

Beginning
in
Grace

**What the Bible Teaches about a
Relationship with God**

Six Basic Truths for Every Seeker

by

Ed Underwood

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Before You Begin

I know exactly how you feel.

Over thirty years ago a man asked me if I would be interested in finding out more about Jesus Christ. We met together every week to study the Bible. I recall how strange the names sounded. I wondered if I ever would really understand this stuff. I especially remember the first time he asked me to pray—out loud! I felt sick as I murmured something. Later, when I considered what I actually said I felt foolish. “What a stupid prayer!”

But we hung in there. Over the weeks something began to happen deep within my soul. I discovered the absolute wonder and joy of developing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I also found a friend who cared enough to share his life with me.

It literally changed my life. Nothing has been the same since. Those weeks with a caring and loving leader guiding me toward a deep and abiding relationship with Jesus Christ were the beginning of an exciting and fulfilling life I never imagined possible.

I was extremely fortunate. Someone cared enough to invest the time I needed to get to know Jesus Christ. The one word he repeated over and over was *grace*. I understood from the very beginning that the Christian life is a life of grace—God loving me so much that He offers me a new life in spite of my shortcomings. I began in grace.

My personal prayer for you is that you too will begin in grace. Grace is experiencing God’s love in a personal way. Grace is the only way we can have a relationship with God. Grace is the only way we can appreciate a relationship with God.

Think of how much evidence you already have that God loves you. Someone is waiting to guide you through these materials. Someone cares enough to share their life with you. Who brought that “someone” into your life? God did! You are already experiencing God’s grace.

Please allow God to love you in this way. I promise that His love will not disappoint you. Some of these lessons may intimidate you. Hang in there. Take your time. Ask questions. But whatever you do, don’t quit. This is the beginning of the greatest adventure there is—experiencing God’s grace through a personal relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ.

Warmly,

Ed Underwood

Pastor, Church of the Open door

What Is Disciple Making?

When Paul wrote his good friend and fellow-laborer Timothy, he gave him very simple and clear instructions:

*You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses,
commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*
(2 Timothy 2:1-2)

Disciple making is the backbone of Christianity. It is teaching the basics, the boot camp for Christians who want to grow in their faith. It involves commitment, but the rewards are exciting and eternal.

Here's the beginning of a plan to take you as far as you want to go!

∞ Beginning in Grace ∞

What the Bible teaches about a relationship with God: six basic truths for every seeker. This six-lesson introduction to Christianity is designed to launch you into a life of eternal significance.

Lesson 1: *How to have a relationship with God*

This is an in-depth look at how to receive God's life. What is eternal life? How can I know I have eternal life? What does it mean to have a relationship with God?

Lesson 2: *The purpose of your relationship with God*

Once you enter a relationship with God, what does He want you to do? This study looks at some of the exciting options available to the child of God. God had something in mind when He gave you eternal life. What is it?

Lesson 3: *Deepening your relationship with God*

What does it mean to be intimate with Jesus Christ? How can I have a deep and meaningful relationship with the Son of God? You will find out that Jesus wants to be your best Friend!

Lesson 4: *Relating to others in Christ*

As you grow in your relationship with Christ, other relationships become more rich and rewarding. This is a survey of what the Bible says about our relationships with family, friends, coworkers, schoolmates, and those we meet in everyday life.

Lesson 5: *Telling others how to have a relationship with Christ*

You can't keep the Good News of the Gospel to yourself. Learn how to tell others about the free gift of salvation with confidence.

Lesson 6: *Relating to your new family in Christ*

The most significant expression of new life in Christ is through the local church. This explains how to get involved by serving Christ in meaningful and exciting ways in the local church.

HOW TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Lesson 1

OVERVIEW

- ◆ God loves you
- ◆ God wants to give you His life, eternal life
- ◆ You can know that you have eternal life

RELATING TO GOD WILL BE RADICALLY DIFFERENT

The deepest need of any human heart is to love and be loved. From birth we desire loving and meaningful relationships. The greatest joys of life come with relationships—parents, families, friends.

Sadly, the word "relationship" often surfaces feelings of disappointment, discouragement, even dread. We all have holes and broken places in our lives as a result of relationships.

Even the most healthy families and friendships depend on frail human character. On our best day we are all weak, self-serving and self-protective. Overwhelmed by the busyness and the pressures of life, we hurt one another. Parents scream in anger or ignore needy moments. Husbands and wives demand and manipulate one another in hurtful ways. Friends let us down. We long to be loved and cared for by someone perfectly reliable and strong.

Many of us have been deeply scarred by unhealthy, dysfunctional families and friendships. Our experiences go beyond frustration and heartache. Abusive relationships have so confused our feelings that we find it almost impossible to trust. Even if we were to meet someone perfectly reliable and strong, we may fear commitment. Risking the pain of relationship and intimacy doesn't seem worth it.

The Bible tells us that God is similar to us in His longing for relationship. He *desires* relationship. Surprisingly, He wants relationships with us, each and every one of us. He wants it far more than we do. The biblical record shows God's relentless pursuit of us so that He can share His life with us. His Son, Jesus Christ, invites everyone to move into a relationship with God. He said very clearly, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

Fortunately, God does not relate to us in the hurtful ways of the world. The Bible says clearly that God doesn't even think the way we do. Read Isaiah 55:8, 9 three times.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."

—Isaiah 55:8, 9

✱ **What do these sentences or verses say about the difference between God's thinking process and ours? That is, what picture from everyday life helps us understand the contrast?**

This means that when it comes to relating to you, God's ways will be radically different from what you've experienced. There are "earthbound ways" of relating and "heavenly ways" of relating. Take some time now to think about this difference.

Something you should know:

God is not going to relate to you in the earthbound ways you have experienced. He's not like your parents, your boss, your teachers, or your friends. God doesn't even think like self-centered weak people.

✳ **Earthbound ways of relating which have disappointed me:**

Heavenly ways of relating I would hope God is committed to:

When you consider entering into a relationship with God you should erase your earthly expectations. God has a deep, passionate and uncompromising affection for you. His love is different than any you have experienced. The Bible characterizes His love for us as unconditional. He simply loves us because He chooses to. There are no conditions, "because of's" or "if's" with His love. His love depends on His deep and perfect character, not on our performance.

Deep down we all know that we cannot keep life in working order. There is a painful void in our life. We long to be loved and cared for by someone perfectly reliable and strong.

The God of the Bible is that Someone. He wants to give His life to you and make you part of His family.

✳ **What relationship in life has been most disappointing to you? _____**

Why? _____

The Bible will be your guide

Before you begin . . . a "navigation" course. Like any other new subject, the Bible can be confusing until you're able to find your way around it. So let's take some time to familiarize ourselves with God's Word, the Bible. For some of you, this will simply be a refresher course. Others will be exploring new territory.

You're going to need a Bible to answer the following questions. We recommend a good modern translation like the New King James Version or the New American Standard Bible. If you don't have a Bible call your leader. He or she will provide one.

Spend some time becoming familiar with your Bible. The main division you'll find is between the Old and the New Testaments. The Old Testament is mostly about God's chosen nation, Israel. The New Testament is mostly about God's family today, the church. There are sixty-six books in the Bible, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New.

Find the Table of Contents in the front of your Bible. It gives you the page number of each book. Turn now to the Table of Contents to find the page numbers for the books of Genesis, Proverbs, Mark, and Galatians. Turn to the page number of each book.

Once you have found the Table of Contents it's really pretty simple to find any passage in the Bible. The books of the Bible are divided into chapters, and the chapters are divided into verses. To find John 3:16 in your Bible, follow these steps:

- Find the *Gospel of John in the Table of Contents. (Note: It is the 4th book in the N.T.)
- Now find chapter 3.
- Now look down to verse 16.
- Write down the page number of John 3:16 in your Bible: _____
- Write down the words of John 3:16 below:

Talking to God:

Prayer is simply talking to God. Find a place where you can be alone for a few minutes. Talk to God about this whole subject of relationships. It's absolutely appropriate to be totally honest with God. Tell Him of your fears and your hesitation to trust Him. Tell Him that you long to be loved and cared for by Someone perfectly reliable and strong. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you through His word, the Bible. Tell Him you are willing to find out more about how to have a relationship with Him. He will answer your prayer.

Record the time, date and place of your prayer here: _____

How did you feel after you "talked to God?" _____

John 3:16 is an important verse.

***Gospel means "good news" — there are four gospels in the New Testament.**

Something you should know:

If you have any problems with this study or a personal need, call your leader at any time . . . day or night.

Be totally honest with God!

GOD INVITES YOU TO RECEIVE HIS LIFE

When it comes to having a relationship with God, there are three central truths found in the Bible:

Three central truths to know→

- God loves you
- God wants to give you His life, eternal life
- You can know that you have eternal life

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

—John 3:16

Amazing Love!

• GOD LOVES YOU

The Bible calls the report that God sent His Son to rescue the world “Good News.” It all begins with God’s love for those who never seem to measure up...and that’s all of us!

God’s love for you cost Him everything!

Study John 3:16 by reading it three times and then write it in your own words.

Something you should know:

The term eternal life may be new to you. This is the life God wants to give to you; it is His life. The Bible calls it a priceless treasure for any man or woman since it gives us the option to go beyond the mere endless existence which every human will experience. Eternal life never ends and cannot be experienced apart from a relationship with God.

✳ **What did God's love for you cause Him to do?** _____

What does it mean to you that God "gave" His Son for you? _____

How does it make you feel when you think that God sent His Son to die for you so that you may have eternal life? _____

How can you receive eternal life? _____

Turn to First John 4:9-10. Notice this is a different book of the Bible than the Gospel of John you just left. First John is a little book near the end of your Bible.

✳ **Read the verses three or four times, then write them out in your own words.**

A Little Help . . .

Manifest means to make something clear, to show it openly. The word propitiation means a payment that restores favor. It is used in the Bible to describe the turning away of God's wrath because of the offering of Christ.

✳️ What was God's greatest demonstration of His love for you? _____

How much would you have to love someone to allow your own child to die for him/her?

How do you feel when you think of God's love for you in these terms?

God's love for you is unconditional.

In a world of conditional types of love, the unconditional love of God is a difficult concept. Most of us have been told, "I will love you *when* you are lovely." We know we are loved *because* we are pretty, *because* we are smart or gifted, *because* we have been supportive. We feel loved *if* we perform, *if* we agree, *if* we help.

God's love isn't a *because of* or *if* type of love. His love is the kind we need—an *in spite of* type of love.

✳️ Look up Romans 5:8. Read it five or six times slowly.

Now rewrite the verse in your own words. _____

How did God demonstrate His love for us? _____

When did Jesus die for us? _____

Why is this significant? _____

God loves you—let's review:

God's love isn't like any love you have ever experienced. He loves you unconditionally. John 3:16 tells you that He loved you so much that He sent His Son to die in your place. Romans 5:8 gives you the good news that God is not waiting for you to fix your life, turn from your sin, or begin doing good things before He begins loving you. He loves you right now. Jesus died for you while you were still a sinner! There is nothing you can do to make God love you more. There is nothing you can do to make God love you less. He simply loves you, and He sent His Son to die for your sin to prove it.

When you enter into a relationship with God, you enter into a relationship that is radically different from any other relationship. You become related to Someone who loves you with perfect, unconditional and never-changing love.

This is good news, but the good news only gets better. Not only does God love you, He also wants to give His life to you.

A Little Help . . .

Say it again! This idea of God's unconditional love is repeated over and over again in the Bible. This is common in the Scriptures. God repeats major themes again and again. This repetition is for emphasis so that we can know that this is extremely important. To make sure we get it, God will tell us that the demonstration of His love for us is the offering of His Son as a substitute for our sin.

ALL WHO BELIEVE RECEIVE

• GOD WANTS TO GIVE YOU HIS LIFE—ETERNAL LIFE

Read John 1:12-13 very carefully. These verses are talking about the men and women in the Gospel of John who responded to Jesus' invitation to believe in Him. They all received the Lord Jesus Christ by believing "in His name." At that moment each became a child of God.

Something you should know:

Receive—believe. This is extremely important. A person receives the Lord Jesus by believing "in His name." When we believe His claims about His name, that He is the Christ, the Savior of men and women, we receive Him.

A Little Help . . .

A good way to understand this transaction, the giving of new life, is with our own families.

If parents want to build a family of children who possess their life, there is only one way—by the process of birth. As a result of conception, the parents give their child the nature, the life, which they themselves possess.

If we want to become a part of God's family by receiving His nature, His life, we must be born again with His life from above. It's only possible through the miracle of a new birth, from a new Father who can give us His life so that we may be called His children.

*The way we receive eternal life could not be clearer. The overwhelming evidence of Scripture is that we receive eternal life when we **believe** or **trust** in Jesus Christ.*

✳ **In verse 12, how does John explain what he means by receiving Christ?** _____

What happens to people when they receive Jesus Christ by believing in Him?

Jesus' famous offer of eternal life.

In John 3:1-18 Jesus offers eternal life to a confused religious leader named Nicodemus. Read through these verses three times. As you read underline the phrases *born again*, *eternal life* and *believe*.

✳ **In verses 3-7 Jesus tells Nicodemus that something is absolutely necessary for Him to see the Kingdom of God. What is it?** _____

In verses 15-16 Jesus explains how someone can be born again. What word does He use to describe how a person receives new life from above, eternal life, when they are born again? _____

Jesus' most famous words.

John 3:16 is probably the most quoted verse in the Bible. The reason for its popularity is clear. It tells us how to receive eternal life in a nutshell. Read John 3:16 again, then answer these questions:

✳ **How much did God love us?** _____

When we believe in God's Son, Jesus Christ, what do we possess forever? _____

God wants to give you His life, eternal life—let's review:

You could receive eternal life right now by faith. Many people are confused by the words *faith* and *believe*. Actually, these two words translate the same concept in the original Greek of the New Testament. Believe and faith are just the verb and noun for a concept that is really no different in English than in Greek. That concept is "taking someone at their word, trusting that what they say is true." In English, trust is a synonym for both *faith* and *believe*. Therefore, to have faith or believe means to trust.

The moment you believe that Jesus is the One who is the Christ who died in your place, eternal life is yours—absolutely free—just as He promised.

Today can become your birthday, the day when you are born into God's family—if you will believe in Christ as your Savior.

If you would like to receive eternal life, place your faith in Jesus Christ. He promises to give His life, eternal life to anyone who believes. He paid the price for all of your sins on the Cross. Then He rose from the dead. He wants to be your substitute for the penalty of sin. Sin causes separation from God. Right now, you are living apart from relationship with the One who loves you with perfect love. Failure to believe in Christ in this life will result in eternal separation from God in a place called hell.

How tragic that people reject God's free gift of eternal life. Reject Him no longer. Receive eternal life right now through this prayer expressing your faith in His Son.

"Father, I want a relationship with You. I understand that you sent your Son to die for my sins. Right at this moment, the best way I know how, I believe in Jesus Christ and his death on the Cross as payment for my sin. Thank you for loving me so much that you sent Jesus so that I could have eternal life. In Jesus' name, amen."

If you trusted Christ alone for eternal life, call your leader right now. He or she would love to hear of your decision to trust in Christ.

✳ **Write down the time and place you believed in Jesus.** _____

This is wonderful news. The relationship you have been looking for all your life is yours the moment you believe in Jesus. God loves you and offers eternal life freely to all who believe in His Son. But there is so much more. To begin with, this is a relationship which will never end—it's yours forever. God guarantees that you will never lose this gift of eternal life He gives you the moment you believe.

✳ **Have you placed your faith in the Lord Jesus?** _____

Is there any reason you are hesitant to believe in Christ? _____

←←←← An important step

IT'S YOURS FOREVER!

- **YOU CAN KNOW YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE**

The Good Shepherd's promise!

The Gospel of John records Jesus' claims to be the Christ, the Savior who gives eternal life freely to all who believe. In John 10 His enemies challenge Jesus to tell them plainly, "Are you the Christ?" His answer to His critics has comforted His followers for centuries. "Not only am I the Christ who gives life freely to all who believe," answers Jesus, "But I am also the Good Shepherd who gives my sheep eternal life which can never be lost."

Read John 10:26-30

- ✦ **Read His words in John 10:26-30 and answer the following questions:**

Rewrite the message of these verses in your own words. _____

In verse 26 Jesus points out the distinguishing mark of a person who is not one of His sheep. What is it that they refused to do, proving that they are not one of His sheep?

This would mean that to be a sheep of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, we need to do what? _____

Once we have believed in Jesus, we become one of His sheep. He is the Good Shepherd. What are the promises Jesus makes to His sheep in verses 26-30? _____

When you believe in Jesus Christ you become one of His sheep. This means that you are absolutely secure in your relationship with God. The mighty hand of God holds you and nothing will ever separate you from Him. How does this make you feel?

Read Romans 8:35-39

Read Romans 8:35-39 three times and rewrite the thoughts in your own words. _____

What is the question the Apostle Paul asks the Roman believers in verse 35? _____

- ✦ **How does Paul answer his own question in verses 38 and 39? _____**

Meditate on this wonderful truth. Nothing in the universe is outside God's control; therefore, nothing can separate believers from His love. Write down your thoughts and feelings in response to the unconditional love of God for you. _____

The Good Shepherd's friend agrees

As an eyewitness to the events of Jesus' life, His best friend on earth, John, was there when Jesus made His promise as the Good Shepherd. Years later, long after the death and resurrection of His Savior, John wrote a letter to Christians—First John. In this short letter he summed up his personal thoughts concerning the life and words of the Lord Jesus. Near the end of his letter John goes out of his way to make it perfectly clear that Jesus' promise to give eternal life to all who believe is absolutely true!

Read 1 John 5:11-13 several times.

✳ What does John say is the testimony of God in verse 11? _____

Verse 12 says that all of humanity is divided between two types of people. What are these two contrasting types? _____

Why did John write these words? Look again at verse 13. What is the unconditional promise given to those who believe in Jesus Christ? _____

The last part of verse 13 shows the importance of knowing that we have eternal life. Those who know for sure that they are secure in their relationship with God will be able to continue to believe in Him. That is, they will be able to trust Him more every day to be their Lord—the One they should continually and obediently follow.

✳ Fill in the blank according to the teaching of the Bible in 1 John 5:13: If I _____, I know I have eternal life and this encourages me greatly to trust Him even more!

You can know that you have eternal life—let's review:

God wants you to be sure that you have eternal life. If you believe in Jesus, you have eternal life (John 6:47). This is called *assurance*. Assurance is the personal realization that you possess eternal life. You are a Christian when you can say confidently that you know you have eternal life because you have believed, or trusted, in Jesus Christ.

When you believe in Jesus Christ you become a sheep of His fold. He is the Good Shepherd and His Father promises that He will lose none of His sheep. Nothing can separate you from the love of God. Once you believe in Jesus, you belong to Him forever. You will never be kicked out of the family of God. Eternal life is just that...eternal. It never ends. It is yours forever.

And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

—1 John 5:11-13, NKJV

HOW DO YOU HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

Three central truths have guided our answer to that question:

Something you should know:

God desires to have a relationship with you and He made that possible through the death of His Son.

- **God loves you**
- **God wants to give you His life, eternal life**
- **You can know that you have eternal life**

You need to understand that God is not like anyone you have ever known. He is not petty, threatened, hurtful, self-serving, weak, or mean. He is perfectly reliable and strong. He will never disappoint you, and He desires a relationship with you.

He loves you in a way you have never been loved. His love is unconditional; there is no small print. He simply loves you. He wants to care for you and to guide you through life. He doesn't want you to spend eternity without Him. He doesn't want to be separated from you.

This is why He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for your sin. That's how much He loves you.

He is offering you His life, eternal life, absolutely free. When you believe or have faith in Jesus as your Savior, He gives you His life. Eternal life begins the moment you believe and lasts forever. Once you believe, you're related to Him. There is a joy and purpose to being a part of God's family through the new birth that unbelievers will never know. We'll be talking about this a lot in our next lesson.

When you believe in Jesus, God gives you eternal life, and then He promises that you will never lose it. Once you are in His family, your Heavenly Father will never abandon you.

Take some time right now to write down your thoughts concerning having a relationship with God...whatever you think of. When you meet with your leader this week you will want to share these words.

✳ **My questions about a relationship with God.** _____

My thoughts concerning a relationship with God. _____

My feelings when I consider a personal relationship with God. _____

Central Truth of Lesson One:

You can have a relationship with God by believing in Jesus Christ His Son.

✳ **Have you believed in Jesus?** _____

Do you feel secure in your relationship with God? _____

Spend some time in prayer right now talking with God about your feelings on this subject of having a relationship with Him.

With every lesson you will be assigned a "memory verse." This will be a few sentences from God's Word, the Bible, which sum up the lesson nicely. Over the centuries believers in the God of the Bible have made it a practice to memorize Scripture to strengthen their faith. One man in the Old Testament who had been unfairly thrown into prison because of his faith found great comfort in his memory verses. These truths guarded his soul during difficult days. His thoughts are recorded in a psalm: "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11).

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Ephesians 2:8, 9

Next Time:

Lesson Number _____

Pages _____ to _____

Memory Verse _____

We will meet at _____ (time) on _____ (day) _____ (place)

A Little Help . . .

If you don't feel secure in your relationship with God, you need to re-examine the meaning of the word believe. It means to be persuaded by the words of someone and trusting what they say is true. If you believed Christ and His message about eternal life, you would now feel secure. He promised to give you eternal life when you believed. To have faith in the promise you would have to feel secure in the relationship.

←Verses to memorize.

THE PURPOSE OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Lesson 2

OVERVIEW

- ♦ You have great potential in Christ
- ♦ You have two options in realizing your potential in Christ
- ♦ God gives you four motivations for developing your potential in Christ

RELATING TO GOD WILL BRING NEW MEANING AND PURPOSE TO YOUR LIFE

Our deep need to love and be loved has been met by God Himself. We can have a deep and meaningful relationship with Someone perfectly reliable and strong.

A relationship is a sharing of life between two persons. One of the greatest joys of sharing life with a mate, a child, a friend, or a colleague is a mutual commitment to a common purpose. Friendships grow strong during times of great challenge and resolution. There's something about striving together toward a common goal that builds love and trust between two people.

This experience from everyday life helps us understand an often-ignored dynamic of our relationship with God. Like any relationship, there is a joy of mutual commitment to a common purpose that brings happiness and fulfillment. God desires this type of deep and meaningful relationship with you. He wants you to join Him in what He's doing here on earth. In fact, He has important and significant plans for every new member of His family.

It's important to understand that God had a purpose in mind when He gave you eternal life freely. You memorized Ephesians 2:8-9 last time. Now turn to Ephesians to read the next verse, Ephesians 2:10. Read verse 10 a few times. Now read all three verses together five times. Each time you read the verses, ask God to teach you His truths. Jot down one personal observation from the verses each time you read them.

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

✳ **Now answer these questions concerning these three critical verses:**

The "for" of verse 10 points out the purpose of God saving you by grace through faith. What is the purpose of your salvation? _____

Notice the last phrase in this sentence, "that we should walk in them." What does the word *should* mean to you? _____

A little help . . .

A personal observation simply means "what you see as you read the words."

Something you should know:

Notice, the word is not "would." This is not something that automatically or always happens to every believer. This is what God desires for every Christian, but these good works are not inevitable or automatic and mechanical. Having been saved by grace, through faith, plus nothing, this is what we should do. We should fulfill the potential of our relationship with Christ. God has great and glorious plans for each and every believer. Those who "walk" or live according to His guidance will do these good works.

Verse to Memorize → → →

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 complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work .

—2 Timothy 3:16,

17

A little help . . .

“Complete” can also be translated “mature.” It means to come to completion or maturity, to fulfill the potential of something. That’s God’s ultimate purpose in giving us the Bible. He wants us to read His words and grow up so that we can do what He wants us to do.

Something you should know:

When you became a Christian, God gave you eternal life and brought you into a relationship with His Son so that you could perform eternally significant good works He planned for you before you were even born! He has given you your Bible to guide you toward maturity so that you will be able to accomplish those very works!

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

—2 Corinthians 5:17

Something you should know:

Do you realize that you are a new person in Christ, old things have passed away, and all things are new? This includes your purpose for living. Whether you feel like it or not, the Word of God says very clearly that you have the potential to live a life of eternal significance.

14

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, Which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

The Bible helps you grow.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Verse 16 says the Bible is profitable, or helpful to Christians in four ways—teaching doctrine (biblical principles), reproof (pointing out what we should not be doing), correction (point out what we should be doing), and instruction in righteousness (training us to live in ways that please God).

✳ How have you personally experienced these benefits in your study of the Bible?

Doctrines I have learned? _____

Behaviors I have stopped (reproof)? _____

Changes I have made (corrections) _____

New outlook on life (instruction in righteousness)? _____

When we are mature, or complete, what will we be able to do? _____

The Christian life is not a journey, it’s an adventure!

The life of a Christian is so much more than a mere journey to heaven. Though heaven is guaranteed to every believer, the Christian life—relating to Christ on a daily basis—is an adventure which begins the moment you receive eternal life. Not only has God saved you by His grace, He has also given you an eternally significant assignment uniquely suited to your gifts and talents. And then, grace upon grace, He has provided a road map to guide you in this adventure—the inspired word of God.

From a biblical perspective, the search for meaning in life should end when we come into a personal relationship with God by believing in His Son. When we become a child of God by faith in Jesus, the ultimate meaning in life can be ours.

✳ Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 three times, then answer the following questions:

Have you ever considered yourself as a person with a mission from God? _____

Why or why not? _____

The Bible will be your guide

All of your study this week will be in the New Testament. The New Testament completes God's words to men and women. The Old Testament begins the story of God's dealings with humanity, the New Testament tells the rest of the story.

The story is about God's Son, Jesus Christ. The Old Testament points ahead to the Lord Jesus. Throughout its thirty-nine books there is a growing expectation of a coming Redeemer.

That hope is realized in the New Testament. The Redeemer, Messiah of Israel and Savior of the World appears! Readers of the Old Testament find out that the prophets were right. The Son of God comes to earth as a real man.

The twenty-seven books of the New Testament are all about Jesus Christ. Nine authors wrote them over a period of about 50 years. These books are easily categorized into four groups.

The New Testament begins with five historic books. The four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, record the life of Jesus from four different perspectives. The writers of these Gospels were either eyewitnesses to the events of Christ's ministry on earth or historians reporting the words of eyewitnesses. The book of Acts describes the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to the rest of the world.

Paul's thirteen letters, or *epistles*, come next. Paul was the primary leader called by God to spread the Gospel throughout the First Century world. His letters are to specific churches or leaders he was dealing with in his ministry. Though they each have a unique purpose, Paul's letters were generally written to instruct, encourage, warn and motivate congregations of new believers and their leaders.

The New Testament closes with nine letters first written to Jewish believers who were suffering terribly under the persecution of Rome. These books, from Hebrews to Revelation, contain timeless truths and practical guidance for all Christians.

The best way to become familiar with your New Testament is to use it. So let's get started. Your New Testament will be your guide as you discover the purpose of your relationship with God.

Talking to God:

Remember that prayer is simply talking to God. Find a time and place where you can be alone with God for an extended period of time. Talk to God about this whole subject of the potential of your relationship with Him. Tell Him how you feel about being a new creature in Christ with a God-ordained purpose for living. Remember that He is perfectly reliable and strong. He loves you unconditionally. He has made wonderful plans for you. Ask Him to guide you through this study, encouraging you as you pursue your new destiny in Christ.

✳ **Record the time, date and place of your prayer here** _____

How did you feel after you told God how excited you are about your new life in Christ?

Share your excitement with God!

GOD INVITES YOU TO A LIFE OF ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE

In considering the purpose of your relationship with God, three principles from God's Word will guide you:

- You have great potential in Christ
- You have two options in realizing your potential in Christ
- God gives you four motivations for developing your potential in Christ

Now that you've believed

• YOU HAVE GREAT POTENTIAL IN CHRIST

Believers in Christ live in a radically new dimension based upon their position and privilege in Christ.

Your new life in Christ

Read the following verses which say that you, as a believer, are **in Christ**: John 14:20, Romans 6:11, 8:1, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:13, 1 John 2:6, 4:13. Now read these verses which teach that Christ is **in you**: John 14:20, Romans 8:10, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 1:27.

- ✦ As you read these verses, what are your thoughts and observations concerning this sharing of life with Jesus Christ?

Something you should know:

Union with Christ means that you are eternally secure. Nothing is able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When you believed in Jesus Christ you entered into a vital union with God. Your life is now commingled with His in inseparable ways. You will never be the same. God lives in you and you will share His life forever.

- ✦ Read John 10:28-30 and Romans 8:38-39. What does this union with Jesus Christ mean to your eternal destiny? _____

Your new opportunities in Christ

Your union with Christ not only gives you a sure eternal destiny, it also offers you two wonderful opportunities those outside of Christ will never have—fruitfulness for the Son of God and friendship with the Son of God. In John 13-17 Jesus gathers His eleven faithful disciples to the Upper Room and gives them His final instructions. In John 15:1-17 He offers them the closest relationship possible with Himself. This rich experience of life with Christ brings with it fruitfulness and friendship. Read John 15:1-17 several times, then answer the following questions.

Fruitfulness has to do with accomplishing the good works you were introduced to in Ephesians 2:10. God's desire for you as a Christian is that you bear fruit. Though He doesn't force you to bear fruit, He does provide direction and power so that you can grow up as a follower of Christ.

✳️ What do you think Jesus means when He says in verse 5 that some of His followers “bear much fruit”? _____

Write out your own definition of fruitfulness for the Son of God. _____

How do you feel when you think about the Son of God asking you to do His work? _____

Look at John 15:4. What does Jesus say we must do to bear fruit for Him? _____

What do you think it means to abide? _____

Look at verse 10, then read 1 John 3:24. How does the Bible define abiding in Christ?

Friendship has to do with enjoying the full capacity of the relationship you have with Jesus. God's desire for you as a Christian is that you would become intimate with His Son. Though He does not force you to draw close to Jesus, He does invite you into this experience of a close personal relationship with the Son of God.

✳️ Look at John 15:14. What does Jesus say we must do to be His friends? _____

What do you think being a close friend with Jesus means in everyday life? _____

Read John 15:15-17.

✳️ There are two marks of friendship with Jesus. The first is in verse 15, and the second is in verse 16. Can you identify these? _____

A little help . . .

To abide in Christ is to dwell in comfort, to be at home and relaxed in Him. This is only possible when we are keeping His commandments. There is no comfort in a home where there is disharmony. Likewise, there is no abiding in Christ for a believer who is not doing what He says. The relationship is strained and there will be no production of fruit. Abiding in Christ is keeping His commandments, that is, obeying His will as presented in His Word, the Bible.

Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

—1 John 3:24

Something you should know:

The requirement for friendship is very clear. Faith in Jesus brings eternal life (John 6:47) and He will never stop loving you. But only those believers who obey His commands will experience a close personal relationship with the Son of God.

A little help . . .

The Lord fully discloses His thoughts to His friends, and His friends will bear fruit that lasts into eternity.

✳ Write out your own definition of friendship with the Son of God. _____

How do you feel when you consider the possibility of being a close personal friend with Jesus Christ, one who is taken into His confidence and guided carefully through life?

Now compare verses 4 and 14 of John 15. What is the one single requirement to experience the full benefits of fruitfulness *for* and friendship *with* Jesus Christ? _____

Something you should know:

The power to live the Christian life comes from the Holy Spirit. This concept may be new to you. Don't be intimidated. For now, you need to know that the Holy Spirit is God, but a separate Person from the Father or the Son.

Your new power in Christ

You may be feeling a little overwhelmed right now. Jesus noticed these feelings of insecurity in His first disciples too! This is why He closed His teaching on fruitfulness and friendship with a promise of a Personal Helper. Read this encouraging news in John 15:26 and 27.

✳ Whom did Jesus promise to send to His followers? _____

What does the Spirit do for you as a believer in Jesus Christ? _____

Now read 16:13-15

How does the Spirit "Help" us as believers? _____

✳ Whom does the Holy Spirit glorify? _____

You have not been left alone. You have power from above and guidance from above. The Holy Spirit will guide you toward fruitfulness through the Bible and empower you to do what the Bible says.

You have great potential in Christ—let's review:

When you believed in Jesus Christ, God placed you "in Christ." This union with Christ means that you are eternally secure in your relationship with the Son of God (John 14:20). Those believers who take full advantage of the benefits of this union with Christ by abiding in Him and doing His will become fruitful for Him and experience deep friendship with Him. He even sends His Spirit to encourage His followers to fulfill their potential.

This wonderful potential in Christ must be developed. God wants to work in your life to produce spiritual maturity that enables you to be more like His Son. But you must cooperate with God's plan to draw you closer to His Son and serve His Son. You must *grow* in Christ if you want to be fruitful for Christ.

GROW UP AND BEAR FRUIT FOR CHRIST!

- YOU HAVE TWO OPTIONS IN REALIZING YOUR POTENTIAL IN CHRIST**

Spiritual maturity is your choice. Only those believers who choose to grow will experience the full potential of their position and privilege in Christ.

Spiritual maturity—your choice

Like every believer, you must decide what kind of Christian you want to be—a grown-up Christian who bears much fruit or a baby Christian who bears little fruit. These two types of believers are described in First Corinthians 2:14-3:5. The spiritually mature believer is described in 2:15-16. Spiritual maturity is a grownup relationship with Christ. The baby believer of 3:1-4 has simply never grown up. Read these verses three (3) times. As you read, write down the differences between the spiritual or mature Christian and the baby or carnal Christian.

Spiritual or Mature Christian	Baby or Carnal Christian

✳ **Read verses 2:14-15. What does Paul say that a spiritual person will be able to do?** _____

Read 3:1 very carefully. Paul is scolding the Corinthian believers because he is not able to teach the deep things of God. They are still *babies* in their faith. But notice that they are babes “in Christ.”

✳ **What does this mean?** _____

Read 3:1-5. What word besides “babe” does Paul use to describe these non-growing Christians? _____

Something you should know:

A third category of human being is the “natural man” of 2:14. This is an unsaved person—someone who has not been reborn spiritually by believing in Christ. This same word is used (translated “sensual”) in Jude 19 and explained as indicating a person who does not have the Spirit (see also Romans 8:9).

A little help . . .

“Carnal” means “fleshly” or “of the flesh.” It implies weakness that is willful. The carnal Christian decides to remain a babe in Christ—he or she refuses to take on the responsibilities of maturity.

✳️ As you read through the whole section again, what are two characteristics of carnal or baby Christians? _____

God's power, your choice

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

—Galatians 2:20

Read Galatians 2:20 out loud two times. This verse says very clearly that Christ lives in you *and* that you live the life. It's a cooperative effort. God will do His part. You have two options. You can grow up and fulfill your potential in Christ—becoming a discerning, mature believer, fruitful in good works and intimate with your Savior. Or, you can remain a babe in Christ—confused and self-centered, fighting with other Christians and feeling far away from your Savior.

✳️ What are some practical ways you can cooperate with God's agenda for your life—that you grow spiritually? _____

✳️ What part does faith play in this process? _____

You have two options in realizing your potential in Christ—let's review:

You have great potential in Christ. To realize your personal potential you need to grow up, or mature, and to become spiritual. God is at work in your life and He will guide you toward maturity. But if you are ever going to grow out of "babyhood" and get off of the bottle, there is a part you must play.

You can become a mature Christian or you can remain a baby spiritually. Growth in Christ is an exciting and worthwhile process. But like any significant process, it is often difficult. All the guidelines from God's word will be useless if you're not properly motivated. Scripture offers many reasons to grow in Christ.

REASONS YOU SHOULD GROW UP AND BEAR FRUIT

- **GOD GIVES YOU FOUR MOTIVATIONS FOR DEVELOPING YOUR POTENTIAL IN CHRIST**

Remember, as a believer in Jesus you have been placed “in Christ.” Again, this means that you are assured of deliverance or *salvation* from hell, and that you are eternally secure, since your salvation is based solely upon the finished work of Jesus Christ (John 10:28-29, Romans 8:38-39). Therefore, receiving or keeping salvation from hell can never be an incentive for growing in Christ. You don't live for Christ to gain or keep eternal life. It was given to you freely, never to be lost, the moment you believed (John 6:47). The Bible, however, does present several motivations to *grow* in Christ—to become a mature believer fully enjoying the benefits of and fulfilling the potential of your relationship with Him.

The purest motivation for growing in Christ is *gratitude* to God for saving us by His grace.

Read Galatians 2:20 again three times.

✳ **How did Paul live His life?** _____

The last eight (8) words of this verse tell us why Paul lived His life by faith, or continued to believe or trust everything Christ said to Him.

✳ **What was it that motivated Paul to continue trusting in Christ allowing Him to live His life through Paul?** _____

Romans is all about the mercies of God. In chapter 12, when Paul looks back at his 11-chapter record of what God has done for us in Christ, he asks Christians to do something. Read Romans 12:1 & 2 three times.

✳ **What is God asking you to do?** _____

What does He use to motivate you to present your life as a living sacrifice in 12:1?

The practical motivation for growing in Christ is the knowledge that our Heavenly Father blesses obedience and disciplines disobedience in His children.

Like any loving father, your heavenly Father desires the very best for you. He instructs you in much the same way children are taught in a loving home. Being perfect, He never makes a mistake, but He does deal with us in the same manner as earthly fathers. He affirms and blesses us when we please Him and corrects and disciplines us when we disobey.

Something you should know:

While believers live on physically, Christ also lives within them spiritually. His resurrection power through the Spirit is demonstrated in the life of the Christian.

A little help. . .

Paul never got over the depth of Christ's love for him demonstrated at the Cross. He knew he could trust the words of His Savior who died for him.

Something you should know:

Based on God's mercy, Paul begs believers to give their lives to Christ.

The Father's blessing

Those children who obey their heavenly Father's words will be blessed by Him. Now this blessing is not necessarily financial or circumstantial. It is an experience of life as *He* would ordain it—the best possible option in every situation. In John 10:10 Jesus calls it the *abundant* life. In Romans 8:13 Paul calls this experience in life “living.” Various word pictures of this deeper life of fruitfulness and friendship with the Son of God appear in the Bible—walking in the light, walking in the Spirit, the abundant life, really living, the victorious life.

You will learn much more about how to experience this life in the next lesson. For now, it should motivate you to follow Christ knowing that it is the best possible choice in every situation and that it pleases your heavenly Father. Read John 10:10 where Jesus says that your experience of this abundant life is why He came.

✳ **What do you think this abundant life would mean for you personally?** _____

The Father's discipline

The Lord disciplines His disobedient children in order to instruct them and to convince them to stop sinning. Read Hebrews 12:5-11 three times. When you read the word *chastening*, remember that it simply means discipline, the discipline of a loving heavenly Father.

✳ **In verse 6 the reason God disciplines us is given. What is that reason?** _____

According to verses 7 and 8, what does this discipline from our heavenly Father prove?

Read verse 11 again carefully. What does the discipline of the Lord produce in our lives?

The first two motivations have to do with the present. We grow in Christ by obeying Him because we love Him and we desire His blessing and we don't want to be disciplined by the Lord. The next motivation has to do with the future.

The prophetic motivation for growing in Christ is to please Christ at His judgment seat.

Every one of us Christians must stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, not to determine our eternal destiny in heaven or hell, but to assess the quality of our Christian life on earth. This is the motivation Christ uses most often (see Matt. 5:10-12; 6:1-4; 10:32-42; 19:27-20). *Anticipating either reward or loss of reward at the Judgment Seat* should also motivate us to persevere in our devotion to Christ and to remain faithful to God's will revealed in His Bible.

Read Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10.

✳ **What judgment must every believer be a part of?** _____

A little help . . .

Discipline is part of a learning process for Christians. It proves His genuine love, encourages obedience, and produces righteous actions and attitudes in God's children.

Something you should know:

There are two judgments described in the Bible. The first, the Judgment Seat of Christ, will take place when Christ returns to take all believers to be with Him in heaven. All who will appear at this judgment will be in heaven. The question that will be settled is faithfulness to the Son of God to receive rewards in His Kingdom! This judgment is the subject of this question. In contrast, the Great White Throne Judgment convenes hundreds of years later in the final stages of history. All who appear there will be thrown into hell because they rejected God's offer of eternal life through Christ (Revelation 20:11-15).

What is the purpose of this judgment according to 2 Corinthians 5:10? _____

Read 2 Corinthians 5:9. What is Paul's aim in the Christian life? _____

This subject may be new to you but again, don't be intimidated. For now, it's important for you to know that though you are assured of your salvation, you are still accountable to your Lord. Following the resurrection of the church-age believers, we will all stand before Him. This encourages us to prepare well by walking in trusting obedience to God and His Word. At the Judgment Seat our works which will be rewarded will be but outward evidences of the reality of our walk with God.

The most personal motivation for growing in Christ is intimacy with Him.

Finally, *we should desire a close, loving relationship with Jesus Christ.* This will be the subject of our next lesson—deepening your relationship with Jesus Christ. We will discuss *how* you deepen your relationship with your Savior. Your personal desire for intimacy with the Son of God should cause you to grow in your relationship with Him.

Read John 15:14-17 again several times. This is the clearest and simplest expression of both the terms for friendship and the definition of this special relationship with Jesus Christ. Review this critical concept again by answering the following:

✦ **What must you do if you want to become Jesus' friend? (See 15:14)** _____

In verses 15-17 Jesus defines friendship with Him. Write out your definition in your own words before reading on.

God gives you four motivations for developing your potential in Christ—let's review:

The Word of God offers many powerful motivations for you to want to grow in Christ. As a believer you should want to mature spiritually so that you can fulfill your potential in Christ. Four reasons stand out from Scripture:

- Jesus died for you; God saved you by His grace. This wonderful truth should make you so thankful that you naturally want to live your life for Him.
- You are now a child of God and your Father in heaven is watching over you. He wants to bless you. And He will, if you follow His guidance. But if you disobey Him, as a loving Father, He will discipline you.
- At the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Son of God will evaluate your life. If you have lived to please Him, He will reward you accordingly in heaven.
- Finally, a close intimate relationship with Jesus is offered to those Christians who will obey His Word and follow His leading.

A little help . . .

When reading 2 Corinthians 5:9, notice that the next verse (5:10) announces the Judgment Seat of Christ. This tells us that the rewards given out at that time will be indicators of how our lives were pleasing to Christ. This means that the rewards we seek are not for self-fulfillment or to feed our pride. We desire to please Him, and we will be rewarded for our actions that are pleasing to Him. We are developing the capacity we will have to bring glory to Christ for all eternity.

A reminder . . .

The definition of friendship with the Son of God is a close relationship in which the Lord fully discloses His thoughts. This means He helps us understand His Word the Bible and He guides us intimately through life.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

We have considered three aspects of this subject:

An important truth! →→→

- You have great potential in Christ
- You have two options in realizing your potential in Christ
- God gives you four motivations for developing your potential in Christ

You need to realize that your life should never be the same. God has great and glorious plans for you. When you trusted in His Son and received eternal life, everything changed. You became a new person in Christ with new potential to experience life and a new, God-given purpose in life.

If you allow Him, God will develop your potential in Christ. He will guide you through His Word and empower you with His Spirit. When you respond to God's guidance He will draw you closer to His Son and enable you to accomplish eternally significant works which please His Son.

You can either cooperate with God in this process and grow to maturity in Christ or you can ignore, be indifferent or even fight Him and remain a baby in your spiritual life. You should want to grow in Christ because you are grateful for the free gift of salvation, you want to avoid your heavenly Father's discipline and receive His blessing, you desire eternal rewards which prove that you have pleased Christ, and you long for a deep and meaningful relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is so important that you need to pause now to reflect on the wonderful truths we have considered this week. Write down your thoughts concerning the purpose of your relationship with God. Record your concerns, your questions, your feelings...any ideas or opinions you may have. When you meet with your leader this week, you need to discuss in detail what you have written down.

✦ My questions about God's purpose for my life. _____

My thoughts concerning God's purpose for my life. _____

My feelings when I think about my potential in Christ. _____

Central Truth of Lesson Two:

The purpose of your relationship with God is to accomplish eternally significant works for Him.

✦ Have you grown in your awareness of your potential in Christ? _____

How do you feel about the Bible’s teaching that God has great and glorious plans for you here on earth and in eternity in heaven with Him? _____

Take some time right now to spend time with God. Talk with Him about the purpose of your salvation—to grow in Christ, draw close to the Son of God and accomplish eternally significant works for Him. Be totally honest with God; share your feelings, your fears and even your excitement concerning the wonderful truths you have studied in this lesson.

Memory Verse:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

Next Week:

Lesson Number _____

Pages _____ to _____

Memory Verse _____

We will meet at _____ (time) on _____ (day) _____ (place)

Something you should know:

God had great and glorious plans for you when He gave you eternal life the moment you believed in His Son.

A little help . . .

If you are not excited about your new life in Christ, you need to meditate on the word workmanship. It means God has uniquely created you to accomplish very precise, pre-planned works in the name of Christ. You are somebody now that you are in Christ.

←←← Verse to memorize

DEEPENING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Lesson 3

OVERVIEW

- ♦ God talks to you through His Word, the Bible
- ♦ You talk to God through prayer
- ♦ If you want to be close to God, you must learn to trust and obey Him

RELATING TO GOD WILL BRING NEW JOY AND SATISFACTION TO YOUR LIFE

Like any relationship, our relationship with God can be cold and distant or warm and intimate. The Bible reveals that God relentlessly pursues those who belong to Him. Though He doesn't force Himself upon us, He is always working to deepen the relationship with His children—those who were born into His family when they believed in His Son, Jesus Christ.

The last book of the Bible is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Turn to Revelation chapter 3, verse 20. Read this verse three times, then write out the words on a 3x5 card.

Revelation 3:20 is one of the most moving invitations to believers to draw close to Jesus Christ in Scripture. Dramatically, Christ pictures Himself standing outside of our lives and knocking on a door. The invitation is for those who hear to open the door. It's an appeal to Christians to allow Him access to our lives so that we can experience intimate fellowship, or friendship with Him.

Study the verse for yourself for a few minutes.

✦ **Write down three personal observations from this warm request from your Savior to draw close to Him.**

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Memory Verse:

***Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door,
I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.***

Revelation 3:20

Now, meditate on this verse for several minutes. Try to memorize the sentence as much as possible. When you're comfortable with remembering the words of the verse, read on. But be sure to put the 3x5 card in your pocket or purse as you continue to memorize this extremely important invitation from your Savior.

✦ **According to Revelation 3:20, what is Jesus' continual invitation to Christians?** _____

A little help . . .

The word translated "dine" indicates that it is the main meal, the one to which only an honored guest would be invited.

Remember . . .

A personal observation simply means "what you see as you read the words."

← ← ← Verse to memorize

This exercise may help you put Christ's personal invitation in perspective.

✳ **Who is the person you most admire in the world today or from history (President, athlete, Bible teacher, scholar, leader, celebrity)?** _____

Suppose tonight there was a knock at the door and when you answered that very person was standing on your porch asking, "Can I come into your house and become your friend? I would like to get to know you better. I thought we could spend a lot of time talking about life. I want to share my insights with you and care for you deeply in a personal and intimate way."

✳ **How would you feel?** _____

How would you respond to this request? _____

How is this hypothetical situation like Jesus' warm appeal in Revelation 3:20? _____

The Christian life is all about fellowship with Christ and His people.

Too many Christians live their lives rarely experiencing the intimate and warm relationship with the Lord Jesus that He desires. Many have never even heard that Jesus is knocking at the door of their lives asking them to give Him access so that He can relate to them more deeply.

Read 1 John 1:1-4 five times.

✳ **Why did the Apostle John share His eyewitness account of the life of Christ with these people?** _____

What would be the result if they experienced *fellowship* with John and with God and with Jesus Christ? _____

Read 2 Chronicles 16:9 three times. Compare 2 Chronicles 16:9 and Revelation 3:20.

✳ **What do these two verses tell us about God's relationship to His people?** _____

Christian, God saved you because He loves you and has wonderful plans for your life. He desires a relationship with you. His Son, Jesus Christ, invites you to become His friend. He wants you to enjoy a deep experience of fellowship with Him.

The Christian life is more than a journey to heaven. The Christian life is an adventure that is guided by the Lord Jesus Himself. Not only has God saved you by His grace and given you an eternally significant assignment, He is also offering you intimacy with His Son! You don't have to find your way alone. You can walk through life with a best Friend—the Lord Jesus Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father, the Lord of Lords and coming King.

Do you like the idea of having Jesus as your close friend through life? Does it seem exciting to you that the Son of God is knocking at the door of your life asking you to allow Him more access so that the two of you can become closer and closer?

✳ **Why or why not?** _____

Something you should know:

You need to comprehend the concept of "fellowship" with the Son of God. Fellowship is a biblical term that describes a sharing of life that brings two people closer and bonds them together. We have fellowship with one another as Christians, and we have fellowship with the Son of God. Fellowship speaks of a deepening friendship where two so share their lives that they become intimate.

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him...

—2 Chronicles 16:9

Something you should know:

God has always been the relentless pursuer of His people. He is constantly looking for a heart that is open to Him. When we open our lives to Him, He works powerfully and leads us intimately.

The Bible will be your guide

Let's continue familiarizing ourselves with the Word of God. This week you will venture into the Old Testament. The Bible is the most unique and greatest work of literature, history and theology ever written. It is a unity produced by God Himself out of a diversity of authors, time spans, and literary forms. The Old and New Testaments smoothly blend to create a bold sweep from eternity past to eternity future. In its sixty-six books we discover our past, understand our present, and gain hope for our future.

The Old Testament is a history of God's people, Israel, the descendants of Abraham. It lays the foundation upon which the New Testament is built. The Old looks ahead and the New looks back at the pivotal event in history: the death, burial, and resurrection of God's Son, Jesus Christ—the Messiah (Redeemer) of Israel and Savior of the world.

The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament are divided into three types. The first seventeen **Books of History** trace the history of Israel from its beginning to the time of the prophet Malachi. The five **Books of Poetry** explore the experiences and feelings of God's people as they lived their history. They emphasize a lifestyle of godliness and deal with some of the deepest questions of life: pain, God, wisdom, life, and love. The seventeen **Books of Prophecy** close out the Old Testament. The prophets have a twofold message for Israel. Often, during times of rebellion and sin, the prophet speaks God's condemnation to His people, warning them of the consequences of sin. Sometimes, the message is one of consolation that gives Israel a future hope during difficult times. The prophets use symbols and figures of speech, but they are pointing to real events. Some of these have already taken place, but most await future fulfillment.

History, Poetry, Prophecy. Past, Present, Future. Three wonderful perspectives on your Savior, Jesus Christ, the same "yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

The Old Testament will help you appreciate and understand the New Testament truths that are so important to your Christian life. You will find it invaluable as you pursue a deeper relationship with the Son of God it exalts.

Talking to God:

Get alone with God and talk to Him about this subject of *fellowship*, or intimacy with His Son. Let Him know of your feelings concerning intimacy. You may be afraid of intimacy because those you love have always hurt you. Tell your Heavenly Father that. He will listen, comfort you and calm your fears. Remember that Jesus is perfectly reliable and strong, and He loves you with unconditional love. You can trust Him. You know that you already share your life with Jesus. That happened when you believed in Him. Now, tell the Father that you hear His Son knocking and invite Him in to every aspect of your life for deeper fellowship. He will show you what Friendship with His Son is all about. Tell Him you want to learn about the joy of intimacy with Jesus through this lesson.

✳ **Record the time, date and place of your prayer here:** _____

How did you feel when you told God you heard His Son knocking? _____

Something you should know:

God desires intimate relationship with you. There is a joy of fellowship the Son of God offers to every Christian. Jesus' work on the Cross guarantees that you will be with Him in heaven forever. But your Savior wants so much more for you. He wants to be a part of every moment and every aspect of your life. He wants to be your close Friend through the trials and triumphs of life. Whether you feel it's true or not, the Word of God says very clearly that Jesus is even now knocking at your heart waiting for your invitation to deeper fellowship with Him.

Share the deepest desires of your heart with God.

GOD INVITES YOU TO A LIFE OF INTIMACY WITH HIS SON

The Bible offers a lot of advice on how to deepen our relationship with God. Three principles are most basic:

- God talks to you through His Word, the Bible
- You talk to God through prayer
- If you want to be close to God, you must learn to trust and obey Him

• GOD TALKS TO YOU THROUGH HIS WORD—THE BIBLE

God's words to you—the Bible

About forty men wrote the Bible over a period of approximately 1,500 years. Yet the Bible has one great theme and central figure—Jesus Christ. All of this would be impossible unless the Bible had one Author—God Himself.

All the words!

Read 2 Timothy 3:16 very carefully. Though human authors wrote the texts, the Bible originated as an action of God who literally “breathed” it out.

✳ **What does this important verse say about the Scriptures?** _____

There are three popular views of how much of the Bible is inspired by God. According to 2 Timothy 3:16, which is correct?

- 1) Some of the Bible is inspired by God.
- 2) All of it is inspired by God.
- 3) Only parts that speak to you in a personal way are inspired by God.

Restate this verse in your own words: _____

Spiritual words!

Second Peter 1:21 tells us how God used the human writers to produce the Bible. Read it several times, then answer the following questions:

✳ **How was Scripture given?** _____

The word *moved* in this verse is illustrated by its use in Acts 27:15. Turn to Acts 27:15 to better understand the concept. What drove, directed, and guided the ship? _____

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness . . .

—2 Timothy 3:16

A little help . . .

Inspired comes from a Greek word meaning “God-breathed.” This tells us that God breathed out words and they became Scripture.

A little help . . .

Second Timothy 3:16 teaches that the entire Bible, every word in the original writing, came from God in order to show us how to live.

For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit .

—2 Peter 1:21

✳ In the final analysis, Who is the real Author of the Bible? _____

What does Titus 1:2 tell us about God? _____

What does this mean when we understand that He wrote the Bible, every word? _____

Every word!

Read 1 Corinthians 2:13.

✳ How did God's revelation come to us? _____

Why is it important to know that God inspired the Bible in words? _____

How did God give us the Bible? _____

Powerful words!

Read Hebrews 4:12 several times.

✳ What does the Word of God have the power to do? _____

The Bible has the power to reach to the depths of your personality and to discern your innermost thoughts, why is this important in your relationship with God?

God talks to you through His Word, the Bible—let's review:

For any relationship to grow communication is absolutely necessary. If you want your relationship with God to grow you must learn to hear His voice. God speaks to you primarily through His Word, the Bible.

The Bible is the Word of God. God made sure that every word written down by the original authors was His word. He cannot lie, so the words you read in your Bible are absolutely reliable and true.

Not only are they reliable and true, but they have the power to transform your life. Since the Bible is the very words of God, when you read your Bible you are listening to the advice of your Heavenly Father. Knowing this, you should dedicate yourself to reading the Bible, understanding the Bible and obeying the Bible.

A little help . . .

The wind: "Though experienced men, the sailors could not guide the ship. They finally had to let the wind take the ship wherever it blew. In the same manner as that ship was driven, directed or carried about by the wind, God directed and moved the human writers He used to produce the books of the Bible. Though the wind was the strong force that moved the ship along, the sailors were not asleep and inactive. Similarly, the Holy Spirit was the guiding force that directed the writers who, nevertheless, played their own active roles in writing the Scriptures."
—Ryrie, Basic Theology, p. 69

Something you should know:

God wrote the Bible for a purpose. He wants us to read it and apply it to our lives. The words of the Bible are His words to us. As a loving Father, He talks to us tenderly yet firmly. In the Bible we discover all the advice we need to find our way through life and to become everything He wants us to be.

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

—Hebrews 4:12

Something you should know:

God wrote the Bible to change your life. He wants you to read it and do what it says. The Bible is your Heavenly Father's personal advice to you.

YOUR WORDS TO GOD—PRAYER

• YOU TALK TO GOD THROUGH PRAYER

Prayer is our means of communicating with God. Those who understand the power and importance of prayer in their lives will experience an ever-deepening relationship with their Savior.

The Privilege of Prayer

As a believer in Christ you have special privileges and opportunities. Read Hebrews 4:14-16 several times. Verses 14 and 15 tell us that our Lord Jesus is very special.

✳ **What do you find in these two verses that causes you to appreciate how wonderful Jesus is?** _____

The *therefore* of verse 16 is in response to the greatness of the Person we are related to by faith. This is an awesome truth—Jesus is the Great High Priest who is able to meet our needs yet the understanding Savior who has compassion for our weaknesses.

✳ **What is the primary application of this truth?** _____

Why is it important that the throne we approach through prayer is a throne of *grace*?

The Passion of Prayer

In 1 Samuel 1 there is an illustration of how someone relates deeply to God through prayer. A godly woman named Hannah is extremely distraught because she is barren. Read the chapter twice. As she talks to God, a man watching accuses her of being drunk. Look at 1 Samuel 1:15.

✳ **How does Hannah answer this charge?** _____

Knowing that God is her refuge, Hannah “pours out her soul to God.”

✳ **What do you think she means by this?** _____

Now read Hebrews 4:14-16 again.

✳ **How does this encourage you to “pour out your soul” to God in prayer?** _____

✳ **What might keep you from expressing your heart to God?** _____

Something you should know:

Jesus was not only fully God but also fully man—except He never sinned. Though He was tempted to sin He was distinct from all other men—He never sinned.

A little help . . .

Grace has been described as “God’s riches at Christ’s expense.” When the point of contact between God and His children is a “throne of grace” every Christian will truly find mercy to help in the time of need!

The Power of Prayer

Turn now in your New Testament to the book of Philippians. Philippians 4:6-7 teaches you about a powerful antidote to anxiety. Read it five times.

✳ **What should you do when you feel anxious about the circumstances of life?** _____

What does God promise to those who bring their anxious thoughts to Him? _____

What do you need to take to God's throne of grace right now? Specifically, what area of your life do you feel most anxious about? _____

You talk to God through prayer—let's review:

Communication is vital for any growing relationship. God has provided prayer as the means of communicating directly with Him through Jesus Christ. Scripture encourages us to pour out our heart to God.

Prayer should not intimidate us. Jesus, our Great High Priest who understands our weakness, waits for our petitions of prayer at His throne of Grace. He loves us and wants to hear our every thought. Prayer can release us from fear and worry because we are talking to God about our life. Remember that He is perfectly reliable and strong. And never forget that He loves you unconditionally.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:6-7

INTIMACY WITH GOD—TRUST AND OBEY!

- **IF YOU WANT TO BE CLOSE TO GOD, YOU MUST LEARN TO TRUST AND OBEY HIM**

Read 1 John 1:5-10 three times. This is a discussion of sin and fellowship. As Light, God both exposes our sin and condemns it. If anyone walks in darkness, he is hiding from the truth that the Light reveals. Since God is Light, it follows that a Christian cannot truly claim to have *fellowship*, or closeness with Him, while living in darkness, or sin.

- ✳ **Think of a close relationship in your life. What happens when there is disagreement and conflict?** _____

In the same way, disagreement with God always strains the relationship. Since God is Light, and there is no darkness in Him, when we disagree with Him we are always in the wrong.

- ✳ **How does this differ from every other relationship?** _____

Look at verse 6. This statement is absolute. If we are living in sin, that is, if we are stubbornly making choices to do what God says not to do, we cannot have fellowship with Him.

- ✳ **Is there anything in your life right now that you know is darkness?** _____

What happens when you cling to this darkness and walk, or live, apart from God's guidance? _____

Now read verses 7-10.

- ✳ **What do you need to do to walk in the light and have fellowship with Him?** _____

Read John 15:14 several times. Again, Jesus gives a requirement for fellowship, or friendship with Him.

- ✳ **What is it?** _____

Read Deuteronomy 10:12-13.

- ✳ **What did God require of Israel?** _____

Why did God want them to keep His commandments? _____

Now read 1 John 5:3.

- ✳ **How does this verse and the Old Testament passage in Deuteronomy 10:12-13 help you in your life today?** _____

A little help . . .

Verses 6 and 7 tell us two things about a believer who walks in the light:
(1) They are in fellowship with God.
(2) They are being cleansed from every sin. This is speaking of Christian imperfections which verse 8 tells us are inevitable. There is an ongoing cleansing based on Christ's blood which enables imperfect children to have a genuine experience of fellowship with a perfectly holy Heavenly Father.

Something you should know:

Confess means to say the same thing about sin that God does.

You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

—John 15:14

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

—1 John 5:3

Read and meditate on (think about) John 14:15 and 14:21.

✳ **What is the relationship between *loving* God and *obeying* Him.** _____

If you want to be close to God, you must learn to trust and obey Him—let’s review:

Though sin does not stop God’s love for you nor sever your relationship with Him, it does break your *fellowship* with Him. Those believers who walk in darkness cannot have fellowship with Him. When we refuse to do what Jesus says, we cannot be His friends.

We obey God because we love Him. Trust and obedience are two sides to the same coin. Knowing that He is a good and loving God, we trust Him enough to do what He says. Like any relationship, there must be harmony if the relationship is to grow. Obedience is absolutely necessary if we want to have a deeper relationship with God. Obedience to God’s will enables us to experience God’s LOVE.

HOW YOU CAN HAVE A DEEPER RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Three principles have surfaced in our pursuit of intimacy with Christ:

- **God talks to you through His Word, the Bible**
- **You talk to God through prayer**
- **If you want to be close to God, you must learn to trust and obey Him**

The Lord Jesus Christ is constantly knocking at the door of your life wanting access to every area. It's an extremely important question for you: Are you experiencing intimate fellowship with Christ? His appeal is for you to open the door. With Him on the outside of your life, there can be no fellowship. With Him on the inside, you will have wonderful fellowship and share the wonders of His marvelous grace.

To deepen your relationship with God you need to learn to communicate with Him. He will communicate with you through His Word, the Bible. Knowing that your Bible contains His very words should motivate you to study it and apply it to your life. You talk to God through prayer. Knowing that He is listening to your requests which come to His Son's throne of grace should cause you to talk to Him often and about everything.

God will not draw close to you if you refuse to trust and obey Him. You should want to obey Him because you love Him so. If you don't do what He says, your relationship with Him will never grow.

Central Truth of Lesson Three:

You deepen your relationship with God by communicating with Him through studying His Word and praying, and trusting Him enough to do what He says.

Applying the Truth of Lesson Three

Two very practical applications of this lesson will help you deepen your relationship with God. There are two daily disciplines which have helped Christians through the ages grow in their intimacy with Christ — confessing your sin to Him and spending personal time with Him every day.

Confess your sin to Him

When we choose to disobey God, to walk in darkness, we break fellowship with Him. How do we return to the Light? That is, how do we restore fellowship with Him? First John 1:8-10 is an extremely important passage in leading us back to fellowship with our God.

Read 1 John 1:5-10 again several times then answer the following questions:

✳ **What does God say we must do when we realize that we have sinned (verse 9)?** _____

Why is this important? _____

What does God promise to those Christians who confess their sins to Him? _____

Remember . . .

Confess means to say the same thing about sin that God does.

✳ **Personal Application:** Is there any sin you need to confess to God right now? _____

When you confess, you can know that this sin is forgiven!

Spend personal time with Him every day

Every person who has ever become something for God has had this at the core of his or her priorities: time alone with God. This is commonly referred to as a “Quiet Time.” If you want to deepen your relationship with God you must spend time with Him. When you spend time with Him alone you will hear His voice in His Word and communicate effectively with Him through prayer.

The key is getting started. Many Christians find the early morning to be best for this quiet time. You may not be a morning person or your routine may not lend itself to an early morning time with God. But pick a time and get started. Consistency is what you’re looking for. Make an appointment with God and keep it!

Once you have determined the time, here’s a suggested outline for your time alone with God.

- ◆ One minute to prepare your heart for your time with God. Thank Him for spending the time with you and then simply ask Him, “Lord, prepare me to hear Your voice through Your Word and to talk with You through prayer. Open my heart to Your will and make my mind alert. I know Your Son wants access to every corner of my life and I want to open every door. Guide me today as I spend this time with You. Come close to me now I pray. Amen.” Finish your prayer by reading Psalm 139:23-24 as your closing request.
- ◆ Now take five minutes to read the Bible. Your most pressing need is to hear what God has to say to you. Pick a book of the Bible and begin reading it verse by verse. Start with something simple like the Gospel of John or Philippians. Don’t hurry. Read the words devotionally remembering that these are the words of your Heavenly Father. Read for the pure joy of hearing what God has to say.
- ◆ After God has spoken to you through His Word, speak to Him through prayer for your closing four minutes. Use the word ACTS to remember the four areas of prayer.

Adoration: Tell the Lord how much you love Him. Talk with Him about His greatness, His love, His power, His grace. Whatever you want to praise Him for...do it.

Confession: Be sure every sin is forsaken. Remember 1 John 1:9. Ask God to reveal to you any sin that you need to confess. When a sin comes to mind, confess it. Agree with God that He is right and you are wrong. Then claim the promise that you are forgiven and restored to full fellowship with Him.

Thanksgiving: You have so much to be thankful for. Thank Him for several specific things He has done for you recently. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says to thank God for everything!

Supplication: Now, pour out your heart to God. What’s on your mind? Remember Philippians 4:6- 7. Pray about everything and trust God to work...you will find real peace when you share your heart with God.

- ◆ Close with a prayer of daily commitment: “Father, help me to love everyone I meet today with the love of Christ, help me to obey everything I know about your will today, and help me to trust You no matter what circumstance I face today.”

←←← An important truth

A little help . . .

Your leader will help you plan your quiet time this week. For now, tell God you will spend 10 minutes with Him tomorrow. Tell Him the time too, and write it down in your daily planner. Then, if anyone tries to intrude on your time with God, you simply turn to your daily planner and say, “I’m sorry, I have an appointment that I must keep at that time.”

Something you should know:

The Son of God desires a deeper relationship with you. He wants to be your Friend!

A little help . . .

If you are still struggling with making time alone with God a priority, you need to meditate on the word fellowship. It means that the Son of God is offering the experience of intimate friendship to you, an ordinary human being—a sinner saved by His grace!

Verse to memorize →→→

Remember the Central Truth of Lesson Three:

You deepen your relationship with God by communicating with Him through studying His Word and praying, and trusting Him enough to do what He says.

✳ Do you feel your need to draw close to Christ? _____

How do you feel about Christ’s invitation to enjoy deep intimacy with Him? _____

How did your “quiet time” help you stay close to Christ during the day? _____

Memory Verse:

***“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door,
I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”***

Revelation 3:20

Next Week:

Lesson Number _____

Pages _____ to _____

Memory Verse _____

We will meet at _____ (time) on _____ (day) _____ (place)

RELATING TO OTHERS IN CHRIST

Lesson 4

OVERVIEW

- ♦ Give up your rights
- ♦ Let God guide your relationships
- ♦ Open your life to others

RELATING TO GOD WILL CHANGE THE WAY YOU RELATE TO OTHERS

Every skill or profession has an indicator of success or failure. For athletes, it's the game or the event; for soldiers, the battle; for business people, profit; for students, the test. All the planning, all the work, all the preparation, all the activity, it all boils down to this issue. Did we have a winning season? Did we defeat the enemy? Did we make money? Did I pass?

For Christians, it's relationships. If I am truly growing as a Christian, it will make a difference at home, at work, in my neighborhood, and at church. The ones who should be most impressed with my maturity in Christ will be my family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and closest Christian friends.

Turn to Philippians 2:3-5. Read through these verses several times in different translations. Now, pick the translation which seems most meaningful to you and write out the verses on four 3x5 cards. You're going to memorize these verses this week so put one in your pocket or purse. Place the other three in prominent places where you will be reminded of their message every day—your bathroom mirror, your refrigerator, the sun-visor of your car, or your desk.

Memory Verse:

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:3-5

Spend some time now looking at these verses in detail.

✳ According to these verses, how would you complete the following sentences?

In every relationship of life, I should esteem others _____ than myself.

In every relationship of life, I should be looking out for the interest of _____.

In every relationship of life, I should be thinking like _____ would think.

Christ's unconditional love for you caused Him to put you first.

✳ According to Romans 5:8, when did Christ die for you? _____

Before Christ reconciled you to God, what was your status? (Colossians 1:21-22) _____

Something you should know:

The Word of God is extremely demanding on us when it comes to relationships. We're told to treat others as Christ would treat them, and we're told to start at home.

←←← Verses to memorize

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

—Romans 5:8

A little help . . .

Reconciliation means a change of relationship from hostility to harmony. To reconcile is to bring peace between enemies.

Something you should know:

You need to learn to apply your Christianity to the primary relational arenas of life—home, work, neighborhood, and church.

How did Jesus reconcile you to God? (see also John 10:14-15) _____

The unconditional love of Jesus Christ was given to us to share. Christlike love, when shared with others, is powerful evidence that He is real. Your friends and loved ones may not be impressed with your growing knowledge of the Bible, your prayer life, or your new insights into the spiritual life. They will take notice when you begin to love them with the unconditional love of your Savior.

✳ **How do you feel when you realize your Christian maturity will be most apparent in the primary relationships of life?** _____

On a scale of 1-10, how do you think your loved ones and friends would rate your Christlikeness...

- ...as a husband or wife
- ...as a father or mother
- ...as a daughter or son
- ...as a brother or sister
- ...as an employer or employee
- ...as a coworker
- ...as a fellow student
- ...as a neighbor
- ...as a close friend
- ...as a fellow member of a church or Bible study group
- ...as friends working together in your church

If you've been honest, this has been pretty convicting. You're not the only Christian who struggles in these areas. This is our most difficult assignment from God, but also the most important.

The Bible will be your guide

You're going to find that you spend a lot of time these next few weeks in the last twenty-two books of your Bible with the unfamiliar names. We call these books the *epistles*, or letters. These are simply letters of instruction sent by the early leaders of Christianity. These leaders were different from your leaders today in one very important way. God Himself inspired the letters they wrote which became part of your Bible. This means that when you're reading their directions you are reading instructions from God.

The first thirteen epistles beginning with Romans and ending with Philemon come from the pen of Paul to various New Testament churches and pastors. The first nine were written to new, struggling congregations that Paul had either started or taken personal interest in during his three missionary journeys. They are Paul's epistles to churches. The last four are Paul's epistles to pastors. They were written to

encourage pastors in their difficult and demanding duties as leaders of the church.

The last nine epistles beginning with Hebrews and ending with Revelation were written to the many Jewish believers who had been dispersed around the world. These early Christians came under intense persecution and faced many problems. Many of them were tempted to simplify their lives by leaving their churches and returning to Judaism. Since the encouragement and instruction contained in the letters sent to these discouraged Christians was written to believers generally rather than a particular church or person, we call these the *general* epistles.

These are letters written to real people with real problems just like you. So when you read what God says about relationships, you can be sure that these words were intended for you. The original audience wasn't some group of holy men and women. Their homes and neighborhoods were filled with regular people. They struggled to make ends meet, changed their children's diapers, put up with demanding bosses, feared for the future of their children...they were just like you.

Talking to God:

Find your quiet place and talk with God about the primary relationships of your life. This will be painful for those who have been hurt deeply. But those who have failed miserably in relationships will feel the most pain in this exercise. There's nothing wrong with feeling bad about failure. Guilt is a God-given emotion. Just remember that God's grace means you can change.

Pour out your heart to God, asking Him to show you the way to building healthy, Christ-honoring relationships. Tell Him that you want to be more like His Son in this area of your life. Let Him know that you trust Him to transform your life.

Something you should know:

Your Bible is a very practical book. It's a handbook on marriage, child rearing, and friendship. If you follow God's instructions, His power will flow into the most precious relationships of life.

Give your relationships to God!

GOD INVITES YOU TO A LIFE OF MAXIMUM RELATIONSHIPS

In this week's study we will concentrate on three biblical principles in relating to others:

- Give up your rights
- Let God guide your relationships
- Open your life to others

A radical requirement

• GIVE UP YOUR RIGHTS

Godly, Christ-honoring relationships are costly. We must give up our rights for the sake of the Gospel and in the manner of the Lord Jesus.

Take care of Christ's message—the Gospel!

Paul's little letter to the Philippians is one of his most personal. Paul had founded the church on his second missionary journey, and the believers in this Roman military outpost loved him dearly. They often sent him financial gifts to support his ministry.

In AD 61, when Paul was in prison in Rome, he received disturbing news that their relationships were beginning to break down. Jealousy and selfish ambition were splitting the church into rival groups. His words are blunt and to the point: There's only one way to heal your relationships. You must give up your rights and care more for others than you do for yourself. Christ is your model. Act like Him!

Read Philippians 2:1-4, 4:2.

✳ **What was going on in Philippi?** _____

✳ **Have you ever been around a group of Christians that were characterized by this type of behavior?**

What were the results? _____

In 4:2 Paul speaks bluntly to two women he knew were arguing.

✳ **What does he tell them to do?** _____

How would you feel if your church received a letter from a leader that challenged you by name to stop fighting with another member? _____

A little help . . .

The church at Philippi was pretty normal. People were looking out for their own interests. This always leads to competition fueled by selfish-ambition and conceit (pride).

A little help . . .

"Be of the same mind" simply means to agree.

✳️ Why do you think Paul was so frontal with these two ladies? Why did he actually name them in his letter? _____

The reason Paul was so open and persistent in his confrontation is found in the theme sentences of Philippians in 1:27-30. Read these verses several times, then answer the following questions:

✳️ The command at the beginning of verse 27 is what Paul wants them to learn to do. This is the reason for writing this letter. What is it that Paul wants them to learn to do? _____

The rest of the sentence reveals what will result if they learn how to do this. What will happen if they learn to conduct themselves worthy of the Gospel of Christ? _____

What is at stake when relationships between believers begin to fall apart? _____

Now, how do you feel about Paul's blunt and public confrontation of these two women?

—

—

—

Follow Christ's example—humility!

What Paul wants the Philippians to do is to live lives worthy of the Gospel by restoring their relationships to the point of unity. How he tells them to restore their relationships is found in chapter 2:1-11. Read these verses several times, then answer the following:

✳️ Write down five personal observations from this critical section of the Bible which impress you the most.

Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.

—Philippians 1:27-30

Something you should know:

When believers are living their lives worthy of the Gospel, they will be unified in their service for Christ and confident in the face of enemies.

A little help . . .

When fighting believers are walking or conducting themselves unworthy of the Gospel, the Gospel is literally compromised.

Remember . . .

A personal observation is "what you see as you read these words."

Now that you are somewhat familiar with the section, here's an important insight. These verses can be divided into two sections. In verses 1 and 2 we have Paul's personal request. Then, there are three commands that tell them how to accomplish this. The last command has an extended illustration to explain what he means.

✳ **In 2:1-2, what does Paul personally ask the Philippians to do?** _____

Something you should know:

As you work your way through these verses in Philippians you will be applying some simple principles of interpretation which help you understand the message. This is an exciting and significant step forward for every Christian!

In 2:3-11, the three commands all begin with "Let..." They occur in verses 3, 4, and 5. The command in verse 5 is followed by a long explanation given through an illustration.

✳ **Verse 3—Rewrite this command in your own words.** _____

Verse 4—How would you state this command in one simple sentence? _____

Verses 5-11—When it comes to relationships, who does Paul tell us to think like? _____

What is the example Paul then uses to explain what he means in verses 6-11? _____

A little help . . .

Paul's plea for unity is passionate and powerful. "Struggle for unity by following Christ's example of humbly putting others first" (Philippians 2:1-11). The only way Christians can live in harmony is by exercising Christ-like humility. This means we must learn to think like Christ who humbly put others first.

In verses 6-8 we're told that Jesus humbled Himself by doing something.

✳ **What did He do?** _____

Verses 9-11 give us the result of Jesus willingly humbling Himself by becoming a man and dying for our sins.

✳ **What was that result?** _____

Take care of the Gospel by putting others first!

Paul wrote this letter to teach the bickering Philippians how to live worthy of the Gospel of Christ by becoming unified and confident in their service to Him (1:27-30). In the first sentence of chapter 2 he begs them to fulfill his joy by restoring their relationships and becoming unified once again (2:1-2). Then he tells them how to restore their relationships in three commands:

- ◆ Put others first in your actions (3).
- ◆ Put others first in your attitudes (4).
- ◆ When it comes to relationships, think like Christ who put you first by giving up His rights, taking on the limitations of humanity, and dying for your sin (5-11).

There is no way around it. The book of Philippians is clear. If you want to live worthy of the Gospel, you must learn to put others first.

Principle for relationships . . .

Relate to others the way Jesus related to you. Put others first by giving up your rights.

Give up your rights—let's review:

Maintaining healthy relationships is never easy. Even in churches there will be misunderstanding, jealousy, disagreements, and even rivalries. But this is an embarrassment to the Gospel. That's why Paul wrote to the Philippian church—to tell them to restore their relationships and to serve Christ in unity.

His advice was simple—put others first by giving up your rights. His example was the Lord Jesus Himself. Jesus willingly gave up many of His rights and prerogatives by taking on the limitations of humanity and dying for our sins.

Knowing this truth, give up your rights, is one thing. Doing it is quite another. To relate selflessly as Christ does will not come easy. We are by nature self-centered beings.

God realizes how difficult this will be for us. So He has provided further guidance in His Word. For every important relationship in life, there are specific instructions that tell us how we should live selflessly in this relationship, how we should give up our rights in this situation.

GOD WILL SHOW YOU THE WAY TO MAXIMUM RELATIONSHIPS

• LET GOD GUIDE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Something you should know:

In the book of Romans, the first eleven chapters are all about the mercies of God. We are saved by grace (1-4) and being transformed by grace (5-8). These mercies are even more meaningful since we, as Gentiles, have graciously been granted them as a result of Israel's rejection of their Messiah (9-11). Mercy motivates. In this context of the hard work of allowing God to guide our relationships, the constant motivation for giving up our rights is the mercy of God toward us.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

—Romans 12:1-2

A little help . . .

The Greek word translated reasonable is logikos or logical. It indicates that living for God is the only rational reaction to all the good gifts God has showed on us.

Principle for relationships . . .

Relate to others with the same grace Jesus extended to you. Put others first! Notice that this will require faith on your part.

Your growth as a Christian occurs in the context of the local church. The relationships you develop with other believers will become one of God's most powerful tools for changing you in ways that are pleasing to Him. Since we all begin the Christian life as babies in Christ, we need more mature believers to teach us the ways of God. Even the mature Christian needs others since we are so sinful by nature that we tend to deceive ourselves concerning our own progress.

We need each other in the local church, but church relationships are often shallow or hurtful. Many Christians suffer needlessly because they have not carefully developed their relationships in the extended family—the local church (Hebrews 10:24-39). This is because we don't follow God's guidelines for relating with one another as His children. One of the most important passages on relationships in the local church is Romans 12. Turn to this chapter now and read all 21 verses carefully. After you have read and meditated on these verses in prayer, answer the following questions.

As previously mentioned on page 21, the first verse asks you to “present your body as a living sacrifice.” This means to give your life to God with a commitment to full-time obedience. Notice that this is the only reasonable decision (your reasonable service) in light of the mercies of God.

First, give your life to God

✳ **Why do you think it's important that this decision to submit to God's will in your life is motivated by His mercy toward you?** _____

Verse 2 encourages us to live *God's perfect will* concerning relationships in the local church by changing the way we think about relationships. That is, we should stop conforming to the world's way of relating and be transformed by a new way of thinking. This focusing of our heart upon the spiritual interests of life, upon the things of Christ as revealed in His Word will literally change our way of thinking! Remember, the specific context here is relationships.

✳ **What are some differences between how the world thinks about relating to one another and the way Jesus thinks about relationships?**

How Jesus Relates	How the World Relates

Second, relate with Christlike humility

Verse three gives us a general principle for this radically different way of thinking. It's a familiar principle, the same one we saw in Philippians. This is the first time in the book of Romans that we are given a specific concerning God's will for us!

Notice the connective "for" between verses 2 and 3 of Romans 12. It's significant that the first place God asks us to apply His mercy is to our relationships in the local church (12:3-21).

✳ **How do you think this would help local churches if believers took this seriously?** _____

How are we to think of ourselves as we relate to one another in the fellowship of believers?

What do you think it means to think about ourselves soberly or sensibly, knowing that each of us is enabled by God to serve in our own unique way in the local church? _____

Have you ever known someone in a local church who thought more highly of themselves than they should have? What was the impact on the relationships in that church? _____

How do you think God wants you to keep from thinking too highly of yourself as you relate to your brothers and sisters in Christ? _____

Christlike humility unifies a church but each one must do his or her part. Romans 12:4-8 speaks of the great diversity in the local church. God is asking each of us to do something unique and important in our service to Him in the local church. Though this section deals with the subject of spiritual gifts, don't worry about that now. The most important point in this context of relationships is that we're all different but God wants us to work together. This means that we're not comparing and competing. Rather, we are cooperating with one another toward a common goal.

The last verses, 12:9-21, are full of "bullet truths" for relating in the local church. Read them through a few times, then write down 10 do's and don'ts for relating to your Christian friends at church.

A little help . . .

A renewed mind thinks soberly about oneself. Christlike humility is one of the first changes God will make in our life. When we are being spiritually transformed by the renewing of our mind we quickly realize that it's not our good but God's grace that is building His church.

Something you should know:

Remember, if we are truly allowing our new life in Christ to work its way into our everyday existence, the Bible tells us it will be seen in our relationships. The way you treat people is extremely important to God. This is why He has provided incredibly practical guidance for each of these relationships.

Do treat others in this way	Do not treat others in this way

Finally, start now with one person

✳ **Is there someone in your church you have a hard time cooperating with because of either jealousy (comparing) or contention (competing)?** _____

What do you think God wants you to do with this jealous or contentious spirit? _____

Now, review your list. Which two do's and which two don'ts do you have the most trouble living out?

What do you think God wants you to do in light of this struggle? _____

What principle from these verses do you feel you need the most help with? _____

Write out a plan of action that will help you do what Jesus wants you to do in this area of your life. _____

Something you should know:

Your plan of action should be very specific. James 1:22 says this, "But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." You need to receive the Word of God with a teachable spirit, applying it to your daily life.

Let God guide your relationships—let's review:

Putting others first by giving up your rights is the guiding principle in relationships for a believer in Jesus Christ. But God's Word offers even more specific guidance. In the most important relationships of life to God—those in the local church, family, and the workplace—God has provided detailed instructions.

Motivated by His mercy toward us, we should be willing to give our life to Him. This commitment to obedience will be most evident in our relationships at church. If we are truly committed to Christ, we will stop thinking too highly of ourselves at church and will serve with humility and love.

The people we are around the most, our family and coworkers, should see our obedience to Christ in the way we treat them.

THE ONLY WAY TO MAXIMUM RELATIONSHIPS IS CHRISTLIKE SACRIFICE

• GIVE YOUR LIFE TO OTHERS

Your relationship with God began when Jesus gave His life, eternal life, to you. He gave it to you freely. The reason He gave you His life is because He loves you.

Now, as you relate to others, He is asking you to do the same, to follow His example. He wants you to give your life to others. The Christian life is not self-centered; it is other-centered. The only way to maximum relationships is the way of the Cross—to sacrifice your needs, your wants, your desires, your priorities and agenda for the sake of those you love.

Christ's sacrificial love

I Corinthians 6:20, 7:23, 1 Peter 1:18-19 and Revelation 1:5 point out something extremely significant to this discussion.

✳ **What do these verses say about you as a Christian?** _____

Who bought you? _____

What was the price? _____

If you were bought with a price, then who now owns your life? _____

Since your life now belongs to Christ, what do you think He wants you to do with it? _____

Paul's Christlike sacrificial love

Paul and his companions never sought praise or desired positions of authority. Though he was an Apostle with great authority in the early church, he willingly waved his rights for the sake of Christ. He was a success in ministry because he not only talked about the love of Christ, he demonstrated the love of Christ! First Thessalonians 2:7-8 highlights his sacrificial love for others. Meditate on these verses, then answer the following:

✳ **What did Paul do with his life in respect to his brothers and sisters in Christ at Thessalonica?** _____

Why did he give them his life? _____

A little help . . .

The phrase "bought at a price" in 1 Corinthians 6:20 was used in the purchase of slaves in first century slave auctions. With His death Jesus Christ paid the cost to redeem you from your slavery to sin.

Something you should know:

Redemption means liberation because of a payment made. God bought your freedom, paying for you with His Son's life (1 Peter 1:19).

But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

—1 Thessalonians 2:7-8

What picture of giving his life to others does Paul give us in verse 7? _____

✳ Write out in your own words what it means to give your life to others. _____

Risking Christlike, sacrificial love

In Ephesians 4:15-16 the church is seen as a body with many parts all growing together toward maturity. We all know that only healthy bodies grow to maturity. Biblically speaking, a healthy church body requires a radical commitment to honesty! Read these two verses several times then answer the following:

✳ In verse 15 we find that something is absolutely necessary for this process to work. What is this? _____

What do you think it means to speak the truth in love? _____

What are the risks involved in telling someone the truth, that is, what you really feel they need to know? _____

Have you ever discovered that a friend really wasn't being truthful with you? _____

How did you feel? _____

If you're not speaking the truth in love, who are you thinking of, yourself or others? _____

How does this passage encourage you to speak the truth in love? That is, what is at stake? _____

Speaking the truth in love doesn't come naturally. You must learn to depend on God in this. Since this is His will for you in relationships, He will show you the way. Here are some verses from His word that will help you give your life away in this way. Restate these in your own words.

A little help . . .

A literal translation would be "truthing in love." It is borrowed from an Old Testament expression used when the fidelity between two parties is the subject (Genesis 47:29, Joshua 12:14). This is a relational dynamic which is a prerequisite to healthy growth in a church.

Something you should know:

This is extremely important. When I refuse to tell someone something they need to hear, I'm thinking only of myself. To have the courage to speak the truth in love means that I care more for the other person than I care about myself.

A little help . . .

If you care about the healthy growth of the church, you will risk truth-telling.

✦ Proverbs 15:1 _____

✦ Proverbs 15:5 _____

Proverbs 15:7 _____

Proverbs 15:10 _____

Proverbs 15:22 _____

Proverbs 15:31-33 _____

Proverbs 18:13 _____

Proverbs 18:19 _____

Proverbs 18:24 _____

Give your life to others—let’s review:

Your life doesn’t belong to you anymore. It belongs to Jesus. He bought you with His own blood. And Jesus is asking you, literally for His sake, to give your life to others.

This isn’t easy. To give your life away means to think of others first. In relationships this often translates into speaking the truth in love. When we fail to tell someone the truth about himself or herself, we’re really thinking of ourselves. It’s far more comfortable to gossip about them rather than telling them what we think in love. God’s Word provides ample encouragement in this regard. The book of Proverbs is a good place to start when we think of giving our life away in this way.

RELATING TO GOD WILL CHANGE THE WAY YOU RELATE TO OTHERS

How do you relate to others more deeply? By relating to others the way Christ relates to you. You can begin to do this by applying three basic truths to your relationships:

- Give up your rights
- Let God guide your relationships
- Give your life to others

True spirituality will be revealed in relationships. Like the Lord Jesus you need to put others first by giving up your rights. You have to stop thinking like you have in relationships and start thinking like Jesus.

←←← An important truth!

The most difficult arenas to give up your rights and begin relating like Jesus are the most common. Your church...your home...your workplace. This is where people need to see your Christianity.

A Christ-centered relationship will always shift the focus from your needs to others. To give people your life is to live selflessly. The most difficult part of this is relating honestly. We need to learn to put others first by speaking the truth in love. This is the way we will all mature in Christ.

Central Truth of Lesson Four:

You should put others first by giving up your rights, following God's guidance in relationships and developing the courage to speak the truth in love.

Reevaluate your relationships

Now we want to ask two extremely personal but important questions in response to all that we have studied this week. Having now looked at relationships from a biblical perspective, give each of these thorough thought and deliberation before God as you prepare for your time with your leader. Be honest before the Lord as you answer.

✳ On a scale of 1-10, where do you think Jesus would rate your primary relationships in life?

- At church?
- With your spouse?
- With your children?
- With your parents?
- With your coworkers?

What specific steps do you think God wants you to take to improve these relationships?

Something you should know:

The way you treat others matters to God. He asks you to follow His Son's example by giving up your rights for the sake of the Gospel.

Verses to memorize →→→

A little help . . .

If you are not concerned about relationships you need to meditate on the word let. It means "let this happen in your life." No definition of spiritual maturity ignores your treatment of others!

✳ **How do you want your leader to help you in this?** _____

If you expect others to listen to your advice as you speak the truth in love, you must be ready to hear what they have to say.

✳ **How do you handle criticism, even constructive criticism? In what ways do you become defensive and protective in relationships?** _____

Share these defense mechanisms with your leader, asking him/her to hold you accountable for being more open and honest with others.

Prepare for your time with your leader this week. Ask God to give you the courage to be absolutely open and honest about the relationships in your life. You need a friend in this. Your leader wants to be your friend. Ask God to show you how to trust someone else with this very difficult aspect of the Christian life.

Memory Verses:

***Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit,
but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.
Let each of you look out not only for his own interests,
but also for the interests of others.
Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.***

Philippians 2:3-5

Next Week:

Lesson Number _____

Pages _____ to _____

Memory Verse _____

We will meet at _____ (time) on _____ (day) _____ (place)

TELLING OTHERS HOW TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

Lesson 5

OVERVIEW

- ♦ God wants you to tell others about the free gift of eternal life
- ♦ You begin by building relationships with non-Christians
- ♦ You must know how to share the Good News accurately

GOOD NEWS WAS MADE TO SHARE

There is an interesting story in the Old Testament. It's about beggars who discovered something very special. Turn to 2 Kings 6:24. The armies of Syria had besieged the Israelite city of Samaria. After a time, the citizens ran out of food. The famine was so severe that people were actually eating their children. Read the tragic story in 6:24-33. As you read, try to picture how desperate and helpless the people of the ancient city must have been.

In the first two verses of 2 Kings 7 you will meet Elisha, God's prophet. His message to the tormented people seems too good to be true. "Tomorrow about this time, God will deliver you from your hopeless situation. Food will be plentiful and inexpensive." Read the words of the prophet in 7:1-2. Can you understand why the officer of verse two found this hard to believe?

What the officer couldn't know is soon discovered by four lepers outside the gates of the city. Leprosy was a disfiguring, deadly and incurable disease in that day. Lepers were vile outcasts, forced to scavenge for food in garbage dumps beyond the walls of the city. As the siege went on, even the garbage ran out. The four starving beggars decided to surrender to the enemy armies. Read the story now in 2 Kings 7:3-9 several times.

✳ **What did the beggars discover when they entered the camp of the Syrians?** _____

Read 2 Kings 7:8 carefully three or four times.

✳ **What was the initial reaction of these beggars when they experienced God's bountiful deliverance?** _____

Now look at verse 9. Read it aloud over and over.

✳ **How were they feeling about their self-centered behavior on this "day of good news?"** _____

Memory Verse:

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

John 5:24

Something you should know:

Jesus' number one priority is the lost—those who have yet to receive the free gift of eternal life. We're told to share this Good News with others.

A little help . . .

God had miraculously delivered and provided for His people by frightening the enemy armies so that they had fled, leaving behind their vast stores of food and supplies. The prophet Elisha had been correct. As He had promised, God saved the helpless and hopeless residents of Samaria.

←←← Verse to memorize

Something you should know:

Though this story was recorded primarily to remind Israel of God's great deliverance in spite of their unbelief, it illustrates a very practical problem when we experience God's deliverance. In our initial joy and excitement, we may forget about others.

What did the beggars say to each other? "We're not doing right selfishly enjoying God's deliverance. This is a day of Good News. Let's tell others before they starve!"

Can you remember how you felt when you first discovered God's deliverance from sin? Take some time now to recall the circumstances of the day when you heard the Good News that Christ died for your sins and arose.

✳ **In what ways were you much like the beggars starving outside the gates of Samaria? _____**

✳ **When you trusted in Christ and received eternal life, how did your experience parallel the lepers when they discovered God's bountiful provision for life? _____**

Are you sharing the Good News?

Since that day of Good News, what have you done with God's blessing? Have you shared it with others? How many starving beggars have you told about the "Bread" come down from heaven—the gift of eternal life given freely to all who believe in Jesus Christ?

✳ **Take some time now to write the names of everyone you have shared the Good News of the Gospel with during the last twelve months. _____**

✳ **How many of these have actually believed in Jesus Christ? That is, how many of those you have told about the free gift of eternal life have become children of God through receiving Christ as their Savior? _____**

If you're like most of us, you probably had a difficult time even remembering one person you have shared the Good News of the Gospel with. The sad reality is that most Christians never tell others how to have a relationship with God. But this isn't the way it's supposed to be. Jesus wants us to tell others! Turn to the following verses:

✳ **Luke 19:10 Why did Jesus come to earth? _____**

Acts 1:8 What does Jesus want us to be? _____

Matthew 28:19-20 What does Jesus want us to do? _____

There is no getting around it. Jesus' number one priority is the lost, those who have never heard the Good News of the Gospel. He wants us to be His witnesses, to tell others about Him. We should be telling others how to have a relationship with Him.

The Bible will be your guide

This week's study will challenge you to share your faith and then show you how. You probably feel a little intimidated right now. Most Christians feel inadequate when it comes to *evangelism*, the process of telling others how to have a relationship with Christ. You're not alone, and you're not the first.

From the very beginning of the church, Jesus has been asking His followers to share the Good News. The fifth and last historical book of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, records their experience. Before returning to His Father in heaven, Jesus told His disciples, or followers: "You shall be my witnesses...in Jerusalem (their hometown)... Judea and Samaria (their home provinces or states)... and to the end of the earth (every people, every culture)" (Acts 1:8).

The book of Acts is their story. Normal, everyday men and women who filled their lives with eternal significance because they took Jesus' words seriously. In a few months everyone in Jerusalem had heard about Jesus (Acts 1-8). A few years later, the Good News had spread to Judea and Samaria (Acts 9-12). In less than a century the free offer of eternal life had gone to the remotest corners of the known world (Acts 13-28). What began as a few frightened believers huddled in an Upper Room grew into the most powerful movement in world history. Thousands of committed disciples boldly took the Gospel message throughout the Roman Empire. Millions received the free gift of eternal life, grew in their faith, and the world changed dramatically.

But it happened one life at a time. One friend telling another about a Great Friend, Jesus Christ. Just one poor beggar telling another poor beggar where to get bread!

The story didn't end at the close of Acts. It's still being told today. And you can be part of it...if you follow your simple instructions for telling others how to have a relationship with Christ.

Talking to God:

Get alone with God. Ask Him to probe your priorities in life. Have you neglected Jesus' number one priority—telling others about the free gift of eternal life? Have you been like the self-centered beggars—selfishly enjoying the bounty of God's deliverance while ignoring spiritually-starved people all around you?

Tell God you want to obey His Son's Great Commission, that you want to change your priorities. Ask Him to use you to tell others how to have a relationship with Christ. Don't worry about your fears or what you don't know. Your starting point is a commitment to obedience. If you're willing to obey God, He will show you the way. You *can* tell others how to have a relationship with Christ. Like the lepers, confess that you are not doing right. You have remained silent. This is a day of Good News; go tell others before they starve!

Give your priorities to God!

GOD INVITES YOU TO SHARE HIS LIFE WITH OTHERS

God has filled His Word with practical advice to those who want to tell others about Jesus Christ. We can easily categorize this information under three basic truths:

- God wants you to tell others about the free gift of eternal life
 - You begin by building relationships with non-Christians
 - You must know how to share the Gospel accurately
- **GOD WANTS YOU TO TELL OTHERS ABOUT THE FREE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE**

Sharing the Good News is a privilege and a responsibility

Since most believers never share the Good News of the Gospel, God is seeking those few who will. When He finds a Christian who takes this responsibility seriously, it pleases Him greatly.

Sharing the Gospel: It's a matter of life and death!

You've already seen that Jesus' #1 priority is to seek and save the lost. The lost are those who have never received the free gift of eternal life. If they never hear about Jesus and believe in Him they will die in their sinful state and go to hell. Let's review some of these critical passages which remind us of the importance of telling others about the free gift of eternal life.

Read Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45, and Luke 19:10.

✳ **What is Jesus' highest priority?** _____

Why did He come to earth? (See also 1 John 4:14) _____

In Romans 9:1-3, Paul makes an amazing statement concerning his ethnic brothers and sisters, the Israelites.

✳ **How did Paul feel about his friends and loved ones being separated from Christ through unbelief?** _____

What did he wish he could do for his lost friends and loved ones? _____

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.

—1 John 4:14

Something you should know:

Most of Paul's Jewish friends and relatives rejected his message of grace—that righteousness could come apart from the law.

Sharing the Gospel: It's an issue of obedience!

Jesus' final earthly instructions to His followers are recorded in Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8. Review these verses, then write out Jesus' final command to His disciples in your own words on a 3 x 5 card. Make it personal, using your name as if Jesus is talking to you.

There is just no denying it. Jesus' highest priority for you is to tell others how to have eternal life. So much so that He commands it. But sharing the Good News is so important to God that He offers several other motivations. You'll find some of the strongest in 2 Corinthians 5:9-15.

✳️ **2 Corinthians 5:9 tells us that our moment by moment ambition should be to do what?** _____

How do you think telling others about eternal life fits into this ambition? _____

In 2 Corinthians 5:14 Paul says that a unique power controls or compels Christians to share the Good News.

✳️ **What is that power?** _____

What did Jesus do for you? _____

Verse 16 gives us a special perspective on everyone we meet.

✳️ **How does this make a difference in your everyday acquaintances?** _____

Read 1 Peter 3:15 several times.

✳️ **As a Christian, we should always be ready to do something. What is it?** _____

What do you think this means to you on a daily basis? _____

God wants you to tell others about the free gift of eternal life—let's review:

Evangelism, or telling others about Jesus, isn't optional for a Christian. Jesus says very clearly that the lost, those who have never believed in Him, are His highest priority. He left us clear instructions to tell the world about His love. The Gospel message is our responsibility and we're to take it to everyone, just like they did in the book of Acts.

Obedience to our Savior isn't our only incentive for spreading the Good News. His love for us should cause us to want to please Him and to love others enough to tell them.

We should live our lives on the lookout for someone who is spiritually dead. We should always be ready to tell them how to receive the free gift of eternal life.

A little help . . .

The love of Christ in this verse can be taken two ways: Christ's love for us or our love for Christ. Either way it is our love relationship with Christ that motivates us to tell others about His love.

But sanctify the Lord in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear...

—1 Peter 3:15

A little help . . .

Sanctify the Lord means to reverence the Lord. A sure way to show our reverence to Christ is by remembering His number one priority of telling others about Him.

YOU MUST EARN THE RIGHT TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS

• YOU MUST BEGIN BY BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH NON-CHRISTIANS

Many Christians don't tell others about Jesus because they think they need to go door to door talking to strangers. This isn't at all what the Bible teaches. Though it's true that we should always be ready to tell everyone about Jesus, most of our contacts will be familiar friends and loved ones.

Building bridges to the lost

Evangelism, telling others about Jesus, begins at home, at work, and at school. It really is one friend telling another friend about his or her Best Friend, Jesus Christ. We need to learn how to earn the *right* to be heard. An extremely practical paragraph in the Bible gives us three steps for building relationships with the lost. Turn to Colossians 4:2-6 and read it four times in either the New King James Version or the New American Standard Bible.

There are three sentences in this paragraph. Each deals with a different aspect of reaching out to non-Christians. Find the periods.

✳ **How do the sentences divide the paragraph?** _____

What is the subject of each sentence? _____

In Colossians 4:2-4 Paul asks his friends to pray for his evangelistic efforts. Read the three verses again, then answer the following:

✳ **What specifically does he ask them to pray for?** _____

In verse 5 the Apostle tells them to be careful in how they conduct their lives or walk among those outside of the faith; that is, non-Christians. Paul is making an important transition here. After we pray for our friends, we need to make contact with them. Read this verse twice, then answer the questions.

✳ **How does he tell them to walk?** _____

Why? _____

A little help . . .

Be careful not to make this too complicated. Simply divide the paragraph of 4:2-6 into its three sentences. Then try to identify the main subject of each sentence.

A little help . . .

"Those who are outside" is a technical term referring to non-Christians—they are "outside" of God's grace.

Verse 6 is all about speech or how we talk to non-Christians. This is the final step in building bridges to the lost. Prayer—conduct—speech. Read verse 6 out loud, then answer the following:

✳ **What type of speech does this verse encourage?** _____

✳ **How would you season your speech with grace when it comes to talking to non-Christians?**

Why do you think it is important that you tailor your speech sensitively to each person?

Building bridges to the lost—three positive steps:

This paragraph gives us three steps for building bridges to those we know and love who have yet to receive eternal life: Pray persistently, walk wisely, and speak sensitively.

Persistent Prayer

Read Colossians 4:2-4 again. Notice that Paul asks them to pray for two things in his interaction with non-Christians—an open door and a clear message. He also asks them to pray persistently and with thanksgiving. This is expectant prayer; he expects God to open doors. It's also specific prayer; he wants his message to be clear to *each* person.

How practical! You may not know much right now, but you can begin praying for your non-Christian friends and relatives. Ask God for an open door and a clear message. This puts all the pressure on God!

Wisdom Walk

Read verse 5 through twice. Your walk or conduct among non-Christians is to be a *wise* walk. Time is short so you need to carefully plan your personal contact with unbelievers. Make the most of every opportunity. Always be thinking of how you can move this person toward belief in Christ.

Take some time now to read about heavenly wisdom in James 3:17.

✳ **What are some characteristics of the type of wisdom that comes from God?** _____

How do you think this will help you reach out to those who need His love? _____

Something you should know:

Salt is both a preservative and a seasoning. Our speech should make the Gospel “taste” better to non-Christians.

A little help . . .

Just as a cook needs to be sensitive to the tastes of those eating a meal, we need to be sensitive to the “taste” of every non-Christian. No two will be the same.

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

—James 3:17

Something you should know:

You can win the argument but lose the goal! Stay with the primary issue—the Gospel!

Seasoned Speech

Pay close attention to the details of Colossians 4:6. Your conversations with non-Christians should be as tasteful and appetizing as a well-seasoned meal. You're not trying to convert them to your priorities in life. You are looking for an opportunity to tell them about the free gift of eternal life. You should also know them well enough to consider how you should talk to them personally. Remember that everyone is fighting some type of personal battle. So be kind!

Be careful not to get caught up in secondary details. Too often while talking with someone about Jesus the conversation will turn to religious or political issues which have nothing to do with receiving eternal life. Stay on track. God's Word warns us against distractive arguments in 2 Timothy 2:14 and 25-26.

✳ **Read 2 Timothy 2:14, 25, 26 and restate them in your own words.** _____

You begin by building relationships with non-Christians—let's review:

Though God wants you to tell everyone about His Son, Jesus Christ, most of us become Christians through a friend or loved one. This is why it's so important to learn to build bridges to the lost. We need to earn the right to be heard.

Colossians 4:2-6 gives us three practical steps for reaching out to non-Christians. We begin by praying for them by name, asking God to give us an open door and a clear message. Then we walk wisely among them being careful to make every contact count for moving them toward faith in Christ. Finally, we speak graciously and wisely with them, watching our words so that they will not be turned off.

SHARE THE GOOD NEWS ACCURATELY

• YOU MUST KNOW HOW TO SHARE THE GOSPEL ACCURATELY

Once you have earned the right to be heard you can be sure that God will answer your prayers. You soon find that He is providing an opportunity to share the Good News about Jesus Christ with your friend or loved one. When the opening comes, make sure you share the Gospel accurately. Though the Gospel is simple, it is also precise. God cares deeply about the correctness of the Gospel.

Share the Good News completely!

The biblical truth that men and women are declared righteous by God the moment they believe in Christ is the theme of Galatians. This doctrine—justification by faith—is defended, explained and applied. Read Galatians 1:6-8 four times, then answer the following:

✳ **In verse 6 Paul marvels at something. What is it?** _____

What type of gospel have they turned to? _____

If something is different, it is not the same. What does this mean in respect to the Gospel?

Could a “different” gospel be “the” Gospel? _____

Read verse 7 again. What had the Galatian Christians done to the Gospel of Christ? _____

Look back at Galatians 1:4 where you will find the true Good News or Gospel in a nutshell.

✳ **On the basis of verse 4, what is a short definition of the true, unperturbed Gospel of Christ?**

Now read verse 8 very carefully.

What does the Apostle Paul say about anyone who teaches a gospel different from the true Gospel he taught the Galatians? _____

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

—Galatians 1:6-8

Something you should know:

The Galatians were turning away from Paul's Gospel (v. 4). They were deserting grace to retreat to the law. As is usually the case, false teachers were pressuring them to add human works to the work of Christ on the Cross.

A little help . . .

Verse 4 defines the Gospel of Christ as the Good News of God's grace in Christ, who gave Himself for our sins.

Something you should know:

The word accursed is literally “anathema” or devoted to destruction. This is the strongest language in the entire New Testament!

Something you should know:

The importance of sharing the true Gospel cannot be overemphasized. You must have a clear understanding of what the Gospel is. The Gospel that Paul mentions in Galatians is found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. This is the one place in the New Testament where the historical elements of the Gospel are clearly defined.

An important truth! →→→

These false teachers are under God's curse. This doesn't mean that they are going to hell. Only those who reject Jesus' free gift of eternal life go to hell. Whether they are believers or not, this does mean that God will deal with them severely. This is the only place in the Bible that the word accursed, or literally *anathema*, is applied to a human being. The bottom line is that God is extremely displeased when anyone lies about His free offer of salvation by grace. It's a serious mistake to pervert the Gospel of Christ by teaching that someone can be saved from hell by any human work.

Share the Good News concisely!

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-6 at least three times and answer the following questions.

Complete the following on the basis of the first three verses:

✳ **What did Paul do?**

I _____ (v. 1) that which I also _____ (v. 3).

How did the people respond? _____

What were the four verbs Paul used in defining the Gospel?

Christ _____ (v.3) for our sins according to the Scriptures (the Old Testament predictions of the Savior's death like Isaiah 53). He was _____ (verse 4a, Note: This is proof that a death occurred.). He _____ (v 4b) the third day according to the Scriptures (the Old Testament predictions of the Savior's bodily resurrection like Psalm 16:10). He was (v. 5, Note: This is proof that a resurrection occurred).

Based on this critical passage, the definition of the Gospel is: **Christ died for our sins and arose.**

This is the content of the Gospel. This is what must be believed for a person to receive the free gift of eternal life.

This is so important. Take some time right now to memorize the true Gospel: **Christ died for our sins and arose.**

God wants you to share the true Gospel. The true Gospel is *Christ died for our sins and arose*. But there's another extremely significant question we need to answer before we share the Gospel. What is God asking the unsaved or lost person to do? That is, what response will bring eternal life to a person?

When you tell someone about Jesus, that He died for his or her sins and arose, what response are you looking for? The Bible says very clearly that they must **believe**. Often people will say they believe something but they do not understand the biblical concept of belief, or faith.

The two Greek words translated believe and faith emphasize the idea of "trust." This means "reliance on" or "dependence on." Those who rely upon or trust in the truth of the Gospel as their only hope receive eternal life. The New Testament emphasizes this many times. Notice the use of the word *believe* or *faith* in the following verses about eternal life: John 1:12, 3:16, 5:24, 6:47, 20:30-31; Acts 16:31; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5.

Could it be more clear? God is asking the lost person to believe in His Son Jesus Christ. Specifically, saving faith is a reliance on the truth of the Gospel as revealed in the Word of God. Those who believe that Jesus died for their sins and arose receive eternal life.

So you want to get the Gospel right, and you want to ask people to believe in it.

Share the Good News confidently!

It helps to have a basic method to use in presenting the Gospel. A method which makes the Gospel clear and asks the person to believe will make you more confident in telling others how to have a relationship with Christ. Even a brand new Christian who knows very little about the Bible can share the Gospel accurately by using the little booklet *Life's Most Important Question*. Three simple steps will give you the confidence you need to share the Good News:

1. Read through the booklet several times out loud so that you are familiar with each page.
2. Practice telling others about Christ by reading the booklet to a Christian friend or relative. Ask them to critique your presentation.
3. Carry several booklets with you and be ready to share the Gospel always.

You may feel awkward at first, but with a little experience you can tell others about the free gift of eternal life. Here is a way of asking permission to share the Gospel:

“Has anyone ever shown you how you can know for sure you are going to heaven?”

If they say “no” then ask . . .

“Mind if I do?”

Once they give you permission read through the *Life's Most Important Question* booklet with them.

You must know how to share the Good News accurately—let’s review:

God cares deeply about the correctness of the Gospel. There is only one Gospel—Christ died for our sins and arose. And there is only one response to the Gospel which brings eternal life—belief, or trust.

The best way to make sure that we share the Good News precisely is to use a presentation that is accurate and simple. I have included in this book several copies of the tract *Life's Most Important Question*.

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

—John 5:24

GOOD NEWS WAS MADE TO SHARE

To selfishly enjoy God's deliverance is not right. This is a day of Good News. Let's tell others before they starve!

Jesus is asking you to tell others how to have a relationship with Him. As you share the Good News, remember these three principles:

- **God wants you to tell others about the free gift of eternal life**
- **You begin by building relationships with non-Christians**
- **You must know how to share the Gospel accurately**

An important truth! →→→

The Great Commission, the famous last words of Jesus to go and make disciples of everyone, is for every Christian. Jesus' #1 priority is the lost, those who have never heard. You have a personal responsibility to tell others about Jesus' free offer of eternal life to all that believe.

The first place to look for those you should share the Good News with is close to home. Your friends and relatives will listen to you. But you must earn the right to be heard. You prepare the way for the Gospel through persistent prayer, pave the way through a wise walk, and pass it on through seasoned speech.

Once a person seems ready to hear the Gospel, be sure you share it accurately. You must never be sloppy in your presentation of the Gospel. A person's eternal destiny depends on what you tell them. So make it clear—Christ died for your sins and arose. And make sure they know what God wants them to do—believe, or trust in His Son.

Central Truth of Lesson Five:

You should be telling others how to have a relationship with Christ by making friends with non-Christians and sharing the true Gospel.

Think of ten people you know who do not know Jesus Christ. These may be relatives, neighbors, friends at work or school, old friends from the past or new acquaintances.

Persistent Prayer. Begin to pray for these people by name. Ask God for an open door into their lives for the Gospel. Also ask God to give you a clear message when He opens the door. Write their names down on a 3x5 card and carry it with you. Pray for them constantly—in your morning quiet time, while driving, before you eat, before you go to bed, any time God calls them to mind. Pray expectantly and with thanksgiving. Remember that God wants these people to be saved.

✳ **Write their names down.** _____

Share your list with three other people. Ask them to also pray for your friends.

Wisdom Walk. Start making contact with these people right away. Free up your schedule enough to do something with one of the non-Christians you're praying for. A ballgame, a golf date, a dinner invitation. Be creative, but schedule it **this week**.

Seasoned Speech. Continue to study the booklet *Four Fantastic Facts*. Practice the presentation with a friend until you can go through it smoothly. You have to be prepared to share the Good News accurately.

Prepare for your time with your leader. You will share the *Four Fantastic Facts* with your leader as if sharing with a non-Christian. Remember that your leader wants you to succeed in telling others about Jesus.

Memory Verse:

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

John 5:24

←←← Verse to memorize

A little help . . .

If you do not feel a heavy burden for those who are lost, without Christ and without hope, you need to ask God to give you His heart in this matter. He sent His only Son to die for this hurting world.

Next Week:

Lesson Number _____

Pages _____ to _____

Memory Verse _____

We will meet at _____ (time) on _____ (day) _____ (place)

RELATING TO YOUR NEW FAMILY IN CHRIST

Lesson 6

OVERVIEW

- ◆ Christ wants you to be a part of His church
- ◆ The local church is where you grow in Christ
- ◆ The local church is where you serve Christ

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY OF GOD

Children need loving and stable families. A healthy family is committed to nurturing. The family guides children through experiences and stages of development which prepare him or her for a healthy adult life. The best place for a child to grow is in a loving, healthy family.

We enter our new relationship to God as a baby. Having been born again through faith in Christ (John 3:16), we begin our new life as infants needing constant care and guidance. As we grow in Christ we pass through many new experiences and stages of development. Just as God has provided families to nurture children in the physical realm, He has, in His grace, provided a spiritual family to nurture us in our spiritual growth to maturity. This family is the local church.

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Acts 20:28

Turn to Ephesians 2:19-22

These verses are speaking of the church. Not the physical building but the people in the church. Paul describes the people in a local church as a building to help us understand how God has put it together. Christ is the cornerstone, the teaching of the apostles and the prophets in the Bible is the foundation, and each Christian is a building block.

Read these verses five times.

✳ **As you read, write down three observations.** _____

Read verse 19 again aloud, over and over. The church is a gathering of those who were formerly strangers with one another and foreigners to the household of God. That is, people who didn't know one another or God as their Father.

✳ **Do you remember when you were outside of the family of God?** _____

How did that feel? _____

Something you should know:

The word church literally means "a called-out group or assembly." When we believed, God called us out of this world order and placed us in "the Body of Christ"—that spiritual organism of which Christ is the Head, and is composed of every Christian in the church age. A local expression of this Body of Christ is your local church—a group of believers in Christ who have organized themselves for the purpose of doing God's will.

←←← Verse to memorize

A little help . . .

The cornerstone was the first large stone placed at the corner of the building. The builder would line up the rest of the structure to the chief cornerstone. The teaching and preaching of the first century apostles and prophets established the early church. But Christ Himself is the rock foundation on which the whole church rests.

Something you should know:

To fully experience the benefits of this new family, you need to be committed to it. Notice how exciting this new family is. God is the Father. His loving care is extended to everyone in the family. Jesus is the cornerstone, His work on the Cross established the family and His continuing love and guidance hold the family together. The teaching of the Bible is the guide. There are no co-dependent code words to learn or family secrets to discourage you. It's all right out in the open, in black and white. God's Word is the "family guide," and you are a significant part of the family. As a brother or sister in Christ, your contribution to the family is extremely important.

A little help . . .

Be very careful not to think of the church as a business or a fraternal organization. The church is not an organization but an organism pulsating with the very life of the Lord Jesus.

Something you should know:

This is extremely important to your growth as a Christian. You need to be part of a local church. Remember, God had something in mind when He gave you eternal life. The only way to discover this is by serving Christ in the local church.

Notice that all those in the local church were at one time strangers to one another and outside of the household.

✳ **How does this cause you to look at people in the local church differently?** _____

Regardless of what type of home you grew up in, now you're a part of a new household, the family of God, the church.

✳ **How does this make you feel?** _____

A new and different family!

✳ **How does the church, the family of God differ from the family you grew up in?** _____

✳ **How does the church, the family of God, differ from an organization or an institution?**

There is a place for you to grow in Christ. It's not really a place, but a family—the local church. Here you can be nurtured, cared for, taught, trained, protected, encouraged, guided, and equipped for the future. The only place for you to grow in ways pleasing to God is in the local church.

Where are you now?

✳ **What has been your personal experience with local churches?** _____

✳ **What reservations do you have when it comes to becoming part of a local church?**

Talking to God:

Spend some time with your Heavenly Father through prayer. What are your feelings about becoming part of a local church? Most people will have some reservations, even some fears. You may have been hurt in the past or disappointed in a pastor. Share these feelings with God. Tell Him you really want to please Him, even though this is difficult. He knows your past and your feelings on this. He will help you find a church you can settle into to grow and serve.

Share your honest feelings about church with God.

GOD INVITES YOU TO ENJOY HIS FAMILY

The most significant expressions of your life should be through the local church. The fellowship of believers is the family God has provided for you. A place to grow in Christ and to serve Him. Three biblical realities will guide you in your involvement in a local church.

- Christ wants you to be a part of His church
- The local church is where you grow in Christ
- The local church is where you serve Christ

A Place to Belong!

• CHRIST WANTS YOU TO BE A PART OF HIS CHURCH

As a new creation in Christ you have spiritual privileges and power you never had before. One of the most precious blessings God has provided for His children is a place to gather with others who have been redeemed. In many ways your success as a Christian depends on your relationship with your local church.

The church, the church and the church!

If you asked fifteen different people what the word church means, you would receive a variety of answers. The New Testament uses the word *church* in three ways. (1) The universal church, usually referred to as the “body of Christ” (Ephesians 1:22-23). This includes 100% of those who have received eternal life by faith. Every Christian on earth and those who are in heaven (Heb 12:23) belong to the church universal, “the body of Christ.” (2) The visible church, that part of the body of Christ we come into contact with. So there is the church in America, the church in Cambodia, the church in this decade. In Acts 9:31 the singular “church” is used to indicate several churches in a region. (3) The local church, the specific assembly or gathering of believers we belong to and relate with. A local church can vary in size from a gathering in a home (Romans 16:5) to some of our very large churches today.

Every Christian is a member of the body of Christ, the *church universal*. Every Christian is identified with other Christians they come into contact with, the *visible church*. But it is at the *local church* level that the fullness of our relationship with God can be experienced.

You may find this difficult to accept because of a bad experience in a church. Ask God to help you trust His Son’s church again as you consider how important the church is to your Savior.

A group Jesus loves!

✳ Read Acts 20:28 five times then rewrite the verse in your own words. _____

What did it cost Jesus Christ, God’s Son, to provide the church for His people? _____

Something you should know:

In Acts 20:28 Paul is exhorting the elders of the church at Ephesus. He speaks to them as shepherds of the precious flock of God—the church.

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

—Acts 20:28

A little help . . .

It was the blood of the Son of God that was shed for the sins of the church.

✳️ How dear is the church, both the universal or worldwide church and your local church to the Lord Jesus? _____

How do you imagine Jesus feels when His people are not actively participating in His church? _____

Jesus is devoted to the Church!

In Ephesians 5, Paul uses Christ's relationship with His church to teach men how to love their wives. Though the primary emphasis is on the husband-wife relationship, these verses give us vital insights into the Lord Jesus' deep devotion to His church. Read Ephesians 5:25-30 several times, writing your observations below:

✳️ Observations: _____

According to verse 25, how much does Christ love the church? _____

Since the church is His body, what is He constantly doing to provide for the health of His body? (See verse 29) _____

Christ gave Himself for the church, He loves the church, nourishes and cherishes the church.

✳️ What difference does this make to you when you consider your commitment to a local church? _____

Jesus works through the church!

The first mention of the church by Jesus followed Peter's profession of what only God could reveal to him—that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16-18). Jesus responded by telling Peter that this profession of faith in Him as Christ, the Son of God would be the "rock" or foundation to His coming church. Read these verses noting verse 18 very carefully.

✳️ What is Christ's principal or main work in the world today? _____

Will He succeed? _____

Something you should know:

Ephesians 5:25-30 is Paul's brief outline of what Jesus has done for the church: 1) He was willing to suffer and die for the church. 2) He has devoted Himself to growing the church and developing the church until it becomes what it should be—the holy temple of God.

A little help . . .

Since Christ considers the church is truly His Body, He treats it with love and care.

Something you should know:

The name Peter (Greek, Petros) means rock or rock-man. Christ uses this word-play to make His point.

A little help . . .

Jesus is building His church as men and women, boys and girls around the world believe the bedrock truth of life—Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ (Savior), the Son of God. The forces of evil will not conquer these people who believe in Christ.

Building the church is what the Lord Jesus is doing today, and the success of the church is inevitable; He guarantees it!

✳ **How does this help you to risk trusting Him enough to become a part of a local church, in spite of past hurts or disappointments?** _____

Jesus invites you to church!

In Hebrews 10:24-25 we are encouraged in the strongest of terms not to neglect our involvement in a local church. Read these verses very carefully 10 times slowly.

✳ **What are these verses saying:** _____

According to verse 25, what are we not to forsake? _____

Why? _____

Verse 24 reminds us of what we will miss out on if we forsake building a strong relationship with a local church and the people in it.

✳ **Describe what involvement in a local church will do for your spiritual life in your own words.** _____

Christ wants you to be a part of His church—let’s review:

Jesus loves the church. He purchased the church for His Father with His own blood. He cares for, nourishes, and cherishes the church. Building the church is His main work in the world today and He will not be stopped.

It pleases Jesus when you become part of a local church by entering into deep and meaningful relationships with other Christians who will encourage you along the way. His word strongly exhorts you to do this. When you do, you find that the local church is where you can grow and serve Him best.

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

—Hebrews 10:24, 25

A little help . . .

The assembling of ourselves together is the gathering of Christians to worship Christ and build one another up in the faith.

Something you should know:

The Day is the very day that Christ returns to receive the church into heaven. You will learn much more of this in later studies. The point here is that the time is short since we never know, Christ might come today!

A PLACE TO GROW!

• THE LOCAL CHURCH IS WHERE YOU GROW IN CHRIST

As the church exploded across the New Testament world the First-Century believers grew in Christ. Men and women became strong in their faith as they loved one another and carried the message of the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

The Jerusalem church described in Acts 2 was alive and dynamic. Its members had great impact on their families, their communities and their world. The history of what happened reveals four distinguishing characteristics of a healthy church which are vital to the growth of every believer.

Four ways to grow

Read Acts 2:40-47 five times.

✳ Write down five personal observations from this description of the early church.

Try to picture these early church meetings from the description in Acts 2:42. Describe their church meetings in your own words. _____

How does this compare to your personal experience in church? _____

Acts 2:42 concentrates on the four primary activities of these early Christians when they assembled together—teaching, fellowship, worship and prayers. These are the four needs of every Christian that can only be met in a local church.

Transforming truths

The believers in the early church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ doctrine or teaching” (Acts 2:42a). This is speaking of the Scriptures written by the Apostles or their companions. The Apostles were the leaders God designated for the infant church. They were devoted to the teaching of the Bible.

A little help . .

The tremendous growth in the number of believers should impress us with the effectiveness of their simple plan. These new believers were trained by the Apostles. This training involved four basic steps.

Something you should know:

The new believers were trained in the apostles’ doctrine. As eyewitnesses to the life of Christ, these followers of Christ taught the early church the truth.

A little help . . .

In verse 2 Paul charges Timothy to preach the word. Pastors must preach God's truth with courage and perseverance.

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

—Hebrews 4:12

Something you should know:

The inspired words of your Bible are alive and active. The message of God's Word has the unique power to penetrate and evaluate your thoughts, motives and actions. Only the Scriptures can expose what God wants to teach you about your heart.

A little help . . .

Rightly dividing the word of truth means to correctly handle the Word of God. Diligent students will learn to correlate and categorize the truths of Scripture in a harmonious way.

Something you should know:

The new believers were trained in the fellowship of the church. The Apostles knew the value of Christian friendship from personal experience. They knew the power of the redeemed community and taught their converts to relate in Christ-pleasing ways.

Learning the truths of the Bible is a basic need in your life as a Christian. The church is the place where you best learn the truths of Scripture.

In 2 Timothy 4:2-4 Paul instructs a young pastor named Timothy concerning his primary responsibility. Read these verses several times.

✳ **What is a pastor's main job?** _____

Read Hebrews 4:12 several times.

✳ **Rewrite this verse on the potential of the Word of God in your life in your own words.**

What does 2 Timothy 2:15 tell you to do when you study the Bible, the word of truth?

You need the church to grow. The leaders in your local church have studied the word of God for years. They can teach you these life-changing truths in ways that will transform your life. Write down your thoughts on your personal need to study the word of God under the guidance of your pastor and leaders of your church.

Radical relationships

The believers in the early church "continued steadfastly in fellowship" (Acts 2:42b). Fellowship was the term the first century Christians chose to describe their relationships. It means a sharing of life on the deepest level.

Relating to other Christians is a basic need in your life as a Christian. The church is the place where you find the supportive and encouraging relationships which will help you grow.

Read Hebrews 10:24-25 again three times.

✳ **Write down five personal observations from these important verses on fellowship.** _____

✳️ **What will relationships in a local church stir up in your life?** _____

Another friend of the Apostle Paul was Titus. In 2 Corinthians 7:6 Paul speaks of his relationship with Titus. When Paul was deeply concerned about the events in Corinth, Titus visited him.

✳️ **What did Titus' visit do for the tired and downcast Apostle?** _____

When your soul is downcast and you're feeling overwhelmed, God will work directly through Christian friends to comfort you.

✳️ **How does this make you feel?** _____

You need the church to grow. The Christian who doesn't develop a new web of relationships within the Christian community will find growth very difficult. God will use the relationships you build in the local church to powerfully transform your life. The local church is where you will find friends to encourage you, comfort you and show you how Christianity works in real life.

Winsome worship

The first Christians in Jerusalem "continued earnestly...in the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42c). This is speaking of the Lord's Table, the centerpiece of worship in the local church. Worship is responding to God. When His people are falling more deeply in love with His Son, captivated by His grace, they respond through worship.

Worshiping God with other Christians is a basic need in your life as a believer. The church is the place believers gather to worship their God.

In John 4 Jesus gets into a discussion with a lonely woman by a well. When the subject turns to worship, the Lord gives some pretty clear instructions. Read verses 23 and 24 of John 4.

✳️ **How does Jesus tell us to worship His Father?** _____

What do you think it means to worship Him in spirit and truth? _____

How does it make you feel when you realize that your Heavenly Father is seeking people to worship Him? _____

A little help . . .

The love and good works Christ desires from us must be stirred up by personal interaction with other believers.

Something you should know:

The new believers were trained in the Lord's Supper. The Apostles had worshiped with the Lord Himself. They valued worship and made sure new converts shared in this unique Christian experience.

A little help . . .

This means that we should acknowledge God's worth in spirit (not focusing on the physical way we worship Him but emphasizing our spiritual relationship with Him) and truth (being careful to worship Him in ways which are true to what His word says about Him).

✳️ **What impact does this truth have on your decision to worship Him in your local church?**

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus makes a promise to His people who gather together. Meditate on Jesus' promise for a few minutes.

You can always add one more Person to your attendance in a local church—the Lord Jesus.

✳️ **How do you feel when you realize that when you worship with your Christian friends, Jesus is right there with you?** _____

You need the church to grow. You need to express your love for God and appreciation of His mercies in outward ways. Vital, dynamic worship will draw you closer to God and encourage you to please Him. The local church is where you gather with other Christians to worship Him. The Lord's Supper is the centerpiece of worship in the local church.

Powerful prayers

When the members of the first church gathered they “committed themselves to prayer” (Acts 2:42d). Prayer is simply talking to God. But this is speaking of praying together with your fellow-Christians in the setting of a local church.

Praying with other Christians is a basic need in your Christian life. The church is the place where you join with others to pray as one voice.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Do you feel you know how to pray in this way?

Every letter written to churches in the New Testament directs the believers to pray for specific requests. Prayer moves God. Read Matthew 7:7-11 several times.

✳️ **Write down five personal observations concerning prayer.** _____

✳️ **How do these verses encourage you in your prayers?** _____

Read Philippians 4:6-7.

Something you should know:

The new believers were trained in their prayer life. The Apostles had been with the Lord during His public ministry. He had impressed them with the necessity of prayer in the Christian life.

A little help . . .

Unceasing prayer does not mean constant prayer. There are times when Christians cannot pray because of human necessities such as sleep. This is speaking of an attitude of prayerfulness and a discipline of relating to God. It speaks of a prayer life that is persistent, specific and consistent.

✦ **What are some benefits of a dynamic prayer life?** _____

You need the church to grow. When you gather with your Christian friends to pray, the power of prayer is multiplied dramatically. The leaders of your church can guide you in your prayer life. They can focus your prayers on world events, missionary needs, or local problems. You can also ask your Christian friends to pray for you personally.

The local church is where you grow in Christ—let’s review:

Your local church is where you will grow to maturity in Christ. Your church provides the nourishment your soul needs to grow through the teaching of the Word of God. Friendships with other Christians or fellowship gives you a support system to encourage you in your growth. Expressing your joy and love for God through corporate worship gives you an opportunity to display His glory to a watching world. Praying together with your fellow Christians at church multiplies and focuses the power of your requests to God.

Be sure to find a local church where the Word of God is taught, relationships with other Christians are emphasized, worship is Christ-honoring and prayer is a priority. When you do, you will grow quickly to the point that you can begin serving your Savior.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:6, 7

Something you should know:

Paul encourages the Philippians to pray about everything! His words have encouraged every generation of Christians. Think of it, not only do you have the privilege of talking with God, He also promises to give you supernatural peace and protection as you pray!

A little help . . .

The verb translated “will guard” is a military term picturing your mind as a battle zone guarded by the “sentinels” of an intimate prayer life.

A PLACE TO SERVE!

• THE LOCAL CHURCH IS WHERE YOU SERVE CHRIST

When you read the history of the early church you realize that the people were involved! There were no “Sunday only” members. The First-Century Christians came to church with great expectations that God was going to use them to do His work on earth.

Body Life

The New Testament pictures the church as an organism rather than an organization. It’s not a building, but a body. The local church of the Lord Jesus is alive with His life. The Gospels record the works of Jesus Christ in His physical body. Acts records the beginning of the works of Christ through His spiritual body—the church. We, the believers in the Lord Jesus, are the Body of Christ—a living and powerful manifestation of God to man.

The book of Ephesians more than any other gives us God’s blueprint for the church. One paragraph of this book, Ephesians 4:11-16, describes how the Body of Christ, the church, is to operate. This key passage tells us exactly how the body will grow. Gifted leaders are to equip the saints for the work of the ministry and the building up of the Body of Christ.

✳ **Read this critical paragraph Ephesians 4:11-16, in two different translations. What are three personal observations you find most striking in these verses?**

Leading the Body

Verses 11 and 12 spell out the job description for every church leader. Read these verses again.

Gifted leaders (v 11) are responsible for the equipping of the saints (v 12).

✳ **What does the word “equip” mean to you?**

Building the Body

Verse 12 says that leaders should equip believers for the “work of the ministry, for the edifying (building up) of the body of Christ.”

Well-equipped saints do the work of the ministry and the Body of Christ grows. Leaders should equip all believers to serve and build up the church.

Something you should know:

Verse 11 emphasizes the fact that when the Lord ascended into heaven (v 10) He gave gifted leaders to the church. Theologians have devoted volumes to the discussion of the specific gifts mentioned in this verse. Try not to be distracted by these terms now. The most important truth is that Christ blesses the church with gifted leaders.

A little help . . .

If you were building a house or sewing a dress and someone was responsible to “equip” you so that you could finish the project, what would you expect? In the same way, spiritual “equipping” involves teaching, providing tools, guiding, encouraging, correcting and modeling so that you can do your part in building the church, the Body of Christ.

Something you should know:

“Saint” is a word that comes from the same Greek word as holy and sanctify, referring to what the believer is in Christ. It is a virtual synonym for Christian. The term never measures the personal character or worthiness of a Christian. All believers are saints the moment they believe—set apart for God in Christ.

Something you should know:

The word “edify” simply means to build up. An expression of development, it pictures the church as a building being constructed by God through the obedience of His people.

✳️ **Have you ever thought of yourself as being “in the ministry?” Why or why not?**

✳️ **How would your life change if you really believed you were working for Christ by doing His will 24 hours a day, 7 days a week?** _____

When you think of doing the “work of the ministry”, where do you feel inadequate?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Training | <input type="checkbox"/> Confidence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding | <input type="checkbox"/> Ministry skills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maturity | <input type="checkbox"/> Where to begin |

Try to write out your personal thoughts on your specific ministry in the church in three sentences. _____

How could the leaders in your church help you best in fulfilling this ministry? _____

Verse 13 says that this process will continue until the church becomes doctrinally and functionally mature.

Read this verse, then try to describe this “fully mature” church in your own words. _____

Displaying the Body

The last three verses, 14-16, give us the result of this process. If leaders stay focused on their primary responsibility of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry, the church will fulfill her potential as the Body of Christ. His glory will be displayed in three specific ways.

➔ Believers will discern sound doctrine (v 14). Since children are gullible, leaders should equip young believers to grow in their understanding of the Scriptures.

✳️ **On a scale of 1-10, how mature are you in your understanding of the Bible?** _____

Using the same scale, how effective are your leaders in equipping people to discern sound doctrine? _____

➔ Believers will display the life of Christ (v 15). Like the Lord Jesus, the Head, the Body will reflect the glory of God. This will be seen primarily in the way believers relate to one another—“speaking the truth in love.”

A little help . . .

The work of the ministry is for every believer. The Bible does not divide Christians into clergy and lay people, only leaders and saints. Every believer is “in the ministry” and responsible to help “build up” the church.

A little help . . .

When the body of Christ “grows up” the Body (the church) will look like the Head (Christ, Ephesians 1:22—5:23).

A little help . . .

Speaking the truth in love is to relate in Christ-honoring ways—honestly, and truthfully in a loving manner.

✱ On a scale of 1-10, how mature are you in the way you relate to others truthfully and lovingly? _____

✱ Using the same scale, how effective are your leaders in equipping people to relate in Christ-honoring ways? _____

➔ Believers will become dynamic contributors to a self-sufficient local body of Christians (v 16). Every Christian is essential to full growth and anything that builds up believers and the church is included in this process.

✱ On a scale of 1-10, how mature are you in your commitment to do your share in the ministry of the local church? _____

Using the same scale, how effective are your leaders in equipping people to make their full contribution to the growth of the church? _____

The local church is where you serve Christ—let's review:

You are in the ministry! Jesus Christ wants you to reach your world for Him. He provided your local church as a forum for ministry. That is, the local church provides opportunity, training, and encouragement in following Christ's desire for you to serve Him.

The leaders in your church have the responsibility to take you as far as you want to go. Ask them to equip you for ministry.

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY OF GOD

Jesus loves the church. He purchased it with His own blood. He wants you to be a part of His church. He is asking you to be involved in His church. There are no perfect churches. They're all full of sinners...just like you.

Keep these three truths in mind as you become involved in a local church:

- **Christ wants you to be a part of His church**
- **The local church is where you grow in Christ**
- **The local church is where you serve Christ**

This chapter is about the church. Not the church as it often is, but the church described in the Bible. God designed the church to be the most powerful force on earth. The local church is where the most significant expressions of a believer's life occur.

Take some time right now to record your thoughts about the church. When you meet with your leader this week, you can discuss these thoughts.

✳ **My questions about joining a local church:** _____

My concerns or fears having to do with church membership : _____

My feelings having to do with my personal ministry in the local church: _____

Central Truth of Lesson Six:

You should commit to a local church in order to grow as a Christian and to serve Christ.

✳ **Is there someone in your church who is equipping you for ministry?** _____

Something you should know:

You will never find a "perfect" church. Since the church is made up of redeemed sinners just like you, the perfect church does not exist. God will guide you to a church that perfectly fits your needs to grow and serve.

A little help . . .

If you still don't feel the need to be identified with a local church, you need to review Christ's teaching on the church. If you truly want to follow Him, He will lead you to a local church.

Prepare for your time with your leader. Be ready to talk honestly about your feelings toward you church and your need to be equipped for personal ministry.

Memory Verse

Verse to memorize → → →

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Acts 20:28

Your relationship with Christ

~ the adventure is just beginning!

Several weeks ago you began investigating what a relationship with Jesus Christ is all about. He loves you very much and your diligence pleases Him greatly. These studies require a commitment level few Christians are willing to give. But I'm sure you agree that the benefits are worth it. There is no greater joy in life than a growing friendship with Jesus Christ.

Speaking of friends, someone who cares deeply for you has guided you through these lessons. You now understand how important it is to share Christ with others. Think of what a difference your new friend has made in your life. You could be that kind of friend to another—someone lost and without hope, unaware of God's offer of eternal and abundant life.

The family of God, the church, has room for every person. Who do you know who needs these truths that have changed your life? Ask your leader-friend for a leader's packet so that you can make a difference in someone's life.

This is how Christianity works—one friend telling another friend about a Great Friend, the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I wrote these materials I prayed for you—every single person who completes the course. My prayer is that you would experience the joy of a growing and intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus. I am confident that the journey so far has been rich and rewarding. I hope you know that completing this course has increased your options in life. You are now equipped for the greatest adventure possible—living for Christ. And the adventure is just beginning!

Did you know that the Lord Jesus even tells you how to begin the adventure? He asks His *disciples* to announce their intentions of following Him toward His purposes for their lives. The way we announce our devotion to Him is through baptism.

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19,20).*

Baptism is the first step in a life of walking in obedience to Christ. For nearly two thousand years believers in Christ who want to follow Him have obeyed His command quoted by Matthew. Baptism is a means of identifying with Christ and His people. Like graduation for a student, the wedding ceremony for the bride and groom or the taking of an oath for the soldier, baptism announces your devotion to Christ.

Baptism does not make you a Christian; it shows that you already are one. Baptism cannot earn or keep your eternal life; Christ gave you eternal life when you put your faith in Him. Baptism has the same effect as a wedding ring. Wearing the ring does not make you married; it simply announces that you are. And what devoted husband or wife would not want everyone to know their status? Loving couples want everyone to know, “I belong to this person!”

What devoted Christian would not want everyone to know, “I belong to Christ?” There is no better way to begin the adventure of walking with Christ than the first step of obedience He asks of His disciples—baptism.

Take the step. Identify with Christ and His people. Announce your devotion to Jesus Christ through baptism. And I could not think of a more deserving person to baptize you than your leader-friend who guided you through these pages.

Welcome to the family.

Warmly in Christ,

Ed Underwood

Pastor, Church of the Open Door

Beginning in Grace: Review Sheet

1. Subject	4. Subject
Memory Verse:	Memory Verse:
<i>Central Truth:</i>	<i>Central Truth:</i>
2. Subject:	5. Subject
Memory Verse:	Memory Verse:
<i>Central Truth:</i>	<i>Central Truth:</i>
3. Subject	6. Subject
Memory Verse:	Memory Verse:
<i>Central Truth:</i>	<i>Central Truth:</i>

PRAYER SHEET

Prayer Requests/Date	God's Answer/Date

