

# Kingdom Life

## DISCIPLESHIP PATH

A Firm Foundation for Life

# FOUNDATIONS

**201**

THE BODY OF CHRIST

*“All the parts of the body, though they are many, are still one body - so it also is with Christ. For by one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free. And we were all made to drink of one Spirit, for the body is not one member, but many.”*

Paul the Apostle | 1st Corinthians 12:13-14

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## Introduction and Purpose

What is my ministry and purpose? How can I learn God's will for my life? Where do I fit in God's grand plan? How can I hear His voice to really know? How can I know what He wants me to do? What are my gifts? These are questions most every Christian will ask somewhere along the way in their lives. If God would only give us a summary sheet and itinerary....

Like it or not, our individual path with God is usually an unfolding mystery throughout our entire lives. We get the direction we need just when we need it, but not too much in advance. For some of us, that is a difficult process of seeking persistently, waiting patiently, and learning to trust deeply at the same time. It seems God is just as interested in walking us through the process as He is in the completion of the task. In the end, it is a richly rewarding experience.

In this study, we search the scriptures to find those revealed truths that help us to prepare ourselves to be used by God – to find our place. The Apostle Paul gives us keen insight in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians where he said, “Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.” And then in Ephesians, he said, “...in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” This is the mystery of the body of Christ. He works in and through His body, of which we are a part. He pours His gifts out to the body and for the body.

God has called us to connectedness with other believers. It is through this connectivity of the body of Christ that we find our place and purpose. And, as our individual calling and ministry is revealed to us, we can be certain it will fit together and work in concert with the callings and ministries of others in the body. This is the way God has designed it to work. If we can learn to work within God's design, we will find direction, purpose, success, and fulfillment.

In the book of The Acts, God has preserved the account of the earliest days of the Church as our model and example of a Holy Spirit empowered community – the body of Christ in action. In this study, we explore the many ways the Holy Spirit radically impacted those early believers in their personal experience, their relationships, and their surrounding culture. We will study topics which include Spiritual Empowerment, Baptisms, Christian Fellowship, Compassionate Generosity, Ministry Gifts, Devotion to Prayer, The Body of Christ, and Spiritual Gifts.

Through this, we are trusting God will pour out His love and spiritual understanding to us in a deeper way, so we may experience the fullness of all He desires within our Christian community, as well as our lives individually. Amen?

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**FOUNDATIONS 201   WEEK ONE**

**YOU SHALL RECEIVE POWER**

## Week 1 – “You Shall Receive Power”

### Lesson 1-1 – “Wait for the Promise of the Father”

Do you enjoy waiting? Maybe you enjoy waiting at the doctor’s office, or for the cable guy to show up to do an installation? How about waiting at an exceptionally long traffic light for the second or third time? How about when the interstate highway becomes a parking lot - and you are already late for an appointment? And I know you must love those long lines at the DMV and Post Office. Doesn't it make you feel a little stressed just thinking about it?

I do not think any of us enjoys waiting, but sometimes there are benefits for those who wait. Isaiah 40:28-31 is one of those Bible passages that encourages us to wait.

[<sup>ISA 40:28</sup> Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.](#)

[<sup>ISA 40:29</sup> He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. <sup>30</sup> Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; <sup>31</sup> but those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. \\_NRSV](#)

As we can see in this Isaiah passage, there is a prophetic promise of empowerment for those who wait upon the Lord. But do you find it interesting that God would instruct us to wait for Him? I do. After all, there is nothing in God’s nature that would ever cause Him to be late. He never gets too busy. He never loses track of time. He never forgets appointments, and He never gets stuck in traffic. But still, He instructs us to wait on Him. And His commandment to wait comes with a promise of empowerment to soar like eagles. Of course, our other option is to run ahead without Him, doing our own thing, in our own strength, which eventually leads us to fatigue, frustration, and failure.

After His resurrection, and before He ascended to be seated at the right hand of the Father, Jesus gave His disciples some final face-to-face teachings and instructions. And He gave them a commandment that was far beyond their ability to accomplish. Here is what it says in the gospel of Mark.

[<sup>MK 16:15</sup> And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.” NRSV](#)

This mission was way over their heads. How were they supposed to do this? There were only eleven of them. There was no fast way to travel anywhere. There was no mass media, no radio or television, no internet or computers, no telephones, no Skype,

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Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Yet by AD 100, it has been estimated that one out of every ten people in the Roman Empire identified themselves as being a Christian. How does something like that happen through eleven, mostly uneducated men? Well, “Go into all the world”, was not the only instruction Jesus gave them during this time. He also told them to wait for the promised gift. Here is Luke’s account in Acts.

AC 1:4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

AC 1:6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." NIV

There is something important we need to remember about these men. They had just spent three years studying at the University of Jesus. He had been their face-to-face professor, explaining the scriptures and teaching them all about the Kingdom of God. They were close to Him, and they could ask questions to get clarity on everything He taught. They ate with Him, they traveled with Him, they observed His lifestyle, they were eyewitnesses to His miracles, and had even performed miracles themselves. He had already sent them on short-term mission trips to preach the good news to people. If anyone could be prepared to live the Christian life and do the work of the ministry, it would have been these eleven men. But Jesus told them to wait, because without the Holy Spirit, they were still not ready for the mission. Is it any different for us today?

The Holy Spirit was so necessary in fulfilling the mission, that Jesus commanded His disciples that they not even attempt to do the work of the ministry without first being baptized in the Holy Spirit. They were to stay in Jerusalem and wait there until the Holy Spirit was poured out. So that is what they did - they prayed and patiently waited.

AC 1:12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. <sup>13</sup> And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. <sup>14</sup> These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. NASB

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I have some questions for you. Do you and I need the Holy Spirit any less today than they did back then? Do we need spiritual anointing and empowerment less now than they did then? Do our hearts need to be changed any less than theirs did? Is there anything that can replace the Holy Spirit in the Church, or in our personal lives? Is our education or organization enough? If they needed the Holy Spirit after having been personally taught by Jesus for three years, how much more do we need the Holy Spirit?

The prophetic promise they received remains for us today, but we must be willing to wait on the Lord and seek Him for it. We must resist the temptation to run ahead in our own strength and abilities. Isaiah warns about what happens when we do that.

[ISA 40:29 He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. <sup>30</sup> Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; <sup>31</sup> but those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.](#) NRSV

Apart from God's strength, any attempts to live out the Christian life will eventually wear us out. No matter how smart we are, how much knowledge we have attained, or how much training we have received - we cannot succeed in the Christian experience or ministry without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. That is the point Jesus made to His disciples and continues to make to us today. Here is something Jesus said about it.

[JN 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing."](#) NASB

Are you willing to wait for Him? Are you willing to humbly recognize your need, and to ask Him to fulfill His promise in your life and heart today? If we will begin to invite Him into our lives daily, He will begin to make His presence known daily.

**Study Questions** – 1a. What is the conditional promise given to us in the Isaiah 40? 1b. In Acts 1:4-5, what did Jesus instruct His disciples to do? 1c. And what is the promise Jesus has given us in Acts 1:8?

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**Prayer** - Father, I am tired of attempting to live this Christian life in my own strength. I ask you to baptize me in Your Holy Spirit and Your love. Empower me to live the way You intended from the start. I admit I do not understand everything about this, but I trust You with my life today, in Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

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## Week 1 – “You Shall Receive Power”

### Lesson 1-2 – “I Will Pour Out My Spirit”

Have you ever used a chainsaw? Instead of using up all your own strength with an axe to cut the tree, you just hold the chainsaw, and it does the hard work of cutting. It is a wonderful invention. There are gas-powered chainsaws and there are electric-powered chainsaws, but the concept is still the same - something other than our own strength powers the saw to make it cut. But just try cutting a piece of wood using a chainsaw that has no fuel or is disconnected from its power source. You will find there is nothing in this world is more useless than a chainsaw without its underlying source of power. The same is true with our lives, as it was spoken through the prophet Zechariah.

ZEC 4:6 Then he answered and said to me, "This is the word of the LORD..., 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts. NASB

It is not the abilities, education, knowledge, intelligence, or strength of the person that makes the big difference, but rather the Spirit of God within them that produces eternal results. This was the point Jesus made to His disciples when He told them to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit from the Father. At the time, the followers of Jesus had dwindled down from thousands to about 120 people. But these were praying expectantly for the fulfillment of the promise. Then a few days after Jesus had ascended, it happened.

AC 2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. NRSV

What a rush it must have been in that room! Their prayerful waiting had paid off and the Holy Spirit was poured into them just like Jesus promised. It caused such a commotion, that a large crowd of people gathered around to see what was going on. Peter took the opportunity to speak to them, and he quoted the prophet Joel.

JOEL 2:28 Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. <sup>29</sup> Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. NRSV

The Holy Spirit touched the people's hearts and produced some amazing results.

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AC 2:40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." <sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. NIV

So, the Church grew from around 120 people, to around 3,000 in one day! This was not only the first church, but also the first mega-church. With this explosive start, the Church was born and continued to grow rapidly as Luke, the writer of Acts documents.

AC 2:47 ...And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. NASB

In a very short time, the Church had grown even more, to the point that the religious leadership of the temple began to feel threatened by the number of people who were believing the message of Christ.

AC 4:3 They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. <sup>4</sup> But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand. NIV

In a few short weeks, the Church had grown to 5,000 and was continuing to expand at a steady clip. And it all happened without the benefit of a slick mass-media marketing campaign or a strategic church growth initiative. It was not the result of their organizational excellence, or their ability to engage and entertain a crowd with their impressive oratory skills or good jokes.

Luke is clear in his writing that none of these kinds of things played any role in the success of the ministry of the Apostles in the early Church, yet the Church experienced explosive growth. So how did it happen? It happened because they waited for God's gift of the Holy Spirit, then they flowed with the Holy Spirit's moving. They did not attempt to fulfill the ministry of Jesus in their own strength – but with His power.

All throughout the Book of Acts, Luke emphasizes how the people in the Church were filled with the Holy Spirit's empowerment to do miracles, to heal the sick, to speak the word of God with boldness, to see visions, and to gain supernatural wisdom and direction. And possibly more important than any of these, the Holy Spirit transformed the hearts of the people.

AC 2:43 And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day continuing

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with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God, and having favor with all the people. NASB

These radical lifestyle changes do not happen without a powerful catalyst – something to cause a fundamental change in the hearts of the people. In Romans, the Apostle Paul explains how the indwelling Holy Spirit produces this change in our hearts.

RO 5:3 And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. NRSV

The Holy Spirit brings many things into our lives, but the most defining attribute is God's loving nature being poured into our hearts. More than anything else, the Holy Spirit baptism is a baptism of love. I do not know about you, but I want to experience and be filled with all of God's love that is available to me. Do you think this might be what you want, as well?

**Study Questions** – 2a. From Acts 2:43-47, what were some of the outward actions that showed the people's hearts were being transformed by the Holy Spirit? 2b. From Romans 5:3-5, what does the Holy Spirit pour into our hearts?

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**Prayer** - Father, I ask that You baptize me in Your love. Change my heart and fill me with Your loving nature. Please empower me to be an expression of your kindness and goodness to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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## Week 1 – “You Shall Receive Power”

### Lesson 1-3 – “My Spirit Within You”

In many ways, the working of the Holy Spirit is a mystery - but not a secret. In John's Gospel chapter 3, Jesus was visited under the cover of darkness by a prominent leader of the Jews, a man named Nicodemus. As they talked, Jesus told him of our need for a spiritual rebirth - a truth that left Nicodemus both amazed and confused.

[JN 3:5](#) Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. [6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.](#)<sup>7</sup> Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'<sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. [So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.](#)"<sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? NRSV

In this passage, Jesus compares the movement of the Holy Spirit to the blowing of the wind. If you are outside, you can see the effects of the wind blowing in the trees, and you can feel the breeze on your skin, but you cannot physically see the wind. The Holy Spirit works in a similar way to effect change in our lives. Nicodemus really struggled in accepting this truth. But as Jesus pointed out, this is something Nicodemus should have known about.

Over and over, the Old Testament Jewish prophets spoke of the coming Messiah who would die for the sins of the people, but they also spoke of the promise of the Holy Spirit to be poured out through Him - it was not a secret. If Nicodemus had truly been a student of the Jewish scriptures, he would have at least had an intellectual knowledge of the prophetic promises concerning the Holy Spirit. Here is an example from Isaiah revealing how the Holy Spirit's power would make us flourish spiritually...

[ISA 44:3](#) For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; [I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.](#)<sup>4</sup> They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams. NIV

And here is what it says concerning the Holy Spirit upon Jesus, the Messiah.

[ISA 42:1](#) Here is my Servant, whom I uphold, my Chosen, in whom my soul delights; [I have put My Spirit upon him;](#) He will bring forth justice to the nations.<sup>2</sup> He will not cry or lift up His voice or make it heard in the street;<sup>3</sup> a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; He will faithfully bring forth justice.<sup>4</sup> He will

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not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching. NRSV

And there is the promise given through the prophet Joel, that the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all of mankind, giving the power to prophesy and receive spiritual dreams and visions...

JOEL 2:28 "And it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. <sup>29</sup> “And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. NASB

In the prophecies of Zechariah, God speaks of sending His servant, the Branch, and how the sins of the people would be removed in one day. The statement, “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit”, is part of that Messianic passage from Zechariah. Here is another prophetic passage spoken through Ezekiel foretelling the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

EZE 37:13 "Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. <sup>14</sup> "And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD." NASB

At the time of Jesus, all these prophetic promises (and many more) had been recorded in the Jewish scriptures for hundreds of years. Nicodemus and all the Jews should have had knowledge that these prophecies would come to pass - and that the promises were meant for them. But Nicodemus did become a believer in Jesus as his Messiah. He even attempted to defend Jesus at His trial before the Sanhedrin, and he also anointed the body of Jesus for burial. So, he did eventually see the truth of these prophecies.

There are so many things revealed in these prophecies concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. One of the most powerful of the prophetic promises was delivered through Ezekiel.

EZE 36:26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> "And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. NASB

Think about the implications of these promises for a moment. This word from God outlines the radical work God wants to accomplish in our lives through the Holy Spirit. This prophecy is not calling for spiritual heart surgery, but for a spiritual heart

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transplant. In this passage, God diagnoses the diseased part of us that is killing us - it is our own hard heart. This is the basic point Jesus made to Nicodemus in telling him we must be born of the Spirit - to take on the nature of the Spirit. But before we can come to God for a new heart, we must first be willing to admit we have a heart problem.

In the New Testament writings, the Spirit is mentioned more than two-hundred, thirty times. The Book of Acts alone contains fifty-five references, with the first ten or so chapters averaging three to four mentions of the Holy Spirit per chapter. Time and time again, the Holy Spirit is shown to empower believers in the Church to testify boldly, to receive supernatural direction, to prophesy, to speak in other languages, to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to do signs and wonders, and to live far beyond their natural abilities. The Holy Spirit is God's power distribution system for the Church.

But the most critical role of the Holy Spirit can be found in His name - Holy. The Spirit's most important role is to implant God's holy nature in us, and to impart to us the power to live in alignment with God's heart. Once again, here is the prophetic promise of God for us.

[EZE 36:26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> "And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. NASB](#)

Together, let us take hold of this promise, open our hearts to receive it, and embrace the fullness of His grace in our lives. Amen, and glory to God.

**Study Question** – 3a. What are the prophetic promises revealed in the Ezekiel 37:13-14 and Ezekiel 36:26-27 scripture passages? In other words, what does God say He will do in our lives? 3b. And why are these promises so important in our Christian experience?

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**Prayer** - Father, I recognize my need to be changed. I open my heart to You and ask that You give me Your heart and nature. I thank You for Your awesome promises, and I receive them by faith. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

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## Week 1 – “You Shall Receive Power”

### Lesson 1-4 – “The Fruit of the Spirit”

We live in a world of technological advancement, having complex machinery designed to make our lives more productive or enjoyable. When you buy a new smart phone, it takes a little while to learn how to use it. This is what is known as the learning curve. If your new phone is very similar to your old one, then you can adapt very quickly. But if your new phone happens to be very different and with many new features, it will take longer. This is a steeper learning curve - meaning you have more to learn about that device.

It usually helps to have millennial or any adolescent around to teach us how to use the new technology. If none is available, we might have to resort to reading a user manual, which can be an adventure in itself. But one way or another, we must learn how the device was designed to work.

In our Christian experience, it is essential we understand how God has designed it to work in our lives. When it comes to holiness, our natural thought process typically defaults to a rules-based performance system. But God's design is radically different from our natural way of thinking. In Galatians, Paul was comparing a rules-based way of approaching holiness, versus a Holy Spirit-based way of approaching holiness. Here is one thing he said about it.

**GAL 5:22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. NASB

When the Holy Spirit is in control of our hearts, this is what we will experience - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, etc... When you look at this list, where are most of these attributes sourced - in the intellect of our brains, or in the emotion of our hearts? Most people say these are primarily issues of the heart. Paul confirms this conclusion in his letter to the church at Colossae.

**COL 3:12** And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. <sup>14</sup> And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. NASB

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Here in Colossians, we see the same kind of list as in Galatians, Paul just added a few things, like compassion, forgiveness, humility, and thankfulness. And he also describes them as issues of the heart. Do you remember the prophecy God in Ezekiel?

[EZE 36:26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. NASB](#)

All this spiritual fruit is the evidence of the prophetic promise of God being fulfilled in us. When we are submitted to the indwelling Holy Spirit, the fruit will be the inner experience of our hearts. In that Galatians 5 passage, Paul says something else that is very important in understanding true holiness.

[GAL 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. NASB](#)

In other words, when we are living in this Holy Spirit fruit, we are not breaking the law, but living in a righteous manner. The Holy Spirit fruit is the mechanism through which God produces His own experiential holiness in us. This is not a rules-based righteousness, but a righteousness that comes from a change in the nature of our hearts. Paul simplifies this even more for us in 1st Corinthians 13, where he says:

[1CO 13:4 Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, <sup>5</sup> does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, <sup>6</sup> does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; <sup>7</sup> bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. <sup>8</sup> Love never fails... NASB](#)

Love is the core attribute of all the Spiritual Fruit. We may think we need more patience, but what we really need is more love - because a heart that loves is a patient heart. Do you want more joy or peace? If so, pursue love because love is the core out of which all the other attributes flow. And love is the way the Holy Spirit produces God's righteousness in us. Paul said it again in Romans 13.

[RO 13:8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. NRSV](#)

When we love people, we will not try to harm them in any way because we want them to succeed in Christ. We literally do not sin against them. If love is the fulfillment of the law, then we can walk in God's righteousness to the degree that we walk in love. The

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Apostle John talked about this truth extensively in his first letter. And as you read this, notice the ways in which he links God with love.

<sup>1JN 4:7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup> God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us. NRSV

He continues with this same line of thinking in verse 16.

<sup>1JN 4:16</sup> So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. <sup>17</sup> Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. NRSV

Love is the perfecting influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. When we embrace love in our hearts, we are embracing God himself. This is how we know when we are abiding in Christ or not. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will be filled with love.

<sup>EPH 3:14</sup> For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, <sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. NASB

**Study Question** – 4a. From the Galatians 5 and Colossians 3 passages, what is the evidence of a life that is being controlled by the Holy Spirit? 4b. From Romans 13:8-10, in what ways does walking in love fulfill the righteous requirement of the law in us?

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**Prayer** - Father, I am so thankful You love me. I choose to embrace Your love in my heart, and to let Your Holy Spirit have full control of my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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<b>FOUNDATIONS 201</b>	<b>WEEK TWO</b>
<b>WHAT SHALL WE DO?</b>	

## Week 2 – “What Shall We Do?”

### Lesson 2-1 – “They Were Cut to the Heart....”

I am an extremely logical person, who sometimes acts in a totally illogical way. I will go to the Home Depot and walk every aisle before I ask a store associate for directions for what I am trying to find. However, if I just cannot find what I need, I will finally break down and ask. My wife tells me it is a guy thing, but I am not so sure. “Why don't you just ask someone”, she will say, “You could save so much time.” That does seem logical..., but for whatever reasons, I really do not like asking for directions. Is it pride, or maybe I just do not want to be a bother to them? I am learning...

Sometimes, before we can find what we are looking for, we must come to the end of ourselves and realize we do not have the solution. This humble posturing of our hearts creates the atmosphere in which God begins to give answers. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter boldly preached a sermon that left people asking an essential question.

AC 2:36 “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” <sup>37</sup> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” NIV

It is a simple, but profound question every person should ask God, “What should I do?” When we approach God, there is something very powerful about admitting we need help. In their hearts, the people knew they needed to do something with this Jesus, but they did not know what or how. Here is how Peter responded to their question.

AC 2:38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.” NIV

At another time, Peter gave a similar message when a crowd gathered to see a lame man who had been healed.

AC 3:17 “And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also.” <sup>18</sup> “But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled.” <sup>19</sup> “Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” NASB

These are probably the most concise presentations of the Gospel you will ever hear, yet they are so rich with truth. They serve as a basic outline of truth that when followed,

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opens the door to a refreshing and flourishing relationship with Christ - repent, be baptized, the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. But what happens if we are not willing to turn from our sinful ways in repentance? Should we expect our sins to be forgiven? Should we expect to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? Many people believe they can come to God on their own terms rather than on His, then they wonder why they still feel guilty and empty. The promises of God are conditional, and our failure to truly repent will prevent us from receiving the blessings from God.

Not only do these passages give us direction about what we should do, but also what we should have faith for God to do in our lives, setting our expectations. It gives us an idea of how God has designed it to work and what God sees as being necessary in our lives, not only as a beginning point in our relationship with Him, but also for our ongoing daily experience with Him. “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” And on that first day when Peter gave this simple message, the people responded.

AC 2:40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" <sup>41</sup> So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. NASB

They were ready for change in their lives - ready to cross that line with God. I believe there are many people who want something more, realizing they need something more, but they simply do not know what to do. Often, our daily Christian experience falls short of what is available to us in Christ, simply because we do not understand God's roadmap for success in our lives. So, over the next few lessons we will attempt to unpack and expound upon these essential elements Peter outlines, so we can realize and experience the fullness of the promise of the Gospel in our lives. Glory to God.

**Study Question** – 1a. In Acts 2:36-39, when the people asked Peter what they should do, what did he tell them? 1b. And what does Peter say would happen if they followed his instructions? 1c. Also, what do you think would happen if they did not follow Peter's instructions?

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**Prayer** - Father, I thank You for Your great love for me. I know I have failed in many ways, but I am committed to learning and following Your roadmap for success in my life. I trust Your way is better than I could figure out on my own. In Jesus name, Amen.

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## Week 2 – “What Shall We Do?”

### Lesson 2-2 – “Repent and Return...”

[AC 3:19](#) “Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away...” NASB

The first thing Peter tells us we should do, is to repent and return so our sins may be wiped away. Notice the conditional nature of his statement - that the forgiveness of our sins is dependent upon our willingness to repent and return. So, it is essential we understand what repentance is, and what it means to repent and return.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the English word "repent" as follows:

- 1. to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life*
- 2. to feel sorrow, regret, or contrition*
- 3. to change one's mind*

The third definition is closer to the Greek word "metanoia" which is used in the Bible. Metanoia simply means “to change one's mind”. In the scriptures however, “metanoia” is often used in the context of turning from sin, with sorrow, regret, and contrition. So, from a Biblical standpoint, all these definitions apply. “Metanoia” implies we are changing from one mindset and heart attitude - and changing to a different mindset and heart attitude. We can see this in Peter’s statement, “Repent therefore, and return”. The writer of Hebrews mentions this “change of heart” as a foundational aspect of faith.

[HEB 6:1](#) Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God. NIV

In Biblical Christianity, repentance is the changing from a mindset and heart attitude that produces a lifestyle of deadly sins and changing to a mindset and heart of faith in God that does not produce deadly sins. In his letter to the Church at Galatia, Paul gives us a sample list of attitudes and actions that proceed from a sinful, unrepentant heart.

[GAL 5:19](#) The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. NIV

The purpose of this list is to identify the inward motives and the outward actions of a sinful, unrepentant heart. So, when we experience these things in our hearts, we know it is the sinful nature. What does Paul say in verse 21 about those who do not turn from living like this? In Colossians, Paul gives another similar list, with the same warning.

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COL 3:5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. <sup>6</sup> For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, <sup>7</sup> and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. <sup>8</sup> But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.  
NASB

Also, in his letter to the church at Ephesus, there is yet another list and warning.

EPH 5:3 But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints; <sup>4</sup> and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. <sup>5</sup> For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. NASB

These attributes are the evidence of a selfish heart ruled by the sin nature. This is the heart of stone God wants to remove from us because these actions, attitudes, and emotions are opposites of the Fruit of the Holy Spirit. Paul clearly warns us in each of these passages that those who continue in this unrepentant life will not be forgiven and should expect to receive wrath from God, not eternal life. Also, in Ephesians, Paul reveals the spiritual source that works to stir up this rebellious sinful nature in us.

EPH 2:1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. NASB

Who is the “prince of the power of the air”? Well, that is just another name for Satan. The sinful nature is Satan’s nature – it is how he operates. So, when we allow ourselves to be controlled by a heart of selfishness, deception, greed, gossip, slander, lust, profanity, unforgiveness, envy, jealousy, pornography, and bitterness, we are giving Satan control of our hearts. We are playing on Satan's team and aligning ourselves with the enemies of God. If we are not willing to abandon these things and embrace God's Holy Spirit, why should we expect to be forgiven? Peter said it in that first sermon.

AC 3:19 "Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. NASB

We need to make it clear that we are not promoting the idea that we can earn our salvation by simply attempting to do good works. True repentance is much more than

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an attempt to do good works to make ourselves appear acceptable to God. Repentance is an act of faith in which we recognize our heart needs to be changed - and only God can do it. We renounce and abandon our old selfish heart and embrace a new heart of love that comes from the indwelling presence of Jesus. As we continue to abide in Christ's love, our inward experience is changed, which changes our outward actions. It changes how we treat our spouses and our other family members. It changes how we respond to our co-workers, authorities, and other drivers on the interstate at rush hour. We treat people differently because the Spirit of Christ in us changes the way we feel about them. Here is something Paul said to the Church in Rome as he was encouraging them to embrace the Holy Spirit-led life.

RO 12:9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup> love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup> Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

RO 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. <sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." <sup>20</sup> No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. NRSV

This is the life we are turning to when we repent - this is the Spirit we embrace through faith in God. This heart and mindset proceed from the nature of God. And as we live this way, our hearts will be refreshed, and we will truly be playing on Jesus' team.

**Study Question** – 2a. From the Galatians, Colossians, and Ephesians passages, list the attitudes and actions that come out of the sinful nature of man. 2b. Where does this lifestyle ultimately lead if we do not turn from it and embrace the life of the Holy Spirit?

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**Prayer** - Father, as I look at these scriptures, I see many familiar sins. But I choose You over them all. I choose to abandon my old selfish nature, and I choose to embrace the goodness of Your loving nature. I ask you to fill and empower me by Your Spirit. My faith is in You to accomplish this in me.

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## Week 2 – “What Shall We Do?”

### Lesson 2-3 – “And Be Baptized...”

There are several viewpoints out there about the proper practice of Water Baptism, as well as its purpose in the Christian experience. Some believe full emersion is the only valid method of Baptism, while others believe sprinkling with water is just fine. Some have contended the waters must be running rather than still. Some believe infants should be baptized, while others say one must be of a decision-making age. Others believe a person may be baptized as a proxy for dead relatives so they can be saved. Some believe baptism is nothing more than a symbolic ritual, while others believe if you are not physically baptized, you will not receive eternal life. Some believe a spiritual transaction takes place during baptism, others not.

What is more confusing, is that everyone has their own scripture passages or traditions they use to support their positions. In the past, some arguments surrounding baptism became so heated, that people were murdered because of it. It can really be a divisive issue, and we are not going to try to sort it all out in this lesson. But what cannot be denied, is the importance the early-Christian Church placed on baptism. It is mentioned over seventy times in the New Testament and is listed as a Foundational Principle in Hebrews 6. To Jesus, it was important enough that even He chose to be water baptized.

[MT 3:13 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. NASB](#)

Jesus considered baptism to be act of righteousness He needed to fulfill. When He did it, something very interesting happened.

[MT 3:16 And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, <sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." NASB](#)

When Jesus was baptized, God expressed His own approval with what Jesus had done. If God sees baptism as being a pleasing and important thing, and if Jesus was baptized setting the example for us follow, then we should be careful about minimizing baptism and relegating it to nothing more than a meaningless ritual. But what role does baptism serve in the life of a Christian? Here is something Peter says in his first letter to the churches, comparing baptism to the flood of Noah's day.

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<sup>1</sup>IPE 3:18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, <sup>19</sup> in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, <sup>20</sup> who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. <sup>21</sup> And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him. NASB

Notice in verse 21, Peter references the flood of Noah's day as a prophetic parallel, a foreshadow of water baptism – “And corresponding to that (*the flood waters*), baptism now saves you...” There has been an argument in the Church for centuries over this question. Is water baptism required for salvation, or not? This scripture passage seems to indicate water baptism is required for salvation. But do not draw that conclusion too quickly, because what Peter says next is a key to understanding something very important about baptism.

<sup>1</sup>IPE 3:21 And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. NASB

He says we are saved through baptism, but not through the “getting wet” part of baptism. We are saved through the “appeal to God for a good conscience” part of baptism. This reveals an interesting aspect of what baptism should be all about. Some of the early-Church understanding of baptism is illustrated in the ministry of John the Baptist. Here is something that was recorded in Matthew 3.

<sup>1</sup>MT 3:1 Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” NASB

What was the basic message of John the Baptist? To repent? The account continues.

<sup>1</sup>MT 3:5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; <sup>6</sup> and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. NASB

When the people came out to be baptized by John, what were they doing? Confessing their sins? Then we can see something else happening in verse 7.

<sup>1</sup>MT 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” <sup>8</sup> “Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance.” NASB

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When the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John for baptism, why did he refuse them? Because their lives did not demonstrate a repentant heart. Then John said this to them.

MT 3:9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>10</sup> "And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>11</sup> "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance. NASB

What did John say water baptism is supposed to be all about? Repentance. And what do we see consistently associated with water baptism? Repentance. This is the same message Peter gave to the people on the Day of Pentecost - "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." Water baptism is a baptism of repentance – an integral part of our repentance.

It is important to note that water baptism did not start with Jesus, or with John the Baptist. In Jerusalem, the people would wash in baptismal pools called Mikvahs, to cleanse themselves prior to entering the temple to worship. It was not just a time of external cleansing, but also of heart introspection. Somehow over the years, baptism and repentance became disjoined. But for a 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jew, they were combined, with baptism being the public proclamation of their repentance. Once again, Peter said...

IPE 3:21 And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience... NASB

It is not the "getting wet" part of baptism that saves us, but a repentant heart crying out to God to cleanse our conscience of our past sins. It is the "repentance" part of baptism that is necessary for salvation. In the early-Church days, baptism was the right of passage into the Christian faith. Baptism was the point at which the persecution would begin, when your family and friends would disown you. In those days, you were not even considered a Christian until you were baptized, because refusing baptism showed you had not really converted. Baptism was a big deal then, as it should be for us today.

**Study Questions** – 3a. In Matthew 3, what were the people doing when they came to John to be baptized? 3b. When the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John for baptism, why did he refuse them? 3c. What reason did John give for water baptizing people?

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**Prayer** - Father I cry out for You to cleanse my conscience from all my past sins. I turn my heart from all my sin, and I fully rely on the shed blood of Jesus as my atoning sacrifice. I thank You for your great love for me.

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## Week 2 – “What Shall We Do?”

### Lesson 2-4 – “The Forgiveness of Your Sins”

LK 22:42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." <sup>43</sup> An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. <sup>44</sup> And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. NIV

Have you ever wondered why God did not find a way to answer this prayer? Was there really no way for our sins to be forgiven - other than Jesus having to die for us? Think about it - God is the judge. Should He have just pardoned us and declared us forgiven and righteous as an act of His sovereign will? God is very creative, so why did He not find another way? If it were our innocent child headed to a brutal death on that cross, would we not explore every option to avoid it? Are we more loving and compassionate than He is? I believe if there had been any way for our sins to be forgiven, other than Jesus on the cross, God would have taken it in a heartbeat. But there was not another way. After His resurrection, Jesus paid a visit to his disciples to let them know He was alive. And here is something He said to them.

LK 24:25 And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. NASB

Jesus' death on the cross was necessary. There is a lot of theology about why it was necessary for Christ to die as a substitute for us to satisfy God's justice, but we are not going to explore that in this lesson. For our purposes right now, we just need to know if there had been any other way for our sins to be forgiven, Christ would not have had to shed His blood and die for us. Here is an insight the writer of Hebrews gives us about how sins are forgiven.

HEB 9:22 Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. NRSV

And here is what Paul said about it in Ephesians.

EPH 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. NIV

And in Colossians, he said this.

COL 1:19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to

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reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. NIV

And again, in Revelation, it says:

REV 1:5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood... NASB

Here is the main point - the forgiveness of our sins is accomplished only through Jesus' shed blood on the cross. If there was any other way for our sins to be forgiven, Christ would not have had to die. Why is it important we know this? It is important so we can properly direct our faith. His atonement must be the focus of our faith for the forgiveness of our sins - both at our initial conversion, and ongoing in our lives. There is no other remedy for any sin we have committed. His blood is the only way. Here is something the Apostle John said about forgiveness and the cleansing of our sins.

1JN 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; <sup>7</sup> but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. NRSV

1JN 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; <sup>2</sup> and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. NRSV

There is so much in these verses to unpack, but basically, John is giving us a blueprint of how our sins can be forgiven as we “walk out” our Christian experience. Some people believe when we become Christians, our sins are perpetually and unconditionally forgiven for the rest of our lives. Others believe when we become Christians, God views us as legally righteous, even though we continue to sin. John clearly contradicts both of those conclusions. He lays out the conditions under which our sins will be forgiven and the conditions under which our sins will not be forgiven. In doing so, he makes the case that we will always be dependent on the blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, and that continued repentance is prerequisite for ongoing forgiveness. This is God's roadmap for the forgiveness of our sins and the way through which He extends His mercy to us each day. Morning by morning, His mercies are new.

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But John also gives us the good news about forgiveness - if we sin, all we must do is confess it, turn our hearts back to God, and put our confident faith in Jesus' atoning blood to cleanse us. It is not at all complicated. The writer of Hebrews spoke about this cleansing of sins and the freedom it brings to our inner being.

HEB 9:11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; <sup>12</sup> and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? NASB

How can we know if we need the cleansing power of the blood? We can know by paying close attention to what is going on in our own heart and conscience. If we are feeling guilty, or cold and empty on the inside, then it is probably a sign sin has crept in. But the invitation to come and be cleansed remains.

HEB 10:19 Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. NASB

Let us not hold back, but rather seize the opportunity to confess our sins so our conscience can be fully cleansed. Let us come to Him with an honest and sincere heart whenever we need His mercy and grace. He wants us to come to Him.

**Study Questions** – 4a. What is the main point of the Hebrews 9, Ephesians 1, Colossians 1, and Revelation 1 passages? 4b. What are the promises given to us in 1st John 1:7 and 1st John 1:9? 4c. In what ways could these be considered conditional promises?

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**Prayer** - Father, I will not hide my sin. I ask You to search my heart to see if there is any dark way in me. Reveal to me the depths of my heart. I confess my sins and turn from them. I thank You for the sacrifice of Jesus, and I put my whole faith in Him for the complete cleansing of my sins. It is in His name that I pray, Amen.

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## Week 2 – “What Shall We Do?”

### Lesson 2-5 – “The Gift”

Not too long ago at the company where I worked, we were having a problem with a computer system. I needed help from someone who knew more about this system than I did, so I started an email conversation with a person in the manufacturer's technical support department. I carefully outlined the problem that we were having, with hopes they could provide a solution. A couple of days later, I received a response back that basically said, “The answer to your question can be found on page 12 of the user manual.” At first, I was a bit bothered by the lecturing tone of that response. Why could they not just answer my question? But honestly, they had already answered it. And if I had only taken the time to study the instruction manual, I would have known.

Oftentimes our frustrations and failures in our Christian life are the direct result of our lack of understanding of how God has designed our salvation to work. God has given us an inspired and very detailed instruction manual from which to learn about our Christian experience. It contains direction for us in the things we must do, but also sets our faith expectations about what God says He will do for us. Peter's sermons in the beginning of Acts serve as a basic outline for our salvation walk with Christ.

[AC 2:37](#) Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" <sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, "[Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.](#)" <sup>39</sup> "For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." NASB

In this short passage, we are instructed that we should turn from our sins, but it also shows what God has promised to do in our lives. It reveals two primary things God does in saving us. The first is the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus' atoning blood. As Paul said in Ephesians...

[EPH 1:7](#) In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. NIV

The second is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to purify our hearts with love.

[RO 5:5](#) and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. NASB

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These two - His blood and His Spirit, are the substance of the grace God uses to save us. The blood and the Spirit are not of our doing, and we could never match the outcome God accomplishes through them. But we can repent in our hearts and put our faith in Him, recognizing our dependence on Him as our atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. And we can submit to Him by placing our whole dependence on His Holy Spirit within us to sanctify our hearts and our behavior. Through doing this, His loving nature sets us free from our bent toward sinning. Here is something Paul said about this grace in his letter to Ephesus.

EPH 2:8 For by [grace you have been saved through faith](#); and that [not of yourselves](#), it is the [gift of God](#); <sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, that no one should boast. <sup>10</sup> For [we are His workmanship](#), created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that [we should walk in them](#). NASB

This is not just a one-and-done event, but an ongoing, daily experience and lifestyle. It is a grace in which we become established by standing firm in faith day after day - faith in His blood and in His indwelling Spirit. Paul talks more about this in Romans 5:1-2.

RO 5:1 Therefore having been [justified by faith](#), we have peace with God through our [Lord Jesus Christ](#), <sup>2</sup> through whom also we have obtained our [introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand](#); and we exult in hope of the glory of God. NASB

And again, in verse 8.

RO 5:8 But [God demonstrates His own love toward us](#), in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Much more then, having now been [justified by His blood](#), we shall be [saved from the wrath of God through Him](#). <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies, we were [reconciled to God through the death of His Son](#), much more, having been reconciled, [we shall be saved by His life](#). NASB

The work to reconcile us to God was accomplished by Jesus nearly 2000 years ago, but it is only applied to our lives as we repent and turn to Him in faith. And His blood is available to us as often as we need it for cleansing. But Paul also said that while we are reconciled through His blood, "[we shall be saved by His life](#)". In 2nd Thessalonians, Paul gave us clear teaching on the necessity of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

2TH 2:13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, [because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth](#). <sup>14</sup> [He called you to this](#) through our gospel, that you might [share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ](#). <sup>15</sup> So then, brothers, [stand firm](#) and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. NIV

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The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit works to save us through sanctifying our hearts in love. This helps us to understand the role that the Holy Spirit plays in our salvation, and it also emphasizes why it is so important we stand firm in being submitted to Him in faith. In Colossians, Paul said this truth of the indwelling presence was a mystery now revealed.

COL 1:26 ...the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, <sup>27</sup> to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. <sup>28</sup> And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. <sup>29</sup> And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. NASB

Christ *in us* is our hope of glory. Not Jesus as our guru, or out there in the starry heavens, not baby Jesus in a manger, not Jesus dead on the cross or in the tomb, but Jesus Christ resurrected and dwelling within us. So, I will say it again, just in case you did not get it the first few times. The primary focus of our faith must be on Jesus' atoning blood for the forgiveness of our sins and on His indwelling presence through the Holy Spirit to sanctify our hearts in love - day by day by day. It is not just one or the other, but both. The reason I have repeated this so many times is I do not want you to possibly miss the message, because these are the underlying substance of the grace of God by which we are saved - through faith. This is the gift. Not going to say it again..., and the whole Church said "Amen!"

**Study Question** –5a. From Ephesians 1:7-8, what role does the blood of Jesus play in our salvation? 5b. From 2nd Thessalonians 2:13-15, what role does the Holy Spirit play in our salvation? 5c. And what must we do to receive these two?

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**Prayer** – Father, I thank You for the grace by which I have been saved, by which I am being saved, and by which I will be saved. I put my whole confidence in the atoning blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins. And I put my whole confidence in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to fully sanctify my heart in love. In Jesus' name, amen.

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<p><b>FOUNDATIONS 201</b>   WEEK THREE</p>	<p>CONTINUALLY DEVOTING THEMSELVES</p>
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## Week 3 – “Continually Devoting Themselves...”

### Lesson 3-1 - “Suddenly from Heaven”

Are you familiar with the term “Change Management”? It is a corporate buzzword used to describe the need for companies to constantly evolve to survive in a changing technological and business environment. This change can be a tremendous challenge, and businesses that are unable to adapt to new conditions are destined to fall behind and eventually fail.

Companies will often hire consultants or other experts to help guide them through the process of efficiently implementing new technologies and updating the skill sets of their workforce. These people are known as “Change Agents”, and their job is to act as catalysts to help create a corporate culture that embraces the change rather than being resistant to it. On the Day of Pentecost, God inserted an “Agent of Change” into the community of Jesus followers.

AC 2:1 And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.<sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.<sup>3</sup> And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.<sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. NASB

Imagine you were there when this “Agent of Change”, the Holy Spirit, rushed into the room. Suddenly the disciples had abilities they never had before. And as we studied in an earlier lesson, there was an effect on their hearts, as well.

GAL 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,<sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.<sup>24</sup> Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. NASB

This describes the Holy Spirit’s effect on our hearts as individuals, but how does this impact the culture of believers as a group? How does it affect our relationships with one another? There is a passage in Acts that gives us some valuable insights into the daily lifestyle and culture of the believers in those earliest days of the Church.

AC 2:42 And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.<sup>43</sup> And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

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AC 2:44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common.  
45 And they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all,  
as anyone might have need.

AC 2:46 And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from  
house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,  
47 praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their  
number day by day those who were being saved. NASB

So, this is what a Spirit-filled community and culture looks like? It is certainly not the way people naturally act in our western societies today. But is this not precisely the way Jesus acted during His ministry on earth? When Jesus' Spirit is in control, He produces a community that acts like Him –a culture that has His heart.

Please keep in mind these things in Acts were written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They are preserved for the purpose of providing us a snapshot of authentic New Testament Church life. It shows us how a healthy, Spirit-led community functions and creates an atmosphere in which new believers can quickly grow to maturity. It is a culture of love and fellowship - like a colony of Heaven on earth.

Over the years, the Church has tended to drift from this blueprint, but there is so much for us to gain by seeking to follow this pattern. We were never intended to be a "Sunday morning only" church, but rather a healthy, vibrant, tight-knit family that is connected and experiencing life together. Does this type of community experience seem appealing to you? Are you willing to take the risk of working together to build these kinds of relationships? I hope so, because this is the kind of community Jesus wants to build as His own habitation.

**Study Questions** – 1a. From the Acts 2:42-47 passage of scripture, list the activities and experiences Luke mentions as being part of the early-Church culture, lifestyle, and devotion. 1b. How does this 1st Century Church culture compare with what we see broadly in our society today?

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**Prayer** - Father, I pray You would help me to connect with Your people in a new and deeper way. I ask that You design and build a Holy Spirit-filled community among us, in which healthy spiritual relationships can grow. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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## Week 3 – “Continually Devoting Themselves...”

### Lesson 3-2 - “In the Temple and House to House”

Football, Baseball, Basketball, Auto Racing, Soccer, Boxing, and all things Olympic - what do they all have in common? They are all sports, right? True, but they can also be considered “spectator sports”. Spectator sports are the ones we love to watch other people do. We will buy tickets, fill stadiums, or spend hours watching these sports on television, because they entertain us. In some cases, the sports are the dangerous kind that scare us, so we would much rather watch others than to participate ourselves.

If we are not careful, we can fall into the trap of approaching Church as if it were a spectator sport - one in which we only watch and do not participate. It is all too easy to go to the sanctuary on Sunday, with a bunch of people we do not really know, listen to the worship band sing a few songs, hear an inspiring message, then rush out the door and go home - to watch football on TV. We have done our duty to God; we have checked our “church” box. We come back a week or two later to do the same thing all over again - always being a spectator. But in the earliest days of the Church, it was not that way. Once again, here is the way Luke describes it in Acts 2.

AC 2:42 And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

AC 2:44 And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

AC 2:46 And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. NASB

These people were not just *going* to Church, they were *being* the Church. They were living life together, devoted to the mutual benefit of the whole community of Jesus followers. But this did not happen just through human effort. The leadership of the Apostles was important, but the Holy Spirit was the catalyst in the people's hearts that made it all possible. They acted this way because they loved each other.

But in addition to their changed hearts, there were also some inspired organizational practices implemented by the Apostles which assisted in the development of the Holy Spirit culture among them. One of those things is found in Acts 2:46.

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AC 2:46 And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house... NASB

Where did the early Jesus followers meet? From the very beginning, we can see their meetings included both a large corporate setting in the temple and smaller group settings in their homes. The early Christians were devoted to this practice, and it was not just happening one day a week, but every day! Both types of gatherings, as well as the frequency, played an important role in the life of the Church as a whole and for the growth and maturity of each person.

Meeting in homes continued to be a standard practice for the Church throughout the book of Acts, which covers a timespan of about 30 years. Toward the end of his ministry, Paul gave a farewell message to some of the Church leaders of Ephesus and the surrounding areas. In this message, he mentions teaching in people's homes.

AC 20:18 "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, <sup>19</sup> serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; <sup>20</sup> how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, <sup>21</sup> solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. NASB

Paul mentioned these house meetings in the closing remarks of many of his letters. House meetings were also mentioned in 2<sup>nd</sup> John, which was probably written more than 50 years after the birth of the Church. The small group was an integral part of the New Testament Church and when you think about it, their "large group, small group" design was an invention of necessity. The Church had grown from 120 to 3,000 in one day. How do you go about discipling 3,000 brand-new Christians? And from there, the Church began to spread to the whole Roman Empire with exponential growth. With that type of rapid expansion, how do you provide the personal attention necessary for individual spiritual growth?

A large corporate setting can be an exciting worship experience. There is something special about all of us being together, learning together, being encouraged together, being motivated together, seeking the Lord's manifest presence together. Nothing can replace that dynamic environment. But it is also easy to get lost in the crowd and become a spectator. So, while the large group is wonderful, it also has its deficiencies.

This is where the small groups add strength by providing an opportunity for in-depth teaching, discussion, mentoring, and asking questions. It also is a good atmosphere for

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group prayer and personal ministry. And small groups are excellent for fellowship, building relationships, and personal accountability. This is how the early Church did it. In our Church, there are multiple Sunday morning services, which makes it difficult to address every individual need. So, the larger the congregation, the greater the need for small groups. The writer of Hebrews emphasizes the need for a close-knit fellowship.

[HEB 10:23](#) Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; <sup>24</sup> and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near. [NASB](#)

Encouragement is an essential element in our Christian experience - encouragement to stay strong and faithful to the Lord, knowing His promises will be fulfilled. We not only need to be encouraged, but also to encourage others. You need the body of Christ, and the body of Christ needs you. Your involvement in a small group is just as much for others as it is for you!

Is it risky? Yes. Is there a possibility we will get hurt? Yes. Will we be given the opportunity to forgive occasionally? No doubt. But the Holy Spirit will lead us to take chances in building relationships with others. Being inside the Indy Car is far more exciting than watching the race on TV, but it is also more of a risk. Stepping out to build relationships is far riskier than being a Sunday morning spectator, but it is also more exciting and fulfilling. One key we must always remember - our success depends on having a heart of love toward others.

[Study Question](#) – 2a. From the Acts 2:46 passage, where did the Christians meet in the early days of the Church? 2b. And what can we gain by following their example today?

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[Prayer](#) - Father, I thank You for Your love for me. Lord, please give me the courage to take that first step in building relationships, to speak that first hello. Give me wisdom in being patient with the process and help me to be a blessing to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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## Week 3 – “Continually Devoting Themselves...”

### Lesson 3-3 - "Fellowship and the Breaking of Bread"

Sometimes, things that do not appear to be spiritual, can be very spiritual. We see an example of this in the Acts chapter 2 scripture we have been studying.

<sup>AC 2:42</sup> And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

<sup>AC 2:46</sup> And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,  
<sup>47</sup> praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. NASB

Have you ever thought of eating food as being a spiritual experience? Some of you are giving a hearty "Amen" right now. Yep - you knew there was something heavenly about that Hot Fudge Sundae with a big red cherry on top! Glory! But wait, that is not exactly what we are talking about here, because eating can also be a fleshly experience.

So..., what is it that makes eating a spiritual experience? Think about some of the things that happen when someone opens their home to host a meal. Right there, we can see generosity in action. And if the guests are appreciative, then thankfulness is being returned. Both are spiritual fruit expressions. Sharing a meal can have many spiritual benefits, including helping to create a sense of community and family. Conversation happens around the table. It is a good way to get to know people, to learn about their interests, and to understand how they think and feel. A meal is an opportunity to express thankfulness together. And if we invite Jesus in, that adds another dynamic.

Here is an excerpt from Baker's Evangelical Dictionary that helps to explain why the communal meal would have had such importance for 1st Century Christians.

*"The hospitable act of the communal meal possesses great symbolic significance. In the ancient world, to share food with someone was to share life. Such a gesture of intimacy created a bond of fellowship. Hence, Jesus' meals with tax collectors and sinners, Peter's meal with Gentiles, and the common meal of the early Christians in Acts 2 communicated a powerful message of intimacy and unity."*

Breaking bread together was an integral part of the early-Church culture. It may sound a little weird to us today, but in the Bible, Jude refers to these events as “love feasts”. It

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was a time to come together to share God's love, as well as an opportunity to share sustenance with others who may have been needy. However, it did not always work perfectly. The Apostle Paul had to correct a problem in the congregation at Corinth.

<sup>1CO 11:17</sup> But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse.<sup>18</sup> For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part, I believe it. NASB

And then in verse 20.

<sup>1CO 11:20</sup> When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat,<sup>21</sup> for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk.<sup>22</sup> Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not! NRSV

This is a very different attitude among the people of Corinth than we saw expressed in Jerusalem right after Pentecost. In Corinth, some of the people were acting selfishly, thinking only of their own bellies. They were missing the whole point. Sharing a meal with someone is supposed to be a sign of acceptance and of assigning great value to the other person. Jesus gives us an interesting example of this in Mark 2.

<sup>MK 2:13</sup> Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them.<sup>14</sup> As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

<sup>MK 2:15</sup> While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.<sup>16</sup> When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and `sinners'?"

<sup>MK 2:17</sup> On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." NIV

Once again, Jesus breaks the religious mold. For Him, they did not all have to be perfectly sanctified to eat with them. He did not seem to be at all worried He might be soiled by hanging out with these "sinners". Jesus loved them, He had compassion for them, and saw it as an opportunity for evangelism. We have much to learn from this.

While sharing meals is a great opportunity for evangelism, it is also an opportunity for koinonia. What is koinonia? Well, this is the Greek word translated into "fellowship"

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here in Acts 2. But the English word “fellowship” does not quite express the depth of the meaning. Koinonia is a shared spiritual identity, a unity and commonness of purpose. It is much deeper than just having similar interests. The Apostle John gives us some insight in 1st John.

1JN 1:3 What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship (koinonia) with us; and indeed, our fellowship (koinonia) is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. <sup>5</sup> And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we say that we have fellowship (koinonia) with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. <sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship (koinonia) with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. NASB

God is the source of koinonia. When we walk in His Spirit being controlled by His love, we have a spiritual connection with God. When a group of Christians who are walking in the Holy Spirit get together to share a meal or for some other kind of gathering, they share the same God connection with each other. As a result, God's love flows among us in a supernatural way. This is what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 18.

MT 18:20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. NRSV

But this spiritual unity only happens when we walk in God's Spirit - because He is the source of it and Jesus shows up to participate in it. But if we walk according to our own selfish flesh, koinonia will not happen. Do you know what else will prevent koinonia from happening? Koinonia will never happen if we are not making the effort to gather in Christian fellowship. And that is an obvious no-brainer.

**Study Question** – In the Acts 2:42-47 passage, Luke mentions not once, but twice, that sharing meals together was an integral part of the early-Church culture. 3a. What is special about eating together in someone's home? 3b. Also, what are some good things that can happen in relationships when a meal is shared?

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**Prayer** – Father, I thank You I do not have to live my Christian life alone, but You have provided others to grow alongside me. Help me to connect with them for our mutual benefit. Lord, I ask You to join and oversee this process. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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## Week 3 – “Continually Devoting Themselves...”

### Lesson 3-4 – “Practice Hospitality”

Maybe it was a Southern thing, but in our home when I was growing up, there was a time of the week we had to make sure the house was presentable. My mom was and still is a good housekeeper, even though the children created constant challenges in that area. But when the weekend approached, special effort was made to get everything in order because you never knew who might be stopping by for a visit.

On Saturday night, Sunday afternoon, or Sunday evening, friends would just show up seemingly out of the blue to visit. They might call beforehand, or they might not. And it did not seem at all strange to us, because if no one came to our house, we would just load up in the car and pay a visit to someone else. Today, it would be considered incredibly rude to come to someone's house for a visit unannounced. But in the not-too-distant past, people saw it as an important opportunity to fellowship and show hospitality. Since it was the normal, cultural thing to do, people planned for it to happen - by cleaning the house and baking a pie. How times have changed.

In his letter to the Church at Rome, the Apostle Paul encourages them to practice hospitality - although it may not have been exactly what I have described above. But as you read through this passage, notice some of the other things Paul mentions in the same context with hospitality.

RO 12:9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. <sup>11</sup> Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. NIV

Do you see all the things Paul is encouraging us to do? Love one another, honor one another, zealously serve the Lord, be joyful, be hopeful, be patient, be faithful, be generous, and last of all - practice hospitality. Is it possible Paul is telling us "hospitality" is a Fruit of the Holy Spirit, just like love, joy, peace, patience, etc...? Well, there it is listed in the same context as these other heart attitudes we call the Fruit of the Spirit.

Hospitality originates in the heart of God, and it should be coming forth as an expression of our Spirit-filled Christian experience. We should not let our secular culture squeeze hospitality out of our Christian DNA, because we all need to give it and receive it. So, what is hospitality? Here are a couple of dictionary definitions that might help us to see the different aspects of hospitality.

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## *Hospitality -*

- 1. The friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers.*
- 2. The quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way.*

As you can see, one of these definitions focuses on the action, and the other focuses on the heart motivation behind the action. But at its core, hospitality is a form of generosity toward guests, visitors, and strangers.

There are numerous examples of hospitality in the scriptures. One instance happened in Philippi and is recorded in Acts 16.

AC 16:13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. <sup>14</sup> One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. <sup>15</sup> When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us. NIV

Paul, Silas, and the rest of the ministry team were strangers in Philippi. But in her heart, Lydia wanted to bless those through whom God had blessed her and her family. And I believe she received a blessing from God for doing so. The book of Hebrews speaks specifically about expressing hospitality toward strangers.

HEB 13:1 Let love of the brethren continue. <sup>2</sup> Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. <sup>3</sup> Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body. NASB

Why do you think angels might come to visit you? Angels visited Abraham to announce to him that he and Sarah would be having a son as an heir, even though they were both advanced in years. Angels visited Lot to lead him and his family away from the coming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In both instances, the blessings came after they had shown hospitality to strangers. And what would have happened if they had not done so? We do not know. But there is an important point the writer of Hebrews is trying to make - a failure to practice hospitality results in missed opportunities for receiving blessings from God.

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Am I suggesting we should open our doors to anyone who might want to walk in? Absolutely not, we should always exercise wisdom. But think of all the people who invited Jesus in for a meal. What an awesome opportunity for blessing. But there were many people who did not invite Him into their homes - a lost opportunity for blessing.

Would you prayerfully consider opening your home for a Christian gathering of some kind - a night of bible study, prayer, fellowship, a potluck dinner? It will be a way to give your home over to God to be used for His kingdom and glory. It is an opportunity to bless others, and to be blessed.

Will it be a lot of work? Maybe a little, but worthwhile things do require effort, right? It is easier to team up with others and share the load. As with anything else, the most important step is the first one. The first step is to decide to do something. And who knows, you might just entertain an angel or two.

**Study Question** – 4a. In the Hebrews 13:1-3 passage, what are the different things we are encouraged to do? 4b. And what is the reason given for practicing hospitality to strangers?

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**Prayer** - Father, I pray You would help me to be an instrument of your grace, generosity, and hospitality toward other people. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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## Week 3 – “Continually Devoting Themselves...”

### Lesson 3-5 - "Not of this World"

A few years ago, my wife and I were on a mission trip in Escuintla, Guatemala, where we were helping the locals construct a building for a small congregation. In the evenings, after we had worked all day, something would happen that caught my attention. As the sun went down, the people came out of their tightly packed houses and began to fill the streets. Music was playing, people were talking, laughing, and having a good time. And I remember thinking, “I’ve never seen this happen in my neighborhood.” When the sun goes down where I live, people go into their houses and lock the doors. But this kind of open-air activity was part of the Guatemalan culture and routine.

Cultures throughout the world are different. In this group of lessons, we have been looking at the Holy Spirit culture that was established among the Jesus followers in the earliest days of the Church. Even in that day, the pattern we see described in Acts was not the cultural norm. It is certainly not the cultural norm for our society today. Here is Luke's description again.

AC 2:42 And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

AC 2:44 And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

AC 2:46 And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. NASB

That was then, and this is now. But the same Holy Spirit that birthed this heart of community in their day is working now to do the same thing within our hearts. The Holy Spirit is working in us to birth a loving community that is relationally interconnected to form a functional body through which Christ can live His life, accomplish His ministry, do His miracles, and establish His kingdom in this earth. But we must be willing and devoted participants, just as they were. It all begins with the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Many of the motivations driving our society are opposed the motives of the Spirit. So, to a large degree, we will have to break with the mindset of our culture, so it does not define our Christian community. Here is something Jesus said in John's Gospel.

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JN 17:14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. <sup>15</sup> My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. NIV

We are not of this world, we do not belong to this world, and we should not allow this world to define our lives personally or our Church culture. In Romans, Paul appeals to us to avoid being squeezed into the mold of this world.

RO 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect. NRSV

"Do not be conformed to this world" covers many more areas of life than we are discussing in this lesson. It covers every aspect of our lives, both individually and as the Church corporately. We must allow the Holy Spirit to transform our minds and hearts, so we think in Jesus terms, rather than the culture in which we live.

Relationally, there are many dysfunctional tendencies within our culture today and we must learn to recognize them so we can avoid them. In the United States, something has happened over the past 100 or so years, especially in suburbia. Due to several contributing factors, our relational community structure has broken down. Most people do not know their neighbors anymore. We now have cars and transit infrastructure that allows us to travel long distances to our jobs and churches. At one time, Churches were community-centered, but now the people are scattered over large areas making it more difficult to build relationships. We must overcome this.

Technology in our homes has brought us unlimited choices for entertainment, without ever having to leave the air-conditioned comfort of our recliners. Years ago, the boredom of home life was one of the things that would drive people together for community gatherings, Saturday night dances, and friendly competitions, board games, etc... Today, we have so many ways to be entertained without ever looking anyone in the eye. In many ways, we have abandoned a relational world in favor of a virtual world. A few years ago, there was a term coined to describe what is now happening - "Cocooning". It describes how people escape into their homes to hibernate and shut out the rest of the world. We must resist and overcome this tendency.

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Our fast-paced lifestyles of running from place-to-place leave little time or emotional energy for building deep relationships. If we are not intentional about stepping off the hamster wheel to avoid these pitfalls, we will be swept away by the current of the culture in which we live.

How do we begin to walk in the Jesus-world reality? It starts with courage and a determination in our hearts that we are not going to be conformed to the pattern of the world system in which we physically live, but rather to embrace the lifestyle, culture, and community of Jesus. It is a big step, because there is a wide gap between the world culture and the Jesus culture. But I also believe deep down, this Jesus culture is the desire within the heart of every Holy Spirit-filled believer - because God puts it there.

What to do? First, pray. And then seek opportunities to build relationships, get to know people. Get out of your comfort zone. After Church on Sunday, have lunch with some other people. Open your home for a pot-luck dinner. Get involved in Church activities that are relational in nature. And most of all - share the love of Jesus.

**Study Question** –5a. In the John 17:16-18 passage, Jesus said we are not of this world. If we are not of the world, then what are we? 5b. What does this mean to you personally in your relationship with God, and in our relationships with one another? 5c. In Romans 12:1-3, what direction does Paul give us to help us avoid being conformed to the world?

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**Prayer** - Father, I thank You for the work You are doing in my life in continually changing me to be more like Jesus, through abiding in the fruit of the Spirit. I am convinced in my heart that You love me. Please help me as I learn to let You connect me with other believers so we together can be a powerful force for your kingdom work. In Jesus' name, amen.

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<b>FOUNDATIONS 201</b> WEEK FOUR	NOT A NEEDY PERSON AMONG THEM
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## Week 4 – “Not a Needy Person Among Them”

### Lesson 4-1 - “Everything in Common”

They called it the Second Aliyah. Fleeing a growing anti-Semitic persecution in Russia and Eastern Europe in the early 1900's, they were the second wave of Jewish people who immigrated to the traditional Jewish lands in the Middle East. Since there was little in the way of industry at the time, their only sustainable source of livelihood was agriculture in a dry, harsh land.

Partly due to the difficulties of farming the land, partly for security reasons, and partly because of their idealist views, they formed collective communities known as kibbutzim in which they shared everything as common property. Here is a description from the Jewish Agency for Israel.

*The Kibbutz operates under the premise that all incomes generated by the Kibbutz and its members go into a common pool. This income is used to run the Kibbutz, make investments, and guarantee mutual and reciprocal aid and responsibility between members. Kibbutz members receive the same budget (according to family size), regardless of their job or position. In terms of education, all children start equally and are given equal opportunity. The Kibbutz is governed by a system of direct participatory democracy, where the individual can directly influence issues and events in the community. In this mostly self-sufficient community, the collective as well as the work ethic play a major role.*

*It is a voluntary society in which people live in accordance with a specific social contract, based on egalitarian and communal principles in a social and economic framework. The main characteristics of Kibbutz life were established in adherence to collectivism in property alongside a cooperative character in the spheres of education, culture, and social life. With this came the understanding that the Kibbutz member is part of a unit that is larger than just his own family.*

Although they have evolved to include a variety of social and economic structures, there continue to be over 250 kibbutzim in Israel, with 125,000 plus members. Kibbutzim have widely diversified over the years to include a variety of industries, and they continue to be a major part of Israel's modern economy. They produce around forty percent of Israel's agricultural output, and nearly ten percent of the total economic output.

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The Kibbutz may seem to be a strange way of life to us, but here is something Luke records about the early Church in Acts, chapter 4.

AC 4:32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and **not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own**; but **all things were common property to them**. <sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> For there was **not a needy person among them**, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, <sup>35</sup> and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need. NRSV

By now, you may have raised an eyebrow and are wondering where we are headed with this. No, I am not suggesting we all go sell our property, collectively buy a farm, and hoe corn together. I hope you are not disappointed. But over the years, many Christian communes have been founded using these verses to support the idea that the earliest Christians were operating as a commune and practicing this form of socialism. And while a quick glance at this passage might leave you with that impression, if we look closer an important fact emerges from something Peter said to Ananias in Acts 5.

AC 5:4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? NRSV

Even though the early Christians viewed material possessions as being for the common benefit of the group, they still retained individual ownership and control of their property. They continued to work their own jobs, maintain their own finances, and conduct their own businesses. They were not a kibbutz. They were not practicing communism - they were practicing simple and pure generosity out of a loving heart. The social system of the early Christians would probably best describe as "family". Let us look at the Acts passage again.

AC 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

AC 2:46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. NIV

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Look at the things they were doing together. They were spending time together, learning together, eating meals together. They were praying together, being generous to one another, and sharing their possessions. Isn't this what a family looks like? Isn't this what families do? In Mark 3, there is an instance where Jesus made this very important point so we could understand how this works.

MK 3:31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup> A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." <sup>33</sup> And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" <sup>34</sup> And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" <sup>35</sup> Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." NRSV

Is it possible God defines family differently than we do? If Jesus sees us as family, then why do we not see one another as family? If we have a common Heavenly Father, then are we not heavenly brothers and sisters? If He sees us as being family, then we most certainly are.

We have physical families, and we have a spiritual family. One comes through our biological fathers; the other comes through our Heavenly Father. One family is a natural family; the other is a supernatural family. One is temporal, one is eternal. So, which has the deeper bond, the physical or the spiritual? How do you think Jesus sees it?

**Study Question** – 1a. from Mark 3:31-35, in what way does Jesus redefine the concept of family? 1b. And how should Jesus' definition of family affect the way we relate to one another within the Church?

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**Prayer** - Father, I thank You I have a bigger family than I ever imagined. Please show us how to experience the full depths of your love, and to then express it to one another. Thank You for being the loving head of our household. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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## Week 4 – “Not a Needy Person Among Them”

### Lesson 4-2 – “You’ve Done it Unto Me”

This is the place where I usually try to give you a semi-interesting real-life analogy that is somewhat relevant to the upcoming the point of the lesson. But in this case, there is no need, because Jesus speaks so directly into this subject. But I will give you a clue – it is all about having a compassionate heart. I hope that does not spoil it for you. Here is Jesus.

MT 25:31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup> and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

MT 25:34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

MT 25:37 Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup> And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' <sup>40</sup> And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

MT 25:41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

MT 25:44 Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' <sup>45</sup> Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' <sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." NRSV

Do you get the impression that Jesus may take this personally? When we express compassionate generosity toward our fellow Christians who are in need, Jesus says we

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are pouring the same blessing on Him. Jesus places a high value on a compassionate heart, along with the corresponding action of generosity. And He says this is a defining characteristic that shows the difference between sheep and goats - between the righteous who will receive eternal life, and the accursed who will not. There is another story Jesus told with a similar message.

LK 10:25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 And Jesus said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" 27 And the man answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." 28 And Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

LK 10:29 But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied and said, "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went off leaving him half dead. 31 "And by chance a certain priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 "And likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

LK 10:33 "But a certain Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, 34 and came to him, and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 "And on the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return, I will repay you.'

LK 10:36 "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" 37 And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same." NASB

I love the way Jesus directed the conversation away from "who is my neighbor" and made it all about "am I being a neighbor". The Jews considered the people of Samaria to be half-breed apostates from Judaism who had intermarried with other cultures. Jesus making an unclean Samaritan out to be the compassionate hero of the story might have been a little difficult for a 1st Century Jew, especially since those in the story who showed no compassion were the Jewish religious elites. I am guessing even Jesus' own disciples might have swallowed hard when they heard this come out of his mouth.

But what is the point of this story? - God values a compassionate heart. All our religious trappings are useless if we do not have a loving and compassionate heart. I hope this

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challenges you, even as it challenges me as I write. James, the brother of Jesus, echoed this point in the letter he wrote to the Churches.

JAS 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

JAS 2:18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. <sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.

JAS 2:20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. <sup>23</sup> And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. NIV

For a long time, this passage has been debated in the "Faith/Works" controversy. But if we get hung up in that kind of analysis, we will miss the main point James is making here. If we do not have a compassionate heart and a generous spirit, then our religion is dead and useless. It is important to Jesus that we have compassion and mercy on others who are in need. Here is what it says about this in Proverbs 19.

PR 19:17 He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD,  
and he will reward him for what he has done. NIV

When we take notice of others who are in need, God takes notice of us.

**Study Question** – 2. From the Matthew, Luke, James, and Proverbs passages in this lesson, what do you see as the points the writers are trying to make to us? There are several.

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**Prayer** – Father, I know You have a compassionate and generous heart. Please impart that compassionate and generous heart to me. I offer myself up to You. Show me how to be a blessing to others. In Jesus' name, amen.

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## Week 4 – “Not a Needy Person Among Them”

### Lesson 4-3 - “As He Has Decided in His Heart”

There is an old story about a man who was walking on a beach early one morning. There had been a tremendous storm the night before that had left thousands upon thousands of starfish stranded on the sand as far as the eye could see in both directions. And he thought to himself, “What a shame.”

As he looked further down the shore, he saw a small boy picking up starfish and throwing them back into the water. So, he walked up to the boy and said, “Son, look at all of these thousands of starfish, do you really think you're going to make a difference here?” The boy picked up a starfish and threw it into the water and said, “It made a difference for that one.” Upon hearing this the man started picking up starfish and throwing them back into the ocean.

In many areas of ministry, it seems the need is overwhelmingly impossible to meet. But imagine if there had been a thousand people on the beach, with each of them throwing in a few starfish. God never intended for us as individuals to feel that we alone must meet every need we see. And none among us can do it all ourselves. In his letter to the Church at Rome, Paul talked about a mission of mercy, in which many Churches and many more individuals participated.

RO 15:25 At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; <sup>26</sup> for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup> They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them; for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things. <sup>28</sup> So, when I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will set out by way of you to Spain; <sup>29</sup> and I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. NRSV

It was an interesting opportunity. Paul had solicited gifts from the “mostly Gentile” Churches he had planted, to be taken to help feed poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Many of the Gentile Churches were in wealthy cities, Jerusalem was not so wealthy.

For a hundred years, Israel had been ravaged internal wars, foreign invasions, followed by bloody insurrections that were put down by occupying armies. Except for the elites, it was not a place of great prosperity. To make things worse, Christians had been rejected by much of the Jewish population making Jerusalem a less than ideal place for the Church to thrive economically. Not only would this collection for the saints meet a genuine need for the Christians there, but it would also be an opportunity for unity and

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acceptance of the Gentile Churches. Many Jewish Christians were still not sure what to make of this growing population of non-Jewish believers. The gift would show the sincerity of faith within the Gentile Churches, as well as their concern for the well-being of Christians in the Jerusalem Church. It would also be an opportunity for the Gentile Churches to show appreciation for the ministry that originated from the Church in Jerusalem.

Paul had been working to collect this gift for some time. In his second letter to the Church in Corinth, he encourages them to be prepared to follow through with what they had already committed to do. And in this passage, he makes a couple of his most famous quotes.

<sup>2CO 9:6</sup> Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.<sup>7</sup> Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. NIV

There are so many noteworthy statements in this passage, so many potential sermon topics. But the one we are going to focus on for this lesson is in verse 7, not the “cheerful giver” part, but the first part of the verse in which he says, “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion”. For the remainder of this lesson, we want to explore what it means to be Spirit-led in our giving.

Some of the world's best fundraisers are skilled at using guilt, pride, or other means to manipulate people into giving. But Paul said we should not give out of guilt or pressure. The Lord wants to lead us and orchestrate our giving through His Holy Spirit in our hearts. He wants to give us a passion for the cause, so we can support it out of joyful enthusiasm, as opposed to the reluctance of guilt.

The Holy Spirit may put a passion in your heart for one area of ministry you are to support, while putting a passion in my heart for different area of ministry I am to support. That way, God gets both funded as He desires. This is how the Body of Christ functions. Therefore, I do not expect everyone to practice their generosity toward the same things I do.

How do we know what we should support and what we should not? We simply ask God with an open and willing heart whether we should support it financially or not. He will confirm to us one way or another. If we will do this with an honest heart, our giving will be cheerful and joyous, not legalistic, or obligatory. It will break the bondage of legalism

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and manipulation from our lives. But we should always be obedient and never, ever use this as an excuse to hide a greedy or selfish heart.

If we will be led by the Holy Spirit, God can use us in several ways. For example, if a ministry has some hidden motive or action that is not pleasing to God, He might lead people to hold back on their giving for a season to get the attention of the leadership. Or on occasions, God may lead us to be extravagant with our generosity. We do not need to know why; we just need to be obedient. Here is a promise for us in verse 8-11.

2CO 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. <sup>9</sup> As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

2CO 9:10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. <sup>11</sup> You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. NIV

Being obedient to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in our giving keeps us in a position to be blessed by God in every area of our lives. And we should always put our hope in God who supplies the provision, rather than the provision itself. But the key is to let the Holy Spirit consistently fill our hearts with God's love and to follow His leading in generosity.

1TI 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. <sup>18</sup> Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. <sup>19</sup> In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. NIV

Let us faithfully do all He puts in our hearts. Amen and glory to God.

**Study Question** – 3a. What does the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 9:6-7 passage teach us about the proper and improper motivations for giving? 3b. And from the 2nd Corinthians 9:8-11 passage, what are the promises given to those who give out of a generous heart?

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**Prayer** - Father, I thank You for Your provision in my life. Lord, I put my giving under Your authority, knowing I can trust You to supply in all things. I ask You to give me a passion in my heart for the things You want me to support. In Jesus name, Amen.

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## Week 4 – “Not a Needy Person Among Them”

### Lesson 4-4 - “Neither Should They Eat”

Generosity can be a tricky business. You compassionately give money to a homeless person; then you wonder if they are going to spend it on alcohol or drugs. Drug addicts can be some of the neediest looking people, and their appearance tugs at your heart strings, but you suspect there may be a lot more to the story than what you see. Would it have been better to have not given at all, than to fuel their addiction?

You see someone with a sign asking for financial help, and you imagine yourself in that situation. But just as you give the money, you see evidence they are part of an organized group, leading you to believe this is more of a business, than actual destitution. Then you see reports on TV showing panhandling can be a more lucrative profession than working a job. It is easy money. It offends your sense of fairness and justice, making you feel you have been played.

Giving can be complicated. And if we are not careful, we may damage ourselves by becoming jaded and shutting down the tenderness of our hearts. It is essential we do not judge but remain open to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We may drive past someone twenty times, then on the twenty-first time, God may lead us to give.

The early Christians were a very giving people, and they considered their possessions to be for the common benefit. But their community was not without checks and balances to prevent some from taking advantage of the generosity of others. Being an apostolic overseer, Paul dealt with some of these kinds of problems in the Church at Thessalonica.

<sup>2TH 3:6</sup> Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. <sup>7</sup> For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, <sup>8</sup> and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. <sup>9</sup> This was not because we do not have that right, but to give you an example to imitate.

<sup>2TH 3:10</sup> For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. <sup>11</sup> For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. <sup>12</sup> Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. <sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters do not be weary in doing what is right. <sup>14</sup> Take note of those who do not obey what we say in this letter; have nothing to do with them, so that they may be ashamed. NRSV

Can you imagine sitting in the meeting when this letter was first read to the Church? I suspect you could have heard a pin drop, and it might have been difficult to avoid

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glancing around the room to see how certain people were reacting. Everyone probably already knew exactly who he was addressing. And if Paul had to deal with this problem publicly, it would have already been a contentious issue within the Church. But for whatever reasons, the congregation had been unsuccessful in dealing with it. So, Paul gave them instructions to disassociate themselves from able-bodied people who were content to selfishly live off the hard labors of other people, while doing no productive work themselves. He said they should be ashamed for doing this. But he also followed with this statement.

**2TH 3:15** *And yet do not regard him as an enemy but admonish him as a brother.* NASB

“Brother, we love you, but what you are doing here is not right, it is not good for you, and it is not good for the fellowship.” “You are family to us, but if you continue to abuse the generosity of other people, you will no longer be welcomed here in this fellowship.” “You are able to work, so you must pull your own weight.”

Those are difficult, but sometimes necessary conversations to have. However, they are for the good of the Church and for the benefit of the individual, as well. But it takes courage, and a loving heart. Church discipline is never supposed to be for the purpose of punishment, but for bringing repentance and wholeness. We must be careful we do not allow ourselves to become hard-hearted toward anyone, especially those who are truly in need. But at the same time, we do not have to feel responsible to support people who do not seem willing to do productive work to support themselves.

Widows and orphans were a primary focus of the early Jesus followers. James, the brother of Jesus, talked about the importance of this ministry in his letter.

**JAS 1:27** *This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.* NASB

In Acts 6, there were complaints that some of the Greek speaking widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. The Church selected the first deacons to oversee this ministry to ensure that none of the widows were overlooked. But even in this ministry, there were checks and balances within the system to make sure the resources were going to those who were truly in need. Here is what Paul said in one of his letters to Timothy.

**1TI 5:9** *No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband,<sup>10</sup> and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.* NIV

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So, this was not an across-the-board support program, but for the faithful elderly widows who had no other means of support. These ladies would have otherwise starved to death, had the Church not assisted them. He said this about them in verse 5.

**1TI 5:5** The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. NIV

There is a point at which we as Christians must step up to support the elderly Christians who are in need. But Paul also cautioned against long-term support for the younger people who are capable of supporting themselves. It can ultimately be harmful to them.

**1TI 5:11** As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. <sup>12</sup> Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. <sup>13</sup> Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to. NIV

Paul went on to say the young widows should get married, have children, and take care of their own business rather than being idle and expecting support. Paul also instructs us to be sure we take care of our own family members, rather than leaving them destitute for the Church to support.

**1TI 5:4** But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. - break in text - <sup>8</sup> If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. NIV

Wow. It does not seem like Paul wanted there to be any doubt about what we should do. How does the fifth commandment go? “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long...”

**Study Question** – 4a. From the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 3:6-14 passage, what problem was Paul attempting to correct? 4b. What instructions did Paul the Church? 4c. From 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 3:16, what is the proper way to implement this kind of church discipline?

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**Prayer** – Father, I pray You would lead me in whatever mercy ministry You have for me. Lord, give me compassion for those who need compassion, and mercy for those who need mercy. I give myself over to Your service. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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## Week 4 – “Not a Needy Person Among Them”

### Lesson 4-5 - “Do Not Muzzle the Ox”

In the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, you will find chapter, after chapter, after chapter of rules the Israelites were supposed to follow. Most of them give specific directions to be followed for a given circumstance. Some of the commandments were about waging war on enemies, crimes requiring capital punishment, honest business dealings, and the proper treatment of foreigners and slaves. Included in the list is the following commandment, which seems a little random and out-of-place.

**DT 25:4 Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain. NIV**

The surrounding verses provide no context or explanation for this commandment. Why then? People muzzle their dogs to keep them from biting others, but the only reason to muzzle an ox would be to keep it from eating the grain. If the ox is otherwise well fed, why not muzzle him while he is treading out the grain? He is just an ox, right? But there is a greater underlying principle that leads right back to the heart. The ox is not just an ox, he is the one toiling for the farmer’s benefit. The farmer should appreciate and reward that labor by allowing the ox to share in the harvest while he is working. If this principle applies to the lowly ox, then how much more in greater things?

The Apostle Paul planted the Church in Corinth, and occasionally he had to remind them of that fact. Even though Paul had spent 18 months working in Corinth to bring the people to Jesus and to disciple them in the faith, they had apparently never supported his ministry - because he would not let them. He accepted support from other Churches, but not from Corinth. Here is something he said in his second letter to them.

**2CO 11:7 Did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I proclaimed God's good news to you free of charge? <sup>8</sup> I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. <sup>9</sup> And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for my needs were supplied by the friends who came from Macedonia. So, I refrained and will continue to refrain from burdening you in any way. NRSV**

Macedonia would have included Churches in Thessalonica, Philippi, and Berea, among others in northern Greece. These areas were quite poor compared to the prosperity of Corinth, yet Paul received financial support from Macedonia, and he refused to take support from Corinth. Don't you find that interesting - in an odd way? I do.

There was an unhealthy dynamic in the Corinth Church. Every time Paul left town, things in Corinth would go haywire. The news would eventually make it back to Paul wherever he was at the time, and he had to stop what he was doing to pen a letter in an

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attempt to right the ship. Even though Paul's ministry had been God's instrument to bring them all to Christ, there were some in Corinth who were constantly questioning Paul's authority as an apostle. In 1st Corinthians, Paul felt the need to remind them.

<sup>1CO 9:1</sup> Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? <sup>2</sup> Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. NIV

Paul should not have had to defend himself in this way, not in Corinth. He had led them to the Lord. Their wavering distrust of his calling is what prompted Paul to refuse their support. He felt he had to prove to them he was not in it for the money, even though he was fully entitled to receive support from them.

<sup>1CO 9:3</sup> This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. <sup>4</sup> Don't we have the right to food and drink? <sup>5</sup> Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? <sup>6</sup> Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? NIV

<sup>1CO 9:7</sup> Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? <sup>8</sup> I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? <sup>9</sup> For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? <sup>10</sup> Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. <sup>11</sup> If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? NASB

Now we see the spiritual significance of the Deuteronomy passage about muzzling the ox. It is all about supporting the people who are planting spiritual things into our lives to bring our spiritual fruit to harvest. When we fail to support our local Church and leadership financially, it is like muzzling the ox when it is threshing. We are showing no appreciation for the spiritual life we receive through the ministry. Paul continues.

<sup>1CO 9:12</sup> If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. <sup>13</sup> Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? <sup>14</sup> In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. <sup>15</sup> But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. NIV

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What a strong sentiment. Paul loved them and would have died for them, but he would not take their money. And because of their failure to properly accept and honor the ministry of Paul for the work he had done in their Church, the Christians in Corinth missed out on the opportunity to participate in what was arguably the most powerful evangelistic, Church planting ministry in history. They should have begged to contribute.

We too, will miss out if we fail to recognize, appreciate, and support those who are sowing into our lives. Let's not be the kind of people who show up on Sunday morning to soak up the worship, soak up the ministry, soak up the preaching, and soak up the air conditioning - then muzzle the ox by not financially supporting the Church even to help cover the ongoing expenses of the ministry. None of us can do it all ourselves, but together we can make a big difference with our consistent financial support.

In 1st Timothy, Paul once again emphasizes the need to support the ministers who are leading us into the things of the Spirit.

[1TI 5:17](#) The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. <sup>18</sup> For the Scripture says, "[Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,](#)" and "[The worker deserves his wages.](#)" NIV

There is the "ox" again. And just like the Christians in Corinth, we too will miss out on a great opportunity to participate in the Gospel if we fail to recognize, appreciate, and regularly support those who have so diligently sown into our lives. And just in case you are wondering about that last statement - "worker deserves his wages", well that is a statement made by Jesus.

[Study Questions](#) – 5a. From the Deuteronomy 25:4 passage, why do you think God would give this kind of commandment to a farmer? 5b. From the 1st Corinthians 9:1-15 passage, how does the "do not muzzle the ox" principle apply to us in the Church today, and why should we never do it?

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[Prayer](#) - Father, I thank You for the people You have put in my life to help lead me into the life of the Spirit. Lord, I commit to consistently support the ministries of the Church so Your work may continue without interruption. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

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<p><b>FOUNDATIONS 201</b>    WEEK FIVE</p>	<p>CONTINUALLY DEVOTED TO PRAYER</p>
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## Week 5 – “Continually Devoted to Prayer”

### Lesson 5-1 – “The Prayers”

Three times a day. Brush your teeth three times a day. One of the keys to having healthy gums is to brush your teeth three times a day - and floss once. Remember, as soon as you finish eating your food, your food starts eating your teeth. But if you will clean those choppers after breakfast, after lunch, and before you go to bed, your dental hygienist will really be impressed.

Three time a day. Pray at least three times a day. One of the keys to having a healthy spirit life is to pray at least three times a day - morning, afternoon, and night. You think I am making this up, right? I am not making it up.

In Jesus' day, the Jewish custom was to stop and pray three times a day, not counting the prayers before and after meals. This is still the tradition among devout Jews. The first prayers are at sunrise - known as the *Shacharit*. Then there are the afternoon prayers - known as the *Mincha*. And finally, there are the evening prayers - known as the *Ma'ariv*.

These were the hours of the day that every devout Jewish man would stop to meditate, make petition, recite prayers, and give thanks. Each of the prayer times included specific traditional prayers that were read or recited from memory. These would include psalms, hymns, and verses structured to constantly remind them of certain truths and principles about God and their relationship with Him. There were regular temple services scheduled to coincide with these times for corporate prayers - three times a day. Here is a passage from Acts.

[AC 3:1](#) One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer--at three in the afternoon. NIV

Why were they going up to the temple at three in the afternoon? It was for the *Mincha*, the afternoon prayers. The Jewish prayer framework was three times a day, and this would have been the custom of Jesus, His disciples, and the early Jewish Jesus followers. The early-Church account in Acts, lists prayer as one of the defining activities of these Christians.

[AC 2:42](#) And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. NASB

While most English translations render this as "prayer", in the Greek it literally means "the prayers". They were devoted to praying "the prayers". There was probably a

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mixture of reciting structured prayers and freestyle prayer. That was the Jewish custom. Structured prayer is okay, provided it is coming from our hearts, and not meaningless repetition. But with whatever methods they prayed, they were devoted to it.

There is some historical evidence that the three-times-a-day prayer custom continued in the Church for many years. There is a historical writing known as the "*Didache*", that dates to the mid-to-late 1st Century AD. It was written as a handbook or instruction manual for early-Christian practice. It includes some of the sayings of Jesus, some moral instruction, and it covers subjects such as fasting, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and prayer. The *Didache* instructs us to pray three times a day, just like the Jewish tradition, but with the Lord's Prayer replacing the Jewish prayers.

So, what are we suggesting here, that we should set up a rigid, three times a day recitation of the Lord's prayer? No, but we are suggesting we should be devoted to prayer. And a devoted prayer life will require regular prayer throughout the day. The account in Acts makes it clear that prayer was a significant part of the life of the early Church. And even before the Holy Spirit was given, prayer was their practice.

AC 1:12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. <sup>13</sup> And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. <sup>14</sup> These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. NASB

Right after Jesus ascended to the Father, the disciples went to Jerusalem just as Jesus had told them to do. And what did they do as they were waiting for God to give what was promised? They devoted themselves to prayer. And after the Holy Spirit was given, the whole group of new believers adopted this devotion to prayer.

AC 2:41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. <sup>42</sup> And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. NASB

And there is another instance in Acts where this is mentioned.

AC 6:1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup> So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God

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in order to wait on tables. <sup>3</sup> Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them <sup>4</sup> and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

AC 6:5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. <sup>6</sup> They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. NIV

As the Church grew larger, the food distribution job got larger, to the point that the Apostles could not handle it along with all their other responsibilities. So, this is where the Church got its first group of deacons who were selected to oversee the food distribution. And what was the reason the Apostles gave for selecting these men? It was so the Apostles could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

The Apostle Paul was devoted to prayer, as well. And he reminds us of one of the keys to having an effective prayer life. The first passage is from 1st Thessalonians.

1TH 5:16 Rejoice always; <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing; <sup>18</sup> in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. NASB

There it is – pray without ceasing. And what does he say in verse 18? It is not just a suggestion, but it is the will of God for us. And he mentions this again in Colossians.

COL 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; NASB

Once again, we see we should be devoted to prayer. And once again, we see a reference to giving thanks. So, let us make prayer our practice - and to brush our teeth. How many times a day?

**Study Question** –1a. In 1st Thessalonians 5:16-18, we are encouraged to pray without ceasing. To you, what does it mean for someone to be continually devoted to prayer in this way? 1b. And what do you see as some obstacles that might hinder this kind of lifestyle? 1c. What is it about thankfulness that makes it an important part of prayer?

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**Prayer** - Father, I thank You for the opportunity to come to You in prayer, it is truly an honor. I ask that You draw me to pray more. Please lead me in my prayers by showing me the things I should pray, and the heart I should pray with. I love You and thank You in Jesus' name, amen.

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## Week 5 – “Continually Devoting Themselves to Prayer”

### Lesson 5-2 - "Pray in Secret"

If you are part of the medical community, you may have heard of “Sutton’s Law”. It states that during the process of medical diagnosis, the physician should first test for the most obvious possibilities. If the most obvious causes are eliminated, then move on to the less obvious possibilities. It is a systematic approach to diagnosis, rooted in basic analytical troubleshooting techniques. This is intended to reduce unnecessary tests and expense. One interesting tidbit about “Sutton’s Law” is that Willie Sutton was not a doctor - he was a bank robber.

William Francis Sutton, Jr., had a 40-year career robbing banks with an estimated total haul of over \$2 million dollars. He spent over half of his adult life in prison, having escaped from jail three times. He was especially adept at using disguises in his heists, earning him the nicknames “Willie the Actor”, and “Slick Willie”. In a newspaper article, Sutton was reportedly asked why he robbed banks, to which he responded, “Because that’s where the money is.” This rather obvious answer morphed into “Sutton’s Law”. Although Sutton later denied ever making the statement, the quote attributed to him stuck. In his biography, he gave the real reason he robbed banks – “I enjoyed it, I loved it.”

Sometimes in scripture, Jesus has a way of stating the obvious in a profound way. When Jesus was teaching His disciples about prayer, he gave them some specific instructions about how to pray, and how not to pray.

[MT 6:5 "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.](#) NRSV

What reason does Jesus give for finding a place to pray alone in secret? Because that is where God is. That is an obvious answer, because God is everywhere, right? But all places are not necessarily best for praying. When we pray in public, are we not somewhat aware of the people around us who are listening to us pray? Are we not tempted to tailor our prayers for their ears, at least a tiny bit, even if we are not trying?

Jesus warned us about trying to impress people with our eloquent prayers. If that is the motive of our hearts, then the approval of men is all we will ever receive. But when we pray in secret, we do not have those distractions. We are not tempted to put on the

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pretense of spirituality or to worry about what anyone else thinks. We can bumble around and make a real mess of it, and it is all okay because God is not looking for eloquence, but for our honesty and pure motives. In secret, we can focus entirely on God, without being distracted by our surroundings. And since God already knows what is in our hearts, we can be totally honest with Him about how we feel. But when it comes to praying in a group of people, we must be careful about getting too honest with God, lest it end up on Facebook before we say “Amen”. Jesus encouraged us to pray in secret because it is a powerful thing for us, but also because it was His own practice. Here is something recorded in Luke’s Gospel.

[LK 5:15 But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and great multitudes were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. <sup>16</sup> But He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.](#) NASB

And here is another similar passage.

[MT 14:23 And after He had sent the multitudes away, He went up to the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.](#) NASB

Even Jesus felt the need to get away from the distractions to pray. We are not saying that praying with others is a bad thing, but praying in secret, one-on-one with God, is an essential part of our daily relationship with Him. As Jesus said...

[MT 6:6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.](#) NRSV

Our loving Father is there waiting in the secret place, ready to reward us. Do you think we should show up?

**Study Questions** –2a. What do you see as some of the benefits of praying in secret?  
2b. And why is it important we come to God in prayer with pure motives and an honest heart?

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**Prayer** - Father, my desire is to come before You with complete honesty and with a pure heart. Help me to know how to do this. Lord, I so want to commune with You and get to know Your heart. In Jesus' name, amen.

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## Week 5 – “Continually Devoting Themselves to Prayer”

### Lesson 5-3 - "Pray for Your Enemies"

We love our idioms. Idioms are little phrases we use to convey a thought, even though the words have nothing to do with the actual thought. Without being told, how would someone know that a "hot potato" was really a reference to a controversial issue people argue about? And how would we know "a piece of cake" means something that is easy to do, or "sitting on the fence" refers to indecisiveness, or "when pigs fly" means something will never happen? These colorful little phrases add a visual element to our daily conversations proving that "a picture paints a thousand words".

I do not want to "beat around the bush" here, because we know "to be human, and to forgive is divine", and since "some things are easier said than done", and "talk is cheap", we must "put our money where our mouth is" concerning that "pain in the neck" person even if they are a "thorn in our side". Did you get all of that? In other words, as difficult as it is, we must love and pray for our enemies. Jesus said it this way.

[LK 6:27 "But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup> If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. NRSV](#)

This is probably one of the most difficult things Jesus calls us to do because it is so counterintuitive from a human perspective. What we really want to pray is for God to slap them around for a while, maybe to rain fire down from heaven on them. But Jesus instructs us to respond in a way that requires a very different heart. But does He not know what they have done - and how they act? Yes, He knows. But He also knows what is best for us - which is to love.

[MT 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' <sup>44</sup> But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. NIV](#)

We say we want to be like Jesus, right? Well, loving our enemies is one of the ways we get to be like Jesus. God sends rain on the unrighteous. In other words, He still cares about them and loves them and wants to bless them. God feels love for the worst sinner. Feeling love for our enemies and expressing that love by offering loving prayers

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to God on their behalf is the best evidence of God's love working to perfect our hearts. Love is a safe place for our hearts to be. Here is something Paul said to Timothy.

1TI 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. <sup>3</sup> This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. NASB

This is God's heart, for all to be saved. But do we desire for them to be saved? Or would we prefer He judge and destroy them? We tend to carry angst toward people we do not even know personally, people with whom we have never had a conversation or any personal contact.

Many years ago, I remember watching a television program that caused an extreme anger to rise within me toward a person on the TV screen - until I realized my heart was despising a fictional character. The person was not real, but the anger in my heart was very real. Have you ever experienced anything like that? How about with real people on TV? Have you ever been watching the news and suddenly you feel your emotions change to anger when you see the face of a celebrity or politician on the TV screen? Can you see them in your mind now?

What do you feel when you see Donald Trump's face? How about Barak Obama? What emotions are there when you see a picture of Nancy Pelosi? Maybe it is someone at work or a family member? Maybe it is a whole slideshow of people who have hurt you? Who do you have trouble praying for? Being able to honestly pray for a person without feeling the angst in our hearts is evidence we have truly forgiven them - just like Jesus did on the cross. Forgiveness is possibly the greatest expression of love.

**Study Question**— 3a. In Luke 6:27-29, what specific instructions does Jesus give us about how we should view and treat people who make themselves our enemies? 3b. And why is this so difficult to do sincerely? 3c. What does 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:1-4 reveal about God's heart?

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**Prayer** - Father, I know You love \_\_\_\_\_, so I choose to love them as well. I pray You would not judge \_\_\_\_\_ for their sin, but You would show mercy and forgiveness. I pray you would bless \_\_\_\_\_ and draw their heart to You. I thank You that You did all of this for me when I was undeserving. In Jesus name, amen.

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## Week 5 – “Continually Devoting Themselves to Prayer”

### Lesson 5-4 - "Pray in the Spirit"

You could go to any Christian bookstore and probably find a hundred books on prayer. If you go to Amazon.com and search for "prayer books", you will get over forty-thousand hits. Prayer is a popular topic.

But what do we do when every prayer method we have learned from the books, training videos, and seminars seems ineffective? There are times we know we should pray, but we do not know what to pray - or even how to pray. It is a helpless feeling. And in these times, our faith in God must enter a different depth and dimension. Paul speaks of this in Romans, chapter 8.

**RO 8:26** Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. NRSV

This is a mystery and a paradox - God praying through us and for us. It is a form of communication that exceeds our capacity to comprehend, not being limited by our human intellect. It produces perfect prayers that are in complete harmony with God's will and purposes.

So, is this all about praying in tongues? It can be, but not necessarily. While praying in tongues is a valid and powerful expression, in this case Paul says, "**but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.**" This is a meditative form of prayer that uses no words at all. It is non-verbal communication, with no words formed on our lips, and no words formed in our mind. It is a spirit-to-spirit communication in which our heart reaches out to be connected to His heart. Occasionally, there are interesting things that happen when we are in the Spirit. Here is something that happened to the Apostle John, which is recorded in the Revelation.

**REV 1:9** I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup> I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup> saying, "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." NRSV

John did not get up that morning expecting to get a series of visions to write down and

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send to all the Churches. Nor was he expecting those visions to be preserved, read, and studied for the next two-thousand years. John was just practicing the spiritual life and experience that had become his routine. He had probably been "in the spirit" a few thousand times before.

How can we begin to practice this? Praying in the spirit can be a difficult discipline because our natural tendency is to process everything in our minds into language. In the beginning, we might find it hard to express thanks to God, without forming the words "thank you" in our minds. But isn't the true expression of thankfulness much more than saying and thinking the words? Should thanksgiving not start in our hearts first? If it does not emanate from our hearts, the words are empty. But if thanksgiving is offered from the heart without the words, is it not still an offering of thankfulness? Is love not the same way? Is love not much more than saying the words "I love you"?

What is the point of this? The spiritual is higher than the natural. God speaks in spirit, and when we lean into Him with our hearts alone, we are speaking in His language. We are connecting spirit-to-spirit without the processing limitations of our natural intellect getting in the way. We start by expressing the intent of our hearts to God, without trying to attach words to the prayer. It opens a whole new dimension of conversation. And just like riding a bicycle, we learn to do this by regular practice until it become second nature. Then we can do what Paul encourages in Ephesians 6, following his teaching on the full armor of God.

**EPH 6:18** And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. **NIV**

So along with our prayers of the intellect, what are we supposed to do? Pray in the Spirit. And how often? On all occasions. Well, I guess we need to get started - right?

**Study Question**— 4a. From the Romans 8:26-27 passage, in what ways does the Holy Spirit help us to pray? 4b. Is it possible to pray without using words? 4c. If so, how do we do pray without words?

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**Prayer** - Father, I ask that You teach me a deeper prayer life and help me to pray in the Spirit. I desire to have my heart connected to yours in prayer. In Jesus' name, amen.

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## Week 5 – “Continually Devoting Themselves to Prayer”

### Lesson 5-5 - "Lord, Teach Us to Pray"

LK 11:1 And it came about that while He was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." NASB

Do you think Jesus’ disciples did not know how to pray? As devout Jews, they would have been taught several Jewish prayers from childhood. These prayers were very much a part of Jewish life. So, it was not as if they did not know how to pray at all, they just did not know how to pray the way Jesus prayed. When they listened to Him pray, it was different. There was a relational depth in His prayers they did not have.

Most Rabbis of that time would have taught their disciples a prayer to use along with the standard daily Jewish prayers. Even John the Baptist did it. The prayer Jesus taught His disciples is found in two of the Gospels – Luke and Matthew. Though they vary slightly in the wording, they are the same in substance. Here is the Matthew version.

MT 6:7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. <sup>9</sup> "This, then, is how you should pray:

" `Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

<sup>10</sup> your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread.

<sup>12</sup> Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. '

<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. NIV

This is not only a prayer we can pray; it is also a prayer that teaches us how to pray. This is a prayer containing an outline of basic principles that pertain to our relationship with God. It teaches us how to approach God and what basic posture we should take in prayer. Jesus even brackets this prayer with instructions. He starts with this.

MT 6:7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. NIV

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What is the basic truth Jesus is getting across to us here? It is to keep our prayers simple and uncomplicated. We do not have to impress Him with our spirituality, in fact, it is a mistake to try to do that. God already knows our hearts and our needs before we even ask. Before we even begin to pray, we can assume He cares for us and is excited to hear from us. We are invited to approach Him as a loving Father.

MT 6:9 "This, then, is how you should pray:

" `Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. NIV

"Hallowed" is one of those three-dollar Bible words, but what does it mean? It means holy and honored. This has to do with the posturing of our hearts when we approach Him, with honor and reverence. Getting an audience with the God of the universe is an honor, not a common thing. We should not be ho-hum about it. Then Jesus said this.

MT 6:10 your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. NIV

This once again is an opportunity to check our hearts. Are we truly aligned with His will and purposes, or do we have our own agendas? Are we coming to find out what He wants so we can be a part of His kingdom, or are we wanting to employ Him to be part of our kingdom? Jesus gave us the example in the garden when He said, "Not my will, but Yours be done". It is good to determine in our hearts that no matter what God's will is for us today, tomorrow, or the next day – we are all in. We do not have to know every tiny detail of God's will for our hearts to be submitted to His authority.

MT 6:11 Give us today our daily bread. NIV

Many times, we do not realize how dependent we are on God for provision - both spiritually and materially. We may have big bank accounts with all kinds of resources available to buy anything we want. But that could all change in a day for us individually or as a society. Trusting in money is a misplaced trust, and the idea of human control is nothing but an illusion. All power and resources rest with God, so it is vital we recognize who our ultimate source is - both spiritually and materially.

MT 6:12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. NIV

There is an old proverb that says, *"Be careful what you pray for because you might get it."* In other words, there are times we pray, but we do not always understand the full implications of what we are asking. This verse 12 statement is one of those prayers. It points not only to our need for forgiveness, but also to our need to forgive others. In fact, Jesus binds the two together. The Luke version of this prayer shows this linkage even more clearly.

LK 11:4 `And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. NIV

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Let me say this another way. “Lord, please forgive me of my sins in the same way that I forgive others.” Is that how we want it to work? Or do we want to be forgiven of our sins even though we are unwilling to forgive others? Hmmm... There are a lot of church people who believe their sins are forgiven, yet they continue with unforgiveness and bitterness in their hearts toward others. But at the end of this model prayer, Jesus gives a little bit of follow-up instruction to drive His point home about how forgiveness works.

MT 6:14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. NIV

Do you get the impression Jesus is serious about having us forgive one another? Some people will argue this has nothing to do with salvation, but do we want to roll the dice on it? Just so we can hang on to our unforgiveness? Not me. If this upends our doctrinal apple cart, then good. That is exactly what Jesus intends to do. If anyone wants to debate the truth of how this works or to sweep it under the rug, I suggest you take it up with Jesus in prayer. After all, He is the one who said it. As for me, I believe I will just take what He says at face value - and forgive people.

MT 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. NIV

Jesus wants us to realize we have an enemy intent on deceiving and destroying us. Temptations are everywhere, but God can lead us away from these situations if we will ask and be sensitive to His leading. If it were not important, He would not have instructed us to pray about this. Each of these prayer elements is critical to the success of our Christian experience. Working these into our daily prayers will position us for success with the wisdom of Jesus.

**Study Questions** – 5a. What do you see as some of the fundamental elements in the model prayer and the surrounding verses? For example, verse 11 is a “request for God's provision”. 5b. And why is it important we learn to incorporate these concepts into our own prayer lives?

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**Prayer-** Pray the Lord's Prayer.

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<b>FOUNDATIONS 201</b>	<b>WEEK SIX</b>	<b>YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST</b>
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## Week 6 – “You Are the Body of Christ”

### Lesson 6-1 – “One Body, Many Parts”

PS 139:13 For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. <sup>14</sup> I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. <sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. NRSV

The human body is an amazing invention of God. Consider the physical capabilities we have been given - things like the ability to stand upright, to dance, to jump rope, to swim, to ride a bicycle, or play a musical instrument. We can do these things fluidly because our physical bodies are so perfectly designed with the necessary strength, balance, manual dexterity, and motor skills. The mechanical complexities and computational processing necessary to coordinate so many body parts is nothing short of miraculous.

Beyond the physical, we have the intellectual capabilities of thought, reason, and creativity. We can communicate through speech, language, and text. We have the five basic senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell, through which we experience the physical world around us. We eat food and burn it as fuel to sustain and keep this body energized. When we consider the capabilities built into our human design, we must agree with the Psalmist that we are fearfully and wonderfully made!

God could have designed us in an infinite number of ways, but have you ever wondered how God settled on this specific design for us? Did He just say, “Two arms, two legs, two eyes, two hands, two feet, and one head - that should do”? And “I’ll give them two ears, but only one mouth, so hopefully they will listen twice as much as they talk”? Or is it possible our physical design points to a greater reality and purpose? In the very beginning before God created mankind, He spoke these words about us, giving us a clue of His intentions for us.

GE 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." <sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. NRSV

From the very beginning, God intended that in some way or another, we would be patterned after Him. But as Jesus said in John, chapter 4, "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." If God is spirit and we are flesh, how

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then do we reflect His image? If we are fallen creatures, how can we truly represent the image of a Holy God? Here is something the Apostle Paul said about the design of our physical bodies, and how this compares to the relationship we have with Christ and with one another as Jesus followers.

1CO 12:12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.<sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.<sup>14</sup> For the body is not one member, but many. NASB

Is this just an analogy Paul is making here, or is it possible our human bodies were designed from the beginning to prophetically foreshadow the spiritual relationship between Christ and His Church? Here is something else Paul said in Ephesians.

EPH 4:15 But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,<sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. NRSV

So..., in the spirit realm, Christ is the head, and we are the individual body parts connected to Him, as well as to one another. Is it possible the design of our physical bodies was intended from the very beginning to point to the deeper spiritual truth concerning Christ and the Church? And maybe the body of Christ is that true spiritual reflection of the image of God as He intended from the beginning? God does nothing without there being a purpose in it. God designed our physical bodies in such a way that we could learn about our need for spiritual connectedness to Him and to each other. Here is something else Paul has to say about it.

1CO 12:14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.<sup>15</sup> If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.<sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.<sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?<sup>18</sup> But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.<sup>19</sup> If they were all one part, where would the body be?<sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts, but one body. NIV

And later in verse 27.

1CO 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. NIV

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Do you see the interdependent nature of our human body and how this relates to the interdependent nature of the individual members of the body of Christ? While the eyes are capable of sight, they are still dependent on the ears for hearing and the nose for the sense of smell. Neither the eyes, nose, nor the ears can take in food for the nourishment of the body - that is the job of the mouth. Every part is designed to provide a different ability for the benefit of the whole body. But no individual part has every ability.

The same is true in the body of Christ. You and I are dependent upon one another because God has designed it to be that way. None of us has everything we need apart from the others in the body - and God purposely designed it to be that way. I need you, and you need me. God has intended from the beginning that in Christ, we would function together as a body. When we realize and embrace the idea that we need one another, and each of us is an integral part of the body, then we can begin to work together as God has intended.

The Church is the most healthy and effective when each individual part functions in the gift God has given them, which benefits the whole body. You and I individually are not the body, we are just body parts. But when we are properly connected, we are the body of Christ. As such, we are together fearfully and wonderfully made. And as we come together as a body under the headship of Jesus, we can truly begin to fulfill our created purpose of reflecting the spiritual image of the One who made us.

**Study Questions** –1a. In the 1st Corinthians 12 passages, what analogy does Paul use to describe the Church corporately? 1b. And in what way does he describe us individually? 1c. Also, what does this passage reveal about our relationships with one another?

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**Prayer** - Father, I give You thanks that You have created me and given me life. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Father, I also thank You I can be part of Christ's body. Please help me to find my place so I may be a benefit to the rest of the body. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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## Week 6 – “You Are the Body of Christ”

### Lesson 6-2 – “Christ as the Head”

A few years back, there was an animated kid’s movie called “Happy Feet”, which was about a little dancing penguin. But the concept of “Happy Feet” did not originate with the penguin movie, but with a comedian - Steve Martin. Martin rose to fame through his stand-up comedy which was often physical in nature. One of his routines was “Happy Feet”, in which his legs would suddenly go crazy and start dancing wildly, dragging him along, without his having any ability to stop them. Then as quickly as it started, his feet would go back to functioning normally. And then it would happen again. Martin joked the condition might have been brought on by the drugs. Feel free to go now to check it out on YouTube, but hurry back to the lesson and do not get sidetracked.

So..., what could that possibly have to do with us in the Church? Well, I have been in Christian circles a long time, and I have seen the “Happy Feet” dance many times. I have done it myself. It happens every time one of us starts doing our own thing, operating independent of the Holy Spirit - and we end up looking like a Steve Martin comedy bit. But here is what Paul said in Ephesians about how the Church is supposed to function.

EPH 4:15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. NASB

And there is something similar here in Colossians where he warns us not to operate in fleshly religion that is not motivated by the Holy Spirit.

COL 2:18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. <sup>19</sup> He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. NIV

If Christ is the head, that means He gets to be the brains of the operation, and we do not. The only way we can find our true purpose in the body is if we humbly submit our will to Christ as our head. Jesus gets to be in charge, He gets to call the shots, and He gets to run the show - He is the orchestrator, the maestro, the director, the leader. And if we refuse to submit to His will and His purposes for our lives, one of two things will happen. We will either find ourselves burning up our energy and looking foolish as we do the “Happy Feet” dance, or we will do nothing and just hang there like a paralyzed

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limb that has no function at all. Either way, we will not fulfill our calling. Only when we are submitted to Christ as our head, will we begin to find our true purpose and calling in the body of Christ. That is when we will experience the same effectiveness in ministry Jesus had when He was here on earth because He works through the body parts to the degree, we are submitted to Him. This is from Ephesians.

[EPH 1:18](#) I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,<sup>19</sup> and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might<sup>20</sup> which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,<sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.<sup>22</sup> And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,<sup>23</sup> which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. NASB

Submitting ourselves to Christ as our head is the beginning of an enlightened existence. Having our heart, our mind, and our will subjected to Christ brings our lives into proper alignment with the whole creation as God has designed it to be. It puts us in a position to be blessed by God, and for His power to work on our behalf. But we must let go of our own agendas and the idea that God exists to serve us, when in reality we exist to serve Him. Then and only then can we function together as His body, with every part working its designed purpose. This is when the prophetic promise of Isaiah is fulfilled in and through us.

[ISA 52:7](#) How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" NIV

When we bring the good news of Christ, that is what really makes our feet happy...

**Study Question** –2a. What does Ephesians 4:15-16 reveal about the relationship between Christ and the rest of us in the body of Christ? 2b. In the human body, what role does the head play? 2c. And what does this analogy teach us about how we are all supposed to function in the Church?

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**Prayer** - Father, I thank You for the privilege of being part of the body of Christ. I submit my will to Christ as my head - as the one in charge of my life. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

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## Week 6 – “You Are the Body of Christ”

### Lesson 6-3 – “Honoring Every Part”

“Mr. Potato Head” is one of the most iconic children's toys. First conceived by George Lerner in the 1940s, it was initially a flop, but when he pitched the idea to the Hassenfeld Brothers, they loved it. Their toy company later became known as Hasbro. Mr. Potato Head was finally introduced for the mass market in 1952 and earned the distinction of being the first children's toy to be advertised on television. There was eventually a Mr. Potato Head TV program, a starring big screen role in the Toy Story movies, and of course, a Mrs. Potato Head.

Most everyone knows about Mr. Potato Head, but did you know in the beginning, he did not actually have a head? The kit came with all the body parts, including ears, shoes, multiple noses and eyes, a couple of mouths, eyeglasses, a pipe, three hats, and even facial hair - but no head. You had to supply your own real potato, or other vegetable for the head. Eventually, complaints from moms about finding rotting vegetables under beds and in the bottom of the toy boxes led to the plastic head being added to the kit.

When I was kid, we were privileged to have a Mr. Potato Head. One of the most fun things about playing with it was creating odd looking faces with the mouth upside down, a hand coming out where the nose should be, and single ear right on top of the head. Can you picture it? The possibilities were endless.

You know where we are going with this, right? The Church is a sort of like that original Mr. Potato Head kit, with you and me being the body parts. I know that is not the picture of the Church you have in mind, but it was the best I could do. So, here is the 1st Corinthians 12 passage again.

1CO 12:14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. <sup>19</sup> If they were all one part, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts, but one body. NIV

God has designed it so each of us will have a necessary function in the body. But what happens if we, as individuals do not fulfill our function? And what happens if we

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attempt to take the role of a body part to which we are not well-suited? You know, like the Mr. Potato Head with three noses and no ears? Here is an example from Ephesians where Paul was teaching on some of the grace gifts that have been given to the Church.

[EPH 4:11 It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,](#) <sup>12</sup> [to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up](#) <sup>13</sup> [until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.](#) NIV

Through His Spirit, God has empowered certain believers to function as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Each of these is a distinct gift with a specific purpose for bringing the Church to a healthy maturity.

But sometimes these gifts do not interchange so well. For example, those with a strong prophetic gift will be excellent at delivering God's pointed message for the moment, but they may be weak in the nurturing gift needed to fill the role of a pastor. They might be too direct with their words. The evangelist gift is powerful in precisely delivering a message that will touch people's hearts in a way that will lead them to Christ, but they may not be the most gifted in discipleship, which is the role of the teacher. Conversely, the teacher might tend to overwhelm a "not-yet-Christian" with way too much information, because teachers tend pour information into people. Nothing can do the job of a foot better than a foot can.

Here is the main point - each of these gifts fills a specific need in the body of Christ. And none of us has all the gifts. While is not unusual to see Christian leaders operating in multiple gifts, there is usually one primary gift. And if we attempt to fill a role that is outside of our spiritual gifts, we tend to struggle because a hand cannot effectively fill the role of an ear. So, it is essential all the body parts find and operate in their gifted functions. If we individually do not operate in our gifts, or if we fail to recognize the gifts of others, the whole body suffers, and we will be crippled to some degree.

[1CO 12:21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"](#) <sup>22</sup> [On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,](#) <sup>23</sup> [and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty,](#) <sup>24</sup> [while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it,](#) <sup>25</sup> [so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for](#)

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each other. <sup>26</sup> If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. <sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. NIV

God has designed the Church so we will not be independent, but interdependent. I must realize that apart from you, I do not have everything I need – and God designed it that way.

There is a tendency in the human mind, to exalt certain people and gifts - and ignore others. But the people and gifts that seem insignificant in the eyes of man are necessary in the eyes of God. Whether it is a gift within us, or a gift within another person, we should never ignore it as being insignificant to the body. “But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.” NIV

There are certain parts of our physical bodies we pay absolutely no mind to - until they stop functioning properly. Take any part of your body you choose and give it a good whack with a hammer, then you will personally experience exactly what Paul was talking about. “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

If we are driving a nail, it is good to pay attention to our thumb before we swing the hammer. It is not good to just close our eyes and hope for the best. In the Church, we need to pay special attention to those who normally would not be recognized at all. In the body of Christ, God has elevated everyone up to the same level. If we do the same, there will be no divisions among us. God has equal concern for each of us, as we should for one another. The individual members of the body will flourish, and the body as a whole will be strong and healthy together. So, let us go find someone who is doing a thankless job, and thank them for doing it!

**Study Question** –3. What do you consider to be the main point being made in the 1st Corinthians 12:21-27 passage of scripture?

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**Prayer**- Father, I thank You for my brothers and sisters in Christ. I thank You that You bring them into my life for our mutual benefit. May You be blessed through our working together for Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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## Week 6 – “You Are the Body of Christ”

### Lesson 6-4 – “Every Supporting Ligament”

It is a little difficult to describe his humor, except to say that it is just weird. I am talking about Gary Larson, the guy who brought us “The Far Side” comics. With each comic being a single panel, Larson presented a silly, satirical jab at about every serious subject you could imagine. Whether it was the social interactions of animals doing very human things, or nerds in hell making goofy remarks about how hot it was, or dinosaurs smoking cigarettes as being the real reason for their extinction, his comics always presented a bizarre viewpoint of life that left you wondering what kind of twisted mind thinks up this stuff. But you also could not wait for the next strip to come out.

One of Larson’s more famous cartoons was the “Boneless Chicken Ranch”, in which he depicted a farm which raised chickens with no bones - for the purpose of supplying your local supermarket with “boneless” chicken. As you might imagine, the chickens are just awkwardly scattered about, incapable of doing anything other than just lying around because they were nothing but a lump of meat and feathers - with no bones. So, just in case you were wondering where the “boneless” chicken in your market came from, now you know.

Imagine your own body without bones. How difficult would it be to function? The best we could do would be to inch along like a slug. The strength and mobility of our bodies is dependent on several factors, including our bones which provide rigidity, our muscles that provide motive strength, and nerves which provide electrical control. But we also we have ligaments and tendons which are the connective tissues holding our muscles and bones together to create stability in our joints. This allows for leverage, strength, and movement of our limbs. The Apostle Paul said the body of Christ works in a similar way, with you and me being held together by ligaments in Christ so we can function as a single body.

[<sup>EPH 4:15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.](#) NIV

So, there are several things we can learn here about the way you and I should function together in the body of Christ. One, is that none of us gets to be the head, because Jesus is the head. This we have already discussed in a previous lesson. A second thing is that we are connected and bound together by ligaments. But what are the ligaments? Well, there is another passage in Colossians that sheds light on this.

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[COL 3:12](#) And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. <sup>14</sup> And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.<sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful. NASB

According to this passage, what is it that binds us together in unity? Do you see it there in verse 14? Love is the perfect bond of unity. Let me summarize it this way. In the body of Christ, love functions just like ligaments to perfectly connect you and me so we can work effectively together in the same way our joints work in our physical bodies. Without physical ligaments, our joints would painfully slip out of socket every time we tried to move. The same is true in the body of Christ if we are not spiritually bound together in love. Without God's love, our attempts to work together will produce every form of drama imaginable, causing us to become painfully disjointed. However, when we lovingly work together, His Spirit unifies us, we grow stronger together, and we accomplish great things for the Kingdom of God. As he says in Ephesians...

[EPH 4:15](#) Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. NIV

Think about happens to our physical bodies if we go for an extended period without any movement. Our joints get stiff, we lose mobility, our muscles shrink and grow weak from atrophy - like a boneless chicken. The same thing can happen in the spiritual realm. But when we choose to vigorously work together, our spiritual joints will loosen, our spiritual muscles will grow strong from the exercise, and we become healthy and productive together. And love is the perfect ligament that holds us all together.

**Study Question** – 4a. In Ephesians 4:15-16 Paul speaks about “joints” and “ligaments”. What purpose do “joints” and “ligaments” serve in the human body? 4b. And how does this apply to us members of the body of Christ? 4c. Also, in Colossians 3:12-15 passage, what does God use to bind us together in unity?

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**Prayer** - Father, I thank You for the wisdom in Your design of the body of Christ. I willingly give myself over to Your love, to receive it, to experience it, and to express it to others. I commit myself to Your purposes in my life as a connected part of Christ's body.

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<b>FOUNDATIONS 201</b>	<b>WEEK SEVEN</b>
<b>HE GAVE GIFTS TO HIS PEOPLE</b>	



## Week 7 – “He Gave Gifts to His People”

### Lesson 7-1 – “On All Mankind”

Over the past few lessons, we have been studying the effect the Holy Spirit has on the hearts of those who receive Christ. We have seen the prophetic promises of a new heart fulfilled through the Holy Spirit fruit, and we have seen how that change impacts our personal lives, our relationships, and our Church culture. We have seen how our sins are forgiven through repentance and our faith dependence on the atoning blood of Jesus for cleansing. But there is yet another aspect of the ministry of Christ to the Church. Paul mentions this in Ephesians.

[EPH 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup> But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high, he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people."](#) NRSV

Spiritual gifts have been a subject of great debate - even contention in the Church for many years. Some argue the gifts are no longer operational for today, but there is no denying the important role spiritual gifts played in the earliest years of the Church. Even the Old Testament prophets spoke of spiritual gifts being imparted through the Holy Spirit. One of those is the prophecy of Joel, through whom God gives details of how the Holy Spirit would empower and give revelation to the people who received.

[JOEL 2:28 "And it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind. And your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. <sup>29</sup> "And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days."](#) NASB

Look at all the things God said He was going to do in the lives of people through the Holy Spirit. People would receive revelation through prophecies, visions, and spiritual dreams - supernatural abilities that would come through the Holy Spirit.

It is remarkable to see how this word, spoken through a Jewish prophet, proclaims this blessing is not just for the Jews, but that God will pour out His Spirit upon all mankind. This would include the Gentiles who were considered unclean by the Jews. The Holy Spirit would not be just for the men, but for the women, too. This blessing would not just be for the adults, but for the children, too. And it would not just be for the privileged, or the religious elites, or the well-educated, but the Spirit would be poured

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out even upon the male and female slaves. Then on the day of Pentecost, it became more than a promise for the future - it became a present reality.

AC 2:1 And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

AC 2:5 Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men, from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were bewildered, because they were each one hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup> And they were amazed and marveled, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup> "And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?" NASB

Look at what happened to the Apostles. They suddenly received the supernatural ability to speak languages they had never learned - for the purpose of sharing the gospel. But why would God do it this way? After all, there were natural means by which the gospel could have been communicated. They could have easily used translators, of which there would have been many in an international city like Jerusalem. Or they could have used Greek which was a common language widely spoken throughout the Roman empire, the same way English is spoken in Europe today alongside the native languages. The best explanation is that God used the supernatural tongues as a sign pointing to the fulfillment of prophecy for the purpose of evangelism. The people were amazed these Galileans could speak their native languages. The tongues got their attention so they would listen to the message. Here is something else Jesus prophesized in Mark 16.

MK 16:17 "And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." NASB

Jesus said these supernatural abilities, including speaking in new tongues, would manifest in the lives of those who believe. And He said this in the context of the great commission to evangelize, which he spoke just two sentences before.

MK 16:15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. NASB

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So, supernatural tongues were used for the purpose of evangelism, but not exclusively. Spiritual gifts were widely practiced in the early-Church, with Paul writing about it in several of his epistles, including Romans, Ephesians, and in 1st Corinthians where he gives the most detail.

1CO 12:4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. <sup>7</sup> But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup> For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. NASB

This was written some twenty or more years after the beginning of the Church on the Day of Pentecost. So, it is evident that at least during the time of the Apostles, the spiritual gifts were widely practiced. And in this case, the purpose for spiritual gifts was not evangelism, but for ministry within the Church. This is not an exhaustive list, as there are other places in scripture where more spiritual gifts are mentioned having been imparted through the Holy Spirit for various purposes.

But does any of this apply to us today? This has been a subject of great debate in the Church as to whether the spiritual gifts have ceased, or if they are still available to believers today. In our next lesson, we will investigate to see what the scriptures say about whether the gifts have ceased or not.

**Study Question** – 1a. Through the prophet Joel, what did God promise would happen in the lives of those upon whom the Holy Spirit is poured out? 1b. And on the day of Pentecost, what special ability did the Apostles receive through the Holy Spirit?

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**Prayer** – Father, You are God Almighty and there is nothing impossible with You. I thank You for Your Holy Spirit that dwells within me to sanctify my heart. I trust You and give my life into Your hands. In Jesus' name, amen.

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## Week 7 – “He Gave Gifts to His People”

### Lesson 7-2 – “When the Perfect Comes”

LK 24:44 Now Jesus said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." <sup>45</sup> Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures... NASB

There is a clear implication here - if He does not open our minds, we cannot understand the scriptures. It is humbling to have to admit I am not smart enough to understand the scriptures on my own, but it is true. So, this has become one of my regular prayers - that Jesus would open my mind to understand the truth of the scriptures. Here is something Paul said about how this “understanding” works in our lives.

1CO 2:11 ...no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. <sup>13</sup> And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

1CO 2:14 Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they (the gifts) are spiritually discerned. NRSV

When we interpret the scriptures through the lens of our natural human understanding, we will misunderstand it and get it wrong every time. Most of the disagreements and divisions among Christian groups today have come as a direct result of interpretations and commentaries born out of the natural intellect of man, rather than from God’s Spirit. If we are not led by the Spirit, the door is wide open for Satan to deceive us in every area of our lives. As we continue in this lesson, we are going to see an example of how this has happened, and we will expose one of Satan's deceptions.

After His resurrection, Jesus met with His disciples and told them about the gifts and empowerment that would come through the Spirit to those who believe.

MK 16:15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. <sup>16</sup> "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. <sup>17</sup> "And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." NASB

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When you look at this list Jesus gives us, why do you think Satan might want to prevent this kind of spiritual empowerment in the Church? Well, this empowerment interferes with Satan's agenda. He does not want his demons to be cast out, and he does not want us to recover when we get sick. Satan does not want us to experience supernatural protection. But in Acts 28, we can see this protection at work in the life of Paul when he was shipwrecked on the island of Malta.

AC 28:1 And when they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta. <sup>2</sup> And the natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all. <sup>3</sup> But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. <sup>4</sup> And when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." <sup>5</sup> However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. <sup>6</sup> But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god. NASB

Was Paul playing with the snake when it bit him? Was he dancing around with it to prove his great faith? Did he keep it as a pet? No, he shook it off in the fire, because that is what you do with a snake. Paul did not tempt God by making a sideshow of it, but you can be sure he was praying for God's protection. Wouldn't you?

This is the exactly the kind of situation Jesus was talking about in Mark 16, where he said those who believe would speak in new languages, have power over demons, have supernatural protection from snakes and poisons, and sick people would get well. But does God still work this way today? Christian groups and leaders disagree on whether the spiritual gifts and supernatural empowerment are even available to us today. Ironically, both camps use the same scripture passage to argue their position.

1CO 13:8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; <sup>10</sup> but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. NASB

In this passage, Paul spoke of a time when the spiritual gifts would cease, being no longer be needed because "the perfect" will have come. Some groups teach "the perfect" refers to the canon of the New Testament scriptures and once the canon of

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scripture was completed, the gifts of knowledge, prophecy, tongues, signs, and wonders were no longer needed. So, God stopped speaking and working in those ways. The groups that interpret the scripture this way reject the spiritual gifts.

But there are a couple of problems with interpreting this passage that way. First, Paul does not indicate “the perfect” has anything to do with the canon of scripture, nor is that idea implied anywhere else in the scriptures. The second problem is Paul continues his thought in the next few verses, and he explains what he means by “the perfect”, and it has nothing to do with the canon of scripture.

**1CO 13:12** For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. NASB

When Jesus returns, we will see Him face-to-face and our knowledge of Him will be perfect. But until that happens, we only have partial knowledge. And if Paul says the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will cease when we see face-to-face, is he not also saying the gifts will be in operation until Jesus returns? When Jesus does return, the gifts will be rendered obsolete because our knowledge of Christ will be perfect and complete. But until that happens, we need the spiritual gifts to at least provide the partial knowledge God provides through them. Here is what Paul said next.

**1CO 14:1** Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. NIV

How can we eagerly desire spiritual gifts if we believe the spiritual gifts have ceased? If Satan can convince us the spiritual gifts have ceased, then we will have no expectation of faith that God will give us any of the gifts. By deceiving us in this way, Satan will have robbed us of the blessing of God - like taking candy from a baby. But not if we choose to believe, eagerly desire, and ask for the gifts.

**Study Questions** –2a. In 1st Corinthians 13:8-12, Paul speaks of a time when spiritual gifts would cease because they would no longer be needed. What is this event that renders spiritual gifts obsolete? 2b. And why will spiritual gifts no longer be needed?

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**Prayer**— Father, I love You. And I offer myself up to be used by You in any way You see fit. I trust You, and I surrender my will to You, in Jesus’ name, amen.

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## Week 7 – “He Gave Gifts to His People”

### Lesson 7-3 – “For the Common Good”

Dining can be complicated, especially if you are eating at an expensive restaurant. A causal restaurant is simpler, because all your utensils for eating will probably be delivered to you wrapped up in napkin – one knife, one fork, and one spoon. But with fine dining, you might have three forks - one for your salad, one for your entrée, and one for your desert. The same is true with spoons. You might have a spoon for your soup, a spoon for your tea, and a spoon for your desert. Depending on the type of meat you order, you might also have several knives. So much pressure...

Fortunately, each of these utensils has its own proper placement around your plate to help you avoid embarrassing yourself by using the entrée fork for your salad. If you are still uncertain about what spoon to use, you can discreetly glance around the room to see what other people are using – then smile like you own the place. But remember, even if you do sit down to dinner and see ten utensils around your plate, they all serve a common purpose - to help you shovel food in your mouth. Fine dining simplified. The same is true with spiritual gifts. While there are many gifts, each having a specific purpose, they also serve a common purpose.

[1CO 12:4](#) Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.

[1CO 12:7](#) But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup> For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. NASB

Look at what he says there in verse 7. In the body of Christ, everyone is given at least one manifestation of the Holy Spirit. And for what purpose? It is for the common good. This means the gifts you have been given are not just for you, but they also benefit me, and the rest of the Church. Everyone who has been baptized into Christ has been given gifts of the Holy Spirit. But it does not necessarily mean we are mature in them or are even functioning in them at all. Our gifts may be dormant because we do know how to use them, just like that third fork in your dinner place setting.

If we are not active in our gifts and callings, the body of believers suffers because collectively, we do not get the benefit of that gift. We will not receive that word of

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encouragement from the Lord, we will not pray that prayer of faith, we will not receive that healing, we will not get that word of wisdom we need - if we do not learn to flow in our gifts. This is one reason we should eagerly pursue the gifts of the Spirit; they are for the common good of the body. Here is something Paul said about gifts in Ephesians.

[EPH 4:11](#) The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. NRSV

This list is what is known as the five-fold ministry gifts. All these leadership gifts are given through the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the whole body of believers.

Apostle - *"One who is sent", gifted as a missionary, or church planter*

Prophet - *"One who speaks the word of God" The word could be about the future or the present, often conditional in nature.*

Evangelist - *"One gifted to lead the lost to Christ"*

Pastor - *"An overseer, one gifted to shepherd the flock"*

Teacher - *"One gifted to teach the scriptures", often for discipleship*

Each of these has a unique purpose, but they also have a purpose collectively. Paul says they are for equipping you and me for ministry, strengthening the body, bringing us to a unity of the faith, leading us to a deeper knowledge of Christ, to mature us into the image of Jesus. But what happens if the teacher does not teach? What if the prophet does not speak God's word? What if the evangelist does not witness to the lost? If we are not active in our spiritual gifts, the body receives no strengthening benefit.

If you were the enemy and wanted to weaken the Church, what would you do? What strategy would you employ? Would you distract people so they would not step into their gifts and calling? Would you try to discourage them? Would you try to convince them they have nothing to offer? Satan whispers all these lies in our ears to attempt to prevent the full operation of the spiritual gifts in our lives. Will we believe him, or God?

**Study Questions** –3a. From 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:7, for what reason does God impart the spiritual gifts? 3b. What are the five-fold ministry gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11-13? 3c. And in what ways does the Church benefit from these spiritual ministry gifts?

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**Prayer**— Father, I pray You would reveal and activate Your spiritual gifts within me for the benefit of the body of Christ. I give myself over to You, in Jesus' name, amen.

**Notes and Questions** \_\_\_\_\_



## Week 7 – “He Gave Gifts to His People”

### Lesson 7-4 – “Eagerly Desire Spiritual Gifts”

Learning to ride a bicycle can be a daunting task for a little kid. There are so many things to simultaneously coordinate, like pumping the pedals to make it go, keeping balance so you do not fall over, and learning to steer and apply brakes to keep from crashing into things. But with a little patience, practice, and time, they are riding the bike like they have been doing it all their lives.

None of us hops on the bike the first day and rides like an expert. We might get a few bumps and bruises along the way while we are learning to keep our balance. We might be a little shaky as we are learning to steer, and we might run into a few things until we learn to properly apply the brakes. All of this is a normal part of learning. Learning to operate in our spiritual gifts is very much like a child learning to ride a bike. None of us is an expert on day one. And yes, we will be a little shaky and we might get a few bumps and bruises, but that is part of the learning. Fortunately, we have a patient and loving Father there to pick us up, dust us off, and encourage us to get back on the bike and go at it again. But one thing is for certain; a child will never learn to ride the bike if they never climb on and try - they must have the desire to do it. The same is true with us and the spiritual gifts. Here is something Paul said about spiritual gifts in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians.

[<sup>1CO 14:1</sup> Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.](#) NIV

What does it mean to eagerly desire something? Maybe a more important question would be, what qualities or attributes must something have to cause us to eagerly desire it? For me, eagerly desiring something begins with the value I place on it in my mind and heart. And if God wants us to eagerly desire spiritual gifts, then He must assign a great value to them, as we should.

Just like learning to ride the bicycle, we will never learn to experience the gifts of the Spirit unless we step out and try. One thing that often stands in our way is fear. Here is something Jesus said about God's heart toward us that should help alleviate our fears about the things of the Spirit.

[<sup>LK 11:11</sup> "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? <sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"](#) NIV

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God loves us and we never have to worry He is going to give us something that will hurt us. The gifts of the Spirit are for our benefit, not to our detriment. So, as we ask God for these spiritual gifts, there is no reason for us to be fearful or apprehensive about it. If the gifts are coming from God, they cannot be bad for us, right? James, the brother of Jesus gives us this wisdom about the gifts God gives to us.

[<sup>JAS 1:17</sup> Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.](#) NIV

God gives us gifts that are good and perfect. This shows His loving nature and His heart toward those of us who believe. There is no reason to be afraid of the unknown because we know God's heart. We know we can trust Him because He is a good and loving Father who will pick us up and dust us off if we need Him to do so. And if these spiritual gifts come from God, there is no reason to be concerned what other people might think. After all, we are more concerned with the approval of God than the approval of men, right?

In yesterday's lesson, we saw how the spiritual gifts are given for the common good of the body. So, when we ask God for the gifts, it is not for ourselves we are asking, but to be a conduit of blessing to others. Paul gives us some good direction on what our attitude should be in receiving and expressing the spiritual gifts.

[<sup>1CO 14:1</sup> Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.](#) NIV

Notice how Paul links love together with spiritual gifts - love comes first. The genuine spiritual gifts from God always flow out of a heart of love. If we attempt to walk in gifts apart from a loving heart, we will make a mess of it. So here is the rule - Love first, then gifts. Love first, then gifts. Love first, then gifts. What comes first? And what comes second?

Then Paul said we should eagerly desire spiritual gifts, not just to desire, but to eagerly desire. Jesus taught the people with a parable illustrating what a person should do if they eagerly desire something. These are words he spoke to the people right after teaching them how to pray in Luke's account of the Gospel. So, as you read this, keep in mind it was spoken in the context of Jesus' teaching on prayer.

[<sup>LK 11:5</sup> And He said to them, "Suppose one of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; <sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; <sup>7</sup> and from inside he](#)

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shall answer and say, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.'

LK 11:8 "I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. NASB

The man kept asking persistently until his friend fulfilled his request. He did not just desire the bread, he eagerly desired it. Then Jesus followed up with this instruction.

LK 11:9 "And I say to you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> "For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened. NASB

In the context of the previous parable, we can see Jesus is implying we should ask persistently, and seek persistently, and knock persistently. Then he immediately follows with these words.

LK 11:11 "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? <sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" NIV

Can you see how all this instruction on asking, seeking, and knocking is about the Holy Spirit and the things of the Spirit? It is one continuous thought encouraging us to persistently pursue the things of the Spirit in prayer. And this is what we will do when we eagerly desire the spiritual gifts. We will ask and keep asking, we will seek and keep seeking, and we will knock and keep knocking. God sees His gifts as a valuable blessing to the body of Christ, as we should also. God uses them to edify, build up, strengthen, and encourage the Church. That is why we eagerly desire spiritual gifts - to pour them out as a blessing to others.

**Study Questions** – 4a. What does it mean to “eagerly desire” the spiritual gifts? 4b. And what are some things that can hinder us from desiring and pursuing spiritual gifts?

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**Prayer** – Father, I thank You that the promise is for me. I pray that You baptize me in Your Holy Spirit and activate within me every good gift as You see fit, at whatever times needed. I am Yours. I will ask and keep asking in Jesus' name, amen.

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<b>FOUNDATIONS 201</b> WEEK EIGHT	A VARIETY OF GIFTS, MINISTRIES AND EFFECTS
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## Week 8 – “A Variety of Gifts, Ministries, and Effects”

### Lesson 8-1 – “We Have Different Gifts”

Whenever there is a conversation about spiritual gifts, two specific gifts usually become the focus of the discussion - Prophecy and Speaking in Tongues. And because these two get so much of the attention, it is easy to overlook other spiritual gifts even as they are being manifested in the body. Here is something Paul said in Romans about just a few of the gifts God pours out upon us in the Church.

[RO 12:6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. <sup>7</sup> If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; <sup>8</sup> if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. NIV](#)

Have you ever thought of “serving” as being a gift of the Holy Spirit? And what about “encouraging”, is that a spiritual gift? Both are incredibly important gifts within the body of Christ, and many times people do these things without even realizing they are manifesting a gift of the Holy Spirit. All Spirit-led Christians will express generosity and mercy, but some others have a special gift that empowers them to go way over and beyond. In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, Paul mentions several more spiritual gifts.

[1CO 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. <sup>28</sup> And in the church, God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. NIV](#)

Most people would call healing a spiritual gift, but what about administration? Yes, some people are supernaturally gifted by the Holy Spirit to organize and administer the work of the Church for the furtherance of the Gospel. It is just as much a spiritual gift and is just as necessary in the body of Christ as prophecy and healing. These gifts may not seem as glamorous as some others, but imagine the confusion of any large Church event if these people did not exercise their spiritual gifts of leadership and organization for the good of the body. Paul specifically makes this point earlier in the same chapter.

[1CO 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. <sup>19</sup> If they were all one part, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts, but one body. <sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to](#)

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the feet, "I don't need you!" <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. NIV

It is a mistake to think some spiritual gifts are more spiritual than others. In fact, it might take a greater grace to cheerfully clean a baby's bottom in the nursery than it would to stand up on the stage and proclaim, "Thus says the Lord". The Spirit gives a variety of gifts to bless the body of Christ.

1CO 12:4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. <sup>7</sup> But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup> For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. NASB

To each one of us, the gifts are given through the Spirit for the common good. And if we will look closely, the Spirit will begin to reveal to us the depth of value and purpose each and every person brings to the body of Christ through the gifts that have been bestowed from God - for our common benefit.

**Study Question** – 1. In the 1st Corinthians and Romans passages, Paul speaks of the various spiritual gifts, ministries, effects, and manifestations that were broadly experienced and practiced in the early-Church. Make a list of as many as you can find.

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**Prayer**– Father, I thank You for the body of Christ and the blessing they are to me. I pray You would help me to see and appreciate the contributions of each one. And I pray You would use me as a blessing to them in any way you see fit. In Jesus' name, amen.

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## Week 8 – “A Variety of Gifts, Ministries, and Effects”

### Lesson 8-2 – “Gifts of the Spirit”

In the last lesson, we presented scriptures that identify some of the spiritual gifts Christ pours out to the Church through the Holy Spirit. And it could be there are many more ways the Holy Spirit manifests in the body of Christ beyond those listed. But how do we know which spiritual gifts we have individually been given?

Ironically, other people may recognize our spiritual gifts in us before we recognize them ourselves. When God gives us spiritual gifts, those abilities flow so naturally through us, we may not see it as anything special. Operating in our gifts may seem so easy to us, we think anyone should be able to do it. But when others see that gift working in us, they see it as something extraordinary.

These spiritual gifts often begin to manifest very early in our Christian lives, and it takes time for us to mature into their fullest expression. Many years before I started teaching, a perceptive person pointed it out as being a spiritual gift in my life - but I did not have a clue. You may be wondering what spiritual gifts you have been given. The chances are good that someone around you already sees, and you may just need some time to grow into it. As we continue to mature in love, the gifts will naturally flow from the Spirit.

[1CO 12:4](#) Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. <sup>7</sup> But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup> For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. NASB

This is a partial list of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Over this lesson and the next, we will attempt to explain their purpose and how they work in and through us. We will start with the "Word of Knowledge" and "Word of Wisdom" from verse 8.

The "Word of Knowledge" and "Word of Wisdom" often go hand-in-hand. Think of it this way - knowledge is information, while wisdom is knowing what to do with the information. There are times when God supernaturally gives us knowledge and understanding about a circumstance or situation in our own lives or the life of someone

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else. This is something we could not otherwise know unless the Spirit reveals it to us. This kind of knowledge must be handled very, very carefully. Just because God gives us the knowledge, does not automatically mean we should speak it or share it with anyone ever - especially if it is of a sensitive nature. The knowledge might only be for the purpose of showing us how we should pray for the person. The old saying, “Loose lips sink ships” certainly applies here. A good way to torpedo someone's life is to reveal something that has only been given for the purpose of intercessory prayer. We must be trustworthy with the knowledge the Spirit gives.

The “Word of Wisdom” is a supernatural understanding of what we should do with the knowledge we have. The wisdom from the Lord shows us how to effectively handle situations, how to proceed in life, how to keep peaceful relationships, what actions to take or not to take, etc... Many times, the Word of Wisdom will come in the form of a scriptural principle, pointing back to a specific verse, or set of verses.

Then there are the gifts of “Faith”, “Healing”, and “Effecting of Miracles”. These gifts are often associated with intercessory prayer warriors and Church leadership. Here is some direction given by James, the brother of Jesus.

*JAS 5:13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; <sup>15</sup> and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. <sup>16</sup> Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. NASB*

All Christians have some level of faith, but some have a spiritual gift empowering them to pray with extraordinary faith for healings and other miracles. You can hear the confidence and anointing in their voice as they pray. It is a gift. If I am sick, these are the people I want to have praying for me.

Now we will explore the gift of “Distinguishing of Spirits”. This has nothing to do with fine wine tasting or with knowing the difference between scotch, whiskey, and bourbon. No, this is all about the ability to discern the work of the enemy. Here is something Paul said about this.

*<sup>2CO 11:13</sup> For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of*

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light. <sup>15</sup> So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. Their end will match their deeds. NRSV

We must be aware that Satan does not play fair. He presents himself as an angel of light, as a teacher of truth, and a minister of righteousness. But his goal is to twist the word and deceive us - and he uses people to do it. The “Distinguishing of Spirits” gift provides revelation from God that exposes the work of the enemy through false teachers and other ways. The Apostle John produced all his New Testament writings at a time when the Church was under assault by Satan through false teachers. Here is something John wrote to some of the remaining faithful Christians.

1JN 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup> By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup> and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world. NRSV

In John’s day, there was a heretical sect teaching that Jesus had not come in the flesh and had not actually died on the cross. John recognized this as a demonic teaching that undermined and perverted Christ’s atonement. Through the gift of “Distinguishing of Spirits”, John knew the difference between God's truth and Satan's lie. He instructed the people to test the spirits, which was essentially a litmus test of the false prophet's teachings. If anyone came to them presenting this false doctrine, they were to reject that teacher. “Discerning of Spirits” is a spiritual gift that empowers people to recognize demonic activity that would not be perceptible through our natural senses and abilities.

In the next lesson, we will explore “Prophecy” and “Tongues”.

**Study Questions** – 2a. What is the difference between the “Word of Knowledge” and the “Word of Wisdom” spiritual gifts? 2b. What is the purpose of the “Discerning of Spirits” spiritual gift?

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**Prayer**– Father, I pray You would fully baptize me in Your Holy Spirit, and You would place within me the spiritual gifts of your choosing. I submit to Your will. In Jesus' name, amen.

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## Week 8 – “A Variety of Gifts, Ministries, and Effects”

### Lesson 8-3 – “Especially that You Might Prophecy”

The first letter Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth reveals that the people were zealous for spiritual gifts, but also that they were immature in their expression of those gifts. That immaturity was most apparent in their use of tongues in their meetings. So, as a part of his teaching on the spiritual and ministry gifts, Paul devoted some additional instruction specifically to the purpose and use of prophecy, tongues, and interpretation of tongues within the congregation.

<sup>1</sup>CO 14:1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. <sup>2</sup> For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. <sup>3</sup> But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. <sup>4</sup> He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

<sup>1</sup>CO 14:5 I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.<sup>6</sup> Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? NIV

Imagine you are in a Church service and there is a Christian man from Ecuador who gives a prayer in Spanish. It is a beautiful, loving, heart-felt prayer, but because you do not speak Spanish, you cannot understand a single word he says. You may have been blessed by the passionate expression of his heart, but not by his words because they are a mystery to you. However, if he or someone else interprets into English, then you will be blessed by the words of the prayer, as well.

Paul did not discourage them from speaking in tongues. In fact, he said he would like for every one of them to speak in tongues and to prophesy. But if he had to pick one for the Church service, he would prefer we prophesy because we are speaking the word of God in such a way that it blesses and strengthens those who hear us. He continued to teach on tongues in verse 12.

<sup>1</sup>CO 14:12 So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church. <sup>13</sup> For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. <sup>14</sup> For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. <sup>15</sup> So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind, I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. <sup>16</sup> If you are

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praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? <sup>17</sup> You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified. NIV

Praying in tongues is an amazing gift that greatly benefits the one who is praying. When we pray in tongues, it flows out of our spirit-heart and is directed toward God in the form of prayer, praise, worship, thankfulness, etc.... We basically bypass our own mind in a spirit-to-spirit communion with God. It blesses God and it strengthens and blesses us individually. But for others who hear it, it is spoken as a mystery and it does not edify them because it cannot enter their intellect for understanding in their mind and heart, unless there is also an interpretation given.

When we prophesy, we speak the word of God in our native tongue which can be understood in the minds of others. When we pray in our native tongue, others can join us in agreement. It can enter in through the ears, into the mind and be understood so it can be a blessing to the heart of the hearer. Paul continues with comments on how these two gifts potentially impact the lives of unbelievers.

<sup>1CO 14:23</sup> So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? <sup>24</sup> But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, <sup>25</sup> and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So, he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!" NIV

When not-yet believers come to Church and the word of God is spoken, it probes into the secret places of their hearts leading them to repentance. But it comes in through their ears and their minds. But if all they hear is people speaking in tongues, they will only see it as something strange. The day of Pentecost was different because while the disciples were speaking in tongues, the languages spoken were native to the listeners in the crowd. Here is something else Paul said about this.

<sup>1CO 14:18</sup> I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. <sup>19</sup> But in the church, I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue. NIV

These are the reasons why we do not hear a lot of tongues in our corporate meetings. Unless the manifestation of tongues can be understood by the hearers like on the day of Pentecost, it will not edify the Church, nor will it lead the unbeliever to faith. However, through prophecy, God can reveal the secrets of their hearts and lead them to faith.

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We need to be careful we do not minimize the value of speaking in tongues, because on a personal level they are of great benefit in communing with God on a spiritual level. There may be some spiritual things that cannot be accomplished in us other than through communing with God in this way. Paul testified that tongues were a major part of his own spiritual experience. Here are some of the things he says about it.

**1CO 14:18** I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. NRSV

And,

**1CO 14:39** Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. NIV

And,

**1CO 14:5** Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues. NASB

And,

**1CO 14:1** Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts. NIV

Since we are instructed to eagerly desire spiritual gifts, this leads me to believe our desire for the gifts plays a large role in the distribution of the gifts. And the spiritual gifts may be more broadly available to us than we think. Could it be we do not have simply because we have not asked? Eagerly desire the spiritual gifts.

**Study Questions** – 3. In the 1st Corinthians 14 passages, what does Paul express as his desire concerning the exercise of the gifts of tongues and prophecy in the Church, as well as in the lives of the individual believers?

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**Prayer** – Father, You are God Almighty and there is nothing impossible with You. I admit I do not understand everything about the gifts, but I pray You would give me the ability to commune with You through praying in tongues, and to strengthen others through prophecy. I trust You and give my life into Your hands. In Jesus' name, amen.

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## Week 8 – “A Variety of Gifts, Ministries, and Effects”

### Lesson 8-4 – “Do not Neglect the Gift”

As a child and up into my teenage years, I was an avid camper. We would clear a small area, pitch our tent, and start building a fire. After all, what is the point of camping if you have no campfire? How are you going to char hotdogs or burn marshmallows without a campfire? What are you going to sit around while you tell scary stories?

There is quite a bit of science to building a good campfire. First, you must have fuel. So, we would wander off in different directions into the trees to find firewood. And before long, we would come back to camp dragging a bunch of nasty limbs we had found lying around. It was great! Then using an axe or machete, we would cut those long limbs into more manageable lengths.

Once the fuel was secured, there was the process of getting the fire started - this was the hardest part. To start the fire, you need a source of ignition and we always brought a box of matches for this purpose. But you do not get a blazing campfire by throwing a match onto a pile of water-soaked logs. You must start with small dry pieces of kindling and you carefully nurture the fire, maybe even blowing on it to add oxygen. Then you continue to add more small kindling until it is self-sustaining. Then you can add the larger limbs and logs to get that perfect, rip-roaring campfire. Ask any Boy Scout and they can tell you all about it.

Operating in the spiritual gifts is sort of like building and sustaining a campfire. Here is something Paul said to Timothy, who was his young disciple.

[2TI 1:6 And for this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. <sup>7</sup> For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.](#) NASB

Another translation uses the phrase, “[fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you](#)”. NIV Paul perceived Timothy was becoming timid with the spiritual gift that had been bestowed upon him. As a result, it was like the flame of a campfire that slowly dwindles away if it is not occasionally stirred and stoked. Spiritual gifts can become dormant within us if they are not regularly exercised. But every time we operate in the spiritual gift, it is like fanning the flame, causing the gift to grow stronger. There is another place in scripture where Paul encouraged Timothy in a similar way.

[1TI 4:12 Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. <sup>13</sup> Until I come, give](#)

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attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.<sup>14</sup> Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. <sup>15</sup> Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to all. <sup>16</sup> Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. NASB

When we neglect the spiritual gifts within us, they will slowly die down like a neglected campfire. So, we must pay attention and be spiritually alert to those opportunities to express the spiritual gifts of God within us.

If you are totally new to the idea of spiritual gifts, but you are interested, it can start with a desire and a prayer to God that He would birth it within you. That is how it begins. We make ourselves available to God to be used by Him. Link up with some other like-minded believers who understand the gifts so you can be in an atmosphere where the gifts can be nurtured within you until you grow mature in it. In time, the gift will become second nature to you. But it is important you move forward and not be discouraged.

The same is true if you have experienced the gifts in the past, but they have become dormant due to neglect. The fire must be rekindled within you; the flame must be fanned. It will begin with small opportunities, then grow larger with use. Before long, the spiritual gift within you will be flowing and flourishing. Glory to God.

**Study Questions** – 4a. In the 2nd Timothy 1:6-7 passage, Paul encourages Timothy to “rekindle” the gift that had been given to him. What are some things we can do to rekindle the spiritual gifts God has placed within us? 4b. And what tends to happen when we neglect our spiritual gifts?

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**Prayer** – Father, You created me and know everything about me. You know the plans You have for me and the gifts You are placing in me. I ask You to lead me by Your Spirit into the ministries You have for me. I trust You and give my life into Your hands. In Jesus' name, amen.

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## Week 8 – “A Variety of Gifts, Ministries, and Effects”

### Lesson 8-5 – “Without Love, I Am Nothing”

I will not talk in class. I will not talk in class. I will not talk in class. I will not talk in class.  
I will not talk in class. I will not talk in class. I will not talk in class. I will not talk in class.  
I will not talk in class. I will not talk in class. I will not talk in class. I will not talk in class.  
I will not talk in class. I will not talk in class. I will not talk in class. I will not talk in class.

Do you remember those days? I remember being assigned that special type of repetitive homework designed to encourage me not to talk in class at school. Write it out a hundred times, or maybe more. I remember once when the number was so high, I taped five pencils together so I could do five lines at a time. Repetition is an effective memory tool. Even the Apostle Paul testified to this fact.

**PHP 3:1** Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. **NIV**

There are some things so important, we need to hear them over and over again. For our own good, we need to be reminded regularly. In his first letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul wrote three full chapters (12, 13, 14) on spiritual gifts and their proper use within the Church. Right in the middle of his extensive teaching on spiritual gifts, Paul wrote this in chapter 13.

**1CO 13:1** If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. **NASB**

This is intended to bring the spiritual gifts into perspective. While Spiritual gifts are a wonderful blessing to the Church, there is also a danger if the expression of gifts does not flow out of loving hearts. The Corinthians needed to be reminded of this.

The gifts are given for the common good of the Church, for the strengthening of the body of Christ. So, one of Satan's strategies is to attempt to rob the Church of the gifts in order to keep the Church as powerless as possible. Deception and apathy are his most effective tools in hindering the flow of the gifts in our lives. But if he cannot prevent the gifts, he will attempt to pervert them through pride, competition, and jealousy. Paul felt the need to deal with this in the Corinth Church. And God has chosen to preserve this teaching for our benefit and instruction. Paul continues in verse 4.

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1CO 13:4 Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, <sup>5</sup> does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, <sup>6</sup> does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; <sup>7</sup> bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.  
NASB

When the manifest power of God starts to flow through us, Satan will begin to whisper in our ear telling us how spiritual we have become. We must reject any such thoughts and give all the glory to Jesus. If we entertain these thoughts, we will tend to first exalt ourselves in our own minds, and then we will attempt to exalt ourselves in the eyes of others = spiritual pride.

Another area Satan will tempt us is with jealousy whenever we see someone else being used by God in a powerful way, or if we see them advancing in leadership. Satan will whisper all kinds of questions and comments in our ears about how much less they are deserving of recognition than ourselves. Why are they getting that spiritual gift, instead of me? Why are they being given that leadership position when I really deserve it more? Those kinds of thoughts = jealousy.

If we view the gifts through eyes of selfishness, jealousy, or pride, Satan can come right in and pervert our expression so it harms the body instead of helping. I believe one of the reasons we do not see more displays of God's power is because we are not mature enough in God's love to handle the power. Remember this principle - love makes power safe; love makes the expression of spiritual gifts safe and pure. We need to be regularly reminded we are to love one another. One perspective that will help us is that love is eternal, but spiritual gifts are not.

1CO 13:8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; <sup>10</sup> but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. <sup>13</sup> But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. NASB

When Jesus returns, the spiritual gifts and church leadership positions will all become obsolete. Faith, hope, and love will endure within us through all eternity, with the greatest being love. But until Jesus does return, we must serve one another with the gifts God has given. Here is an admonition from the Apostle Peter, to do that very thing.

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1PE 4:10 Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. <sup>11</sup> Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. NRSV

First and foremost, we are to follow the way of love - to experience it and to express it. In doing so, we are experiencing and expressing God's nature. Then, we can be trusted with the gifts God gives for the common good of the body of Christ. So, we are finishing this series of lessons right where we started - with love.

1JN 4:16 And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. NASB

And you can always grab a pencil and write this if it helps you to remember.

Without love, I am nothing. Without love, I am nothing. Without love, I am nothing.  
Without love, I am nothing. Without love, I am nothing. Without love, I am nothing.  
Without love, I am nothing. Without love, I am nothing. Without love, I am nothing.

Continue as many times as it takes...

**Study Questions** – 5a. Why do you think Paul felt the need to talk about love right in the middle of his teaching on spiritual gifts? 5b. And what are some of the things he says about love that might be directly related to the expression of gifts in the Church?

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**Prayer** – Father, I commit myself to follow the way of love and to eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit. I know all these things come from You, so I trust You in everything. In Jesus' name, amen.

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