

*Follow
Jesus
Make
Disciples*

17 Discipleship Principles
for Small Group Study



Steve Hixon

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Principles of Discipleship

Introduction

by Steve Hixon

Somewhere in the late 1980's some friends of mine and I asked ourselves the question, what are the foundational principles that a new follower of Jesus needs to know? That launched us into a project which has been ongoing since then, with several iterations. We forced ourselves to limit the number of studies, because once you begin to think about it, the list of ideas grows longer and longer. You'll probably wonder why we didn't include this or that concept yourself. But these were hashed out in the context of small groups, where men and women talked, prayed and discussed their spiritual lives with honesty and transparency.

We structured the principles around the three relationships that Jesus talked about with his own disciples during their last dinner together in John 15: their relationship with God ("I am the vine ; you are the branches"), with one another ("this is my command: love each other"), and their relationship with the world ("you must testify about me").

There are several ingredients in these studies, and most of them are mixed into each study: an introduction to wonderful, rich, Biblical passages that speak to each concept, brief readings that articulate that particular topic, questions for personal application and group discussion, and soul-training exercises – something you can think about or do to help you “own” the principle you're studying. It's one thing to “know” these things – it's another to practice them, to make them part of your life, to experience them in your relationship with God. Because the goal is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind.” It's my hope that these principles will help individuals, groups and churches to lay a solid foundation for discipleship, a foundation that can be added to and built upon with whatever you feel God leading you to pursue.

What is Discipleship?

discipleship: the condition or situation of being a follower, or a student of some philosophy, especially a follower of Christ.

One of my favorite authors was Dallas Willard (1935-2013), perhaps best known for [The Divine Conspiracy](#). One of his most helpful books was [The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship](#). Here's what he had to say about discipleship:

- “Discipleship is the process of becoming who Jesus would be if he were you.”
- “A disciple is a person who has decided that the most important thing in their life is to learn how to do what Jesus said to do.”
- “A disciple is a learner, a student, an apprentice, a practitioner... Disciples of Jesus are people who do not just profess certain views as their own but apply their growing understanding of life in the Kingdom of the Heavens to every aspect of their life on earth.”
- “The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as ‘Christians’ will become disciples – students, apprentices, practitioners – of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence.”

My Life Map

A Tool for Community-building

Many of you will be using this material in a small group setting. Maybe your group has been together for several years and you already know each other pretty well. But more commonly you don't. A good way to get started is by investing significant time in your early meetings in the process of self-disclosure. The tool we've chosen for that is a Life Map. Now, life maps can get elaborate, although this one is fairly simple. Some people even like to use a large paper or project board and different colored post-it notes. Be creative! There's even a whole ministry called Listen to My Life, which is excellent. The important thing is to get started. Give each person time to share parts of their Life Map with the group. Authenticity and depth cannot be forced, and are best modelled by the group leader. Some suggestions:

- go on a retreat at the beginning of your group's life and have people share from their life map,
- spend the first month of meetings having 2-4 people share from their life,
- carve out 20 minutes in each meeting and have one person every week share one thing from their life map.

Note: it's not necessary or even advisable to have people share their entire life map all at once. Often that's TMI for the other groups members to retain. Instead, allow them to choose one significant person or defining moment that has marked them. These don't always need to be success stories; often the things that mark us are disappointments or failures. Watch for things like:

- Heritage: not just the facts about your family, but who they really were and who you are as a result.
- Heavy Hitters: people in your life who had a great impact - either for good or evil.
- Hard Times: painful or difficult experiences, losses & regrets, doubts, conflicts, etc.
- High Points: wonderful times, life-shaping events and experiences.
- Holy Moments: times when you feel God has broken into your life to speak, change or direct you, or times when you have felt His presence and pleasure most powerfully.

On the following pages is a Life Map you can print out. The 2nd page is a continuation of the first - print them both and tape them together, or some people like to use an 11x17 sheet that provides more room.

My Life Map

Spiritual highs & lows	
Significant people	
Defining Moments	
Basic Events	
Years / Decades	

HOW TO USE THIS LIFE MAP

START out by charting the years of your life in the bottom section, from left to right.
(You can match them with calendar years if you want.)

Then simply move up the Life Map by recording events and people as you remember them:

- **Basic Events** are the things you'd tell a stranger on an airplane – where you lived, went to school, jobs you've had, etc.
- **Defining Moments** are those that have marked you as a person (good or bad), pivotal decisions, moments that have changed you or your outlook on life.
- **Significant People** – those who have made a difference - friends, parents, teachers, mentors, role models, those who have invested in you.
- **Spiritual Highs & Lows** – how you see God working in your life through events and people – maybe other things as well. (books, etc)

Be as creative as you want!

Use different colors, highlighters, etc. – whatever helps you create a visual picture of your life so far...

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus

Principles of Discipleship

Lesson 1: The God Who is There

Who is God? Where did we come from?

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us...”

- A.W. Tozer

What is a **worldview**? As the word itself suggests, a worldview is an overall view of the world. It’s not a physical view of the world, but rather a philosophical view, an all-encompassing perspective on everything that exists and matters to us.

“A person’s worldview represents his most fundamental beliefs and assumptions about the universe he inhabits. It reflects how he would answer all the “big questions” of human existence: fundamental questions about who and what we are, where we came from, why we’re here, where (if anywhere) we’re headed, the meaning and purpose of life, the nature of the afterlife, and what counts as a good life here and now.”

– Ligonier Ministries

“The point is this: If God does not exist, then life is objectively meaningless; but man cannot live consistently and happily knowing that life is meaningless; so in order to be happy he pretends life has meaning. But this is, of course, entirely inconsistent—for without God, man and the universe are without any real significance.”

– William Lane Craig

“We can say it in another way, and that is that the infinite-personal God, the God who is Trinity, has spoken. He is there, and he is not silent. There is no use having a silent God. We would not know anything about him. He has spoken and told us what he is and that he existed before all else, and so we have the answer to the existence of what is.”

– Francis Schaeffer, He Is There and He Is Not Silent

“I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”

– C.S. Lewis

Some worldviews would say that we are orphans in this universe, that we are the product of pure chance, with no real significance or purpose. The Biblical view is drastically different. Let’s take a look at what the first two books of the Bible have to say...

GENESIS 1: CREATION

26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

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

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

29 Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

- **RESPONSE: What do you think it means that we are made in God’s image?**

“You see, the founding fathers were really influenced by the Bible. The whole concept of the imago dei, as it is expressed in Latin, the ‘image of God,’ is the idea that all men have something within them that God injected. Not that they have substantial unity with God, but that every man has a capacity to have fellowship with God. And this gives him a uniqueness, it gives him worth, it gives him dignity. And we must never forget this as a nation: there are no gradations in the image of God. Every man from a treble white to a bass black is significant on God’s keyboard, precisely because every man is made in the image of God. One day we will learn that. We will know one day that God made us to live together as brothers and to respect the dignity and worth of every man.”

- Dr. Martin Luther King, sermon, “The American Dream”

READ the Dallas Willard quote “Creation Covenant” (at the end of this lesson) and summarize his main point.

EXODUS: RELATIONSHIP

In Exodus 33 it says, “The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.” Read this passage from Exodus and think through what it tells us about God.

Exodus 3: The burning bush

13 *Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”*

14 *God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’”*

15 *God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ “This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.*

- **What does the Exodus passage tells us about God?**

JESUS: THE REVEALER

- *John 1:18. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.*
- *John 14:8-9 Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”*

- **How did Jesus reveal more of God to us?**

God's "Creation Covenant" with Human Beings

From Dallas Willard, The Divine Conspiracy

Keeping in mind these truths about personality, we will not be surprised at the Bible's simple, consistent picture of human beings in relation to God. The human job description (the "creation covenant," we might call it) found in chapter 1 of Genesis indicates that God assigned to us collectively the rule over all living things on earth, animal and plant. We are responsible before God for life on the earth.

However unlikely it may seem from our current viewpoint, God equipped us for this task by framing our nature to function in a conscious, personal relationship of interactive responsibility with him. We are meant to exercise our "rule" only in union with God, as he acts with us. He intended to be our constant companion or coworker in the creative enterprise of life on earth. That is what his love for us means in practical terms.

Now, what we can do by our unassisted strength is very small. What we can do acting with mechanical, electrical, or atomic power is much greater. Often what can be accomplished is so great that it is hard to believe or imagine without some experience of it. But what we can do with these means is still very small compared to what we could do acting in union with God himself, who created and ultimately controls all other forces.

Lamentably, we fell away from our intended divine context and from the task for which we are by nature fitted. We mistrusted and distanced ourselves from God and then, very naturally, from one another. In our arrogance and fear we flounder through our existence on our own. The earth itself is "subjected to futility"

because of this (Rom. 8:20). However we may picture the original event, "the fall," one cannot deny that such mistrust pervasively characterizes human life today and that things do not go well on earth. History and the eleven o'clock news leave no doubt.

But at the same time our fundamental makeup is unchanged. The deepest longings of our heart confirm our original calling. Our very being still assigns us to "rule" in our life circumstances, whatever they may be. If animals are in trouble anywhere, for example, people generally feel they should do something about it—or at least that someone should. And we still experience ourselves as creative will, as someone who accomplishes things, constantly desiring to generate value, or what is good, from ourselves and from our environment. We are perhaps all too ready, given our distorted vision and will, to take charge of the earth.

Apart from harmony under God, our nature-imposed objectives go awry. The social and individual chaos of human desires sees to it. Much of our time and energy is spent trying to dominate others or escape domination by them, from "office politics" to tribal warfare to international relations on a global scale.

In the biblical account of our fall from God, we were assigned to earn our bread by the sweat of our face. The sweat comes from our own energies, which is all we have left after losing our roots in God's own life. But we relentlessly try to earn our bread by the sweat of someone else's face, even when it might be easier to use our own strength.

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 2: SIN, OUR BROKENNESS

READ Genesis 3

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it ... 23 So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. 24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

READ Romans 1:18-3:20

9 What shall we conclude then? ... For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. 10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." ... 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

1. Do you think we are sinners because we sin, or that we sin because we are sinners?

- What's the difference? How does our answer affect our theology?
- The Pharisees of Jesus' day often criticized him for hanging out with "sinners." What did they mean? How were they defining "sin"? What would the Pharisees have said about themselves?

2. **READ the CS Lewis article.** People in our post-Christian culture don't really like to use the word "sin," but they readily admit that no one's perfect, or that we're all a bit dysfunctional. Without the concept of the fall of man (Genesis 3), how does modern man tend to explain the problem of evil in humanity?

3. Without a sense of our own sin & guilt, we don't really feel the need for a Savior. When you became a Christian, how did God open your eyes to your sinfulness?

4. It's fairly easy to see other people's sin, but we tend to be blind to our own. (see James 1:23,24) Read the following passage from Psalm 139 –

*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

This week, consider asking God through his Holy Spirit to open your eyes to your own need for change, knowing that he is committed to transforming your life from the inside out. *"For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him."* (Philippians 2:13)

Every one has heard people quarrelling. Sometimes it sounds funny and sometimes it sounds merely unpleasant; but however it sounds, I believe we can learn something very important from listening to the kinds of things they say. They say things like this: "How'd you like it if anyone did the same to you?" – "That's my seat, I was there first" – "Leave him alone, he isn't doing you any harm." People say things like that every day, educated people as well as uneducated, and children as well as grown-ups.

Now what interests me about all these remarks is that the man who makes them is not merely saying that the other man's behavior does not happen to please him. He is appealing to some kind of standard of behavior which he expects the other to know about. And the other man very seldom replies: "To hell with your standard." Nearly always he tries to make out that what he has been doing does not really go against the standard, or that if it does there is some special excuse. And there would be no sense in trying to do that unless you and he had some sort of agreement as to what Right and Wrong are; just as there would be no sense in saying that a footballer had committed a foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football.

Now this Law or Rule about Right and Wrong used to be called the Law of Nature. Nowadays, when we talk of the "laws of nature" we usually mean things like gravitation, or heredity, or the laws of chemistry. But when the older thinkers called the Law of Right and Wrong "the Law of Nature," they really meant the Law of Human Nature.

Each man is at every moment subjected to several sets of laws but there is only one of these which he is free to disobey. As a body, he is subjected to gravitation and cannot disobey it; but the law which is peculiar to his human nature is the one he can disobey if he chooses.

This law was called the Law of Nature because people thought that every one knew it by nature and did not need to be taught it. The human idea of decent behavior was obvious to every one.

I know that some people say the idea of a Law of Nature or decent behavior known to all men is unsound, because different civilizations and different ages have had quite different moralities.

But this is not true. There have been differences between their moralities, but these have never amounted to anything like a total difference. If anyone will take the trouble to compare the moral teaching of, say, the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Hindus, Chinese, Greeks and Romans, what will strike him will be how very like they are to each other and to our own.

It seems, then, we are forced to believe in a real Right and Wrong. People may be sometimes mistaken about them, just as people

sometimes get their sums wrong; but they are not a matter of mere taste and opinion any more than the multiplication table. Now if we are agreed about that, I go on to my next point, which is this. None of us are really keeping the Law of Nature. If there are any exceptions among you, I apologize to them. They had much better read some other work, for nothing I am going to say concerns them. And now, turning to the ordinary human beings who are left.

I hope you will not misunderstand what I am going to say, I am not preaching, and Heaven knows I do not pretend to be better than anyone else. I am only trying to call attention to fact; the fact that this year, or this month, or, more likely, this very day we have failed to practice ourselves the kind of behavior we expect from other people. There may be all sorts of excuses for us. That time you were so unfair to the children was when you were very tired. That slightly shady business about the money – the one you have almost forgotten – came when you were very hard up. And what you promised to do for old So-and-so and have never done – well, you never would have promised if you had known how frightfully busy you were going to be. And as for your behavior to your wife (or husband) or sister (or brother) if I knew how irritating they could be, I would not wonder at it – and who the dickens am I, anyway? I am just the same. That is to say, I do not succeed in keeping the Law of Nature very well, and the moment anyone tells me I am not keeping it, there starts up in my mind a string of excuses as long as your arm. The question at the moment is not whether they are good excuses. The point is that they are one more proof of how deeply, whether we like it or not, we believe in the Law of Nature. If we do not believe in decent behavior, why should we be so anxious to make excuses for not having behaved decently? The truth is, we believe in decency so much – we feel the Rule of Law pressing us so – that we cannot bear to face the fact that we are breaking it, and consequently we try to shift the responsibility. For you notice that it is only for our bad behaviour that we find these explanations. It is only our bad temper that we put down to being tired or worried or hungry; we put our good temper down to ourselves.

These then, are the two points I wanted to make. First, that human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave that way. They know the Law of Nature; they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in.

SOUL-TRAINING EXERCISE: Praying the Examen

St. Ignatius Loyola's Examen is an ancient prayer; it gives us opportunity for a peaceful daily reflection. It invites us to find the movement of God in all the people and events of our day. The Examen is simply a set of introspective prompts for you to follow or adapt to your own character and spirit.

Begin with a pause and a slow, deep breath or two; become aware that you are in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Thanksgiving

What am I especially grateful for in the past day?

- *The gift of another day...*
- *The love and support I have received...*
- *The courage I have mustered...*
- *An event that took place today...*

Petition

- *I am about to review my day; I ask for the light to know God and to know myself as God sees me.*

Review

- *Where have I felt true joy today?*
- *What has troubled me today?*
- *What has challenged me today?*
- *Where and when did I pause today?*
- *Have I noticed God's presence in any of this?*

Response

- *In light of my review, what is my response to the God of my life?*

A Look Ahead

- *As I look ahead, what comes to mind?*
- *With what spirit do I want to enter tomorrow?*

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 3: SALVATION, GOD'S GREAT SURPRISE

READ Ephesians 2:1-10

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

1. These verses are some of the most amazing and important verses in the Bible. Read the passage and then take 2 minutes to make a list of the things you find that God did for us in Christ. (Note: verses 2 and 3 are a kind of parenthesis.)

2. **READ the John Stott article.** What are the four images he describes, and how do they paint a picture of salvation?

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-
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-

3. **READ** the four conversion stories. Do you resonate with any particular one?

John Stott, from his book The Cross of Christ

Moved by the perfection of his holy love, God in Christ substituted himself for us sinners. That is the heart of the cross of Christ. It leads us to turn now from the event to its consequences, from what happened on the cross to what was achieved by it. Why did God take our place and bear our sin? What did he accomplish by his self-sacrifice, his self-substitution?

It would be hard to exaggerate the magnitude or the changes which have taken place as a result of the cross, both in God and in us, especially in God's dealings with us and in our relations with him. Truly, when Christ died and was raised from death, and a new day dawned, a new age began.

This new day is *the day of salvation* (2 Cor. 6:2), and the blessings of such a great salvation (Heb. 2:3) are so richly diverse that they cannot be neatly defined. Several pictures are needed to portray them. Just as the church of Christ is presented in Scripture as his bride and his body, the sheep of God's flock and the branches of his vine, his new humanity, his household or family, the temple of the Holy Spirit and the pillar and buttress of the truth, so the salvation of Christ is illustrated by the vivid imagery of terms like *propitiation, redemption, justification and reconciliation*.

They are not alternative explanations of the cross, providing us with a range to choose from, but complementary to one another, each contributing a vital part to the whole. As for the imagery, *propitiation* introduces us to rituals at a shrine, *redemption* to transactions in a marketplace, *justification* to proceedings in a lawcourt, and *reconciliation* to experiences in a home or family. My contention is that *substitution* is not a further *theory* or *image* to be set alongside the others, but rather the foundation of them all, without which each lacks cogency. If God in Christ did not die in our place, there could he neither propitiation, nor redemption, nor justification, nor reconciliation.

There is logic in the order in which we are reviewing these great words which describe the achievement of the cross. Propitiation inevitably comes first, because until the wrath of God is appeased (that is, until his love has found a way to avert his anger), there can be no salvation for human beings at all. Next, when we are ready to understand the meaning of salvation, we begin negatively with redemption, meaning our rescue at the high price of Christ's blood from the grim captivity of sin and guilt. Justification is its positive counterpart. True, some justification is the

opposite of condemnation (e.g. Rom. 5:18; 8:34), and both are verdicts of a judge who pronounces the accused either guilty or not guilty. To reconcile means to restore a relationship, to renew a friendship. So an original relationship is presupposed which, having been broken, has been recovered by Christ.

We have examined four of the principal New Testament images of salvation, taken from the shrine, the market, the lawcourt and the home. Their pictorial nature makes it impossible to integrate them neatly with one another. Temple sacrifices and legal verdicts, the slave in the market and the child in the home all clearly belong to different worlds. Nevertheless, certain themes emerge from all four images. First, each highlights a different aspect of our human need. Propitiation underscores the wrath of God upon us, redemption our captivity to sin, justification our guilt, and reconciliation our enmity against God and alienation from him. These metaphors do not flatter us. They expose the magnitude of our need.

Secondly, all four images emphasize that the saving initiative was taken by God in his love. It is he who has propitiated his own wrath, redeemed us from our miserable bondage, declared us righteous in his sights, and reconciled us to himself. Relevant texts leave us in no doubt about this: *God...loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. God...has come and has redeemed his people. It is God who justifies. God...reconciled us to himself through Christ.*

Thirdly, all four images plainly teach that God's saving work was achieved through the bloodshedding, that is, the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. With regard to the blood of Christ the texts are again unequivocal. *God presented him as a propitiatory sacrifice, through faith in his blood. In Him we have redemption through his blood. We have now been justified by his blood. You who once were far away have been brought near (i.e. reconciled) through the blood of Christ.* Since Christ's blood is a symbol of his life laid down in violent death, it is also plain in each of the four images that he died in our place as our substitute. The death of Jesus was the atoning sacrifice because of which God averted his wrath from us, the ransom-price by which we have been redeemed, the condemnation of the innocent that the guilty might be justified, and the sinless One being made sin for us.

SOUL-TRAINING EXERCISE: What's your story?

Some people come into a relationship with God through Christ in a moment, over a short period of time, or even more gradually. For example, C. S. Lewis converted while riding to a zoo in his brother's motorcycle side car. "When we set out I did not believe that Jesus is the Son of God and when we reached the zoo I did," he later wrote. For Lewis, this was the culmination of a long period of questioning and long talks with his friend, J.R.R. Tolkien. Francis Schaeffer came to believe in Jesus over a six-month period. Although many of the "ingredients" are the same, our stories are all unique.

What's your story?

- Where does your story of salvation fall in your **Life Map**?
- What were the circumstances?
- What were some of your big questions?
- Who was instrumental in helping you?
- Take a moment and consider writing a prayer of gratitude to God for opening your eyes to the beauty of Christ.

Four Conversion Stories

St. Augustine, AD 386, from his book “The Confessions”

I sent up these sorrowful cries: “How long, how long? Tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not this very hour make an end to my uncleanness?”

I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when suddenly I heard the voice of a boy or a girl I know not which—coming from the neighboring house, chanting over and over again, “Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it.” Immediately I ceased weeping and began most earnestly to think whether it was usual for children in some kind of game to sing such a song, but I could not remember ever having heard the like. So, damming the torrent of my tears, I got to my feet, for I could not but think that this was a divine command to open the Bible and read the first passage I should light upon.

So I quickly returned to the bench where Alypius was sitting, for there I had put down the apostle’s book when I had left there. I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence read the paragraph on which my eyes first fell: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.” I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.

Martin Luther, 1518

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!” Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience.

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as

it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’” There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me.

Chuck Colson, 1974, from his book Born Again

Thirty years ago today, I visited Tom Phillips, president of the Raytheon Company, at his home outside of Boston. I’d represented Raytheon before going to the White House, and I was about to start again.

But I visited for another reason as well. I knew Tom had become a Christian, and he seemed so different. I wanted to ask him what had happened.

That night he read to me from Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis, particularly a chapter about the great sin that is pride. A proud man is always walking through life looking down on other people and other things, said Lewis. As a result, he cannot see something above himself immeasurably superior—God.

Tom, that night, told me about encountering Christ in his own life. He didn’t realize it, but I was in the depths of deep despair over Watergate, watching the president I had helped for four years flounder in office. I’d also heard that I might become a target of the investigation as well. In short, my world was collapsing.

That night, as Tom was telling me about Jesus, I listened attentively, but didn’t let on my own need. When he offered to pray, I thanked him but said, no, I’d see him sometime after I read C. S. Lewis’s book. But when I got in the car that night, I couldn’t drive it out of the driveway. Ex-Marine captain, White House tough guy, I was crying too hard, calling out to God. I didn’t know what to say; I just knew I needed Jesus, and He came into my life.

It’s been a long time since the dark days of Watergate. I’m still astounded that God would take someone who was infamous in the Watergate scandal, soon to be a convicted felon, and take him into His family and then order his steps in the way He has with me. God touched me at that moment in Tom Phillip’s driveway, and thirty years later, His love and kindness touch and astound me still.

Anne Lamott, 1984, from her book Traveling Mercies

That April of 1984, I took a fourth urine sample to the lab, and it finally came back positive. I had published three books by then, but none of them had sold particularly well, and I did not have the money or wherewithal to have a baby. The father was someone I had just met, who was married, and no one I wanted a real life or baby with. So one evening my friend took me in for the abortion, and I was sadder than I'd been since my father died, and when she brought me home that night, I went upstairs to my loft with a pint of Bushmills and some of the codeine a nurse had given me for pain. I drank until nearly dawn.

Then the next night I did it again, and the next night, although by then the pills were gone. I didn't go to the flea market the week of my abortion. I stayed home, and smoked dope and got drunk, and tried to write a little, and went for slow walks along the salt marsh. On the seventh night, though, very drunk and just about to take a sleeping pill. I had a cigarette and turned off the light. After a while, as I lay there, I became aware of someone with me, hunkered down in the corner, and I just assumed it was my father, whose presence I had felt over the years when I was frightened and alone. The feeling was so strong that I actually turned on the light for a moment to make sure no one was there—of course, there wasn't. But after a while, in the dark again, I knew beyond any doubt that it was Jesus. I felt him as surely as I feel my dog lying nearby as I write this.

And I was appalled. I thought about my life and my brilliant hilarious progressive friends, I thought about what everyone would think of me if I became a Christian, and it seemed an utterly impossible thing that simply could not be allowed to happen. I turned to the wall and said out loud, "I would rather die."

I felt him just sitting there on his haunches in the corner of my sleeping loft, watching me with patience and love, and I squinched my eyes shut, but that didn't help because that's not what I was seeing him with.

Finally I fell asleep, and in the morning, he was gone.

This experience spooked me badly, but I thought it was just an apparition, born of fear and self-loathing and booze and loss of blood. But then everywhere I went, I had the feeling that a little cat was following me, wanting me to reach down and pick it up, wanting me to open the door and let it in. But I knew what would happen: you let a cat in one time, give it a little milk, and then it stays forever. So I tried to keep one step ahead of it, slamming my houseboat door when I entered or left.

And one week later, when I went back to church, I was so hungover that I couldn't stand up for the songs, and this time I stayed for the sermon, which I just thought was so ridiculous, like someone trying to convince me of the existence of extraterrestrials, but the last song was so deep and raw and pure that I could not escape. It was as if the people were singing in between the notes, weeping and joyful at the same time, and I felt like their voices or something was rocking me in its bosom, holding me like a scared kid, and I opened up to that feeling—and it washed over me.

I began to cry and left before the benediction, and I raced home and felt the little cat running along at my heels, and I walked down the dock past dozens of potted flowers, under a sky as blue as one of God's own dreams, and I opened the door to my houseboat, and I stood there a minute, and then I hung my head and said, "I quit." I took a long deep breath and said out loud, "All right. You can come in."

So this was my beautiful moment of conversion.

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 4: IDENTITY, THE NEW YOU

READ Colossians 3:1-10

3:1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Read the passage above and discuss these topics:

- a. Paul is asking the Colossian believers to make some changes in their lives, but he says the basis for those changes is that their spiritual identity was changed first. What is he saying about our old self vs. our new self? (What do 2 Cor 5:17 and Rom. 6:6 contribute to the discussion?)
- b. How does Hoekema's article illuminate this passage? (Note: it's not an easy read!)
- c. What are some things that we tend to get our identity from?
- d. Spend a few minutes reading the following article from Discipleship Journal and personalize it by comparing your own process of understanding your identity in Christ since you've become a Christian. Has it been easy or difficult to see yourself the way the New Testament describes you?

Identity Check

What those you disciple need to know about who they are in Christ

from DISCIPLESHIP JOURNAL

When I became a Christian, I was told I'd been "adopted" into God's family and was a "new person" in Christ. That sounded nice, but I didn't have a clue what it meant until much later. If I'd understood earlier, I might have been spared years of insecurity.

Now, when I disciple new believers, I begin with five biblical truths about our identity in Christ that can help them avoid self-accusation, doubt, and uncertainty. Though we usually cover these truths in weekly, casual settings (over coffee, perhaps) at the start of our relationship, the same truths can be covered in a structured Bible study using the Scripture references I've provided.

Truth 1: We are God's children.

One woman I discipled saw herself as God's unfavored foster child: The Christians with perfect faces and tidy lives were His real children. As we looked at scriptures on God's love (such as 1 John 4) and talked about being part of a loving family—not the shattered family that had been her experience—she gradually absorbed her true status as God's dearly loved child.

Romans 8:15–17 as well as Gal. 3:26–4:7 explain the theology of adoption, but I sometimes find it helpful in discipling someone to put those truths into these less complicated terms:

When we receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, we enter God's family. We are no longer orphans, slaves, beggars, strangers, or prisoners. Neither are we foster kids, distant cousins, employees, team members, or His management staff. We become permanent members of God's family in every ideal sense of the word. God delights in us just as loving earthly fathers delight in their children—only more so. He loves us not because of anything we've done, but because it's His nature to do so. We belong to Him.

Truth 2: We are heard.

"Lorraine" doubted God would hear her, let alone answer. She assumed He was too busy with other people's big problems to listen to her small concerns. Then we watched the movie *Anna and the King*.

In one moving scene, King Mongkut's young daughter, fearing something that occurred in her classroom, sought help. She raced through elaborate courtyard gardens, up the palace's marble steps, and down a gilded hall. Breathing heavily, she stopped short at the Grand Hall's entrance and peeked in. Dozens of men knelt in reverence before the enthroned king while dignitaries petitioned him with their concerns.

Undeterred, the little girl picked her way through the bowing men, scooted around the dignitaries, climbed the steps to the throne, scampered onto the king's lap, and whispered in his ear. The king dropped everything to come to her aid and calm her fears. Other matters would wait; his child needed him.

That scene helped Lorraine realize that because we are God's children, He is constantly available to us. We can climb confidently onto His lap—"approach the throne of grace," as Heb. 4:16 puts it—and whisper into His ear anytime, anyplace, and in any circumstance. Just as King Mongkut joyfully responded to his daughter's cry for help, so God delights in coming to our aid. Many of the psalms reinforce this marvelous truth (see 46:1, 50:15, and 91:15).

Truth 3: We are condemnation-free.

In a world that portrays God as a stern school monitor waiting to smack our knuckles, we all need to be reminded that God meets us in grace and forgiveness. As Ro. 8:1 reminds us, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

"It's too easy," said "Allison," when I told her God had forgiven her past. "With what I've done, how can I expect Him just to forgive? Don't I need to make up for my mistakes?"

I identified with Allison. For many years, I felt haunted by the need to do more. I didn't get it until someone put it this way: "So you think what Jesus did wasn't good enough for you?"

"What do you mean?" I stammered, horrified at the thought.

"By saying you have to 'do more' to make up for your bad acts, you're essentially saying Jesus' sacrifice on the cross wasn't sufficient to pay the cost of your sin."

My friend was right. According to the Scriptures, my sinful attitudes and actions did

require punishment to satisfy a righteous God's justice, but Jesus' punishment paid for it all. He then gave me His spotless record to replace my criminal one, the one for which He paid. I was clean before God and no longer condemned.

When I explained the doctrine of justification to Allison in this way, she realized that God didn't condemn her anymore; neither should she condemn herself. Reading and discussing Ro. 8:1–11 is an effective way to drive home these truths with the person you're discipling.

Truth 4: We are changed but in process.

How different the world would be if every believer knew, really knew, he was a changed person in Christ (2 Cor. 5:16–17)! But explaining this change to new believers can be a challenge.

One of the most important assurances we have is of God's ongoing presence within us. His indwelling Spirit frees us to resist sin and temptation in ways we couldn't before. We don't have to stay mired in bad choices or unhealthy behaviors. The same power that enabled Jesus to rise from the dead is available for us to live by each day (Ro. 8:10–11, Eph. 1:19–20).

However, that doesn't mean our thoughts and behaviors change overnight (Ro. 7:14–8:2). I repeatedly remind those I disciple that change is a process—one choice at a time—of learning to depend on God and act more like Jesus. It's an "already but not yet" experience of being, yet becoming, princes and princesses in God's royal family. Yes, we are the King's kids, but we have to learn royal ways. We will mess up sometimes; we can count on it. That doesn't change the truth that God's Spirit permanently resides within us and possesses the power to make us new.

Truth 5: We are the recipients of God's faithfulness.

At the point of failure, all the assurances we have talked about in the first four truths can come under question. That's when we most need this last truth: God is faithful.

"Linda," just four weeks into our meeting together, called me in tears. "I swore I wouldn't lose it with my kids again, Joan. I asked God to give me patience. But I blew it big time. I screamed and screamed at Timmy until I was hoarse. Now what do I do?"

Inevitably we will respond to circumstances and people in our lives with thoughts or actions that are less than Christlike. Some days, even 25 years into the journey, I wonder if I'll ever become the woman God wants me to be. It can be discouraging when we see how much we still need to grow.

After discussing with Linda what happened and why, I prayed with her and then reminded her of the first four truths we'd already covered in our times together. I encouraged her to trust what she knew the Scriptures said about her identity in Christ over what her feelings were telling her. This review helped us gain perspective on her situation, but our greatest encouragement came from a new truth about God's faithfulness.

First Thessalonians 5:24 reminds us, "The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." Philippians 1:6 tells us that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion." God promises to keep us blameless until He comes; He says He will accomplish what He started.

The God whose "compassions never fail" and are "new every morning" (Lam. 3:22–23) is our God. The truth that He is ever faithful, ever at work in our lives, helped Linda overcome her despair over her sinful temper, to confess her sin to her little boy and to God, and to move forward with confidence in her identity in Christ.

All of us—new believers and old—will sometimes fall in this walk of faith. We need regular assurance from the Scriptures and from each other that God loves us, hears us, refuses to condemn us, empowers us to change, and is ever faithful to us.

From **Discipleship Journal**, 2004, a publication of NavPress and The Navigators. NavPress is committed to helping people grow spiritually and enjoy lives of meaning and hope through personal and group resources that are biblically rooted, culturally relevant, and highly practical. To find more spiritual-growth resources, visit www.discipleshipjournal.com.

“Old and New Man,” from *A Christian Looks at Himself*, by Anthony Hoekema

But, someone may still say, what about our “sinful nature”? What about our “depravity”? Does not the Bible teach that even after we have been born again, even after we have become believers, we continue to have a sinful nature and therefore to keep on sinning? And does this not imply that the Bible teaches us to continue to have a negative image of ourselves even after we have been converted?

In fact, such a person might go on to say, even when I accept the fact that in Christ all my past sins have been forgiven and all my past guilt has been removed, if I am as bad a sinner as the Bible describes me to be, don’t I keep on increasing my sins and piling up my guilt every day? Though, to be sure, I confess these new sins daily and receive forgiveness for them, doesn’t all this add up to a pretty negative self-image? Mustn’t I continue to see myself as a person perpetually dogged by failure, constantly trying to do the right things but just as constantly failing to do them? If the very holiest of men, as one Christian creed puts it, have “only a small beginning of this obedience,” how can any believer avoid having a negative image of himself?

This is the problem with which we must now deal. In trying to find a solution to it, let us first of all consider what the Scriptures teach about the concepts “old man” and “new man.” A better understanding of these concepts than is sometimes held will, I believe, help us to answer the question posed above.

It has been rather commonly held by Christians that in the believer there is a continual struggle between two aspects of his being, the “old man” which he is by nature and the “new man” which he puts on at the time of regeneration and conversion. According to this view, the old man and the new man are distinguishable “parts” of the believer. Before conversion he is only an old man; at the time of conversion he is said to put on the new man without, however, totally losing the old man. The converted person, or believer, is understood to be partly new man and partly old man. At times the old man is in control, whereas at other times the new man is in the saddle; the struggle of life, therefore, is the struggle between these two aspects or parts of his being (also sometimes called the “new nature” and the “old nature”).

This understanding of the old and the new man can easily lead to a negative self-image. One may, of course, think of himself as primarily new man, and only secondarily old man, but even in such a case his self-image will be of a person who is partly new and partly old – partly obedient to God and partly in rebellion against God. One might, however, also think of himself much more pessimistically, as primarily old man and only occasionally and rarely new man – in which case his self-image would be negative indeed.

It is to be seriously questioned, however, whether the view of “old man” and “new man” described above is the right one. In his *Principles of Conduct*, John Murray has rejected the idea that the believer is both old man and new man. It is just as wrong to call the believer both a new man and an old man, he argues, as it is to say that he is both regenerate and unregenerate (p. 218). Murray contends that since according to New Testament teaching the believer has put off the old man and put on the new, we must think of him as a new man though a new man not yet made perfect, and still the subject of progressive renewal. This renewal, however, is not to be conceived of as the progressive putting off of the old man and putting on of the new (pp. 218-19).

I believe that what Murray is saying is of great significance for our subject. The old and the new man, it seems to me, ought not to be seen as aspects or sides or parts of the believer which are both still somehow present in him. How, then, should we understand these concepts? Murray can help us here. He says, “‘Old man’ is a designation of the person in his unity as dominated by the flesh and sin” (p. 218). If this is so, it is obvious that the regenerated person is no longer an “old man.” Paul says in Romans 6:6, “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin” (ASV). This crucifixion of the old man happened in salvation history. When Christ died on the cross, our old man – that is, our total person as enslaved by flesh and sin – was put to death with Him. This means that we who have been united with Christ through faith are no longer “old men.” Our old man or old self has been put to death with Christ.

What happened when Christ was crucified, however, has also been subjectively appropriated

by us. This is taught by Paul in the two other passages where the terms “old man” and “new man” occur: Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:9-10. To quote just the latter passage, Paul there writes, “Lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (ASV). After the analogy of what has just been said about the old man, we conclude that the new man must mean the person in his unity ruled by the Holy Spirit. In this passage, therefore, Paul appeals to his readers not to lie to each other because they have once and for all put off the old man or old self and have once and for all put on the new man or the new self.

Our self-image as Christians, therefore, must be of ourselves as those who have decisively rejected the old self or old man (the total person enslaved by sin), and have just as decisively appropriated the new self or the new man (the total person ruled by the Spirit). Because of what Christ has done for us, and because we, enabled by His Spirit, have grasped all His benefits by faith, we are now to look upon ourselves as no longer identified with the old self or old man, but as identified with the new self or the new man. We are to see ourselves, therefore, not as partly old selves and partly new selves, but as new persons in Christ.

Does this mean that for the believer the struggle against sin is over? No! The New Testament is full of the language of struggle: the Christian life is called a battle, a race, and a wrestling against evil spirits; we are told to be good Christian soldiers, to fight the good fight of the faith, to resist the devil, to take heed lest we fall, and to put on the whole armor of God. Moreover, in this struggle we do not always win, we do not resist every temptation. On the contrary, we hear New Testament saints confessing that they are far from perfection, that they have not yet attained, that in many things they all stumble. We hear John saying in his first epistle, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1:8).

The point is, however, that when we do fall into sin, we are momentarily living according to the old man, or the old self, which we have actually repudiated. We are then living contrary to what we really are in Christ. Though we are regenerate: we are then living contrary to our regenerate life. Though we have put on the new man, we are then living contrary to the new man, as if we were still the old man.

But the fact that this does happen – and may, indeed, happen frequently – does not mean that we must therefore revise our self-image as having to include both old man and new man. For – and this is a most important point – when we slip into an old man way of living, we are living contrary to our true selves; we are denying our true self-image. Paul does not say in Romans 6: 11, “Consider yourselves to be mostly alive to God and mostly dead to sin.”

What he says is, “Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God.” This, then, must be our Christian self-image. We must consider ourselves to be new persons in Christ, who have once and for all turned our backs upon the old self, and who therefore refuse to be identified with it any longer. The old man or old self reveals itself in an old lifestyle, that of enslavement to sin. The new man or new self should reveal itself in a new lifestyle, that of joyful obedience to God. But it does not always do so. There are times when even the believer, who is a new person in Christ, lives in accordance with the old lifestyle. When he does so, however, he is being inconsistent with the person he truly is. Therefore, Paul calls on believers to make their lifestyles consistent with the new selves they have put on.

Though the believer is still inclined to all kinds of sin, the indwelling Spirit now enables him more and more to say no to sin. We ought therefore to see him, think of him, and describe him as a person who is a new creature in Christ, who is being progressively renewed in the image of God.

Soul-Training Exercise: Let the Bible tell me who I am

Below is a list of verses that reflect our new life in Christ. This week, pick one verse for each day and think about it throughout your day. You might want to write it on a 3x5 card, or a sticky note, or even memorize it. At the end of the week, which one resonated most with you? Did you find your thinking challenged? Do you think you see yourself Biblically – as God sees you – or do you tend to let old “tapes” define your self-image?

- *... anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person.
The old life is gone; a new life has begun!* 2 Corinthians 5:17
- *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
- *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!
And that is what we are!* 1 John 3:1
- *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* Philippians 4:13
- *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do.* Ephesians 2:10
- *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made, your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.* Psalm 139:13-14
- *Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid;
you are worth more than many sparrows.* Luke 12:7
- *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...* Romans 8:1
- *But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander,
and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off
your old self with its practices.* Colossians 3:8-9
- *When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?
Yet you have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.* Psalm 8:3-5
- *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with,
that we should no longer be slaves to sin.* Romans 6:6
- *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession,
that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness
into his wonderful light.* 1 Peter 2:9

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus



PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 5: GRACE VS. LEGALISM

Most Christians realize that the only way we can have a relationship with God, the way of salvation, is by grace. It is clear to us that we can't earn our way into heaven. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the poor in spirit (those who admit they are spiritually bankrupt), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And yet, after we become Christians and experience an initial joy and a new-found sense of freedom, we often gradually lapse into a thought process where we feel we must "earn" God's love and favor on a daily basis. I know this happened to me. That idea of having to earn God's favor is called **legalism**. The idea that God's love is a moment-by-moment gift to us is called **grace**. Understanding the difference between the two can have an enormous impact on our lives. It's important enough to devote a whole week (at least!) to studying it.

Read Romans 6:14.

"For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace."

- How does this verse relate to the issue?
- Would you say that throughout your Christian life, you have felt you were under law or under grace? What difference does it make?

1. READ & discuss the "**Grace Quotes**" from **page 2**.

- a. Which one strikes a nerve with you, and why?

2. READ & discuss the **5 marks of a grace-based Church** on **page 3**.

- a. How do you respond to these? Have there been examples (pro or con) of these in your experience?

3. READ the "**GRACE**" article on the pages following this study.

Grace Quotes

- **Joseph Cooke**, the author of Celebration of Grace, grew up in a Christian environment and set out to do the most spiritual thing he thought possible: become a missionary. After a few years out in the field, he suffered a nervous breakdown and was forced to return home. As he began to heal, he discovered he had been living under a dark spiritual cloud of legalism:

"I tried to keep what I thought were God's commandments, only to meet with repeated failure. And upon the heels of failure came self-hatred and despair. The worst of it was that I could not very well sort out God's attitude toward me from my own. This is where my religion was so deadly. I had a God who was the epitome of warmth, forgiveness, and understanding when I had been reduced to despair, hopelessness and raw need. But once I undertook to live for Him, there was no pleasing Him. I simply could not do well enough in my Christian life to maintain fellowship with Him. In other words, fellowship was not something that sprang from mutual love and acceptance; it was something earned. I had to perform up to a certain level before I could win the continuing sense of His love and acceptance. So even though I knew in my mind that God was gracious, yet at the heart-habit level I acted as if He were not. I was a legalist through and through."

- In his paper, "Doing What Comes Unnaturally," **Ray Stedman**, pastor of Peninsula Bible Church, wrote:

"There is still one final misunderstanding. This is the idea that it is quite optional whether a Christian lives by law or grace. That is, if grace is found too difficult or demanding, the Lord will accept sincere legalism. Nothing could be further from the truth. Legalism is sin! If you discover it in your heart, you ought to be down on your face before God repenting and confessing the thing. It is corrupting; it is vile; it is disturbing; it destroys the unity of the Spirit and produces the works of the flesh in your life."

- **David Seamands**, author of Healing Grace, wrote:

A lifetime of counseling evangelical Christians has driven me to a disturbing conclusion: the basic cause of many of our most troubling emotional and spiritual problems is insufficient grace. Although we sing "Amazing Grace" and vigorously proclaim salvation by grace through faith alone, grace is largely head knowledge, a truth believed about God but not a living experience with God. Being restless achievers instead of resting believers causes a whole variety of personal problems. These range all the way from anxiety, guilt, and low self-esteem to severe emotional breakdown. I am convinced that the failure to receive and live out God's unconditional grace and the corresponding failure to offer grace to others are at the root of it all."

- **Mike Yaconelli**, author of Messy Spirituality, wrote:

"Nothing in the church makes people in the church more angry than grace. It's ironic: we stumble into a party we weren't invited to and find the uninvited standing at the door making sure no other uninviteds get in. Then a strange phenomenon occurs: as soon as we are included in the party because of Jesus' irresponsible love, we decide to make grace "more responsible" by becoming self-appointed Kingdom Monitors, guarding the kingdom of God, keeping the riffraff out (which, as I understand it, are who the kingdom of God is supposed to include)."

What Does a Grace-Based Church Look Like?

- **Freedom**

Grace tends to set people free. Religion, while looking good on the outside, tends to produce bondage, unrealistic expectations, and phony relationships. Jesus said to his disciples: “you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Gordon McDonald, author of *Rebuilding Your Broken World*, wrote: “The freest person in the world is one with an open heart, a broken spirit, and a new direction in which to travel.”

- **Messiness**

Grace does not produce perfect churches any more than it produces perfect people. In fact, a grace-based church may look messier than other churches, because its focus is not on looking good on the outside, but seeking and celebrating inner transformation in the lives of its people. A grace-based church is not a museum for perfect saints, but a hospital for healing sinners.

- **Authenticity**

A grace-based church is a safe place to be honest. What’s the point of acting like we’re more spiritual than we really are? When the church becomes a safe place – a place where we know we will not be judged if we are honest about our struggles — then people are willing to risk transparency. Jesus fully accepted and embraced people in their current spiritual condition, but He did not leave them there. Those who encountered Christ and responded to His invitation to follow Him began, slowly but surely, to change. And so a grace-centered church seeks to create an atmosphere of acceptance and love, lifting up Christ who alone can change us.

“Freedom is being out in the open, having boldness, having nothing to hide. Those who are free are those who do not have any reputation to defend, no image to hide behind, nothing to preserve. They can be themselves.” — Ray Stedman, “Who is that Masked Man?”

- **Dependence on the Spirit Rather Than Formulas**

We believe that we’re trying to get people to live the way they really want to live. When a person becomes a Christ-follower, the Holy Spirit indwells them; they are given a new nature, their deepest desire is to love God, and they are most fulfilled when they do. And while we have all these things in common, at the same time each person is unique. The New Testament tells us what functions a church should have (worship, teaching, fellowship, etc.) but it allows great freedom in the forms — the way we do those functions. And so the challenge is to be creative, to ask God what new thing He might want us to do, instead of simply relying on traditions.

*“A healthy church does not depend on methodology. The dynamic is Spirit-filled people meeting other people’s needs in Jesus name, wherever they are. You can’t reduce that to methodology. Concentrating on practices instead of principles is like building our houses on sand.” — Frank Tillapaugh, *The Church Unleashed**

- **A Place for Second Chances**

Where in life can we go and experience freedom to fail? Most of us fail more than we succeed, and if failure is met with immediate rejection, we won’t take the risks that are necessary if we’re going to grow. Failure doesn’t necessarily mean sin — it may simply mean that we try something new — a new ministry, a crazy idea, a volunteer position, and it just doesn’t work. What then? A grace-based church urges us to get up, dust ourselves off, and try again. It also means a willingness to look at a person as an individual, despite mistakes of their past. Where would David, Peter and Paul be if God had said, “Three strikes and you’re out!”?

Soul-Training Exercise: Grace in your home?

Often the most formative structure in our early lives is our home. That's where we learn about relationships, love, life, principles, values – everything. We think we are in charge of teaching our children how to live, but some things are more caught than taught.

Question: Would you say that your home life was based upon grace or law?

Question: Would you say that the home you have created (if you're a parent) is a home of grace or law – or somewhere in between?

The following are some of the **messages**, intended or not, that different kinds of parents send to their kids.

Judgmental parents:

- *"God is watching you, and so am I."*
- *"You may be bad, but you're better than so-and-so."*

Legalistic parents:

- *"You owe God, so you better get busy."*
- *"You may be bad, but if you try harder, you can ultimately please God."*

Grace-based parents:

- *"You are a gift from God; go make a difference."*
- *"You may struggle doing the right thing sometimes, but you're forgiven."*

1) What kinds of messages do you remember from your childhood?

2) How can you send grace-based messages to your kids now?



GRACE

*There's a wideness in God's mercy
I cannot find in my own
And He keeps His fire burning
To melt this heart of stone
Keeps me aching with a yearning
Keeps me glad to have been caught
In the reckless raging fury
That they call the love of God*
— Rich Mullins, "The Love of God"

What is grace? We say "grace" before dinner, we name our daughters "Grace," we remark that dancers or athletes are "graceful," and we sing "Amazing Grace." But what does it really mean? The word "grace" in the New Testament is actually one of a group of words, which mean "joy, rejoice, gift, give freely, thankfulness, gratitude." It was how first-century people started their letters to one another. And it may be the most important word in the Bible.

"The world can do almost anything as well as or better than the church," says Gordon MacDonald. "You need not be a Christian to build houses, feed the hungry, or heal the sick. There is only one thing the world cannot do. It cannot offer grace."

Justification: Grace for Heaven

Let's rewind the clock about 500 years. The biggest issue in the early 1500's was the re-discovery of grace. Somehow, odd as it seems, the church had misplaced its most prized possession. The raw power of God's grace had been diluted by the medieval church's teaching that justification came by believing in Christ plus doing good works. Once the idea of performance is introduced to the equation, grace loses its distinctiveness. The word "grace" and the word for "gift" in the New Testament come from the same root. Grace is a gift; it's not something you earn or purchase. This concept has always been tough for us humans, who are used to a performance-based society and performance-based relationships. The idea that God would accept us for free seems too good to be true. Certainly we have to contribute something! After all, isn't religion our attempt to reach a holy God? How can we do that if we don't have anything to show for our efforts?

But Martin Luther and others began to see that the essence of the gospel was the radical, astonishing truth that God offers us an arrangement (a new covenant) that was dreamt up, planned, accomplished and paid for completely by Him without any help from us. Now that's good news! It stunned the first-century world, but by the Middle Ages it had become watered down. The Reformation's main contribution to the church was the re-discovery and articulation that a relationship with God through Christ was available to anyone, regardless of how pathetic or rebellious their life, and it was free for the asking. Their slogan was "sola gratia, sola fide, sola deo Gloria" — "by grace alone, by faith alone, God alone gets the glory."

Grace is ... God's free gift of salvation through Christ.

Sanctification: Grace for Now

OK. Fast-forward to the 21st century. Today most Christians would say, "I know it's only by God's grace that I'm going to heaven." But what about now? How does this relationship with God operate between earth and heaven? I know that salvation is by grace, but what about the Christian life?

The Problem of Legalism

"You are not under law, but under grace." (Romans 6:14)

Evangelical (the word evangelical means "focused on the good news") churches today understand and teach that getting to heaven is by God's grace alone. That is the great legacy of the Reformation. And yet sometimes a legalistic form of Christianity stills slips in. The idea goes something like this:

I know I'm going to heaven by the grace of God, but until then, my relationship with Him is conditional, based on my performance. After all, look at all He did for me! Certainly He has the right to expect me to earn His love on a daily basis by being good.

And so Christians develop a split spiritual personality: we're partly grateful to God for saving us, but we're also partly insecure, feeling a vague guiltiness that we somehow haven't done quite enough to make Him happy. We feel we don't pray enough, read the Bible enough, give enough - you name it - to earn His favor. We start each year vowing that this year will be different, that we'll set our sights high enough that He will smile upon us and bless us - because we've finally cleaned up our lives and done enough good deeds to meet His approval. That lasts 35 until... maybe the Super Bowl, if we're lucky. And so we begin

looking around us and comparing ourselves with others. Yes, there are those super-saints in every church who we can't possibly compete against. But the average Christian, perhaps we can find several of them who don't measure up to our standards. We say to ourselves, "At least I show up on Sunday, and volunteer, and I joined a small group (OK, I missed the last three meetings but I'm still on the list) – and I know for sure there are tons of people who only show up on Christmas and Easter who don't do nearly as much as I do! I can rest assured I'm way ahead of them." And so it goes. Once we start comparing, then we start judging, and once we get on that performance treadmill, it never stops. And it's never enough.

Joseph Cooke, the author of *Celebration of Grace*, grew up in a Christian environment and set out to do the most spiritual thing he thought possible: become a missionary. After a few years out in the field, he suffered a nervous breakdown and was forced to return home. As he began to heal, he discovered he had been living under a dark spiritual cloud of legalism:

"I tried to keep what I thought were God's commandments, only to meet with repeated failure. And upon the heels of failure came self-hatred and despair. The worst of it was that I could not very well sort out God's attitude toward me from my own. This is where my religion was so deadly. I had a God who was the epitome of warmth, forgiveness, and understanding when I had been reduced to despair, hopelessness and raw need. But once I undertook to live for Him, there was no pleasing Him. I simply could not do well enough in my Christian life to maintain fellowship with Him. In other words, fellowship was not something that sprang from mutual love and acceptance; it was something earned. I had to perform up to a certain level before I could win the continuing sense of His love and acceptance. So even though I knew in my mind that God was gracious, yet at the heart-habit level I acted as if He were not. I was a legalist through and through."

Is that really the type of relationship Jesus died to give us? What about "you will know the truth and the truth will set you free?" What about "come to me all who are heavy-burdened and I will give you rest?"

Under the law, God-followers tried their best to be righteous. Looking at God's perfect law was like looking at jewelry in a store window; you can appreciate it and want it but you can't quite get to it. It's beyond our grasp. And because the standard is perfection, any flaw is magnified. As James 2:10 put it, "...whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." If I do 100 good things, how do I know I don't need to do 101? The dangling "carrot" of God's approval is maddeningly just beyond our reach, because we are flawed people. As a friend of mine put it, the Old Covenant is like a wonderful toy in attractive packaging but with the familiar disclaimer "batteries not included." God knew it wouldn't work with us, because while we could appreciate righteousness, we lacked the spiritual ability to be righteous.

In Jesus' day, the Jewish leaders had re-defined righteousness as outward acts, behaviors that, though rigorous, were externally achievable. But in his Sermon on the Mount,

Jesus made the shocking claim that his followers needed a righteousness that "exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees." He called for an inside-out righteousness of the heart, not just external behaviors. Jesus' hearers were stunned; how can you be better than the religious experts? Their natural response was to cry out for help. They realized they needed grace. And that's exactly what Jesus intended to bring.

Ray Stedman wrote:

"There is still one final misunderstanding. This is the idea that it is quite optional whether a Christian lives by Law or grace. That is, if grace is found too difficult or demanding, the Lord will accept sincere legalism. Nothing could be further from the truth. Legalism is sin! If you discover it in your heart, you ought to be down on your face before God repenting and confessing the thing. It is corrupting; it is vile; it is disturbing; it destroys the unity of the Spirit and produces the works of the flesh in your life."

What is legalism? Legalism is the notion that God accepts me because of what I do. It is the idea that my relationship with Him depends upon my self-reliant performance.

New Covenant Grace: The Radical Message of the New Testament

The Apostle Paul has been called the "apostle of the heart set free." After meeting Jesus unexpectedly on the road to Damascus, he spent the rest of his life proclaiming the radical truth, so foreign to his Old-Covenant upbringing and culture, that an entirely new kind of relationship with God had been made available by Christ. The law, good as it was as an accurate representation of God's holiness, had been surpassed by a grace-based covenant, which sets us free not only for heaven but for right now.

"Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory... will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!" (2 Corinthians 3:7-9)

In Paul's day, the immediate response from legalists to this new teaching was that it must be wrong. Well-meaning Jewish Christians tried to bring novice Gentile believers back under the "protective custody" of the law. But Paul, in his fiery letter to the Galatians, fought for the freedom of the gospel:

"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (Galatians 3:1-3)

According to Paul, the Christian life was not supposed to be lived as a set of impersonal rules and regulations and formulas, but in the freedom of a personal relationship with a

personal God, the Holy Spirit. Paul's detractors wondered, "What will keep these new Christians in check if they don't have the Law? (Never mind that no one was ever able to keep the Law in the past.) Certainly they need the controls we impose upon them!" Paul's response was that these new Gentile Christians had been radically changed from the inside. They were not the same people they had been. They would no longer live like their old selves because their old selves were gone. They had been made new. Yes, they still had the flesh, that tendency and ability to sin. But they now had a new nature, and the indwelling Spirit who was committed to changing them. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6) "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Paul went further, as he wrote in Galatians 5: "It was for freedom that Christ set you free." Freedom from impossible standards, freedom from self-imposed guilt, freedom from a tentative standing before God. Christians are new creations, secure with a loving father we call "Abba", who live a new life not by the letter but by the Spirit, motivated by gratitude for all we've been given. (2 Corinthians 3:6, 5:17, Romans 8:15)

What's My Motivation?

Jesus established a New Covenant that was fundamentally different. He introduced a new kind of spiritual motivation: gratitude versus guilt, inspiration versus fear, trust in God versus self-reliance. People are used to a shame-based "have-to" motivation. But God wants to motivate us by the sheer astonishing magnitude of His grace. He wants us to be so moved by the love of Jesus that our whole lives are a response to His goodness towards us. In 2 Corinthians 5:14 Paul revealed what really made him tick: "the love of Christ controls and urges and compels us."

David Seamands, author of [Healing Grace](#), wrote:

"A lifetime of counseling evangelical Christians has driven me to a disturbing conclusion: the basic cause of many of our most troubling emotional and spiritual problems is insufficient grace. Although we sing "Amazing Grace" and vigorously proclaim salvation by grace through faith alone, grace is largely head knowledge, a truth believed about God but not a living experience with God. Being restless achievers instead of resting believers causes a whole variety of personal problems. These range all the way from anxiety, guilt, and low self-esteem to severe emotional breakdown. I am convinced that the failure to receive and live out God's unconditional grace and the corresponding failure to offer grace to others are at the root of it all."

Grace is... the truth that, as a Christian, my relationship with God is based upon his free, unconditional love. I cannot do anything that will make Him love me any more or less than He does right now.

Misunderstandings About Grace

Sometimes people reject the idea of God's grace because they simply misunderstand it. Some common misconceptions are:

- *Grace means we don't need to encourage people to be righteous.*
No one reading the Bible carefully would come away with the sense that Christianity doesn't care about ethics or morals. Every New Testament book talks about developing a holy, righteous life. The issue is motivation: law motivates by guilt and fear, grace motivates by love. Under law we attempt to be righteous so that God will accept us; under grace we desire to serve Him because of His unconditional love.
- *Grace means that sin has no consequences.*
There is no sin that Christ did not pay for, and therefore there will be no future condemnation in heaven for believers. However, when we choose to sin there very well may be earthly consequences. If I steal something or murder someone, I will probably go to jail. If I have an affair it will affect my family life. God can bring healing and restoration to many situations, but we will reap what we sow.
- *Grace means God doesn't care about sin.*
In Ephesians 4:30 it says that Christians can "grieve" the Holy Spirit. Like a good father, God desires the best for us, and He will even go so far as to discipline us if we get too far off the trail. But the punishment for our sins, the just wrath of God, was taken by Christ. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1) If God didn't care about sin, He wouldn't have paid the ultimate price to get rid of it.

In his paper, "Doing What Comes Unnaturally," Ray Stedman dealt with several of these issues:

"There is yet another misunderstanding: This is a very common one and a very serious one. It is the thinking that says the standards of grace are much lower than the standards of legalism. The argument goes something like this, in various forms: "True Christians," someone says, "never use tobacco, or dance, or go to the movies, or go to the theater, or gamble, or drink. And since you sometimes see those who say they are living by grace do some of these things, it therefore proves the standards of grace are lower than those of the Law." Actually, the reverse is true. In the light of the Word of God, which alone must set the standards for believers, these outward acts — smoking, drinking, dancing, movies, theater, gambling, etc. — are much less serious sin, if they are sin at all, than the inward, vicious sins of the spirit that legalists almost invariably permit in their own lives. Legal standards always concern themselves with outward acts. As long as you can keep the outward aspect of your life adjusted to a particular rule or standard, you can consider yourself spiritual. But grace does not stop there. Grace goes beyond the outward act into the heart,

and says the heart must be right as well. The spirit must be righteous in God's sight. The standards of grace are concerned with those inward attitudes that create the outward act."

What Does a Grace-Based Church Look Like?

- **Freedom**

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- **Dependence on the Spirit Rather Than Formulas**

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Conclusion

The message of grace, then, is stunningly radical. There's nothing like it in the world, or in any other religion. Although it is free to us, it cost God the death of His Son. Inexplicably, it was worth it to Him to suffer so that we might have life. And that's why it's called... "amazing."

"Grace is the central invitation to life and the final word. It's the beckoning nudge and the overwhelming, undeserved mercy that urges us to change and grow, and then gives us the power to pull it off." — Tim Hansel

"There is, however, one absolutely inescapable condition that must be met if grace is to change a person. Grace must be believed." — Joseph Cooke

Grace-Related Books

- *Abba's Child*, by Brennan Manning
- *Authentic Christianity*, by Ray Stedman
- *Celebration of Grace*, by Joseph Cooke
- *Free at Last*, by Ron Ritchie
- *Grace Walk*, by Steve McVey
- *Healing Grace*, by David Seamands
- *Messy Spirituality*, by Mike Yaconelli
- *The Grace Awakening*, by Chuck Swindoll
- *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, by Henri Nouwen
- *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, by Brennan Manning
- *Transforming Grace*, by Jerry Bridges
- *What's So Amazing about Grace?*, by Philip Yancey

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 6: HOW DO I GROW?

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18)

Philippians 2:12-13

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

In verse 12, the phrase “work out your salvation” really means “to grow spiritually.” It reflects a partnership between us and God, and the process of spiritual growth is called “sanctification.” We are asked to put effort into our spiritual growth (for instance, we make choices to pray, or read the Bible, or serve others), but those choices are always in partnership with the Holy Spirit. Our efforts are not legalistic works that earn points for us. The whole process is based on grace, not law.

God created the differences we see in each other’s personalities and characters. There is no one path to spiritual growth. Just as God created these differences, we celebrate the differences through various means and methods in how we pursue Jesus.

- Thinking back over your spiritual life, what were **the top three situations or events** that produced the most spiritual growth in your life? Why do you think that was? What were some of the ingredients in those situations that helped you to grow?

1.

2.

3.

Spiritual disciplines are the different ways that we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to pursue growth, and they vary from person to person. Sometimes these disciplines (things like prayer, journaling, Bible memorization, meditation, etc.) are called “spiritual practices.” What spiritual practices have been the most helpful to you?

- For this lesson, READ the “GROWTH” paper found at the end of the study.

READ the following excerpt from Henri Nouwen's article "Moving From Solitude to Community to Ministry." In this he describes the spiritual discipline of solitude and why it's so important – why Jesus practiced it, and why we should as well.

Solitude is being with God and God alone.
Is there any space for that in your life?

Why is it so important that you are with God and God alone on the mountain top? It's important because it's the place in which you can listen to the voice of the One who calls you the beloved. To pray is to listen to the One who calls you "my beloved daughter," "my beloved son," "my beloved child." To pray is to let that voice speak to the center of your being, to your guts, and let that voice resound in your whole being.

Who am I? I am the beloved. That's the voice Jesus heard when he came out of the Jordan River: "You are my beloved; on you my favor rests." And Jesus says to you and to me that we are loved as he is loved. That same voice is there for you. When you are not claiming that voice, you cannot walk freely in this world.

Jesus listened to that voice all the time, and he was able to walk right through life. People were applauding him, laughing at him; praising him and rejecting him; calling "Hosanna!" and calling "Crucify!" But in the midst of that, Jesus knew one thing—I am the beloved; I am God's favorite one. He clung to that voice.

There are many other voices speaking—loudly: "Prove that you are the beloved." "Prove you're worth something." "Prove you have any contribution to make." "Do something relevant." "Be sure you make a name for yourself." "At least have some power—then people will love you; then people will say you're wonderful, you're great."

These voices are so strong in this world. These were the voices Jesus heard right after he heard "You are my beloved." Another voice said, "Prove you are the beloved. Do something. Change these stones into bread. Be sure you're famous. Jump from the temple, and you will be known. Grab some power so you have real influence. Don't you want some influence? Isn't that why you came?"

Jesus said, "No, I don't have to prove anything. I am already the beloved."

I love Rembrandt's painting "The Return of the Prodigal Son." The father holds his son, and says, "You are my beloved. I'm not going to ask you any questions. Wherever you have gone, whatever you have done, and whatever people say about you, you're my beloved. I hold you safe in my embrace. I touch you. I hold you safe under my wings. You can come home to me whose name is Compassionate, whose name is Love."

If you keep that in mind, you can deal with an enormous amount of success as well as an enormous amount of failure without losing your identity, because your identity is that you are the beloved. Long before your father and mother, your brothers and sisters, your teachers, your church, or any people touched you in a loving as well as in a wounding way—long before you were rejected by some person or praised by somebody else—that voice has been there always. "I have loved you with an everlasting love."

That love is there before you were born and will be there after you die.

A life of fifty, sixty, seventy, or a hundred years is just a little moment in which you can say, "Yes, I love you too." God has become so vulnerable, so little, so dependent in a manger and on a cross and is begging us, "Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you really love me?"

That's where ministry starts, because your freedom is anchored in claiming your belovedness. That allows you to go into this world and touch people, heal them, speak with them, and make them aware that they are beloved, chosen, and blessed. When you discover your belovedness by God, you see the belovedness of other people and call that forth. It's an incredible mystery of God's love that the more you know how deeply you are loved, the more you will see how deeply your sisters and your brothers in the human family are loved.

Now this is not easy. Jesus spent the night in prayer. That's a picture of the fact that prayer is not something you always feel. It's not a voice you always hear with these ears. It's not always an insight that suddenly comes to you in your little mind. (God's heart is greater than the human heart, God's mind is greater than the human mind, and God's light is so great that it might blind you and make you feel like you're in the night.)

But you have to pray. You have to listen to the voice who calls you the beloved, because otherwise you will run around begging for affirmation, for praise, for success. And then you're not free.

Oh, if we could sit for just one half hour a day doing nothing except taking a simple word from the gospel and putting it in front of us—say, "The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want." Say it three times, and we know it's not true, because we want many things. That's exactly why we're so nervous. But if we keep saying the truth, the real truth—"The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want"—and let that truth descend from our mind into our heart, gradually those words are written on the walls of our inner holy place. That becomes the space in which we can receive our colleagues and our work, our family and our friends, and the people whom we will meet during the day.

The trouble is, as soon as you sit and become quiet, you think, Oh, I forgot this. I should call my friend. Later on I'm going to see him. Your inner life is like a banana tree filled with monkeys jumping up and down.

Solitude is where spiritual ministry begins. That's where Jesus listened to God. That's where we listen to God.

Sometimes I think of life as a big wagon wheel with many spokes. In the middle is the hub. Often in ministry, it looks like we are running around the rim trying to reach everybody. But God says, "Start in the hub; live in the hub. Then you will be connected with all the spokes, and you won't have to run so fast."

SOUL-TRAINING EXERCISE: Lectio Divina *

Lectio divina is an ancient spiritual practice that many people have found helpful over many centuries. It is not strange or mystical, but simply a way of slowing down to read Scripture and listen to what God teaches us in the process. A benefit of lectio divina is that there is less temptation to read solely in order to consume information (a temptation of studying inductively). In whatever way you interact with the Bible, Scripture is meant to be read with ears open to hear God's voice through his Word and respond!

To practice lectio divina yourself, select a passage of Scripture. For this week, choose **Isaiah 55** or **Psalms 23**. Set a timer for 20 minutes (so you don't think about how much time you have left), and go through the following exercise slowly. Enjoy the time. Listen to the Holy Spirit.

- **Silencio (silence):** Prepare to enter this devotional time by singing a hymn, reading a psalm, or praying. Thank God for life and his presence. This time is for you to slow down and focus. Sit comfortably, alert, and relaxed. Try, if you can, to put away your thoughts of the day and ready yourself to listen. Start with a simple prayer, such as: "Lord, put me in a place to enter into your presence."
- **Lectio (reading):** Read the passage aloud (or silently, if you are not in a place where you can read aloud). Listen for a word that sticks out to you (for example, in Psalm 23, it could be "shepherd" or "dwell" or "green pastures"). Read the passage again. If one word or phrase stood out the first time, see if it does the second time. Begin to repeat this word or phrase to yourself and let it resonate with you. If nothing sticks out, that is okay; just read again! Imagine someone taking a highlighter and pointing out one word or phrase. Remember, this is not a performance-driven exercise (spiritual devotions are not meant to be about performance; they're meant for worship of our Most High God!). Focus on spending time with God in his Word.
- **Meditatio (meditation):** Reread the passage. Meditate upon your word or phrase and ask God how this word speaks to your life. This could be a realization, image, thought, etc. Let your imagination be engaged, as well as your heart and mind. As these images, thoughts, and feelings come to you, take time to think about them. When you feel like praying, move to the next phase.
- **Oratio (prayer):** Pray what you most desire to say to God, and then listen! Journal and write down thoughts that come to mind, and what you believe God is speaking to you. Listen to the Holy Spirit to discover a possible invitation relevant to today, the next few days, or the year to come. It could be an action to take, a truth to discover about God, a way of life to change, someone to forgive, or something to celebrate. As you sense God bringing the time to a close (or your timer goes off!) pray to close the time.
- **Contemplatio (contemplation):** Pray that you will be able to respond to God in the ways he's spoken. Celebrate hearing from God and simply be still. Reflect on the experience. Regardless of how you feel, thank God for the chance to encounter him and his living Word. Ask God to bless you, especially if you feel called to an action.

* from Laura Abrams, Intervarsity. Adele Calhoun's [Spiritual Disciplines Handbook](#) has become a standard for those who want to expand their knowledge of spiritual practices.



GROWTH

The Christian Life is different: harder, and easier. Christ says, "Give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work. I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked — the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself, my own will shall become yours." — C.S. Lewis

Once we've experienced God's grace, we want to grow. In Philippians 3:10 the apostle Paul revealed his main passion in life: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings." In 2 Corinthians 5:14 he described how that motivated him: "For Christ's love compels us..." The Greek word for "compel" means to control, dominate, to hold in its grip. Paul never recovered from discovering the astonishing love of Jesus for him, such an unlikely and unworthy recipient. So it is for us. We don't want to stay the same. Something within us makes us want to grow, to pursue Jesus and to be more like Him. This theme of growth resonates throughout the New Testament:

- "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow." - 1 Corinthians 3:6-7
- "What we're hoping for is that as your lives grow in faith, you'll play a part within our expanding work." - 1 Cor. 10:15
- "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ." - Eph. 4:15
- "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation." - 1 Peter 2:2
- "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." - 2 Peter 3:18

Sanctification: The Process of Progressive Spiritual Transformation

A redeeming encounter with Jesus leaves us changed people. But the initial change is just the beginning of more change – in fact, the start of a lifetime of change. As followers of Jesus we are no longer the people we used to be and yet we are not the people we will eventually be. One of Jesus' best friends, the apostle John, described it like this:

"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2)

And so it appears that the goal of God in the changing of man is to make us like His Son. He is the model, the one to emulate. Without destroying our unique personalities, He is intent on transforming our fallen selves until we resemble Christ.

The Greek word for transformation is the basis for our English word "metamorphosis." We use it to describe the changing of a lowly caterpillar into a soaring butterfly. It occurs four times in the New Testament; twice in the Gospels (describing Jesus on the mount of transfiguration), once in Romans 12:2 ("*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*"), and once in 2 Corinthians 3:18. In this last verse Paul is writing to the Corinthians about the glory of the New Covenant. Unlike Moses, who wore a veil over his face, we have had a spiritual veil removed so that we can see⁴⁴

the "glory of God in the face of Christ." Paul uses that metaphor to describe our spiritual awakening, our God-given release from blindness. But he doesn't stop there. He continues to portray the process we have come to call "sanctification" – the progressive change that takes place over a Christian's lifetime.

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

We have "unveiled faces." And we simultaneously "reflect" and "behold" (the word for "reflect," translated, means both) the Lord's glory. As we do that, the Holy Spirit works on us and in us, so that a progressive "morphing" takes place. Lo and behold, often imperceptibly to us but often more visibly to others around us, the resemblance begins to take shape. The early Christians experienced this osmosis:

"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13)

It was apparent to others that they had been with Jesus. Perhaps it was their language or manners, but in some significant way their three-year association with Christ had begun to rub off in a way that others could notice.

John Ortberg, in his book The Life You've Always Wanted, writes:

"The little word morph has a long history. It comes from one of the richest Greek words in the NT. 'Morphoo' means 'the inward and real formation of the essential nature of a person.' Paul used this word in his letter to the Galatians: 'until Christ is formed in you.' We are pregnant with possibilities of spiritual growth and moral beauty so great that they cannot be adequately described as anything less than the formation of Christ in our very lives.

The primary goal of spiritual life is human transformation. It is not making people sure they know where they're going after they die, or helping them have a richer interior life, or seeing that they have lots of information about the Bible. The first goal of spiritual life is the reclamation of the human race."

What's God's Part? What's My Part?

So – how does this happen? Is it automatic? If it were automatic, then wouldn't all Christians look the same, or at least be equally mature? And yet we're obviously not. So then, is it completely dependent on my spiritual efforts? That was the conclusion I came to early in my Christian life. I assumed that God had done all the work to get me to heaven, so now it was my job to serve Him and try to conform myself to what He wanted me to be. As you can imagine, that didn't last long. I soon sank into a no-win cycle of trial and error, the emphasis being on error. And my errors mounted up substantially, so that I felt the need to ratchet up my spiritual activity level to the breaking point. Studying the Bible, saying yes to every ministry opportunity (I hadn't yet learned that the need is not necessarily the call), sharing my faith, praying multiple times a day, working with middle school kids (OK, *you* find a tougher group!) until my brain turned to mush. All good things really, but I assumed God was standing by, evaluating my work like an Olympic judge. The only way to get higher scores was by increasing the degree of difficulty.

In His mercy, God soon brought people and literature into my life to help me discover what grace was all about. But a by-product of discovering grace was that I also began to study sanctification and soon noticed that it was a partnership, not a sole proprietorship. In regards to justification (becoming a Christian) I was *not* a partner with God. I was spiritually dead and unable to contribute anything to my salvation, except to receive it. But once reborn, my growth as a follower *was* a partnership. God's Holy Spirit had taken up residence in me, as He does in every believer. I cannot tell you how encouraging it was to realize that God was not watching from the sidelines, but fully participating with me in this process for spiritual growth. He was in there with me in the daily battle, my Lord and my comrade, my counselor and my helper.

I noticed that God was just as passionate about my spiritual growth as He was about my spiritual birth. I was heartened by the book of Philippians, perhaps Paul's most positive letter. In the first chapter he writes: "... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." God started something in me which

He fully intends to finish. That's good news! One chapter later, there is an amazing couplet of verses which, for me anyway, put together the God's-part / my-part puzzle:

"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Philippians 2:12-13)

What does Paul mean by "work out your salvation"? Doesn't that go against the idea of grace? One commentator explains:

The biblical concept of salvation needs to be understood in order to comprehend Paul's intent here. Salvation has many aspects, including a present one. Hence, "working out" salvation does not mean "working for" salvation, but making salvation operational. Justification must be followed by sanctification, by which the new life in Christ is consciously appropriated and demonstrated. "With fear and trembling" does not contradict the joyful spirit permeating this letter. Christian joy is the experience of every believer, but holy fear of God that trembles at the thought of sin is also the attitude of the careful Christian.

So, in verse 12, "work out your salvation" is my part. I am to exert effort to pursue Christ. The Christian life is not passive, although at the same time that I work I am also to rest in Him — knowing His gracious love for me. But look at the next verse – "It is God who works in you." To me, this spells out God's part. It says that God is working in me. He not only enables me to live the Christian life ("to act") but He also even gives me the desire to do so ("to will"). How gracious is that? He doesn't even assume that I'll have a non-stop desire to follow Him, so He supplies that as well. The same commentator continues: *"The Philippian Christians can carry out the exhortation of verse 12 because God himself produces in believers both the desire to live righteously and the effective energy to do so."*

So, how does sanctification actually take place? At the risk of over-simplifying things, let's divide this process into two halves: things we think and things we do.

Concepts: Things We Need to Know

Much of sanctification happens in our thought-life. Paul writes in Romans 12: *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* In a sense, our fallen minds need to be re-programmed to see the world as God sees it, to perceive life through a Biblical worldview. A worldview is the grid through which we understand reality and answer the questions: is there a God? What is He like? What is the nature and purpose of man? Where did the world and the cosmos come from? Where is history going? The Scriptures address and answer all of these questions, and the combined answers make up what we call a Biblical worldview.

Theology is the systematic treatment of many of these same questions. It is the gleaning from the entire Bible of truths (doctrines) that God has revealed through the Scriptures. A working knowledge of these basic doctrines provides a foundation for the renewing of our minds. Books like Know What You Believe by Paul Little can

provide a solid start for beginners. Theology deals with God's attributes, the person and work of Christ, the meaning of sin and salvation, the identity of a believer, the nature of evil, Satan, angels and demons, the purpose of the church, and the "things to come" the consummation of history.

While all of these truths have been meaningful to me, some have had more of an effect on my daily life than others. For instance, a major concept for me has been the realization of my identity in Christ. I had to learn to see myself as God sees me, to accept the truth about his work in me regardless of whether my feelings matched up with that image. Sanctification is not just learning facts; it is the process of "owning" those truths, of letting them sink in, becoming part of how I see and respond to life. It is not just knowing about God, but gradually getting to know Him personally. Paul knew that a growing, increasingly intimate relationship with God would radically alter the lives of the new Christians he worked so hard to help. He revealed to them his prayer for them in the first chapter of Ephesians:

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."

Paul's desire was that the doctrines he had taught the Ephesians might find their way deep into their hearts, so that they instinctively applied Biblical truth to everyday situations. He wanted them to operate out of a personal relationship with God that was growing deeper all the time.

Practices: Things We Can Do

What can we do that will help us grow? Two of the greatest activities, loving others (groups and community) and serving others (gifts and mission) will be dealt with separately in later papers. So let's just focus on what we do as individuals.

Many of the actions that lead to spiritual growth have been called "spiritual disciplines." To begin with, it's important to remind ourselves that these activities can easily degenerate into mere religious duties which we mistakenly think will earn us our acceptance before God. In addition, we also can do them as a way to compete with other believers. This is precisely what Jesus warned against in the Sermon on the Mount: Matt 6:1, *"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' (praying, giving, fasting) before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."*

Instead, these are things we can do, which the Spirit can energize and use to help us get to know God better. Our motive is always gratitude for His grace, never a vain hope that we do them "so that" He will love us more.

- **Prayer**

Jews certainly knew about prayer before Jesus came along. But what He added was the invitation to come before God as "Abba" — "Daddy" — in an intimate, loving relationship in which we can pour out whatever is on

our hearts without fear of retribution or cold indifference. In essence this is what David did in the Psalms, and what Jesus and the New Testament writers later emphasized.

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)

Because it is relational, there is no "right way" to pray. It can take many forms, from a structured method to a literal walk in the park. Prayer is talking to God, telling Him what's going on inside us, sharing struggles, asking for help. But prayer is also listening:

"The garden of our private worlds is cultivated not only when we draw apart for times of silence and solitude, but also when we begin, in that environment, to deliberately practice the discipline of listening. I have not met many who know how to listen to God. Busy people find it hard to learn how. Most Christians learned at an early age how to talk to God, but they did not learn to listen well. We listen every time we open the Scriptures and place ourselves at the feet of the inspired writers who unfold the mysteries of God. We listen when we sensitize ourselves to the proddings of God's indwelling Holy Spirit." — Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World*

- **Bible study**

Because the Bible is alive, it is more than a book of facts. The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures in our lives to hone us and cause us to grow.

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Hebrews 4:12

Therefore we need to expose ourselves to the Bible on a regular basis. How often and how much? That's up to us. But like healthy nutrition, a regular diet of personal Bible reading provides fresh insight and guidance to our daily lives.

- **Journaling**

Some people love to write, and may even find that writing their thoughts to God is easier than praying. It can be, in fact, a way to pray. Gordon MacDonald, in *Ordering your Private World*, writes about his practice of journaling:

"I am reminded that the Lord once had the Israelites save 'three quarts of manna' (Ex 16:33) so that they would have a tangible reminder of His constant care. My journal became my 'three quarts,' for in it I had all the testimony I needed to the faithfulness of God in my life. This reminding process, which a journal provides, is very significant. Today after twenty years of journal keeping, I have acquired a habit. Hardly a morning passes that I do not open the journal and record the things I hear God saying through my reading, meditation, and daily experience. When the journal opens, so does the ear of my heart. If God is going to speak, I am ready to listen."

- **Solitude**

Henri Nouwen, a Catholic priest and prolific writer about

will run around begging for affirmation, for praise, for success. And then you're not free. Solitude is where spiritual ministry begins. That's where Jesus listened to God. That's where we listen to God."

- **Fasting**

Fasting is choosing to do without eating for a period of time in order to focus upon God. It is often coupled with praying for specific things. Again, it is not magic and it is not done with the thought that God will be more likely to answer our prayers if we suffer a bit. It is to deprive ourselves temporarily of immediate gratification and to realize our dependence upon Him.

- **Sabbath**

Although observing the Sabbath is not a New Testament command, it is still a spiritual practice that can help us. The whole original point of a Sabbath was to keep us from non-stop work, and to allow God to show us that He can help us get done in six days what we think will take seven. It is setting a day aside for relaxation, time with friends and family, allowing our brains and bodies to rest, to remember that God loves us and wants us to enjoy life. It means taking a break from everyday stress. The Westminster Catechism's first question – "What is the chief end of man?" – is answered by, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Taking a Sabbath break reminds us of that truth.

- **Meditation**

Learning spiritual truths in class, a book or by reading the Bible is great. Meditation takes it a step further. It means to set aside time to allow some of that truth to take root by dwelling on it. It may look like taking a walk and repeating a few memorized verses over and over, or picking them apart to see their hidden meaning, and taking time to allow deeper insights to come to us. Have you ever received an especially significant letter from someone you love? You probably spent the next few days delightedly obsessing over the meaning of each phrase, turning them over in your mind. That's meditation.

- **Music & the Arts**

What other practices have you found meaningful? God is the giver of our sense of creativity, and if you're an artist, perhaps you find you're most "alive" when you're listening to music, playing an instrument, painting, writing music, working with wood or writing a poem. Don't be afraid to bring your relationship with God into that part of your life. The lordship of Christ extends to all of life, not just a truncated "religious" section of our lives. Take the composer George Frederic Handel, for example. In the summer of 1741 Handel, at the peak of his musical prowess but depressed and in debt, set out to write The Messiah and finished it in an astonishing 24 days, rarely leaving his room and hardly stopping to eat. While writing the "Hallelujah Chorus," his servant discovered him with tears in his eyes. He exclaimed, "I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and the great God Himself!"

The Goal: A Christ-Centered Life

The book of Proverbs describes the wise person as one who not only knows about God but has put truth into practice so that his life is full of "hokma" – Hebrew for the "skill of living." Wisdom is knowledge plus application, all within the context of knowing God. Proverbs chapter two portrays our relationship with God in the form of a father teaching his young son:

*My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,
turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding,
and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding,
and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,
then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.*

In the New Testament the goal of spiritual transformation is "Christlikeness." The Holy Spirit is working in us, filling us, producing spiritual results: *"... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."*

That's where we're headed, as a church body and as individuals:

"...until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13)

Recommended Reading

- Renovation of the Heart, by Dallas Willard
- Invitation to a Journey, by Robert Mulholland
- Know What You Believe, by Paul Little
- The Life You've Always Wanted, by John Ortberg
- Living by the Book, by Howard Hendricks
- Knowledge of the Holy, by A.W. Tozer
- Discipleship Essentials, by Greg Ogden
- The Fight, by John White
- Growing in Grace, by Bob George

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 7: PRAYER, TALKING TO GOD

“Prayer gets us in on what God is doing.”

- Eugene Peterson

“Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not in the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference.” – Max Lucado

“To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”

– Martin Luther

The Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:5-13, Luke 11:2-4)

“When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. “When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!”

Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don’t let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

- Jesus begins by correcting some well-known dysfunctional current practices of prayer. What are they, and why do you think he does this?
- Jesus walks us through several issues in this prayer. What are they, and how could they help you as you pray?

The Holy Spirit helps us

“And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God’s own will.”

- Romans 8:26-27

“Simple Prayer involves ordinary people bringing ordinary concerns to a loving and compassionate Father. There is no pretense in Simple Prayer. We do not pretend to be more holy, more pure, or more saintly than we actually are. We do not try to conceal our conflicting and contradictory motives from God—or ourselves.

And in this posture we pour out our heart to the God who is greater than our heart and who knows all things.”

– Richard J. Foster, Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home

How does this passage from Romans 8, along with the Richard Foster quote, help you as you pray?

Paul’s prayers for the Ephesian believers

Paul was in prison, probably in Rome, and he could not travel to see his friends in the city of Ephesus. He knew they were living in a culture of intense spiritual warfare and religious intimidation. So he prayed these prayers for them. True to Paul, they are complex and somewhat mind-boggling. Don’t worry about understanding every point. Read them and try to summarize his main ideas. (Hint: focus on verse 1:18-19 and 3:17-18.)

1:15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

3:14 When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, 15 the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. 16 I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. 17 Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. 18 And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. 19 May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. 20 Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PSALMS

The following is Eugene Peterson's introduction to the Psalms in his translation of them in *The Message*.

Most Christians for most of the Christian centuries have learned to pray by praying the Psalms. The Hebrews, with several centuries of a head start on us in matters of prayer and worship, provided us with this prayer book that gives us a language adequate for responding to the God who speaks to us.

As a pastor I was charged with, among other things, teaching people to pray, helping them to give voice to the entire experience of being human, and to do it both honestly and thoroughly. I found that it was not as easy as I expected. Getting started is easy enough. The impulse to pray is deep within us, at the very center of our created being, and so practically anything will do to get us started—"Help" and "Thanks!" are our basic prayers. But honesty and thoroughness don't come quite as spontaneously.

Faced with the prospect of conversation with a holy God who speaks worlds into being, it is not surprising that we have trouble. We feel awkward and out of place: "I'm not good enough for this. I'll wait until I clean up my act and prove that I am a decent person." Or we excuse ourselves on the grounds that our vocabulary is inadequate: "Give me a few months—or years!—to practice prayers that are polished enough for such a sacred meeting. Then I won't feel so stuttery and ill at ease."

My usual response when presented with these difficulties is to put the Psalms in a person's hand and say, "Go home and pray these. You've got wrong ideas about prayer; the praying you find in these Psalms will dispel the wrong ideas and introduce you to the real thing." A common response of those who do what I ask is surprise—they don't expect this kind of thing in the Bible. And then I express surprise at their surprise: "Did you think these would be the prayers of nice people? Did you think the psalmists' language would be polished and polite?"

Untutored, we tend to think that prayer is what good people do when they are doing their best. It is not. Inexperienced, we suppose that there must be an "insider" language that must be acquired before God takes us seriously in our prayer. There is not. Prayer is elemental, not advanced, language. It is the means by which our language becomes honest, true, and personal in response to God. It is the means by which we get everything in our lives out in the open before God.

But even with the Psalms in their hands and my pastoral encouragement, people often tell me that they still don't get it. In English translation, the Psalms often sound smooth and polished, sonorous with Elizabethan rhythms and diction. As literature, they are beyond compare. But as prayer, as the utterances of men and women passionate for God in moments of anger and praise and lament, these translations miss something. Grammatically, they are accurate. The scholarship undergirding the translations is superb and devout. But as prayers they are not quite right. The Psalms in Hebrew are earthy and rough. They are not genteel. They are not the prayers of nice people, couched in cultured language.

And so in my pastoral work of teaching people to pray, I started paraphrasing the Psalms into the rhythms and idiom of contemporary English. I wanted to provide men and women access to the immense range and the terrific energies of prayer in the kind of language that is most immediate to them, which also happens to be the language in which these psalm prayers were first expressed and written by David and his successors.

I continue to want to do that, convinced that only as we develop raw honesty and detailed thoroughness in our praying do we become whole, truly human in Jesus Christ, who also prayed the Psalms.

Recommended Reading:

- [How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People](#), by Pete Greig
- [Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home](#), by Richard Foster

Soul-Training Exercise: Pray John Stott's Morning Prayer

John R. W. Stott (1921 - 2011) was born in London and was an evangelical Anglican, preacher, and teacher of Scripture. He was ordained in 1945 and for most of his years served in various capacities at All Souls Church in London, where he carried out an effective urban pastoral ministry. A leader among evangelicals in Britain, the United States and even around the world, Stott was a principal framer of the landmark Lausanne Covenant (1974). Whether in the West or in the Third World, a hallmark of Stott's ministry has been expository preaching that addresses not only the hearts but also the minds of contemporary men and women. Stott wrote numerous books, such as Basic Christianity and The Cross of Christ, both published by IVP.

Stott wrote the following prayer, which is notable for its focus on the Trinity. This week, pray this prayer each morning. Note how it affects your thinking throughout the day, and discuss this in your group when you meet next time.

*Good morning heavenly Father,
good morning Lord Jesus,
good morning Holy Spirit.*

*Heavenly Father, I worship you as the creator and sustainer of the universe.
Lord Jesus, I worship you, Savior and Lord of the world.
Holy Spirit, I worship you, sanctifier of the people of God.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.*

*Heavenly Father, I pray that I may live this day in your presence
and please you more and more.
Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you.
Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and
cause your fruit to ripen in my life:
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

*Holy, blessed and glorious Trinity, three persons in one God,
have mercy upon me.
Amen.*



dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 8: GOD'S NEW COMMUNITY

When I first became a Christian, I was overwhelmed by the idea that I now had a personal relationship with God... and that's all I wanted. Soon, someone explained to me that I wasn't alone in this, and that I had a whole new spiritual "family" that I needed to pay attention to. As an introvert, I wasn't so thrilled with that idea. In fact, the thought of sharing something so intimate as my relationship with God with a bunch of people I had not chosen did not appeal to me at all. But I gradually warmed up to it, and now, looking back over several decades, I cannot think of many defining moments in my life that did not include brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.

- **Discuss:** thinking back over your life, what was your most intense experience of being part of a community (church, family, sports team, small group)?

Acts chapter two is an amazing account of three things: the coming of the promised Holy Spirit, the emerging leadership of Peter through a shockingly effective sermon, and finally, a snapshot of the early life of the infant church.

Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 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, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

- What were the essential ingredients, the core activities of this new thing called the "church" (literally, the Greek word *ecclesia*, which meant "the called-out ones.")

1. READ the “COMMUNITY” article at the end of this study.

2. READ this excerpt from the book Life Together, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

So between the death of Christ and the Last Day it is only by a gracious anticipation of the last things that Christians are privileged to live in visible fellowship with other Christians. It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in this world to share God’s Word and sacrament. Not all Christians receive this blessing. The imprisoned, the sick, the scattered lonely, the proclaimers of the Gospel in heathen lands stand alone. They know that visible fellowship is a blessing. They remember, as the Psalmist did, how they went “with the multitude to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday” (Ps 42:4).

The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer. Longingly, the imprisoned apostle Paul calls his “dearly beloved son in the faith,” Timothy, to come to him in prison in the last days of his life; he would see him again and have him near. Paul has not forgotten the tears Timothy shed when last they parted (2 Tim 1:4). Remembering the congregation in Thessalonica, Paul prays “night and day exceedingly that we might see your face” (1 Thess 3:10). The aged John knows that his joy will not be full until he can come to his own people and speak face to face instead of writing with ink (2 John 12).

The believer feels no shame when he yearns for the physical presence of other Christians. Man was created a body, the Son of God appeared on earth in the body, he was raised in the body, in the sacrament the believer receives the Lord Christ in the body, and the resurrection of the dead will bring about the perfected fellowship of God’s spiritual-physical creatures. The believer therefore lauds the Creator, the Redeemer, God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for the bodily presence of a brother. The prisoner, the sick person, the Christian in exile sees in the companionship of a fellow Christian a physical

sign of the gracious presence of the triune God. Visitor and visited in loneliness recognize in each other the Christ who is present in the body; they receive and meet each other as one meets the Lord, in reverence, humility, and joy. They receive each other’s benedictions as the benediction of the Lord Jesus Christ. But if there is so much blessing and joy even in a single encounter of brother with brother, how inexhaustible are the riches that open up for those who by God’s will are privileged to live in the daily fellowship of life with other Christians!

It is true, of course, that what is an unspeakable gift of God for the lonely individual is easily disregarded and trodden under foot by those who have the gift every day. It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace, a gift of the Kingdom of God that any day may be taken from us, that the time that still separates us from utter loneliness may be brief indeed. Therefore, let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God’s grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (4 February 1906 – 9 April 1945) was a Lutheran pastor, theologian, anti-Nazi dissident, and key founding member of the Confessing Church. His writings on Christianity's role in the secular world have become widely influential, and his book The Cost of Discipleship has been described as a modern classic. He was arrested in April 1943 by the Gestapo and imprisoned at Tegel prison for one and a half years. Later, he was transferred to Flossenbürg concentration camp. After being accused of being associated with the 20 July plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler, he was quickly tried, and then hanged on 9 April 1945 as the Nazi regime was collapsing.

SOUL-TRAINING EXERCISE: Worship *

The exercise for this week involves attending a worship service. This can be a church you regularly attend or one that you're visiting for the first time.

- Arrive early – so that you're not in a hurry.
- Prepare - your heart to fully engage with all parts of the service, including the singing and the message and whatever else is involved.
- Come with an openness - that Richard Foster calls "holy expectancy." Ask God to speak to you through Scripture and other elements of the service.
- Focus – on one aspect of worship this week and pay special attention to that (sermon, Bible reading, singing, Communion).
- Apply - one thing that you heard or that you sense God is wanting you to do this week - someone you need to speak with, a change you need to make, a new practice you need to make as you walk with God. Keep it simple.

* from The Good and Beautiful Community, by James Bryan Smith, p. 186.



Community

"If we are made in God's image, and He is three persons, then at our fundamental core we are made for community."
— Tim Keller

"The church is a community of people on a journey to God. Wherever there is supernatural togetherness and Spirit-directed movement, there is the church – a spiritual community. Why is spiritual community so rare? I suspect it has to do with the requirement of brokenness. We'd much rather be impressively intact than broken. But only broken people share spiritual community."

— Larry Crabb

"Americans are good at forming clubs and gathering crowds. But clubs and crowds, even when they are religious clubs and crowds, are not communities. The formation of community is the intricate, patient, painful work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot buy or make community; we can only offer ourselves to become community."

— Eugene Peterson

It happened to me while I was on a train in Scotland. I was 21 years old, and wondering what to do with my life. I had picked up an oddly-titled book at a Christian book store, I supposed because it intrigued me: Cinderella with Amnesia by Michael Griffiths, perhaps the worst title of all time. But then again, maybe not, since I can recall it now, 36 years later. It was a book about community - a living, breathing network of deep relationships — and it startled me because it was describing something I hadn't associated with deep, meaningful relationships: the church. I had grown up in a church - sort of, although our family didn't really seem to know anyone in particular there. And since I'd become a Christian, just two years earlier, I had viewed church as a place to learn and to do ministry, but it had never occurred to me that it could be a family, a place to be myself, to share life with actual friends. Here's the passage that stopped me in my tracks:

"The whole emphasis of Scripture is that Christians need the body, need each other, and cannot really exist as healthy, balanced Christians except as members of the body. To be an "independent operator," a kind of free-lance Christian, is not only to be missing the blessing you should derive from others, but also to be depriving them of your own contribution. It is not enough to say that you are a member of the universal church. You are properly required to be a member of that church in its local setting. The spectator Christian who merely attends services is missing part of the gospel."

Could he be telling the truth? Could church be more than what I'd already experienced? That wondering hope set me off on a quest to find authentic *koinonia* — Greek for "fellowship" — and the ensuing search turned up some things that changed my life...

God Creates Community: A Brief History

Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian, one of the founders of Willow Creek Church in Chicago and a professor at Wheaton College and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, used to point out that God is in the business of creating community. In fact, that

"Community is not easy. Somebody once said, 'Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives.'"

— Henry Nouwen

is what He always does. First of all, He is a holy community within Himself; the Trinity functions as three loving, communicating persons who are somehow mysteriously one in essence. Then, when God created man, He said, "It is not good for the man to be alone," and so He created woman — similar but not identical — complementary and unique. (And the man really liked her!) Adam and Eve soon had children and became a family — dysfunctional, to be sure, but still a family — another type of community. When God graciously began His plan of redemption, He chose one man, Abraham, and miraculously gave him a family, and over time his family multiplied into a nation-community: Israel. When God sent His son, Jesus did not live an isolated life, but chose a dozen men to do life with. They were His disciples, a roving mini-community, but He made a point to call them friends (John 15:15), and after the resurrection He made a special point to call them brothers (John 20:17). When Jesus ascended and the Spirit came, the church was born on the day of Pentecost. It was not just a massive gathering of

individuals, but an interconnected “body” of believers who sensed an inner shared life and expressed that life openly as a community. Here’s a snapshot of their common life together:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 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, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42-47)

And finally one day, when human history draws to a close, as revealed in the next-to-last chapter of the Bible, God will consummate His love relationship with His people:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.” (Revelation 21:1-3)

There you have it. God created, formed and redeemed humanity, all the while doing it through the vehicle of community.

And yet we have an inner conflict. We sense that we are wired for community, but we live in a society, especially here in America, which is highly competitive, consumer-driven and individualistic — not very community-friendly. Yet our desire for authentic community is reflected in some of the most highly-rated television shows in our culture: MASH, Cheers, Seinfeld, Friends, The Office. There’s even a new program called “Community.” Each of these shows features a quirky ensemble of characters with their own idiosyncrasies but who are necessary to the whole. And while we laugh at the strangest characters, at the same time we can’t imagine the group without them. We secretly long for a place where everybody knows your name, where you’re accepted, warts and all, and where you’re sincerely missed if you don’t show up.

Could the church be the place that meets that longing?

Jesus’ New Commandment and Paul’s Follow-up

The New Testament describes in detail what the life of this new community is to look like. Gathering His follower-friends for one last Passover dinner, Jesus announced that He was ready to issue a new directive. “A new command I

“Love — and the unity it attests to — is the mark Christ gave Christians to wear before the world.”

— Francis Schaeffer

give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). And just to prove how serious He was about this, He added in the very next verse: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” In other words, this “love” thing is not just a sidebar to being a fully-devoted follower – it’s the essential measuring stick. It’s the proof Jesus will offer to the world that a Christian really is a Christian. Francis Schaeffer, in his booklet [The Mark of the Christian](#) commented: “Love — and the unity it attests to — is the mark Christ gave Christians to wear before the world. Only with this mark may the world know that Christians are indeed Christians and that Jesus was sent by the Father.”

The Apostle Paul picks up where Jesus left off. In his epistles, Paul took this command to “love one another” and expanded on it. Like a prism that expands white light by showing all the intrinsic colors of the spectrum, so Paul’s use of the Greek word “allelon” (“one another”) spells out in detail what love looks like. (Outside of the gospels, the word occurs 58 times, and Paul’s share of that number is 40.) As portrayed by the “one anothers,” love is not so much a feeling as a conscious choice to act in certain ways in our relationships. A survey of the New Testament occurrences of “allelon” yields this partial list:

- love one another
- honor one another
- accept one another
- forgive one another
- encourage one another
- bear with one another

In addition to the “one another’s,” Paul also used a striking metaphor for the church that would highlight not only the need for connectedness but the fact that Christians are organically linked together. He spoke of the church as a “body,” and in the process he also dealt with the twin psychological problems of inferiority and superiority:

“The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ...”

Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, “I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand,” that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, “I am not part of the body because I am not an eye,” would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it." (1 Corinthians 12, New Living Translation)

Gene Getz, who wrote the groundbreaking book Sharpening the Focus of the Church at the beginning of the church renewal movement in the early 1970s, wrote:

"The church is pictured in the New Testament as a unique organism. Even in its local expression it is more than an organization. Every localized group of believers is composed of individual members, who are to function and be part of the whole."

But just because the church has the potential to experience deep community doesn't mean it always happens. Sometimes it occurs as a serendipity, but it usually takes some intentional effort. That may come in the form of someone risking rejection by sharing a vulnerability or struggle. Ray Stedman was pastor of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California for forty years, from 1950 to 1990. But it wasn't until he was almost halfway through his tenure there that he and the church began to discover what they called "body life." They began to devote their Sunday evening service to a time of sharing needs and then meeting them on the spot, whether they came in the form of prayer requests or physical needs, like a place to stay for the night. Ray wrote, "In the early church all Christians were intimately and actively involved in the vibrant life of the body. Their witness to unbelievers coupled with their love for each other rocked the Roman world. And it must be so again."

Throughout the 1970s churches began to realize that while large gatherings like Body Life were exciting, community was much more likely to happen in small groups. Call them what you want – fellowship groups, mini-churches, community groups, home groups – the point is to create a smaller expression of the larger church, a safe place, often in someone's home, where you can actually get to know one another. Small groups can "do life together." Each individual meeting may not be spectacular, but the long-term effect of caring for one another through life's ups and downs is priceless. Whether it's an exciting answer to a year-long prayer, or the angst of a negative report from the oncology center, who can you call who will really care? That's the beauty and value of small groups. And while it may be very meaningful for a pastor to visit you in the hospital, there's nothing like the praying presence of a group of friends who've come to know, love and support you.

John Ortberg, pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church,

writes in his article "The We We Want to Be,"

"When we hear the phrase spiritual formation, we usually think about individual lives. That's not a bad thing; Paul says he labors and struggles "to present everyone mature in Christ." However, Paul wasn't writing to an individual at the time. Most of the New Testament books are letters to congregations; to corporate bodies; to groups, not individuals.

If I'm a member of a gym, it may not matter much to me what kind of shape other people are in. I'm interested in my fitness. I don't have a strong investment in the fitness of other people. In fact, I don't mind a little flab in the bodies working out around me. It makes me feel better by comparison. I use the fitness center to get my body in shape. The fitness center is a tool for individuals.

The church is not a spiritual fitness center. The church is not a tool. The church is a body. It is *the* body. It is Christ's body."

Pain, Forgiveness and Celebration

But experiencing authentic community isn't always easy. Often it requires a conscious commitment, because in community we expose our weaknesses and flaws. We can hurt one another, and we may need to resolve conflicts. Frankly, that's messy, and many people would rather not take the risk. Sometimes we feel like Woody Allen, who said, "I wouldn't want to join any club that would accept me as a member." Jean Vanier, director of the L'Arche community for severely handicapped individuals, writes,

"Community is a place of pain, of the death of ego. In community, we are sacrificing independence and the pseudo-security of being closed up. We can only live this pain if we are certain that for us being in community is our response to a call from God. If we do not have this certitude, then we won't be able to stay in community."

Shortly before his death, the Catholic priest and writer Henri Nouwen described community in his 1995 article: "Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry." Using the account of Jesus' "long day" in Luke 6, Nouwen observed that Jesus began that day (actually the night before) in prayer, then spent time with his disciples, and finally ministered to the crowds of people with all of their various needs. Nouwen noted that in solitude Jesus allowed himself time to be reminded of his relationship with a Father who called him his beloved son, a practice we should emulate. That identity as the beloved was the core of his strength. But he did not venture out alone; he deliberately lived with and served in the context of his disciples. Using that paradigm, Nouwen made the following comments:

- "Why is it so important that solitude come before community? If we do not know we are the beloved sons

and daughters of God, we're going to expect someone in the community to make us feel that way. They cannot.

- Community is not easy. Somebody once said, 'Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives.'
- Within the discipline of community are the disciplines of forgiveness and celebration. Forgiveness and celebration are what make community, whether a marriage, a friendship, or any other form of community.
- What is forgiveness? Forgiveness is to allow the other person not to be God.
- This is where celebration, the second discipline of community, comes in. If you can forgive that another person cannot give you what only God can give, then you can celebrate that person's gift."

"...let him who has the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart."

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Despite the hassles of dealing with mess-creating sinners like ourselves, once we have tasted the blessings of authentic community, most people conclude that the downside is worth it. We sense that we were not made to go it alone, as tempted as we are to try it, and that God has somehow wired us to experience life with others. When we are accepted and known and cared about, we begin to feel we are part of a team, that life is not just about me.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor in Nazi Germany during World War II, experienced authentic community with fellow believers in a sort of underground fellowship. He was captured and imprisoned, and finally executed shortly before the Allies liberated Europe. He described his experiences of real "koinonia" in the book [Life Together](#):

"It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace that any day may be taken from us. Therefore, let him who has the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren."

Recommended Reading

- [Body Life](#), by Ray Stedman
- [The Body](#), by Chuck Colson
- [Life Together](#), by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- [Cinderella with Amnesia](#), by Michael Griffiths
- [The Mark of the Christian](#), by Francis Schaeffer
- [The Safest Place on Earth](#), by Larry Crabb
- [Love One Another](#), by Gerald Sittser
- [Building Up One Another](#), by Gene Getz
- Articles in Leadership Journal:
 - o John Ortberg, "The We We Want to Be" (Spring 2010)
 - o Henri Nouwen, "Moving From Solitude to Community to Ministry" (April 1, 1995)

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 9: EQUIPPING, WHAT LEADERS DO

READ Ephesians 4:4-16

Ephesians 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it...

11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 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.

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 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.

Historical Note: the “Fatal Comma” of the King James Version

When scholars translate the New Testament, since there was no punctuation in the original Greek, they have to put in punctuation marks, like commas, where they think they fit grammatically. Most of the time this does not have major consequences. However, when the King James Version was introduced in 1611, they decided to place a comma in Ephesians 4:12 after the word “saints.” Therefore, it read as follows:

“for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...”

A normal reading of that verse meant that the leaders (“apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers”) were supposed to 1) perfect or “equip” the saints, 2) do the work of the ministry, and 3) build up the body of Christ. That’s a lot of work for leaders, but not a lot of work for the “saints”. So, this led to the idea that leaders do everything, and regular saints don’t really do anything. This also led to the joke that professional Christians are “paid to be good,” while lay people are “good for nothing.” This translation lasted for about 300 years, until 20th-century scholars realized that it was a mistake. When they removed that comma, suddenly the “job” of leadership becomes clear, as well as the “job” of the saints. A good illustration of this is the NASB translation, where the “fatal” comma is obviously missing:

11 “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.... (NASB)

Someone has said that church can be a lot like a football game – “50,000 people in the stands in desperate need of exercise, and 22 players on the field in desperate need of rest.” For much of the past 2000 years, the idea was that “clergy” (professional Christians) did all the work and the “laity” (amateurs) sat and watched. But this passage, among others, teaches a different paradigm – that leaders are here to equip others to do ministry. The end result should be spiritual “employment” for both groups.

- Unity: what we all have in common. Paul mentions a lot of “one’s” in verses 4-5. What are they?
- Diversity: how we are different. Verse 7 introduces the concept of each Christian having a unique set of one or more “spiritual gifts.”
- Leadership: what they’re supposed to do. Paul lists 5 leadership gifts in 4:11. What is their job, according to verse 12?
- Maturity: what it looks like. What are some of the ingredients or signs of maturity portrayed in verses 13-16?
- On a scale of 1 -10, how would you rate your church life - more of a “spectator” or a “player”?
Spectator 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Player
- In what areas do you feel spiritually equipped to function in the Body? In what areas do you feel a need for more help?
- What do you think your spiritual gift(s) might be? We’ll be talking more about this in the few weeks.

READ the following excerpt from Brian Morgan's message on Ephesians 4. Brian is a teaching pastor at Peninsula Bible Church South in Cupertino, California.

Ephesians 4:11,12 *"...and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ..."*

Some take this to mean that the task of church leaders is to do three things: they must equip the saints, do the work of the ministry, and build up the body. This is the school of thought that says pastors should do all the work of the ministry, that they are responsible to meet everyone's needs, in other words. They must be available night and day for counseling, visitation of the sick, organizing committees, fund-raising, weddings, funerals, coaching, even maintenance of the church facilities. When a church functions this way, however, disaster is close at hand.

Moses is a good illustration in this regard. Because of his exalted position as leader of the nation during the Exodus, everyone who needed counseling came to him. But Jethro, his father-in-law, took him to task for responding to everyone who had a dispute. Here is what Jethro said, in Exodus 18:18, *"What you are doing is not good, you will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone..."* The solution was for Moses to quit being a full-time counselor and become instead a full-time teacher and discipler and allow the people whom he had trained to become the counselors (Moses would remain a part-time counselor for the most difficult cases). The apostle Paul would agree. This was how God designed the church to function.

The pastor's job description is but one thing: he is to "equip the saints for the work of service." "To equip" means "to restore something to its former conditions"; "to add what is lacking to something to

make it complete, fit for use"; "to prepare something creatively." The verb is used of mending a torn fishing net, setting a broken bone, or restoring a broken brother. "Equipping" here means being fitted out for a task, in relationship with others, so that, working together with the whole, nothing is lacking. Equipping, in other words, is a synonym for discipleship. If the pastor-teacher's job description is equipping the saints for the work of the ministry therefore, then the saint's job description is doing the work of the ministry.

I will always be indebted to one man who faithfully carried out this ministry in my life. David Roper took me under his wing when I was 19 and a sophomore in college, and he set about the process of equipping me. I asked him to teach a Bible study in my fraternity, but he refused my request and offered instead to teach me so that I in turn could teach my fraternity. Dave never took me out of my setting as a student or an athlete to do something that had religious connotations. He helped me become God's man in those very settings so that I could function as a minister of the gospel. Meeting him changed my life.

So there we have the foundations for growth in the church: Gifted leaders who know their job description, who faithfully teach God's word, discipling others to do the work of the ministry.

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 10: SERVING

READ Mark 10:41-45

41 When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. 42 So Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. 43 But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (NLT)

READ also Mark 10:32-40, the paragraph immediately preceding this one, which provides the context. Given what Jesus says in 32-34, why is it ironic that James & John focus on themselves?

How would you describe the conversation from 35-39? How does it strike you? How did the other disciples react when they found out about it?

When most people just see problems, Jesus sees teachable moments. So he calls a “huddle-up” meeting and addresses the issue with the whole gang of disciples. How would you paraphrase his main point in one short sentence?

- Give an example of how people in our culture use position to flaunt their authority or to get other people to serve them. Have you ever done that?
- We often use the phrase “servant leadership.” What would that look like in your life? Is there anyone that you have a position of authority over; how could you serve them this week?
- Who has been an example of servant leadership in your life? What did they do for you, or for others?
- **READ** the following article (“Ask for a Towel, Not a Title”). What does it add to this discussion?

Ask for a Towel, Not a Title

Developing servant-leaders in the local church.

by Derwin L Gray, Pastor, Transformation Church,
Indian Land, South Carolina

A little while back, I was in a conversation with a gentleman at our monthly newcomer's gathering. He was a Christ-follower who had walked with Jesus for many years. He asked the typical questions that someone would ask concerning the new local church he was considering joining, including what was our biblical basis for ministry. This was a great question.

I explained to him that one of our values is leadership development. This means that we are committed, through the Spirit's enabling power, to developing leaders. The church rises or falls on the shoulders of her leaders; therefore, every member must be seen as a "royal priest" and a leader (See 1 Peter 2:9).

Another value we teach is that we are a servant community. We describe it this way: "Transformation Church is committed, by the Spirit's enabling power, to develop a biblical, servant-hearted community, in which we serve each other through our grace-gifts as we serve in our spheres of influence by being the heart, hands, and feet of Jesus" (See John 13).

I told him that we are committed to developing leaders from our congregation who serve effectively at school or their jobs, as well as serve in a ministry role here in the local church. We believe a key ingredient to our discipleship and leadership development is serving people. In fact, nearly 90 percent of our staff has come from within our congregation.

More than 1,100 people serve in vital ministry roles. We don't use the word "volunteer" to describe them; instead, we use the word "servant-leader" because they lead by serving our community. Volunteering is something that's optional. When you are a member of the body of Christ, you have an essential function in maintaining the health and

life of the local church (Eph. 4:16). My heart doesn't "volunteer" to beat—it's a necessary role that must be fulfilled for my body to operate the way it was designed. Servant-leaders in the body of Christ are necessary in order for the local body to operate effectively.

The gentleman said basically that he didn't graduate from seminary to be a servant-leader, and I thought in my mind, "Yep, you'll be around for a month or so before you leave." This gentleman was looking for a title, instead of a towel. He left about a month later.

Ironically, about the same time there was another man, who had experienced great success in the corporate world, that came to me and said, "I'll clean toilets. Just let me know what I can do to serve. God has changed my life so much through this ministry; I just want to give back." After several years of behind-the-scenes service, this man is now on our executive leadership team.

So much of what I read in Christian circles on leadership is about "how to lead" instead of "how to embody what you want those you influence to become." I believe leadership is not telling people what to do, but living out yourself what you want those you influence to embody.

I believe leadership is not telling people what to do, but living out yourself what you want those you influence to embody.

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, his disciples argued over who would have the greatest title among them, "*And he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who*

serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves” (Luke 22:24–27, ESV).

The disciples wanted a title, and Jesus gave them a towel! Shockingly, Jesus--the Son of God, the King of Kings, the Great I Am--washed the feet of his disciples to embody the kind of leaders he wanted them to become.

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him” (John 13:3–5).

This is the essence of leadership--this is beauty and power. Imagine how different the world would be if we led this way?

How was Jesus able to humble himself?

Ken Boa in Conformed to His Image shares an insight into why Jesus, in his humanity, was able to humble himself:

- He knew where his dignity and power came from (“knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands”).
- He knew his significance and identity (“and that he had come from God”).
- He knew his security and destiny (“and was going back to God”).

When God’s people know that their dignity, power, significance, identity, security, and destiny are rooted in the limitless, unconditional love of God in Christ, we, too, can ask for a towel, instead of a title.

Marinate on that.

SOUL-TRAINING EXERCISE: Secret Service *

The exercise this week is to do 3 things that will lift someone's else's burden. Any act of service that lightens someone's load will do. Examples include doing someone's laundry, filling someone's car with gas, cleaning someone's room, helping out put up wallpaper, driving someone to where he or she needs to go, or helping someone complete some tasks. Other examples:

- Listen, really listen to someone
- Offer to serve dinner at a homeless shelter
- Help your kids with homework
- Borrow a car over lunch hour and clean it inside and out
- Ask God to send you a person in need. Watch out for this one!

However, there is another catch to this one: strive to do it in secret! We all tend to want to have our good deeds noticed. This can ruin or acts of kindness and generosity, because our motive may be to be rewarded for what we have done. As far as you are able, try to be of service to others without them knowing. It may be impossible to hide it, but try not to draw attention to what you have done. It is likely that some of your acts of service will eventually be known. When that happens, simply say, "I just wanted to help you out. It was no big deal," and move on.

1.

2.

3.

* from The Good and Beautiful Life, by James Bryan Smith, p. 151.

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 11: SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1 Peter 4:7 *The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. 8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 11 If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

The topic of spiritual gifts is dealt with in four major New Testament passages: Romans 12, 1 Cor. 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4. Peter Wagner in his book Your Spiritual Gifts, defines them in this way:

*A spiritual gift is a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the Body of Christ according to God's grace for use within the context of the Body. **

Often when Christians study and discuss this issue, an inordinate amount of time is spent on the fascination with and confusion over the supernatural "sign" gifts like speaking in tongues, miracles, etc. Some say these gifts ceased after the apostolic age of the 1st century, while others say that certain gifts (like tongues), are essential for every Christian and ought to be sought. We would say that, while there was certainly a historical decline in the miraculous gifts after the 1st century, God is able to do whatever He wants whenever he wants. We would also maintain that every Christian has at least one, if not several, spiritual gifts; one is not more important than another, and no one gift is given to every Christian as a sign of superior spirituality. As 1 Corinthians 12 teaches, no Christian should feel inferior, because each believer has something valuable to offer to the body, and no one should feel superior, because no one is complete in themselves. And certainly no Christian is omni-gifted (having all the gifts).

So, what's yours? How do you find your gift(s)? The process of discovering your spiritual gifts includes the following steps. It is important to realize that these are not automatic, and may require years of trial and error, and yet God will "steer" each believer into the area(s) where He wants them to serve:

- Volunteer for a wide variety of ministries. Where did you feel you were most effective?
- Ask good friends, who have seen you serve, to honestly tell you where they see God using you best.
- Take a spiritual gifts test. These are not fool-proof, but they often help narrow the options down.
- Ask yourself: what do I really enjoy doing? Surprise! The place where God wants you to serve will probably be the place that "fits" you the best, and ultimately where you'll find the most fulfillment.
- **Try this exercise in your group:** tape a sheet of paper to each person's back. Pray and think of one another for a few moments, and then go around and have everyone write on each others' sheets what gifts they see that person using in real life. Then have each person read what the group members wrote. Again, this is not fool-proof, but it may indicate an area of giftedness you didn't know you had.

* Wagner says, "By *in the context of the body* I do not mean that gifts are always for use just within the church. Many gifts benefit those outside the church. But the point is that these are not to be used just by individuals but by Christians working as a team..."

From Body Life, by Ray Stedman, 1972 “The book that inspired a return to the church's real meaning and mission.”

To become aware that God himself has equipped you - yes, YOU - with a uniquely designed pattern of spiritual gifts and has placed you exactly where he wants you in order to minister those gifts, is to enter a whole new dimension of exciting possibility. In all the world there is no experience more satisfying and fulfilling than to realize that you have been the instrument of the divine working in the lives of others. Such an experience awaits any true Christian who is willing to give time and thought to the discovery and understanding of his pattern of gifts, and will submit himself to the authority of the Head of the body, who reserves to Himself the right to coordinate and direct its activities.

One of the important facts to get clearly in mind in an attempt to understand spiritual gifts is to realize that a spiritual gift is not the same as a natural talent. It is true that talents such as musical ability, artistic skills, athletic coordination etc., are also gifts from God. But they are gifts on a physical or social level only, given to benefit mankind in its “natural” life. Spiritual gifts, on the other hand, are given for benefit in the realm of the spirit, the realm of an individual's relationship to God. The effect of the operation of a spiritual gift is to improve a person in his spirit's enjoyment of life and love of God - to bless him, in other words. Moreover, since the spirit is the most fundamental part of in man's being, from which all other relationships flow, it is clear that the exercise of spiritual gifts operates at the level of human existence, and strikes right at the root of all human problems. Talents, however, deal more with the surfaces of life and though useful or entertaining, do not permanently change men as spiritual gifts can do.

Talents obviously, are distributed to men and women quite apart from any reference to their spiritual condition. Non-Christians as well as Christians have talents and both can find many opportunities for useful expression of their talents in both religious and secular ways. But only Christians have spiritual gifts, for they are given only to those in whom the Spirit of Christ has come to dwell (1 Cor. 12:7).

Perhaps the question most pressing upon you right now is how do I discover my spiritual gifts? If they are the doorway to a new world of fulfillment and challenge then I surely want to know what mine are, but just how do I go about it? The answer is really very simple. You discover a spiritual gift just like you discovered your natural talents!

How did you find that you were musically talented? Or artistically endowed? Or able to lead, to organize, to run, or to paint? Probably it began first with some kind of desire. You simply liked whatever it is you are talented at, and found yourself drawn toward those who were already doing it. You enjoyed watching those who were good at it, and came to appreciate something of the fine points of the activity. That is the way spiritual gifts make themselves known at first too. Somewhere the idea has found deep entrenchment in Christian circles that doing what God wants you to do is always unpleasant; that Christians must always make choices between doing what they want to do and being happy, and doing what God wants them to do and being completely miserable.

Nothing could be more removed from the truth. The exercise of a spiritual gift is always a satisfying enjoyable experience though sometimes the occasion on which it is exercised may be an unhappy one. Jesus said it was his constant delight to do the will of the one who sent him. The Father's gift awakened his own desire and he went about doing what he intensely enjoyed doing. So, as a Christian, start with the gifts you most feel drawn toward. Study the biblical lists of gifts and try those which make special appeal to you.

Then, the next step is to watch for improvement and development. Do you get better at it as you go along? Do you find your quite understandable initial fears subsiding and a growing competence developing? Remember that's the way it was in discovering your talents, too. Gifts need to be exercised just as talents do and practice tends to make more perfect in one just as much as in the other. Paul wrote to young Timothy, telling him, Rekindle the gift of God that is within you (2 Tim. 1:6). As skill in the exercise of a gift develops, the spiritual blessing it brings will become increasingly evident. You will find yourself more and more seeking occasions in which you may manifest your gift, but never, of course, for your own personal advancement but always for the enrichment and profit of others. As Paul reminds us: to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7).

Do you have certain spiritual gifts, or don't you? A final test is this: do others recognize this gift in you? When someone says to you quite unsolicited, “We'd like you to take on this ministry, we think you have a gift for it,” then you can be quite sure that you have that spiritual gift. It may well be that others will see it long before you do. In fact one of the most helpful ways the members of

Christ's body can minister to each other is to help one another discover spiritual gifts. It is much better for others to tell you what gifts they see in you than for you to lay pretentious claims to gifts you might not actually have. One great Bible teacher used to say it was a great pity to see someone who thought he had the gift of preaching, but no one had the gift of listening!

It is helpful, also, to realize that hardly anyone discovers all his gifts at the beginning of his Christian experience. Gifts, like talents, may lie undiscovered for years and then a certain combination of circumstances may bring them to light. It is wise, therefore, to be always ready to try something new. Who knows but what the Spirit of God has put you on the doorstep of a new endeavor for the express purpose of helping you discover gifts you never knew you had.

In the preceding chapter we mentioned the fact that the gifts, though only about 17 or 18 in

number, are given in clusters or combinations which makes possible an almost infinite number of varying ministries. Judging from the analysis of the natural world it is highly likely that no two Christians have exactly the same pattern of gifts. Therefore no two have exactly the same ministry. No two faces in the world are precisely alike yet all are made up from the same basic features: two eyes, two ears, one nose, one mouth, two cheeks, one chin and one forehead. God gave you your face because it is exactly right for the expression of his life where you are. Likewise he gives you the precise cluster of gifts you possess because it is just what is needed for the ministry the Lord Jesus will indicate for you.

Do you see what this means? It completely eliminates all competition within the body of Christ! No Christian needs to be the rival of any other; there is a place for all in the body and none can take another's place.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS INVENTORY

Answer spontaneously and honestly; don't be modest! ^[SEP] Place your answers next to the question numbers: 0 for not at all, 1 for slightly, 2 for somewhat, 4 for greatly. "I would feel fulfilled in the following way..."

1. Helping new people understand.
2. Encouraging someone who is downhearted.
3. Having a good, healthy cry when someone else is hurting.
4. Being called on to assist others in a variety of ways.
5. Organizing people and things.
6. Giving away more than 10% of my income.
7. Accepting responsibilities.
8. Telling someone about Jesus Christ.
9. Being called upon to do special jobs around the church.
10. Going out on a limb for God.
11. Relating to a certain group of people over a long period of time, personally in the successes and their failures.
12. Explaining what something means.
13. Cheering people onward when they are doing a good job.
14. Being a "good Samaritan."
15. Doing routine things if they will help someone else.
16. Accomplishing objectives.
17. Providing financial aid to others.
18. Inspiring people to do things I know need to be done.
19. Praying with someone to receive Christ.
20. Taking initiative in doing what needs to be done for others.
21. Believing something will happen when others disbelieve.
22. Assuming the responsibility for the spiritual well-being of a particular group of Christians.
23. Seeing the light of understanding "click on" in someone.
24. Encouraging people toward goals they should be accomplishing.
25. Forgiving someone who has wronged me.
26. Cleaning up after the party is over.
27. Planning things properly.
28. Having people borrow things from me.
29. Making important decisions.
30. Talking about what my faith means to me.
31. Accomplishing routine tasks and doing them well.
32. "Hanging in there" because God said to.
33. I feel unafraid of giving spiritual guidance and direction in a group of Christians.
34. Being responsible for imparting knowledge to others.
35. Bringing out the best in others.
36. Calling on the sick and shut-ins.
37. Relieving distress of various kinds.
38. Overseeing what needs to be done.
39. Looking to God to supply my needs.
40. Directing others toward accomplishing a goal.
41. Seeing an "unlikely someone" in church.
42. Being active and doing something rather than sitting around talking, reading or listening to a speaker.
43. Getting guidance from God.
44. Guiding fellow believers to relevant portions of the Bible and praying for them.
45. Telling others what I have learned from the Bible.
46. Showing a person "a better way."
47. Helping someone who is "down and out."
48. Helping others achieve their goals.
49. Seeing that all the "loose ends" are tied together.
50. Having things available that others need.
51. Seeing a program I have devised put into practice.
52. Leading a person into a relationship with Jesus Christ.
53. I respond cheerfully when asked to do a job, even if it seems menial.
54. Trusting God rather than circumstances.
55. Restoring people to the Christian community.
56. Helping others become dedicated Christians.
57. Assisting those who feel defeated.
58. Doing something about people's needs.
59. Supporting people in their ministries.
60. Solving problems.
61. Sharing what I have with others.
62. Knowing that others share my vision.
63. Taking a stranger to church.
64. Serving someone who has a special need.
65. Seeing God "come through" in a situation.
66. Watching a group "grow up" together.

Spiritual Gifts Inventory Score Sheet *Which Gifts are Mine?*

Determine which areas your gifts appear to lie in by placing your answers in the appropriate boxes, then adding them up across the line. You can get an indication of which spiritual gifts you may have by determining the gifts which have a greater total value than the others listed.

Note: This is not intended to be a perfect test! However it will tend to surface some true characteristics, and should be combined with Scriptural study and discussion with members of your group who know you and can give you honest feedback.

Gifts	Record Your Responses	Total Score
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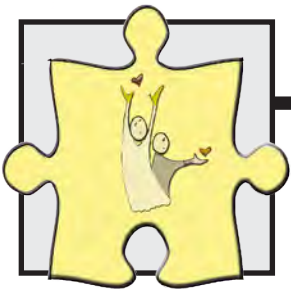
Teaching	1	12	23	34	45	56	
Encouragement	2	13	24	35	46	57	
Mercy	3	14	25	36	47	58	
Helps	4	15	26	37	48	59	
Administration	5	16	27	38	49	60	
Giving	6	17	28	39	50	61	
Leadership	7	18	29	40	51	62	
Evangelism	8	19	30	41	52	63	
Service	9	20	31	42	53	64	
Faith	10	21	32	43	54	65	
Shepherd	11	22	33	44	55	66	

Spiritual Gifts Definitions*

(a partial list)

- **Evangelist.** The spiritual ability to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ's redemptive story to a lost world. The evangelists were also called of God to equip others to develop their spiritual gifts (Eph. 4:11,12).
- **Pastor-teacher.** The spiritual ability to shepherd the flock of God (guarding, guiding, encouraging, warning, etc.), feed them the Word of God, and equip them to find their gifts so that they, too, can do the work of ministry (Eph. 4:11, 12). Peter (John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 5:1-15).
- **Serving** (Greek: diakonia, the root for deacon). The spiritual ability to meet the physical needs of people within a given community of believers or unbelievers.
- **Teaching.** The spiritual ability to take the truth from the Word of God and explain it clearly so that the flock of God can understand it and apply those spiritual truths effectively to their daily lives.
- **Encouragement.** The spiritual ability to come alongside a person who may be hurting spiritually or emotionally and offer them a word of comfort concerning the past and a word of encouragement, admonishment (truth in love), and challenge so that they will be able to walk in the steps of the Spirit in the future.
- **Giving.** The spiritual ability to give financially or materially to the needs of others within the body of Christ or the community in which they live. They express this spiritual gift in simplicity to the glory of God without drawing attention to themselves.
- **Leadership.** The spiritual ability to stand before a group of people and lead them in a deep walk with the Lord, or mission project, the building of a new community of Christians, or an elders meeting, etc.
- **Mercy.** The spiritual ability to manifest pity and give aid to those who are physically, emotionally or spiritually helpless. The ability to express compassionate loving action and lift up the one who is downtrodden and to do it joyfully.
- **Faith.** The spiritual ability to see what isn't, believe it to be, and trust God to do it in His way and time.
- **Helps.** The spiritual ability to come alongside others and support them and their ministry in physical ways.
- **Administration.** The spiritual ability to give guidance, pilot, or steer. The spiritual ability to be a helmsman for a local church in helping direct its life and order. One who deals with people and not paper.

** from a paper by Ron R. Ritchie*



GIFTS

*"Find your spiritual gift and wrap your life around it."
— Ron Ritchie*

*"God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another."
— 1 Peter 4:10 (NLT)*

*"To become aware that God himself has equipped you – yes, you! – with a uniquely designed pattern of spiritual gifts and has placed you exactly where He wants you in order to minister those gifts, is to enter a whole new dimension of exciting possibility."
— Ray Stedman*

The Dead Sea isn't named "dead" for nothing. Nothing can live in it. It's an interesting place, to be sure. For starters, it's the lowest place on the planet, over 1,200 feet below sea level. It's called a hypersaline body of water, almost nine times saltier than the ocean, full of minerals but little else. Water flows from Mt. Hermon in the north (9,200 feet high), down through the Sea of Galilee into the Jordan River which then spills into the Dead Sea just east of Jericho. But that's where everything grinds to a halt. The water just sits there. It has nowhere to go, no outlet to keep things moving along. It sits, and sits, and sits – discolored and dead.

The Dead Sea has often been compared to a Christian who has no spiritual outlet, no way of serving others and using his gifts. And there's a lot of truth to the analogy. It's very exciting to become a follower of Christ, and there's a lot to learn. But if we make maturity equal to learning, then it's logical that Christians simply focus on ingesting more and more knowledge without the accompanying practical application. We get a lot into our heads, but not necessarily much into our hearts or our hands and feet. We all know what happens when the winter holidays roll around: lots of great food, very little exercise. We settle into our easy chairs to watch another analogy – football games, where sixty thousand fans desperately in need of exercise observe 22 players, who are desperately in need of rest. Sometimes the church can be a lot like that.

How about you? If you were to draw a line, and on one end label number "one" as knowledge and on the other end, a "ten" as application, where would you rate yourself, assuming "five" is a healthy mix of both?

In the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs talks a lot about wisdom. The Hebrew word is *hokma*, which means the "skill of living." When you read Proverbs you realize it's very life-related and that wisdom is knowledge applied to real-life situations: money, words, sex, parenting, marriage, friendship, etc. And so biblical maturity has always meant knowledge applied to life.

When Jesus gathered his disciples, he did not invite them to spend three years in a classroom. He wasn't even an accredited rabbi. He asked them to be his followers, and that's immediately what they had to do – follow. They had to make a quick decision to leave their old lives behind, because following Jesus meant a lot of walking, and a lot of different, unusual, adventurous situations. He taught them through words and sermons and

*"The effect of the operation of a spiritual gift is to improve a person in his spirit's enjoyment of the life and love of God — to bless him, in other words."
— Ray Stedman*

impromptu instructional moments, but he also taught them by showing them how to interact with people and how to serve people. And then, even when they felt unprepared and inadequate, he asked them to do the very things they had seen him do. One such event took place in Luke 10:

"... the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go."

A few days later, *"the seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.'"*

Jesus replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority... However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.'

It was one of the few times that Jesus is recorded as being full

of pure joy. He was absolutely thrilled that his disciples had had the opportunity to experience first-hand the exhilaration of kingdom ministry. It was one thing for Jesus to do it himself, but he seemed to actually enjoy it more when he watched his men do it. He knew they would grow more if they had to do it themselves. The Apostle Paul expressed a similar idea when he instructed his young protégé Timothy:

"You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others." (2 Timothy 2:2)

It's easy to drive our kids around in cars, or to carry them on our shoulders – to do things for them. It's harder to patiently go through the process of teaching them to ride a bike, to be there when they crash. But it's also pretty exciting when they finally get the hang of it. Likewise, it's easier to give someone a fish than to teach them the skill that will last them a lifetime. People grow when they have to do something, especially if that something is a little bit terrifying, and they have to call upon reserves they didn't know they had.

A Servant Attitude

Sadly, the terms "minister" and "ministry" have pretty well become synonymous with "religious professional" in our culture. But minister simply means someone who serves. And the New Testament is full of talk about serving.

- *Mark 10:45* — "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..."
- *Romans 12:7* — [regarding spiritual gifts] "If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach..."
- *Galatians 5:13* — "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."
- *Ephesians 6:7* — "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men..."
- *1 Peter 4:10* — "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."
- *1 Peter 5:2* — "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve..."

All Christians are called to serve others. Jesus Himself modeled serving to his men, and still they balked at the idea. Peter didn't want Jesus to serve him by washing his feet, probably because he thought it was beneath Jesus to do so – something a lowly slave would do. On another occasion, Jesus, always on the lookout for teachable moments, once noticed that the disciples were beginning to squabble over which one of them would be most rewarded in the kingdom with important positions: Jesus called them together and said,

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first

*"Find your spiritual gift
and wrap your life around it."*

— Ron Ritchie

must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20)

A friend of mine likes to say, "I don't mind being a servant; I just don't want to be treated like one!" We want glory and prestige, and sometimes being a servant doesn't include a lot of either. Stacey Rinehart, in his book Upside Down, writes, "The choice of whether to follow the leadership path to power, authority, and control or the road to humility and putting others first is an important one."

Let's sum things up so far:

1. We grow when we apply what we've learned.
2. We grow when we focus on others and seek to meet their needs.

How Are You Wired?

Believe it or not, Christians are not all alike. We look different, we think differently, we have different personality types and idiosyncrasies. We're been wired up by God, and He seems to delight in creating uniqueness in people. There's an almost infinite variety in human design, inside and out. And let's face it — some of those people (not us, or at least not me) – are weird. They're different in a way that's tough to deal with sometimes. John Ortberg observes in his book Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them:

"In certain stores you will find a section of merchandise available at greatly reduced prices. The tip-off is a particular tag you will see on all the items in that area. Each tag carries the same words: 'as is.'"

"When you deal with human beings, you have come to the "as-is" corner of the universe. Think for a moment about someone in your life. Maybe the person you know best, love most. That person is *slightly irregular*."

And yet God loves them... and us. Amazingly, He appears to especially enjoy that slight irregularity. Paul points out that all Christians are different, and that they make up different parts of the Body of Christ, and that's exactly the way God planned it...

"Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 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. 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. 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? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one

part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.”

Not only are we different in personality, background, capacity, etc., but God has also given spiritual abilities to each Christian, abilities that are called “spiritual gifts.” Note: the New Testament word for “grace” and “gift” both come from the same root. Ray Stedman, in his book *Body Life*, described the nature and effect of spiritual gifts: “The effect of the operation of a spiritual gift is to improve a person in his spirit’s enjoyment of the life and love of God – to bless him, in other words.”

These gifts are discussed in four major passages: Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4. The Romans passage reiterates the idea of how spiritual gifts function in the Body of Christ:

“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 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. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 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.”

No two passages have identical lists of gifts. The 1 Peter passage tends to categorize gifts into “speaking” gifts and “serving gifts

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides...”

What’s a Leader To Do?

The Ephesians passage is unique in that it appears to give the job description for leaders. It begins by listing seven things Christians have in common: *“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called — one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*

After that he lists four gifts that are recognized as leadership gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers.

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,* ¹² *to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up*

¹³ *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.* ¹⁴ *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*

¹⁵ *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things*

grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 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.”

Can you spot the job description for leaders? (hint: it’s in verse 12) “...to prepare God’s people for works of service.” Other versions translate the word “prepare” as “equip.” We tend to think that leaders lead best when they’re doing all the serving. But according to this passage that’s not true. Leaders aren’t supposed to do all the serving themselves, they’re supposed to “prepare God’s people” to do the serving. They’re supposed to multiply themselves, like Jesus multiplied himself through training disciples, like Paul multiplied himself through Timothy and Timothy’s trainees.

You would think this would be clear, but it’s surprisingly difficult to get across. We have a Christian culture that has reinforced the idea that leaders do the ministry all by themselves. After all, that’s what they’re paid for, right? And frankly, it’s kind of nice to be admired for all the hard work they do. That’s where the old joke comes from: “ministers are paid to be good; everyone else is just good for nothing.”

I had the opportunity to teach some of these principles to leaders and pastors in Romania several years ago. We tried to communicate the concept that leaders should devote a considerable portion of their time to mentoring and training others to do the ministry. Often we were met with blank stares. When we asked what they were thinking, they often replied, “But I don’t have time for that; I’m too busy.” “Can’t we do the ministry better than lay people? After all, we’ve been trained to do it!” It was tough for them to see the clear teaching of Ephesians 4 – that the ministry is not for leaders only – it’s for everyone. And only when everyone is involved is the ministry really happening the way it should. And the only way to get everyone involved is if leaders devote themselves to discipling the members of the body and delegating ministry to them.

My wife and I once took about 15 single people to Colorado to backpack for a week in the San Juan mountains outside of Creede. Most of us were green – no, very green – and all we brought were boots and hiking clothes. We had no provisions and very few skills that would keep us alive in the wilderness. Thankfully, when we arrived there were very competent guides whom we hoped would stick with us and protect us from harm. The first thing they had us do was to sit in a huge circle, and then they brought in tons of equipment — canteens, sleeping bags, flies, tents, cooking gear, food — and spent the next hour sitting with each of us and parceling out the exact items we would need for the coming week’s trip. At the end of that hour we each had been equipped – we had a backpack full of expertly chosen provisions, tailored to our unique abilities. I remember thinking: *this is what I’m supposed to do.* Maybe I’ve been given special training, but I’m not just supposed to use that training to do ministry on my own – I’m supposed to equip others to do it. Only together are we a functioning body. As Ephesians teaches: “the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

How Do I Find My Spiritual Gifts?

I asked this question of a retreat speaker when I was a young Christian. His answer encouraged me and guided my thinking. He said that I may have one or more gifts, probably a unique mix of gifts that fits me. They were given to me when I came to Christ, but it takes time to discover and develop them. As Ray Stedman wrote, "It is helpful to realize that hardly anyone discovers all his gifts at the beginning of his Christian experience. Gifts, like talents, may lie undiscovered for years and then a certain combination of circumstances may bring them to light. It is wise, therefore, to be always ready to try something new."

This man encouraged me to try a variety of ministry opportunities, and to be careful not to "sign up" for too long in any one of them. The church is littered with casualties – people who volunteer for something and then feel too guilty to back out when they sense it's not something they enjoy or should be doing. Some people even leave a church because they're too shy to stop teaching a class! But while I'm searching for my best ministry "fit" it makes sense to try lots of different things.

Secondly, he told me to lean towards things I enjoy. I was surprised at that. I secretly assumed that ministry should be really hard; that if I actually enjoyed doing it then it didn't "count" – it wasn't enough of a sacrifice. That was sick thinking. God is not out to make us miserable, believe it or not! Sure, ministry often requires time and commitment and hard work, but in the end it should be something we love doing and that others enjoy.

Thirdly, as I get involved in different ways of serving, the Spirit will slowly but surely guide me towards those areas that fit me best. I can look at that as my "major" in life, like I "majored" in history in history or math. Now, I still needed to take lots of other courses in school. And in the same way, God wants us to serve in all different areas, even though my "major" – my gifts – may not be in those areas. Example: I may not have the gift of evangelism, but God still wants me to share my faith. I may not be gifted in mercy, but I can still show up at a hospital and show love to someone who's recovering from surgery. My gifts are simply areas of ministry that I should gravitate to over a lifetime of service.

Finally, I may have the same gift as yours, but it will probably look different. Two people may have the gift of evangelism: one uses it in stadiums (Billy Graham), the other shares Christ with friends at Starbucks. Two people are teachers: one is a professor and writes bestsellers, while the other shares biblical insights as a home group leader. Two people are gifted in mercy: one is Mother Teresa, the other loves to pray with hurting people in her church. First Corinthians 12:4-6 beautifully describes this principle:

"There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us." (NLT)

Let's sum things up one last time:

1. We grow when we apply what we've learned.
2. We grow when we focus on others and seek to meet their needs.
3. We grow when we step out of our comfort zone and learn to trust God.
4. We grow when we use the gifts God has given us to express His love to others.

Recommended Reading

- [Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them](#), by John Ortberg
- [Life Together](#), by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- [Body Life](#), by Ray Stedman
- [Upside Down: The Paradox of Servant Leadership](#), by Stacy Rinehart
- [The Master Plan of Evangelism](#), by Robert Coleman

"There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us."
— 1 Cor 12:4-6 (NLT)

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 12: LOVE ONE ANOTHER

READ Romans 12:9-13

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to **one another** in love. Honor **one another** above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with **one another**. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Jesus gathered his best friends together for dinner on the last evening of his earthly life. He gave them what he called a "new command": *Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

Everyone talks, sings and writes poems about "love" but nobody seems to really grasp it. It may be the most over-used, least understood word of all time. So when Jesus tells us to love ("agape" in Greek) one another, what exactly does that look like? How can I tell when I'm doing it?

Thankfully, the New Testament writers, especially Paul, used another word besides *agape* – they used *allelon*, which sounds like "all-alone" but actually means "one-another." If you're an ambitious Bible student, you might want to pull out your concordance and look up all the occurrences of *allelon* or "one another" in Paul's epistles. When you do that, you will find a plethora of descriptive words that shed light on what it means to love someone. Check these out:

- Galatians 5:13 *...one another*
- Ephesians 4:32 *...one another*
- Ephesians 5:21 *...one another*
- Colossians 3:13 *...one another*
- Hebrews 10:25 *...one another*
- James 4:11 *...one another*

DISCUSS a time in your life when someone showed love to you in one or more of these ways. Include the three "one-anothers" found in the Romans 12 passage at the top of this page. Which one of these is hardest for you to show?

READ the excerpt from Larry Crabb's book on the following page. Have you experienced a similar defining moment in your life?

The bright side of the picture is that words can not only sting, but soothe. Far more important, they can even reroute a life from a bad direction to a good one. These are the words – words of life and encouragement – with which I am concerned.

The apostle Paul instructs us in Ephesians 4:29 to

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

One illustration demonstrates how a few well-timed words suited perfectly to the need of a particular moment yielded enduring results in my life.

As a youngster I developed a thoroughly annoying and humiliating problem of stuttering. Any person afflicted with this puzzling menace can tell you that certain letters and sounds are especially hard to say. Two troublesome letters for me were L and P. My name is Larry and I attended Plymouth-Whitemarsh junior and senior high schools in Pennsylvania. In the ninth grade, I was elected president of our junior high student body. During an assembly of the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades – several hundred students – I was beckoned by the principal to join him on stage for the induction ceremony.

Standing nervously in front of the squirming, bored crowd, I was told to repeat after the principal the words, “I, Larry Crabb of Plymouth-Whitemarsh Junior High School, do hereby promise ...” That’s how the principal said it. My version was a bit different: “I, L-L-arry Crabb of P-P-P-Plymouth-Whitemarsh Junior High School, do hereby p-p-p-promise ...”

The principal was sympathetically perplexed, my favorite English teacher wanted to cry, a few students laughed out loud, most were awkwardly amused, some felt bad for me – and I died a thousand deaths. I decided right then that public speaking was not for me.

A short time later, our church celebrated the Lord’s supper in a Sunday morning worship service. It was customary in our congregation to encourage young men to enter into the privilege of worship by standing and praying aloud. That particular Sunday I sensed the pressure of the saints (not, I fear, the leading of the Spirit), and I responded by unsteadily leaving my chair, for the first time, with the intention of praying. Filled less with worship than with nervousness, I found my theology becoming confused to the point of heresy. I remember thanking the Father for hanging on the cross and praising Christ for

triumphantly bringing the Spirit from the grave.

Stuttering throughout, I finally thought of the word Amen (perhaps the first evidence of the Spirit’s leading), and said it, and sat down. I recall staring at the floor, too embarrassed to look around, and solemnly vowing never again to pray or speak aloud in front of a group. Two strikes were enough.

When the service was over, I darted toward the door, not wishing to encounter an elder who might feel obliged to correct my twisted theology. But I was not quick enough. An older Christian man named Jim Dunbar intercepted me, put his arm on my shoulder, and cleared his throat to speak.

I remember thinking to myself, “Here it comes. Oh well, just endure it and then get to the car.” I then listened to this godly man speak words that I can repeat verbatim today, more than twenty years later. “Larry”, he said, “There’s one thing I want you to know. Whatever you do for the Lord, I’m behind you one thousand percent.” Then he walked away. Even as I write these words, my eyes fill with tears. I have yet to tell that story to an audience without at least mildly choking. Those words were life words. They had power. They reached deep into my being. Since the day those words were spoken, God has led me into a ministry in which I regularly address and pray before crowds of all sizes. I do it without stuttering. I love it. Not only death, but also life lies in the power of the tongue.

God intends that we be people who use words to encourage one another. A well-timed word has the power to urge a runner to finish the race, to rekindle hope when despair has set in, to spark a bit of warmth in a otherwise cold life, to trigger healthful self-evaluation in someone who doesn’t think much about his shortcoming, to renew confidence when problems have the upper hand.

The Meaning of "Allelon"

Scripture gives us a simple blueprint for thriving relationships.

By Judith Folkerts

One Greek word is sprinkled throughout the New Testament like salt on popcorn. The word is used about 100 times, over half of the time in the form of positive commands. What word could be so important that it glues together the verses that make up Jesus' words and the apostles instructions? It is allelon.

Allelon (pronounced al-lay-lone) is not a verb. It's not a specific "something" that we are told to do. It is who we are told to do many things to, for and with. Its constant use in the New Testament reveals to us the building blocks of Christian community, and provides a detailed blueprint for successful, thriving relationships in the body of Christ. What does this amazing word mean? The word is usually translated into English as the two words one another.

100 times, we are told to how to specifically focus on one another in The New Testament. The word allelon also means each other, mutually or reciprocally. It means that when one person does one of these directives to another person, that person should do it back to that person. It's a wonderful plan when well-implemented. But first, we need to recognize how thoroughly interconnected to one another that Jesus and His early followers have instructed us to be.

Here are 36 of the things that we are told to do in regards to one another:

- Accept (or welcome) one another (Romans 15:7)
- Admonish one another (Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16)
- Be at peace with one other (Mark 9:50)
- Be devoted to one another in love (Romans 12:10)
- Bear (or carry) one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2)
- Bear (or be tolerant) with one another (Colossians 3:13)
- Be kind and compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32)
- Be patient with one another (Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13)
- Be likeminded towards one another (Romans 15:5)
- Build up (or edify) one another (Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- Care (or have equal concern) for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25)
- Clothe yourselves with humility towards one another (1 Peter 5:5)
- Comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18)
- Confess your faults (sins) to one another (James 5:16)
- Consider one another better than yourselves (Philippians 2:3)
- Employ the gifts that God has given us for the benefit of one another (1 Peter 4:10)
- Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18 and 5:11)
- Exhort one another (Hebrews 3:13)
- Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13)
- Greet one another with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16; 2 Corinthians 13:12)
- Honor (be devoted to, be kind to) one another above yourselves (Romans 12:10)
- In humility consider one another better than yourselves (Philippians 2:3)
- Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16)
- Look to the interests of one another (Philippians 2:4)
- Love one another (John 13:34 and at least 15 other times)
- Pray for one another (James 5:16)
- Serve one another (Galatians 5:13)
- Show (offer) hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9)
- Speak the truth in love to one another (Ephesians 4:25)
- Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19)
- Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21)
- Teach (instruct) one another (Colossians 3:16; Romans 15:14)
- Stir up (spur) one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24)
- Teach one another (Colossians 3:16)
- Wash one another's feet (John 13:14)
- When you come together to eat, wait for one another (I Corinthians 11:33)

This is a long and exhaustive list! There shouldn't be many one-person selfies in the body of Christ. Jesus was seriously into reaching out to one another. Paul repeatedly admonishes the body of Christ to interact, to get involved in one another's lives, and to be responsible for one another. Mutually. Back-and-forth.

Vulnerability does not seem optional if you adhere even partially to this list.

There is another list of things NOT to do to one another. But when we succeed in doing the things that we should do, little room is left for strife and disharmony. Still, as we read Scripture, these warning verses should now pop out at us. For example, James 5:9 says, "Don't grumble against each other." At least three verses on the list above immediately prevent grumbling against another person. "Build one another up" (Romans 14:19) is one verse that is mutually exclusive of this. If we get the "Do's" right, there will be very few "Do Not's" to be concerned about.

The one another verses are based on a norm of reciprocity. Despite rank, gender, age or social class, this way of relating to one another ushered in a new standard for Christian relationships. Jesus' Kingdom would follow a radically different model from that of the world. Honor, respect and accountability in all

relationships would make His church a place of safety, healing and peace.

Is this the church of today? It could be. There are times when most of us need to be reminded of the Allelon Imperative. Matthew 7:12 says, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." Allelon puts this verse into action. Attention to the one another verses turns Matthew 7:12 into a lifestyle that focuses on others. We need to follow through, and hit the ball back when it comes in our direction. Do this and watch what happens; Jesus' church will become the "spotless and shining" bride of Revelation 19:8. May the Holy Spirit guide us as we focus on allelon.

Article found at:

<http://www.propheticcrossroads.com/home/the-allelon-imperative>

Perhaps the most pervasive form of judgment is gossip. I define gossip as (1) speaking negatively (2) about someone who is not present. Those are the two elements of gossip.

This week try to go one to three days without gossiping. Forgoing gossip for a single day can be challenging, but try to go for at least three days without saying anything negative about a person who is not present.

John Wesley (1703-1791) created small groups of three to five serious apprentices of Jesus, which he called bands. Among the basic rules Wesley drew up for the bands was this: "Not to mention the fault of any behind his back, and to stop short those who do."

I believe that most of us know exactly what gossip is and when we or someone else is doing it. Even when I try to spin it as "just being honest about a person." I know in my heart when I am trying to tear someone down. Refusing to gossip and trusting God to help us silence as much gossip as we can is one of the most loving things we can do for others.

* from [The Good and Beautiful Life](#), by James Bryan Smith, p 202.

Note: (not from Smith's book) - sometimes gossip starts because we need to have a difficult talk with another person, but we're afraid to do it, perhaps because we don't like conflict. So we find it easier to talk about the issue to someone else, rather than directly to the person involved. Sometimes this is called "triangulation," because it forms an unhealthy "triangle" rather than a healthy, direct conversation. Watch out for these!

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 13: KINGDOM

When Jesus started his public teaching ministry, his most common subject was “the kingdom” of God (which is synonymous with the kingdom of heaven):

- *“The time has come. The **kingdom** of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15)*
- *“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the **kingdom**, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.” (Matthew 4:23)*

In Matthew’s gospel alone the word crops up 54 times. Take a look at just some of these occurrences, found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

- *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the **kingdom** of heaven.” “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the **kingdom** of heaven.” (5:3,10)*
- *For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the **kingdom** of heaven. [Ⓢ]_{SEP} (5:20)*
- *“...your **kingdom** come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. [Ⓢ]_{SEP} (6:10)*
- *“But seek first his **kingdom** and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (6:33)*

The apostle Paul taught consistently about the kingdom of God as well:

- *“He proclaimed the **kingdom** of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!” (Acts 28:31)*
- *“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the **kingdom** of the Son he loves.” (Colossians 1:13)*

Discussion Questions

Often Christians think of the kingdom as only future, and yet it is here now. It is not here in the same degree of fullness as it will be experienced in the future, but it is here nevertheless. Discuss these thoughts with your group:

- What evidence do you see of the kingdom of God in the world today?
- While we certainly have emotional ties to our home country and earthly life, how does Paul’s declaration that our “citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20) affect our day-to-day outlook?
- Do you tend to think of Christianity as mostly your own personal relationship with God, or that you are a part of His greater kingdom? What difference would it make to think one way or the other?
- How can you apply Mathew 6:33 (see above) in your own life?

The Kingdom of God by Tullian Tchividjian

According to Jesus, it's impossible for Christians to properly understand the practical nature of the Christian life without properly understanding the nature of their citizenship in God's kingdom. In fact, one of the primary biblical descriptions of Christians is that they're citizens in God's kingdom.

So what is the kingdom of God? Sinclair Ferguson defines the kingdom as "the rule and reign of God, the expression of his gracious sovereign will. To belong to the kingdom of God is to belong to the people among whom the reign of God has already begun." George Eldon Ladd defines the kingdom as "the realm in which God's reign may be experienced." Simply put, the kingdom of God is a kingdom where God's appointed King--Jesus--is presently reigning in and through the lives of His people, accomplishing His will "on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10).

The presence and purpose of God's kingdom undergird the teaching of the whole Bible, exhibiting God's plan--past, present, and future--for this world. The most exhaustive description of God's kingdom, though, is given to us by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), where He shows the kingdom of God to be central to His teaching and to the mission of God. Throughout this sermon, Jesus descriptively shows what kingdom living in a fallen world looks like, as the kingdom shapes our experience here and now.

It's helpful to think of the Kingdom of God in three stages: inauguration, continuation, and consummation.

The Kingdom's Inauguration

With the arrival of King Jesus to earth, God's kingdom was inaugurated "on earth as it is in heaven." To be sure, Jesus had always been Lord over all creation. "For everything was created by Him . . . He is before all things, and by Him all things hold together" (Col 1:16-17). Since the dawn of time, there has never been a moment when the Lord hasn't reigned over all that He has made. But God's reign and rule were demonstrated in new and dramatic ways when Jesus brought it from heaven to earth in a paradigm-shattering manner.

Previously, "He looked down from his holy heights--the Lord gazed out from heaven to earth" (Ps 102:19). Prior to the incarnation, the Lord ruled from afar (although His providential activity on earth never ceases). But then Jesus came and announced, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near" (Mk 1:15). The time had come; God's kingdom was here with us. Here was God's kingdom earthed.

With Christ's first coming, God began the process of reversing the curse of sin and redeeming all things. In Christ, God was moving in a new way. All of Jesus' ministry--the words He spoke, the miracles He performed--showed there was a new order: God's order. When Jesus healed the diseased, raised the dead, and forgave the desperate, He did so to show that with the arrival of God in the flesh came the restoration of the way God intended things to be.

Tim Keller observes that Christ's miracles were not the suspension of the natural order but the restoration of

the natural order. They were a reminder of what once was prior to the fall and a preview of what will eventually be a universal reality once again--a world of peace and justice, without death, disease, or conflict.

The inauguration of God's kingdom through Jesus began the "great reversal"--repealing the curse of sin and death, ensuring that God had begun the process of recreating all things.

The Kingdom's Continuation

The continuation stage of the kingdom of God is the stage we are in now--living in between Christ's first and second coming. It's a stage marked by tension between present and future. We're in the period of redemptive history often referred to as "already and not yet": the kingdom is already here in true form, but not yet full form; it's present in its beginnings, but still future in its fullness.

This guards us from an under-realized eschatology (expecting no change now) and an over-realized eschatology (expecting all change now). In this stage, we embrace the reality that while we're not yet what we will be, we're also no longer what we used to be. We're like Israel during her wilderness wanderings--we've left Egypt, but haven't yet entered the Promised Land.

The Kingdom's Consummation

The third stage, the kingdom's consummation, will take place when Jesus comes back and the process of reversing the curse of sin and recreating all things is completed (1Co 15:51-58). When our King returns there'll be no more sickness, death, tears, division, or tension. The "peace on earth" which the angels announced the night Christ was born will become a universal actuality. God's cosmic rescue mission will be complete. The fraying fabric of our fallen world will be fully and perfectly rewoven. Everything and everyone will live in perfect harmony. Shalom will rule. Isaiah 11:6-9 pictures it this way: The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the goat. The calf, the young lion, and the fatling will be together, and a child will lead them. The cow and the bear will graze, their young ones will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. An infant will play beside the cobra's pit, and a toddler will put his hand into a snake's den. None will harm or destroy another on My entire holy mountain, for the land will be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the sea is filled with water.

For the pardoned children of God, there will be complete harmony when Jesus comes back. We'll work and worship in a perfectly renewed earth without the interference of sin. We who believe the gospel will enjoy sinless hearts and minds along with disease-free bodies. All that causes us pain and discomfort will be destroyed, and we will live forever. We'll finally be able "to enjoy what is most enjoyable with unbounded energy and passion forever." Until then, the resistance remains; the combat carries on. But we can press on faithfully knowing that for citizens in God's Kingdom, the best is yet to come.

SOUL-TRAINING EXERCISE: **clashing kingdoms**

*"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the **kingdom** of the Son he loves.."*
- Colossians 1:13

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."
- Romans 12:2

1. Take one day this week and **fast** for one whole day from... technology, TV news, your phone – whatever it is that tends to pull you into finding your identity in the kingdom of this world. Obviously we live in this world, and we need to participate in it, but we are citizens of another kingdom.
2. Fasting involves removing something, so on the positive side, **choose something** to do that invests in the kingdom of God. Spend time doing something – reading, meditating, having a conversation, serving someone – that reflects your identity in God's kingdom.
3. **Record here** what you chose to fast from, and what you chose to invest in, and how those two things altered or affected your mindset for that day.

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 14: EVANGELISM

READ all of John chapter 4 (see next page)

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John — although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon..."

Trace the course of this amazing conversation through the various questions that are asked and the topics that are brought up:

- Why does it say that Jesus "had to go" through Samaria (verse 4)? (see a map of Israel)
- Look up "Samaritan" in a Bible dictionary. What was their history, and why did the Jews of Jesus' day despise them? In what sense was this a "cross-cultural" encounter? (Jesus once told a parable that highlighted this Jew-Samaritan animosity - see Luke 10:30-36) What would be a modern-day equivalent for you?
- What do you notice about Jesus' style of interaction? Does he force the conversation? Does he steer it? Does he listen well? What can you learn from watching Jesus relate to this woman?
- How does Jesus deal with religious differences, which could easily become a "rabbit-trail"? (see verses 19 and following) Give a personal example of a "religious rabbit-trail" that has sidetracked a conversation you've actually had with someone.
- The "rest of the story." How did the disciples react to Jesus' encounter? What do you think they learned through this experience? What does the woman do when the disciples return? What do the townspeople do?
- Jesus asked us to be his ambassadors (2 Cor 5:2), and to take his message to the world (Matthew 28:18-20). There are many legitimate ways to convey a message, from stadium-filled speeches to personal confrontations to apologetics dialogues to telling your story over coffee at Starbucks. What style of communication fits you, your gifts and personality? What style did someone use to tell you about Jesus?

JOHN 4:1 Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John 2 (though Jesus himself didn't baptize them—his disciples did). 3 So he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

4 He had to go through Samaria on the way. 5 Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. 7 Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." 8 He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

9 The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"

10 Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

11 "But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? 12 And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?"

13 Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. 14 But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."

15 "Please, sir," the woman said, "give me this water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to get water."

16 "Go and get your husband," Jesus told her.

17 "I don't have a husband," the woman replied.

Jesus said, "You're right! You don't have a husband— 18 for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!"

19 "Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet. 20 So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?"

21 Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain

or in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. 23 But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. 24 For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

25 The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

26 Then Jesus told her, "I am the Messiah!"

27 Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, "What do you want with her?" or "Why are you talking to her?" 28 The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, 29 "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?" 30 So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

31 Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus, "Rabbi, eat something."

32 But Jesus replied, "I have a kind of food you know nothing about."

33 "Did someone bring him food while we were gone?" the disciples asked each other.

34 Then Jesus explained: "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. 35 You know the saying, 'Four months between planting and harvest.' But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. 36 The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike! 37 You know the saying, 'One plants and another harvests.' And it's true. 38 I sent you to harvest where you didn't plant; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest."

39 Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, "He told me everything I ever did!" 40 When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay in their village. So he stayed for two days, 41 long enough for many more to hear his message and believe. 42 Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world."

From Lifestyle Evangelism by Joe Aldrich

“Seventeen years ago I moved into a lovely apartment with a load of dreams. My dental student husband was in his senior year and we had decided to treat ourselves to luxuries – a swimming pool and a dishwasher – for the last few months before his graduation. I dreamed of soon quitting my secretarial job and starting a family. But all my dreams exploded just a few weeks later when my husband moved out and filed for a divorce. When the rent was due that month, I revealed my tragedy to the managers of the apartment only because we had rented it on a special discount for dental students and the dental student was gone. The managers happened to be a couple, a seminary student and a schoolteacher, named Joe and Ruthe Aldrich.

Ruthe empathized with the heartache and loneliness I felt; she genuinely seemed to care. She told me that she believed her own marriage worked because she and Joe put Christ at the center of it. I didn’t understand but it sure sounded good.

Ruthe stopped by often to check on me, and over the next days and weeks, she and Joe began to take me out to dinner and have me over for meals. As they opened their lives to me, I knew I had found some very special friends, unlike any I’d ever known. They always seemed to care and have time to listen to me and even cry with me. From the close vantage point they gave me with their lives, I knew there was something about them and their marriage that I truly wanted. The books and Bible verses they gave me were wrapped in their constant love. Eventually I asked them about their personal relationship to Christ. It was so simple and clear for me when they came to Revelation

3:20 that I had no doubt what my response was to be. That night I invited Christ into my life.

Though I had hoped that my problems would be over the next day, they weren’t. My marriage never mended and I struggled over my future. But I knew I was a new creature and had been given a fresh start in life by Christ. The constant support and encouragement of Ruthe and Joe kept me going. As they helped me discover what was happening to me, I began to see

God’s Spirit was at work in my life and I wanted to share what I’d found with others. As I studied and learned how to do just that, I also knew that I needed to get involved in people’s lives and learn to love and care for them – just like the Aldriches had loved and cared for me.

That spring and summer, around the swimming pool, the three of us spent time getting better acquainted with our neighbors. People opened up to us with questions about our personal faith when we took the time to invite them over for hamburgers. Several made quiet commitments to Christ during the course of the Bible study Joe taught at my apartment. I could go on and on.

I am now married to a wonderful Christian man and have a six-year-old son. Our thirteen-year marriage has not been problem-free, but God has helped us work through the difficulties as I’ve practiced Joe and Ruthe’s plan – putting Christ at the center of our marriage. As we have learned to communicate this reality of our faith to others, God continues to bring us back to the same costly kind of evangelism Ruthe and Joe used to minister to me: mixing the Good News with genuine love, care, and friendship.”

Soul-Training Exercise: Sharing our faith

If you are a Jesus-follower, how did you first hear about Him? Who was instrumental in you coming to faith? As a friend once said, “You don’t have to be someone’s whole story. Sometimes you’re just a chapter, or a paragraph in a person’s life. Maybe even a sentence.” See if you can recall how many people played a part in telling you the Story. And, if you’ve never thanked them, consider doing so this week. Send a text or an email or even a card, and let them know how much you appreciate the part they played.

The exercise for this week is to engage in a conversation that relates to someone’s spiritual beliefs, or questions, or journey – someone who does not share your faith in Jesus. This may be someone you know well or someone you’ve just met.

1. **Pray** – ask God to create the opportunity. Don’t force it.
2. **Watch** – for a situation where spiritual issues come up.
3. **Listen** – for questions they may have, for times when they were “burned” by a religion, for issues in their upbringing, or for longings they may express about life and God. Ask questions so that you may truly understand them – not just so that you can tell them the “right” answers.
4. **Tell your story** – if it’s appropriate and there’s time. Often someone can hear and process your story rather than someone “preaching” at them.
5. **Share** – what you have found to be true about Jesus and how you came to know God, being sure to admit that you’re not perfect. If they ask difficult questions, feel free to say “Good question! I’m not sure, but I’ll try to find out and get back to you.”

“...if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.” (1 Peter 3:15)

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 15: SALT & LIGHT

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

- Matthew 5:13-16

“Salt was used in the ancient world to flavor foods and even in small doses as fertilizer. Above all, salt was used as a preservative. Rubbed into meat, a little salt would slow decay. Strictly speaking salt cannot lose its saltiness; sodium chloride is a stable compound. But most salt in the ancient world derived from salt marshes rather than by evaporation of salt water, and thus contained many impurities. The actual salt, being more soluble than the impurities, could be leached out, leaving a residue so dilute it was of little worth.”
(NIV Bible Commentary)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used these two metaphors to describe his followers. We tend to understand the concept of light more than salt. We know what it means to “shed light” on a subject, or to “enlighten” someone. We carry the light of the gospel to the world. But what about salt? How do we live in such a way that we are like salt? (**Read** the above quote, as well as the following article by John Stott)

- Often we differentiate between proclaiming truth and meeting human needs, as if Christians should only do one or the other activity. Did Jesus do just one, or both? How can we imitate him?
- When you came to faith in Christ, what helped you, or got your attention – a Christian who was meeting your needs, or one who was explaining the truth, or both?
- What are some examples of how Christians can be salt in our culture? How can you be salt in your community?

“What I’m calling for is a radically different way of thinking about our world. Instead of running from it, we need to rush into it. And instead of just hanging around the fringes of our culture, we need to be right smack in the middle of it. Why not believe that one day the most critically acclaimed director in Hollywood could be an active Christian? Why not hope that the Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting could go to a Christian journalist on staff at a major daily newspaper? Is it really too much of a stretch to think that a major exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art could feature the works of a Christian artist?”

- Bob Briner, [Roaring Lambs](#):

[A Gentle Plan to Radically Change Your World](#)

From Christian Counter-Culture: The Message of the Sermon on the Mount, by John Stott

Salt and light have one thing in common: they give and expend themselves – and thus are the opposite of any and every kind of self-centered religiosity.

Nevertheless, the kind of service each renders is different. In fact, their effects are complementary. The function of salt is largely negative: it prevents decay. The function of light is positive: it illuminates the darkness.

So Jesus calls his disciples to exert a double influence on the secular community, a negative influence by arresting its decay and a positive influence by bringing light into its darkness. For it is one thing to stop the spread of evil; it is another to promote the spread of truth, beauty and goodness.

Putting the two metaphors together, it seems legitimate to discern in them the proper relation between evangelism and social action in the total mission of Christ in the world – a relation which perplexes many believers today. We are called to be both salt and light to the secular community.

Take first our vocation to be salt. The apostle Paul paints a grim picture at the end of the first chapter of his Roman letter of what happens when society suppresses (out of love for evil) the truth it knows by nature. It deteriorates. Its values and standards steadily decline until it becomes utterly corrupt. When men reject what they know of God, God gives them up to their own distorted notions and perverted passions, until society stinks in the nostrils of God and of all good people.

Now Christians are set in secular society by God to hinder this process. God intends us to penetrate the world. Christian salt has no business to remain snugly in elegant little ecclesiastical salt cellars; our place is to be rubbed into the secular community, as salt is rubbed into meat, to stop it going bad. And when society does go bad, we Christians tend to throw up our hands in pious horror and reproach the non-Christian world; but should we not rather reproach ourselves? One can hardly blame unsalted meat for going bad. It cannot do anything else. The real question to ask is: where is the salt?

Jesus was teaching somewhere near the sea of Galilee. Less than a hundred miles to the south the River Jordan flows into another sea, the Salt Sea, so salty that it is dead. And on its western side there lived at that time a Dead Sea Community, whose library of scrolls caused such a sensation when it was accidentally discovered a few years ago. They were a monastic community of Essenes who had withdrawn

from the wicked world. They called themselves the sons of light, but they took no steps to let their light shine, and in their ghetto their salt was as useless as the deposits on the shores of the nearby sea. Is it possible that Jesus was thinking of them? W.D. Davies thinks he made a “side – glance” in their direction. It is an attractive conjecture.

What does it mean in practice to be the salt of the earth? To begin with, we Christian people should be more courageous, more outspoken in condemning evil. Condemnation is negative, to be sure, but the action of salt is negative.

Helmut Thielicke takes up this same theme of the necessarily sharp quality of true Christian witness. To look at some Christians, he says, “one would think that their ambition is to be the honeypot of the world. They sweeten and sugar the bitterness of life with an all too easy conception of a loving God ... But Jesus, of course, did not say, “You are the honey of the world.” He said, “You are the salt of the earth.” Salt bites, and the unadulterated message of the judgment and grace of God has always been a biting thing.”

And alongside this condemnation of what is false and evil, we should take our stand boldly for what is true, good and decent whether in our neighborhood, in our college, profession or business, or in the wider sphere of national life, including the mass media.

Christian salt takes effect by deeds as well as words. We have already seen that God has created both the state and the family as social structures to restrain evil and encourage goodness. And Christians have a responsibility to see that these structures are not only preserved but are also operated with justice. Too often evangelical Christians have interpreted their social responsibility in terms only of helping the casualties of a sick society, and have done nothing to change the structures which cause the casualties. Just as doctors are concerned not only with the treatment of patients but also with preventive medicine and public health, so we should concern ourselves with what might be called preventive social medicine and higher standards of moral hygiene. However small our part may be, we cannot opt out of seeking to create better social structures, which guarantee justice in legislation and law enforcement, the freedom and dignity of the individual, civil rights for minorities and the abolition of social and racial discrimination. We should neither despise these things nor avoid our responsibility for them. They are part of God’s purpose for his people. Whenever

Christians are conscientious citizens, they are acting like salt in the community. As Sir Frederick Catherwood put it in his contribution to the symposium Is Revolution Change? "To try to improve society is not worldliness but love. To wash your hands of society is not love but worldliness."

But fallen human beings need more than barricades to stop them becoming as bad as they could be. They need regeneration, new life through the gospel. Hence our second vocation to be "the light of the world." For the truth of the gospel is the light, contained indeed in fragile earthenware lamps, yet shining through our very earthiness with the more

conspicuous brightness. We are called both to spread the gospel and to frame our manner of life in a way that is worthy of the gospel.

So then, we should never put our two vocations to be salt and light, our Christian social and evangelistic responsibilities, over against each other as if we had to choose between them. We should not exaggerate either, nor disparage either, at the expense of the other. Neither can one be a substitute for the other. The world needs both. It is bad and needs salt; it is dark and needs light. Our Christian vocation is to be both. Jesus Christ said so, and that should be enough.

SOUL-TRAINING EXERCISE: being salt & light

In 2011 Francis Chan was a “successful” pastor of a large California megachurch. But he felt like God had other plans for him, so he resigned. He spent some time overseas, thinking and praying, and came back with an idea. In San Francisco there is a one-square-mile area called the Tenderloin District, with 37,000 people living in 586 apartment buildings. He and several church members started an Adopt a Building movement. Their plan was to create prayer teams and then knock on the door of everyone living in their assigned building. They only came with two questions: 1) What is your greatest physical need? and 2) How can we pray for you?

Group Project:

It’s often true that people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. Jesus often met people’s physical needs (healing diseases, providing food) before telling them about God.

What are some examples of meeting needs – something someone did for you, or that you’ve done for someone else – that might open the door to talking about spiritual things?

Is there a way that your group can reach out into your community and **meet a physical need?**

It doesn’t have to be a long-term commitment; it can even be a one-time thing, like serving at a soup kitchen. For example, once our small group became aware of a woman whose small home needed a new roof. Most of us had never put on a roof! But a few guys did have experience, and they showed us what to do.

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus



PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 16: SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Ephesians 6:10-20

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. **11** Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. **12** For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms...

There is one aspect of our life in Christ that most Christians tend to forget, and it is one of the most crucial. We think of dealing with God, with ourselves and other people, and with the world - yet we often fail to recognize that there is dark side to spiritual reality. This "dark side" is alive, intelligent, and actively working against all that is good and life-producing. It seeks to hinder our personal progress even as it tries to stop the overall progress of the kingdom of God. All of the apostles were well acquainted with the reality of spiritual warfare, just as Jesus was constantly confronted with it. So how should we think about it, and what can we do to emerge victorious?

- What do you learn about spiritual warfare just from verses 10- 13? What are the "principalities and powers"? (Use a Bible dictionary.)
- What is the armor of God (vs 14-17), and how does it work?
- What aspect of warfare does he describe in verses 18-20?
- Name two situations over the past year or so when you felt like you were in the midst of spiritual warfare. What was it about those situations that made you feel that way? How did you deal with it?
- **Discuss** the following quote by C.S. Lewis:*

"There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight."

* One of the best books about spiritual warfare is C.S. Lewis' book, [The Screwtape Letters](#), a very creative fictional account of two devils trying to destroy one man's spiritual life.

- **READ and discuss** the article on the next page by Ray Stedman.

What would you answer if you were asked, "What is the thing that gives you the most difficulty in life; of what does the struggle of life consist?" Many would say that it is other human beings. There are the Communists, for instance, who are always causing difficulty. They can never let anything rest in the world but are forever stirring up some kind of trouble somewhere. And then there are the Republicans, or, if you are on the other side, the Democrats. They never let anything rest either but are always making difficulties. In their bullheaded obstinacy they are continually refusing to "see the light".

And let us not forget the Internal Revenue Service. Certainly they are devils, if there ever were any. And the county tax department! And don't leave out your wife and her family! Or your husband and his family. Then, what about our ancestors? Our heredity is at fault. It is because we are Scotch or Irish or Italian – our family has always been this way; we have always had a hot temper. And so it goes.

But the Apostle says that you cannot explain life adequately on that level. The battle is not against flesh and blood. Rather, it is against the whole human race that certain principalities and powers, world rulers of darkness, wicked spirits in high places are set. There is your problem, Paul says. Those are the enemies we are up against. And it is not just Christians who are opposed by these, but every man, everywhere. The whole race is opposed by the principalities and powers, the world rulers of this present darkness. There is Paul's positive explanation of the struggle of life. I hasten to say that this declaration will only be fully believed and understood by Christians. The world either distorts it to the point of ridiculousness or it rejects it as unacceptable to the intelligent mind. Superstition has taken this great revelation and distorted it, twisted it, reduced it to a ridiculous pantheon of goblins,

witches, spooks, and ghouls.

I am very well aware of the disdain, even contempt, with which the biblical concept of the devil and his cohorts, this kingdom of darkness, these principalities and powers and wicked spirits in high places, is received in many circles. There are those who say, "Are you going to insult our intelligence by talking about a personal Devil? Surely you are not going back to those medieval concepts and tell us that the Devil is the root of all our problems?"

I once spent an evening in Berlin discussing the whole problem with four or five intelligent churchmen – men who knew the Bible intimately. Though we never once opened a Bible, we spent the whole evening together discussing various passages, and I never referred to a single passage that they were not aware of and could not quote almost verbatim. Yet all of them rejected the idea of a Devil. They could not believe in a personal Devil. At the end of the evening they admitted that, in their rejection of the Devil, they also had no answers to the conundrums which life was continually presenting. We had to leave it there.

I am reminded of the story Billy Graham told in response to this idea that there is no Devil. A certain boxer was being badly beaten in a match. Battered and bruised, he leaned over the ropes and said to his trainer, "Please throw in the towel! This guy is killing me!" The trainer responded, "Oh no, he's not. He's not even hitting you. He hasn't laid a glove on you!" And the boxer replied, "Well, then, I wish you'd watch that referee – somebody is sure hitting me!" In similar fashion, the questions we must ask when challenged with this idea that there is no Devil are, "How do you explain what is going on in the world? How do you explain the entrenched evil in human affairs?"

The following is from a letter written in July 1530 to Jerome Weller, a 31-year-old friend who had previously lived in the Luther home, tutored his children, and was now struggling with spiritual despair:

“. . . Excellent Jerome, You ought to rejoice in this temptation of the devil because it is a certain sign that God is propitious and merciful to you.

You say that the temptation is heavier than you can bear, and that you fear that it will so break and beat you down as to drive you to despair and blasphemy. I know this wile of the devil. If he cannot break a person with his first attack, he tries by persevering to wear him out and weaken him until the person falls and confesses himself beaten.

Whenever this temptation comes to you, avoid entering upon a disputation with the devil and do not allow yourself to dwell on those deadly thoughts, for to do so is nothing short of yielding to the devil and letting him have his way.

Try as hard as you can to despise those thoughts which are induced by the devil. In this sort of temptation and struggle, contempt is the best and easiest method of winning over the devil.

Laugh your adversary to scorn and ask who it is with whom you are talking.

By all means flee solitude *, for the devil watches and lies in wait for you most of all when you are alone. This devil is conquered by mocking and despising him, not by resisting and arguing with him. . .

When the devil throws our sins up to us and declares we deserve death and hell, we ought to speak thus:

“I admit that I deserve death and hell.

What of it?

Does this mean that I shall be sentenced to eternal damnation?

By no means.

For I know One who suffered and made a satisfaction in my behalf.

His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Where he is, there I shall be also.”

Yours,
Martin Luther

* Obviously “solitude” is not always a bad thing, but at certain times of weakness it is better for us to have the company and encouragement of fellow believers than to be alone.

It should also be noted that not all depression is “from the devil,” and sometimes it comes from our own inner psychological workings. In that case, it’s wise to seek help from other believers or from a trained counselor.

WATCH the following video featuring Tony Evans as he addresses the question of how we put on the armor of God: <https://youtu.be/MNKL NJo21o>

READ the definitions below and choose to focus on one of the pieces of armor each day this week.

The Bible often illustrates the Christian life as a battle against Satan. As Scripture says, "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against . . . spiritual hosts of wickedness" (Eph 6:12). Let's take a look at each piece of this spiritual armor and see how it can enable us to be effective in our battle against the "spiritual hosts of wickedness."

1. Belt of truth (Ephesians 6:14)

"Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth," Paul says. Truth is the belt that holds all the other pieces of the armor in place. It refers to the truths of Scripture as opposed to the lies of Satan. Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (verse 32). The great truths of the Bible-the love of God, salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, the Second Coming, forgiveness of sin, grace and power to live for Jesus-these truths set us free from Satan's lies. Satan would have us believe that we are sinful, lost, and without hope. The truth is that God's love and salvation has set us free from sin and death.

2. Breastplate of righteousness (Ephesians 6:14)

The breastplate covers the heart and shields it and the other vital organs. That is what Christ's righteousness does for you. It protects you against all of Satan's accusations and charges. This righteousness is not made up of the good deeds you do. The Bible is clear that none of us are righteous in ourselves (Romans 3:10).

The breastplate of righteousness is entirely the righteousness of Jesus which He gives us freely when we accept Him as our Savior (2 Corinthians 5:21). It is Christ's righteousness - not our own righteousness - that covers and protects us.

3. Shoes of the gospel (Ephesians 6:15)

Soldiers marching into battle must have comfortable shoes. As soldiers of Christ, we must put on "gospel shoes" that will allow us to march wherever our Lord leads. Satan will try to place obstacles in our path, but in Jesus' strength we can walk forward, following our Lord, obeying Him, and advancing the gospel.

4. Shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16)

Paul says, "Above all, . . . [take] the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of

the wicked one" (Ephesians 6:16). When Satan attacks with doubts, the shield of faith turns aside the blow. When temptations come, faith keeps us steadfast in following Jesus. This faith is not something that comes from within us; it is God's gift to us. Then as we walk with Him, that faith grows and develops until it becomes a shield, protecting us and allowing us to live a full life in Christ.

5. Helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17)

The helmet protects the head - perhaps the most vital part of the body since it is the seat of thought and the mind. When we have a sure knowledge of our salvation, we will not be moved by Satan's deceptions. When we are certain that we are in Christ with our sins forgiven, we will have a peace that nothing can disturb.

6. Sword of the spirit (Ephesians 6:17)

The sword of the spirit is the only weapon of offense listed in the armor of God. All the other parts are defensive in nature. God's Word is described as "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). Jesus used this weapon when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness. To each of Satan's efforts to lead Him into sin, Jesus replied, "it is written. . ." and proceeded to quote Scripture to destroy Satan's temptations. God's Word is truth (John 17:17). That is why it is so powerful. That is why it is so important that we study the Bible and become familiar with its truths and its power.

- from BibleInfo.com

dis·ci·ple

noun. a follower of Jesus

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 17: THE GREAT COMMISSION

Matthew 28:16-20

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Famous last words

We all want to take seriously the Greatest Commandment ("love the Lord your God"), the New Command ("love one another") and the Great Commission ("make disciples"). This famous passage constitutes the "marching orders" he gave his men, words that would resonate with them for years to come, guiding them with purpose. We can end up doing many good, well-intentioned things for God, but we need to look at this passage and ask ourselves if we are doing to main thing he asked us to do.

- Why is verse 18, along with the second half of verse 20, so important in this setting?
- The commission is actually one thing ("make disciples") with two parts. What are the two parts?
- Think back over your spiritual journey. Who were the most significant people in your discipleship process? Who helped lead you to Jesus, and who taught you about him in your spiritually formative years (which are still going on, by the way)?
- Whose lives are you having an impact on today? Would anyone answering the previous question include you in their answer? (Remember, you will probably not be the ONLY spiritual influence in someone's discipleship process.)

SOUL-TRAINING EXERCISE: Passing it On

The Exercise for this week is to think about how you could pass on these things you've learned. If you're a parent, what about your children? Or is there someone you know, perhaps a new Christian, who has not had the opportunity to learn the basics? Jesus intends for us to pass on the things we learn, even though we are imperfect and still "in the process." Actually, one of the best ways to learn is to teach someone else! And although your first response might be "No way!" the Holy Spirit will enable you to do way more than you think. Maybe you and one of your friends can team up and start a small group.

Here's a current example from a friend of mine:

"Early in the Covid pandemic, I realized I had no network of men to gather with. With our church shut down, I kept thinking of GK Chesterton's well known quote, "A man by himself is in bad company".

So armed with this thought, I reached out to several men from various backgrounds, ages and educational levels with the offer that if they would commit to meet weekly, we would discuss Scripture, life and any issues that came up during the week. No cross talk, no fixing, just fellowship. Now almost a year later, we are still gathering each Tuesday morning. We rotate who leads and always begin with the question, "How is everyone doing?"

One of the members, a 70 year old attorney recently shared that, "I've never been in a small group before and can't believe what I've missed. This group is my church". Another member in his 30's came to realize the Dad wound he has and how his life has been spent trying to please an absent father. He looks to the older men in the group to impart wisdom and life recommendations". These are just two examples of what occurs when men gather.

My own group experience goes back to the early 1990's when a friend called several of us and asked if we would be open to joining a weekly men's group. This group became life-time friends as we shared laughs and tears; victories and losses all in a safe environment. A discipleship group is life changing when a group comes together with guidelines that ensure good boundaries and Christ-centered teaching."

- Ben, Dallas, Texas

1. **WATCH** this 2-minute Francis Chan VIDEO: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KIA-DGx_3Y

Summarize Chan's main point:

2. **WATCH** this 15-minute Nooma VIDEO by Rob Bell, called "Dust." It's a great reminder of how Jesus chose and worked with his disciples, and how he continues to work with us: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kM3qHBAekhg>

What stood out to you from this video?

3. **For Further Study:** READ my paper on my experiences with Discipleship: http://www.hixonstudies.com/papers/25_years_of_discipling_men.pdf