

In Jesus Steps

Disciples for Life

Unit 2: Christian Leadership

How to positively influence the attitudes and actions of others for Jesus Christ.

Lesson 13

Faith of a Leader

Day One

God is Faithful

In Lesson 12, *Praying Leader* we used an example of a diamond to give us a visual of how precious and brilliant believers shine when they make prayer a priority. Praying leaders trust God, seek His will, and desire to mirror Jesus' character. Spending time with God helps us to reflect God's excellency and His glory through Jesus Christ.

God also uses our prayers to increase our faith. I am reminded of a story of a missionary in China in the early 1900s. He was working with two different villages in remote areas. In one of the villages the people were growing in faith and becoming a godly community. The other village was not doing well in maturing and growing in their faith.

He began to analyze the situation and talk to God about it. He lived in one of the villages and spent a great deal of time preaching, teaching, and counseling the Chinese people. Since the other village was over a mountain range, he did not travel or spend as much time with them.

However, the village that he lived with and spent the most time with, was *not* the one thriving in Jesus. He did not understand until the Lord began to show him the reason. Since the missionary could not spend much time with the villagers across the mountain range, he spent much more time praying for them.

Subsequently, the missionary concluded that there are four basic elements in making disciples: 1. prayer, 2. prayer, 3. prayer, and 4. the Word. I cannot recall where I heard this story, but it rings true. Prayer is talking to God, and nothing happens without seeking Him.

Just like the story of the missionary in China, God will use our prayers to affect others, whether near or far. However, our prayers must be based in faith.

Definition: The Greek word translated *faith, believe, or trust* in English translations is *pistis* (πίστις). It is a noun that means the state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted. It is trust and confidence in God in the *active* sense. For Christians it also means placing our *faith, trust, and confidence* in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Faith is *active* in the sense that we believe in God and act upon those truths as set forth in the Bible. If people do not act and live according to what God has said, they are without faith; they are faithless. Faith is not a passive belief. One cannot say the "sinner's prayer" and continue to live according to their own wishes. Accepting Christ in faith is a lifetime commitment of loyalty

and service to God. When Christ is trusted as Savior, King, and Lord, one is saying, *I trust, rely, depend, serve, and place my hope in the triune God.*

Definition: The *sinner's prayer* is a name given to a prayer whereby a person admits they are a sinner and accepts by grace Christ as Savior and Lord. The prayer is meant to be a first step and decision to give up control of one's life and follow Christ forever. Sadly, some misunderstand and think it is a onetime prayer and then, life as usual.

Some have mistakenly taken the free gift of salvation to mean passivity and that activity becomes works of the flesh. Not so! Our lives in Christ are dynamic from the moment we recognize our sins and choose the Spirit's prompting of grace. We are to *actively* seek God and *actively* do what He says. When we are following God, He provides the strength and power to accomplish His directives (orders).

The Church Doctrine of Justification states that man is saved by faith in Christ and His work on the cross. Christ alone is our righteousness, and we are justified (freed from guilt) by His blood alone. It is a free gift; no works are involved on our part. However, it takes *active* participation with our hearts and minds. The Holy Spirit prompts, but we must answer in faith.

Read Hebrews 11:6 and answer questions 1–2:

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Hebrews 11:6

1. Can you please God without faith? Yes No (Underline One)

2. Who does God reward?

Liu Zhenying, known as Brother Yun, was born in 1958 in the southern part of China's Henan Province. Brother Yun accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior when he was 16 years old and was eager to learn everything about Jesus. His mother, also a Christian, told him that Jesus recorded his teachings in the Bible but there were none left. This was during the Cultural Revolution¹ when most Bibles had been destroyed and those having one were beaten or imprisoned or both.²

Nevertheless, Liu still tried to find a Bible. An old pastor told him, "The Bible is a heavenly book. If you want one, you'll need to pray to the God of heaven. Only He can provide you a heavenly book. God is faithful. He always answers those who seek him with all of their hearts."³

Liu prayed and cried out to the Lord every morning and afternoon for a Bible. For months, he only ate a small bowl of steamed rice at night. Then one morning at 4 AM, he received a vision

¹ "The Cultural Revolution was a sociopolitical movement in China that began in 1966 with Mao Zedong, the leader of the Chinese Communist Party, denouncing the old capitalistic and traditional ways of Chinese life." <https://www.history.com/news/what-was-the-cultural-revolution>,<(Accessed 2/1/2022)

² Brother Yun and Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Monarch Books, 2002), 23, 26.

³ *Ibid.*, 27.

from the Lord that he would receive a Bible. He started searching the house for the Bible but could not find it. He was in such anguish and wept so loudly that his parents were awakened and rushed over to him. They were concerned that all his fasting and praying was causing him to lose his mind—but then suddenly, there was a faint knock on the door. *Two men appeared who handed Liu his very own Bible and quickly left.*⁴

Definitions: The Hebrew word *emunah* (אֱמוּנָה), which we translate as *faithfulness* in Psalm 33:4, is defined as firmness, steadfastness, and *fidelity*. It means that God is constant, strong, and sure. He is loyal, unchanging, and consistent. He is trustworthy, dependable, and reliable. *Fidelity* is defined as loyalty to an allegiance, promise, or vow.

Read Psalm 33:4 and answer questions 3–6:

For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. Psalm 33:4

3. Is God faithful in all He does? Yes No (Underline One)

4. How has God been faithful in our world?

5. How has God been faithful in *your* life?

6. How does God’s faithfulness help *you* to trust Him?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer to #3–6 with your discipleship team.

We are placing our faith in a God who is completely trustworthy. His faithfulness is grounded in His righteousness, justice, and unfailing love. We trust God because He is dependable, reliable, and unchanging. He is truthful with us and with all people.

7. Read Psalm 84:12. Why are people blessed when they trust in the Lord?

LORD Almighty, blessed is the one who trusts in you. Psalm 84:12

Definition: *Bless* means to give someone a desirable quality, state, gift, or talent. God is the source of all *blessings*. Being *blessed* is a state of happiness and well-being that is found in a faith relationship with God.

God is good and the source of all that is good. We are blessed when we trust and place our faith in Him. He is the God who provides every perfect gift. No matter the circumstances or what happens in our lives, we can be assured God is working it out for our eternal good.

⁴ Ibid., 29–30.

8. Read Psalm 145:13. *The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does.*
True False (Underline One)

*Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations.
The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does.* Psalm 145:13

Definition: The word *promise* can be defined as a vow or pledge to do or provide something. A *promise* will cause someone to expect something. In Christianity, the *promise* is God's announcement of His plan of salvation and His subsequent blessing to His people. The subsequent blessings contain other *promises* connected to God's overarching plan of salvation.

God can be trusted to keep His promises. His promises tell us what He will or will not do. They declare how we are affected by the past, the present, and the future. The Old and New Testaments are united and resound with God's promises to humanity.

In some English translations of the Old Testament, God's *word* is translated *promise* because His *word* is true. What He says, He will do. Also, the Old Testament did not use a specific Hebrew word for *promise* but used quite ordinary words such as speak, say, and swear to convey key *promises*.

Man's word is not always a promise. You and I may say we are going to do something and then forget about it or just not do it. You have heard children say, *Yes, I will clean my room I promise!* They are saying, *not only am I telling you that I will clean my room, but this time I will really do it.*

Read Joshua 21:45 in the NIV and NKJ versions and answer question 9:

Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.
Joshua 21:45

Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass. ^{NKJ} Joshua 21:45

9. Why can you place your faith and trust in God?

Bible versions depend on translators' interpretation as they translate from the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages. After they determine what the original word meant in the original language, they have to choose a word in their own language that best fits its meaning. Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic words do not always translate word for word into another language and culture. The translators study the word and context carefully and choose a word or words that they believe accurately portray the meaning of the text. This would be true of any kind of translation process.

Sometimes one translation captures the essence of what the original author intended better than another. Nevertheless, if you compare various translations, you will find that most transmit the

meaning quite well even if the passage is described in different words. Just like the two versions of Joshua 21:45 above, the meaning is clear and anyone reading either one will see the same truth: *God is faithful and keeps His word.*

Although we do not have the original, inerrant (without error) autographs or manuscripts, we can be assured of the reliability of the copies that we do have. No other books of antiquity have been copied as much as the New Testament. We have 5,686 copies of the Greek manuscripts and 19,284 ancient manuscripts in other languages. The importance of the copies is twofold: 1. Copies can be compared with other copies for an accurate reconstruction or restoration of the original text. 2. No other historical book or ancient literature comes close to these numbers.⁵

Not only can we be confident that the Bible we read today is the same as the original manuscript, but we can also be confident of God's faithfulness. He has kept a record of His divine truth, promises, and providence (God's continual care over creation). The sheer number of manuscripts attest to God's sustaining and sovereign activity in history.

One of the impressive ways that we have in confirming the Old Testament's reliability is the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. A shepherd boy, looking for his goat, threw a rock into a cave and heard something break. Upon investigating he found several large jars containing leather scrolls of the Hebrew Bible. They had been well preserved for nearly 1,900 years.⁶ They are named the Dead Sea Scrolls because they were found on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is a salt lake bordered by Israel, the West Bank, and Jordan.

Just as scholars compared all the Greek manuscripts to determine the original words, scholars took the Dead Sea Scrolls and compared them with other copies of Hebrew manuscripts. In particular, the complete book of Isaiah that was found in one of the clay jars was compared with the Hebrew text (Masoretic) of 916 A.D. The comparison is highly accurate with 95% of the two manuscripts being identical. The other 5% have to do with incorrect alphabetical letters or copyist errors that do not significantly change the meaning of the passage.⁷

Action Step: Read Psalm 89:1–2 and complete number 10:

I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. ²I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself. Psalm 89:1–2

10. Consider all the ways God has been faithful to you. Prayerfully share one of the ways God has been faithful to you with another person; make God's faithfulness known. What happened?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer to #10 with your discipleship team.

—End Day One—

⁵ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 34–35.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 78–79.

Day Two

Trust the Promises of God

After miraculously receiving his Bible from the two men. Liu explains, “From that moment on I prayed to Jesus with faith-filled prayer. I fully trusted the words in the Bible were God’s words to me. I always held the Bible. Even when I slept I laid it on my chest. I devoured its teachings like a hungry child.”⁸

Not only did Liu read the whole Bible, but he began memorizing a chapter a day. Liu, who we will now refer to as Brother Lu, began getting requests to speak the words from the Bible. In his first year as a Christian and still a teenager, God enabled him to lead more than 2,000 people to the Lord. However, the government got wind of Brother Lu’s activity and resolved to stop him.⁹

Like Brother Lu, your faith as a leader is interwoven with God’s promises. You trust what God says in His Word, and you help others trust His Word as well. However, not everything written in the Bible is a promise that God wants us to claim personally.

For example, the book of Proverbs contains godly principles that we should follow but are not necessarily promises. Proverbs 3:9–10 says to honor the Lord with your wealth and your barns will be overflowing. However, this is not a promise for everyone to claim in order to receive more money from the Lord. There are devoted Christians who honor the Lord daily and are poor in regard to monetary wealth; there are ungodly people who dishonor the Lord and are wealthy.

When God blesses you, it does not mean that you will have lots of money and never have any trouble in your life (Proverbs 10:22). The point is that when you follow these rules you will generally have a good result. When you do not follow the wisdom of the proverbs, you will generally have a bad result.

Christians are living with an eternal perspective or viewpoint. Our blessings have a spiritual dimension both on earth and in heaven. For example, Jesus taught disciples to sell their possessions, give the money to the poor, and follow Him. In this way, they would have treasure in heaven (Matthew 19:21). Jesus took the word *bless* and gave it a divine, and radically different sense than how it was being viewed in the first century (Matthew 5:3–10).

Read the Bible with discernment and sensitivity. Even if a particular promise is not meant for us personally, we are still to learn about God, how He works, and respond to Him accordingly. The Bible is a record of God’s working with individuals and nations at certain points in time in order to accomplish His main goal of redemptive history—buying back sinners.

11. Read Genesis 3:15. What is the overarching and unifying promise of the Bible?

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” Genesis 3:15 (God is speaking to Satan, the serpent, in the Garden of Eden. Through Eve’s descendant, Satan will be defeated.)

⁸ Brother Yun and Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man*, 30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 33, 40, 55.

Definition: *Enmity* describes the hatred and hostility that exists between humanity and Satan.

From Genesis through Revelation, the promise of the Messiah, the Christ, brings together the whole of Scripture. We are blessed to live in a time when the promise of Jesus Christ can be fully understood. However, as with many of God's promises there are conditions to meet.

Definition: *Condition* in the sense of a promise or agreement means that something must exist for something else to happen. In order for God's promise to take place or occur, we must be in a state of faith or do something.

Read Romans 10:9–10 and answer questions 12–13:

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved." Romans 10:9–10

12. What is the condition for being saved from God's wrath and eternal punishment?

The condition for salvation rests in a person's outward and inward response to Christ as Savior and Master. It is not a onetime response but a continual response—a lifetime commitment of faith. It is a state of being. Jesus *is* our Master, and we *follow* Him.

13. How are *you* meeting the qualifications of this promise of salvation?

God speaks to believers through His Word in various ways. He may take Scripture and impress it upon you in such a way that you are to apply it specifically to yourself or your personal situation. He may give you instructions and answers as you meditate on Bible passages. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you discern how God is speaking to you through His Word. Also be aware that God will not ask you to do anything that is sinful, evil, or contrary to His Word.

God spoke to Abraham, and he believed. From the beginning, Abraham's faith was not passive or inactive. God told him to start moving toward an unknown destination and he did (Genesis 12:1). Can you relate to Abraham? Perhaps God has you moving, and you do not know where you are going.

If Abraham had not trusted God, what would have happened? God could have done a variety of things including raising up another leader. God's plans are never dependent on anyone or anything. In the same way, if we fail to act when God calls, He may give our assignment to another.

Many times when God calls a leader there will be a radical life change. This life change will test one's faith as it tested Abraham's. However, the testing serves a purpose. God is fitting that person for service; He is deepening and strengthening their faith.

14. Read God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2–3. List the seven parts of this promise:

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Genesis 12:2–3

Read Galatians 3:6–9 and answer questions 15–19:

So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” ⁷Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. ⁸Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” ⁹So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. Galatians 3:6–9 (See Romans 4:13–25)

15. What happened when Abraham believed God (v. 6)?

16. Are you a child (descendent) of Abraham (v. 7)? Yes No (Underline One)

17. If you answered yes that you are a child of Abraham in #14, how did you become his descendant (vv. 7–8)?

18. What is the value of knowing that you are a child or an offspring of Abraham (vv. 8–9)?

19. If you answered no that you are *not* a child of Abraham, explain your answer:

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer to #15–19 with your discipleship team.

In Galatians 3 Paul explains the phrase “all nations will be blessed” through Abraham. It means that Christ will be born through Abraham’s seed or through his descendants (offspring). Abraham’s first children became the Israelites, later called the Jews. These were the people that God chose to carry forth His Word and promises to the world.

Jesus was born into the family of Mary and Joseph, descendants of Abraham. Now, in Christ, Abraham is also our spiritual father, and we can rightfully trust the promises that are meant for Abraham’s children. In other words, we are in the family of God and are blessed. In Christ, we have the ability to bless the people of the earth by sharing the truth of the gospel.

—End Day Two—

Day Three

Faith is Progressive

Brother Yun was sharing the truth of the gospel but under difficult circumstances. He referred to this period of his life as “fleeing evangelism.” That is, he would preach the gospel in one area and then have to flee to another because of persecution by the police (Matthew 10:23).

He cried out to God for protection, but His Spirit replied, *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps* (1 Peter 2:21). The Holy Spirit also reminded Brother Yun that God’s grace is sufficient, God’s ways are higher than ours, we must submit ourselves to God, and embrace our circumstances.

When the police finally captured Brother Yun, they paraded him through the streets with a big red cross on his back. They warned the people about him saying he caused confusion by his preaching. They beat him until he lost consciousness and then took him to an interrogation room.

When he was conscious, he felt God encouraging him in his faith and he decided to try and escape. He walked out the door, through the courtyard, and to the front gates. For some reason, no one noticed him. The front gates were locked so the only way to escape was over an eight-foot cement wall embedded with sharp-cut glass on the top.

Brother Yun pulled himself onto the wall when all of a sudden it felt like somebody had hoisted him up and threw him over the wall. When he found himself on the other side, he quickly ran away to safety. When Brother Yun met up with other believers, they were amazed the Lord had rescued him. They were also greatly encouraged and wanted to obey the words from the Bible.¹⁰

As with Brother Yun, the faith of a leader is not static or stationary. It moves and advances. In a word, our faith is progressive. That means that we will go forward in faith in steps or increments. Sometimes our movements will seem slight, barely noticeable, and other times we may feel like we are on a space shuttle.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:3 and answer questions 20–21:

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing.

2 Thessalonians 1:3

20. Why was apostle Paul thanking God for the brothers and sisters at Thessalonica?

21. Give an example of how your faith is growing more and more?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #20–21 with your discipleship team.

¹⁰ Ibid., 55, 62–63, 65, 67.

22. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:4. Under what conditions were the believer's faith growing?

Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. 2 Thessalonians 1:4

The Thessalonians' faith was growing through the persecutions and trials they were enduring. Suffering, though painful, can be used by God to increase our faith. It teaches us perseverance or determination to cling to Christ no matter what difficulty we are facing. One of the ways that we cling to Christ is by seeking His strength and encouragement through prayer.

In *Lesson 11: Praying Leader* we touched on praying in faith. Faith is the first step into the cleansing blood of Christ and into a relationship with God. In this lesson we are talking primarily about *faith*, but as a leader, our responsibility will be to *pray* for ourselves and those we shepherd. All believers need a strong and unwavering faith. Not only do we need faith to step into the kingdom, but we will need faith for a steady and uninterrupted journey.

Read Hebrews 11:6 and answer questions 23–24:

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Hebrews 11:6

23. And without _____ it is _____ to please _____ (v. 6a).

24. Who does God reward (v. 6b)?

Read Luke 22:32 and answer questions 25–26:

"But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." Luke 22:32

25. Why did Jesus pray for Simon Peter?

26. After Peter turned back, what was he supposed to do?

Peter denied that he knew Jesus, but then he repented and turned back to the Lord. Jesus wanted Peter to use his denial of Him as a lesson of faith so he could strengthen others. Jesus used Peter's experience to give us a guiding biblical principle: Our temptations, struggles, lessons, talents, and resources, are not for us alone but are to be used to help others, especially Christians.

Brother Yun also used his experiences to encourage believers. He was hounded, persecuted, and rejected. Sometimes he complained bitterly to the Lord of his situation but would always repent. He recalls one night in particular when he and his two co-laborers were being chased by the

police. Even the believers were afraid to help them, so they shivered outside alone through the black of night, wet, cold, and hungry.

The Lord began to show Brother Yun that He wanted his heart fully committed and dependent on Him. Brother Yun recognized that this was the way God has chosen to train him and others in China so they would cry out to Him and trust in Him only. These lessons he freely shared and helped strengthen others.

Although Brother Yun escaped the police that particular night, other times he did not. When the police would catch him they would beat him savagely with steel-capped boots, pistol handles, and electric batons. He continued learning to rely on Jesus and remember all Jesus had suffered for him and the world. The Holy Spirit would remind him of Scriptures such as:

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted . . .
2 Timothy 3:12

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.
James 1:2–3

Brother Yun was in Nanyang Prison on January 25, 1984. He concluded that God wanted him to fast for China and the advancement of the gospel and house churches. He constantly meditated on God's Word and thought about men and women who had suffered for their faith.

Although it is impossible for a person to live more than a few days without water, Brother Yun fasted from food and water for 74 days. All of the prisoners in the vicinity witnessed his fasting and it has been well documented. Author Paul Hattaway interviewed dozens of witnesses and verified this and other events of the book, *Heavenly Man*.

At one point when his family was allowed to visit, they did not even recognize him because of his severe beatings and extreme loss of weight. His mother was able to identify him through a birthmark. This was April 7, 1984 and the first time he had anything to eat or drink. His mother and wife brought crackers and grape juice and they celebrated the Lord's Supper.¹¹

Action Step

27. Meditate on and memorize Hebrews 12:2.

. . . fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
Hebrews 12:2

Accountability: Be prepared to share your memory verse #27 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Three—

¹¹ Ibid., 14, 72–73, 82, 94, 100, 128.

Day Four

Attitudes Affect Faith

Whether we are facing extreme persecution like Brother Yun or experiencing boredom from working a dreary job, we must fix our eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2). He is the originator or initiator of our faith and *will* bring our faith to its highest end. Jesus went before us by refusing to escape His death on the cross. He paid no attention to the disgrace and humiliation associated with the cross but focused on the joy of serving and being with God.

28. What assurance do you have that your faith will progress or go forward in the right way?

When we fix our eyes on Jesus, we should also pray for the right attitude and cooperate by taming our flesh. For example, we must be confident we are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). We need to recognize we have the mind and sweet fragrance of Christ. We trust God is pleased with us and has an excellent plan for our lives. We also know God desires our success and joy in His kingdom (Psalm 37: 4).

Sometimes because of our past sins and faulty relationships we may believe there is something wrong with us. Even our current sins and faulty relationships can make us wonder, *What is the matter with me!* We may even have a wrong attitude about our ethnicity, gender, appearance, intelligence, or skills. God does not have favorites based on any of these things (Acts 10:34–35).

Read Acts 15:8–9 and answer questions 29–30:

God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Acts 15:8–9 (Peter is stating that God made no distinction between Jew and Gentile.)

29. How does God, who knows the heart, show His acceptance (v. 8)?

30. How does God purify hearts (v. 9)?

Faith, which is a gift of God, is the means for having our hearts cleansed and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We are talking about faith in God and faith in His Son's death and resurrection. Faith *is* God's condition for acceptance and within reach for all people who genuinely seek it.

Returning to the subject of our relationships, God is in control as in all other areas of our lives. Therefore, He may allow difficult relationships to help us grow in Christ's likeness. God may also block certain friendships for our own spiritual welfare. He may have bigger and more fruitful plans for us rather than being part of certain groups, even if they are believers.

We live in a fallen world, and this will also adversely or negatively affect our relationships. This includes family, friends, and really anyone on the face of the earth. However, if you are

concerned about your ability to make friends and keep them or your relationships in general, pray the following prayer:

Almighty and Loving Father, You are faithful and delight to answer our prayers. Please reveal to me any unknown sin or incorrect personality trait that is keeping me from healthy relationships. Are there sins of jealousy, self-righteousness, pride, or selfishness in my life that is hindering my progress? Cleanse me of any of these unholy characteristics and help me to correct them. I trust You to help me with any necessary changes and I thank You that I am a likeable and loveable person. Heal all my relationships, especially (insert name) and establish good Christian friends in my life. Make me a good family member, friend, church member, and employee (employer). Thank You in Jesus, Amen.

Sometimes, we are *our own worst enemy*. We find fault with what we say, how we look, what we do or what we do not do. We are an easy target because we are always around! We may even think that to put ourselves down is the humble thing to do. It is just as wrong to criticize ourselves, as it is to puff ourselves up. Neither are honoring to our Creator.

If you grew up with parents, relatives, or caregivers who were constantly putting you down, you might actually have a *mental* recording telling you untrue things about yourself. You may even be in a situation right now where you are being verbally abused. Satan, the source of these lies and false accusations, will use them to steal your joy and peace. It will take constant prayer and vigilance (attention) to overcome false thought patterns.

31. Read Ephesians 6:16. What do you take up when Satan, the evil one, begins his attack or character assassination on you?

In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Ephesians 6:16

Paul is using the picture of a large, leather shield. The Romans could soak it in water so that when their enemy shot flame-tipped arrows, the fire would be extinguished when they hit the shield. Our faith is like that shield. When we trust Christ and who we are in Him, Satan's fiery arrows of destruction are snuffed out.

Read Psalm 139:13–14 and answer questions 32–35:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well
Psalm 139:13–14

32. Who created your inmost (deepest) being (13a)?

33. Who knit you together in your mother's womb (13b)?

34. How are you made (v. 14a)

35. How is everyone made (vv. 13–14)?

God created every single part of you and everyone else. When we have a bad attitude about how we and others are made, we are criticizing our Creator. He gave the DNA¹² instructions for every microscopic detail of our beings. We are perfectly put together.

36. Read Genesis 1:27. We are created to be like God, resembling Him in certain ways. How does this affect the way that you think about yourself?

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27

God is the Ruler and Master Controller. He made us in His image to rule and control the earth (Genesis 1:28). As Christian leaders and disciples, we are called to faithfully govern all things in righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24). We are to faithfully follow Jesus' teachings and to bless and not curse. We are called to a godly state of authority following biblical principles.

Definition: *Cursing* is not only exclaiming foul words, but also saying evil or hurtful things about another human being. Even hoping for evil to come to another is silent *cursing* and definitely wrong. *Cursing* is also lightly esteeming others or making someone loathsome.¹³

Teenagers are adept at making others loathsome to their peers. Seeking popularity, the sin of caring more for what others think than God, can cause a rash of cursing. To make themselves seem cool, teenagers may dishonor others by bullying, ignoring, gossiping, or making sport of their frailties and weaknesses. Sadly, teenagers are not the only ones to curse and not to bless others.

Christians, no matter the age, are called to a higher standard. Even if we are cursed, we must still bless others. In blessing others, we are to find something good to say about them, and something good to do for them. We are to love and pray for them. They too, are made in God's likeness and must not be cursed. Read the following words of Brother Yun on this subject. May his faith attitude inspire you.

“We can grow to such a place in Christ where we laugh and rejoice when people slander us, because we know we are not of this world, but our security is in heaven. The more we are persecuted for His sake, the more reward we will receive in heaven.

¹² DNA, or deoxyribonucleic acid, is the hereditary material in humans and most other organisms. Nearly every cell in a person's body has the same DNA. DNA contains the instructions needed for an organism to develop, survive, and reproduce. To carry out these functions, DNA sequences must be converted into messages that can be used to produce proteins, which are the complex molecules that do most of the work in our bodies.

¹³ Trent C. Butler, *Holman Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville, Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 198–199.

“When people malign you, rejoice and be glad. When they curse you, bless them in return. When you walk through a painful experience, embrace it and you will be free!

“When you learn these lessons, there is nothing left that the world can do to you.

“God is my witness that through all the tortures and beatings I’ve received I have never hated my persecutors. Never. I saw them as God’s instruments of blessing and His chosen vessels to purify me and make me more like Jesus.”¹⁴

Action Step

37. Read Luke 6:27–28 and James 3:9. Practice *blessing* others this week, and not *cursing*. Share the difficulties or joys in this assignment and what God reveals to you:

“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” Luke 6:27–28

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. James 3:9

Accountability: Be prepared to share #37 with your discipleship team.

All men and women are made in the image of God, in God’s likeness. Granted, it may be difficult to see God’s appearance in some people, but Scripture tells us it is there. When we think about the beauty and magnificence of the Lord, and how all human beings have been made in His image, we have concrete reasons to love and honor others.

Perhaps you have done poorly in blessing others, or in another area of your life. Thinking badly about yourself or having a guilty conscience over past sins can be very discouraging. You may be disheartened and lack motivation to move forward.

This actually is a faithless position, one that lacks truth and power. If this is where you are, you will not stay here. Discouragement is not of God. He wants you to be encouraged that you were made in His image, and He loves you. He also sent His Son to take away all your sins, all your shame, and all your guilt (Romans 3:21–23, 8:1; Hebrews 10:22).

Our value rests in God; we trust God for His evaluation of us. This is different from the self-esteem the world tells us to have. Self-esteem is confidence in one’s own worth or abilities; self-respect. Instead, we have confidence in God’s worth and strive to reverence and respect Him. The reason we have a favorable opinion of ourselves is because we are made in God’s image. So instead of self-esteem, we need to work towards God-esteem. We have faith and respect for God and appreciation for the people He created.

¹⁴ Brother Yun and Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man*, 311.

It is important for you to realize that many people do have insecurities and suffer from poor self-images. Self-image is the personal view, or mental picture, that we have of ourselves. Having a negative view of oneself can be true for Christians and non-Christians alike. Pray and ask God to be a blessing in everyone's life, leading them to their true image in Christ Jesus.

Faithful leaders are Christ's ambassadors winning the world to His love. They do exactly what Jesus would do if He were walking on the earth—ministering to people. Faithful leaders, faithful disciples are empowered to deliver Jesus' message of truth, hope, and reconciliation.

Definitions: An *ambassador* is a *diplomat* sent by one country as a representative to another for a purpose or mission. A *diplomat* is someone who is tactful and sensitive in working or dealing with other people.

The apostle Paul called himself an ambassador even when he was in prison (Ephesians 6:20). Paul also tells believers that we are Christ's ambassadors. We are here by special appointment, sent by heaven on a special mission.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:20 and answer questions 38–41:

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20

38. Who, as ambassadors, do we represent (20a)?

39. What is the message believers plead on Christ's behalf (20b)?

40. How does it help your faith attitude knowing you are an ambassador on earth representing God's kingdom?

Action Step

41. Practice being Christ Jesus' ambassador and having His attitude for two days. If you are unsure of His attitude, read Philippians 2:5–7. As you go through your days, consider: *What would Christ think?* How did your attitude change or improve during the two days?

Accountability: Be prepared to share #41 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Four—

Day Five

Strengthening your Faith

What happens when things do not turn out the way you thought? You had prayed and had really felt God was telling you to go in a certain direction. But your way became blocked and no matter how hard you continued to pray, nothing seemed to happen. Similarly, you may have felt God was going to heal a sick friend, but he or she died. There could be other kinds of circumstances where you believed God was going to act in a certain way, but He did not.

Misunderstanding God's directions happens to individuals and to churches of all denominations. A charismatic church in Raleigh had fasted and prayed for a young boy who had become ill with a virus. The church had come together mightily in intercession for the healing of this child. Many in the church prophesied that he would be healed, and they rejoiced in God's answer. However, the young boy died.

Another church, conservative in affiliation and led by the elders, believed it was God's will to build a larger worship center. The church members voted in agreement and contracts were signed to purchase a parcel of land. Halfway through the process however, there was a problem. Although it was a large piece of property, it could not accommodate adequate parking spaces.

42. Can you share a time when you really believed God for something, and it did not happen?

43. If you had a story to share in #42, how did this affect your faith and what did you learn?

I was at the two churches mentioned above during their worship services; both after the boy died, and after the property was deemed unworkable. Both pastors spoke to their congregations as faithful leaders. I was blessed to hear God speak through these two men.

The congregation who had lost the young child was in a tender and vulnerable place. The pastor spoke compassionately, addressing every question his congregation might have regarding this sad occasion.

From the pulpit, he stated, "I have never seen a group of people come together so faithfully. You have done absolutely everything the Scriptures call for in seeking God for healing. And you have done it passionately!"

The pastor ended his message on God's sovereignty. He reminded the church members that God is in control and ultimately it was His decision. He said, "God is faithful, loving, compassionate, and merciful." The pastor was conveying that even though the child had died, it did not change God's character. The pastor upheld God's honor.

The other pastor also addressed his congregation. He explained the facts of the situation and that they had an exit clause in the real estate contract. The church would exercise this option and not

go forward with the purchase. He simply stated that he and the elders had all agreed to purchase the land and now they all agreed not to purchase the land. He ended his explanation by saying, “This is what I thought God’s will was, but I was wrong.”

Perhaps *you* will always be sure and right about what God is saying to you. But more than likely there will be times when you will simply be wrong. It is best to admit it. We are not infallible (never wrong). We can make mistakes. So too, the men and women in the Bible were not always correct in assessing what God was telling them.

Barnabas and Paul would never have done anything they thought was outside of God’s will. They both believed so strongly in their views that they had a sharp disagreement over whether or not they should take John Mark with them. Mark is the author of the third Gospel.

On an earlier mission trip, Mark had left and returned home. Paul seems to have viewed this as desertion. *But here’s the point:* there would not have been a *sharp* disagreement if they had both heard from God correctly.

44. Read Acts 15:39–40. What happened because of the disagreement between Barnabas and Paul?

They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, ⁴⁰but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. Acts 15:39–40

45. Read 2 Timothy 4:11. Since Mark turned out to be faithful, who do you think was more discerning of God’s will in this instance, Barnabas or Paul (Acts 15:39–40)?

Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. 2 Timothy 4:11 (Paul was in prison and writing years after Acts 15:39)

God is able to use anything, including our disagreements. Twice as much territory was covered with Barnabas and Mark going to Cyprus, and Paul and Silas heading for Syria and Cilicia. However, having such a sharp disagreement was not God’s plan. We know this because God desires spiritual unity.

In this particular case, Paul was wrong about Mark. God was not finished with him, and Barnabas rightly kept him in tow. This was God’s will and one that Paul came to understand in later years. In keeping with spiritual unity, Paul and Barnabas could have graciously disagreed and gone forward on their separate journeys.

46. Read Acts 16:6–7. What faith lesson do *you* learn from these verses?

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. Acts 16:6–7 (The Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus are one and the same.)

The Scripture says that the Holy Spirit *kept* Paul and his companions from preaching in the province of Asia. The same is true when they tried to enter Bithynia. If, 10 miles outside of Bithynia, we had asked Paul if he was going in the direction God wanted him to go, he probably would have answered yes. Nevertheless, his way was ultimately blocked.

Paul acted on what he knew and what he believed to be God's plan. He acted in faith. He was not always correct, but God is always faithful. If we misunderstand God, His Spirit will get us back on the right path. He works in unique and wondrous ways to keep us moving in the right direction. But please be cautious. This does not mean that we can just go forward as we please and presume on the Spirit's intervention.

Definition: *Presume* is defined as accepting something to be correct although there is no proof. It also is defined as acting arrogantly or overconfidently. When we *presume* on God, we are not acting in faith, but taking things into our own hands. We are not seeking God in prayer or the Scriptures, but *assuming* that our plans are exactly what God wants.

Presumption is born of pride. *Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall* (Proverbs 16:18). We must inquire of God and listen carefully before we act.

Be flexible and adaptable to the Spirit's leading. There are times when you will be called upon to persevere, suffer, and endure. On the other hand, there may be times when you will be wrong and if you stubbornly cling to false ideas or dreams, it will be detrimental to your faith.

About following God's instructions, God may lead us in a certain direction even though it is not the final destination. Perhaps Paul had followed correctly to Asia and Bithynia (Acts 16:6–7) to the point the Spirit had to intervene. We cannot know for sure. In other words, God may be taking us incrementally along a path and then we jump to a more far-reaching and faulty conclusion.

Action Step

47. Write any faith challenge that you are experiencing right now?

Accountability: Be prepared to share #47 with your discipleship team and pray for each other.

We briefly discussed discouragement. If discouragement goes on for too long, leaders could become depressed, extremely disheartened, and full of self-pity. This condition actually takes people into faithless territory where they begin to question God's plan, love, and sovereign control over their lives.

If a leaders and disciples find themselves in this dangerous condition, they must seek God for His grace and mercy. They should not be too proud to ask other Christians for help and prayer. In addition, Christian leaders may also be called upon to help others climb out of this dark, sad, pit of hell. Now realize that we are talking about healthy, normal individuals in this section and not those who may need medical attention. Prayer will help you discern the difference, and how God wants you or another person to be healed or treated.

Read 1 Kings 19:3–4 and answer questions 48–50:

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." 1 Kings 19:3–4

48. Was Elijah discouraged? Yes No (Underline One)

49. Was Elijah depressed? Yes No (Underline One)

50. Was Elijah trusting God? Yes No (Underline One)

Elijah had just completed an extraordinary assignment on Mt. Carmel. He had faced off with 450 prophets of Baal. The contest was for the Baal worshippers to prepare a sacrifice for their god and Elijah to prepare one for the Lord. The true God would answer by fire.

Nothing happened when the Baal prophets prayed. But when Elijah prayed, the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice. When the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried out, "The LORD—He is God! The LORD—He is God! (1 Kings 18:39).

Ahab, king of Israel, and his wife Jezebel were not happy. Jezebel was a Baal worshipper and sent word to Elijah that she was going to have him killed by the next day. This trial of faith had the great prophet running for his life. What trial is making you run for your life? What is causing you to run away from God's will? Simply, what is keeping you from trusting God completely?

Read 1 Kings 19:11–12 and answer questions 51–52:

The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹²After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 1 Kings 19:11–12

51. Why did the Lord tell Elijah to go out and stand on the mountain in His presence (v.11a)?

52. Why do you think God showed Elijah wind, fire, and earthquake before His manifestation in a gentle whisper?

Accountability: Be prepared to share #48–52 with your discipleship team.

God had made His presence known to His people in wind, earthquake, and fire (Nahum 1:3; Job 38:1; Exodus 19:18; Psalm 68:7–9). However, with Elijah, He chooses to make His presence known in a gentle whisper. Other ways of describing God’s presence in 1 Kings 19:12 is a soft calm or humming stillness.

Through the wind, earthquake, and fire God may have been revealing His spectacular power to overcome enemies, such as Jezebel, before meeting Elijah in the gentle whisper. Also, God may have been revealing to Elijah that He is not restricted to one method of expression—He can appear in many forms. In addition, wind, earthquake, and fire can be signs of God’s judgment. The Lord may be communicating that He is not yet ready to judge Israel.

One or all three of the explanations of the wind, earthquake, and fire may be correct. There may even be other explanations. However, the reason for using 1 Kings 19:11–12 in this lesson is because a faithful, successful, and fruitful leader experienced classic burnout.¹⁵

The Lord showed Elijah that he must get his focus off his circumstances. The right focus is God. Elijah was thinking about Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1–18) and became afraid and discouraged. God is greater than any problem, no matter how severe it may seem.

The Lord did not criticize or scold Elijah but reminded him that he was not where he was supposed to be. Elijah’s ministry had not ended. God told him to go back the way he had come. God strengthened Elijah with His presence and sent him on his way.

Recognize that God had Elijah’s less than faithful episode recorded in the Bible to help succeeding generations. We are to submit to God and admit we have no valid reason for being discouraged or depressed. The Lord is on the throne, and nothing can stop His purposes for the world and for us.

53. Action Step Memorize Jeremiah 17:7–8

“But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him ⁸They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”
Jeremiah 17:7–8

Accountability: Be prepared to share your memory verse #53 with your discipleship team.

¹⁵ According to the Mayo Clinic, burnout is “a state of physical, emotional, or mental exhaustion combined with doubts about your competence and the value of your work.”

After Brother Yun's 74 days of fasting many of his fellow prisoners repented of their sins and gave their lives to the Lord. The Lord used him in prison and then four years later he was released from prison. Again, he preached the gospel and again was arrested and spent two years in prison.

While in prison for the second time, the Lord gave Brother Yun a vision for reaching China with the gospel. He shared with the house churches his vision and began by training thirty young believers to be gospel warrior across China. In addition, each church member was required to lead at least three people to Christ during the year. Church leaders were required to lead five people to Christ. After two years, 123,000 new believers were baptized. The initiative continues today and is still experiencing exponential growth.

Brother Yun was arrested and imprisoned a third time. This time he was beaten and tortured until his legs were fractured so badly he could not walk. He had to have other prisoners carry him to the torture room and the toilet.

This was a lowest point ever for Brother Yun. He was not only crippled but was facing a ten-to-fifteen-year sentence. He became more depressed and began complaining to the Lord. Brother Yun accused God of being weak and unable to protect him.

The Lord began encouraging Brother Yun with a promise from Hebrews 10:35— *So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.* God encouraged him in other ways until brother Yun felt as if God had descended into his prison cell.

Six weeks after Brother Yun's legs were smashed and he was still unable to put any weight on them, God performed a miracle. It was May 5, 1997. He felt God telling him to leave prison, so he got up and walked out of his cell, through various doors, and gates to freedom. It was only after he had escaped that he realized the Lord had completely healed his legs.

Brother Yun with the help of other believers was able to escape from China. Since his escape he has been working with the mission, *Back to Jerusalem*, to train Chinese missionaries. The goal is for the house churches in China to send 100,000 missionaries to 51 countries.¹⁶

54. How does Brother Yun's story strengthen your faith?

Accountability: Be prepared to share #54 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Five and Lesson 13—

Next—Unit 2: Christian Leadership, Lesson 14: Knowing God's Will

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¹⁶ Brother Yun and Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man*, 219, 222, 233, 241, 246, 248, 253, 285, 289.