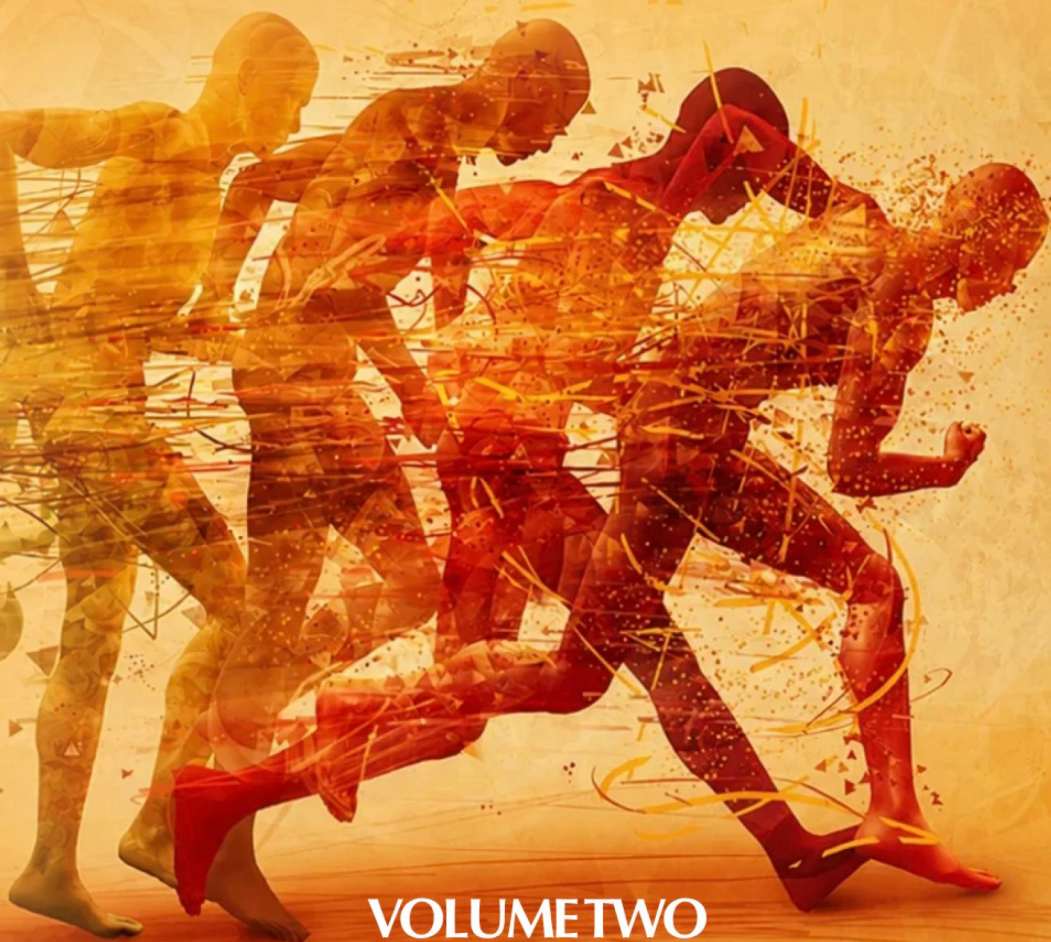


DR. R. TIMOTHY JONES

THRIVE

TURNING PRINCIPLE INTO PRACTICE



VOLUME TWO

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FORWARD PRESS
SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA

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*I press toward the mark for the prize of
the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

PHILIPPIANS 3:14 KJV

*Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself
what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because
what the world needs is people who have come alive.*

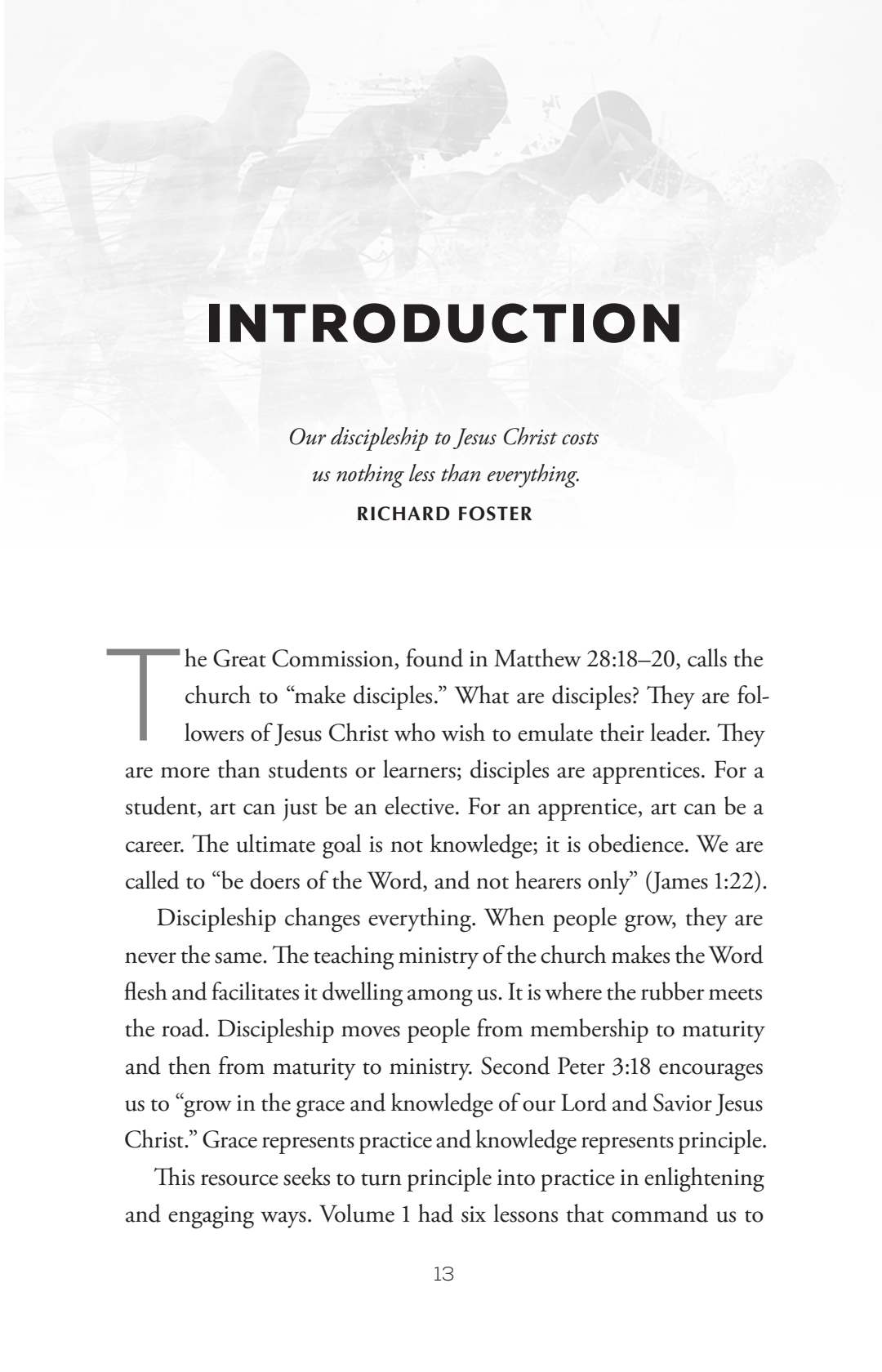
HOWARD THURMAN



This volume is dedicated to emerging adults (young people between the ages of eighteen and twentysomething) who are committed to being salt and light for postmodern generations.

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INTRODUCTION

*Our discipleship to Jesus Christ costs
us nothing less than everything.*

RICHARD FOSTER

The Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:18–20, calls the church to “make disciples.” What are disciples? They are followers of Jesus Christ who wish to emulate their leader. They are more than students or learners; disciples are apprentices. For a student, art can just be an elective. For an apprentice, art can be a career. The ultimate goal is not knowledge; it is obedience. We are called to “be doers of the Word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

Discipleship changes everything. When people grow, they are never the same. The teaching ministry of the church makes the Word flesh and facilitates it dwelling among us. It is where the rubber meets the road. Discipleship moves people from membership to maturity and then from maturity to ministry. Second Peter 3:18 encourages us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Grace represents practice and knowledge represents principle.

This resource seeks to turn principle into practice in enlightening and engaging ways. Volume 1 had six lessons that command us to

surrender completely, pray fervently, think differently, worship faithfully, live holy, and speak wisely. Volume 2 has an additional seven lessons that challenge us to grow intentionally, love unconditionally, give cheerfully, witness boldly, fast occasionally, serve selflessly, and fight courageously. These lessons demonstrate what it means to walk consistently with God and to flourish in the faith.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

HEBREWS 12:1–2

Hebrews 12 illustrates what it means to thrive. It infers that we can excel in the faith when we rid ourselves of sin and other distractions while focusing on Jesus Christ, who is the author and finisher of our faith. We are not just being called away from something (sin), we are being called to someone (Jesus Christ).

While this book can be read individually, it is best used in small group settings over several weeks. It was designed to be both a study and a journey. A study becomes a journey when people grow together, serve together, and care for one another. We believe community is the best environment for discipleship. The objective is to connect people to God and to each other. Ecclesiastes 4:9 says, “Two are better than one.” Thus, we believe spiritual growth happens best in community.

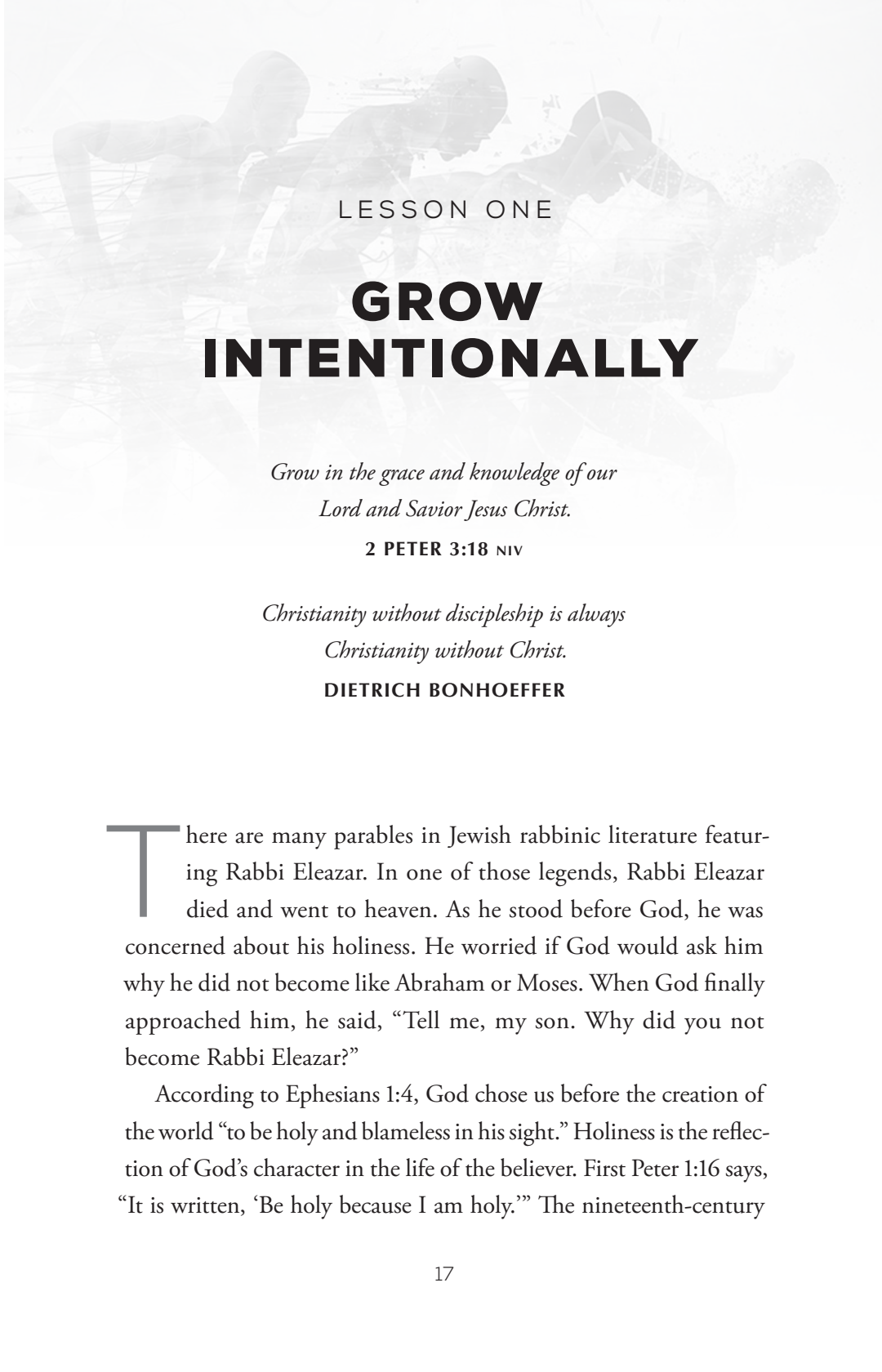
Small groups offer several benefits, such as accountability, connection, and encouragement. Small groups provide opportunities for people to be heard, as healing begins with hearing. Small groups open the door for the right questions which pave the way to the right answers. In small groups, rows are turned into circles wherein people can be visible and valued.

*Community means that people come together around
the table, not just to feed their bodies, but also to
feed their minds and their relationships.*

HENRI J. M. NOUWEN

Let's grow!

Dr. R. Timothy Jones

A background image showing the silhouettes of several runners in a race, overlaid with a geometric, low-poly pattern. The runners are in various stages of their stride, creating a sense of motion and competition.

LESSON ONE

GROW INTENTIONALLY

*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our
Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

2 PETER 3:18 NIV

*Christianity without discipleship is always
Christianity without Christ.*

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

There are many parables in Jewish rabbinic literature featuring Rabbi Eleazar. In one of those legends, Rabbi Eleazar died and went to heaven. As he stood before God, he was concerned about his holiness. He worried if God would ask him why he did not become like Abraham or Moses. When God finally approached him, he said, “Tell me, my son. Why did you not become Rabbi Eleazar?”

According to Ephesians 1:4, God chose us before the creation of the world “to be holy and blameless in his sight.” Holiness is the reflection of God’s character in the life of the believer. First Peter 1:16 says, “It is written, ‘Be holy because I am holy.’” The nineteenth-century

Scottish theologian John Brown said, “Holiness is thinking as God thinks, and willing as God wills.”

Born-again believers are *positionally* holy. Second Corinthians 5:21 confirms that through the death of Jesus Christ, we have become the righteousness of God. Believers are also called to be *practically* holy. While positional holiness is the work of Christ, practical holiness is the work of the believer—“Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Holiness is the aim of spiritual growth. In 1 Timothy 4:7 (NIV), Paul said, “Train yourself to be godly.” The time an athlete spends training always exceeds the time spent performing. A football team practices all week for a one-hour game.

THE SOWER AND THE SEED

Jesus’s parable about the sower in Luke 8 illustrates why some people do not grow spiritually. As seeds were being sown, some fell by the wayside and were devoured by birds. Some fell upon a rock and withered as soon as they sprouted because they lacked moisture. Some fell among thorns that sprang up and choked the plants. Other seeds fell on good ground and produced fruit a hundredfold.

At the request of his disciples, Jesus explained the parable with precision. Jesus identified the seed as the Word of God. The seed that fell by the wayside represents those who hear the Word, but the devil snatches it from them, preventing them from believing. The seed that fell upon a rock symbolizes those who hear the Word with enthusiasm but fall away during moments of temptation because they lack roots.

The seed that fell among thorns depicts those for whom the Word is overshadowed by worries, money, and pleasure. Such things distract

people and prevent them from growing spiritually. However, the good ground characterizes those who faithfully embrace the Word and ultimately produce a harvest.

REMOVING WHAT HINDERS GROWTH

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

1 PETER 2:1–3 NIV

Farmers and gardeners alike first prepare their fields before sowing seeds. This often entails removing weeds, unwanted vegetation, rocks, dead roots, and residue from previous seasons. As 1 Peter chapter 1 issues a command to be holy, chapter 2 encourages believers to get rid of five things: malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. In our natural way of thinking, we may ask why these sins are mentioned when we do not view them as egregiously as murder, stealing, or adultery.

Perhaps these sins are listed because they are sins of the heart rather than the hand. These toxic elements can hide in the hearts of respectable people in the body of Christ, thus they tend to be quietly tolerated. These sins are not always easily discerned and are lethal to one's spiritual maturity.

Malice. This is the malevolent desire to injure another person. Malice may be the mother of the other four sins listed. First John 3:15 (NIV) likens malice to murder: “Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer.”

Deceit. Much like a decoy, deceit is an implicit lie told to intentionally deceive another under the guise of truth. Deceit is the practice of creating a false impression. It has been said that one who seeks to deceive others will eventually deceive oneself.

Hypocrisy. In the ancient theatre, actors played many roles by wearing several different masks. To be a hypocrite is to have multiple faces. The problem with being a hypocrite is how easy it is to forget who one is supposed to be.

Envy. While jealousy is the fear of losing what one already has, envy is to experience displeasure over the prosperity of others and to desire it for oneself. Someone said, “Envy is grief over someone else’s good.” Solomon called envy “rotteness to the bones” (Proverbs 14:30).

Slander. This entails backbiting, speaking evil against another, or the defamation of someone’s character. Rab-bis have historically taught that slander hurts three people: the one who speaks it, the one who listens to it, and the one it’s spoken about.

A NEW APPETITE

After ridding ourselves of these five vices, Peter commands us to “crave spiritual milk” (v. 2). As with the farmer or the gardener, removing hindrances to growth is not the goal; it is simply preparation. The five sins cited have been called sins of affection. Sins of addiction are things that hold on to us; sins of affection are things we are holding on to.

To crave spiritual milk is to develop a desire for something different.

Colossians 3:2 (KJV) says, “Set your affection on things above.” To grow requires change, as we cannot become and remain at the same time. A new life requires a new appetite, and spirituality is an acquired taste. A new appetite begins with a new taste: “Now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Peter 2:3 NIV).

*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after
righteousness, for they shall be filled.*

MATTHEW 5:6

This first-century biblical idea of “hunger and thirst” literally stands at the brink of starvation. The blessed person in this verse is the believer who has what William Barclay called a “starving spirit.” Yes! God has promised to bless the person with a “starving spirit” because real hunger delivers us from our preferences. *Starving people don’t talk about what they don’t eat!* Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness shall be filled. The idea is that of feeding livestock until they are full. It means total satisfaction.

Pure spiritual milk not only creates a new appetite, but also replaces malice with love, deceit with truth, hypocrisy with authenticity, envy with gratitude, and slander with encouragement.

HOW WE GROW

*Grow in the grace and knowledge of
our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

2 PETER 3:18 NIV

To grow in grace is to grow in practice. According to 1 Peter 4:10, we use our gifts to serve others as stewards of God’s grace. To grow in

practice also requires being “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Genuine growth yields obedience. During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln met with a group of ministers for a prayer break-fast. One of the ministers said, “Mr. President, let us pray that God is on our side.” President Lincoln responded, “No, gentlemen, let us pray that we are on God’s side.”

To grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ is to grow in principle. God does not want to be known simply intellectually; God wants to be known intimately. In John 17:3 (NIV), Jesus said, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” Paul counted everything as nothing compared to knowing Christ (Philippians 3:8). As God desires to be known intimately, the key to intimacy is obedience.

“If you love Me, keep My commands.”

JOHN 14:15

We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. . . . Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

1 JOHN 2:3–6 NIV

THREE DOLLARS’ WORTH OF GOD

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk, or a snooze in the sunshine. I don’t want enough of God to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation. I want warmth

of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.

WILBUR REES

PRAYER

Father, thank You for the awesome privilege to walk with You daily and to enjoy every step of the way. May Your Holy Spirit help us to grow and to reflect Your glory. In the name of Jesus, amen.

SCRIPTURES (READ AND REFLECT)

2 Corinthians 5:17

Hebrews 5:11–14

2 Peter 1:5–8

THINK ABOUT IT

Discipleship is a long obedience in the same direction.

EUGENE PETERSON

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Ephesians 1:4. What does it mean to be blameless?

2. Distinguish between positional holiness and practical holiness.

3. Read 1 Timothy 4:7 and elaborate on how we train ourselves to be godly.

4. Which type of soil in Luke 8 describes your spiritual condition?

5. How do the sins in 1 Peter 2:1–3 challenge our spiritual growth?

6. Discuss the significance of hungering and thirsting after righteousness.
7. How do we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ?
8. Elaborate on the lessons from Wilbur Rees's "Three Dollars' Worth of God."

JOURNALING

How has this lesson spoken to your life?

MY NEXT STEPS