness to find it. Often, it is well-written and convincing craziness. This is why the Bible is the foundational and final resource. We must be careful what goes into us in our study just as we would in our conversation or our activities. It's easy to see the dangers of obvious sin, but more difficult to discern false doctrine in Gospel disguise. Even if it's not dangerous in it's teaching it may be a tangent that takes our time away from the Word of God and leads to imbalance in our lives. Because of my ministry as a traveling evangelist and teacher, I am bombarded by books, and suggested websites, from people who I meet in my travels. These books and websites vary wildly in subject depending on whatever that individual thinks is most important at the time. In my early ministry I read them all, thinking that it could only lead to more knowledge and wisdom. In reality, it can easily lead to imbalance and confusion. A good writer can lead many people to believe almost anything is true, especially if our grounding in God's Word is not solid. Even when it is, a good author can take us off on tangents at the expense of other important areas of doctrine. I made a commitment many years ago that I would not read any book but the Bible unless I felt led to do so. This

commitment has served me well in my teaching ministry and personal growth. I read and study regularly, but my study is primarily focused on God's Word. Often the Lord will lead me to other resources but I endeavor to make certain it is of God.

There are many ways to justify a belief. The use of logic and statistics is one of the most common. In the secular world you will often hear things like "most accidents happen within five miles of home". I heard a comedian say that this statistic concerned him so much that he moved! What it does not take into account is that most of your *driving* occurs within five miles of home! Another good one is, "Most shark attacks happen within five feet of water or less". This could lead you to believe that sharks prefer to attack in shallow water. What it misses is that fact that 99% of *swimmers* are in five feet of water or less! These are simple debate tricks but there are many that are used to justify false doctrine.

Know Your Facts . . .

Another common error is to go beyond what the Bible has written. Often a Christian can feel so strongly about one point that it seems every scripture is about that subject. We can easily become very dogmatic about something that the Bible is not dogmatic about. *Do not teach anything as absolute unless it is absolute in the Word of God.* To do so is to become like the Pharisees, adding law where there is none. Anything that is essential to the Christian life will be taught as essential in the Word. As a man who deals with many who are addicted to drugs and alcohol, it would be easy to fall in with many brothers and sisters in saying that it is a sin to drink alcohol. At one time I did just that. I was actually confronted on this very subject of being dogmatic about something the Bible is not dogmatic about. In fact, the only thing the Bible teaches as sin in regard to alcohol is drunkenness. Moreover, several times when the Bible speaks of wine it is encouraging it! Jesus makes the water into wine at the wedding (John 2:1-10), and Paul tells Timothy to "drink a little wine for his stomach and frequent illnesses" (1 Timothy 5:23). Now there are those who argue that the wine did not contain alcohol. This is a perfect example of using poor interpretation methods to support what you *want* to be true. The question at the wedding feast is, "why did you bring out the best wine last, you're supposed to wait until everyone is a little sloshed" (my paraphrase). *How would they ever get that way if the wine contained no alcohol?* Jesus was accused of being a "drunkard" or a "winebibber" (Matthew 11:19, Luke 7:34) because as He said "He came eating and drinking". *What do you suppose He was drinking if they called Him a "winebibber" and a drunkard?* Now, before anyone runs out to the bar let me say that there are a lot of other issues that play into this such as being a stumbling block to others. Also, many of the people I deal with simply cannot drink in moderation, and therefore it leads them into drunkenness, which is sin. The point is, many people will tell you that the Bible outright says it's a sin to drink alcohol. It hurts our credibility to make dogmatic statements that cannot be backed up in scripture. The fact is that the Bible does not say it is a sin to drink alcohol, and I therefore will not judge someone who has a glass of wine with their dinner. When discussing essentials of the Christian life and what we believe to be sin, we cannot simply say "*it just is*". Everyone has the right to say, "show me the scripture that supports your view". So before you get dogmatic about any issue, make sure it can be backed up by the Word of God.

The whole concept of drinking is a good example of allowing a reaction to form your doctrinal beliefs. Throughout my years in ministry I have seen a good many lives destroyed by excessive drinking. At one time I reacted by placing a blanket condemnation on all alcohol consumption. I now realize that I had no biblical foundation for that conclusion and have for many years held to a greater scriptural balance on the subject. When I look at it objectively and without reacting to my own opinions and experiences, I realize that I've seen money and sex destroy more lives than alcohol, and yet both of these things are good, positive, elements of our Christian lives *when used as they were intended in scripture.*

Be Proactive Rather than Reactive in Your Study

Most of the denominational movements in existence today were built on a reaction to another system of belief or practice. I have Pentecostal friends who simply look at non-Pentecostal people and try to make sure they are not anything like them, and non-Pentecostal friends who work very hard at being non-Pentecostal. Either way they are simply reacting to someone else's belief and not establishing their own through objective study of the Word of God and application to daily life.

The Word of God is awesome. It can be read over and over again and we can find more truth each time. It challenges us, changes us, and guides our way. Psalm 119:105 says, ***Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*** It keeps us from error and leads us in the way of righteousness as we see in Psalm 119:11, ***Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*** It's sad that so many believers neglect the Word of God in favor of other books or nothing at all. I have often said that if it was illegal to read the Bible in this country a lot more Christians would be reading it. It's sad that many Christians will believe all their pastor has to say without ever checking it against what *God* has said. I have been corrected at times in my ministry and I have always been thankful for that. No human is perfect and I am certainly human. I hope and pray that each person who reads one of these studies or hears me speak will dig into the Word of God to find out if what I said was true.

The Lordship of Jesus Christ means that we believe His Word is true and have chosen to submit to that truth. You *can* understand His Word. You will come upon many concepts that seem impossible to understand or fully grasp at the time. Do not be hasty in forming conclusions. Be willing to place sections of scripture on the bulletin board of your mind until God gives you the answer. There are many issues of truth that I will find the answer to while I am just praying or driving down the road pondering God's Word. Rushing to form a conclusion or feeling like you must have all the answers for everyone else often leads to error. I would rather tell people that I just don't know than lead them astray. Until I know I can back it up in scripture, I will not teach anything as absolute. I have opinions like anyone else, and I am careful to state them as opinion unless it is an absolute truth of the Word of God. I also do not entertain criticism that is not Bible-based.

Once again, don't begin with an answer and then go to the Word to validate it. Go to the Word with a question and an open, changeable heart and you will find the answer. Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you as you study and meditate upon the Word of truth. This is one of the most important issues since usually an individual will interpret the Bible backwards, using the Word to support their beliefs rather than finding their beliefs in the Word.

Don't let tradition rule in your heart, let God's Word rule there. Don't let your desires rule in your heart, let God's Word rule there. Don't let opinions rule in your heart, let God's Word rule there. His Word endures forever, just like His love for us. May God be forever praised!

The Word Of Truth

Session One Review

1. Why do we need the Bible? _____

2. Can a common person understand the Bible?

3. What is the difference between a statistical knowledge of the Bible and a conceptual knowledge of the Bible? _____

4. What are the “seven deadly sins of Bible interpretation” listed in the study?

5. When someone shares a word of knowledge or prophecy, how should we receive it? Should it be tested? If so, how? _____

6. Is there ever a time when a prophetic word can overrule God’s Word?

7. Do you have any questions or comments about the study?

The Word Of Truth

Session Two Review

1. What is the difference between a literal translation and a “dynamic equivalence” translation?

2. What is the difference between a translation and a paraphrase? .

3. What are some examples of paraphrases? _____

4. Why does it mean to “guard your heart” in regard to books and Bible resources?

5. The study says, “most movements and denominations were started as a reaction to another movement, denomination, or belief system. What does this mean?”

6. Why shouldn’t we form conclusions quickly on issues pertaining to God’s Word?

7. We should not begin our study of God’s Word with _____, we should start with _____.

Humility

*The Key to strength and
Confidence*

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Contrary to academic and literary convention, all pronouns referring to God, His Word, or His Church will be capitalized.

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Humility

A freedom from arrogance that grows out of the recognition that all we have and are comes from God. The Greek philosophers despised humility because it implied inadequacy, lack of dignity, and worthlessness to them. This is not the meaning of humility as defined by the Bible. Jesus is the supreme example of humility <Matt. 11:29; Mark 10:45; John 13:4-17; Phil. 2:5-8>, and He is completely adequate and of infinite dignity and worth. Biblical humility is not a belittling of oneself <Matt. 6:16-18; Rom. 12:3>, but an exalting or praising of others, especially God and Christ <John 3:30; Phil. 2:3>. A humble person, then, focuses more on God and others than on himself.

Biblical humility is also a recognition that by ourselves we are inadequate, without dignity and worthless. Yet, because we are created in God's image and because believers are in Christ, we have infinite worth and dignity <1 Cor. 4:6-7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19>. True humility does not produce pride but gratitude. Since God is both our Creator and Redeemer, our existence and righteousness depend on Him <John 15:5; Acts 17:28; Eph. 2:8-10>.

(from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

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¹²Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility. (Proverbs 18:12)

²⁵But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. ²⁶But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; ²⁷And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: ²⁸Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:25-28)

¹²And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. (Matthew 23:12)

¹⁰So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do. (Luke 17:10)

³For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. (Romans 12:3)

¹⁸Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. (1 Corinthians 3:18)

Humility is certainly one of the most important character traits in the Christian life. As we seek to be like Christ, humility can and should permeate every part of us. It's important however, to clarify the true meaning of humility. Throughout history many have sought to change Jesus' teaching on humility and make it something that cripples, rather than empowers, the true believer. The definition on the first page was taken from Nelson's Bible Dictionary and has a lot to say about the true meaning of the word humility in the Word of God. Humility

in the Biblical sense is never a belittling thing, but rather *an attitude that greatly increases our sense of the worth of others*. It is also the realization that without God we are nothing. We come to Him with nothing to offer and He does not owe us anything. Humility brings the realization that we are completely dependent on Him.

Often insecurity is wrongly thought to be humility. This could not be further from the truth. True humility brings great confidence because we are leaning entirely on God's power and not our own. Humility is what allows us to get out of the way so that God can work through us. In reality it is insecurity and pride that go hand in hand. I have had people tell me that they are not proud because they are insecure and have a very poor self-image. Insecure people are generally more bound up by pride than those who are secure in who they are in Christ. Insecurity brings a defensive attitude and the desire to always protect one's self. Insecure people tend to rationalize their behavior and make excuses for their sin. These are not elements of humility but of pride. True humility brings a personal confidence and trust in God that releases us from pride and insecurity. Humble people seldom see a need to protect or defend themselves in a conversation or in life. Their trust and confidence are in God. Pride and insecurity cause an individual to try to appear to be something they are not. The humble person concerns themselves with making others look better. The humble Christian has nothing to prove and lives to please God first.

Some people believe that humility is a constant self-belittling process. These people wander through their lives saying things like, "God could never use me". A lot of Christians are in bondage to this belief. It's true that humility brings us to the realization that we have nothing in and of ourselves that God needs, but through His power and anointing there is nothing He cannot do in and through our lives. I once heard a preacher say that anyone who stepped out to do something great under the leadership of the Lord would be perceived by some to be arrogant. There is a big difference between godly confidence and arrogance. Godly confidence places no trust or worth in self, but only in God. In our Lord we find limitless potential.

The most important thing a Christian can do when desiring humility is to admit they have a problem with pride. Here are a few warning signs:

1. An unhealthy desire to be recognized for your actions.
2. A tendency to defend yourself, rationalize your behavior, and/or justify your sin.
3. A tendency to think of how circumstances effect you before considering others.
4. Striving toward your own personal advancement at the expense of others.
5. Regularly trying to prove your abilities to others and/or making up stories about yourself that exaggerate your capabilities.
6. An inability to readily admit when you are wrong.
7. An unteachable attitude.

These are just a few warning lights that show pride and insecurity in a believer's life. Once again, true humility brings godly confidence. When our hope is placed firmly in Christ we realize that we have nothing to prove. Our desire to defend or exalt ourselves disappears with our *new* goal to see our carnal self die as Christ brings us new life.

What can you do to bring about a greater level of humility in your life? First of all the Bible tells us to pray for everything but it also says "humble yourself". One way to defeat the flesh is to put yourself in humble circumstances. Think of a task or position that you think you are too good for and volunteer for it. Find someone that drives you crazy and spend the day serving them. Go clean toilets for a day and don't let anyone know that you did. Often the only way to gain victory over the flesh is to beat it to death. Recognize when your attitude is one of pride or humility and take action accordingly. Take a good hard look at your life, attitudes, and actions and determine if they are of the flesh or of the Spirit. Pray that God will change your heart.

Remember, you are not too good for anything. Nothing is below you. If God places you in a position that is exalted among men then praise Him for it, but never place yourself there, and never think you are worthy of it in yourself. Only God can make us worthy of anything. Only God can enable us to do great things. The gates of Hell cannot prevail against the humble Christian who trusts God rather than self, who's confidence is in the Lord.

I suggest that you read the book of Philippians and also of James. They speak directly to our attitude of servanthood and humility. Humility is a large part of the foundation of Christian growth. Many try to work around it and skip ahead in their walk with God. Everything else, whether it be spiritual gifts or any other part of your growth in Christ, will come crumbling down without the basic freedom of humility in your life. True biblical humility allows us to place all of our hope and trust in God's ability and not our own.

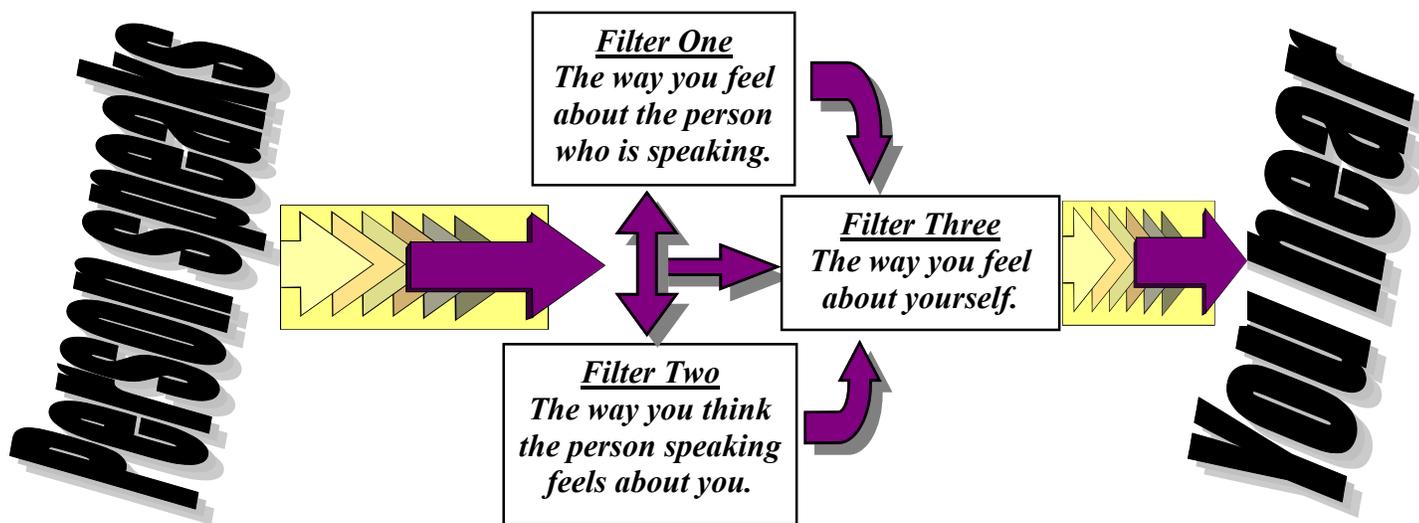
Practical Tips For Victorious Living. “Communication”

Insecurity is a relationship killer. I am convinced that most problems between people are actually misunderstandings. The way that we communicate with others through speech is the primary thing that determines how we relate to others as a whole. The book of James talks a lot about how we should speak to others, but how should we listen?

When someone speaks to you, the information passes through what I call the three “filters”. You can think of these filters as prisms like the ones that often hang by people’s windows. As a straight beam of light hits the prism it splits up and no longer resembles the original beam of light, or “signal”. The “signal” is changed as it passes through the filter.

When someone speaks to us the signal can get mixed up just like the light through the prism. Often a person can say one thing, and people in the room can get many different ideas about what was said. This can have a lot to do with what the speaker said and how they said it, but it also has a lot to do with how people listen. Each person listens through different “filters”.

The three filters of communication.....



These filters come from our insecurities and cause us to think that some people are always getting down on us, criticizing us, etc. This is a battle in many friendships, marriages, and ministry relationships . If we could avoid misunderstandings our lives would be a lot easier. ***The key lies in seeing ourselves the way God sees us.*** When we see the expression of God’s love for us in John 3:16 and elsewhere, we begin to find our value in Him. We can see that just as gold has no value unless someone wants it, ***we have tremendous value simply because God wants us so much.*** Not because of anything in and of ourselves. It is in this truth that we can become completely secure in who we are in Christ and the three filters begin to disappear. We can have confidence that God’s grace is enough to make up for our inadequacies. Then we can hear the things people say to us clearly, and evaluate what is said on it’s own merit.

Humility Review

1. What does the following Scripture mean?

²⁵ But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. ²⁶ But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; ²⁷ And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: ²⁸ Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:25-28)

2. Taking an honest look at your life, do you see the following?

1. A constant desire to be recognized for your actions.
2. A tendency to defend yourself, rationalize your behavior, and/or justify your sin.
3. A tendency to think of how circumstances effect you before considering how they effect others.
4. Striving toward your own personal advancement at the expense of others.
5. Regularly trying to prove your abilities to others and/or making up stories about yourself that exaggerate your capabilities.
6. An inability to readily admit when you are wrong.
7. An unteachable attitude.

Comments _____

3. The study says that “true humility brings great confidence” and that pride is often a sign of insecurity. Why is this true?

Living in Grace

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Understanding The Two Natures

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. ¹³For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. ¹⁴For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. ¹⁵For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. ¹⁶The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. (Romans 8:12-17)

The Sinful Nature: We Need Grace Desperately.

And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. (Genesis 8:21)

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:5)

And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. (Genesis 6:12)

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. (Psalm 51:5)

For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; (Romans 3:9)

Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: ²³For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (Romans 3:22-23)

The fact that we are born with hearts that are fully inclined toward evil is often termed, “total depravity”. Secular Psychology, and even many so-called theologians would like to find a way to prove that man is inherently good and that evil is purely a product of teaching and environment. New-Age teaching is based upon the premise that society is getting better in terms of morality and decency. God’s Word tells us that mankind, if left to itself, will only spiral downward. A simple glance at human history and today’s society proves that things are not getting better.

There is a saying that goes “power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely”. This is not really accurate. The corruption is already present. All that power does is give it a chance to flourish. This is where environment and teaching can really play in by allowing areas of our carnal nature to manifest and take control. Jesus had all power and yet was not corrupt nor did He take any corrupt action. We need God to change our hearts so we can resist the things that would cause the natural corruption of our flesh to flourish.

One could note that there are non-Christians who are basically decent, clean-living individuals with nice families and fairly high moral values. The Bible tells us that God has placed the knowledge of good and evil within everyone. The Lord God is the God of our conscience. It is His Spirit that convicts people of sin. It is that knowledge of right and wrong that God places within us that is responsible for any good that comes from our lives. So we can see that **anything good that comes from our lives is because of God**. If His Holy Spirit and all godly influence was removed from the world we would see the full effect of total depravity. It would not be a pretty sight.

We should also note that people often do good things for selfish reasons. Many times it is simply to make them feel better about themselves, or to ease their guilt over other areas in their lives. We see this in the unscriptural practice of “paying penance.” An individual may also do good deeds to gain public approval. Many cults are founded on a works-based “plan of salvation,” and doing “good works” is what earns points with their god, who is no god at all. This is not to say that it is impossible for a non-believer to do good works for unselfish reasons. *Because God has given us a conscience and He is the God of that conscience, it is not uncommon for people to do good things, or even to live reasonably good lives.* **The important thing to remember is that without God there would be no basis for human morality and sinfulness would rule supreme.** It is the hand of God that holds back the tidal wave of sin in this world.

Important Points

We don't have to teach kids to do what is wrong. Having raised children I can testify that I have never had to lead them into disobedience. They have always figured it out by themselves. I have never had to teach them how to be selfish. It comes quite naturally to them. People are born with a tendency toward sin. This, once again, is the selfish nature referred to in the Bible as the self, the carnal nature, or the sinful nature.

You cannot "fix" the sinful nature. It must be replaced. It must die.

²⁰ I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. (Galatians 2:20-21)

The Spiritual Battle Within (The two voices on your shoulder)

¹⁵ For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. ¹⁶ If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. ¹⁷ Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. ¹⁹ For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. ²⁰ Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ²¹ I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. ²² For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? ²⁵ I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:15-25)

These sound like the words of an individual with multiple personality disorder, but what Paul is characterizing is the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. He clearly depicts the two distinct natures within the Christian. We must understand that there are two distinct and completely separate natures within us that are at war with one another. One belongs to God and the other does not. When you were born again in Christ He created a new being, a new creature. It is this “new man” that Jesus desires to build in you and present before the Father in heaven. Paul is talking about God’s grace in that He can deliver us from the desires of the old man within us. What if we do sin? It is not I that sin but sin that lives within me that does it! Is that a cop-out? Certainly not. It must be qualified by this statement: **As long as our hearts desire, inclination, intention, and motivation is 100% to know Christ and to live for Him we are 100% pleasing to God.** If my heart is fully to follow Christ then I can honestly say, as Paul does here, that I’m not the one who sinned. Our actions *are* important as they are often an *indicator* of our heart’s attitude, but God is more concerned with *who you are* than with *what you do*. It has more to do with our overall attitude and commitment to Him than each individual action. The problem is that our hearts are rarely turned 100% toward God, that is why we need to consistently seek intimacy with Him. Not so that we can be more *accepted* but so we might be more *pleasing* to the Father that we love and serve.

Now why doesn't Romans chapter seven work as a cop-out? Because we have an obligation to live according to the spiritual nature and not the sinful nature. Unconditional love is just that, unconditional! However, the Christian life is still a very demanding life. As God changes our hearts we hunger to walk as true children and please our Father.

⁹ Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. ¹⁰ For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. ¹¹ Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Romans 6:9-12.

One of the wonderful aspects of God's grace is that it is *sufficient* for us while we are growing, until we see Him face to face. We don't have to wallow in sin or guilt. The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus came to set us free from a guilty conscience. ***²² Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*** Hebrews 10:22 How many Christians do you know that live consistently free from a guilty conscience? Oh how we need to understand grace!

Once again, here's the key: **As long as our hearts desire is 100% to know Christ and to live for Him we are 100% pleasing to God.** Our desire to grow near to the Lord must include a true desire to die to ourselves, our flesh, our sinful nature. Now we will discuss one of the greatest joy-stealers the Body of Christ has ever known.....

Polishing Up The Sinful Nature, The Great Mistake Of The Modern Church.

It's no surprise that we have trouble walking in joy, peace etc. when we are under such bondage. The Word tells us that there is no way to repair the sinful nature, it must die. People by nature often want to work for their salvation. Then we could say we deserved it somehow. It's simply not possible. It is only by God's grace that we are saved. Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us ***⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast.*** (Emphasis mine)

¹⁶ Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. ¹⁷ But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. ¹⁸ For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. ¹⁹ For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. ²⁰ I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. Galatians 2:16-21 (Emphasis mine)

Churches are filled with people who are trying to polish their sinful nature. We must understand that when we come to Christ we are a new creation. **At the point you come to the Lord in true repentance and make Him Lord of your life you are His child, 100% accepted by the Living God.** You can be more pleasing to God in relation to obedience, but He will never love you more or accept you more fully than the day you give your life to Him.

This next scripture applies to many who believe they can be saved by their works, at any level.

• Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. • For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. • For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. • For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. (Romans 10:1-4 Emphasis mine)

Many people wonder why new Christians seem to be more excited about their faith than “mature” Christians. Many of these so-called “mature” Christians have not actually grown in grace, love, and intimacy with God, they have grown in works instead. They may be trying to polish the sinful nature, and make it look good to the world, or the rest of the church, but not really building the spiritual nature. Remember the scripture earlier that said, “we have an obligation not to live according to the sinful nature”? *The Devil would just love to get you so consumed with guilt and/or pride, trying to polish up your sinful nature that you can never really develop true intimacy with God.* Remember, *knowing* Christ is infinitely better than simply knowing *about* Christ. I’ve met many people who know the Bible very well and only vaguely know God. People on the outside look at the average church and see a bunch of people who dress well and don’t drink, smoke, or cuss. *Wow! How exciting!* It’s no wonder unbelievers aren’t flocking in droves to get to our church services. *Where’s the passion? Where’s the intimacy? Where’s the life?* The world needs to see people who are so in love with Jesus that it overflows into every area of our lives.

Out With The Old, In With The New

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.” (Galatians 6:14-15 Emphasis mine)

What counts is a new creature, or a new creation. We have already seen that “if righteousness could be attained through the law then Christ died for nothing”. Righteousness means literally to be in a “right relationship with God”. What brings us into a right relationship with God is not our works, the fact that He has imparted righteousness to us by His grace.

What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. Romans 9:30-33 KJV

So what is it that goes wrong along the path of many a Christian’s spiritual journey?

When we first come to Christ we usually have no idea how we could possibly save ourselves. The new believer usually knows too little about the Bible to explain it away or to dance around problem verses. They are consumed with one thing, “I want to know Christ”. They don’t just want to know “about Christ”. They want to know Him personally. Many of us were so messed up when we came to the Lord that we didn’t even know where to *start* purifying our lives on our own. We knew that we were desperately lost and we needed Jesus desperately to save us by His grace. All too often the Christian loses sight of that simple truth as he/she progresses down the path of spirituality and in the traditional church.

I remember when I was saved. I was on fire and wanted nothing more than to get to know Christ better. When we hunger to know Jesus better we are concentrating on building the spiritual nature and we are growing closer and closer to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As the Spiritual nature lives and grows the sinful nature must die. Unfortunately, as many of us get a bit further along in our walk with Christ we begin to feel like we have it all together. **Gradually we begin to leave the passion to know Christ behind and we replace it with the desire to be a “really good Christian”.** We may do many good things. We teach Sunday School, we tithe and support missionaries, we pray before our meals, we don’t use course language. All this is great if it is the result of our growing nearer to Christ. *Otherwise it is only dead works and an effort to polish up the sinful nature instead of building the spiritual nature.* Many times I have heard people say, “I just love to be around brand new Christians, they get me all fired up”. Why is that? Because they have a passion to *know* God. Nothing else is as important as knowing God. They may even slip and swear during their testimony about what God has done for them, but it is their passion that ignites a fire. Churches are filled with people who can sing “I’ve got the Joy, joy, joy,

joy, down in my heart” with a frown on their face. *Many of these people have very polished sinful natures, but they haven’t grown any closer to God in 20 years.* They stopped building the spiritual nature years ago and concentrated only on being a “good Christian”.

There’s nothing wrong with good spiritual disciplines in your life. The point is this: **As you build the spiritual nature the sinful nature will die.** You will *never* permanently overcome any significant area of sin in your life purely through discipline. Only through Christ’s resurrection in our lives can we truly overcome sin.

Those who stress the polishing of the sinful nature like to talk about the “churches’ witness to the world”. As one who often deals with people in the world and fresh from the world, let me assure you that ***a bunch of frowning Christians who are devoid of true joy due to a misunderstanding of God’s grace are a very poor witness to the world, regardless of how “clean” their lives may be.*** Many people leave the bondage of the world only to enter into the bondage of the church! **A church full of people with a passion for God will be a better witness than one with very polished sinful natures who really don’t know Him very well.** We will see more true holiness in people’s lives when we realize that the only part of our nature that God is interested in building is the one He is creating in us, our own nature must die.

I Never Knew What It Was Like To Win Until I Gave Up!

For years I tried to be the greatest Christian on earth. As a Christian Evangelist, musician and teacher I wanted to be as effective as I could be. There’s nothing wrong with that. It’s just that we often leave God behind in the process. **Finally the Lord showed me that if I simply drew near to Him I would grow in every area of my life.** As the spiritual nature grows the sinful nature dies. I keep repeating this because it is the most important point of all. You see, there are works-based cults filled with people who have incredibly polished sinful natures but they are an abomination to God! If they went to a Christian church we might say they were very holy people. We judge on outward appearances but only *God* knows the heart. They have not been raised to new life in Christ unless they have a personal relationship with Him and He is their *Lord*. When they stand before him at the judgment He will not even know them. The question is, “are you God’s child?” **The world needs to see people who are deeply in love with God.** Once I stopped trying to impress God and simply dedicated my life to getting to know my precious Savior I found the strength to overcome things that had always defeated me. **I found the peace that comes from knowing I am 100% accepted by the living God.**

The Gospel Is Good News!

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: ¹⁵And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.¹⁶ Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. ¹⁷Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. ¹⁸And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; (2 Corinthians 5:14-18 Emphasis mine)

Many people wonder how they could possibly be sinless in heaven. Jesus says we will dwell with Him forever in heaven where sin will be no more. You might say, “*Hey I know myself, I can’t make it through eternity without sinning, I’m too weak*”. If that’s the case you are having a spiritual identity crisis. *Your eyes are on your sinful nature instead of the person that Jesus is building in you.* Remember that there are two distinct beings within you. They are completely separate. When Jesus comes to call you home the sinful nature isn’t going! How glorious to be free from that nature once and for all. That is why we can know that we will be with Jesus for eternity. You see when I talk about who I am it is my spiritual nature that I refer to, not my sinful nature. He’s dead, thank the Lord! When he tries to rise again in my

life I want him to find that he has no room to operate. **I want to be so filled with Christ that I can fully recognize what is the old and what is the new.** Paul says, *“if I do sin it is no longer I who do it but sin that lives within me who does it”*. He can say this because he understands that his sinful nature is not “him”. He has died to sin and “he” is what Jesus is building within him. Paul understood that when a believer dies the sinful nature will die with the flesh and will be gone forever. All that will remain is what Christ has built within him. That is who will spend eternity with Christ. This is another reason why it makes no sense to concentrate on polishing the sinful nature. You will never be able to present it to God anyway. He is not interested in saving the flesh and He is not impressed with the works of the flesh.

I Want To Know Christ

“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;” (Philippians 3:10) This is the crucifying of self.

There's the bottom line. You must develop the spiritual nature which comes with knowing Christ. As we draw nearer to Jesus the sinful nature must die. As the spiritual nature increases the sinful nature will decrease. This is a very practical way that the infilling of God's Spirit changes and empowers our lives.

How Can We Develop The Spiritual Nature Instead Of Polishing The Sinful One?

I love my wife. We have been married for 27 years and it just keeps getting better. When I first met her I loved her but now that we have walked through good times and bad I love her more than I ever thought I could love a human being. I find that even after all this time I am still getting to know her. What if I had simply read books about her and then, once I found out what she wanted me to do, molded my life to be exactly what I felt she wanted. Let's say that I then proceeded to be everything she wanted in a man but never spent any time with her. When I faced struggles I faced them alone. What if we even got married but still lived separate lives. I could talk to her friends and find out everything there was to know about her. I could go to weekly meetings and hear someone teach about her. I could become, on the outside, the greatest husband to my wife that could be humanly possible, and still have a lousy relationship. Why? Because the things that have made our relationship great are the time that we've spent together, the victories and defeats that we have shared, the nights crying out to God together because we had reached the end of our rope. Walking through life each day is what has built our relationship into the marriage I am so thankful to God for.

Now the above analogy seems ridiculous until you look at how we often treat God. He becomes distant, like a rich grandfather who we only call when we are really in trouble. The Bible becomes a textbook. Prayer becomes a duty where we say things like, *“Heavenly Father, please help sister Martha in her infirmity. May your eternal blessing be bestowed upon her in the fullness of your everlasting love and omnipotent power.”* Do you talk like that? Maybe you're just trying to impress God or something. Jesus must be your Lord but He also calls you friend. **You don't get to know a friend by touching base with him once in a while.** You don't get to know a friend by simply learning all about them. You must get to know them. You must walk with them, face trials together, and share your life and heart with them. **I love to be around people who seem like they just got done playing golf with God.** They just went fishing with Jesus. When they talk about Him you can see that they love their friend and Lord so much they just want to be with Him. The sinful nature cannot survive in a life like that!

Here are a few things that you must understand about God in order to truly grasp His acceptance of you:

- 1. God is more concerned with who you are than what you do.*
- 2. God is more concerned with what He is building in you than what He is doing through you.*
- 3. It's not about ability, it's about anointing. {It's not what you do, it's what you allow Him to do in and through you.}*

Trusting That Christ Is fully Sufficient For Our Salvation Is The Very Essence of Saving Faith

This is the bottom line. All good theology ultimately points to Jesus. The human tendency is to look at ourselves. We want to return to the law on some level. Galatians 3:2-3 speaks of this when they are asked a few critical questions. ***This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?*** The point is that the Galatians are beginning to trust in their own abilities once again. There is a reward for our good efforts and actions, but there is no salvation to be earned. That price was completely paid at Calvary. Much of the New Testament is given to warnings against trusting in our own actions and abilities. It is God who saves, God who sustains, and God who enables. It is all by His grace. Once again, Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us ***For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*** There is far too much boasting in the Body of Christ today, especially among the legalistic factions. Too many people are taking too much credit for that which only God can do.

I often ask the question, “if Christ is not sufficient for your salvation, what is left to be done?” Some believe that we are saved by God’s grace but kept by our works. This is a sad state of affairs to be sure. Since perfection is the standard for entrance into heaven by the law, it is difficult for legalists to reconcile the fact that Christ is sufficient. We are either saved by law or by grace. There is no middle ground to be found. Realizing this, many legalists who want desperately to include human effort in salvation came up with what is known as perfection doctrine. This is the belief that Christians reach a state of absolute perfection in this life. This would be laughable if not so tragic and destructive. It was the only logical conclusion to reach however, if one is to believe that God’s Grace is not sufficient to save, sustain, and enable His people.

Some will ask, “isn’t accepting Christ as Savior and Lord a work?” Let me illustrate it this way. If a friend of mine says he wants to give me a brand new car I would be excited. To simply catch the keys as he tossed them to me would not be a work. I would simply be accepting a free gift. If he were to say, “I will give you this new car and all you have to do is go out to my mailbox and get my mail for me” it would not be a free gift. Obviously, a new car is worth far more than the effort to simply get the mail. Still, if anything is required it is not a gift. I could simply say, “I got this new car because I got the mail.” God is not willing that anyone should boast that they had any part in His finished work of salvation. All we are doing is receiving a free gift. Trusting that Christ has completely paid the price and that He is fully sufficient for our salvation is the absolute essence of saving faith.

You Are Saved, You Are Being Saved, And You Will Be Saved

The Jewish people understand the Hebrew word for salvation to be plural. The Apostle Paul treats it as such in the Bible. When you accept the free gift of salvation and hand over your life and trust to Jesus you are fully saved. The work is complete. You have been saved from the penalty of sin and death and given eternal life. You are still being saved and delivered day by day in the struggles of this life, and you will

be saved from this body of death (Romans 7:24) when you go to see Jesus face to face. There are sections of scripture that can confuse some people if they do not understand this concept. One of them is found in Philippians 2:12-13, *12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

It would seem odd to “work out your salvation” unless you understand the concept of “being saved.” The salvation part is done. How we live, discipline and rewards, and whether we will be pleasing to our Father day by day is yet to be determined. Even in that however, you will notice at the end of the verse that it is God who works in us. We simply need to keep our trust firmly in Him and our hearts inclined to His Word and will.

So What Is Our Responsibility?

I know that there are those who fear grace as if it will simply enable others to sin. I have found that you do not have to motivate those who are truly born-again to see that holiness matters. You do not have to convince a converted brother that he should serve the Lord. The Bible speaks extensively about rewards for obedience and discipline for disobedience. Some people believe that the reward is simply heaven. Obviously, heaven is an awesome gift, but it is just that, a gift. It is not a reward. A reward is something you earn. The Bible tells us that we earn rewards as we serve the Lord faithfully and that God disciplines those He loves. Obviously that discipline was not a rejection of His child. It was aimed at correcting behavior. Even discipline comes from the grace and love of God. This next section of scripture is a wonderful example of what God desires of His people:

Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. 1 Corinthians 3:8-15

It *does* matter what you do! Even more exciting is that there is a reward for faithfulness. Still, if you look at the one who's life and work was basically a total loss in terms of works, you will see that he was still saved. That is not how we want to enter in though.

I believe there should be way more preaching on the concept of rewards and discipline today. I think many Christians are afraid to think that they can earn anything. You cannot earn any part of your salvation. You would never be able to keep it on your own. Christ is sufficient for you. Put your trust in Him. In terms of day to day living however, we are either pleasing to the Lord and building up rewards or we are storing up wrath and discipline. I know which side I want to be on.

I am fully aware of the debates that rage on all sides of this. There seems to be a fear among some that if we do not keep people in panic over the state of their salvation they will not be motivated to be holy. I would argue that what amounts to legalistic manipulation does not produce true holiness anyway. True holiness comes from submission to the Lord with absolute trust in His power to save, sustain, and empower his children. With the help of His Holy Spirit we are able to serve Him in great ways. God is not interested in having a bunch of people who just don't have as many bad habits as they did before they were saved. There are many cults who can claim that. The Lord is looking for a people who will completely throw themselves with abandon into His arms of grace, fully trusting in Him in all aspects of their lives. It is these people who live in true holiness and bring him glory. It is those people who do not boast in the law.

We must remember that it is only by God's grace that we can enter into His presence. It is only by His grace that we can walk with Him each day. Dry religion kills the soul. Jesus calls us as His bride. He offers joy and freedom to those who would receive. May we never return to our former way of life. Our selfish nature would love to call us back to bondage, Jesus calls us home to Himself.

It's About The Relationship

I once heard a story about a husband who realized his wife was fed up with his lack of attention and romance. Realizing that he had to do something quick he came up with a plan. That next Thursday night he told his wife, "sweetheart, lets get dressed up and go out to dinner." Surprised and impressed with his spontaneity, she went upstairs and got dressed up. The husband had arranged for a babysitter, and much to her surprise, had also rented a limousine to meet them at the front door. They arrived at his wife's favorite Italian restaurant where he had a table reserved. At the table he had flowers and a candle placed ahead of time. As they sat down he told her that there was something for her under the table. She found a beautiful card taped to the underside. The card contained a lovely saying and a poem he had written for her. His wife was overwhelmed and amazed by the gesture. When they arrived back home it seemed like everything had changed.

Now the husband, thinking this had worked out wonderfully, decided the best thing to do was keep it going. The next Thursday night he did the same thing. The babysitter arrived, the limo took them to the restaurant. The same flowers and candle were on the table, and the same card was once again taped under the table. This time his wife thought it was pretty strange. By the time this had taken place for five Thursdays in a row she thought it was downright freaky, and naturally doubted the sincerity of his love and romantic intentions.

This is what we often do with the Lord. Our relationship is Him is filled with religious duties, many of which are good in themselves. You can do many right things and still neglect a relationship at it's most important level. Religion can easily become nothing more than a formula. Relationships do not thrive on formulas. I want to know Christ.....

Saved By Works

I like to open up some of my messages with the statement, "we are saved by works." Just before the fine Christians in whatever town I am preaching try to turn off the sound system and throw me out, I clarify. We are indeed saved by works, the works of Jesus. Salvation was not free, it is simply *free to us* because the price has already been paid.

There are people who would like to call this "cheap grace" because He forgives and gives it so freely. These people would like to hold you prisoner to your flesh and tie you to your works. The Lord gave you His Son, who suffered beyond measure to give you this grace. That, my friend, is not "*cheap*" grace. It was paid for with the highest price in all creation. The blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. It is a free gift to us only because He already paid the highest price in creation so it could be yours. To cheapen it with a dependence on works would be an insult to Christ's sacrifice. I believe that legalism teaches cheap grace because the grace they propose is faulty, weak, and unable to save to the uttermost those who come to Him by faith (Hebrews 7:25).

May His Name be forever praised! Thank you Jesus for your precious gift of salvation by grace.

God's Grace For Us

(Scriptural Supplement)

Romans 3:9-4:8 (Paul speaking of the Jews and those who do not know Jesus) *What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; ¹⁰ As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: ¹¹ There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. ¹² They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable;* {A good note for those who try to claim that our value is found in anything other than God} *there is none that doeth good, no, not one.* {I guess that excludes you and me too} {The following is a list of prophecies from the old testament talking about the generations to come, otherwise known as "us"} *Romans 3:13-18 ¹³ Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: ¹⁴ Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: ¹⁵ Their feet are swift to shed blood: ¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their ways: ¹⁷ And the way of peace have they not known: ¹⁸ There is no fear of God before their eyes.* {Wow! do we ever need Jesus!} *Romans 3:19-20*

¹⁹ Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. {and when we become conscious of sin we become conscious of our need for Jesus}

Romans 3:21-22 ²¹ But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; ²² Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: {Believe means to "place your entire well being in the hands of"} *for there is no difference: Romans 3:23 ²³ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;* {Murderers shoplifters, liars, etc. there is no difference.} *James 2:10-11 ¹⁰ For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. ¹¹ For he that said, "Do not commit adultery", {Exodus 20:14; Deut. 5:18} said also, "Do not kill." {Exodus 20:13; Deut. 5:17} Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.* {tough one to take, He's talking about us again} {Here's the good news, and he's still talking about us}

Romans 3:24 ²⁴ Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: {glory to God!} *Romans 3:25 ²⁵ Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;* {For you and I!} *Romans 3:26 ²⁶ To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*

Romans 3:27 ²⁷ Where is boasting then? It is excluded. {because we could do nothing to save ourselves and we are no different than anyone else in God's eyes} *By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Romans 3:28-31 ²⁸ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. ²⁹ Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: ³⁰ Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. ³¹ Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.* {grace is not an excuse for sin}

Romans 4:1 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? ² For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. ³ For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

" {Gen. 15:6; also in verse 22} Romans 4:4-8, *Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.* {Psalm 32:1,2}

Wow! There's a lot there. He is saying that:

1. Apart from Christ there is absolutely no way to be saved. Not through buddha, mohammed, the watchtower society, social services or the local yacht club. John 14:6 *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

2. He says that grace is not an excuse for sinning. Although we can never be more accepted by God than the day we come to Him and make Him our Lord, We can be more pleasing to God and it is His Spirit that gives us the power to overcome sin.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Romans 6:1-4.

3. But the primary point is that we need Jesus, and Jesus wants us. 2 Peter 3:9 says, *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*



Living In Grace

Session One Review

1. What does it mean to be “under” grace? (read Galatians 2:20-21) _____

2. Is grace an excuse for sin? (read Romans 6:9-12) _____

3. What does “total depravity” mean? _____

4. How can non-believers do good things if all good is from God? Why can we not take the credit? _____

5. What does it mean to say, “you can’t fix the sinful nature, it must die”?

Living In Grace

Session Two Review

1. What are the two natures that we deal with as Paul describes in Romans 7:15-25?

2. What is the difference between the two natures? _____

3. What does the study mean when it states, “as long as your heart’s desire and inclination is 100% to serve God you are 100% pleasing to God”?

4. Why can’t we use Romans 7:15-25 as a cop-out or an excuse for our sin? (see Romans 6:9-12) _____

5. If a Christian has a guilty conscience, what should they do? _____

Living In Grace

Session Three Review

1. What does it mean to “polish the sinful nature”? _____

2. Are we fully accepted by God when we repent and give our lives to Him? Is there more to do? _____

3. What brings us into a right relationship with God (righteousness)?

4. How do we build the spiritual nature? _____

6. The Bible still calls us to live above sin. How do we do this in a sinful world and with a carnal flesh to deal with? (see 2 Timothy 1:13-14)

Living In Grace

Session Four Review

1. How can we be in heaven for all eternity without sin? _____

2. What do the following statements mean to you?

...God is more concerned with who you are than what you do _____

... God is more concerned with what He is building in you than what He is doing through you

...It's not about ability, it's about anointing. {It's not what you do, it's what you allow Him to do in and through you.}

3. What does the following scripture have to say to us individually and as a church?

Galatians 5:1-7 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?

4. Please read through the last two pages of the study, "God's Grace For Us" one more time.

Lordship

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

(John 6:53)

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Contrary to academic and literary convention, all pronouns referring to God, His Word, or His Church will be capitalized.

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All Scriptures taken from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

True Lordship

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.
(Matthew 7:22-23)

Session One

48 I am that bread of life. 49 Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. 50 This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. 52 The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? 53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.
(John 6:48-53)

This seems like a strange verse to many of us. What does it mean to eat His flesh and drink His blood? It sounds gruesome! The Jews of that time thought the same thing. They weren't looking deep enough to see what Jesus was really talking about. Jesus was saying that unless you are willing to die to yourself and allow Him to take full ownership of your life you cannot truly say that He is your Lord. True Lordship means that we are willing to take up our cross and share in His sufferings. It means we will give up our own lives, plans, goals, and dreams. We belong to Christ and not to ourselves. No longer can we say that we have our own life. We are completely under His ownership. That means we don't have our own money, homes, jobs, or talents. They all belong to Him. By saying that you must eat His flesh and drink His blood, Jesus is letting everyone know that they are kidding themselves if they try to take half of His teaching and yet claim He is their Lord. He goes on to say.....

54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. 56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. (John 6:54-57)

"*He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.*" Jesus is speaking of true followers. Then He says "*so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.*" Let's talk about this *feeding* thing for a minute. The analogy of the shepherd and the sheep is a common one in scripture. It usually refers to Jesus as the great shepherd and us as the sheep, or the Greek word "poimen" which shows up 17 times in the New Testament referring to the pastor type of shepherd. This word is translated "shepherd" every time but once in Ephesians 4:11, where it is translated "pastor". In light of this analogy, it should be pointed out that shepherds do not force-feed sheep. They lead them to food, but the decision to eat is left with the sheep itself. Many Christians are all caught up in the "feel good" gospel. Everybody and everything is supposed to be making them feel good or there must be something wrong. Jesus is the "bread of life." We are to eat of this bread not because it always tastes good, but because it's good for us. True Lordship *doesn't always* taste good at the time it confronts you. If a shepherd led his sheep to food

and they were not hungry, or just didn't like the food, they would starve to death. So it is with our spiritual life. Jesus is constantly leading us to food but the decision of whether to eat comes down to the question, "Is He your Lord?"

One day a lady said to her pastor, "I'm afraid I'm just going to have to leave this church because I am not being fed here." The pastor turned to the lady and said, "Dear sister, when I was an infant I needed someone to feed me, but as I grew up I learned to feed myself." Now I am aware that there are churches that are devoid of truth and spirituality. I am not saying that there is never a reason to leave these fellowships. My point is that our churches are often filled with spiritual children who never *want* to grow up. They are just going to church a few times a week saying, "Feed me, feed me, so I can feel good about everything in my life."

What we are talking about here are really steps to freedom. Although many of us know that Jesus came to set us free from the penalty of sin, we sometimes forget that He also came to set us free from *ourselves*. It is our bondage to the selfish nature that creates such conflict in our spiritual lives. It is Christ's Lordship that sets us free from our own weaknesses and limitations.

Another important characteristic of Christ's example is that He never spent His time chasing down reluctant disciples. He devoted Himself fully to those who were truly hungry for His teaching and Lordship. In a moment we will see what became of those who were hungry for personal gain rather than truth.

⁶⁵ This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. ⁶⁶ These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. " Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? (truth is not always easy to stomach,...BG)⁶¹ When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? ⁶² What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? (John 6:58-62)

It's as if Jesus is saying, "if you don't like it maybe I ought to just leave. Am I not enduring the very things I speak of? Am I not experiencing life in the flesh just as you are? If you truly come to me you will realize that this life has nothing to offer you anyway, so why do you cling to it?" He goes on.....

⁶³ It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. ⁶⁵ And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. ⁶⁶ From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. (John 6:63-66)

Look over that section of scripture again. How much does the flesh count for? It looks like nothing to me. It's amazing the way people are always trying to make the flesh count for something. We want to be able to say "we did it" as if we have anything that is not from God. Our gifts, abilities and possessions are all from God. Indeed, every breath we take is given only by the grace of God. ***⁶⁷ And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: ⁶⁸ That no flesh should glory in his presence.*** (1 Corinthians 1:28-29 Emphasis mine)

Now at the time that Jesus was teaching these things there were thousands following Him. He was having a hard time finding a place to rest because the people were constantly seeking Him out. They had seen or heard of His miracles and many even believed that He was the Messiah. They wanted to get in on the deal. "What does He have to offer me?" was the question on many of their minds. The scripture goes on to say that after this teaching many turned back and no longer followed Him. After Jesus' death and resurrection how many were left in the upper room? One hundred twenty who had truly made Him Lord.

What if you were a member of a fairly traditional church of two thousand people. The church was pretty well off financially but fairly complacent on the Word of God. Most of the people had become comfortable with a watered down gospel and rarely heard about the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ. Then one Sunday a fired-up evangelist comes and preaches that same thing that Jesus did here in the book of John and the next

Sunday there are only 120 people left in the congregation. Do you think the church board would be excited about the new-found truth they had found? How excited do you think the treasurer would be? The problem is that we are too often driven by people and not by truth. We should all love God's people, but not at the expense of God's truth. The Lord would never ask us to compromise His message to bring in people. When the scripture says that *"many turned back and no longer followed Him"* did Jesus run down the road behind them saying. *"Come back guys, we'll get a really good worship team,"* or *"hey guys, I didn't mean it that way, just accept what you can and we can agree to disagree"?* Of course not! Think for a moment with me..... what would have happened if Jesus was teaching the original twelve Apostles and one of them said, *"Jesus, that sounds really good but I'm afraid I must disagree with you on that point. You simply don't understand my past and I feel your teaching is a little out of touch with our modern society. Still, I think you're wonderful and I want to follow you around anyway."?* I'll tell you what would have happened. Jesus would suddenly have had only 11 Apostles. Why? because you do not question the teachings of your Lord. You may question my teachings because I am not Lord, but when you say that Jesus is Lord you agree to obey every command He gives you. When He says to do something our response should simply be "yes Lord". We should not ask why or refuse altogether. To do either of these things is to deny His Lordship in our lives. Many of those who turned back had accepted the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, they just would not make Him their Lord.

Session Two

This brings up another important point. In our day and age we have clichés that tend to distort the truth. When asking about someone's salvation we say things like, *"did he pray the sinners prayer?"* or, *"did she invite Jesus into her heart?"* Both of these fall short of encouraging Lordship. There is simply no shortcut to salvation. We accept Jesus as Lord or we do not accept Him at all. We cannot simply "invite Him into our lives." When we make Jesus Lord it is no longer our life. To say we invite him in is to say that we add Him to our predetermined agenda. To make Him Lord is to completely surrender to His will and way. We no longer have our own plans, goals, and dreams. We exist to serve our Lord and master, Jesus Christ. To do less is to cheapen, or water down, His Lordship.

The "sinners prayer" is another thing that has come to be used all too often as a magical formula to find forgiveness of sin and eternal life. The problem is that there are no words that can save you. Often in evangelistic services I have seen people give the impression that all you have to do is pray the prayer. It's kind of like a spiritual sweepstakes where everyone who plays wins. We need to make sure that people understand what it means to take up your cross and make Jesus Lord. He said, ***"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: "Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*** (Matthew 7:13-14)

Oh how often we allow the devil to give us his tools of deception for making the narrow way seem a little wider. What a horrifying thing it is to think that we could ever distort the teachings of Christ to the point where the gate that leads to life is wider than it should be. How sad to think that those on the "wide path that leads to destruction" will be unaware that they are there because someone told them that God's truth was relative. Not long ago a major magazine poll called thousands of Americans and simply asked, "are you a Christian?" The conclusion was that 85% of Americans professed Christianity. I wish I could believe it was true, but what it really tells me is that many people do not know what it means to make Jesus Lord of their lives. It means we have redefined lordship and redefined the cross of Christ. An anonymous writer speaks of the old cross and the new cross like this:

"The new cross encourages a different type of evangelism. the evangelist does not demand destruction of the old self before the new life can be received, He doesn't preach contrasts but similarities. He seeks to key into public interest by showing that Christianity makes no unpleasant demands. Rather, it offers the same things the world does, only at a higher level. Whatever the sin-mad world happens to be clamoring for at the time is cleverly shown to be the very thing the gospel offers, with the religious version claiming to be more fulfilling than the worldly version.

Evangelism which draws friendly parallels between the ways of God and the ways of men is false to the bible and cruel to the souls of it's hearers. Faith in Christ does not parallel the world, it intersects it! In coming to Christ we do not bring our old life to a higher plane, we leave it at the cross!

The new cross does not slay the sinner, it only redirects him. It gears him to a cleaner and jollier way of living and saves his self-respect. The old cross is a symbol of death. It stands for the abrupt, violent end of a human being. A man in bible times who took up his cross and started down the road had already said goodbye to his friends. He did not come back. The cross of old made no compromise, modified nothing, spared nothing. The whole man was slain completely and for good. It did not try to stay on good terms with the victim.

We must not imagine ourselves as commissioned to make Christ acceptable to the world. We are not diplomats but prophets! Our message is not compromise, but rather an ultimatum. God offers life, but not an improved old life, rather a new life that he alone can give when we die to ourselves and allow Him to do so.

Through the old cross the Lord brings life from death. The sinner must repent and believe. He must forsake his sins and go on to forsake himself. Let him cover nothing, defend nothing, excuse nothing. Let him not seek to make terms with God. Let him bow his head before God and acknowledge himself worthy to die. Having done this, let him gaze with simple trust upon the risen savior, and from the Lord will come life, rebirth, cleansing, and power. The same power that raised Christ Jesus from the dead now raises the sinner to new life as well."

We are desperate for a return to the old cross, the true gospel. This is the cross that Jesus said would be ours if we followed Him. That cross was the reason many deserted Him, and the reason many desert Him today.

So after many turned back, Jesus turned to those who were still there and said....

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? ⁶⁷ Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. ⁶⁸ And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. (John 6:67-69)

Now there's a statement of true Lordship. Peter is basically saying, "Jesus, you are Lord. We have abandoned our own lives and the world, *we will not go back.*"

Control is the primary issue. Lordship means you give up total control of everything in your life to Jesus Christ. You don't tell Him how to run His Kingdom. When He says "jump!" I want to say, "how high?" It means we move away from the me-me-me gospel, which is no gospel at all. It means we move away from the I-center to the God-center. Christian maturity can be defined as the moving away from the self-centered life to the God-centered life. The person who is not submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ is always concerned with "getting what is coming to them." The person who understands the Lordship of Jesus Christ is constantly grateful that they will not get "what is coming to them." People who really understand what Jesus has done realize that what we have coming to us is death and hell. It is only because of God's grace that we are freed from that sentence.

Now the thousands that were following Christ were saying, "He's Lord." but like so many of us today they didn't even know what it meant to make Him Lord. Once Jesus began to explain to them what it meant to make Him Lord of their lives they decided to turn back. One of the ministries that I am involved in spends a lot of time and effort working with new believers who have had a lot of struggles in life. Many have lost all of their money and friends to things like drugs and alcohol. Others have just come out of jail or other institutions. Almost all of these peoples say they want to make Jesus Lord when everything in their life is a disaster. It's easy to say, "Jesus, I want you to take control of my life" when everything is out of control. Then as things come together they are faced with a far more difficult decision; will Jesus still be Lord when it

looks like I can take over again myself? When we really say Jesus is Lord we realize that our rights are gone, our pride is gone, our glory is gone (it is found in Him). At this point, will He still be Lord?

Another common scenario that we encounter is the "semi-lord mentality." These are people who have accepted Jesus as their "semi-lord." That means that they are willing to make Him Lord in some areas but not in others. Typically they like to make Him Lord in all the fun things but not in the things that require any sacrifice. We see a lot of people who want Him to be Lord when they get to jump up and down in the service shouting "praise the Lord," or when they get to play a musical instrument for Him. Others really enjoy Him being Lord when they are at all the fun church activities like camps and retreats. Then there are those that really want Him to be Lord when they are in the midst of tragedy or disaster. I find far fewer however, that really want Him to be Lord of their finances, their relationships, their language, their goals, their plans, their dreams, their time, or even their thought life. Of course, if He is really Lord one can't even say they have any of these things. They belong to Christ because we belong to Christ. He is either Lord of everything or He is not Lord at all. ***(¹⁹ What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? ²⁰ For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)***

Do you think that you are smarter than God? Most of you will say, "of course not." Often however, our lives say that we think we are smarter than God. We want to do things our way. We trust our instincts and intellect over His Word. We make our own plans and goals instead of allowing Him to guide our life. We go through our lives rarely praying or studying His Word. These actions show that we think we are smarter than God.

Will He be Lord if He makes you a shoeshine boy on the corner? Will He be Lord if He never gives you any of your plans and dreams? Will He be Lord when you are attracted to that unbeliever in a romantic way? Will He be Lord when it comes time to pay the bills? Or will you accept Him as Savior but not as Lord? Savior-only is a "what can Jesus do for me?" attitude. Lordship is a question of whether or not you will give it all to Jesus. We are kidding ourselves if we say that we are His children and yet refuse Him as Lord.

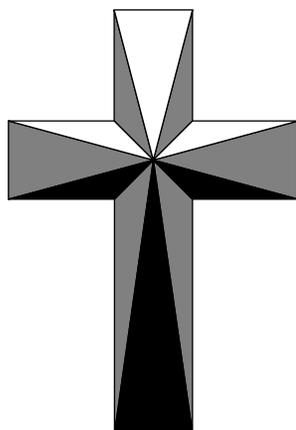
Once again.....

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. John 6:53

It's all or nothing folks. He is saying that you must be willing to die to yourself and allow His Spirit to live in you and take control. It means that you must give your life to Him just as He gave His life for you. Just as He died on the cross for our sins we must die to ourselves and allow *our* lives to be poured out for others the way *His* life was poured out for others. *That* is Lordship. *That* is life in Christ.

Now it is important to understand that the struggle with sin is common to the Christian life and that struggle is not a sign that we have not accepted His Lordship. His grace is sufficient for His children. The very fact that we are struggling with it shows the conviction that comes from a true walk with Christ. It is when someone continues in sin with no struggle there is an obvious lack of Lordship. This study is aimed at those who never really make Jesus Lord. They accept Him as semi-lord over various areas of their lives. If you are one of those people I hope you will take this very seriously. Make no mistake. This world is filled with people who call themselves Christians. Unfortunately, many of them will arrive at the gate to eternal life and find it is too narrow for their broad definition of Lordship. I would be guilty of ministerial treason if I softened this message up to make you feel more comfortable in semi-lordship. Are there parts of God's Word that you refuse to accept? Are there elements of the Christian life that you refuse to submit to? There are probably parts of it all that are very difficult for you. That 's normal. When we understand His Lordship we realize that those are the parts that demand the most attention in our walk with the Lord. I want to encourage you to examine your life and not your words. People tend to become very good at

saying "Jesus is Lord." I feel it's good to say these things, but if He really is your Lord you won't have to say it. People will know. Jesus is Lord whether people accept Him as Lord or not, but He wants to be *your* Lord. He wants to set you free from yourself. When you make Him Lord of your life he will empower you and make your life what it was always meant to be. May He be Glorified as we walk with Him.



True Lordship

Session One Review

1. What does it mean to make Jesus Lord of your life? _____

2. How are we “fed” spiritually as Christians?

3. Why can't we blame others if we are not growing? _____

4. What does it mean to say “Jesus sets us free from *ourselves*”? _____

5. In the Word it is clear that Jesus did not spend His time chasing down reluctant disciples. Why didn't He make the Gospel easier to swallow so that more could follow Him? _____

6. As you look at the Church in North America as a whole, does it seem like the modern Gospel simply “adds Jesus on to our lives”? If so, what is wrong with this? (read 2 Corinthians 5:15) _____

7. Many people say that if Jesus appeared in front of us today everyone would follow Him. Why do you suppose there were so few followers left after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection? After all, He *did* appear in the flesh and do many miracles to prove He was the Messiah.

True Lordship

Session Two Review

1. A Time Magazine poll found that 85% of American households profess to be Christian? What does this indicate? _____

2. What does it mean to “take up your cross” and follow Jesus. (Matt 10:38, Matt 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23) _____

3. What does it mean to “make the narrow way a little wider”?

4. What does it mean to make Jesus “semi-lord” of your life?

5. What does it mean to say “Jesus is Lord” with your life rather than just your words?

6. What does the study say about the struggle with sin?



The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If

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Contrary to academic and literary convention, all pronouns referring to God, His Word, or His Church will be capitalized.

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All Scriptures taken from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

The Baptism of The Holy Spirit and Sanctification

The Holy Spirit is a marvelous ally. Looking at the men and women of scripture and the miraculous power released in their lives it is clear that they were inseparable from the influence of the Spirit. In a world that has become increasingly centered on human intellectualism, we are desperate for a return to Spirit-filled teaching. The Church of the living God groans for a fresh wind of God's power. An unsaved generation desperately needs to see Spirit-baptized, truly empowered Christians who walk in joy and victory, just as the Word of God says they will.

We rarely hear biblical teaching regarding the Baptism of the Holy Spirit in our churches today. Unfortunately, many shy away from the truth of God's Word in this area due to various abuses and misunderstandings. The purpose of this writing is to take a look at what the Word of God has to say about this great work of God that is available to all, and to bring clarity of understanding to the gift of God that is second only to salvation in the life of the believer. As is the case with the other studies in this book, this is not an attempt to discuss each point of the Spirit baptism exhaustively, but rather to present Bible truth and apply it to real life. It is our hope that you will be inspired to dig deeper into the Word of God as a result.

There has been a great deal of controversy regarding the baptism of the Holy Spirit, especially in terms of the "evidence" of the infilling itself. Traditional Pentecostal teaching is that one must speak in tongues as an evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Some movements go to the extreme of stating that tongues is the baptism of the Holy Spirit and not merely an evidence. Others say that speaking in tongues is of the Devil! All of these views would be difficult to justify biblically. While the Bible indicates that at times individuals speak in tongues during Spirit baptism, other times it mentions the exercise of other spiritual gifts or mentions none at all. The belief that all will speak in tongues when baptized by the Holy Spirit originated primarily from the Azusa street revivals in which history records many receiving the gift of tongues as a result of the Spirit's outpouring. The belief that it is of the Devil often comes from the cessationist stance of those who believe the spiritual gifts listed as operating in the new Testament church are not for the church today. My belief is that those who claim that the gifts have ceased in our time do not have a biblical leg to stand on, and although the gift of tongues is of great value to those who receive it, it is in direct contradiction to the following scriptures to assume that all will receive tongues or any specific spiritual gift unless God so wills:

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. (1 Cor. 12:7-11 Emphasis mine) and 1 Cor. 12:27-31, ***Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.*** From here the Word goes on to explain that the greatest gifts are faith, hope and love.

It's not the purpose of this writing to delve into the controversy regarding tongues and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, but rather to take an unbiased approach in regard to the absolutes of scripture and to look at those things that the Bible directly speaks of as the results, or fruit, of the Spirit-filled life. It is clearly relevant to apply the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 as absolute evidence of the infilling of the Holy Spirit: ***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*** Along with a greater ability to operate in the spiritual gifts that God chooses to give to individuals, it is this fruit that comes as a direct result of the Spirit-filled life, and it is this fruit that will always elude us in the absence of the Spirit's power.

Unfortunately many have shied away from teaching about the Holy Spirit's baptism as a result of the various controversies. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a tremendously powerful element in the life of the believer. It's sad that various doctrinal extremes have caused so many to miss the truth. Closely related to the infilling of the Spirit is sanctification. We will discuss both throughout the course of this study. Let's look at a few scriptures:

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. (John 17:1-21)

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. (1 Thes 5:23-24)

The controversy mentioned earlier had many damaging results within the Body of Christ. One of these is that we began to shy away from calling it the baptism of the Holy Spirit and instead called it sanctification. Sanctification is the *result*, not the *act*. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the *act* of God and the *prerequisite* to sanctification. It's far more accurate to have altar calls for the baptism of the Spirit and yet many say "come and be sanctified". As we see in the following paragraphs, sanctification is an awesome thing. However, it can only be attained by the infilling and empowering of the Holy Spirit.

The word "sanctify" or "sanctified" shows up in the KJV 22 times, but the Greek word "hageeadzo" shows up 29 times. Other times it is translated "holy" or hallowed". The word literally means "*set apart and equipped for divine purpose*". It's closely related to the word we usually translate as "holy" except that it includes the "equipped" part whereas "holy" means to be set apart for divine purpose. It also infers that we are *made* holy rather than us becoming holy on our own. Keep these concepts in mind for they will be important through this entire study.

So we see that it's God's desire that we be filled with His Spirit and sanctified by Him and for Him. The next question is when does this happen? Many say it always happens at salvation. I would like to refute that point scripturally and take a look at why God does it the way He does....Obviously we all received the Spirit's *influence* on our lives even before we were saved or we would never even have had conviction of sin, would not have been drawn to the Lord, and certainly the Holy Spirit is always working in and through the believer. However, there are clearly greater infillings available to the believer as we walk with the Lord and seek His Spirit. There is a first great infilling available, and many thereafter. It could happen at the same time as conversion, but that is not necessarily the case.

Acts 8:12-20 tells us, *But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.*

There are two things that I want to point out from this scripture. The first is that they accepted Jesus and were baptized in water prior to the time that Peter and John showed up and asked them if they had yet received the Holy Spirit. They were clearly Christians and yet *it was not assumed* that they had received the Spirit's baptism. The second thing I want to point out from the previous scripture is that the infilling of God's Spirit was not a vague experience. It was of such power that Simon the Sorcerer begged to be sold the ability to administer it. This was a visible event in the life of the believer. It brought real power and real change. Often there are various spiritual and physical manifestations of the inward work of God.

You see folks, when we are saved we are completely renewed, justified, forgiven, and set free from the penalty of sin. But after we find Jesus and experience His forgiveness we are quickly presented with a tremendous problem....*How do we live above sin in a sinful and depraved world between now and when we go to heaven?* Especially when the flesh wars against our soul. How do we really become free enough to serve God in His anointed power? How do we become true witnesses? God is faithful to make the way.

Let's look at Luke 11:10-13, *For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?* and Ezekiel 36:25-27, *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.* (emphasis mine)

Note that it says He will cause us to walk in His statutes. Many claim that it is impossible to rise above sin in this world. Therefore they just give up. While it is impossible to do on our own, the Spirit's power enables us to rise above the carnal nature. While you will never be perfect while you reside in this imperfect form of flesh, you need not be a slave to sin. Am I perfected to the point where I never sin? No, but to resign yourself to sin is to lose the battle before it's fought and to rob the Spirit of His power in your life. Remember the lesson from the study on grace: *you will never be more accepted by God than you are the day you are saved*, but you can be more pleasing to Him. That should be our heart's desire. The infilling of the Holy Spirit brings us to tremendous intimacy with God in our relationship with Him

Jesus was born in human form just as we are and suffered temptation in every way just as we do. My friends, *the same power that lived in Him and raised Him from the dead can live in us!* It is therefore possible to have victory over the practice of sin in this world. Too many people give the Devil too much credit. He is not on equal terms with God folks. The Holy Spirit has the power to enable you to overcome the world. He who is in you is greater than He who is in the world!

Now it is absolutely impossible to live above sin in this world on our own. Scripture clearly illustrates our two natures in Romans 7:15-25, *For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*

Now some folks use this as an example of the hopelessness of trying to live above sin in this world. This scripture is not an excuse to lower the standard of holiness but rather Paul's example of the absolute futility of trying to live above sin *without the Spirit of God!* Look at His last phrase... "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord!" He showed us the answer, He wasn't saying it's impossible, he was showing that the only hope is the death of our old man and the new life that the Spirit places within us. He gives us the answer in Galatians 5:16, *This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*

So we see that the infilling of the Holy Spirit is an essential part of the victorious Christian's life, and sanctification is an obligation for the believer. As it says in Romans 12:1-2, *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

It is God who transforms us through the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit. It is the infilling of the Spirit that empowers us to live as we ought to live. The infilling sanctifies us, set's us apart and equips us for His divine purpose. Too many Christians stop short of all that God has for them. Of equal tragedy is the way the holiness movement has distorted the teaching of holiness. Many have abandoned the teaching of the importance of being filled with God's Spirit and turned instead to a false doctrine of outward legalism instead of the Bible doctrine of inward change. Many holiness books tend to focus solely on personal discipline instead of the Spirit's empowering. Truly holy people are completely dependant upon the Spirit for their victory. There's nothing wrong with spiritual disciplines but we must never lean or depend on our own ability. Over time many have come to stress discipline over deliverance. The baptism of the Holy Spirit as a second definite work in the life of the believer is at the root of the holiness movement and yet now holiness is often preached as a kind of human work. The primary point of true holiness teaching is that we are completely incapable of living holy lives apart from the Holy Spirit's filling and sanctification through Christ Jesus. There is no true holiness without the baptism of the Spirit. Many will get to heaven but will have to fight an overwhelming war with the flesh in the mean time.

Now there are many who say things like, "I was filled with the Spirit in 1975!" That is great, but we need to be continually filled with the Spirit! People often ask me if I believe in a "second definite work in the life of the believer." Yes I do, and I believe in a third definite work, and a fourth, and a thousand other definite works of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

After many years in ministry I met with God in a new and life-changing way. I had been ministering for God for 10 years and had won many to the Lord but His anointing fell on me in new and incredible power. People have certainly noticed it since, as have I. Once again, it is the single most empowering part of the Christian walk and should be earnestly sought by all believers if they have not yet experienced it.

Daniel Warner, a primary founder of the Church of God movement said upon receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, “ I used to preach what I believed, now I testify to what I know”. This is one of the best descriptions of what the Holy Spirit does in the life of a believer. We come face to face with the reality of the supernatural. It takes our head knowledge and sets it deep within our hearts.

Charles Finney, a preacher who many of you will be familiar with, experienced sanctification and the filling of the Spirit after many years of ministry much as I did. Finney said: *"If we are not filled with the Spirit our guilt amounts to disobedience of God. It amounts to all the good we might do if we had the Spirit of God in as great measure as possible -- but good which is now all undone because we are without this power. Our guilt is farther measured by all the evil you do in consequence of not having the Spirit." I read this awful thought something more than a year ago, and it made a profound impression on my soul. Prior to that time I reviewed my ministry with great satisfaction, because I had been blessed with the privilege of leading perhaps twenty-five hundred souls to Christ. But I had consciously worked with a very limited endowment of spiritual power, compared with what God was willing to give. And when I thought what I might have done for God and his cause had I sought with all my soul and obtained the divine anointing for service twenty years ago, my heart sank within me. I look upon my past ministry now with sadness, and plead that the tears and blood of Christ may wash out the stains and guilt of my imperfect service."*

I cannot tell you how wonderfully this expresses the feelings in my own heart. I knelt on the floor and wept when I realized the years that had been spent striving for the Lord in my own power. The beauty of discovering this new unction and intimacy with God was mixed with my despair for not having figured it out earlier, especially when it was right there in His Word.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. (John 4:23-24)

The Lord is Spirit and we need to relate to Him that way. Many people become so physical in their thinking that they forget that battle are won and lost on the spiritual front. The church has become so focused on their programs, their plans, their agenda. How is God to lead us if we are not filled with His Spirit? Many don't even expect God's power in their life. They read books, listen to preachers, and try to implement it all on their own power. All the while they feel like a failure because in their own power they continue to fail. Oh how we need the Holy Spirit to be central in our teaching once again. Many people can't even recognize His presence. God is real! My question to you is: do you know that you have been baptized with the Holy Spirit of God? If you cannot say "yes" with confidence it is likely that you have not. This should not come as a great surprise as a vast number of Christians are like those in Acts 19:1-5, ***And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*** Here we see another group of believers who had not yet received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and why? . . . *they had not yet heard of it.* They were serving God faithfully but without the unction and empowering of the Holy Spirit. Too many people have not heard of it today either. They are taught that it's just something that happens at salvation or that it doesn't even exist in our day. Even those who realize the truth of the Word at times choose to avoid the subject either because of the controversy or because they don't seek that intimacy with God in their own lives. This is nothing less than a profound tragedy. It robs the individual of joy and the church of it's power.

So what's the great secret to The baptism of the Holy Spirit? There isn't one. It's spelled out quite clearly in scripture. Luke 11:10-13 says, ***For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much***

more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? As it is with many things we *have* not because we *ask* not. Too often we don't realize that love joy, peace, and the Spirit's empowering to live a holy life are our inheritance as children of God. However, don't ask God to fill you with His Spirit just because it sounds exciting. The prerequisite is that we must be willing to give our lives to Jesus. The most dramatic result of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is a compelling desire and supernatural ability to serve God and to live out His Word. Some years ago I was preaching on the Holy Spirit to a large group of youth at a camp. Night after night the Spirit came in power and many received the baptism. This was evidenced not only by spiritual evidences but also by dramatically changed lives. One night a young lady in her mid-teens came to me crying. She said that her friends were being changed and empowered before her eyes and that she wanted to receive the same infilling. For all of her desire she had been unsuccessful in attaining it. At first I was surprised because she seemed so sincere in her desire to receive from God. As I questioned her further she mentioned that she was currently very involved with an unsaved boyfriend. Going on she shared that she was very aware that it was wrong to be unequally yoked with unbelievers and that God was grieved by it but she was unwilling to submit to His lordship in this area, and was choosing to continue in sin. It broke my heart but I had to share with her that we will never receive from God what could be ours if we are unwilling to truly make Him Lord. We may feel that we are powerless to change but it must be our passion and desire to *be* changed. When we draw a line and say there is something we are not willing to do or to give up for God we have drawn a line between ourselves and all that could be released in and through our lives if we would truly submit to His lordship.

So how do we stand when we can't do it in our own power?

Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.
(2 Timothy 1:13-14)

Too many people are trying to live the Christian life without the empowering of God's Spirit. You would be amazed at the number of pastors I work with in a typical year who are in that very situation. Often it is because they simply haven't heard. Other times it is because they actually *fear* the Holy Spirit. How ironic that the enemy has caused a deception that causes God's people to fear the very thing that could set them free in service to the King. These fine Christians struggle with ongoing frustration and an overwhelming sense of futility. In my observation I have come to believe that people don't burn out from activity, they burn out from a sense of futility. I can go night and day if I sense I am accomplishing my goals. It is the times of apparent ineffectiveness that drag us down emotionally, physically, and spiritually. We need a deep intimacy with God and the joy and power that can only come by the empowering of His Holy Spirit.

The Bible talks about power. It talks about joy. So where is this joy and power in the life of the believer? Where does it come from? Acts 1:8 says ***But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*** and 1 Corinthians 4:20 tells us, ***For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.*** Often we hear loads of talk but see very little power. In 1 Corinthians 2:2-5 Paul says, ***For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*** Many of our modern day Bible colleges and seminaries rarely teach on the power of God's Spirit, but rather on the "value" of enticing words and man's wisdom. This is yet another reason why the modern church places so much value in intellectualism and so little in the miraculous anointing of God. A return to Spirit-filled teaching will cause people to place their faith in God and not men.

I remember a camp I once preached for in Canada. It was a combination camp that started with three days of youth and then went into a regular camp meeting for everyone. The first night with the youth went fairly well, with the Lord meeting with us and a few people getting saved. At a meeting following the service many of the adults were just amazed at this "outpouring" of God. Ironically, I was

feeling somewhat dismayed at the lack of true spiritual power in the service. My soul was in despair that we have come to expect so little from God. I told them that if they would believe for more the Holy Spirit would come and really change some lives, heal sickness, and set the captives free. The next night that is exactly what happened, the Spirit came in power. After the services there was a line-up at the camp phone as kids called their parents to tell them they had been filled with the Holy Spirit. All this in a holiness church where it should not have been any surprise! A movement that should have been teaching this from day one. Most of these young people were "church kids". I had them fill out a form at the end of camp just asking them what stood out to them about the week and over 90% of the answers were to the effect of; "I never knew God was so real" and "I never had any idea God was so powerful". It's awesome that they could finally come to be filled with God's Spirit, but tragic that it had never been taught to them before.

The young people at this camp no longer believed in God because their parents did or because they were afraid of going to hell, they believed because they met with Him face to face and sensed the love that He has for them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit of almighty God.

The real fun began when the adults showed up for camp meeting. The first night I preached an introductory sermon dealing with the subject matter I would be bringing to them the rest of the camp. It was a good time but I didn't lead into a really specific altar call time. However, at the end of the service a pastor who had been very frustrated and tired came forward for prayer. Since I play guitar, it is always something of a problem for me to finish a song and get free of all the wires to go and pray for those who come forward. Before I could get free a group of young teens from the previous week came forward, laid hands on the pastor and began to pray that the Holy Spirit would fill him. The Spirit poured out on him mightily and all who saw it were amazed. This to me best exemplified the power of the Holy Spirit. A group of young people who would never have stepped out week earlier now began to minister in real ways. They found confidence through Christ and were used of him to touch the life of one who needed it so badly. They could never have done so on their own power.

For many the Christian life is an exercise in futility. How many of you have made commitments that only last a week? The Spirit of God brings real change. I've listened to so many people tell me that they just can't live the Christian life...your right, you can't....not on your power. Are you tired of banging your head against the wall in your Christian life? You can walk in victory. But it's about God's power, not yours. It's about the anointing of His Spirit.

If you are serious about your walk with Jesus and you desire to go on to the fullness of Christ then ask Him to fill you with His Spirit. This is not a one time thing but there is a definite *first* time. We need to continue to seek the Spirit and as the scripture says, ***If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*** Galatians 5:25 Understand though that just as any relationship must be sustained you will need to continue to seek His Spirit as you walk with Him.

The Holy Spirit changes us. This is what the scripture talks about when it says our minds can be renewed in Romans 12. As the Spirit fills and guides us we find that we no longer think like we used to. A Spirit-filled Christian begins to think of life in terms of what they can give instead of what they can get. This is why people in the world seldom understand us. They expect us to think like they do, and far too often this is the case. We need the purifying power of the Holy Spirit to be poured out on the Church. This won't happen until God's people cry out to be filled, and until they are hungry to be transformed and empowered.

Dr. Steele, a great theologian of old gives us these words from the book "Love Enthroned". I couldn't have said it any better than this.....

"What a revolution would be wrought in the Church -- what a resurrection to spiritual life -- what a girding with power if preachers insisted on the duty of all believers imitating their Master in the Spirit baptism as in the water-baptism, in the reality as in the shadow, in the thing signified as in the symbol! O blessed Jesus, hasten that day -- the day of power in thy Church, as it was when it was the first inquiry of the preacher, 'Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?' Then would he who writes these words for thy glory, O adorable Saviour, joyfully drop his pen, and exclaim with good old Simeon: 'Now lettest

The Baptism of The Holy Spirit & Sanctification

Session One Review

1. What does the Bible say about the gift of tongues in relation to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit? _____

2. How does the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 relate to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?

3. What is the definition of "Sanctification"? _____

4. When can/does the baptism of the Holy Spirit occur in the life of the believer?

5. Notes and comments for discussion.

The Baptism of The Holy Spirit & Sanctification

Session Two Review

1. What is the Holy Spirit's role in the life of the believer? _____

2. Can we live above sin in this world? _____

3. Does everyone have to "sin every day"? _____

4. When the church turns from the Bible doctrine of Holy Spirit transformation to outward discipline it turns from inner change to outward legalism. How can we avoid this in our own life?

5. Notes and comments for discussion.

The Baptism of The Holy Spirit & Sanctification

Session Three Review

1. Daniel Warner, one of the founders of the Church of God movement, said upon receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit “I used to preach what I believed, now I testify to what I know”. What did he mean?

2. What things must be true and evident in our lives in order for us to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit? _____

3. What happens when we try to serve the Lord without the empowering of the Holy Spirit?

4. Romans 12:1-2 talks about being “transformed by the renewing of your minds”. Who is it that transforms us and how does this happen? _____

5. What can we do to help bring the Holy Spirit back to the center of the churches teaching?

6. Notes and comments.

Integrity

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Contrary to academic and literary convention, all pronouns referring to God, His Word, or His Church will be capitalized.

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All Scriptures taken from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

Integrity

Session One

Integrity is almost a lost value in the world today. Society honors those who can talk fast enough and bend the truth enough to get ahead. The "look out for number one" attitude within society basically teaches that you do whatever you have to do to "make it." It has become so important to look good to others that people have become masters at appearing to be something they are not. Perhaps the most disturbing element of this trend is the way it has infiltrated the modern church. Oh how God calls us to integrity! Through the years we have watched a number of popular ministers fall in the public eye. These people are certainly responsible for their own actions, but the general public cannot be excused for exalting charisma over character and gifting over integrity. This is what we often do in our churches. Those who can put on the best front are often considered to be the most mature spiritually. **In our own walk we are often pressured into a position where *knowing* the right things and *saying* the right things are more important than *being* the right things.** As we go through this study on integrity, I hope you will search your life and commit yourself to developing godly character. It is the foundation of the true Christian walk and witness.

So what is integrity? I can think of a number of practical definitions. One I use often is; "integrity is who you are when nobody is looking." Another related word is honesty. A man or woman of integrity is honest with themselves, honest with others, and honest with God. To have integrity is to be consistent in your Christian character. It means that who you are with one person in one place you will be with everyone everywhere. Integrity is also to say what you mean and mean what you say, and most of all, Christian integrity is to be unswervingly committed to the Word of God and it's truth.

These are but a few practical definitions of integrity in the Christian life. It is impossible to list every instance where integrity plays a role in your daily walk with God, but what I want to do in the following pages is to apply these principles to some of the major areas of the typical Christian's life. I hope that you will be looking to find yourself in here. God is calling His people to divine character, and true integrity.

Integrity In Our Fellowship With Others

Can you say that you are the same person whether you are at church or at work? How about when you're out with friends on the weekend? Many believers live like they have some kind of multiple personality disorder. They have one personality at work, one at home, one with friends, and still another one at church. They say, "praise the Lord" in every sentence at church but you would rarely hear it during the week. At church they talk about the importance of family but at home it doesn't play out. At church they appear to have their whole life together while in truth they are falling apart inside. This is not integrity. Remember, integrity is consistency and honesty. It means that who you are in the dark you will also be in the light. It means that we will be honest with others and with God. I want to look at something that happened in the Word as a result of a lack of integrity. This is the story of Ananias and Sapphira. The early church was being established and many people were bringing all that they owned to the Apostles and giving for the building of God's Kingdom and the needs of others.

Let's look at Acts 5:1-11, ¹ *But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,* ² *And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.* ³ *But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?* ⁴ *Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.* ⁵ *And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.* ⁶ *And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.* ⁷ *And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.* ⁸ *And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.* ⁹ *Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.* ¹⁰ *Then fell*

she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

Now it's important to understand that they were not punished for failing to give all the money that they received from their property. *Their great failing was in lying about their gift and their commitment to God.* Had they been honest about the percentage of money given they could have been seen as people of integrity, even if their commitment was a bit light. Unfortunately, they chose to try and look good in the sight of others rather than be truthful. I know how many times I have lied to others and myself about the level of my commitment to God! Especially when I was growing up and struggling to live both in the world and in Christ. Oh the grace of God that bore with me through those years. How horrifying it would be if the Spirit of God came today and struck dead the Ananiases and Saphiras in our Churches! May we never test the Spirit of the Lord.

To have integrity in our fellowship with other Christians and in our Church life is to be honest about our commitment to God. It is a better witness to others when we are honest about our failings than when we pretend to be more dedicated than we are. Unfortunately, many Christians learn all the right words, songs, and prayers and think that because they look spiritual to others God must be pleased with them. Those with a more charismatic personality or gifting find it easier to play the game. God is primarily concerned with the motives and attitudes of your heart.

Integrity of Speech

For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. (James 3:2-8)

The tongue is a fire. The Lord has a lot to say in His Word about our speech. He points out that you basically are what you say. We have all said many things in our lives that we regret. This scripture even says that no man can tame the tongue. The only way to change what comes out of our mouth is to change what lies inside our hearts. Matthew 12:33-37 tells us, *Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*

Have you ever spoken a careless word? It's a good thing that God's grace is sufficient for us! We have all spoken careless words that we now regret. I am a speaker by gifting and experience. I am very aware of how easy it is to hurt someone with words. The gifts of preaching, teaching, and evangelism are easily used for the wrong reasons. It's easy to use that "power of persuasion" for the manipulation of others. That's why preachers make good salesmen. I am well aware that I can win arguments with many people whether I'm right or wrong. I have to be very careful not to use that which God has entrusted me with in such a way that it hurts others. To put this in a more practical sense, most of us have said hurtful things to someone we love out of anger. One thing is certain, you can't take a word back once it has left your mouth. We need to be very careful. This all bears reference to integrity because we are what we say. *O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. (Matthew 12:34-35)*

We need to allow God to change us on the inside before we will be able to get a handle on our speech. Our speech will follow the true growth in our spiritual life. It also shows a lack of integrity to try and sound more spiritual than you are. Remember, integrity is saying what you mean and meaning what you say.

Two of the most serious breaches of integrity in the Christian life come in the form of gossip and slander. If you fall into this category you probably already know it. Gossip and slander are cancers that destroy people, Churches, and relationships. These things erode the witness of Christianity to the world and destroy our own lives as well. We see this spelled out in James 3:9-12, *“**Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. ¹⁰Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. ¹¹Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? ¹²Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.**”*

Integrity In the Home

This is a big one. I could write a whole study on the way most husbands and fathers could use more character and integrity. The best indication of true integrity in the home is when each member assumes and fulfills the roles and responsibilities laid out for them in the Word of God. I have heard numerous arguments on the submission of wives to their husbands and there are two things that must be said; the Bible is clear on the roles of husbands and wives, and many marriages are so off-balance scripturally that it's difficult to implement godly roles and responsibilities. What I mean is that it's hard for a wife to submit to a husband who has no character. I once talked to a wife that was very domineering and she told me that she wants to submit to her husband. The only reason she pushed him around so much is because she was trying to get him to stand up and be a man! Well, I am not in agreement with her methods but I do agree that there are times when it is difficult to hold up to a perfect biblical guideline when things are all out of order. This however, does not release us from the responsibility to follow the Word unswervingly. The home is a beautiful place when God's principles are followed. There comes a love and mutual respect that is a terrific witness to their commitment to the Word. The ease with which people get divorced these days is frightening! We are constantly dealing with the long-term effects of these decisions in the lives of children who are viciously wounded in the process. Integrity, integrity, integrity! Too many people make a vow “for better or for worse” and yet easily cast off that commitment when they hit the “for worse” parts. While I am speaking to parents let me say that the most important thing you can do for your children is to be honest about your walk with God. Children can spot a phony a mile off. That's why you can usually tell the true state of a Church by asking the youth. Be consistent at home. Nothing will turn your child's stomach in disgust like watching you scream all the way to Church on Sunday morning after just having a fight with your wife or husband, and then watch you smiling and gently saying "God bless you brother Mike." in the entry of your Church building. Too often children watch their parents laughing and praying with others at Church only to listen to them slander the same people on the car ride home. Often it's the leadership that is being slandered. These same parents come to me absolutely amazed that their children are not interested in the Church. Imagine that! Integrity, integrity, integrity!

Integrity In Your Work Life

The first point of integrity in a Christian's *work life* is to be *working*. The Bible is clear on the dangers and the sin of being idle. II Thes 3:10-12 is clear on this subject, *“**For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. ¹¹For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. ¹²Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.**”* The command for men to support their families is even stronger in 1 Timothy 5:8, *“**But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.**”* Wow! that's pretty powerful. I have met a number of people who actually use the Lord and ministry as an excuse to get out of work. Some see full-time ministry as a way to live a relaxing life. Others are waiting on their "call from the Lord." In the meantime they are just sitting around. I always tell them that they should not expect God to give them a call until they get their life in line with these very simple and direct commands from the

Lord. I travel quite often speaking and holding evangelistic services around the U.S. and in Canada. In that time I have opportunity to meet with many pastors and other Church leaders. Many people have heard the old saying that pastors only work three hours a week. I want to say that in my travels the vast majority of people in Church leadership have been those who work tirelessly for the Lord and the good of others. However, I have met a few of the three-hour-a-week pastors. This is sad both for the people and for the witness to the outside world. There is no question about the biblical command to be diligent in our work life. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 admonishes us to make our own way saying, "***And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; ¹² That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.***

This doesn't mean everyone leaves the home and goes to an office from nine to five, it means we live productive lives. For example, there are few people who work harder than a wife and mother. I am pretty confident in the diversity of my job skills and abilities but I could not do my wife's job. I would be a basket case by the end of one day. I have often worked many hours a week for little or no pay. That doesn't make it any less viable. I am still held accountable to the scripture that commands me to support my family, but I have sought the Lord's will in my decisions and He has always met our needs. If my family was going without food and clothing I would seriously question if I was being faithful to the Lord in my work life.

One of the easiest places to let your Christian integrity slide is in the work place. The Bible is clear on our responsibilities whether we are self-employed or an employee. We often see references to slaves in the Word. Many of these were, in fact, paid slaves. The parallels to employer-employee relationships are pretty clear. Col 3:23-24 says, "***And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; ²⁴ Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.*** It's easy for us to forget that we are working for the Lord. Some people even decide that because they don't like their employer they are not going to work as hard. That is not an attitude of integrity. Self-employed people actually work for their customers. If a mechanic is going to operate with integrity he will do the best job possible for the person he is working for, doing even more than is expected.

Ephesians 6:5-8 says...***“Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; ⁶ Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; ⁷ With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: ⁸ Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.*** (emphasis mine)

Session Three

Integrity In Your Marriage

I've already covered a few things regarding our example to our children and the roles of the husband and wife. I also made a few comments on the need for character and commitment in marriages today. Few would argue that many of our society's problems can be linked directly to the breakdown of the family unit. The answer lies in being husbands and wives of character and integrity. It breaks my heart to drive down the road and see signs that say, "divorce kits-\$50.00." There was a time when divorce was a very shameful thing, now we advertise it. I'm not saying there is never a reason for divorce, but anyone can see it has become far too easy. Divorce among Christians is an especially devastating thing because it involves people who have made solemn vows before their God, their friends, and the world.

This could easily become a study on marriage. For the purposes of this subject let me just say that integrity in marriage comes down once again to the principles of honesty, commitment, character, servanthood, consistency, and unswerving submission to God's Word. There are those who try to skirt the commands of scripture regarding roles and responsibilities within marriage and still others who see marriage as something less than an awesome commitment before God. Suffice it to say that this is not an example of integrity. I can think of no place where our integrity as a Christian is challenged more often than in the home, and I can think of no other place where it is more important.

Integrity In Your Relationships With Others

James 5:12 says...¹² *But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.* Of course Christ is our greatest example of integrity as Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 1:17-20, ¹⁷ *When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay?* ¹⁸ *But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay.* ¹⁹ *For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea.* ²⁰ *For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.*

This relates back to our speech life but it also speaks of simply being reliable. Why should you ever have to "promise" someone that you will do something? Does that mean that you can't be trusted to do it if you simply say "yes"? Many Christians take their commitment to others lightly. We should be a people who are more action than talk. As it is the Church is filled with people who are more talk than walk. This is a bad witness to the world as well as a bad example of Christian integrity. Of course, all of this applies to the command to tell the truth as well. Christians should not be people who bend the truth, stretch the truth, exaggerate the truth, or tell outright lies. We should say what we mean and mean what we say.

Integrity In Leadership

The Bible is clear on the requirements for leadership within the Body of Christ, and the responsibility these positions carry. James 3:1 says, *My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.* We also see many of the requirements for Elders and Deacons laid out in I Tim 3:1-13, ¹ *This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.* ² *A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;* ³ *Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;* ⁴ *One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;* ⁵ *(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)* ⁶ *Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.* ⁷ *Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.* ⁸ *Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;* ⁹ *Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.* ¹⁰ *And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.* ¹¹ *Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.* ¹² *Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.* ¹³ *For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

With such clear-cut guidelines right there in the Word it's hard to believe that so many Churches simply cast them aside and appoint Elders and Deacons based upon seniority or popularity! This practice is one of the primary reasons that Church leadership often lacks integrity. I am once again at risk of taking off on another study of Church leadership. If you are interested I want to encourage you to read the Lifeline study "True Leadership." This is one of the greatest failings of the modern Church. I will leave the rest of this to that study, but in reference to integrity let me say a ministry will only be as solid as it's leadership. As a leader myself I am constantly aware of my accountability to the above scripture. I have even stepped down from my position during times when I needed to get an area of my personal life on track.

Integrity In Everything

***“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”** (Colossians 3:17)*

Once again, integrity is being honest with yourself, God, and others; and being consistent in your walk with Him. I have often been told that I wear my heart a little too close to my sleeve. I try to be straight with everyone and say what I think. I want people to know where I’m really at. Sometimes I admit my weaknesses to a fault. I don't want to be putting up a false front in public. If I'm hurting I'll tell you, and if I'm on top of things you will know that too. What you are in public you should be in private. Your attitude and actions should not be determined by your surroundings or your circumstances but rather by your commitment to God and what you know to be right. Integrity is one of those biblical issues that may not be exciting to talk about, but it is integral to every area of the Christian life. Many Christians try to bypass these issues and seek gifts rather than character. Gifts without character are dangerous. I hope you will commit yourself to the building of Christian integrity in every area of your life.



Integrity

Session One Review

1. The study says “integrity is who you are when _____.” and “to have integrity is to be _____ in your Christian character.”

2. Why did God strike Ananias and Saphira dead?

3. What does it mean to say that “the tongue is a fire”?

4. What does the scripture mean when it says, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”? (Matthew 12:34-35)

5. What area of integrity do you feel you have the most trouble with?

Integrity

Session Two Review

1. What does the study say is the best indication of true integrity in the home?

2. What does the Bible teach about the roles of husbands, wives, and children within a family and a Christian home?

3. What is the first point of integrity in a Christians work life according to the study?

4. How should we view our job performance in light of the Bible's teaching?

Integrity

Session Three Review

1. What does it mean to have integrity in your marriage?

2. What does it mean to “let your yes be yes and your no be no” (James 5:12) and why does the Bible say we should not swear to things?

3. Is it a lie to exaggerate? _____

4. What does the Bible say about the integrity of Christian leadership?

5. Does the Bible have higher standards for teachers and leaders? (James 3:1)

6. Should the church hold to the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 when appointing leaders such as board and council members?

7. Why does the study say that “gifts without character are dangerous”?

Covenant Relationships

A look at....

*Relationships within
the Body of Christ*

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All Scriptures taken from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

Covenant Partnership

"I am not in the business of building ministries, but rather of building a Body" {Keith Intrater relating the Spirit's message to him}

6 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:16)

Certainly one of the greatest needs in the Body of Christ today is true covenant relationships. Partners in service to the Lord are generally so detached they can split up and forget about one another in a very short time. This is caused partly by the independent "look out for number one" attitude that is so prevalent in society {as well as the church} today. It's difficult to picture God bringing a powerful corporate anointing on a group of people with no real unity in the Spirit.

Love is the basis for covenant. Indeed, love should be the basis for everything we do in service to the Lord. 1 John 4:20 tells us, *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*

Four Elements of Interpersonal Covenant Relationships:

1. An attraction to God-centered direction.
2. The formulating of the covenant into words or a written commitment.
3. The commitment to deal upright and with integrity toward one another.
4. The continuance of the covenant to the partners family/descendants.

One of the great examples of covenant relationships in the Bible is the Profound friendship between David and Jonathan. Their covenant together had to stand against extreme adversity and proved to be even stronger than Jonathan's covenant with his own father through their blood relationship.

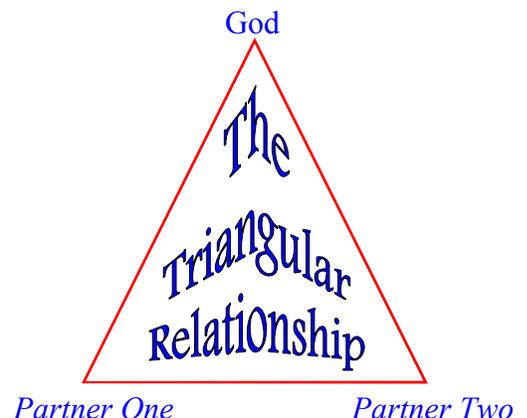
And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. (1 Samuel 18:1)

Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. (1 Samuel 18:3)

And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul. (1 Samuel 20:17)

And they two made a covenant before the LORD: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house. (1 Samuel 23:18)

It's interesting that even with the depth of their covenant it was not a problem to be physically separated. Their relationship was certainly a God-centered one. Both hearts were directed toward the Lord. If you picture a triangle with two partners at each point on the bottom and God at the peak, you will notice that as the two partners move closer to God they naturally move closer to one another. The Lord is the leader of the triangular relationship. He is the source of unity. It's important to realize that unity can not be achieved on the basis of total agreement on every issue. Unity can only be achieved by common commitment and direction.



Commitment Leads to Authority.

Jonathan makes a profound statement of humility and loyalty: *"And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth.* (1 Samuel 23:17)

"Even in the depth of their covenant and love for one another, and the equality of their commitment to God and each other, there was a greater authority granted to David in the flow of that relationship. The greater the level of intimacy, the clearer the dynamics of authority within the relationship will become. If a man and woman desired to have a light friendship there would be no need for them to come to an agreement about their specific roles and the chain of authority within their relationship. If however, they were to get married and agree to live in mutual covenant and cooperation with one another for life, it would become essential to be in mutual agreement about the level of order within their relationship." {Keith Intrater}

"If one does not allow for authority within covenant relationships, he keeps those relationships at a compromised, or more distant level. Often the attitude that, "we must all be equal" in our cooperative authority with one another is an excuse for avoiding the commitment that a deeper level of intimacy would bring." {Keith Intrater}

The analogy of marriage is a good one. The partners in a marriage are of equal value intrinsically and in God's sight, but God has ordained specific roles for those involved in the relationship. This could easily extend to the whole family. Husband, wife, and children of different ages each have their God ordained positions and responsibilities. It has nothing to do with value, and sometimes it doesn't even parallel specifically to abilities. Once again, *"it's not about ability, it's about anointing"*.

Jonathan had quite a dilemma. David represented the new move of God and his own father Saul represented the previous move of God that he had a deep commitment to as well. Not only was Saul his father, he was King! How difficult to be torn between friends and family. It's obvious from a glimpse at scripture however, that God had ordained the covenant relationship between Jonathan and David for the fulfillment of His will.

Love And Trust ~ Two Essential Elements of Covenant Relationships

It's not unusual for us to want a deep friendship like the one David and Jonathan knew. We should be careful, however, that the covenant relationships we enter into are God ordained. One must be careful not to pour out their trust and intimacy on those who wish only to trample it under foot. This could easily bring the Kingdom of God to disrepute. *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.* (Matthew 7:6)

We should be very certain of God's leading before entering into covenant relationships. Covenant is a very serious thing. When we do enter in it must be without reserve. We must not enter with a fear of being rejected, or with a lack of trust. There is great risk in covenant, but one must not guard their pride when entering into a covenant relationship. This would only damage the relationship at its very foundation.

The biblical definition of a friend: *¹³ Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.* (John 15:13-15)

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. (John 15:15)

Other Essentials of The Covenant Partnership:

Immense Grace:

The covenant partner views others in the relationship with tremendous grace. This does not mean that one should turn a blind eye to moral problems in other partners, it simply means that you always give them the benefit of the doubt. Always assume the best. Again the relationship is governed by love and trust. 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 shows us what our heart's attitude should be, *'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. 'And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. 'And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, 'Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; 'Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; 'Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. 'Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. 'For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. 'But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. 'When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. 'And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*

It's easy to look for fault in others. It takes more effort to concentrate on the good points and the personal growth in another's life. An understanding of God's grace will help us to be patient with others who don't see things exactly as we do.

Concern for the Public Opinion of the Partnership Team:

As sure as we guard the Name of our Lord because of our love and commitment for Him we should also guard the reputation of our covenant partners. Each partner should realize that they are representing the whole group, and ultimately the Body of Christ in general. By the same token, we should never criticize covenant partners around those who don't understand the relationship. Incredible misunderstandings can result. It is also a breach of trust in a relationship that cannot survive *without* trust.

The Ability to Receive Instruction:

A basic element of humility. We need to be teachable and learn to listen. *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: 'For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* (James 1:19-20)

Character is More Important Than Charisma:

Integrity and moral character are vital to any ministry and relationship. It's easy to be swayed by great talkers and men with tremendous gifts and abilities. It's easy to covet the "awesome" gifts. It's far more important to seek personal integrity and character. God is more concerned with what He's building in you than with what He's doing through you. He's more concerned with who you are than what you do.

Taming The Tongue:

What a concept! certainly the most challenging part of any relationship. Colossians 4:6 says, ***Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.***

There are many areas in the covenant partnership that the tongue can easily destroy. Probably the most dangerous is talking about one another behind each others back. (we'll get into that more in the "confrontation" section) Human beings by nature tend to speak first and think later.

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. (James 1:26)

Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! (James 3:5)

Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. (James 3:9)

The taming of the tongue requires constant effort. It's a great place to concentrate on in our personal growth. Few things can tear down a covenant trust as fast as loose speech.

Healthy and Scriptural Confrontation:

It would be easy for me to write an extensive study on this subject alone. I've seen more community style ministries destroyed by the wrong and immature use of scriptural discipline than anything else.

The scripture that applies to covenant confrontation is found in Matthew 18:15-17, ***Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.***

It's important to remember that confrontation is only necessary in situations involving one's heart, spiritual integrity, and/or moral condition. It doesn't have anything to do with the fact that I don't like the way someone else puts their socks on in the morning. That is, of course, a ridiculous oversimplification, but the point is important. There are many things in the lives of those around you that are God's problem, not ours. Many people appoint themselves to be "spiritual watchdogs". They find themselves confronting everything they even perceive as imperfect. Another scripture that must be considered in light of the subject at hand is found in Matthew 7:1-5, ***1 Judge not, that ye be not judged. 2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. 3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? 4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? 5 Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. And Matthew 18:21-22 21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? 22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.***

It's important to remember that God is smarter than we are. He has things in control. There is a time to confront, but it comes in extreme cases and after much prayer and self examination. The main thing to consider is: Does the person in question truly desire to follow the Lord? Is their heart open to the Lord? If these two questions can be answered "yes" then our first response should be to pray that the Lord will reveal any wrong in their lives to them without our even sticking our nose in it. Confrontation in the Matthew 18 sense should only happen in cases where an individual is in open rebellion to the Lord and His word.

There is a type of confrontation that is much less intense and occurs in general conversation on an interpersonal level. Personality traits can irritate us. There are things that really irritate us that mean absolutely nothing to someone else. It's important above all else to simply let our statements be immersed in humility and love. Again, we should never do anything to "prove a point". Also, if we do not have solid scriptural basis for criticism, we should give God room to work.

Here's a very important point. If the situation in question causes bitterness in our hearts toward the other partner we have entered into sin ourselves and are no longer regarding the other individual with love and concern. Bitterness always has its foundation in unforgiveness and selfishness. At this point our first concern should be to get our hearts right with God and to seek the forgiveness of the other party.

I want to pull a few more things from Keith Intrater's book, "covenant relationships", as I feel it shows solid wisdom.

"Before a person can enter into covenantal dialogue, a spiritual wrestling match must take place on the inside. When the selfish mind thinks of a dialogue of confrontation, it is primarily concerned with protecting it's own rights. A person who sees covenantal dialogue as protecting what belongs to Him misses the purpose of being reconciled to the other person. Covenantal dialogue has nothing to do with getting something for yourself. It's motivation is to restore a relationship and seek the others good." {Keith Intrater}

Paul showed that many times the healing of the division is far more important than who is right and who is wrong. 1 Corinthians 6:7 says, *Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?* and Ephesians 4:3 tells us that we should be *Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Paul is talking about attitude and motivation. We should never confront in order to prove our point. We should only be seeking the good of the other party and guarding the corporate anointing of the group.

"A useful measure is for each person to take 100% responsibility for all of the problem that they can effect. Even if the other person is 99% wrong and I am only 1% wrong, my 1% is 100% of my area of responsibility. My attitude should be that my part of the fault is 100% my responsibility. What is another person's fault and another persons responsibility is up to him." {Keith Intrater}

This quote goes along with the *"log in the eye"* scripture. There are usually plenty of things in our own lives to work on, without "righting all of the wrongs" in others as well.

When confrontation has to happen, our attitude and goal should be one of pure desire for redemption and reconciliation. However, when an individual continues in willful rebellion and/or moral depravity then the fellowship of partners must take the actions dictated in scripture. A constant covenant-breaking attitude will eventually erode the fabric of the covenant partnership. Disfellowshipping comes as the last resort in a series of attempts toward redemption and reconciliation. This is, in effect, the cancellation of the covenant partnership. It is the only thing besides physical death that can break a true covenant partnership. It should also be kept in mind that even the disfellowshipping is an attempt toward reconciliation. We see this principle in 1 Corinthians 5:5, *To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

Covenant Partners Should Be Team Players:

You should think not only of yourself, but of your brothers and sisters as well. However, one should also be responsible for their own commitment. You should be willing to step out and preach the gospel to the entire world even if all of your covenant partners desert you tomorrow.

Teamwork consists of the recognition of various ministries as found in Ephesians 4:11, ***“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; and also of various gifts as found in Romans 12:6-8, ‘Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; ‘Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; ‘Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.***

These gifts should work together in harmony to produce the covenant partners' corporate ministry as we see in Romans 12:4-5, ***‘For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: ‘So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.***

Covenant partners should be able to "cover each others backs" this cooperation is laid out in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, ***‘Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. “For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. “Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? “And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.***

"Sometimes people have doubts and misgivings about being committed to one another. We must first know who we are ourselves and what it is God has called us to do. Then we can deal straightforwardly with someone else. Too many people do not really intend to fulfill what they say they are going to do. The issue of making covenant is to bring our hearts to the place where we can be firm in the commitments we make. It takes courage to make covenant. It takes courage to be determined not to be unfaithful. Too many people's hearts are wavering so that they could never bring themselves to make a firm commitment. It takes courage to forge your heart to be perfect toward another person. Perfect does not mean flawless in performance. Perfect means being faithful to a covenant" {Keith Intrater}

.....

This study was written to get you thinking about your need for close covenant relationships with others in the Body of Christ. There can be many different levels of covenant just as there are many different forms of service to our Lord, But a group of people will never know the depth of interpersonal service that could be theirs without true covenant partnerships. Too many leaders and staff in churches never make the commitment to one another that could bring greater effectiveness to their ministries and to the Kingdom of God as a whole. The Church of the living God is a *community* of believers, not a group of independent parts. We must strive to be the Body that God would have us to be.

Covenant Partnership

Session One Review

1. Kieth Intrater said, “ I am not in the business of building ministries, I am in the business of building a _____”. What do you suppose he meant? _____

2. What are the four elements of interpersonal covenant relationships?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

3. Explain the principle of the triangular relationship. _____

4. What are the two essential elements of covenant partnerships? _____

5. Name other essentials of covenant partnerships and Kingdom relationships?

Covenant Partnership

Session Two Review

1. What does it mean to say “character is more important than charisma”? _____

2. What does it mean to tame the tongue? _____

3. What are some of the important things to remember about healthy and scriptural confrontation?

4. What is our responsibility in a situation where we are in conflict with another person?

5. In conflict with another person, if I am 1% wrong and the other person is 99% wrong, what is my responsibility?

Covenant Partnership

Session Three Review

1. When is it right to confront another individual with their sin? _____

2. How can we as a church make deeper commitments to one another? _____

Notes and comments on this study.....

The "God's Specific Will" Dilemma



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The “God’s Specific Will” Dilemma

The following is an excerpt from the original Discipleship Center Information Booklet. It was written before the Lifeline Discipleship Center had even begun and was based around a more structured program than what the Lord actually led us to. The program was formed around four "phases" of discipleship. This was to be one of them.....

Phase two: Discovering the Lord's will for your life. Romans 12:1-2 tells us that we cannot know God's will without first knowing God. That is why phase one comes before phase two. *1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, will of God.* This is another place where individual discipleship really shines. Your discipler will be praying and working with you to discover the gifts that God has given you and to discern the Lord's will for your life. Understanding that God has a general calling for all of us to follow Him and serve others, and that He has a specific purpose for your life. *Ephesians 2:10 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.* Phase two is dedicated to finding His purpose for your life.

What is wrong with this picture? It was born out of the reality that many of the Christians I counsel say that this is their biggest struggle. They just don't know what God's specific will for their life is. They are deeply troubled because they really want to please God but they "just can't figure out what He wants them to do."

My question, and what God has been impressing upon me is, where is this specific will stuff in the Bible? Sure we have Ephesians 2:10, but where does it say that we should be looking ahead to find where God is taking us? Where does it say that we should be running frantically worrying about where God is eventually taking us and missing what He has for us today? I therefore stand corrected concerning the above paragraph from our old Discipleship Center booklet.

Romans 12:1-2, which we just mentioned earlier in this study, says *present your life, be transformed, be not conformed to this world*, and you will know God's will. It's automatic.

I am always concerned about things that steal our joy and peace as Christians. I want to see myself and others experience the life of Christ and rightly exemplify that life to others. My eyes are always open for things that have crept into the Body to steal that for which Christ died to give us. I feel that this “find His specific will” issue is, at the very least, a diversion from what He actually called us to be.

Let's take a look at a few people in the Word.....

Hebrews 11:8-16 tells us, *By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. 13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. 15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. 16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*

Abraham left everything he had and took off in a direction that God had showed Him. That direction later proved out to be the way to the promised land and the fulfillment of many prophecies. He didn't even know for sure why he was going there and *he never saw the fulfillment of God's promise in his lifetime*. What do you suppose would have happened if he had waited in his homeland for God to give him the big picture?

What about the Apostle Paul? Or *any* of the early Christians. They didn't even know if they would be *alive* the next day. I don't think they were worrying too much about God's specific will for their lives. They were just walking in faith, living by God's Word, and trusting God day by day.

Lifeline Ministries has Churches in Nigeria. They are confronted every day with the need for food and clothing and supplies just to keep their people alive. They live with the reality of political oppression and muslim persecution. They would like to simply have a Bible for everyone in the congregation. Do you think they wander around wondering what God's specific will for their life is? They're just meeting the needs that are before them.

We are actually talking about living on faith. Can we walk with Him today when we don't know about tomorrow? We always want to see the big picture. We always want to second guess God.

Scriptures to consider.....

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: 29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? 31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? 32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. 33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. 34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. (Matthew 6:28-34)

13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: 14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. 15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. (James 4:13-15)

The problem is that our concern over the future often cripples our ability to walk in God's grace in the present. Our desire for dynamic ministry somewhere down the road can cause us to miss the immediate opportunities God is placing before us. It's easy to miss the opportunities for personal growth that God places before us each day, and it's easy to become overly concerned with what we are doing for God at the expense of allowing Him to mold and change our lives. God has a will for our lives, but He will show it to us in His time, and it *will* be clear.

Every generation has it's own form of legalism. The Jews were wrapped up in the law, The church in the middle ages was wrapped up in hierarchy, the church of our early century was wrapped up in outward things {and in some ways still is} They were more concerned with the way a woman wore her hair than where her heart was at with God.

In every age grace is strapped with some kind of bondage from human philosophies. It's possible that we are wrapped up in the bondage of "service over relationship". Just what the Kingdom needs, a bunch of wild-eyed, stressed-out Christians running around asking, "*what does God want from me anyway?*"

Some of you may think it's no big deal. Others won't be affected because they are not that concerned with serving God in the first place. That's sad but I'm writing this for those people who really do want to serve God and they are frustrated by a lie in modern teaching, the "carrot" that is held in front of our noses by well meaning preachers and teachers that keeps us from being content in our daily Christian walk. Discipleship training schools are often fueled by this concept. People go to these schools feeling that if they could just find the center of God's will it would bring happiness and contentment in their walk with Christ. Look at our own statement at the beginning of this writing. I realize that if I sent out a newsletter that promised we could show everyone what God's specific will for their life is we would need many more buildings to house those who came. Go to a Bible college and ask around. You will find scores of people who are frustrated because they can't see a month or a year into "God's specific will for their lives". It becomes so frustrating that they can't rest in God's grace and see what He has for them today. Again, where does it say in the Bible that we should be concerning ourselves with where God will have us in the overall picture? He just calls us to walk in today. "Each day has enough trouble of it's own".

Now I am not saying that we shouldn't desire to know God's will. We are shown that we can and should know God's will in Romans 12:1-2 and elsewhere. **The point is that 99.9% of God's will for your life can be found right in God's Word. Then as you live for Him each day by His Word, you find that you are coming into God's will for your life.**

We need to trust in His power and grace. God is never vague! This is a really important point. Many people act as if God wants to tease them. My friends, the Lord wants you to know His will. He is not sneaking up on you. If you dwell in Him He will reveal things to you when He wants to. When He is not revealing anything specific it means that you can be content just living by His Word in your daily life. We're so afraid we will miss it. Once again, God is not vague. If you follow after God in your daily life He will reveal His will to you, just like Romans 12:1-2 says. It's not as if He will try to keep it a secret from you just to drive you crazy.

Another reason people get frustrated seeking God's "specific will" is because they lack a very important fruit of the Spirit.....Patience! Oh how often Christians miss the beauty of the daily walk with God because they are always looking for something a little more "spectacular" or exciting. It could be that God is trying to tell us to work on our attitude or to humble ourselves before our brothers and sisters, but we can't hear Him because we are trying to figure out if He wants us to go to Africa or not! Let me tell you folks, if God wants you to go to Africa you will know it. You might run from it once you find out but you will *know*. God is never vague!

Now it's true that we often face day to day decisions and are seeking God's will for the situation. That's normal and James Chapter one says we should seek His wisdom, but the only way to consistently understand God's will for our lives is to grow in Him to the point where so much of us is gone that we begin to think like Him. His Word and His Spirit rule our lives. We must be sure, however, that we are not allowing the devil to make too big a deal about our decisions. I don't believe that most of the moves I make are that significant in the greater scope of things. I want to be obedient but if I make a few wrong turns God's grace is great enough to put things back together. I refuse to be crippled by indecision. The only decision that you can usually be sure is wrong is ongoing stress with no decision.

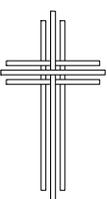
The Lord has done a lot in my life but I just happened to trip over most of it while I was serving Him day to day. Many of you know about Lifeline Ministries and the Vision Bible College ministries. These are really only a few of the outreaches and ministries that we are involved in. I really never saw all of this coming until it was time to get started. Every time God has brought us a new vision we have just started moving in that direction. When the Lifeline Evangelistic Ministry was really moving along we were just doing our thing preaching the Gospel. Then God told us to start a Discipleship Center in Idaho. This eventually became Vision Bible College. I had no plan of doing this, and at that time I would not have picked Idaho {I really like Idaho now}, but He was clear. Now we are moving forward at warp speed in every area that He has led us to. If this is what He has me doing the rest of my life I'm happy. If He leads us into something else or shuts down something we are doing now that's fine. He will make it clear to me when

that time comes. I have never been able to figure out all that He is doing as a whole. I just do my best to serve Him today. There's great peace in that. The Body could use Christians with true peace in their lives. You should also realize that God may never call you into one of the "up front" ministries {preaching, teaching, missionary work, etc.}. That does not make your walk with Him any less valid. Once again {I always repeat important points more than once}, 99.9% of God's will for your life can be found in His Word. If we are not willing to live by His written will we should not expect Him to show us anything else!

Some people think that ministry always has to evolve to the limelight. They reason that as you grow in Christ you should naturally become a Sunday School teacher or something. God will always be more concerned about who you are than what you do. He will always be more interested in what He is building in you than what He is doing through you. The greatest achievement in Christian growth is to simply be an example of God's grace and life-changing power in whatever place God has you, be it preacher, contractor, housewife, or anything else God has for you to do.

I call it "the specific will for your life dilemma" because many people are in a spiritual crisis trying to figure it all out. They are crippled by a lie. It's not that God doesn't have a plan for your life, He does. It's just not the thing that we should be concerned about. We need to also realize that what He leads us into may never carry with it a title. He may simply want you to raise your family in a godly way.

We never know what God is doing in His fullness. We simply cannot see the big picture the way He does. I once heard a story of a small church that planned for quite some time to have a series of revival meetings in their town. It was quite an undertaking and it demanded a large financial commitment for such a small body of believers. They planned and promoted and brought in a famous speaker from out of town. Naturally they were praying for a great revival in their area that would save their town and build the Lord's work there. At the end of the week there had "only" been two people saved. The Pastor of this church is the one who was telling the story and he admitted that he had regarded the event as a failure. All that work and only two souls. All the time planning and praying and no real revival in the town. It was many years later when he found out that one of the two people saved was Billy Graham. A failure? I think not. God knows what He's doing. Faith is trusting in that fact.



And So...

Don't let a deception steal your joy. God's guidance is right there in His Word, the Bible. He wants you to raise your family right.....He wants you to treat your brother right.....He wants to have a relationship with you....He wants you to have joy.... He wants you to place others needs above your own....He wants you to show the joy of the Lord to the world in your daily life....He wants to purify your life daily so you will be more like Him....on and on, the truth is in His Word.

Do you really want peace? Let me tell you a secret...If you can't be content with where you are today you will never be content with where you are tomorrow. If you will walk in His will today and just put one foot in front of the other in your walk with God, you will find that tomorrow you are where He wants you to be. If you will continue to walk with Him one step at a time you will look around in a year and find that you are where you are supposed to be. There is no need to sweat over what His specific will for your entire time on earth is. Scripture says, ***But godliness with contentment is great gain.*** (1 Timothy 6:6)

We should be content with the moment but still desire to grow in Christ. May God grant you peace and contentment as you follow Him.

The “God’s Specific Will” Dilemma

Session One Review

1. Read Romans 12:1-2. What is the order in which things must happen in order to discern God’s will? _____

2. What can we learn from Abraham’s example as far as knowing God’s will? _____

3. Why doesn’t God simply reveal the entire picture of His will for our lives to us ahead of time? _____

4. Read James 4:13-15 & Matthew 6:28-34. What do these scriptures teach on day to day living for Jesus?

5. What are some of the dangers in becoming too concerned with God’s specific will for our lives? _____

The “God’s Specific Will” Dilemma

Session Two Review

1. The study says that 99.9% of God’s will for our lives can be found in His Word. Why do many people overlook this? _____

2. “God is not vague”. what should we do if God is not revealing anything specific to us?

3. Does God call everyone into “formal” ministry? (preaching, teaching, etc.)

4. What effect does our being faithful day to day have on God’s overall work in and through our lives?

5. What callings and commands has God given to all of us? _____

6. What does the study mean when it says “if you cannot be content with where you are today you will never be content with where you are tomorrow”? _____

Contentment



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Godliness with contentment is great gain

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; 'He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, 'Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. 'For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 'And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. 'But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. (1 Timothy 6:3-9 Emphasis mine)

Some years ago a group did a survey on various college campuses asking a simple question. They asked individuals what their greatest goal in life was. The question was most often answered, "to get rich". That probably doesn't come as a surprise to you. For many years money was the most desired commodity among people, especially here in the United States. In more recent years however, money has been replaced by another resource that we always seem to have too little of.....time! Most people, when asked, desire to have more time. Of course there are still many who would prefer more money.

The problem is that money doesn't bring contentment. Neither does time. I am convinced that half the people on Earth are complaining because they don't have enough time and the other half (mostly teenagers) complain that there is nothing to do. I have to be honest with myself and admit that even though I often wish I could live in the mountains with my family by a stream with nobody calling on the phone and nobody else's crisis' to solve, the reality is that I wouldn't last two weeks in that lifestyle. I would be going crazy from boredom.

The point is we can have perfect health, lots of money, and plenty of time and still lack contentment in our lives. Contentment is not a by-product of good circumstances and a lack of contentment is not a by-product of lousy circumstances. Let's look at the account of Peter and some of the other Apostles in Acts...

And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 'And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. 'And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. (Acts 5:40-42 Emphasis mine)

Now being flogged is never a pleasant experience, but in their day it was beyond terrible. It seems amazing then that they would be "rejoicing" because they were counted worthy to suffer disgrace for Jesus' Name. Many of us have trouble relating to that. Why? because our priorities are out of order and our attitudes are not in line with God's Word. So how do we find true contentment in our lives?

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. 'Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. 'I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (Philippians 4:10-13)

The scripture "*I can do all things through Christ which stengtheneth me*" is used in many different circumstances and often it does apply to other areas of our lives, but it's important to note that Paul is talking specifically about being able to be content whether things are good or bad. *The verse is directly relating to the God-given ability to view our circumstances as relatively unimportant in light of God's will and way.* We often use the words, "I can do all things through Him who gives me strength" to justify our attempts to leap large buildings in a single bound, make more money, or start big ministries, but how often do we pray that God will make us content with what we have?

This leads me to ask you the question, "what is the most important thing in your life?"

Hebrews 13:5-6 says, *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

The most important thing in life is having God. Most of you will agree this is true but what does your life say? If God is not your primary desire then you will never be content, nor will you ever be truly pleasing to God and you should not ask anything of Him. This scripture shows us that it is not simply our privilege or choice to be content, but a command from God. It follows that to be discontent with what we have is to be disobedient to God. It also stands to reason that until we can learn to be content with what we have we should not ask God to give us anything more.

He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? (Luke 16:10-11)

Many of the things we face in life are actually a test. We often fail the contentment test so it's no wonder we seldom receive the things we are begging for. God says that He desires to give good gifts to His children but because of our disobedient discontentment we seldom receive the things we ask for. As it says in James, when we ask we do not receive because we ask with wrong motives. Remember, we are commanded to be content right where we are. It's not a request. Discontentment is disobedience, disobedience is sin.

Now the most important step to gaining a right attitude about all this is to take a look at the way we define needs. First of all, many of the things we call "needs" would be ridiculous luxuries to people in many parts of the world. I like the T-shirt that reads, "He who dies with the most toys, still dies". I am often amused at the way many people will sit and try to talk themselves and everyone else into thinking they "need" something. My response is, "can you live without it?" If the answer is yes, it's not a need, it's a "want".

I came across an interesting question in an advertisement one day. It simply asked, "if you lost everything you have right now, how happy would you be to get it back?"

This "needs" thing is incredibly relative. The fact that someone else has a better house or car than you doesn't mean you need one. The fact that most people in America own a home with a room for each of their children doesn't mean you need to. I always love my guitar until I play a better one. At that point my mind starts saying that my guitar is not as good as I thought it was. It's not that my guitar got any worse, it's still a great instrument. I just played a better one. At that point it's easy to say, "I use my guitar for ministry, thousands of souls are in the balance, I need that other guitar". The problem is that it's not my place to tell God what I need, He already knows. It's important that I properly define that guitar as a "want". Again the criteria for "need" must be the question, "can you possibly survive without it? God *does* bless us with many wants as well, but that is not an excuse for being discontent.

The next important principle to remember is that we don't deserve anything from God. When you start with that viewpoint it's a lot easier to be content with what you have. There are two ways to look at life. You can look at what you have or you can look at what you don't have. God's command is that we be grateful for what we have and to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness. Then we are to trust Him to give us what we really need and if He throws in a few wants along the way then all praise to Him for His love and generosity! The minute we start trying to convince God that we deserve something, or that a want is a need, we're already out of line. If it's a want, then ask for it as a child asks a father, not as if you can't survive and will not be content without it.

I believe God knows me a lot better than I do. He knows what I should and shouldn't have. I also realize I cannot judge my life or needs by what God allows others to have. If you resent others for what they have you are not trusting God in your own life or obeying His command to be content. We can moan, groan, and grumble about it but God has a command for that too. It's called "repent". There are many people on Earth who have more "things" than I do. If I won a sweepstakes there would still be many people who have more than me. There are also a lot of people who have less than I do. Instead of asking, "Lord, why do these people have more than me?" we might ask, "Lord, why have you allowed me to have so much more than so many people?"

"But godliness with contentment is great gain." The problem is that as long as we think we need "something else" in order to be content we will never be content. If you cannot be content with what you have today you will not be content with what you have tomorrow. Christians in this country are desperately in need of "an attitude of gratitude!"

Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain. (Proverbs 30:7-9)

Another good test is to look at your prayer life. Do you spend more time praying for your own desires or for the needs of others? If you find you are guilty of the former then you will know that your life is out of balance. This is a good test of our selfishness. If we are obeying the biblical command to regard others needs above our own then it will show up in our attitude and our prayer life.

The Lord has given us so much. Oh how we must look like spoiled children who constantly demand too much of their parents and still complain that they don't have enough. I know God longs to give good gifts to His children, but we must learn to be content with what He has already given us. Praise Him for His love and faithfulness!

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. (1 Timothy 6:6-8)

Contentment

Session One Review

1. How could the early disciples be content in the midst of beatings and persecution?

2. How do we find true contentment? _____

3. What is the definition of a “need”? _____

4. What is the definition of a “want”? _____

5. Why don't we deserve anything from God? _____

Contentment

Session Two Review

1. The study says, “as long as we think we need something else to be content we will never be content”. What do you think of this statement? _____

2. Read Proverbs 30:7-9. What do you think this scripture is saying and how does it relate to your goals and dreams?

3. The study says that our prayer life is a good test of our contentment. Why is this?

4. **Excercise:** Below you will find two boxes with the number 1-5 in them. In the first box write down in order the things that you feel are most important in life. In the second box write down in order the things that your life shows are actually your priorities. Then see how well they line up. What do you spend the most time and energy on. (note....some will say they spend the most time and energy on their secular occupation because they have to. Your occupation can still be focused on God and ministry if your heart is right so that would, in fact, be prioritizing God. The question to ask is: “do I work for my own personal advancement or for the advancement of God’s will in my life?”)

The most important things in life

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Things you focus on the most

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Spiritual Surfers

Discerning Truth
When The Winds
Of Doctrine Blow

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Spiritual Surfers

We should all desire that the Lord will pour His Spirit out on the Church. Yet as much as an outpouring of God leads many into a deeper walk with Him, it can also lead others to be wrapped up in the experience itself. Those who seek a shallow relationship with God find it easy to run from “new thing” to “new thing” without ever growing deeper in their walk with Jesus. My friends...there is no shortcut to spiritual growth.

Everyone wants to hear sermons on power, healing, victory, miracles, etc. How many people thirst for gentleness, patience and self control? How many sermons do we hear on these things? The problem is that our flesh doesn't want things like patience, gentleness, and self-control. We want our own way, we want power, and we want it *now*. It's this lack of patience that produces *spiritual surfers* in the church. I call them spiritual surfers because they are always on the beach of Christianity waiting for the next wave to ride. They live from experience to experience. When the waves are up they are up, and when the waves are down they are down.

· I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; · Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. · For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; · And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. · But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

It's easy to lose balance when you are not grounded in the Word of God. Too many people run after every wind of doctrine that blows through the Church. They want to get pumped up by the “new thing” that God is doing. These are the spiritual surfers waiting to ride the next wave that hits the beach of their spiritual lives. We should all desire what God has for us and remain open for God to reveal things we don't currently understand. The problem comes when we begin looking for shortcuts to spiritual growth.

I have seen a lot of waves come in to the beach. In my time in ministry I have seen the positive confession wave, the prosperity wave, the wellness wave, the tongues wave, the prophecy wave, the apostolic wave, the deliverance wave, the shepherding wave, the five-fold ministry wave, the slain in the spirit wave, the “name it claim it” wave, the “new thing” wave, etc. People have built entire movements and ministries on each of these. God moves in an unusual way and we institutionalize it. Some of these were true moves of God. Many of them have *elements* of truth contained in a cloud of religious humanism. however, none of them were meant to be exalted or institutionalized, and God does not want to build His Church on any of them. He wants to build His Church on the fullness of His Word. Some of these teachings are outright lies taught by wolves in sheep's clothing. These people try to shed criticism by inferring that others are not as "spiritual" or “enlightened” as they are. Many are truly anointed but my friends, there are two sources of anointing! Many are truly in love with God but they have lost balance because their roots are not deeply planted in the Word, but rather in experience. Others are men and women of God who have forsaken the fullness of God's truth for small pieces of it. We must be careful that we do not lose balance by exaggerating one truth at the expense of others. Error is often truth taken to an extreme.

An important principle is that experience should never be the primary basis for discerning truth. There are several reasons for this. One is that God may do something in a situation and then never do it again. Another reason is that the devil can do false miracles. Matthew 24:24 tells us, ***For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*** Most importantly, any experience or doctrine that does not line up with God's Word is not of God! I've read numerous books by people who were trying to justify their new wave of doctrine by citing experience after experience at their services. All the experience in the world cannot stand against one line of scripture. Why? Because Satan can give experiences and he would love to get your eyes on experience instead of truth. Many Christians make the mistake of assuming that God has to work in

other's lives the same way He has worked in their own. Entire movements have been built on this. They say "you don't really have the fullness of God unless you have this experience or that experience". It may have been a great life-changing event for them and yet be non-essential in someone else's spiritual life. This kind of emphasis on extra-biblical experience has led many to frustration. They feel they just can't "receive from God" due to false teaching.

Many times a respected leader will say that God revealed something to them. It's good to respect leadership and anointed people of God, and we should listen seriously to what is shared. However, we must still test everything against scripture. I am close friends with many great men and women of God and I'm yet to meet one with perfect discernment, myself included. This is why the Bible refers to the need for prophets to test prophets in 1 Corinthians 14:32-33, ***And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. (NKJ)*** Most of all, if it doesn't absolutely line up with the Word of God it is not of God. This is an important principle. The written Word of God is first and foremost, that is why a Christian will never have balance in their lives without a firm grasp on the Word. The Word is the rule of faith by which all else is judged.

I love experiences with God. Often in our services the Lord meets with people in great power. These are wonderful and exciting times with the Lord. The problem begins when people place their faith in the experience itself instead of the God who brings it. I find myself regularly correcting those who want me to lay my hands on them so that they can feel the power of God. I have no power in my hands. All godly spiritual power, regardless of what is going on, is from God. I don't want people to come to Lifeline services simply for a great experience. I want them to come to be changed by the Lord. It's too easy for it to become a "fad" thing. At that point a person who is not grounded is ripe to be deceived by false signs and miracles.

I've watched new Christians go to two day deliverance seminars and come out feeling like starting their own demonbusters ministry. They hardly need the Bible, just various formulas that border on a mix of seance and psychotherapy. Many feel no need to be accountable to the greater Body because God has "given them the power". God does not call lone rangers. He has called us to be His Body. Once again folks, there is no shortcut to spiritual growth, and there is never an excuse for a lack of submission to God-ordained leadership. Every minister of God should seek to be accountable to the greater Body. This vigilante mentality is often born of spiritual arrogance and the feeling that God has revealed some "new truth" to an individual. Any person who feels they do not need accountability to the greater body and who refuses to submit to a proper Biblical order of leadership is out of balance.

Often these winds of doctrine blow because people either want to have something to wave in front of other Christians so that they can feel more spiritual than they are, or because they are impatient and bored. They won't put up with simple truth. They want to skip over the Word and the obedience God has called us to walk in and look for the "show". They want to see the red sea part every week. God has to keep proving Himself. They talk about power all the time and miss the fact that the majority of the references to the Spirit's empowering in the New Testament refer to the power He gives us to witness for Him and overcome the sin and garbage in our own lives! It has nothing to do with making a show of how "powerful" we are. This does not discount the awesome and miraculous power of God, or the supernatural power that He releases in the lives of His people. The problem comes when people want to bypass His Word and simply live for the party. It is inevitable that every believer will face trials in their walk with God. At this point the foundation of truth becomes essential.

Spiritual surfers want to skip over basic growth in the Lord and "get a word" instead. The Lord can and many times does give us a word through His Spirit, but many people neglect the Word He has already given us in favor of the movie screen vision in their brain. God has given us a Word for every day of our lives, The *Bible*. A Christian life led apart from biblical grounding leads to error and imbalance. The sooner we realize and accept that there are no shortcuts to spiritual growth and maturity the sooner we can settle into true discipleship and really grow in the Lord. Not just bounce up and down in the Lord.

Many preachers and movements produce spiritual surfers by their doctrine and practices. They hold “spiritual carrots” in front of people to get them to come to their church. Why? Because as the scriptures say, there are many people who simply will not put up with sound doctrine. It’s too challenging on a personal level. They don’t want to have to face the daily battles with the flesh and defeat the flesh through prayer and growth in the Lord. They want to be delivered now and be the next famous preacher. Another reason people run after these things is because they appeal to our basic nature; experience, entertainment, no need for patience, or the “I’m more spiritual than you are” syndrome.

Balance is the most difficult thing to achieve in life. This holds true for spiritual things as well. Balance comes only with maturity and with time spent in God's Word and presence. It comes only through a hunger to know and live by God’s truth no matter what the cost. It comes by daily seeking to be filled by the Spirit of God and empowered to live a holy life. This is the only way to have a consistent walk with Jesus. Christians who ride a sea of emotions will eventually sink. Sooner or later the waves just won’t be enough to keep you going. God’s truth is unchanging and His Word is a solid foundation. That is the foundation that our entire lives should be built upon. Don’t get me wrong...I love experiences with the Lord and I want every experience with Him that I can possibly have. I simply must caution those who would leave their Bible on the shelf and just catch the next wave, as well as those who would base their entire walk with God on one point of truth. Sooner or later the sea will calm and they won’t know where to go. Even worse, there may be a storm so violent they will not be able to weather it. This is also a caution for those who will not submit to authority and those who must be in leadership no matter what. They skip from church to church until they can get a position or title. It’s amazing how self is always attempting to be resurrected while Christ is rising in us. Self must die. We must surrender all.....all of our hopes, plans, and dreams. All of our goals, pride, and ideas about how God ought to run His Kingdom. His truth is simple and life-changing. May we build our lives upon the truth of His Word. The Christian life, all by itself, is the greatest experience of all.



Spiritual Surfers

Session One Review

1. What is a “spiritual surfer”? _____

2. How do we keep from losing balance? _____

3. What does it mean to say “Error is often truth taken to an extreme”?

4. Why isn’t experience a reliable basis for discerning truth?

Spiritual Surfers

Session Two Review

1. What does it mean to say that there are no shortcuts to spiritual growth?

2. Why is it dangerous to desperately seek those shortcuts? _____

3. Why do many people want to skip over the truth of God's Word and find another way to spiritual Growth? _____

4. How can we remain open to the Spirit and maintain balance in our spiritual lives?

Faith and Prayer in the Life of the Believer

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Faith

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

Being sure of what you hope for, not just wishing it would happen. Too many people think faith is just believing God can do something but then they come up with ten reasons why He might not. Many live outside of radical faith because they are afraid of failing. It's safer to stay on the sidelines, but the people on the sidelines never know what it's like to experience true victory.

What about walking in faith? There have been many teachings on faith down through history. For some faith is merely a doctrine of personal gain. For others it is an aspect of the Christian life that just never quite seems attainable. Neither of these are correct or biblical. A few things are certain; faith deals with the spiritual realm and greatly affects the physical. Faith is the foundation of Christian life, and faith empowers the believer to experience the miraculous power of God. Hebrews 11:6 says, ***But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.***

When we say we believe in God we are not simply saying we believe He exists. We are saying we *believe* in God. We believe His Word is true and that He can do what He says He can do. This brings up the question of why we are not seeing the miraculous power of God as much as we should in the church and in our daily lives. While there are a number of potential reasons why people often miss the fullness of God, there is no question that faith is a primary element in the walk of true victory.

Too often the church exists in supernatural vacuum. Few people expect anything great to happen and all decisions are made in light of the physical circumstances and logic. Above all else we need to return to the belief that God can miraculously touch, heal, empower, and save people completely without our physical intervention. Far too many believers lack victory in their lives because they lean on their own ability and intellect instead of the miraculous power of God and the anointing He wants to release in their lives. One of the most crucial elements in our walk with God is the realization that what is unseen has more effect on our lives and our world than what is seen. We walk in the physical, but we are of a supernatural Kingdom.

Far too often we attempt to shrink God down to the level where we can define Him within our intellect. That leaves us with no choice but to replace Him with a lesser God, for he is high above our ability to fully comprehend. In our goal to define God we come up with big words like omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, etc. and yet none come close to His glory and greatness. Many times our definitions and logic amount to the intellectual crucifixion of Jesus; showing Him to be without power and of little effect in our daily lives. Then there are those that believe the age of miracles and spiritual gifts ended with the original twelve apostles. For these people the Lord must have written much of the New Testament for nothing, since He spends much time talking about these miracles and how to operate in the gifts of the Spirit. This view also assumes that God cares less about His people now than He did in New Testament times. Does God no longer want to heal His people? Does He no longer want to speak to them? Does He no longer want them delivered from demons? Does He no longer desire to work through His people? These people cite the apparent lack of miracles in the typical North American church as evidence of God not doing miracles anymore, but that is simply the evidence of a church needing revival! I believe much of the spiritual renewal that is going on in the world today and the manifestations that are being seen are designed by God to call us back to supernatural faith. We have become such a physical church. May God renew our faith!

We need to return to really believing God. Too many people have “sorta-faith”. They sorta believe God heals people today, they sorta believe God speaks to us today, and they sorta believe that God wants to do great things in and through their lives. God is calling His people to move beyond “sorta-faith” to the

kind of faith that glorifies Him and transforms lives. I do not believe in the worldly new-age “power of positive thinking” that so shook the church some years back, but rather the power of a positive faith in the power of almighty God. The Lord is calling us to do what is impossible by human standards so He may be glorified. Unfortunately, there are usually plenty of people in the church that say the impossible can’t be done. These people are faith-crushers. We need people to bring reason and balance up to a point, but we are way beyond that point. God’s people are simply not walking in the supernatural as they should.

I want to look at a section of scripture that illustrates the difference between walking in faith and walking in defeat. It shows how some people look at circumstances through their own eyes and others see their circumstances through the eyes of God.

After the Lord used Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt through the Red Sea they went through the desert on the way to the promised land that the Lord had said He would bring them into. They had been in slavery for many years in Egypt and the dream of entering into this great land was a wonderful thing. Through the desert the Lord fed and guided them toward their goal. Though they tried the Lord a number of times He remained faithful to His promise and led them on. When they reached the river on the edge of the promised land the Lord instructed Moses to send in spies to explore the land and return with a report. This is Numbers 13:17 through Numbers 14:30 which is the account of that experience.

(non-italicized words are my own) *17 And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain: 18 And see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; 19 And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds; 20 And what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the firstripe grapes. 21 So they went up, and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, as men come to Hamath. 22 And they ascended by the south, and came unto Hebron; where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the children of Anak, were. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs. 24 The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence. 25 And they returned from searching of the land after forty days. 26 And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. 27 And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. 28 Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan. (These men saw through the eyes of man, but Caleb saw through eyes of faith) And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. 31 But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. 32 And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel (The same thing happens too often in the church, “they spread a bad report among the people”.) , saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. 33 And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight. (Typical lack of faith, they judged by their circumstances instead of God’s faithfulness) 34 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. 35 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! 36 And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? 37 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt. (How quickly we forget what it was like to be in slavery to sin, just as they forgot about Egypt) Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. 38 And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which*

were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: ⁷ And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. ⁸ If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. ⁹ Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not. (Yes! Now that's faith, but look at the reaction of the people) ¹⁰ But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. (People don't like to be challenged, and they like to find someone else to blame.) And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel. ¹¹ And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them? ¹² I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they. ¹³ And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) ¹⁴ And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. ¹⁵ Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, ¹⁶ Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness. ¹⁷ And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, ¹⁸ The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. ¹⁹ Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now. ²⁰ And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word: ²¹ But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD. ²² Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; ²³ Surely they shall not see the land which I sware unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: ²⁴ But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it. ²⁵ (Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwelt in the valley.) To morrow turn you, and get you into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea. ²⁶ And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, ²⁷ How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. ²⁸ Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: ²⁹ Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, ³⁰ Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

The scripture says "Caleb had a different spirit". He had a spirit of faith and trust in God. Caleb and Joshua were men of faith and were found pleasing to God. Still they had to wait in the desert until all those other people died before they could enter the promised land. There's an important principle there. *Often the faithful suffer for the faithlessness of the unfaithful.* In virtually every church there are Joshuas and Calebs and there are faith-killers. Too often the Joshuas and Calebs suffer for the lack of faith of others and are never able to enter into the promised land of victory that God has prepared for us. The church is often crippled because it's people have settled on the wrong side of the river. At one time they had a vision and a passion for God. They walked through the desert and God took them to the edge of the promised land, but it took too much faith to go on so they were content to stay in the desert. From time to time some preacher comes in and tells them what it's like in the promised land and everyone gets really excited. It's so sad when all it takes to enter in is bold faith.

Someone once said that "faith is believing that God will build the bridge over the cliff". That reminds me of a couple that was going to travel with us back when Lifeline first began. They young man's attitude was, "if God drops a van and travel trailer in my driveway then I'll go". That's not faith. Faith is not simply standing at the edge of the cliff believing God is going to build a bridge to the other side. Faith is stepping out over the cliff and believing that when your foot comes down God will have built a bridge under it. The next part of the bridge may not be there until the other foot comes down. Faith involves risk.

Many people are content in the desert where there is no risk, no challenge, no life, and no victory. They can look across the river and see the promised land. They can read about it in the Word. But without faith they will never experience it.

As I minister at various churches I can tell stories of congregations that have won thousands to the Lord. I can speak of healings and the saving power of almighty God. I can speak of renewal and revival. All the time they will be saying, “praise God!” But when I say it can happen in *their* church they look at me like I’m crazy. I can almost hear them saying, “Ya right, you don’t know these people. You don’t know our history or our battles, you don’t know our financial situation.” It’s easy to have faith to believe that God *has* done these things, but harder to believe that He *will* do these things. A preacher once said, “the Bible is not simply a book of things that God *can* do, but rather a book of things that God *will* do”. When we grasp that we can begin to walk in true faith.

The “Greater Things” Of The Faith

Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. ¹² Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. ¹³ And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.
(John 14:11-14 emphasis mine)

I’ve heard this scripture explained away through various interpretive errors. Many say, as I was once guilty of teaching, that Jesus is speaking to the Body of Christ as a whole. That teaching claims that Jesus was talking about the fact that the church over the ages would win more believers than He did during His time in His physical body. People choose to believe this to explain the lack of spiritual power in their own life or church and also because they don’t want to admit that they might lack faith. I did so myself for some time. Then I realized the scripture says “anyone”. “Anyone who has faith in me will do these things...even greater things....” Wow! Jesus did some great things! Isn’t it glorious to serve a mighty God? It’s time God’s people stepped up to walk in the truth of His Word. It puts us on the spot and it forces us to believe in God.

I can’t remember when I have ever stepped out to do anything significant for the Lord where there weren’t dozens of people saying I was crazy. When we decided to minister without charging up front for services, tapes, or materials people said I was crazy. In fact virtually every time we have made a move forward in the Lord some brother or sister has felt we were “presuming upon God” or “testing the Lord”. Actually the Lord is testing us. He takes us to the edge of the promised land to see if we have the faith to enter in.

I remember when we first took another family along with us on the road. The Lord told us to do it and yet we did not have the money or vehicles to pull it off. We were going to be ministering at the same churches as we always had and there had always been just enough money in the offering to make it. Even some of my best pastor friends told me I was going too far this time. I went for a walk in my home town of Juneau, Alaska near a glacier. The Lord showed me the awesomeness of the glacier and spoke a scripture to my heart from John 11:40, ***Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?*** I said, “yes Lord, but so many of your people whom I respect are saying I’m crazy, what should I tell them?” He spoke another scripture to my heart. I didn’t even know it was a scripture then but I found it later. He told me to say, “Let God be true, and every man a liar”. It’s from Romans 3:3-4, ***For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.*** I went home and wrote the song “Let God Be True” and from that day on I have been saying that to those who challenge us as we follow the vision God has given us.

That “Vision” Thing. . . .

Proverbs 29:18 says, *Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.* Churches often pray for a vision. Then God brings them one and they say, “sorry Lord, we can’t afford that vision.” So God brings them another vision and they say, “sorry Lord, we don’t have the people or the resources for that vision.” My friends, a vision that is within our ability to accomplish will not glorify God. A vision from God will invariably challenge us to step out over the cliff in many areas of our life. Just read Hebrews chapter 11 and you will see the faith required to follow the Lord.

We must allow God to give us a vision so great that it cannot possibly be achieved unless He intervenes.

Think about that statement. How long has it been since you believed God could accomplish much more than you could grasp within your human ability. The world is not changed by those who shrink back, but by men and women of faith. When the going gets tough we need to draw nearer to God. Often our faith will be tested before God releases the blessing. How frustrating it must have been for Joshua and Caleb. How frustrating it must have been for God! That scripture in John where Jesus says, “did I not tell you if you believed you would see the glory of God?” came as He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead. They were doubting Him since Lazarus had been dead for days. Jesus made the statement in frustration as a parent tells their child “didn’t I tell you” this or that. He was frustrated that they still did not have the faith to believe in His miraculous power. Imagine how He feels when He looks at the church today!

Take The Land!

They say that if you aim at nothing you will hit it every time. Too often the church aims at nothing. If I were to say that God can win a thousand people to Himself through your church this year you might say, “ya right”. Why not? Is God not able? Does He not want to win those people? Do you believe we serve a God of miraculous power? We must repent of our lack of faith and our willingness to settle on the wrong side of the river. Allow God to give you a vision so great that it cannot possibly be achieved unless He intervenes. As Caleb said, *If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. 6 Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.* (Numbers 14:8-9) Are you ready to take the land for Jesus? For we can surely do it. The Holy Spirit spoke these words in Hebrews to warn us not to make the same mistake as those in the desert. Let’s look at Hebrews 3:6-19, *6 But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. 7 Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, 8 Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: 9 When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. 10 Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. 11 So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) 12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. 13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; 15 While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. 16 For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. 17 But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.*

Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. ³⁹ But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul. (Hebrews 10:38-39) May we not shrink back. God desires an army of faithful believers who are willing to cross the river and take the land for Jesus.

Walking In Faith

It's important to understand that believers who walk in faith don't just go around jumping off cliffs so God can catch them. People of faith simply trust God and seek His will. Then when God reveals His will to them they move on it whether it appears possible or not. When the faithful believer prays for healing there is real expectation for God to heal. When they step out to serve they trust God for the finances. Most of all, the faithful Christian doesn't depend on what is seen for their decision making, but rather on the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the provision of God regardless of the apparent circumstances. A people of faith will take God at His Word and they won't water it down. A people of faith will allow God to give them a vision so great that it cannot possibly be achieved unless He intervenes. Let God be true and every man a liar!

Prayer



⁷ But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. ⁸ Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. ⁹ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. ¹⁰ Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Matthew 6:7-13)

Prayer is a good subject since it's certainly at the top of the list of Christian essentials. That's also the reason that Christians should have a good understanding of what prayer is and what God desires of us in terms of our prayer life.

One can test the level of their faith in God by their prayer life. A man or woman who really believes in God will lean more on prayer than physical ability. When we do everything in our own strength without prayer we are in effect saying to God, "I don't believe you will do it so I have to do it myself." Often we act first and pray later. We need to depend on God or we will never see anything achieved beyond what we can do in our own power. A life that is not immersed in prayer will invariably lead to burn-out and a lack of fulfillment, and there will never be true renewal or revival without a deep level of prayer. If we are to understand what it means to live a life of prayer we must understand its definition.

The simplest definition of prayer is communication with God. Communication is a two-way activity. Those who do not believe that God will speak to them are destined for a one-sided prayer life. Also, it is one thing to set aside time to be on your knees in prayer and another to "pray continually" as we are directed in 1 Thess. 5:17. To pray continually is to be in constant communication with God. This means we understand that God is constantly near us and we can communicate with Him at any time. Unfortunately many people feel the only mode of prayer is the "head bowed, eyes closed" thing. Many times I pray with my eyes open. One of the greatest men I have ever known will talk to God just like he is sitting next to Him. If you are in a conversation with him he will talk to you, talk to God, talk to you, etc. He doesn't need to stop and say, "let's bow our heads for a word of prayer". He knows God is that close to him at all times. Prayer is communication with God. Each of us needs to converse in the way that we are most comfortable. The time alone kneeling before God is very important, but prayer is something we should be doing throughout the day in a less formal sense as well.

For a long time I judged the level of an individual's commitment to God by the length of time they would spend each day in prayer. I heard and quoted people like Leonard Ravenhill who said "I wouldn't give a dime for a preacher who spends less than two hours a day in prayer". As wonderful as that sounds, it doesn't work unless we understand the definition of prayer. Many people define prayer as "asking God for things". That's a pretty limited definition for sure. In regard to prayer Jesus clearly says that quality is more important than quantity. Rather than hours a day asking for things in prayer, the Lord desires our focused times of prayer, worship, and praise. When we think in terms of all three of these things it is easier to imagine spending that time with the Lord each day.

I remember when I achieved my goal of praying over an hour a day. Then I moved it to two hours. Once again, the problem lies in definition. Prayer is our privilege. It is not something that we do for God. It is a gift that God has given us to humble ourselves on our knees and make our requests known to Him. It also gives us the opportunity to pray in faith believing He will answer. The point of prayer is not how much time we spend asking for something, and we should not feel we are more righteous because we spend more time each day on our knees asking for things. If anything the scripture speaks against lengthy dissertations and polished prayers. In reality, this is simply one more way that Christians have been led into legalistic bondage and false guilt in their Christian walk. Many people struggle because they decide to spend hours each day in prayer and they run out of things to say. When they listen their mind wanders to football or some other distraction. As I said before, prayer is our privilege. Spending precious time with God each day is a good and essential part of our relationship with our Lord, and praying about our needs should be a part of that experience. However, we need to understand that what God desires most from us is our worship and our praise. If we would turn our hearts toward praise, worship and thanksgiving to God our prayers would be a lot more effective and our time with Him would be more real and intimate. He is more than worthy of our praise and devotion. So when you lock yourself in a room to spend time with the Lord, make your requests known and move on to worship and adoration. He is not impressed with our lengthy prayers and polished words. He says, ***But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.*** We need to remember that even as earthly parents we would rather our children didn't spend all of their intimate time with us asking for something. So set apart time for the Lord to praise and worship Him in the beauty of His holiness....let your requests be the secondary reason for prayer. Let the worship of His glory consume you in your private time and in your daily life. That is His desire. Then remember to be quiet and listen. Prayer is communication with God, don't do all the talking.

Hearing God

There are too many people who simply do not believe God speaks to His people. The Lord no longer dwells in temples built by human hands but He has come to dwell among His people. How does God speak to us? In many ways. I have heard an audible voice. Even to the point where I have spun around to see who was speaking to me. Many other times the Lord just speaks to my heart. I know what I am supposed to do and I know what I am supposed to say.

When God speaks to you, you will know for sure that it is God. Many people tell me that they think God may be telling them this or that. If it's God, you will know. At times we try to rationalize against what He is saying but inside we know the truth. That's where obedience comes into play. If you routinely ignore the prompting of God in your life it will become more and more difficult to discern His voice. Many people grieve the Spirit by ignoring His leading.

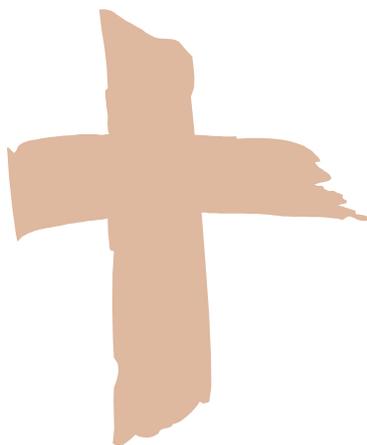
It's also important for us to be where the Lord wants us to be in our walk with Him. As I travel I meet many people who want God to speak with them and show them His will for their lives but they have areas of their life that they refuse to submit to the Lord, or bitterness toward someone that they refuse to release. The scripture is clear on the requirements to hear God and to know His will.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. ² And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

What does it mean to present ourselves as a living sacrifice? In the Old Testament times people were required to sacrifice many animals for the sins they committed. An individual would take those animals to the temple and the priests would sacrifice the animals to God. In the New Testament sense we present *ourselves* to God to be crucified, or sacrificed. It means that we don't put boxes around our obedience. It means we forget the if, ands, or buts. We don't say, "Lord, I'll give you my life but please don't call me to be a missionary", or "Lord, I'll serve you with my whole life when I get married, or when I get older, or when I get more money.....etc.". My friends, when we come to Christ and place ourselves on the altar we must go for it with no reserve. Luke 9:57-62 says, ***⁷ And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. ⁸ And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. ⁹ And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. ¹⁰ Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. ¹² And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*** When we hold back parts of ourselves from God we are not offering ourselves as living sacrifices, but rather wounded offerings. We just jump up from the altar bleeding and say "that's enough Lord".

These things must come in order. Present yourself as a living sacrifice, conform no longer to the patterns of this world (it's priorities, lies, and immorality), and allow God to transform you by the renewing of your mind. Then, and only then, can you test and approve what God's good pleasing and perfect will is. People get the cart before the horse. It's crazy to assume that we would hear the Lord speak to us when we are not willing to submit to the foundational aspects of obedience in scripture. Before we can hear God or know His will we must really want to. Many times the Lord speaks to us about the need for change in our own lives. We must desire to hear from God for our own growth as well as our own comfort and direction. If you limit God in His ability to move in and through your own life you will miss much of His guidance. Once again it comes down to trusting Him and having faith. You must believe He can do a better job of controlling your life than you can, and then you must give Him control. Praise His Name!

God is calling His people back to a full dependence on Him and His supernatural power. May we seek Him and follow in faith.



Faith & Prayer In The Life Of The Believer

Session One Review

1. What does it mean to “walk in faith”? _____

2. What does it mean to say that “too often the church exists in a supernatural vacuum”? _____

3. How do we define God? _____

4. What does it mean to have “sorta-faith”? _____

5. Why does God want to do things among us that are beyond human ability?

Notes.....

Faith & Prayer In The Life Of The Believer

Session Two Review

1. Why do you suppose God had them send spies into the promised land? Why not just send everyone in ? _____

2. Why didn't the people believe they could take the land? _____

3. What did God mean when He said that "Caleb had a different spirit?"

4. What does it mean to say that "often the faithful suffer for the lack of faith of the unfaithful"?

5. How does the account of the Israelites in the desert relate to the church today?

Notes.....

Faith & Prayer In The Life Of The Believer

Session Three Review

1. Why is it easier for many people to believe that God will do miracles somewhere *else*?

2. What does it mean to say that “faith is stepping out over the cliff and believing that when your foot comes down the bridge will be there”, as opposed to simply believing that God will build the bridge.

3. What things should we consider when praying for a vision?

4. What does it mean to “allow God to give us a vision so great that it cannot possibly be achieved unless He intervenes?”

Notes.....

Faith & Prayer In The Life Of The Believer

Session Four Review

1. What do our actions say to God when we fail to pray and simply try to do everything on our own power?

2. What is the definition of prayer? _____

3. What does it mean to say quantity is more important than quality regarding prayer?

4. What does God desire most from us in our private time with Him? _____

Notes.....

Faith & Prayer In The Life Of The Believer

Session Five Review

1. Does God speak to His people today? _____

2. How does God speak to us? _____

3. How can we hear God more clearly? _____

4. What does Romans 12:1-2 have to say about hearing God and knowing His will?

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Contrary to academic and literary convention, all pronouns referring to God, His Word, or His Church will be capitalized.

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All Scriptures taken from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

The Fruit Factor

If you have not read our study on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit I suggest you do so before reading this one. Many things about the fruit of the Spirit will be much clearer. You do not attain the Spirit by chasing after the fruit. You attain the Fruit by walking in the Spirit.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, ²⁰ Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, ²¹ Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. ²⁴ And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:19-26)

It has always been interesting to me that people argue so adamantly about the evidence to the infilling of the Holy Spirit, especially in regard to the gift of tongues. I almost never hear people listing as evidences those things the Bible says are absolute evidences of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life. It would seem that too often people want an "experience" with the Spirit more than they desire the life-changing power of the Spirit. The word "fruit" can actually be translated "evidence". We can accurately say, "The *evidence* of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control". A preacher once said, "you can tell the level of someone's spiritual maturity by their conversation. A mature Christian talks about the fruit of the Spirit most of the time, an immature Christian talks about the gifts of the Spirit most of the time." It's not that gifts are not important, but gifts without fruit are worthless. The believer is in balance when his/her gifts are in balance with the fruit of their life. The Apostle Paul has this to say, ***Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*** (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

Why do people often focus more on the gifts of the Spirit than the fruit of the Spirit? Gifts are easy for the carnal Christian to chase after. They tend to be glorious and public. The fruit of the Spirit is more personal and life-changing. The fruit is where the real depth of spiritual maturity is indicated in our life. The fruit is what we will be known by. It is our greatest witness. Jesus said, ***Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? ¹⁷ Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. ²⁰ Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. ²¹ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ²³ And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*** (Matthew 7:16-23 Emphasis mine)

There is a reason why God did not say we would be known by our gifts. We could not be "known by our gift of prophecy" because there are false prophets. For every gift there is a false version. The Word tells us the Devil can do "counterfeit signs and miracles." Therefore God's people cannot be clearly known by these things. They are not absolute indications of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual. The absolute evidence of God in the life of a believer is a true change of heart. That change of heart manifests itself in spiritual fruit. When that change of heart is taking place and the fruit of the Spirit is evident, the gifts of the Spirit can be used effectively for ministry in the Body of Christ.

It would be impossible to truly manifest the fruit of the Spirit if we did not first submit to some of the biblical principles that we have already discussed. Humility and Lordship are essential in order for us to be teachable and changeable. We must be open to learn and to receive in order for God to bring about the change of heart required for the manifestation of spiritual fruit. As we are teachable and changeable we open ourselves up to be molded and formed in the Lord's hands. Jesus Himself said, ***‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. ²Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. ³Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. ⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. ⁶ If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*** (John 15:1-6)

It's the willingness to be pruned that shows that we are changeable and teachable. Pruning is often a painful process. It must be our heart's desire to bear fruit or we will never submit to the pruning. Jesus also says we must remain in Him. That's why you can't fake spiritual fruit for long. It's possible for someone to pretend for a while, but without a true change of heart they will be exposed for what they are.

The scripture in Galatians 5:19-26 not only lists a number of the fruits of the Spirit, but also many acts of the sinful nature. One of the advantages to knowing these things is that it helps us to recognize the carnal nature when it rears its ugly head in our lives. Battle is always easier when you can recognize the enemy. In this study I want to go over each of the fruits listed in this scripture, and cover some of the acts of the sinful nature as well. This will help you to see just how opposite they really are. There is no way to reconcile the flesh and the Spirit. They are at war with one another. It is the constant attempt to reconcile the two of them that leaves secular psychology at an impasse. The only way to bring about true heart change is through the power of God. ***And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.*** (Galatians 5:24)

The Charity/Love Factor

What can I say? Charity, or some versions use the word “love” is the foundation upon which all others must be built. (Charity is a better translation since it denotes the action element of love) I Cor 13:1-13 says ***¹Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. ²And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. ³And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. ⁴Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, ⁵Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; ⁶Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; ⁷Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. ⁸Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. ⁹For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. ¹¹When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. ¹²For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. ¹³And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.***

Here's one of the best self-evaluation exercises that I know of. Look at that scripture again. Starting with the "charity suffereth long" part, take out every reference to love and replace it with your name. How do you hold up? For example, I would write, "Benje suffereth long, Benje is kind. He envieth not," etc. I hope it's true! Put yourself in all the way through the scripture and ask yourself where you might need to change. Then you can pray that the Holy Spirit will fill and transform you. Dedicate yourself to prayer for change in those areas. It's important to recognize our problem areas so we can be on guard against them.

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. ³¹ And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:30-31)

This love thing is vitally important. It should be the motivation for everything we do. It was certainly Jesus' motivation. Indeed, love is the motivation that has caused God to stick with us from the beginning of history. As sure as the fruit of the Spirit is our greatest witness to the world, love is our greatest fruit. John 13:34-35 says, ***A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. ³³ By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*** It doesn't say that all men would know that we are His disciples because we have big church buildings and great worship teams. It doesn't say that we would be known by our ability to speak or scream "praise God" louder than others. We will be known by our love for one another, or we will we be known for our lack of it. There is no greater witness than Christians who truly love one another in word and deed, and there is no poorer witness than Christians who battle with one another for reasons of personal gain or position. When we reach out to love an unbeliever (not just with words but with action) it is the greatest witness of all.

The Joy/Peace Factor

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. (Romans 14:17)

The greatest barrier standing between most Christians and true joy and peace is their assumption that God must change their circumstances. Joy and peace are not achieved through a change of circumstances as much as through a change of attitude. I have listed a number of scriptures to help you see where joy and peace can be found.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:10-11)

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. ¹¹ And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. (Romans 5:10-11)

Obviously our greatest joy should be found in our salvation. Many Christians lose sight of the awesome nature of Christ's sacrifice and the incredible gift He has given us as a result. You will find that many of the scriptures in the Word dealing with joy and peace relate directly back to our salvation. Jesus taught His disciples to rejoice in things that don't look like a lot of fun to many of us. When the Apostles were beaten before the Sanhedrin in Acts chapter five, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer disgrace for Jesus' Name. That seems a little strange to many Christians today. Here in America we are simply not called on to suffer as a Christian too often. Suffering as a Christian here in America means that the preacher went past 12:00! Seriously, we are spoiled. This is the reason it is hard to have joy and peace. It comes from a wrong attitude. A child who has everything given to him will find little joy in the material blessings of life. I remember when I went to college. Up until that time I had a very comfortable income and I could buy pizza three meals a day if I so desired. When I arrived at college I no longer had the same income. After being there for some time a group of us put our money together and went out for pizza. Never in my life had I ever tasted a pizza so good. I thought I was in heaven. I actually savored every bite. This is a true story and a simple example of what I am talking about in regards to our attitude. The pizza was no different from what I had experienced a thousand times before, but my attitude was. Let's look at a few more scriptures...

Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. 23 Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. (Luke 6:22-23 Emphasis mine)

And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. 24 But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. 25 But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. 26 And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost. (Acts 13:49-52 Emphasis mine)

For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. (Hebrews 10:34)

Wow! Persecution, confiscation of property, rejection.....do these things sound like reasons for joy and peace? In themselves they are not reasons. It is the purpose in life Jesus brings that gives us the ability to regard these things as blessings. These people were not rejoicing because of the suffering itself, but because the suffering and rejection were a reminder that this world was not their home. Those who live for this world and the things it offers will never find joy and peace. The Christians in these scriptures had a purpose in life, serve their Lord and master. In medieval times it was regarded as a great honor for a knight to suffer and/or die in combat for their king. We should have the same attitude as we serve our King.

But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. (1 Peter 4:13-14)

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. (James 1:2-4)

It is often hard to have joy in trials. When someone's child is sick or dying, it is hard for them to be joyful. However, it needs to be understood that joy does not always mean laughter. If a Christian's child is dying they can find peace and joy that someone in the world could not touch. As a believer who realizes this world is not our home, death has already been swallowed up in victory. Even though the parent may grieve deeply over their great loss, they have the knowledge that it is only temporary. Imagine the grief of those who do not have their hope firmly placed in Christ Jesus. They simply have no hope. In light of this, we can see that at times we can be said to have "comparative joy." Paul wept over the spiritual condition of His Jewish brethren. Jesus had times when He was not jumping up and down and laughing. He wept over Jerusalem. He grieved in the garden. Sorrow is not a sign that someone lacks faith in God. In the analogy of the parent with the dying child, it would be idiocy to imply that they should not feel grief. The beautiful part is that God has given them a hope and promise that as believers they will live forever and their grief can be healed. We face many tragedies in life, but God is faithful to rescue us from them all if we will look to Him. This is where we find joy and peace, in the purpose and promise that Jesus gives us, and in the hope of eternal life that He has promised us. We must live to serve our King. It must be more important than anyone, or anything. Then we will understand why the early disciples had such joy in the face of suffering. Once again, joy and peace are not achieved through a change of circumstances as much as through a change of attitude that God brings as He conforms our nature to His own. There's the heart-change principle again!

Now there is also supernatural joy. The Lord desires for His people to know joy. The glorious touch of God's presence should bring joy in our lives. Some people ask, "what good does that do?" My friends, I desire for my children to know joy and our father in heaven wants to touch us with His joy as well.

The Patience Factor

The word "patience" is closely related to the word "endurance," or "perseverance," in the Word. I often relate it to the difference between sprinters and endurance runners. The Church is filled with "spiritual sprinters" who take off like a rocket in thirty different directions, but God's calling is for us to be consistent. God is more pleased with endurance runners who press on steadily toward the mark that He has called them to. There are many Christians who minister in one way for a while. Then they get bored and decide that God must want them to do something else. Patience and perseverance are integral characteristics, or fruit, of the Spirit-filled life.

To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: (Romans 2:7)

Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; ¹² Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; (Romans 12:11-12)

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, (2 Corinthians 6:4)

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, ² With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; (Ephesians 4:1-2)

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; (Colossians 3:12)

Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; (1 Thessalonians 1:3)

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, (Hebrews 12:1)

Earlier in this book we talked about "Spiritual Surfers." Spiritual surfers are people who lack patience and endurance. They are always out hunting the next great "experience." It's not that experiences are bad. I personally enjoy those mountain top experiences with God. The problem lies in chasing after experience to the point where you neglect the things God is trying to do in your personal life simply because it doesn't seem *fun*. We are to "run with perseverance the race marked out for us." It's marked out for us in His Word. People with patience are willing to buckle down and be what God has commanded them to be.

The Kindness/Goodness Factor

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. (Matthew 5:7-8)

Here's where our love for others meets practical application. This is another concept that does not agree with our carnal nature, the command to love your enemies. The following scripture gives us a picture of what it means to love God's way.

For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. ³³ And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. ³⁴ And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. ³⁶ Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. (Luke 6:32-36)

As we do good to others we need to always bear in mind that we are completely unworthy of God's goodness and kindness to us. There is an old saying that goes, "but for the grace of God, there go I." It means every possession and ability we have is from God. There is absolutely nothing in life that we can say we achieved without Him. If it were not for the hand of God we would all be drunks and drug addicts with no place to live, no food, and no income. Every breath we breathe is from God. When we are armed with this attitude we can look at others in a whole new light. We no longer look down on those who are not as blessed as we are. If it were not for the grace of God we would not have what we have or be able to do what we are able to do. This not only makes us more thankful for what we have but it helps us to have compassion for others.

I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. (Acts 20:35)

But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? (1 John 3:17)

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:10)

Our faith should show itself in practical way. James tells us this, *What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? ¹⁷ Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. ¹⁸ Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. ¹⁹ Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. ²⁰ But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? ²² Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. ²⁴ Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. ²⁵ Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? ²⁶ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.* (James 2:14-26)

Some have misinterpreted this scripture to mean that we must work for our salvation. Some cults pervert it to the point of justifying a works-based salvation. Scripture teaches that we are saved completely apart from works, it is the free gift of God. The scripture is saying that true salvation and real faith will bring forth fruit in the form of good deeds. Someone who claims to walk with God but has no fruit is kidding themselves. True faith will manifest itself in goodness and kindness. Over time, in our hearts we find that we love people we never thought we could love and care about things we never cared about before. That's the wonder of the new creation and the Spirit-transformed life.

The Faithfulness Factor

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. ⁴³But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. ⁴⁴Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. ⁴⁵Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? ⁴⁶Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. ⁴⁷Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. ⁴⁸But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; ⁴⁹And shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; ⁵⁰The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, ⁵¹And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 24:42-51)

There is much to be said for consistency. I know many people who are either way up or way down. One day all they want to talk about is Jesus and the next day they don't want to talk about Him at all. The Lord is calling us to be steady in our commitment to Him. To be faithful is to be consistent in our commitment and in our daily walk. It means to have integrity in our relationship with God to the point that we do not waver. To be faithful is to be true to a commitment and to a covenant.

The Gentleness Factor

I like to teach on gentleness because it's so seldom discussed among Christians. This is both unfortunate and disturbing because meekness and gentleness were so much a part of Christ's life and teaching. I often hear people trying to explain this truth away and justify their "tough" attitude. These people like to point to Jesus' clearing of the temple and strong rebuke of the religious leaders. If we are to use this as an excuse for being obnoxious then we will have to follow the logic and say it is only appropriate when addressing leaders who are both political and religious. They must be hypocritical and knowingly use the Word of God for personal gain. The fact is, even when we are told to go and correct someone we are told to do it with gentleness and respect. Jesus tells us to be gentle far more than He tells us to go and preach the Gospel, and yet we hear a lot more sermons on preaching the Gospel than we do on being gentle. Preaching the Gospel is a good part of my life, but may I never neglect what God wants to do *in* me in favor of what God does *through* me. God is more concerned with who we are than what we do. A right attitude and a taking on of the nature of Christ will manifest itself in gentleness and meekness.

With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; (Ephesians 4:2)

Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. (Philippians 4:5)

But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. (1 Timothy 6:11)

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: (1 Peter 3:15)

Gentleness doesn't mean "soft-spoken." It doesn't mean that we don't move very fast. It means we are not brazen or pushy in our dealings with others. A gentle individual thinks first and then speaks. Gentleness and meekness go hand in hand, and both tie in closely with humility. Humility, as you remember, is the exalting of God and others. It's placing other's needs above your own. Meekness, like humility, is not a belittling of yourself, but a lifting up of others.

The Self-Control Factor

Self-control is a topic that hits home with most of us in many areas. I think most of us know what it means. You are probably able to think of several areas in your life in which you could use more self-control. The overall concept is that the Christian's life should be governed by God and His Word and not by self. Everyone faces temptations in their daily walk. Those temptations are sometimes subtle and sometimes intense. God calls us to exercise self-control in these situations. Part of self-control is not exposing yourself to unnecessary temptation in the first place. Many Christians play with fire until they get burned. Self-control is knowing how to avoid the fire and having the courage to do it.

And Those Obvious Acts Of The Sinful Nature

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, ²⁰Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, ²¹Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

Once again, It's good to know these things so you can see them coming. I should point out a few things. Things like sexual immorality are obvious, but it may not be as clear that idolatry is not simply worshipping golden calves or buddha dolls. Many things can become an idol to you. It could be a new car, a rock star, or even a pastor! Many people have even allowed their church to become an idol to them! They would fight harder to save the church building than they would for Jesus and His people! Then we see the word witchcraft. Most of us would say we're pretty safe from that one but the Word says that "rebellion is as witchcraft." This applies it to a far larger group. The rest of them are pretty clear. We need to be aware of the thoughts, actions, and attitudes that are not of God. As we grow in Christ these things will die.

True Commitment+The Holy Spirit=Fruit

There's the key. True Commitment+The Holy Spirit=Fruit. These things must be in order. Fruit without the Spirit is just carnal fruit. True commitment means that we are submitted to His Lordship in every area of our lives. Our heart's desire must be to take on the nature of Christ and to see that nature manifested in our attitudes and actions. A life that is submitted to God and filled with His Spirit will bear fruit. A life that is not submitted will not bear spiritual fruit. Once again, the key is to seek the Holy Spirit. If you seek the fruit without the Spirit your walk will descend into legalism and frustration.

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; (Colossians 3:12)

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; ⁶And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; ⁷And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. ⁸For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. ¹⁰Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: ¹¹For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-11)

Once again, the greatest evidence of the Spirit in a believer's life is a change of heart. When the Spirit of God is living in us it will bring about a radical change in the way we look at things, the way we do things, and the way we treat other people. If these things are not present in your life it is essential that you re-evaluate your commitment. It's easy to just start polishing the outward things and miss what Jesus' wants to do within us.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. ²⁴ And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-25)

The Fruit Factor

Session One Review

1. Do we get the Holy Spirit by attaining the fruit or do we get the fruit by dwelling in the Spirit? _____

2. Why doesn't the Bible say that we will be known by our gifts? _____

3. How do humility and lordship apply to our having the fruit of the Spirit?

4. The study says (page 94) that it's easy to fight the battle when we see the enemy, what does this mean? _____

5. What does John 15:1-6 say about our responsibility as Christians?

6. Looking at the "works of the flesh" and the "fruit of the Spirit" listed in Galatians 5:19-26, which do you feel best exemplifies your life? _____

The Fruit Factor

Session Two Review

1. What does 1 Corinthians 13 have to say about the importance of Charity/Love?

2. What does joy mean for the believer? _____

3. What does our attitude have to do with our joy and peace in life? _____

4. In the Joy/Peace section of the study there are a number of scriptures relating to those who suffered joyfully for Christ. Were these people just crazy? How could they have joy in times like that?

5. In light of these facts, how should we relate to Christians who are facing tragedy?

The Fruit Factor

Session Three Review

1. What does the word patience, or endurance, mean to you? _____

2. What is a “spiritual sprinter”? _____

3. What does Luke 6:32-36 say to us about loving our enemies? _____

4. “But for the grace of God, there go I” was a common statement in the Church of old. What does it mean?

5. What does James 2:14-26 say about our actions as Christians? _____

The Fruit Factor

Session Four Review

1. What does it mean to be faithful?

2. Why don't we hear many sermons or read many books on Gentleness?

3. What is Gentleness in the Biblical sense? _____

4. How can we exercise self-control in situations that may tempt us without simply depending on ourselves?

The Fruit Factor

Session Five Review

1. How do we gain the fruit of the Spirit in our lives? _____

2. True commitment + The Holy Spirit = Fruit. What happens when one of these gets out of order or is missing completely? _____

3. What is the greatest evidence of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life?

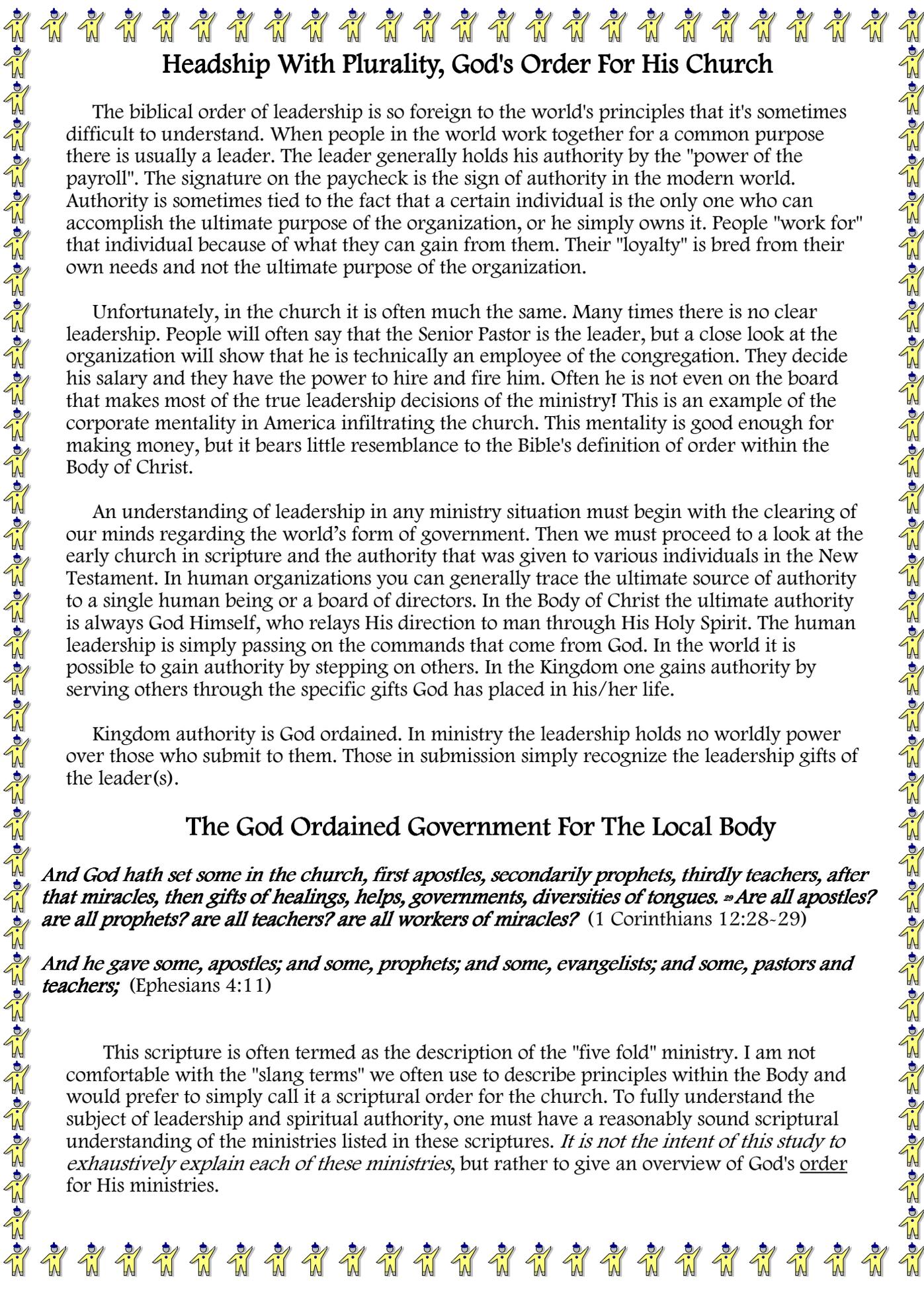
4. What does 2 Peter 1:5-11 tell us about our life in Christ and what we should be striving for? _____

True Leadership

*Biblical Organization For The
Church And Ministry*



Benje Graves



Headship With Plurality, God's Order For His Church

The biblical order of leadership is so foreign to the world's principles that it's sometimes difficult to understand. When people in the world work together for a common purpose there is usually a leader. The leader generally holds his authority by the "power of the payroll". The signature on the paycheck is the sign of authority in the modern world. Authority is sometimes tied to the fact that a certain individual is the only one who can accomplish the ultimate purpose of the organization, or he simply owns it. People "work for" that individual because of what they can gain from them. Their "loyalty" is bred from their own needs and not the ultimate purpose of the organization.

Unfortunately, in the church it is often much the same. Many times there is no clear leadership. People will often say that the Senior Pastor is the leader, but a close look at the organization will show that he is technically an employee of the congregation. They decide his salary and they have the power to hire and fire him. Often he is not even on the board that makes most of the true leadership decisions of the ministry! This is an example of the corporate mentality in America infiltrating the church. This mentality is good enough for making money, but it bears little resemblance to the Bible's definition of order within the Body of Christ.

An understanding of leadership in any ministry situation must begin with the clearing of our minds regarding the world's form of government. Then we must proceed to a look at the early church in scripture and the authority that was given to various individuals in the New Testament. In human organizations you can generally trace the ultimate source of authority to a single human being or a board of directors. In the Body of Christ the ultimate authority is always God Himself, who relays His direction to man through His Holy Spirit. The human leadership is simply passing on the commands that come from God. In the world it is possible to gain authority by stepping on others. In the Kingdom one gains authority by serving others through the specific gifts God has placed in his/her life.

Kingdom authority is God ordained. In ministry the leadership holds no worldly power over those who submit to them. Those in submission simply recognize the leadership gifts of the leader(s).

The God Ordained Government For The Local Body

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? (1 Corinthians 12:28-29)

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (Ephesians 4:11)

This scripture is often termed as the description of the "five fold" ministry. I am not comfortable with the "slang terms" we often use to describe principles within the Body and would prefer to simply call it a scriptural order for the church. To fully understand the subject of leadership and spiritual authority, one must have a reasonably sound scriptural understanding of the ministries listed in these scriptures. *It is not the intent of this study to exhaustively explain each of these ministries, but rather to give an overview of God's order for His ministries.*

There are those who would seek to have authority within the Kingdom out of some kind of power trip. We must understand that leadership in the Kingdom bears little resemblance to leadership in the world. To quote a chorus, "If you want to be great in God's Kingdom, learn to be the servant of all". There are many reasons to pray long and hard before stepping into leadership.

Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. (1 Corinthians 4:2)

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. ¶ But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:47-48)

Actually, in the Kingdom one cannot really "step into leadership". Leadership is a natural outgrowth of ones respective gifts, and those who are submitted to God submit to the leadership He has ordained. One principle I have found to be true is that *anyone who feels they have to have a leadership position probably shouldn't.*

Proper Attitudes For Leaders

The clearest picture of a true spiritual leaders heart and attitude is found in Philippians 2:1-11, ***If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, ¶ Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ¶ Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. ¶ Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. ¶ Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: ¶ Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ¶ But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ¶ And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. ¶ Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: ¶ That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; ¶ And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***

The Need For Leadership

God has placed an order within everything He has ordained. Without order a spirit of chaos would most certainly prevail.

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. (Hebrews 13:7)

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17)

I should also point out an important point; ***Leadership happens!*** I have seen many groups who say, "lets just all be equal in authority." Over time leadership always emerges, good or bad. This is why we should seek the Lord's plan for order and authority.

Historically there have been five types of human government:

Oligarchy - Government by an elite few

Monarchy - Government by one man or woman

Gerontocracy - Government by the old men

Democracy - Government by a large group of people, usually through representation

Theocracy - Government by God through appointed leaders.

Theocracy is the form of government laid out in God's Word for His Church. Theocracy begins with the realization that Christ is the Head.

And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: (Mark 12:10)

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3)

And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: (Colossians 2:10)

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; (Colossians 1:19)

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. (Colossians 2:9)

It is under Christ that the ministries in Acts 4:11 and 1 Cor 12:28-29 have been placed. In the context of scripture the biblical order for the church is laid out quite clear. One could easily question why it seems so foreign to so many people. The fact is, the biblical roles, requirements, and responsibilities of the ministry offices outlined in God's Word are diametrically opposed to human nature. They are not a "chain of command" in the human sense. They are all mutually submitted to one another. They are "specialists" by virtue of their gifting. Each is accountable to one another, but each has respect for the particular office of the other.

It should also be said that these are not simply titles. I am truly concerned about the emphasis on titles for ministers in the Body of Christ today. It is interesting that many Protestants are rightly critical of many of the titles used by the Roman Catholic Church and yet are so willing to make up their own. The Roman Catholics use names such as the Pope, Bishop, his excellency, cardinals, etc. Many Protestants use names such as Reverend, Doctor, Pastor, etc. One must ask what the difference is between the two in the matter of titles. The offices of ministry are not simply titular but functional. I need not be called Pastor Benje to be a Pastor, or Evangelist Benje to be and Evangelist. Let me be clear. I do not think it is wrong to call someone by the title of a recognized gifting and position in their life. Too often however, the title is thrown around where it should not be.

I consider the greatest danger of an emphasis of titular power to be it's strengthening of another prevalent non-biblical concept, the clergy-laity separation. Clergy and laity separations are absolutely nowhere to be found in scripture! Each person in the Body simply fulfills his/her role and calling. To use the concepts of clergy and laity is to separate the Body into two blocks. To use titles to distinguish persons strengthens the false clergy-laity concept. If "Bob" obviously speaks as God's mouthpiece we need not call him "Prophet Bob". It sounds ridiculous. We are used to calling people "Pastor so and so" but not "Evangelist so and so". We can say, "that's Tom, he's an Evangelist." He is recognized as an Evangelist not because of a title but because of his function in the Body. I am an Elder but I need not be referred to as Elder Benje. Titles, or the absence of titles, is very important because it speaks to others and helps us to remember that we are all one Body. God has simply given us different roles and responsibilities by virtue of our calling and gifting.

The Ministry Of The Elder:

Eldership was the position given to those called to lead in the affairs of the church. The concept of Eldership is prevalent throughout the New Testament account of the church. Each geographical area was governed by a body of Elders. In each group there emerges a "head Elder". The head Elder is not greater in rank than the others. He is simply ordained by God to maintain order and direction within the ministry. The Elders make up the sole governing body in scripture, but are certainly not the only ones leading, serving, or teaching in the many areas of ministry the church is called to. It is important to realize that there is never so much as a hint of "congregational government" in the Bible.

And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. (Acts 14:23) This scripture shows the seriousness of the office of Elder. It also shows us that the Apostles appointed the Elders. This runs contrary to the "congregational vote" system of today. Elders were appointed by the body of Elders.

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. (1 Timothy 5:17) Once again showing the importance of the office. It also shows that the Elders were often those who possessed one or more of the Eph 4:11 gifts.

Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Paul instructing Timothy about the office of Elder. (1 Timothy 5:19)

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: (Titus 1:5) Paul letting Titus know that the ministry in the area would not be complete without appointing Elders in the various areas. Titus, an Elder, was appointed by Paul, an Apostle and Elder, to appoint other Elders as he discerned through the Lord.

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: (James 5:14) Again showing a part of the ministry of the Elder.

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: (1 Peter 5:1) Peter showing that he was both Apostle and Elder.

Eldership is a terribly neglected office of ministry in today's church. Often people are appointed Elders because of their age. It is estimated that Timothy was around 22 years old and he was an Elder. Elder does not mean "older." It is about calling and spiritual maturity. I have seen churches with Elders who did not even come close to the requirements laid out in the word for true Eldership.

If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. ⁷ For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; ⁸ But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; ⁹ Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. (Titus 1:6-9)

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; ³ Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; ⁴ One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; ⁵ (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) ⁶ Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:2-7)

It's no wonder people in churches often have little respect for their Elders, or even the office of Elder, when we are so quick to place people in Eldership who do not meet the qualifications. In the Bible the Eldership provided the spiritual direction for the church and managed its affairs. This is a critical and essential part of a healthy church. It's a tremendous responsibility and should be given only to those that God has uniquely called to be Elders. Eldership is a calling and a gifting of God. An Elder should be an Elder for life unless their actions fall out of line with scripture.

This brings us to another point. These offices are callings. *It would be ridiculous to "elect" someone to Eldership for a two or three year term.* First of all, Elders are appointed by the body of Elders. That appointment is an act of recognition. Only those who are recognized as being called and equipped of God to be Elders should be appointed. The by-laws of an organization should not state the number of Elders required. If you have only two Elders then you have only two Elders. The alternative is to appoint people who are not Elders to the Eldership. To do so undermines God's plan for church leadership.

A healthy Eldership serves a tremendous protection for the ministry. A strong leadership body provides clear direction for the flock and wisdom in the midst of crisis. The modern church often fails in this regard because they elect "whoever will do it" to a "church board" made up of "whoever would do it" to do "whatever has to be done". They meet once a month to discuss issues that affect a great number of lives for an hour or two. A true body of Elders lives deep within the workings of the church and the life of its members. It's their life calling. It's not something they were elected to do once a month or whenever there's a problem, it's an integral part of their life.

Even if a church board happens to be made up of qualified, dedicated individuals who are all called to be Elders and Deacons, they are often crippled by the structure itself. The by-laws often state that any decision of great importance {large expenditures, staff positions, etc.} must be decided by congregational vote. Juan Ortiz, author of the book, *Call To Discipleship*, rightly calls this "the upside down church". The most important decisions of the church are made by the least mature members. There are those who will feel insulted by this remark. I hope you will look at scripture and determine whether there is any basis on which to argue this point. I realize the "congregational vote" system is very modern and diplomatic, but it is also bureaucratic, divisive, and stagnating. That is why God did not use it or teach it in His Word. God-ordained leadership can be trusted. It is when we flippantly appoint leaders that we see the abuses that so many people fear.

The modern church is often made up of a confusing semi-corporate structure. It actually resembles a worldly corporation more than the New Testament church in its organizational system. There is the board of directors {church board, church council, etc.} who are elected by the shareholders {congregation}, with a board chairman/CEO {pastor} who goes about being the mediator between the board and the shareholders. If the shareholders are not happy with the direction of the "company" they simply fire the chairman, or just make his life miserable. The best this system can create is a well run, glorified social club. It is far too crippled by bureaucracy and personal agendas to really accomplish the mighty work of our Lord.

It is often said that with an Eldership you could get bad leaders. This is true, but I will argue that *in a congregational government you will eventually get bad leaders every time.* People with control problems tend to relentlessly seek positions of control. In a congregational system they eventually get those positions. Most importantly, the correct measure is whether it is biblical or not.

The church today is desperate for a renewal in the area of godly leadership. This is not a minor problem. Our very structure inhibits the work of the Spirit. We must return to scripture and throw off the worldly arguments. Many people say to me, "I agree that scripture says this is the way it should be, but it just doesn't work today, we are living in a different time". My friends, God's truth is timeless. May we return to His truth.

The Ministry Of The Deacon:

There is a lot of confusion in the Church regarding the ministry of the Deacon. From the Greek word "Diakonos" we get the definition, "a servant of the people. A waiter, attendant, servant, or minister." They are "hands-on" people, servants who get the job done. A good example of Deaconship is found in *And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. ¶ Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. ¶ Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. ¶ But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. ¶ And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: ¶ Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.* (Acts 6:1-6)

One should not assume that Deacons do all the work. Every member of the Body of Christ should exhibit a servant's heart and be willing to help where he or she is needed. Deacons are those who are uniquely called and gifted to serve the Church in many practical ways. It is interesting to note the importance they placed on every ministry among the Body. They were looking for people to "wait tables" and they were very serious about the type of people to choose, *Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.* (Acts 6:3) Oh how lightly we take the service of God today! They realized that anyone who represented God in any way has a great responsibility. The above scriptures do not refer to waiters as we would think of them today. They were looking for those who would distribute food to the needy in their area. It was a huge responsibility and a vital ministry.

Deaconship required the same high qualifications as an Elder. 1 Timothy 3:8-13 states, *Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; ⁹ Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. ¹⁰ And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. ¹¹ Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. ¹² Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. ¹³ For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

It's unfortunate that people often think of Deacons as being lesser in value than Elders. That is worldly thinking. No member of the body is of lesser value than another. These are all callings and offices that God has ordained for various people. It should also be pointed out that just because Deacons are called to do practical work for the body doesn't mean they do all the work. It simply means their calling is different in that they are consumed by it as a virtue of their gifting. Deaconship is also an office in the leadership structure of the overall body. The Elders and Deacons work together to provide structure and unity to the ministry as a whole. Together they accomplish the administrative and practical work of the church, but it's important to remember that the Eldership is the governing body for spiritual direction. Many times Deacons are mistakenly appointed as Elders due to their tireless dedication to the work. This will cripple them in their gifting and hinder the overall work of God in the ministry.

Offices Within The Church:

The five Offices in Ephesians 4:11 are sometimes called the "ascension gifts". ***And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*** (Ephesians 4:11)

This is not a listing of all the gifts in the Bible by any means. There are many gifts, all of which work together to make up God's ministry in and through a given body of believers. The following gifts were clearly given to outline God's order for His work within the local church body.

The Ministry Of The Apostle:

There is great misunderstanding of the ministry of the apostle. Taken from the original Greek word "apostolos", the closest literal definition for the word apostle is "*one who is sent forth*". Further definition is "*a sent one, an ambassador, a delegate, a messenger, a missionary, one commissioned and authorized by another to represent another and carry out his will and purposes.*" Interestingly, the word "Apostle" comes from the same Latin root that we derive our word "Missionary" from. I think a lot of people have a hard time with the concept of Apostleship today because they think we are referring to someone with the equal gifting and responsibilities of the original twelve. The original twelve apostles walked with Jesus. They were given the responsibility of being the foundational apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ and they will sit on the twelve thrones in heaven. They are called the "twelve apostles of the Lamb", showing a definite distinction between the original twelve and the later apostles.

There is a definite order to the apostles. Christ is THE Apostle. ***Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;*** (Hebrews 3:1) Then we have the twelve apostles of the Lamb - {Rev. 21:14} Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Nathanael, Thomas, Matthew, James {son of Alphaeus}, Simon, Judas {or Thaddeus}, and Judas Iscariot.

There are some who would argue that the ministry of the apostle ended with the original twelve. Scripture clearly refutes this by making reference to more than twenty Apostles in the New Testament. Some of the references are indirect so we will stick to only those that are absolute:

And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:26) Some argue that Matthias was not a true apostle and that Paul actually completed the twelve. This view is not sound as we see that upon Christ's resurrection He was seen by the "twelve" and not the "eleven". ***And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:*** (1 Corinthians 15:5) Paul had not yet been converted.

But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. (Acts 14:4) Barnabas is clearly identified as an apostle.

Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. (Romans 16:7) Two more little known apostles.

Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. (1 Thessalonians 2:6) Paul is referring to himself, Silas, and Timothy from his introduction at the beginning of the letter; ***Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*** (1 Thessalonians 1:1)

There are a number of other references in the Bible but this is sufficient to prove the ongoing ministry of the apostle. From the work they did in the New Testament we see apostles as establishers and overseers of fellowships and ministries of the Church. This is a limited definition for sure, but certainly accurate. It does hold as a good definition of many missionaries. The only problem is that our modern assumption and definition of the word "missionary" often requires that a person be on foreign soil. This is sad since we have many great missionary/apostles here in the U.S. who are simply not recognized as such.

The Ministry Of The Prophet:

The prophet is probably the second most misunderstood ministry of those described in Ephesians chapter 4. When many people hear the word prophet they think of either someone who speaks in King James English all the time or some way-out fortune teller. There are a number of words in the original Greek text that are translated into "prophet" in our English translations. The simplest definition would be "*one who serves as God's mouthpiece*". A literal translation would be "*an inspired speaker*". Inspired speech may include foretelling of the future, preaching, relaying a message of rebuke from the Lord, or simply proclaiming the Word of God. The nature of prophecy is basically two-fold:

1. Forth-telling - Preaching; The prophet speaks for God to the people. This will include such things as exhortation, reproof, warning, edification, and comfort.
2. Fore-telling - Prediction; The prophet speaks for God, communicating His mind for the future. Often both the past and present will be used to deal with the future. Many times the purpose of prophetic prediction is to produce present godliness.

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. ²⁸ Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? (1 Corinthians 12:28-29)

But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. (1 Corinthians 14:3)

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; (1 Corinthians 12:8)

The ministry of the prophet is clear in the Word. The church of today needs prophets desperately. Leonard Ravenhill once said, "*The world could use more prophets than preachers. Preachers make pulpits famous, prophets make prisons famous.*" The prophets *were* the preachers in the church of old. This has led to some of the confusion. In our time we assume the Pastor is always the main preacher.

The Ministry Of The Evangelist:

There is little misunderstanding about the ministry of the evangelist. The three Greek words translated "evangelist" all have similar meanings; "*A preacher or messenger of good news*". Also, "*To announce good news or glad tidings*". We know the ministry of an evangelist to be one of sharing the gospel with the lost and the evangelist has a unique anointing to win them to the Lord. This is certainly good news. It's interesting to note that many of the people we label "evangelists" spend most of their time preaching to Christians. It's very possible that many of our "evangelists" are actually prophets. Many "evangelists", including myself, spend much of their time exhorting Christians. This is not a bad thing, it may just show an overlap and a diversity of gifts.

The Ministry Of The Pastor:

Even though the word "pastor" is one that we are all very familiar with, it's also possibly the most misunderstood office of ministry today. Although the Greek word "poimen" is only translated "pastor" once in the Bible, it actually shows up 18 times. 17 times it is translated "*shepherd*". "Shepherd" is indeed the best literal translation of the word. The pastor is a shepherd. The Pastors oversee the flock; feeding, guiding, and superintending them. The Pastor is not necessarily one who possesses a number of gifts. Our modern day application of the pastoral ministry has tended to lump all the gifts together in the pastor's role. Our modern structure tends to say that those who pastor must preach as well. This is not true in scripture. In fact, there is no connection made between pastoring and preaching. It's possible they could possess both the gift of pastoring and preaching, but often they don't. I have met many pastors who were terrible preachers. Many of them would love to stop preaching and simply pastor but the power of the paycheck forbids it. You see, the paycheck is the main reason that we lump the gifts together and expect the pastor to do them all. We feel that if we have all of the offices of ministry in operation within the church we will have to give them all a paycheck. This is sad as well. Another tragedy of the "one-pastor" system is that it promotes the mentality that there are only one or two pastors in a given church. They are the ones on the payroll. Any given church of a hundred people could have ten or more pastors in it. It's sad to assume that because they don't get paid they are not pastors.

A friend of mine once asked me, "*the Bible says to bear one another's burdens. When did we decide it was okay to hire someone to bear them for us?*" The "single-pastor central-figure" system allows many in the Body of Christ to assume they can rightly pay someone else to carry their spiritual responsibilities. No office has carried this load more than those in Pastoral leadership.

The Ministry Of The Teacher:

There are several Greek words translated "*teacher*" in the New Testament. Inclusively they are defined "*one who instructs, and by their teaching causes others to learn. Instructs others in matters of life and doctrine*". A teacher should be characterized by a spirit of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. The teacher should give his life to the perfecting of the Saints.

It should be noted that often there is an overlapping of abilities among the various gifts in the order of the Church. An individual called to one of these leadership gifts can possess more than one gifting but generally will carry a unique anointing in one of the offices of ministry. It is a mistake to assume that everyone must have one of the offices or gifts to be of value in the life and ministry of the church.

Proper Motivation For Ministry And Leadership:

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:28)

Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? ³⁰ Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? ³¹ But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way. ¹ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. ² And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. (1 Corinthians 12:29—13:2)

Paul says, ***“But covet earnestly the best gifts,”*** Many have misinterpreted this verse and think that Teachers should strive to be Prophets, Prophets should strive to be Apostles, and so on. It's far more likely that he was referring to the verses to follow as he says, ***“But covet earnestly the best gifts”***, and then leads into an example, ***“and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way”***. Then he goes on to explain that the greatest gift is charity.

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. ⁹ For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰ But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. ¹² For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. ¹³ And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. (1 Corinthians 13:8-13 Emphasis mine)

“The greatest of these is charity”. That should tell us what we should eagerly desire. You should not covet someone else's office of ministry, there's too much of that in the Body already. God has already figured out what He wants you to do with your life. ***Ephesians 2:10 ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*** One does not become an Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor, Teacher, Elder, Deacon, or attain any other ministry of God by training. Training can be valuable in our growth and maturity as we learn to operate in our gifts. However, these gifts and offices are ordained by God alone and one operates in them only through His anointing.

True Leadership

Session One Review

1. Should the churches government structure mimic the world's, or our nation's? Why or why not? _____

2. What elements are necessary for an individual to have the proper attitude for a leader?

3. Why do we need leadership? Why must it be defined? _____

4. Of the five types of historic government listed in the study, which one does God ordain?

True Leadership

Session Two Review

1. Where is the concept of clergy and laity found in the Bible? _____

2. Where is the concept of “congregational government” found in the Bible? _____

3. What is the ministry of the elder? _____

4. Name some of the scriptural qualifications for eldership? _____

5. How does an elder get their position according to scripture? _____

6. What does Juan Ortiz mean by “the upside down church”? _____

True Leadership

Session Three Review

1. What is the ministry of the deacon? _____

2. What are the scriptural requirements for the deacon? _____

3. What are the five church leadership gifts given in Ephesians 4:11? _____

4. What does the word “apostle” mean? _____

5. What is the difference between the original twelve “apostles of the Lamb” and other apostles listed in scripture?

6. What is the ministry of the apostle? _____

Discipleship

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Matthew 28:18-20

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Contrary to academic and literary convention, all pronouns referring to God, His Word, or His Church will be capitalized.

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All Scriptures taken from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

Discipleship: What is it?

A “disciple” literally means “a learner” or “a pupil”. Therefore, a disciple of Christ would be a person who is a student of Christ’s. But, as we have already covered in the Lordship section, the Biblical meaning of a disciple goes much deeper than simply being a student. A disciple of Christ is 100% committed to Him. One must place their entire well being in His hands. To become a disciple of Christ one has to lay down their plans, goals, dreams, desires, and entire will in order to surrender to His perfect will and teachings. Peter, one of the first disciples of Jesus (**Matt. 4:18-20**), made the following statement about the level of commitment he had made to the Lord, ***Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee.*** (Luke 18:28)

In fact our commitment to our Lord Jesus goes so deep that we actually cease to have our own life, it is His life. ***“ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price:”*** (1 Corinthians 6:19b-20a)

Although one becomes a disciple upon accepting the Lordship of Christ, it is a lifelong process of growth where we are continually challenged to be conformed closer and closer to His perfect image. *Discipleship is the term that we use to describe that process.*

Discipleship: How does it happen?

Discipleship happens through relationships. First of all there is a relationship between man and God. As pointed out above, one can obviously not be a disciple of Christ without entering into a relationship with Him. Second, discipleship is a relationship between man and man. As we will discuss below, Jesus’ model of Discipleship involves close personal relationships and the example of a Christian life and ministry.

Jesus’ Model of Discipleship

During His earthly ministry Jesus had thousands that followed Him for many different reasons. Jesus was never interested in spending all His time with these people. He did preach to them and minister to their needs to some extent but these large crowds were not the focus of His ministry. Jesus did have a plan for reaching each one in those multitudes but His plan did not depend on those multitudes, it depended on a small group of people. Jesus called twelve ordinary men to follow Him; to become His disciples. These men left everything they had to follow Jesus and He in turn invested everything in these men. Jesus knew that His time on earth was to be short. He knew that His purpose on earth was not to take His message to the entire world. His purpose was to become the way of salvation and to lay the framework for the structure of His Body, the Church, that would take His message to the entire world. That framework is discipleship. Jesus knew that if He took the time to train up a handful of people and taught them to then train up others, His message of salvation would surely reach every living person on earth.

Throughout the life of the Church numerous people have come up with many different and creative ways to reach this world for Christ. I believe that there is always room for creativity and new ideas but there really is no need to look for more ways to win the lost to Christ. Jesus has already given us His plan for winning the world to Christ. In fact, in His final words before being taken up into heaven after the Resurrection, Jesus commissioned every one that would ever bear the name Christian with the responsibility of carrying out His plan.

The Great Commission

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. ¹⁹ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.
(Matthew 28:18-20)

Shortly after I became a Christian I read these verses and I assumed as many do that this means that we are supposed to get everyone saved. While there is obviously truth in the fact that this commission includes winning people to the Lord, it does not end there. Jesus commissioned us to ***“teach all nations”*** and to ***“teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”*** Our responsibility does not end when a person accepts the Lord. Their salvation is where our responsibility begins and then it continues as we reach out in love to disciple and teach that person in the ways of the Lord. When we are involved in the discipleship of a person we may always be a part of their lives but we certainly must stay involved until that person is actively sharing their faith and taking part in the discipleship of others.

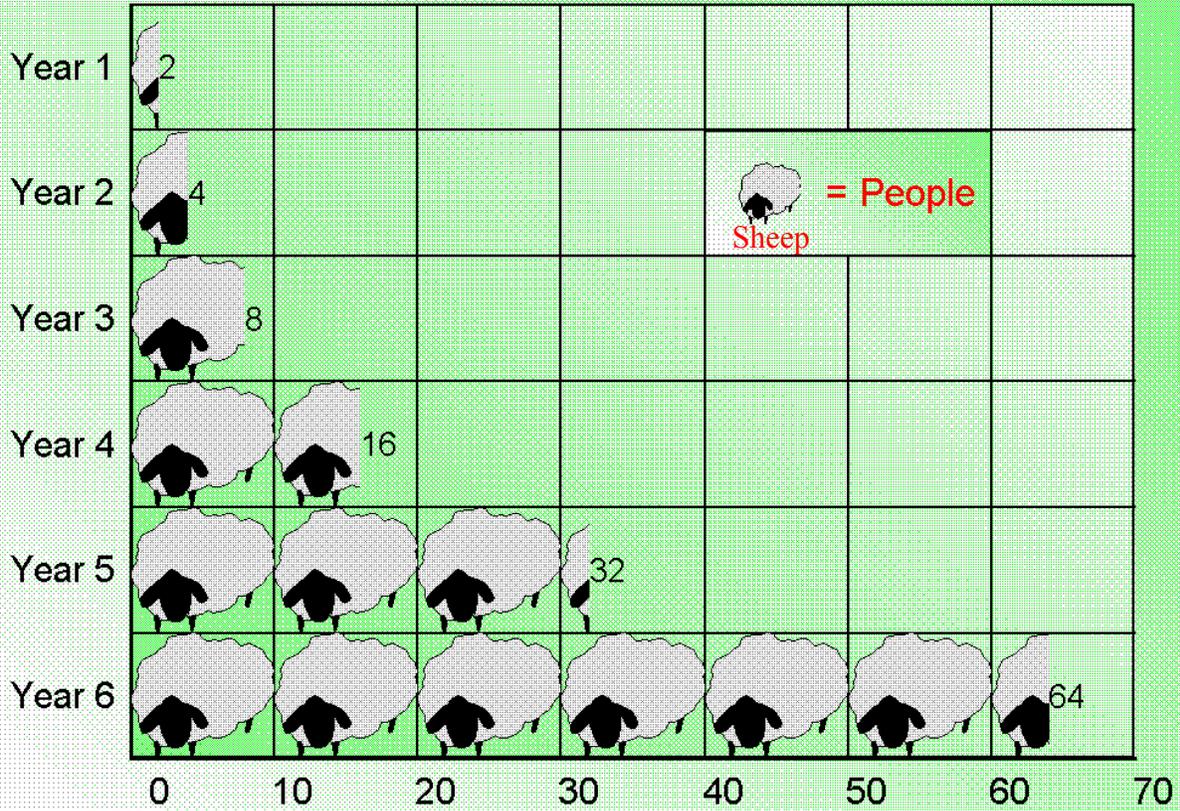
Many times we overlook the fact that the Lord’s plan of discipleship is incredibly effective. It seems so simple but I have yet to hear a plan that is even slightly statistically equal to the one that Jesus laid out for us so many years ago.....

Jesus’ Plan on Paper

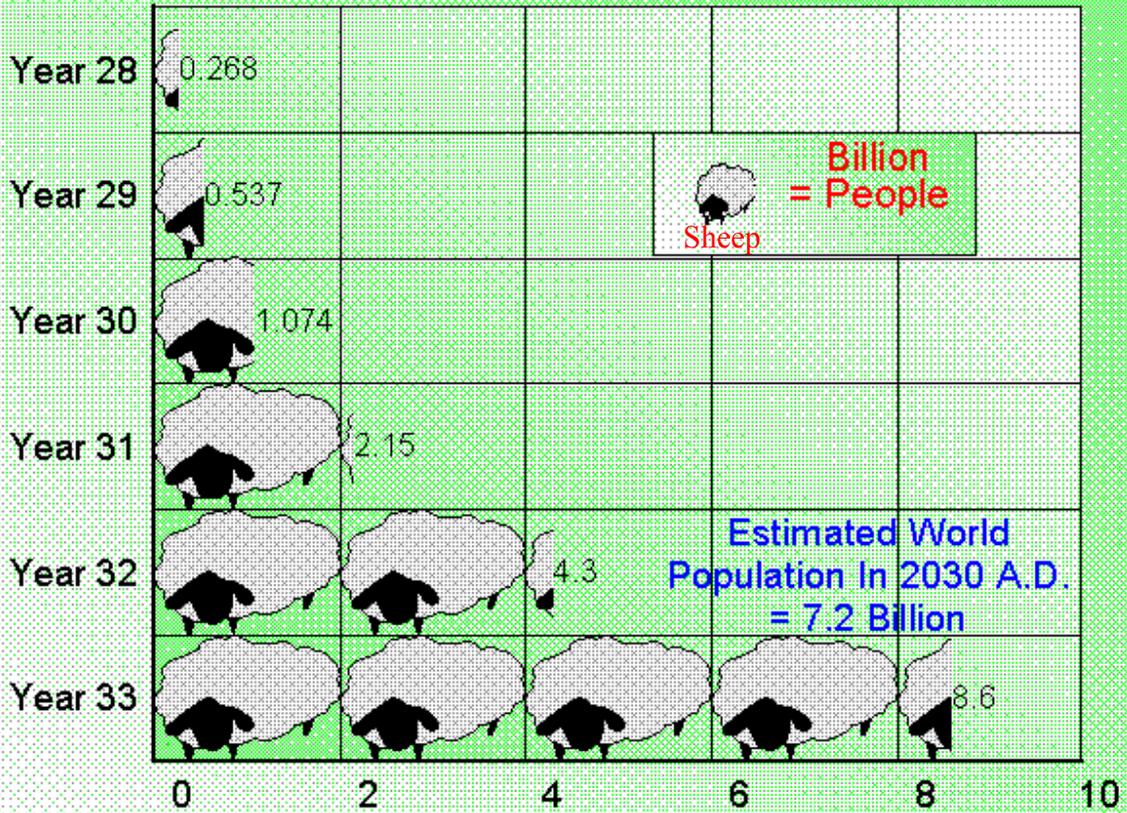
Let’s say I am 25 years old and I am a disciple of Christ and I am at a point in that process where I am able to disciple others. For the purposes of this illustration, let’s assume that I am the only Christian on earth at this moment. This year I am going to really invest myself into one person and I am going to win them to the Lord and disciple them up to the point where they can and will disciple another person. So it is 1997 and there are 2 disciples of Christ in the world - Me and that one other person. Now in 1998 I will take another disciple and my first disciple will also take a disciple. So in 1998 there are now 4 disciples of Christ in the world. Now in 1999 I will take another disciple and each other disciple will also take a disciple. So in 1999 there are now 8 disciples of Christ in the world. (See illustration on page 129) Following this simple and very realistic model, by the year 2025 when I was 53 years old there would be 268,000,000 disciples of Christ in the world. And by the year 2030 when I was 58 years old there would be 8,600,000,000 disciples of Christ in the world. That is the entire population of the world plus some extra growth in only 33 years! (*Estimated world population in the year 2030 is 7.2 Billion people*)

Now that is a plan that works out on paper! Many times we overlook discipleship as a valid way to win the world because it seems to start so slowly. The concept of simply sharing our lives with one person a year and training them to do the same seems so simple that it is hard to believe it could ever be so effective. Mass evangelism, on the other hand, seems to produce the more instant results that this world is so fond of. (See page 130) We are quick to glorify the people that win the masses to Christ. (I am not attempting to de-value Evangelism but to stress the need for true discipleship in the Church today.) Someone has got to take on the responsibility of bringing believers on to maturity.

Jesus' Plan on Paper



Jesus' Plan on Paper



Interpersonal Discipleship actually produces greater results than even the most outrageous fictional Mass-Evangelism example. Below is a graph of the comparison between the type of discipleship we have been discussing and a fictional evangelist that is going to win 700,000 people to the Lord every day.

After the first year the Mass Evangelist has won 255.5 million people to the lord and the the one Discipling has won 2. After 5 years the Mass Evangelist has won 1.533 billion to the lord and the ones Discipling have won 32. (It is obvious why we, as the Church, and the world would exalt the Evangelist as a huge success and look on the ones Discipling as failures in comparison.)

The Church has been fooled by the pattern of this world into judging it's success by numbers. By focusing our attention on attaining large numbers of converts we, the Church, have lost sight of Christ's focus on the surrender of our will to His Lordship and Holiness.

By year 29 we see that the Evangelist has won 7.4095 Billion to the Lord and the ones that are Discipling have won 536.5 million to the Lord. (This is where we really begin to see the power of multiplication at work.) Surprisingly, by year 33 the ones Discipling have beat the Evangelist to the goal of winning the entire world to Christ!!

The Mass Evangelist's target of 700,000 per day is impossible. Even if it were possible, the best that could be hoped for is that the converts would somehow hang on to their new found faith on their own as he could not have anything to do with the people on a personal level. They have been won over but not taken on to maturity as is the case with true disciples of Christ.

So why do we not see these incredible results in practice today? We have lost sight of our mission

The Church : A Headquarters for Discipleship

The Church holds many similarities to a military headquarters. A military headquarters is a place for strategic planning, training soldiers, mobilizing troops, and a place of refuge for the wounded. The leadership of a military unit is normally given orders for a particular mission that they are expected to successfully complete. It is then up to that leadership to plan the best way to accomplish that mission in their specific area and situation. Once they have done this they then go to their well trained soldiers and send them out to complete the mission. Accomplishing the mission is the only concern for everyone involved. If it becomes apparent that the mission is not being accomplished, the leadership must then re-evaluate their plan and make the changes that are necessary in order to see the success of the mission.

God has ordained the Local Church to be the headquarters for ministry in a given area. The leadership of the Church has been given the orders for the mission that they are expected to successfully complete. Those orders are the “Great Commission” - Matthew 28:18-20 ***And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. ¹⁹ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*** From this order we receive the instructions to “teach all nations” and to “teaching them to observe all thingsd whatsoever I have commanded you.” It is now up to the leadership to plan the best way to accomplish this mission in their specific area and situation. The leadership must then ensure that their soldiers are well trained and aware of their mission. The soldiers are then mobilized to complete their mission. If it becomes apparent that the mission is not being accomplished, the leadership must then re-evaluate their plan and make changes that are necessary in order to see the success of the mission. (Many times the Church is stuck in traditions and refuses to change their ways of doing things. Continuing with the same methods when they cease to be effective is like a soldier heading out to fight in world war 3 with a horse and a sword.)

There are many reasons that the Church today is often falling short of their mission. We are going to look at some of the more common ones:

1. Church Order:

We have already covered this area in depth in the “True Leadership” section so I will just make a couple of comments on the necessity of a true Biblical order of leadership. If we are to have a Church that is successfully accomplishing their mission, our leaders must have the authority to be leaders. Many Church leaders are attempting to move forward with the a vision from the Lord but are crippled because their congregations are in control and they do not want to follow. You can imagine how ridiculous it would be in the military if the soldiers had the authority to tell their leaders that they did not want to follow their direction. It just wouldn't work! In order for the Church to move forward to accomplish it's mission each person involved must take their proper, God Ordained, position. From the Scripture we see that every part of the Body is necessary and belongs to all the others. ***For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵ If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁶ And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? ¹⁸ But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. ¹⁹ And if they were all one member, where were the body? ²⁰ But now are they many members, yet but one body.*** (1 Corinthians 12:12-20) and

Romans 12:4-5 *For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.* We often use these Scriptures to teach that every part is important but they also apply to the statement that each part should be in its place. God has made some people leaders in the Body but most people are called to follow that leadership. The Church is being crippled by power struggles. The congregation wants to tell the leadership how to do things. If a member of the congregation does not like the leadership's direction they kick up a fuss, refuse to follow, and attempt to rally supporters to have the leadership's desires overthrown. What would happen to our physical bodies if they behaved this way? Here is a rather tongue-in-cheek little story to illustrate this point:

The Little Finger that wanted to be a Brain

Eyes - "Hey brain."
 Brain - "Yes, who is it?"
 Eyes - "It's me, the eyes. It is dark in the room. We better turn on the light before we go in."
 Brain - "O.K." "Hey arm. Reach for that light switch."
 Arm - "Yes sir."
 Brain - "Now finger." ~ ~ ~ ~ **"Finger!"** ~ ~ ~ ~ **"FINGER!!!!"**
 Finger - "Yeah, what do you want now?"
 Brain - "Please flip on that light switch."
 Finger - **"NO WAY!!!! You can't tell me what to do."**
 Body - "Yes he can little finger. He is the brain and it is his job to direct you. You belong to the Body and we need to use you."
 Finger - **"No Way! I am not a finger"**
 Body - "What do you mean you are not a finger. The Eyes tell us you look like a finger and the other fingers say you feel like a finger and the nerve endings say you are designed to be a finger and to respond when a finger is needed."
 Finger - **"I am not a finger. I am a brain. I am only in a fingers place because that thing pretending to be a brain has taken my place. He is actually the finger and I am the brain."**
 Narrator: To make a long battle short. The finger finally convinced some of the other parts of the Body to follow him instead of the brain. So they walked into the dark room without ever turning on the light. Now the eyes could not see that there was a table in the room and as the Body came near it the big toe was stubbed into the table leg. As the entire Body screamed together in pain the waist bent over and the head was struck on the corner of the table and knocked unconscious. The Body fell to the ground where it lay unconscious, on the floor, in the dark. The whole Body suffered because the finger was not content with being a finger. **THE END**

Congregational government in the Church is just like having our fingers and toes make the decisions for the rest of the Body. Even though our fingers and toes are necessary and valuable to the whole Body, they are just not gifted for leadership. We all need to know our God Ordained place within the Body and we need to be there. There is no place for a power struggle within the Body of Christ. If you are a finger, be the best one you can be as you serve the Body to the best of your ability.

2. The Lack of Proper Focus in the Church:

Discipleship is our primary mission as a Church and it is of critical importance that we remain focused on that vision. As soldiers go into battle they have their mission etched on their brains. They view everything they encounter in light how it applies to their mission. If they lose sight of their vision or get off on a tangent, their mission will be quickly defeated.

Often times, as the Church, we become distracted from our primary mission to make disciples and become consumed with chasing down people that are not really interested in giving everything

to Jesus. The following is taken from the Lordship module on page 18 of this study.

Another important characteristic of Christ's example is that He never spent His time chasing down reluctant disciples. He spent His efforts and gave Himself fully to those who were truly hungry for His teaching and Lordship. In a moment we will see what became of those who were hungry for personal gain rather than truth.

This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. ⁵⁹ These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.⁶⁰ Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? ⁶¹ When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? ⁶² What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? (John 6:58-62)

It's as if Jesus is saying, "if you don't like it maybe I ought to just leave. Am I not enduring the very things I speak of? Am I not experiencing life in the flesh just as you are? If you truly come to me you will realize that this life has nothing to offer you anyway, so why do you cling to it?" He goes on.....

It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. ⁶⁵ And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. ⁶⁶ From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. (John 6:63-66)

Now at the time that Jesus was teaching these things there were thousands following Him. He was having a hard time finding a place to rest because the people were constantly seeking Him out. They had seen or heard of His miracles and many even believed that He was the Messiah. They wanted to get in on the deal. "What does He have to offer me" was the question on many of their minds. The scripture goes on to say that after this teaching many turned back and no longer followed Him. After Jesus' death and resurrection how many were left in the upper room?..... 120 who had truly made Him Lord.

Jesus never spent His time chasing down reluctant disciples. The Church today is always trying to keep the multitudes happy. Jesus weeded through the multitudes to find those who were willing to give Him everything.

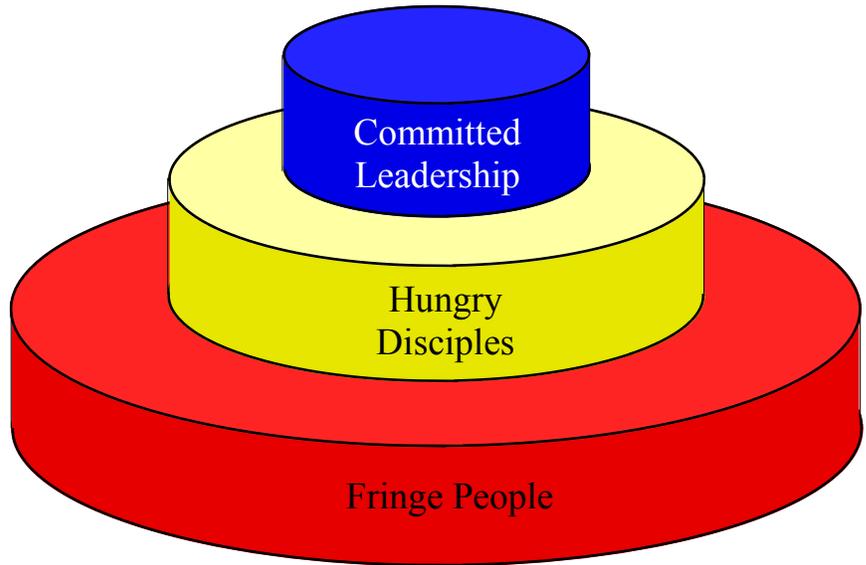
Illustration: Jesus' Focus vs. Misguided Focus

As we mentioned earlier, there were two types of people following Jesus around. There were those who were really serious about giving Him their lives and then there were those who were interested for various other reasons. In this illustration, the Inner Circle begins with Jesus alone. The Middle Circle represents those who were true disciples. And the Outer Circle represents the multitudes that were following Him. Jesus never spent His time chasing down those in the Outer Circle. He took those in the Middle Circle and discipled them into the Center Circle. They in turn would then disciple someone from the Second Circle and so on. Now as this happened those in the Outer Circle were drawn into the Middle Circle where they were then discipled into the Center Circle. After Jesus ascended to heaven the center circle consisted of 12 Apostles and there were a little over 100 others (Acts 1:15) who were committed disciples and somewhere in the Middle or Center Circles. The multitudes of people that were content to stay in that Outer Circle easily walked away when persecution came.

In the Church today we have the same three groups of people. We have the Inner Circle of people.

These are usually the Church leadership and maybe a few other people that are seriously dedicated to the Lord and are at the place where they can disciple others. The Middle Circle of people are the ones that have a solid and consistent relationship with the Lord. They are coming to all the services, reading their Bible and seem to be doing pretty good. Then there is the Outer Circle of people. These people are kind of out there somewhere. They are not too committed to the

fellowship and getting them to prayer meetings or special services is like pulling teeth. Jesus' model was for those in the Inner Circle to spend their time discipling those in the Middle Circle. Unfortunately in the Church today, what typically happens is that those in the Inner Circle spend all time and resources chasing after those in the Outer Circle. On the rare occasion that they can get someone into the Middle Circle they then leave them there and continue chasing those in the Outer Circle. Jesus would never have done this. If the Lord knew that focusing His energy on these people would be very unfruitful then we as His followers need to seriously re-think our focus. Our focus needs to be on bringing those in the Middle Circle into the Inner Circle. All this brings each of us to the question - Which circle am I in?



3. A Lack of Hunger:

The primary reason that it is unfruitful to chase after those in the “Outer Circle” is that you can not disciple someone who is not hungry for discipleship. Jesus’ message always forced people to a point of decision. If they were not hungry and decided not to accept His message, they went their own way and He never chased after them. If they were hungry and accepted His message, He gave them all He had. Each one of us has a limited ability minister to others. Lord has given each of us a different amount of gifting, time, and other resources that we can use as we minister to others. Even though we are all different, we all have something to be used in ministering to others. If we are to be wise stewards of our limited resources, we will invest ourselves into those who are truly hungry. (Again, we still minister to the multitudes but our focus is to find the hungry among the multitudes and bring them on to maturity in Christ.)

4. A Lack of Commitment

The section on Lordship covered the issue of commitment. It concerns me very deeply that there are many in our churches today that try to separate Salvation and Lordship. This is a strange teaching that simply has no truth in it. We come to the Lord with everything or we do not come at all. We can not give Jesus half our lives. Since everything we are and everything we have belongs to the Lord, we simply cannot say, “I am not ready to make that kind of commitment”.

In the same way, there is an incredible personal sacrifice involved in effectively discipling others. Many Christians feel that they have a choice as to whether they make that sacrifice or not. This is another belief that is very confusing to me. If we have given our lives to Christ, how can we have a say in how that life is invested. Jesus wants to invest each of us in the lives of others.

5. Failure of Hungry Disciples to Continue on to Maturity by Discipling Others

There are many reasons that some people never begin to share their faith and go on to disciple others. We will never reach our full potential in Christ nor will we have a complete grasp of all the blessings that are ours in Jesus until we begin to actively share our faith and invest our lives in others.

That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. (Philemon 6)

The lord never intended for us to need college or years of experience in order for us to share our faith with others. Training can help us to grow in effectiveness but all God needs is a willing heart. We simply need to share what He has done, in this life that is His, and with the strength that He provides. His perfect plan was for us to receive from him and then turn around and give what we have found to others.

Let each of us prayerfully examine our lives and discover where we fit in this whole process. Being honest with God, ourselves, and others about where we are right now is the first step in fulfilling the “Great Commission”. If our heart is right, the first question to ask is “Who can disciple me”, and not “Who can I disciple.” If we are not able to disciple others then we need to get there. If we are able but not involved we are neglecting our responsibility. We are all commissioned by the Lord for one purpose:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. ¹⁹ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Discipleship

Session One Review

1. What does it mean to be a Disciple of Jesus? _____

2. Why did Jesus choose to focus on individuals instead of the multitudes? _____

3. What does Matthew 28:18-20 tell us about our responsibility as Christians?

4. As believers, what is our responsibility when someone gets saved? _____

Discipleship

Session Two Review

1. What is Jesus' plan of ministry? _____

2. If we followed Jesus model of ministry and discipleship, how many people could be saved in 33 years? _____

3. Why does the the modern church seem more inclined to embrace the mass evangelism model of ministry? _____

Discipleship

Session Three Review

1. How can the church be a headquarters for ministry? _____

2. Why did the little finger want to be a brain? _____

3. Did Jesus spend His time chasing down reluctant disciples? _____

4. What do the three circles on page 134 mean? What is the common mistake of many ministries in this regard? _____

Discipleship

Session Four Review

1. How do you disciple someone who is not hungry to grow? _____

2. Who is qualified to disciple someone else? _____

3. What does it mean to make an investment in someone's life? _____

4. How can we effect change to make discipleship a key focus in the church?
