

## Learning Experience 3: Curriculum Development

### Learning Experience 3: Holy Spirit Weekend Curriculum Development

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DML921: Holy Spirit Weekend

Following in the Steps of Spiritual Mentors (Elective)

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### **Section 1: Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to create a curriculum that will address the church's desire for spiritual growth, renewal, and well-being. This curriculum was developed to reach a focus group of Christians at our church, primarily 1.5 generation, 2nd and 3rd generation immigrants. Some of these members had grown dissatisfied with their spiritual lives and have expressed a desire for spiritual renewal and revival. The curriculum will be equally accessible to men and women. It is designed to enhance the participants' sense of spiritual well-being, provide guidance for spiritual growth and connectedness to God by allowing the Holy Spirit to engage and transform them through spiritually formed prayer, and various practices of spiritual disciplines. The problem this curriculum addresses is the necessity to create an organized study for spiritual renewal, growth, and well-being. The aim is to use biblically-based methodology that is doctrinally sound in a manner that is not proscriptive, legalistic, or regimented but rather more engaging and systematic in terms of learning and application. The timing of this study coincides with the 40th anniversary of our congregation and an expressed desire by the congregation as a whole to engage in renewal practices at this time. The time frame for this curriculum to be completed is expected to be within 40 days.

### **Section 2: Annotated Bibliography**

Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the heart: Exploring the seven stages of spiritual growth*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019.

This book serves as a roadmap for individuals seeking a deeper understanding of their spiritual growth. Ashbrook divides the spiritual journey to maturity into seven distinct stages. He offers a comprehensive exploration of these stages, providing valuable insights and guidance for individuals seeking self-discovery, personal and spiritual transformation.

Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual disciplines handbook: Practices that transform us*. Downers Grove, IL, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.

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This book gives an overview of all things related to spiritual disciplines including examples of how to practice the disciplines. Like a training manual for bodybuilding whether it be for endurance, strength, or flexibility, this manual provides practices to increase soul-building for spiritual strength, endurance, and decision-making.

Chan, Edmund. *A certain kind: Intentional discipling that redefines success in ministry*. Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church, 2013.

Chan reminds us that discipleship is not about quantity but quality. He focuses on the character of the disciple, reminding us that the goal of the outcome and process is Christlikeness. He outlines how Christlikeness leads to transformation.

Demosthene, Nathaniel. *Rooted: Bible studies for biblical discipleship*. Portland, OR: Bookbaby, 2022.

Organized into a series of bible studies, this book is designed to equip and empower ministry leaders and individuals to faithfully disciple others into life-long faith in Jesus Christ. Demosthene organizes the studies around the following eight biblical principles for spiritual growth as popularized by the renowned discipleship teacher, Edmund Chan: biblical theology, biblical allegiance, biblical identity, biblical purpose, biblical values, biblical priorities, biblical authority, and biblical foundations.

Demosthene, Nathaniel. *The Prophetic ministry: What matters most*. Spring Valley, NY: Independent, 2021.

This book focuses on the internal character and external conduct that is expected to accompany the prophetic gifting in the Holy Spirit.

Prince, Derek. *Baptism in the holy spirit*. Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1995.

This small treatise aims to lead the believer into understanding the purpose of baptism as a crucial step for the Christian in the journey towards spiritual maturity. Prince not only explains the purpose but also examines the

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evidence of this baptism from a biblical and practical perspective as well as the benefits of this experience for the Christian with respect to growth and maturity.

Putman, Jim. *Real-life discipleship: Building Churches that make disciples*. United States, ID: The Navigators, 2014.

Putnam believes the mistake the church today makes is an overemphasis on conversion with a gross neglect of discipleship. The church is so focused on growth that we have an overabundance of immature Christians and not enough mature leaders to disciple and reproduce Christians who are able to reproduce more Christians. We've become dependent on superleaders to lead the flock and who have incredible attractional ability but lead few to spiritual maturity.

Reimer, Rob. *Pathways to the king: Living a life of spiritual renewal and power*. Franklin, TN: Carpenter's Son Publishing, 2013.

Reimer focuses on the church's need for renewal and revival in order to obtain deeper authority, and power in Christ and become a kingdom-minded person living out the compelling life of the Spirit. The outcome of this renewed person is greater and deeper intimacy with Christ. In order to obtain this intimacy he outlines eight pathways that will lead the believer towards that end.

Reimer, Rob. *Soul care: Seven transformational principles for a healthy soul*. Franklin, TN: Carpenter's Son Publishing, 2016.

Reimer follows up *Pathways* with *Soul care*. While the emphasis in *Pathways* is more renewal and revival, the emphasis in *Soul care* is more restoration and spiritual healing. Soul care identifies and explores seven principles that serve as healing tools to address the brokenness that we experience as a by-product of the Fall of man and sin.

The seven principles concern repairing our misplaced notions of identity, repentance, breaking family sin patterns, forgiving others, healing

wounds, overcoming fears, and spiritual deliverance from demonic strongholds. The text encourages the reader to take this journey collaboratively in a true community and so it functions as an excellent piece for small group study in groups that focus on life change.

Riso, Don Richard, and Russ Hudson. *The wisdom of the enneagram: The complete guide to psychological and spiritual growth for the nine personality types*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1999.

In this text the authors explore the psychological and spiritual dimensions of the Enneagram system. The text identifies, explains, and summarizes the functionality of the nine personality types, including a detailed description of specific core motivations and fears, which shape their behavior and perceptions. Using this text the reader can recognize that each type has different levels of psychological health and development from which individuals can learn to grow and evolve. More than just a tool for personality analysis, the text shows how the Enneagram can act as a pathway to spiritual transformation, by helping one understand the limitations of each type and becoming self-aware of automatic reactions from each type. In turn, this awareness will help promote compassion, empathy, reduce judgment, and lead to improved relationships as well as deeper levels of personal and spiritual growth.

Sanders, J. Oswald. *Spiritual discipleship: with study guide*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994.

This book focuses on spiritual growth from a discipleship perspective. Sanders builds a profile of the ideal disciple from the teachings of Jesus. He explores various aspects of discipleship such as servanthood, motivation, maturity, and prayer life, in such a way as to highlight the impact they have on everyday life.

Sanders, J. Oswald. *Spiritual maturity*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2005.

In this book, Oswald demonstrates that an understanding of the nature of the Godhead, the Trinity, is essential to biblical understanding of spiritual growth. Instead of an emphasis on methodology, Oswald highlights through scriptures and illustrations how we should approach God. For Oswald, spiritual renewal is not an objective, but rather a state-of-being wholly dependent on who God is, and how we respond to our understanding of who He is. Consequently, knowing God is the foundation of spiritual maturity.

Scazzero, Peter. *The Emotionally healthy leader: How transforming your inner life will deeply transform your church, team, and the world.*

Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015.

Scazzero's text is geared primarily towards leaders. It highlights the significance of emotional maturity and self-awareness in leadership as well as the importance of creating positive emotional environments around the leader for the organization. The book offers specific strategies, such as embracing vulnerability, leading out of brokenness and weakness, practicing Sabbath, and developing a rule of life, to help leaders cultivate emotional health.

Thomas, Gary. *Sacred pathways: Discover your soul's path to God.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.

In the book, Thomas identifies nine different spiritual pathways or temperaments through which individuals connect with God. These pathways represent various approaches to worship and spiritual practices. While these pathways are not exclusive or mutually exclusive, they represent various frameworks by which individuals can break the monotony or religious ritualism that can come to stymie individuals in their desire to connect with God. Individuals may resonate with more than one pathway, or may not truly "feel" another pathway. What is important is that the individual be open to exploring different ways people find and connect with God in search of spiritual fulfillment and maturity.

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Torrey, R. A. *Person and work of the holy spirit*. Good Press, 2020.

Originally published in 1910, Torrey's treatise on pneumatology remains a classic. Torrey's premise is that until one knows the Spirit himself, one cannot have a practical understanding of how the Spirit works in the life of the believer. From a study of the various names for Him to exegetical arguments supporting the Holy Spirit as a person Torrey presents pneumatology in a way that is clear, concise and applicable to the everyday life of the believer.

Villodas, Rich. *The Deeply formed life: Five transformative values to root us in the way of jesus*. Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook PR, 2021.

Villodas presents a formative book about the rhythms of life for the Christian. The transformative values addressed include, Contemplative Rhythms, Racial Reconciliation, Interior Examination, Sexual Wholeness, and Missional Presence. Through these five topics he presents a holistic, and yet modern approach to spiritual formation as it relates to the current western worldview context.

Webb, Terry. *The Tree of Renewed Life*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1990.

Based on the 12-step method made famous by organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous, this book uses the principles to guide the church into spiritual renewal. The purpose is to use these steps to inspire individuals to engage in self-reflection, moral inventory, making amends, and continual spiritual growth while uplifting others to do the same.

Whitney, Donald S. *Ten questions to diagnose your spiritual health*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group, 2014.

Like many other authors in this bibliography, Whitney emphasizes the importance of cultivating a vibrant and authentic relationship with God through spiritual practices and disciplines. Whitney believes it is important to gauge spiritual health beyond just attending church services or engaging in religious activities. He offers a diagnostic tool in the form of questions suitable

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for small group dialogue that focus on helping the reader cultivate a deep, personal connection with God in everyday life.

Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the heart: Putting on the character of christ*. Kindle Edition. London: Form, 2021.

Willard is one of the foremost authorities on the topic of spiritual formation. In this text, he focuses on how the will, emotions, and the body all must align and conform to the will of God for the Christian to grow.

Wilson, Todd A. *The enneagram goes to church: Wisdom for leadership, worship, and Congregational Life*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, InterVarsity Press, 2021.

While the Enneagram is not universally embraced within the Christian community, Wilson believes it has value as a wisdom tool that can be applied by Christians, in particular leaders for spiritual growth and transformation. Wilson acknowledges the potential for its misuse or reliance on self-focus rather than reliance on God, but has created a framework to use the concept of the personality types, especially in small groups for better self-awareness, team-building, and transformation.

### **Section 3: Target: Description of Target Audience**

#### *i. Location of context*

The curriculum will be enacted at First Timothy Christian Church, in the Village of Spring Valley, NY, a village in the Town of Ramapo within the county of Rockland County, NY. Rockland County is the smallest County in the state of New York outside of the five boroughs of New York City<sup>1</sup>. However, the Town of Ramapo is the largest town in the state with a population of approximately 150,000 residents<sup>2</sup>. Any municipality with a greater population in New York is classified as a city. The Village of Spring Valley, NY including its surrounding areas within the Town of Ramapo is the second most popular area for repatriation of the Haitian Diaspora in the United States behind only Florida (Batalova & Olsen-Medina, 2020). It had the second

1 <https://www.rocklandhistory.org/page.cfm?page=53#:~:text=Rockland%20County%20is%20the%20smallest,a%20land%20rich%20in%20history>.

2 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramapo,\\_New\\_York](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramapo,_New_York)

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largest per capita number of people of Haitian descent in 2010. Although the numbers are declining, recent unrest in Haiti has brought a slight resurgence in emigration by Haitian to the area<sup>3</sup>.

#### *ii. Intended audience (gender, age, level of education, position, etc.)*

The church members who will benefit from this curriculum will primarily be 1.5 generation, 2nd generation and third generation immigrants. They are all high school graduates or have at least an equivalency degree. The majority are not leaders in the congregation, but some of them are leaders in our young adult and youth ministry context as well as the English ministries called Rooted.

#### *iii. Type of context (church, non-profit, etc.)*

The congregation is a non-denominational protestant evangelical in nature. The church has been incorporated for forty years. The ministry was founded by my father and incorporated in 1983. I was installed as the senior pastor in 2010.

The church members that will participate have been members for varied years at the church ranging from decades to less than a year. This church is an ethnic church where Haitian Creole is the primary language of worship services. Three years ago the congregation began an English ministry primarily to retain its 1.5 generation, and 2nd generation members, while simultaneously making the effort to reach out to the community which has changed around the church. The English ministry, Rooted Church, focuses on reaching out to a multicultural audience. The primary language in these services and this ministry is English.

#### *iv. Other: perceived obstacles, who is included, who is not, etc. if applicable*

Most of the older members are not included in this initiative. There are two primary reasons for this exclusion. The first reason is the language barrier. For the majority of the members, English is not the primary language. Haitian Creole and/or French is the primary language. The materials provided will not be translated and consequently will be an obstacle to these members. Secondly, the vast majority of the older members have limited formal education in the home country of Haiti. Due to this

3 1. 2021 Sep 22, "Spring Valley Haitian Community Center Helps Migrants Granted Asylum in the Hudson Valley," News 12 - Hudson Valley, accessed June 1, 2023, <https://hudsonvalley.news12.com/spring-valley-haitian-community-center-helps-migrants-granted-asylum-in-the-hudson-valley>.

deficiency in formal education it would be difficult for them to benefit from the methodology and presentation of the curriculum as constituted.

#### **Section 4: Scope/Sequence**

##### *i. Tentative Outline*

- I. IDENTITY (DAY 1-7)**
  - A. Who is God?**
  - B. Who Am I?**
  - C. What is my purpose?**
  
- II. SURRENDER/SUBMISSION/OBEDIENCE (DAY 8-14)**
  - A. Will, Authority, Desire**
  - B. Emotion, Thoughts**
  - C. Commitment (Time, Possession)**
  
- III. WORSHIP, PRAYER, MEDITATION (DAY 15-21)**
  - A. Worship, Devotion, Prayer**
  - B. Spiritual Disciplines**
  - C. Spiritual Pathways**
  
- IV. MATURITY (DAY 22-28)**
  - A. Bible Study**
  - B. Work of the Holy Spirit**
  - C. Fruit of the Spirit**
  - D. Gifts of the Spirit**
  - E. Suffering**
  - F. Soul Care**
  
- V. RELATIONSHIPS & FELLOWSHIP (DAY 29-36)**
  - A. Relationships**
  - B. Loving People**
  - C. Living in Community**
  
- VI. MISSION (DAY 37-40)**
  - A. Proclaiming the Gospel**
  - B. Relationship Evangelism**
  - C. Discipleship**

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### ii. Time frame, delivery, and methodology

These sessions will take the form of daily delivered lessons via blog or email that the participants will follow during this 40-day period. The individuals range in age from 20-50 years old. Each person was recruited based on volunteering to participate as well as their comfortability with the English language. Consequently, education level was considered. Each person would be responsible to have an accountability partner during the period. The partners must both be participants. The participants will have autonomy on how they will review the material, where they will meet or what medium they will use to meet, as well as how they will keep each other accountable. The requirement is that they pledge to survey the material daily during the 40-day period. Prior to the beginning of the curriculum, the participants will take a series of surveys to assess spiritual well-being, spiritual health, and spiritual growth. At the end of the 40-day period, the participants will take the surveys again to measure what they have learned and if there has been any growth on their part.

The topics chosen in the outline derive from my personal research on spiritual formation in my dissertation work, and the readings from our class, DML 921 Following in the Footsteps of Spiritual Mentors. The approach in delivery will be to combine delivery in terms of the dissemination of knowledge and methods of application. In my context, we have tried this approach before when our church went to virtual Sunday School classes using video and phone conferencing. The participants were given the materials beforehand and discussed it weekly connecting through technology.

### **Section 5: Lesson Plans (See Appendix: 40-day plan)**

The lesson plans for the program will consist of a theme, a key passage or passages, some paragraphs of content, a few reflective questions and structured exercises, that align with the subtopics in the above-referenced outline. The results will be assessed through pre-tests and post-tests that the participants will take on spiritual formation, growth and well-being.

(see attached Appendix for actual lesson plans).

### **Section 6: Conclusion**

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At the completion of this curriculum, there are several goals that will hopefully be accomplished. First, that the participants' awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives will increase. Secondly, the participants will develop spiritual routines and habits through daily experiences with God that will enable them to have the tools for continuous spiritual growth and well-being. Thirdly, those who complete this curriculum will become more engaged in the local church and volunteer to be active as leaders in ministry if they have not already done so. Finally, they will see the fruits and benefits of participation in their daily lives through increased social, emotional and spiritual well-being.

## Learning Experience 3: Curriculum Development

### **APPENDIX : 40-DAY CURRICULUM**

**IDENTITY - DAY 1**

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# Discover the Essence of God Part 1

*Who is God and how does that affect our relationship with Him?*

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**Key Theme Passage/Verse**

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17 (ESV)

**Devotional Content**

Have you ever thought about who God is? Have you ever wondered if someone can really know God? On one occasion, the pastor passed through the Children's ministry on a Sunday morning to observe. He walked through the school class where the four-year-olds were drawing pictures about people in the Bible. One boy had drawn an exciting scene of God driving Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. Another showed Jesus feeding a large crowd of very hungry people. However, another young innocent girl was drawing something that the pastor couldn't quite figure out and he asked her to explain. The girl responded confidently, "Oh, I'm drawing a picture of God." The pastor responded kindly, "That's nice dear, but no one really knows for sure what God actually looks like." But she turned and smiled at him and said, "They will when I get done!" You never know what to expect when a child opens his or her mouth! She may embarrass you; she may amuse you; or she may say something that reveals wisdom beyond her years.

The Bible tells us that God is Spirit, but we do have a picture of who He is? The answer is yes. Jesus did draw a picture for us. His life on the earth drew for us a picture of who God really is. Just like the girl, when Jesus' mission on earth was done, he left no doubt as to who God really is. Remember how Jesus responded when his disciple Philip asked Jesus to see the Father? "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 can you say, 'Show us the Father?'" (John 14:9). Jesus was called "Emmanuel," which means "God with us." When Moses asked God for his name to tell the Israelites, God answered, "Tell them that I AM has sent you." We know that "I AM" is an incomplete sentence. When Jesus came, he finished the sentence. He did not just say, "I am." He said, "I am the Door.... I am the Good Shepherd.... I am the Bread of Life." He revealed to us the essence of God so that we might understand the heart of God. As spirit beings we connect to God through following the example of Christ, and living in communion with his Spirit which we learn about more in later lessons.

**Structured Exercises**

\* Read the seven "I AM's" of Jesus. What does each one affirm about who God is in Jesus?

(1) Bread - John 6:35,41,48,51 (2) Light - John 8:12,9:5 (3) Door - John 10:7,9  
(4) Shepherd - John 10:11,14 (5) Resurrection and Life - John 11:26, Rev. 1:18  
(6) Way, Truth & Life - John 14:6 (7) True Vine - John 15:1,5

\* Memorize and meditate on the theme scripture for this lesson daily

\* Try using each "I am" statement in personal prayer and devotion

**Review/Personal Application:**

- *What did I learn about God or myself that I can use today?*
- *What effect did using the different "I Am" statements have on my prayer routine?*

**Care and Reflection:** Find a song, or a place, or a testimony that reminds you of who God is for you.

***IDENTITY - DAY 2***

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## Discover the Essence of God Part 2

*Who is God and how does that affect our relationship with Him?*

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**Key Theme Passage/Verse**

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17 (ESV)

**Devotional Content**

Questions about God's true identity are always a concern for anyone who thinks about spiritual or religious topics and issues. Does He exist? What is He like? There is a difference between knowing about God and knowing God. Our first lesson focused more on knowing God. We looked at God from a relationship perspective. We looked at how God's nature and essence connects with us. He is our shepherd, our truth, and we live our fullest life in Him.

The Bible gives us a basic but not complete picture of who God is. To fully know God would be impossible, because logically that would make us like Him which we see in a minute is not possible. Why? Because there is only one God. He is the Triune God, three-in-one. There are several major characteristics of God that make him unique. God is immutable, which means unchanging, (Malachi 3:6). God is omnipotent, which means all-powerful (2 Chronicles 20:6). God is infinite and limitless (Psalms 147:5, Isaiah 40:28). God is omniscient, which means all-knowing (Job 37:16). God is omnipresent and transcendent, which means his presence transcends or goes beyond places and time (Psalms 33:14, 139:7-8). Finally, God is immanent, which is one of the most important characteristics for us in a relationship with him. When we say that God is immanent it means that he is personable and relatable to His creation, in particular humanity, even though he is apart from His creation. It is from God's immanence, that Jesus gets the name Emmanuel, God with us. God interacts with His creation, (Psalms 56:8, Psalms 145:18).

Someone asked me once about the idea of God as the Trinity. He told me he was confused by it and could I explain it. I told that the Trinity is a mystery that we simply accept because it is found in the Bible (Matthew 3:16, 28:19, Luke 3:22, John 14:26, 2 Corinthians. 13:14, 1 Peter 1:2 ). However, when he pressed harder, I gave him an illustration. I told him to imagine water in a glass and put some very cold ice in it. Once you put the ice in you will have three different physical forms, liquid which has no shape but has definite volume, ice, which has definite shape and volume, and water vapor, which has no definite shape or volume as you see the glass get foggy. They all weigh differently, move and settle differently, yet they all have the same essence, H<sub>2</sub>O. They are all made up equally with hydrogen and oxygen. They all exist simultaneously, or at once.

**Structured Exercises**

\* Watch the video- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wif\\_yGZcK18&t=66s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wif_yGZcK18&t=66s) see how the glass disappears and is invisible, the same way Christ can be in the Father

\*Memorize and meditate on the theme scripture for this lesson daily

\*Read Ephesians 1:19-20. Formulate a prayer based on this scripture for your life.

**Review/Personal Application:**

- Which one of the characteristics presented do I feel has the most impact on my daily living, why?
- If God knows everything, how should that affect my view of my personal decisions, sin, and thoughts?

➤ *What did I learn that I can use today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Take time to observe the greatness and power of God in His Creation and give thanks

### **IDENTITY - DAY 3**

## Discover the Essence of God Part 3

*Who is God and how does that affect our relationship with Him?*

### Key Theme Passage/Verse

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17 (ESV)

### Devotional Content

Now that we know that God is immanent, and transcendent, we can ask how he relates to us? What are some characteristics of how God relates to humanity? The story of the Bible is the story of God's relationship to humanity. In his immutability, these characteristics don't change. In today's lesson we see how knowing about God and knowing God blend together. The characteristics we will explore today can be shared between us and God.

In the book of Exodus we read about how God's chosen people, the Israelites, were delivered from slavery, and prepared to be brought into their inheritance. This book highlights several key characteristics of God in relation to His people such as sovereignty, faithfulness, compassion, grace, love, patience (slow to anger), and holiness. One of the problems that Israelites encountered was that on many occasions they forgot these things about God and He rebuked them for it. It is not enough to know these things, but we must remember them. God proved his sovereignty, or supreme authority by freeing his people from the most powerful empire at the time, Egypt and driving out the Canaanites in the land. He proved his faithfulness by fulfilling his promise to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. He made Israel a great nation and set a place apart for them to inherit. He proved his compassion by hearing their cries in slavery. He proved his grace by using Moses, a murderer on the run, to rescue his people. He proved his love and forgiveness by not rejecting his people even though they sinned multiple times against him in the desert. He proved his patience by guiding them for forty years in the desert despite their rebelliousness. He eventually brought their children into the land. He proved his holiness by setting up the Levites as the tribe where the priests would come from. The sacrifices, offerings, services, wardrobe, and artifacts used by the priests all represented God's holiness, and how He was set apart. The priests were set apart unto God and belonged to him on a level of holiness beyond that of the common people to set an example for God's people of how important holiness was to him.

God expects to reflect his characteristics in our life. He expects us to show that he is sovereign over us, to be faithful to him, have compassion, grace, love and patience toward others and be holy. If we belong to him, his characteristics should have an impact on our lives.

### **Structured Exercises**

\* Take each characteristic of God in the lesson and reflect on how it can impact your daily life.

\*Memorize and meditate on the key verse.

\*Read Exodus 34 & Psalm 136 and identify all the characteristics of God identified in these passages.

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *Which of the characteristics presented do I feel I need to work on the most & why?*
- *How will I start to apply these characteristics in my life going forward?*
- *What did I learn that I can use today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Take time to thank God for each one of the characteristics presented in the lesson today.

### ***IDENTITY - DAY 4***

## **Discovering My Identity Part 1**

*Who am I and how does God see me?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” Psalms 139:14 (New Revised Standard Version Bible - NRSV)

### **Devotional Content**

When a child is born, he or she doesn't immediately know his or her identity. It is the parents or guardians that give that child a name, and show that child who he or she is and what role he or she plays in the family. We take this situation for granted and don't even think about it. This remains the case without controversy until the child decides to rebel by changing their name or rejecting his or her identity and choosing another. If that happens, parents or guardians may become confused, hurt, and even depressed because the expectations they had for the child are not being fulfilled.

We shouldn't think our relationship with God is much different than what I have just explained. He is our Creator. He is Lord over his creation. He knows who we are and for what purpose we were created. It is normal and necessary that we should look to him for identity and purpose. And like the child, our identity and purpose will reflect characteristics we find in our Creator our guardian, God the Father.

In the book of Exodus chapter 3, God has an encounter with Moses. In this encounter He identifies Himself to Moses. After that He tells Moses who Moses is. He identifies the Jewish people as His own people. He gives them His identity. The moment the Israelites rebelled and started to worship a false god, the golden calf in Exodus, God is upset with the people. He has a right to be. As our Father, God has a right to determine our identity, our purpose and his plan for our life. As our Father we can be sure that in His sovereignty, God's plan and purpose for us is loving, compassionate, and faithful. It is our job to daily seek to know ourselves better by finding our true identity in him and not the false distractions of this world.

### **Structured Exercises**

\* Take each of the following passages and determine what the Bible says about our identity. - (1 Cor. 6:20; John 1:12; James 2:23; 2 Timothy 2:3; 2 Cor. 5:20; Romans 1:7; Eph. 1:4; 2:1; 1Pet. 1:23; 2:11; 1 John 5:4; Matt. 5:13-14)

\*Memorize and meditate on the key verse.

\*Read Exodus 3 and determine the identity that God gives to his people and meditate on the significance of that identity for the Israelites.

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *What gives God the right to determine our identity and purpose?*
- *How will I make an effort to find my identity and purpose in God for my life going forward?*
- *If we don't give God the right to determine our identity and purpose, then who or what else currently has that job?*
- *How does our identity affect what we have and what we can do?*

**Care and Reflection:** Take time to thank God for each one of the characteristics presented in the lesson today.

## **IDENTITY - DAY 5**

# Discovering My Identity Part 2

*Who am I and how does God see me?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verses**

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” 1 Cor. 5:17. (ESV)

### **Devotional Content**

In the New Testament book of John chapter 3 there is a story about a famous Jewish Rabbi who comes to Jesus at night to have a discussion on identity. He starts the conversation by letting Jesus know that he thinks he knows who Jesus is. Jesus switches the conversation and focuses on who Nicodemus is and who we are as a group in humanity. Jesus lets Nicodemus know that part of his purpose in coming to this world was to help humanity reclaim its true identity. To reclaim our true identity Jesus had to sacrifice his own life to redeem us for God. In our identity we find our purpose. Our purpose is to live as sons and daughters of God. To reclaim our birthright, God had to send His Son Jesus Christ to die on this earth for our sins and redeem us. Jesus told us that God wants us to put our faith in this message to inherit the eternal life that we lost in the beginning of time with Adam and Eve in Genesis because of sin.

Jesus said to Nicodemus that the believer in Christ has a new identity because they are “born again.” To be born again is to exchange our corrupt, sinful life for a new life born from above. In the life from above symbolized by water baptism, we

have a fresh start in the form of forgiveness of sins, eternal salvation, and spiritual renewal. God sees us as a new person. We have the ability to change our attitudes and our actions because of the work of Jesus on the cross. Paul contrasts this new person and attitude with our old person in the book of Ephesians chapters 4 and 5. Some of us think just like Nicodemus. We get confused because we believe that salvation is about doing certain religious exercises or accepting a particular religious viewpoint. This 40-day journey is NOT the transforming vehicle. It is only a tool to develop the transformative power already in you when you get born again. Born again means new emotions, as destructive habits and attitudes become uncomfortable. Previously you were immune to change, now God has given you the desire and will to be transformed.

### **Structured Exercises**

\* Read each of the following passages and determine what the Bible says about our old and new identity. - (Eph. 4:17-32; Eph. 5:1-16).

\*Memorize and meditate on the key verse.

\*If you haven't been water baptized make a decision to start the process.

\*Find a hymn or a song that talks about salvation in Christ and listen to it this week. e.g. The Blood Will Never Lose its Power (Andrae Crouch); Build my life (Pat Barret); This is Our God (Phil Wickham); Amazing Grace (Chris Tomlin); No Bondage (Jubilee Worship); I Give Myself Away, Withholding Nothing (William McDowell), Imagine Me (Kirk Franklin)

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *What aspects of your old identity still give you trouble?*
- *How can my accountability partner help me promote new identity while rejecting the old?*

**Care and Reflection:** Reflect on a positive aspect of your new identity that you want to build on in a journal reflection or in a voice memo/video to yourself.

### ***IDENTITY - DAY 6***

## **Discovering My Identity Part 3**

*Who am I and how does God see me?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verses**

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” 1 Cor. 5:17. (ESV)

### **Devotional Content**

In John chapter 17 we find Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane for his mission, his purpose, and his disciples. One of the interesting things he says concerns our identity. He tells the Father that his disciples are in this world, but not of this world. We learn from Jesus' prayer that although we are living on this earth, we are different from the other inhabitants when we become believers in Christ.

Recently I learned something about whales. Whales are one of the unique species on the planet because they are mammals that live in the ocean. Like other mammals, but unlike fish, they breathe air. This means that they must come up out of the water from time to time to get air. Whales who don't come up for air drown. Often, young baby whales who get caught in nets, or who are born in deep waters and don't have enough experience to learn when and how to come up for air, die. Very old whales whose muscles atrophy and can't swim to the top also drown. Similarly we need the air from above to survive in this world since we are not from it. As young Christians we can get so caught up in this world we don't surface to experience the presence of God enough to help us survive because of our inexperience. As older Christians, sometimes we can get too comfortable and complacent in our spiritual muscles so that we can't surface anymore and drown in the concerns of this world without the air of God's presence. There are cases of whales that became stuck in shallow water and drowned because the water was shallow enough to prevent the whale from swimming but deep enough to cover the whale's blowhole and prevent it from breathing. In other words, their position seemed to be a safe environment, but actually it was the apparent safety of their location that led to their death. It is our identity that makes us hunger for God's presence. We are only safe when we can access His presence continually. It is our identity that leaves us unfulfilled by the wealth of this world, the pleasures of this world, the power, and the approval of others. We need the breath of God's presence, His approval.

In the Bible we have the story of Daniel. He was God's prophet that always took time apart to be in His presence. Even Daniel's enemies knew this about him. They even used this against him to get the king to put him in the lion's den. Still this didn't make Daniel change or waver. He was willing to risk everything to preserve his time with God, are you?

#### **Structured Exercises**

- \* Take time to reflect on how many times you think about the presence of God with you during the day. If you can record it on a phone or in a written journal try to do so.
- \*Memorize and meditate on the key verse.
- \*Listen to This is the Air I breathe (Joe Mettle or others); No Foreign God (Chevelle Franklyn)

#### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *What situations or circumstances lead you to neglect your identity and God's presence?*
- *How will I make an effort to find my identity and purpose in God for my life going forward?*
- *Do others realize that you won't compromise your identity and time with God? How or Why not?*

**Care and Reflection:** Make a decision to treat God's presence like the whale treats breathing. Make a decision to structure your quiet time with God and get your "air".

#### ***IDENTITY - DAY 7***

## **Discovering My Purpose**

*What does God expect from me?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (1 John 2:4-6; ESV)

-Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1 John 4:7-8)

-What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet. (Psalms 8:4-6)

### **Devotional Content**

When God created man, He had three major purposes for His creation. The first was that we love, honor, respect and obey the Creator. The second was that we would demonstrate the same type of love for others that God has for us. The third was that we would take dominion over the other aspects of Creation.

When we reflect on the passages above, we can see that we get stuck or in a rut in our spiritual life when we are not fulfilling these purposes. When we don't keep God's commandments we grieve His Spirit. Disobeying God is destructive not only to us but also those around us. Jonah almost got a whole boatload of people by running away from God's will. Thank God that even when we disobey God, He still pursues us. When we don't love others we don't display the principles of the Kingdom of God. Even when it's difficult we must make the sacrifice because Christ made the sacrifice for us. In Christ's sacrifice we are forgiven. You can't love without forgiveness. Without forgiveness we can't release the pain others have caused us. Forgiveness also requires patience, as God is patient with us. Love is also about service. In Luke 10:25-37 Jesus tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan. This story is the example of love and service that God expects from us. God also expects us to have dominion over Creation. In other words, we shouldn't be ruled by objects, but rather we should rule over them. We should be responsible in our actions on how they affect others as people with dominion. We should work to sustain excellence and lead by example. We should also have dominion over the evil of this world when we interact with dark and evil spirits.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Think about someone you find it difficult to love and interact with. Why is that? Reflect on how you can love in your heart for that person even when they make it difficult.

\*Read the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Think about how you can be a Good Samaritan to a stranger or someone not close to you in the coming days and weeks.

### **Review/Personal Application:**

➤ *Which one of the purposes do I find the most difficult to accomplish and why?*

➤ *How will I make an effort to better acknowledge God's general purpose for my life?*

**Care and Reflection:** Take time to pray for the strength to love people that you find it the most difficult to love and forgive.

### ***SURRENDER/SUBMISSION/OBEDIENCE - DAY 8***

## **The Call to Surrender**

*What does it mean to surrender my will to God?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:6)

### **Devotional Content**

One of the most famous prayers found in the Bible is the Lord's Prayer found in the books of Matthew and Luke. When the disciples ask Jesus for a model prayer, a formula for the proper way to pray, he gives them this prayer. The first thing which gets priority is the worship of God and the surrender to His will. "Hallowed be thy name." If we want to get God's attention, if we want to be heard by Him, in community "Our Father" expects us to "hallow" or honor, His name. In the same breath we declare, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." It is the central piece of Jesus' teaching on prayer. Surrender to God's will must first mean that His supreme worth, His greatness, His infiniteness, His transcendence is firmly acknowledged by us. We have to be like the prophet in Isaiah chapter six when he has a vision and sees God seated on His throne and train of His garment filled the temple. We must imagine and visualize the majesty of God so we can address God from His rightful place. It is then that we can be in our rightful place. Spiritual growth cannot occur until our view of God grows. Spiritual formation starts with the formation of our view of Him. How can we surrender to Him if we don't know Him or fully respect the awesomeness of His person?

One of the obstacles to our surrender to God and respect for Him is how we react to problems. The greatness of God does not stop us from experiencing heartache, disappointment, and pain. Often those situations that bring the negative situation, impact our view of God. Recall Job's attitude during his trials and tribulations. He said this about God, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him." We can also look to the three young Hebrews in the Book of Daniel chapter 3 who expressed the belief that even if God didn't deliver them from the fiery furnace they wouldn't bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's idol. Just like these heroes of faith, we can't let negative circumstances distract us from the preeminence of God. The question is are we willing to say Thy will be done no matter what? Is our view of God dependent on how we feel, on what we need, or what we want? Surrender requires that we seek His will above our own, regardless of the consequences. Whether big or small we should seek to surrender every circumstance to God.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Think about a time you were experiencing a difficulty season, how did that affect

your relationship with God? Did you grow closer or farther away? Were you bitter or patient?

\*Make it a habit to ask for God's direction in even the smallest requests.

\*Memorize the key verse

\*Review the following passages and meditate on their meaning for you in your life:

James 4:7-10; Isaiah 45:9; Matthew 6:33; 6:9-10; Romans 8:7-; 1 Peter 5:6-10

**Review/Personal Application:**

- *When do you find it most difficult to surrender your will to God and why?*
- *How can your accountability partner help you in quest to surrender more to God?*
- *What are some major thoughts that have occupied your mind this week? How can you do a better job of surrendering these thoughts to God?*

**Care and Reflection:** Take time to reflect in silence on how your life reflects the will of God.

***SURRENDER/SUBMISSION/OBEDIENCE - DAY 9***

## Surrendering My Desires

*How do my fleshly desires conflict with my ability to surrender?*

**Key Theme Passage/Verse**

“And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

Galatians 5:24 (ESV)

**Devotional Content**

In the book of Galatians chapter 5:17, Paul says, “the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other...” When we are born again, our new born spirit is at war with the flesh within us. Although God has granted us through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit the ability to overcome the flesh, we still struggle when we don't live in surrender.

The conflict in the flesh comes from several sources. One source is desires based on objects. Wealth and pleasure are two desires based on objects that often lead us into conflict with the will of God. There is nothing wrong with wealth or money, for our God is the wealthiest entity in the world and we are His children. The Bible says the “love of money” is root of all evil. When we elevate money to a desire that overrides all others than we cannot surrender. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel had Naboth killed because they couldn't control their desire to possess his land. Instead of controlling their desire, they let their desire control them. Pleasure is another desire that can get in the way of surrendering to God. God is not against fun, or pleasure. Psalms 16:11 tells us that there are pleasures at the right hand of God. However the lust for pleasure is where we can go wrong. David's lust for pleasure led him to commit adultery with his friend's wife and then have his friend killed over a night a pleasure. The appetites for wealth and pleasure are strong within us, but we cannot let them rule us. However, you cannot fight flesh with flesh. The good news is that when we surrender to God, His Spirit takes over to battle for us.

Power and popularity are also desires that are obstacles to our surrender. These desires deal with our relationship to others. Power can lead to excessive pride, and

narcissism. This was the sin of king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It became about him and he had people worship a statue that represented his power. When we lord it over others as we make everything about us. Power can lead us to not see others and thus block out our ability to exercise love in leadership. Popularity feeds our desire to be accepted and approved. This desire leads to an excessive dependence on the opinion of others about ourselves over and above the opinion of God. Other problematic desires are unfulfilled requests. For example, Cain was upset when God didn't accept his offering. Jonah was mad because God forgave Ninevah. Cain and Jonah experienced bitterness as a result of these unfulfilled desires. We need to depend on the Holy Spirit to combat these desires so that we can wholly surrender.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Memorize and meditate on the key verse

\*Listen to Make Room (Live) (Jonathan McReynolds); In the Room (Jason Nelson)

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *What is an area of your life that you know you need to surrender to God?*
- *Why are you having a difficult time surrendering that area of your life?*
- *How could surrendering that area of your life benefit you?*
- *What freedom might be available to you by surrendering this area of your life?*

**Care and Reflection:** Pray about your relationships, your priorities, your attitude towards others and sexuality. Ask God to make surrender to His will the most important thing for you in all of the above.

## ***SURRENDER/SUBMISSION/OBEDIENCE - DAY 10***

# Surrendering My Emotions

*How do my emotions conflict with my ability to surrender?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

“And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”  
Galatians 5:24 (ESV)

### **Devotional Content**

Over a decade ago, Dr. Brene Brown nearly broke the internet with her Ted Talk on vulnerability and shame. Not too long ago she did it again at another talk on her recent research into relationship and human interactions, “We like to think we are rational beings who occasionally have an emotion and flick it away.” On the contrary, she says: “We are emotional, feeling beings; who, on rare occasions, think.” How else can we explain Tik Tok challenges and all the other eccentricities that we witness on social media? According to Dr. Brown, our brains are wired to make up a narrative to explain our emotional decisions. We feel first, think later.

Unchecked emotions and feelings can leave us depleted and drained without the energy to push through our purpose. Feelings of fear and failure overwhelmed the prophet Elijah after Jezebel threatened to end his life, to the point that he asked God to end his life. God understood that Elijah was drained. In his emotional depletion he no longer saw himself as a vessel to fulfill God’s will. God took special care to nourish a physically and emotionally-drained Elijah and get him back on surrender and

purpose. When we surrender to our emotions and feelings we often reject surrender to God. When Jesus felt drained emotionally he asked the Father to take away the cup with one difference. He said not my will but Your will be done. Jesus set the example that God's will still trumps our emotions and feelings.

Often our emotions drive our desires and passions. King David was bored and restless. These emotions and feelings led him to go on the rooftop and notice a naked Bathsheba bathing to the point that he lusted after her. Emotions and feelings can cause us to do three things that compromise our ability to surrender to God's will. First, we can make mistakes when we deny our feelings and emotions. Peter denied what Jesus clearly saw in his heart. He refused to acknowledge his fear and uncertainty and claimed he wouldn't deny Jesus. Of course this was not the case and later he did deny Jesus. Secondly, we try to avoid our emotions even if we acknowledge them. We don't seek to let God control them until its too late and they consume us. This is what happened to Cain. He let envy and jealousy consume him despite God warning him until he killed his brother Abel. Finally, we chase emotions above our purpose. We chase pleasure because we seek the feeling of happiness. This is why people do substance abuse until they are addicted. They are chasing a feeling that becomes their idol. We must make every effort to give God control over emotions and surrender them.

### **Structured Exercises**

- \*Memorize and meditate on the key verse
- \* Pay attention to negative thoughts that occur before or after strong emotions;
- \* Try to catch yourself when you are emotional and reflect on the bigger picture

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *How could sharing your emotions help you better manage your emotions and feelings?*
- *How could strengthening your relationships with others help you improve your emotional state?*

**Care and Reflection:** Think about a time when your emotions led you to make a destructive decision. Think about how you would have handled it differently today if you had the opportunity today.

## ***SURRENDER/SUBMISSION/OBEDIENCE - DAY 11***

# Surrendering My Thoughts Part 1

*How do I surrender my thoughts to God?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Philippians 4:8 (ESV)

### **Devotional Content**

A man was pulling out of his parking lot before daybreak in a hurry to go to work. As he drove off, he didn't a brand new pothole that took out one of his tires. He hurriedly open his trunk to get out his jack and then remembered he had lent it to a friend at church a few months ago and never asked for it back. Nervously, he started to think.

He knew now that he'd be late to work. He remembered that the neighbor had a jack. He had seen him use it on his car in the other driveway. Suddenly, he began to worry about the reaction he might get when he requested the jack from his neighbor. It was his day off and he would have to wake him up out of bed. He began to think about how that neighbor would feel, how angry and resentful he would be, and how he wouldn't want to get up and give him the jack. He thought to himself that they would probably have to get a flashlight to see since the Sun wasn't up yet. It was cold outside and he thought that might make the neighbor even grumpier. He thought it's not fair. Why should the neighbor be so grumpy? He thought about all the times he had helped the neighbor and loaned him things. The longer he thought about it the madder he got. He angrier and angrier as he arrived at the neighbor's house, went up and banged on the door until the neighbor finally showed up and slowly opened the door. When he saw that he looked up at the groggy and disoriented man in frustration and anger and screamed, "Well, if that's you feel you can keep your lousy jack and turned to leave much to the neighbor's confusion.

Unfortunately, more often than not our thoughts take over from our emotions and we act just like the man with the flat tire. Paul talks in 2 Corinthians 10:5 about challenging the people to hold every thought captive. Paul was talking about spiritual warfare in the mind. People were losing the battle to live according to God's will not in actions but in thought. They were already defeated before lifting a finger. We must take steps to control our thoughts. We must surrender them to God and use the tools he outlines in Philippians 4:8 to live in victory.

#### **Structured Exercises**

- \* Accept responsibility for your negative thoughts and confess them before God.
- \* Memorize the key verse.
- \* Choose to replace negative thoughts with positive ones.
- \* Find things to be grateful about in the midst of your negative situation.
- \* Daily make a list for something positive to represent every clause in Phil. 4:8 (true, lovely...)

#### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *What can I do differently to become a more positive person?*
- *What did I learn that I can use today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Pray the following: Father, teach me that faith-filled optimism is not rooted in my own strength but in the knowledge that you are in control and you are adequate to meet all my needs.

### ***SURRENDER/SUBMISSION/OBEDIENCE - DAY 12***

## **Surrendering My Thoughts Part 2**

*How do I surrender my thoughts to God?*

#### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Philippians 4:8 (ESV)

### **Devotional Content**

Some might say that focusing on positive thinking sounds more like some new age philosophy than anything we learn in the Bible. However, I would disagree. Research shows that we can think almost 45,000 thoughts per day. This barrage of thoughts could be a bit overwhelming, especially if it's predominantly negative. On many occasions, God showed his people that they needed to retune their thinking and be more positive. Recall how God reacted to Sarah when she laughed at the angel saying she would become pregnant in her old age. The angel read her *thoughts* and rebuked her. She had to retool her thinking. In Mark 2 the Pharisees see a sick man come to Jesus and they are negatively focused on what Jesus says about the man's sins being forgiven. They are not concerned about his healing. The Bible says Jesus knew what they were *thinking* and he rebukes them while healing the man. Nathanael is thinking negatively about Jesus just because he comes from Nazareth until he realizes that miraculously Jesus had seen and heard him from afar.

Unfortunately, there are times when we can take positive thinking too far. Thinking positively doesn't mean everything that happens will be positive because of how we think. Biblical positive thinking is not the same as "Name it, claim it" theology. We cannot misinterpret verses like Phil. 4:13 that say we can do all things through Christ, or Romans 8:28 all things work together for the good. Bad things still happen to Christians despite our thinking. However we can remain positive in spite of bad things. Paul, the author of Philippians was actually jailed in that city. He was falsely accused and wrongly imprisoned in the book of Acts 16. However, he remained positive and the Bible tells us that in the middle of the night (midnight actually) Paul and his companions were having a praise and worship session in jail. He didn't let the circumstances get him down. Eventually, God set off an earthquake that delivered them while from the shackles in jail.

Sometimes in the midst of the bad there is evidence of good that we miss because we are so preoccupied with the negative that we miss the good in what God is doing. John the Baptist fell into that trap. He sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he was really the Messiah as John sat in jail awaiting his sentencing. Maybe John's circumstance led him to be frustrated or even doubt. Jesus sent word to remind him that even as he was imprisoned, people were still getting healed, delivered and the gospel of the kingdom was being preached. As Paul and the others remained positive in jail, God used their negative situation to launch the church in Philippi after his miraculous deliverance and release from jail.

### **Structured Exercises**

\* Even in a negative situation, look at the big picture and find the positives.

\* Memorize the key verse

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *How have your thoughts affected your physical and mental health recently?*
- *What did I learn that I can use today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Monitor the impact that your thoughts are having on your physical health daily.

**SURRENDER/SUBMISSION/OBEDIENCE - DAY 13**

## Handling My Commitment

*Am I truly committed to God?*

### Key Theme Passage/Verse

“For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war.”

2 Chronicles 16:9 (NIV)

### Devotional Content

Today, whatever you have accomplished in your life can be viewed as the sum total of your commitments. If you graduated and got a degree, it is because you committed to attend. If you have a driver's license, it's because you committed to learn to drive. If you're married, it's because you committed to being faithful in a relationship with someone for the long term.

Nothing of significance is ever accomplished without commitment. Today, God has personally called each believer to follow His call in a lifetime of faithful service and commitment. This commitment may have different details unique to each believer. Noah's commitment led to different results than Abraham's commitment. Peter's commitment was different than Paul's commitment. Peter was called to lead and organize the church, while Paul was called to witness to the Gentiles. However, all commitments have one thing in common: the commitment is evident in the life of the believer.

Interestingly enough, the word commitment does not appear in the Bible as it applies to Christ and his followers or disciples. However, it is strongly implied when Jesus says to his disciples "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Lk. 14:26-27). Jesus demands a commitment that is above and stronger than any other relationship we have or will have. That is the essence of commitment. What does commitment to Christ look like in general. It means that we put God first. It means we serve Him in everything we do. It means we trust Him and his judgment even in the little things. It means we choose to let him deal with the things we can't control. It means we focus on building and working in his kingdom without distraction from the world. It means we are not afraid to die for his sake. It means we trust him to watch not only over us but also are loved ones as we commit them to Him as well. It means we have faith that he will return to take us to reign with him in glory. We can trust God to strengthen our commitment daily (see our key verse) if we trust Him. It would be foolish not to. **Structured Exercises**

\* Take time to reflect on what is the outward evidence of your commitment to Christ. Write them down in a journal and reflect on how your evidence can increase going forward.

\*What is the evidence of a committed life according to these passages: Eph. 4:20-31; Romans 12:1-21; 1 Kings 8:61. Write them in a journal or record them in a video or audio file.

\*Reflect on the evidence and evaluate where you are strong and where you are weak.

\*Make a commitment to talk to God first and last everyday; Partner with Him in everything.

**Review/Personal Application:**

- *Is there an area where you are afraid to totally commit to Jesus that you need to pray about?*
- *What are some things that serve as barriers to your full commitment to Christ? How will you address these barriers?*
- *Do others realize that you are fully committed to Christ? How do you know this?*

**Care and Reflection:** Take a few quiet moments and reflect on this lesson. Is there a decision or commitment that God may be inviting you to make today in your personal journey? Are you willing to do so?

***SURRENDER/SUBMISSION/OBEDIENCE - DAY 14***

## Handling My Commitment Part 2

*Am I a committed steward of God's blessings?*

**Key Theme Passage/Verse**

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. (NIV).

**Devotional Content**

Randy Alcorn, a New York Times best selling-author on faith and wealth once said, "God created us to love people and use things," but when we are bad stewards, we become people who "love things and use people." Let that sit for a minute. There is no greater giver in the universe than God. He loves us and gives us things starting with the oxygen we breath everyday at no cost. Stewardship is a big deal in the Bible. Nearly 15% of Christ's recorded words deal with money, and 66% of his parables deal with riches and possessions. In the gospels, 1 in every 10 verses addresses a financial issue, while In the Bible as a whole, financial matters are covered in 2,350 verses (more than faith and love combined!)

Unfortunately, while believers are often willing to commit their time, temple (the body) and talents to God, we are more reluctant with the stewardship of our treasures. Stewardship is the act of managing what God has given us wisely and giving back to God in gratitude for what we have received from Him. It is an essential part of our full commitment to God. He expects us to be givers just like Him. There are at least four principles of stewardship that we find in the Bible.

The first principle of stewardship is ownership. Basically, God owns everything, and we are simply managers following his commands (see Psalms 24:1). We need to acknowledge God's ownership and right to direct how we spend. The second principle

is responsibility. We are responsible to manage his holdings well and according to his desires and purposes. Why? Because the third principle is accountability. God will hold us accountable for our stewardship (Rom 14:2). This is the point of the Parable of Talents (Matt. 25:14-30). Not only does God hold us accountable, but he also uses the fourth principle which is reward. God gives us opportunities to be faithful stewards and also makes provision to reward us (Matthew 25:21).

Many passages in the Bible focus on financially supporting God's work. Paul instructs the Corinthians on this in 1 Cor. 16:1-3. When there is a need, his plan is that his people give responsibly to meet it. The ongoing operation of church's ministry, for example, requires the ongoing support of faithful believers. A good practice I have used is to give 10% of my main source of income to my local church. Then, I use 10% or more of all other income sources and unexpected blessings to help fund other Christian needs and opportunities that God brings into my life. Mal. 3:10 tells us to put God to the test to see the rewards of stewardship.

### **Structured Exercises**

- \* Take time to reflect on how faithful you have been in your stewardship.
- \* Make a plan and monitor the results.
- \* Read and meditate on the following passages about Stewardship: Lev. 7:28-36; Deut. 12:5-7; Matt. 25:14-30; Malachi 3:8-11; I Cor. 9:14; 16:1-3; Col. 3:23-24

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *What did you learn about stewardship that you didn't know before this lesson?*
- *How do you think your financial support will impact your local church's ministry? Can you ask?*
- *What truth can you put into practice this week?*

**Care and Reflection:** Share and discuss this lesson with your accountability partner and pray on it.

## **WORSHIP-PRAYER-MEDITATION DAY 15**

# My Worship Part 1

*What is true worship?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

"God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

John 4:24 (New Revised Standard Version Bible - NRSV)

### **Devotional Content**

We were created and designed by God to be in His presence and offer true worship. However, sin changed all of that. Adam and Eve hid from God's presence after sinning in the garden. In John 4, Jesus has a conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well about worship. As their conversation gets deeper, the subject of her personal life comes up. Jesus makes the woman realize that to get to true worship one must be authentic in our approach to God. It has to be based on truth. We have to acknowledge the reality of our sin.

From this encounter in John 4 we learn some key lessons about true worship. Just like the Samaritan woman was sought out by Jesus. God still seeks us in spite of

our sin. He knows that if we enter into true worship that true worship is life-changing! He knows it creates within the worshiper's heart a hatred for sin. True worship results in repentance, obedient submission, and a desire for holiness (Isa. 6:1–8). True worship generates a desire to show mercy, justice and forgive others like God has forgiven us. It includes a joyful acceptance of all that God has provided by His grace. True worship is not exclusive. Just as the Samaritan woman rushed off to tell others of her encounter with the Lord, so true worship inspires us to share with others. True worship produces a transformed life, reflecting a sense of peace in the soul given by the One who has been worshiped.

In Jesus' encounter with the woman, he taught her a lesson that still helps us today. Jesus sought out this woman for a personal encounter to give her abundant life. In the same way the Father seeks a personal encounter with each of us that is real and personal. Although worship is both personal and corporate, it starts with the individual encounter. God's word is the living water that facilitates this encounter.

Most Christians hear the word "worship" and immediately think of music, which is not necessarily a bad thing. Although music is a very common way to worship in church and in our communities, worship is more than music. The early church probably didn't worship with instruments. Certainly, Paul and Silas didn't have any as they worshiped in jail during the middle of the night in Philippi. Christian author and pastor John Piper once said, "The essence of worship is to know God truly and then respond...by valuing God, treasuring God, prizing God, enjoying God, being satisfied with God above all earthly things. And...[also respond with] demonstrable acts of praise from the lips and demonstrable acts of love in serving others for the sake of Christ."

### **Structured Exercises**

\* Take time to reflect on Isaiah 1. Identify the problem God has with his people's worship.

\*Memorize and meditate on the key verse.

\*Take time and reflect on Isaiah's reaction to the vision of worship in heaven in Isaiah ch. 6.

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *What does it mean to worship in spirit and in truth?*
- *How will I make an effort to make my worship more authentic and genuine?*
- *What did I learn today that I didn't realize or know before?*

**Care and Reflection:** Make a decision to take some quality to just be alone with God. Make a decision to structure your quiet time with God and let your spirit enjoy His presence.

### **WORSHIP-PRAYER-MEDITATION DAY 16**

## **My Worship Part 2**

*What is true worship?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

"God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."  
John 4:24 (New Revised Standard Version Bible - NRSV)

### **Devotional Content**

In the Bible we realize that there are various expressions of worship that are acceptable to God and have been offered by His people. The key to worship is not the type of expression but rather the genuineness of the heart, the sincerity of the worshiper. Worship is a response of praise to the character of God that can be manifested in many different ways. We can glorify God throughout our entire day. Worship can happen anywhere you are and in whatever you're doing, assuming it is not sinful or against God.

A few of the many ways to worship God include:

- Music, Singing and Dancing (Psalm 98:1)
- Prayer (1 Chronicles 29: 10-13)
- Creativity: Filmmaking, Writing, Painting, etc. (Exodus 35:30-35)
- Exercise (Romans 12:1)
- Serving Others (1 Peter 4:10)
- Giving and Sacrifice (Genesis 22 and 2 Corinthians 9:11)
- Reading His Word (1 Timothy 4:13)
- Fasting (Luke 2:37)
- Enjoying His Creation (Psalm 63: 3-4)
- Obedience (1 Samuel 15:22)

The essence of these various activities is that focus during this activity is on and not the individual. In fact, God can truly be glorified in everything we say and do, so this list represents just a fraction of the ways you can exalt him. Whatever you do, do it for him. Honor him in all that you say and do, and he will be praised.

We cannot emphasize enough that worship is not about us. Too many times we enter worship with the idea of what can I get out of it. Exalting God is not about what you can get out of it; it is about choosing to praise God and trust him regardless of your circumstances because you know him and you know that he is sovereign, loving and by your side. Worship is about praising God and giving to him, not receiving. Although we do receive benefits from God in worship, these benefits are a bi-product of worship, not the aim of worship. Worship is loving God. Worship is honoring God. Worship is knowing God for who He is, adoring Him, obeying Him, proclaiming Him as a way of life.

### **Structured Exercises**

- \* Memorize and meditate on the key verse.
- \* Establish a daily time alone with God in worship and prayer
- \* Reflect and meditate on these Psalms of Praise : Ps. 34, 91,95, 100, 111,139

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *What expression of worship makes me feel the closest to God?*
- *What did I learn today that I didn't realize or know before?*

**Care and Reflection:** Make a decision to take some quality to just be alone with God. Make a decision to structure your quiet time with God and let your spirit enjoy His presence.

***WORSHIP-PRAYER-MEDITATION DAY 17***

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# My Devotion and Prayer Life

*What is true devotion?*

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## Key Theme Passage/Verse

“God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:24.

## Devotional Content

The world is constantly competing for our attention. We are overwhelmed daily through the media. If a social media app, a streaming service, a TV show, movie, music video pollutes your mind or crowds out your daily time with the Lord, cut it out. If the phone, tablet or computer monopolizes your time, you’ve got to restrict it. If you’re yielding to the temptation to view porn on your device, you’re in serious spiritual trouble (Matt. 5:27-30)! You cannot glorify God with your body unless you flee from immorality (2 Timothy 2:22, 1 Cor. 6:18-20). You’ve got to discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness (1 Tim. 4:7). Remember, true worship is inseparable from godliness. God knows we are not perfect. We cannot make ourselves perfect. However, He expects us to come to Him authentically, desiring to live pure and holy lives. He doesn’t want worship or devotion that hides behind a false image that we show to others. He doesn’t receive it and we get nothing out of it except to portray a false sense of holiness we don’t have. God wants us to come honestly, humbly, and naked before him in our soul.

The enemy knows that if he keeps us distracted it will limit our devotion and prayer. He does this because prayer life is the foundation of a victorious life. If the enemy can distract us from seeking God’s face, he can reign in our lives and make us slaves to his destructive desires for us, for our family, our community, and this world. He also knows that our power derives from the source, God. The more distant we are from God, the more powerless we are. True devotion starts with seeking God’s face and making that a priority above all else.

In the scriptures we see four types of worship. Only one of these represents authentic devotion to God. One type of illegitimate worship is legalistic, self-imposed worship which is more religious than spiritual. Paul talks about this in Col. 2:20-23. The focus is more on what men do than who God is. Another similar illegitimate type is vain worship. Vain worship is when the focus is more on showing who we are than meeting God. Jesus talks about this in Matt. 15:7-9. The Pharisees honored God with their lips, but in actuality they were showing off to others. A third illegitimate type is ignorant worship. Paul talks about this in Acts 17:22-23. Its when we worship what we don’t know like the Athenians. The Israelites did this in the desert with the golden calf. The Samaritans practiced this. This worship is not biblically-based. The only true worship is done in spirit and in truth. All other types are distractions from God’s plan. The plan of the enemy is to keep us from true worship.

## Structured Exercises

\* Memorize and meditate on the key verse.

\*Read the passages referenced in the devotion and meditate on them.

Matt. 5:27-30; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Cor. 6:18-20; 1 Tim. 4:7

### Learning Experience 3: Curriculum Development

\*Complete this sentence: If truly worshiping God is my priority, my daily schedule must change by ....

**Review/Personal Application:**

➤ *How often do I pray each day? Is it enough?*

- *What are some worldly influences that choke out worship in my life? How can I deal with them?*
- *How can I better monitor and protect my mind and soul from things that try to pollute them?*

**Care and Reflection:** Discuss with your accountability partner about how you can monitor each other.

## **WORSHIP-PRAYER-MEDITATION DAY 18**

# Spiritual Disciplines Part 1

*What are spiritual disciplines?*

### Key Theme Passage/Verse

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV)

### Devotional Content

Getting closer to God, developing spiritual intimacy is not a works-based activity. Just doing things to get closer won't make it happen. Our previous lessons have taught us that it is God who seeks us first and we respond. Secondly, our heart, our desire matters. We can't just go through the motions. Think about athletes that compete in sports. They train and practice and learn to sharpen their skills in their respective fields and competitions. All this requires time, effort, and devotion. However, if they don't have the actual desire, they won't win the competition. If they don't value what they are doing, all the training will amount to nothing but a waste of time. They won't win and they won't be fulfilled. This point is important because we should never use spiritual disciplines as a formula. While they can help us achieve our goals, they are only valuable if our heart is in the right place.

Since the early days of the church, the people's desire to get closer to God has been linked to a series of intentional practices, relationships, and experiences that help facilitate this desire. In the book of Acts 2:42 we see that the early Christians "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching [a practice], and to the fellowship [relationships], to the breaking of bread [an experience], and to prayer [another practice]." These intentional practices, relationships, and experiences are known as spiritual disciplines. Have you ever felt that you are in a spiritual rut, or that you have spiritually plateaued? Have you ever experienced a state of spiritual dryness? The spiritual disciplines help us unlock what keeps us from getting to the next level in our relationship with God. Often we have alternative motivations that we have not faced either consciously or in our subconscious that prevent us from moving forward and growing. Spiritual disciplines help us address the hungers of the soul that we will touch on in later lessons. For example, Mary wants Martha to help, and gets frustrated when Mary isn't helping. However, Jesus tells Martha that imposing her drive to help on Mary is actually blocking her from fulfilling her first passion which should be to attend to Jesus first (Luke 10:41-42). The rich young ruler wants eternal life, but he doesn't want it enough to give his earthly wealth away (Mark 10:21). The disciples

understood this principle and even asked Jesus to give them a spiritual discipline or practice as an example when they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1). There are many examples of spiritual disciplines in our next lesson we will explore some of them. The key for today is to remember that spiritual discipline without authentic desire, is just religion but not true spiritual connection or growth.

### **Structured Exercises**

\* Memorize and meditate on the key verse.

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *What are some intentional practices you do, relationships you have, and experiences you've enjoyed that help build your intimacy and connection with God?*
- *What did you learn about that you can apply to your life today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Discuss with your accountability partner about how you have addressed and dealt with spiritual dryness in the past.

### **WORSHIP-PRAYER-MEDITATION DAY 19**

## Spiritual Disciplines Part 2

*What are spiritual disciplines?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verses**

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV)

### **Devotional Content**

Spiritual disciplines don't make us look cool to God or get a passing grade or a promotion. The role of spiritual disciplines is to put us in a place where we are available to God for Him to talk with us, fellowship with us, and use us to build his kingdom in community. The goal of using spiritual disciplines is to have tools for spiritual transformation, growth and maturation.

The following are some examples of spiritual disciplines by category taken from *Spiritual Disciplines* by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun.

Prayers [practice]:

- Listening/Centering Prayer - to quiet the heart and rest in God alone- seek His voice.
- Fixed-Hour Prayer- dedicated times during day to stop my work/activity to seek God
- Fasting - self-denial of an appetite (food, activity, etc...) to focus on God and prayer
- Intercessory Prayer - to turn my concerns and worries into prayers; to pray for the worries and concerns of others; to pray for the world's problems
- Conversational Prayer - to talk naturally to God as with a friend
- Communal Prayer [relationships] - to pray aloud with others simultaneously in conversational or intercessory prayer
- Inner-Healing Prayer/Exorcism - Request emotional repair and healing for wounded souls. Cast out demonic influences and oppression.
- Prayer-walk - pray for the kingdom of God and Christ's will to be accomplished as walk in particular places.

## Learning Experience 3: Curriculum Development

- Liturgical Prayer - To present myself and requests to God in a group or alone using an established pattern of prayer or a tradition of written prayer or readings
- Praying Scripture - to allow God to shape my life through the words of His Scripture

### Bible [practice]:

- Memorization - to carry the life-changing word of God with me at all times.
- Lectio Divina (Devotional Reading) a slow, rhythmic reading and praying of a Scripture passage. You pick a passage and read it. Notice what arises within you as you read it. Then you read it again, and then again, noticing what words and phrases grab your heart and noticing the feelings that arise. It is usually followed by prayer/mediation.
- Bible Study - to learn about the word of God and how it applies to my life
- Sermon - listen to commentary on the Word of God applied to life today

### [Relationships/Experiences]:

- Communion - to be nourished by the body and blood of Christ in remembrance of grace
- Worship Service - to honor God and adore him in community with others or alone
- Small Group - to take my spiritual journey with a community of trusted friends

This is nowhere near an exhaustive list. Hopefully this list just wets your appetite.

### Structured Exercises

\* Start trying out the different spiritual disciplines

### Review/Personal Application:

➤ *What are some intentional practices you already do? What are some you'll try?*

**Care and Reflection:** Discuss your favorite discipline with your accountability partner.

## **WORSHIP-PRAYER-MEDITATION DAY 20**

# Spiritual Disciplines Part 3

*What role do worship and celebration play in my spiritual disciplines?*

### Key Theme Passage/Verse

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV)

### Devotional Content

Spiritual disciplines always come back to the heart. God wants your heart, and deep inside our souls aren't satisfied until we connect with God. Worship and celebration are two of the most popular disciplines in the Bible and today that meet this need. In fact, worship and celebration are two spiritual disciplines that are eternal and will still be practiced in heaven in eternity.

Although worship can be done in solitude, the Bible has many examples of corporate worship. God takes pleasure in his people worshipping together. Psalms 133:1 talks of us dwelling in unity. Hebrews 10:25 tells us to not neglect to meet together. The early church made it a practice to meet together (Acts 2:42-47). All the

spiritual disciplines eventually lead to worship. Even when the Psalmist laments in Psalms 73 (a spiritual discipline of complaining to God in prayer) he ends up in praise to God. Many times God reveals his manifest presence in corporate worship. He anointed David king in a corporate worship. King Jehosaphat led the armies to defeat his enemies with the Levites in front in a display of corporate worship.

True worship does not equal going to church every Sunday. Jesus pretty much said that

when he talked about how the Pharisees would be in the synagogue and still thinking about their business deals. They were honoring God only with their lips but their minds were far from the activity of worship (Matt. 15:8). Jesus also said that not everyone who says Lord, Lord (presumably in a service) loves and worships God, even if they can perform miracles (Matt. 7:21-23)! Still, this is not an excuse to neglect attending worship service. God tells us not to neglect meeting together. Even if some people we meet with have the wrong attitude, we should pray for them, not avoid them. Corporate worship is a form of celebration. Right now, cherubim, seraphim, angels, archangels, and heavenly spirits are all enjoying God's presence in worship and celebration. Why not seek Him in worship and celebration too?

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Think of a time that you were deeply moved in worship. What was happening in your life at that time? What was going on in the worship?

\*If you have been neglecting your church worship, return to services. Visit some other churches and observe their worship service. What are some things that are happening there that speak to your heart that you can share with your home church? Write or record them and share them with your leaders and ministry team.

\*Write a letter or a song to God expressing your love, honor and gratitude towards him

(or paint/draw a picture if that is your best mode of expression).

\*Reflect on how you prepare to go to corporate worship. What could you do differently that would improve your worship experience? What happens after service and how does that affect your worship?

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *What are some things you do in worship that you take for granted or don't think about?*
- *Have you ever been at a worship service and just went through the motions, why?*
- *Describe any difference you feel or see between worshipping alone and with others?*
- *What about God particularly moves you to worship?*
- *When you see others worshipping or celebrating in a way that is foreign to you how does that impact you and your worship?*

**Care and Reflection:** Identify a place you most readily connect with God. Go there and worship.

## **WORSHIP-PRAYER-MEDITATION DAY 21**

# Spiritual Pathways

*How do spiritual pathways impact my spiritual growth?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” James 1:5 (NIV)

### **Devotional Content**

Ever wonder why you or your friend feel closer to God in a quiet environment while someone else you know feels closer to God when they are giving joyful, loud praises to God? There is nothing wrong with either person. We just may prefer different spiritual pathways. Gary Thomas is the author of *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul’s Path to God*. The book explores nine different sacred pathways to connect with God. Thomas’ theory is based on the premise that we are all unique and everyone doesn’t necessarily connect with God in the same way. He believes that God knows this about His Creation and actually embraces that.

Thomas has created a diagnostic tool to help individuals determine which is their preferred spiritual pathway. He believes that exploring new sacred spiritual pathways could be a way to avoid being stagnant in worship or caught in a spiritual rut. Thomas identifies nine categories of sacred spiritual pathways, each with specific spiritual disciplines attached to them. The following are the nine pathways:

(1) Naturalists — love God best outdoors. These people worship in the midst of God’s creation.

(2) Sensates — love God through their senses and worship through sensual experiences — (like art), sounds (music), smells (incense), and more. (3)

Traditionalists — love God through religious ritual and symbols like sacraments of the Church. They revere structure, repetition, and rigidity. (4)

Ascetics — love God in solitude and simplicity such as prayer and quiet time. (5)

Activists — love God through confrontation, fighting for godly principles and values. They feel God the most when fighting for social justice and evangelistic causes. (6)

Caregivers — love God by serving others, and worship by giving of themselves. (7)

Enthusiasts — love God through mystery and celebration such as parties, concerts, laughter, dancing. (8)

Contemplatives — love God through adoration. They have an active prayer life of all sorts of prayers. (9)

Intellectuals — love God with their mind and their hearts are opened up to a new attentiveness when they understand something new about God. They love apologetics.

Another popular spiritual pathway is the Enneagram. The Enneagram divides people into nine personality types that describe patterns of how people interpret the world and manage their emotions. Unlike other personality types that focus on behavior and psychology, the Enneagram is more spiritual and focuses on our motivations. Todd Wilson’s book, *The Enneagram goes to church: Wisdom for leadership, worship, and Congregational Life* is an excellent resource for understanding how this pathway can impact spiritual growth. The Enneagram doesn’t lock you into a behavior or personality that can’t change. It helps you understand your core motivations so you are more self-aware and can grow.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Take the survey at [9types.com](http://9types.com) to determine your Enneagram number.

\*To determine your sacred pathways rankings take the survey at

<https://www.soulshpherd.org/sacred-pathways-survey/>

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *What are some things you learned that you didn't know about before?*
- *What did you learn that you can apply today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Identify a place you most readily connect with God. Go there and worship.

## ***SPIRITUAL MATURITY-DAY 22***

# Bible Study Part 1

*How does reading the Bible impact my spiritual growth?*

### Key Theme Passage/Verse

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. 2 Tim. 3:16(ESV)

### Devotional Content

One of the major issues the church faces today is biblical illiteracy. At a time when the Bible is more accessible than it has ever been in its history, it is more neglected than ever before. I recall a seminary professor complaining about how his new seminary students didn't know the Bible like he had to know it when he was in school. To graduate, he had to recite a chapter in Isaiah (61) from memory in Hebrew. Now most of his graduate students don't even have one chapter of the Bible outside of Psalms memorized in their native language.

Now, no one is saying it's necessary for us to memorize Scripture in its original language, but the point is that memorization and general familiarity with the Bible is less important than it has ever been since the printing press made owning a Bible a universal possibility. How bad is it? Consider these results from various surveys:

- Fewer than half of all adults can name the four gospels
- Many professing Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the disciples
- 60 percent of Americans can't name even five of the Ten Commandments
- 82 percent of Americans believe "God helps those who help themselves" is a Bible verse
- 12 percent of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife
- A survey of graduating high school seniors revealed that over 50 percent thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife

Unfortunately, biblical illiteracy can be directly correlated to negative consequences. What are some of the negative effects of our neglect of the Word of God? Scripture tells us that God's people have always been destroyed by lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:1,6). Without knowledge of the word individuals lack real direction or guidance in life (Ps. 119:105). The word is also a source of joy and peace when life is troubling (Ps. 119:111,165). Without proper foundation in the word the churches will languish for lack of teachers. False doctrines and confusion will dominate for lack of knowledge Heb. 5:11-14. If churches are led astray by false teachers and false doctrine, the people are destined for destruction (2Pet. 2:1-3) Once churches are affected, the community will also suffer because we won't have a biblical standard of morality in society. We are starting to see the effects of this where people

say good is evil and evil is good (Isa. 5:20). Today we slaughter the innocent (abortion). Adultery, fornication, pornography and sexual immorality are now considered lifestyle choices. We have removed the Bible and prayer from schools as incarceration, drug addiction, juvenile delinquency, mass shootings, and suicides are on the rise.

### Structured Exercises

\*Memorize the key verse/Read Psalm 119: 1-176 and meditate on it.

\*Follow a dedicated devotional plan to read the Bible in one year or less if possible.

### Review/Personal Application:

- *What are some things you learned that you didn't know about before?*
- *How can you encourage others to read the Bible more going forward?*

**Care and Reflection:** If you have children, take time to read them the word of God daily at any age.

## **SPIRITUAL MATURITY-DAY 23**

# Bible Study Part 2

## *How should I read the Bible?*

### Key Theme Passage/Verse

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. 2 Tim. 3:16 (ESV)

### Devotional Content

In the previous lesson we learned the importance of reading our Bibles. Next we will address how we should read the Bible. We need to make reading the Bible a priority and learn how to do it. We need to create a positive addiction to reading the Bible. We can do that by making the experience a pleasurable one. Just like starting an exercise regimen, we do better when we start small and do it in a positive environment. If we go about it the wrong way, the daily workouts are painful and miserable. Many try exercises in a dance, yoga, or boxing class when they first start out until exercising becomes a habit. The same applies to reading the Bible, too many of us try to do too much too soon. A noble goal is to read through the Bible in one year, which is an admirable goal, but most never make it past Leviticus. You don't have to do that. It could be like trying to run a marathon without training. I would recommend starting with making the New Testament a yearly goal. The material is easier, and more edifying at the outset. Once you have read the New Testament in a year a couple of times, start the Old Testament the next year. Very soon you'll be able to do the whole Bible.

How should you read the Bible? Start with prayer and read it slowly. At times it helps to read it out loud at times, as though you were reading to someone else. Make use of study aids available online. A great website is [www.blueletterbible.com](http://www.blueletterbible.com). This site has commentaries and lexicons which are linguistic resources to provide dictionary definitions of Biblical words in the original languages. Biblical maps are also good aids. It can also be enjoyable to read in a group and finally end each session in prayer.

The following are three simple steps that will help you extract meaning from the text (which is known as exegesis) and avoid reading your own meaning into the text (known as eisegesis). (1) Let the verse speak for itself. Before you do anything else in your study, look for the passage's meaning in the most straightforward way. (2) Use the context to determine the meaning. It doesn't matter if you're looking to interpret a passage, a verse, a phrase or even a single word, the context needs to guide your every thought. Finally, (3) use clear passages to interpret unclear ones. After you have let a verse speak for itself and have examined the context, the correct interpretation might still be unclear. If you can find a clear passage that is applicable, you can use that to help determine the correct meaning. Often a Bible Concordance can help you find a corresponding passage to help.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Read Philippians 4:8. How does your perspective on life, others, and God change when you read the Bible frequently? How is your perspective on life, others, and God affected when you don't read the Bible for a while?

\*Do some research and reflect on steps you can take to make your time of personal Bible study more meaningful and impactful.

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *What role does studying Scripture currently play in your spiritual life?*
- *What did you learn that you can apply today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Identify a place that you're most comfortable reading, make it your spot.

### ***SPIRITUAL MATURITY-DAY 24***

## **The Work of the Holy Spirit**

*How does the Holy Spirit direct my spiritual growth?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

John 14:16-17, 25-26; 15:26;

### **Devotional Content**

Although the Bible is the primary tool that helps our spiritual growth and formation, God's direct influence in and on our spiritual growth takes place primarily through the work of the Holy Spirit living in us. It is the third person of the Trinity that is primarily responsible for spiritual maturation. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples at Pentecost to fulfill the promise that Jesus made of sending a new Helper (John 14:16). It is in this role today that He is engaged in (1)regenerating, (2)sanctifying, (3)comforting, (4)equipping, (5)interceding (on behalf of), (6)gifting and (7)empowering every believer. In essence every aspect—intellectual and ethical, devotional and relational, worshiping and witnessing—is enabled and sustained supernaturally by the Holy Spirit. Consequently a basic understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit is essential to any success in spiritual formation for the believer. The believer needs to know what to expect, pray, hope for and receive.

For centuries Christians have understood and embraced the Holy Spirit's key role in spiritual development. However, today, many different churches focus on one of two extremes. One group focuses exclusively on the word and neglects the role of the Spirit. Another group depends only on the Spirit and breeds emotionalism,

sensationalism, and false teaching. A balanced Spirit-filled approach is the biblical model “in Spirit AND in truth.”

The Holy Spirit’s job of regeneration in the Christian is the new birth, the starting point of spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit motivates the new believer to pursue holiness. Believers who ignore this prompting are said to “grieve” the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). The Holy Spirit oversees the work of sanctification daily in the life of the believer (2 Thess. 2:13). It assures and comforts believers in times of trials and tribulations. The Bible says the Holy Spirit intercedes for us in our weakness (Rom. 8:26). We are equipped by the Holy Spirit for several tasks in ministry for Christ (Heb. 13:21). He not enlightens our knowledge that we may understand the Bible (1 Cor. 2:10-16), but He also gives us spiritual gifts which leads to empowerment. The empowering of the Holy Spirit is a mark of all true followers of Christ (Lk.24:49; Acts1:8; 4:8, 31; 13:9-10). The primary reason for the Holy Spirit’s power was that we might be “witnesses” of Jesus (Acts 1:8). We further learn from Paul in Galatians that if we “walk in the Spirit” we will be enabled to fulfill the law of love (5:14), to overcome the flesh (5:16) and to bear the fruit of the Spirit (5:22). Simply put, the Holy Spirit has power to intercede for us to deliver us from enslaving sin, and gifts us to effectively and powerfully proclaim Jesus and claim victory over the powers of darkness (Acts 13:6-13).

### **Structured Exercises**

\*If you would like to experience more of God through his Holy Spirit. Begin to make this a regular part of your prayer requests. Find a prayer partner to connect with on this.

\*Find someone you believe has more experience with the work of the Holy Spirit and interview him/her about his/her Holy Spirit experience and journey.

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *What are some things you learned that you didn’t know about before?*
- *What can you do this week to become more open to the teaching and guiding of the Holy Spirit?*

**Care and Reflection:** Think about a time you felt touched by the Spirit. Reflect on that experience.

## ***SPIRITUAL MATURITY-DAY 25***

# The Fruit of the Spirit

*How does the Fruit of the Spirit impact my spiritual maturity?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23; 5:13-26)

### **Devotional Content**

In the passage in the key verse above the Fruit (singular) of the Spirit is listed. Many people (myself included) often refer to it as the fruits (plural) of the Spirit, but this is an error. It is the Fruit because it is a packaged deal. We like to think of them as fruits, but it is important to note that we should think of it as a fruit. Take for example a

banana. If we would characterize the “banana of the Spirit of God” we would say it is sweet, soft, elongated, curved, covered, yellow outside, cream-colored inside, you get the picture. These would be the attributes of the banana. The fruit of the Spirit represents the attributes of Christ that the Holy Spirit plants in us. The banana doesn’t get to choose to be sweet, but not covered. We don’t have some bananas with a covered skin and others with no skin. The banana, as a fruit, is a packaged deal. Calling the fruit of the Spirit, “fruits”, confuses the point of the text. It is one fruit that has all these listed attributes of Christ. Not surprising it starts with (1)love, then (2)joy, (3)peace, (4)patience, (5)kindness, (6)goodness, (7)faithfulness, (8)gentleness, (9)self-control, for a total of nine attributes of Christ that are made accessible to us in this package by the Holy Spirit.

If a banana were to not have all of its attributes, say for example it became completely dark and changed to black on the outside (which happens when it is overripe) it would no longer be a desirable banana because one of the key attributes is missing. The fruit of the Spirit is desirable and effective as a package. One attribute without the presence of another signifies a defective fruit. You and I may know unbelievers who are gentle, who really do good things, or may be more patient than many Christians we know. However, the presence of those characteristics isn’t evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence in their lives. Those dispositions are not coming from the Spirit’s presence in their lives, it’s just their own temperament and personality. When the Holy Spirit is truly at work in us, then we should see the evidence through the presence of the entirety of the “fruit.” It is the entirety of the fruit that is impossible for our personality or temperament. Flesh cannot do it, only the Spirit can. This means that the only way to develop the fruit (all attributes simultaneously) is by spending time in God’s presence, and being immersed in prayer and his Word. When we have the fruit in our lives, it cannot be hidden, it must be shared like a good banana, or an apple.

Each attribute displays a picture of Christ. The term love is “agape” in the Greek which is the highest form of love, selfless love. Joy is deeper than happiness, because it is a sense of contentment that isn’t dependent on circumstances, followed by peace that doesn’t depend on circumstances as well. Patience is actually translated literally, long-suffering. It’s the ability to get through suffering. Kindness refers to your response to people, and gentleness your approach to people. Goodness refers to your motivations of justice, and forgiveness. Faithfulness speaks to your dependability. Self-control refers to restraint over emotions such as anger, bitterness, rage, envy, jealousy, and lust. Without this our flesh would run wild.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Take time to contrast the works of the flesh and fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5 .

### **Review/Personal Application:**

➤ *What did you learn that you can apply today?*

**Care and Reflection: Pray daily for each one of the attributes of the fruit of the Spirit to increase.**

***SPIRITUAL MATURITY-DAY 26***

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# The Gift of the Holy Spirit

*How do spiritual gifts impact my spiritual growth?*

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## Key Theme Passage/Verse

“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.” Joel 2:28 (NIV)

## Devotional Content

The baptism of the Spirit and the outpouring of spiritual gifts was intended by God to be one of the most unifying and strengthening occasions for the church. Instead the enemy has used it to make a point of confusion, doctrinal division, and strife in the body of Christ. This is no surprise because spiritual gifts pose one of the greatest threats to the powers of darkness in this world. The apostle Paul thought it was very important that Christians not be ignorant concerning spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:1) and yet we find this to be the unfortunate case today.

The irony of spiritual gifts in Corinth is that while they were given for the edification of the church, they became a source of jealousy and envy in the congregation. Though diverse, the purpose of these gifts was always unity and building of the church. We believe the gifts are imparted through a second work of grace, that some refer to as baptism of the Spirit, others as being filled with the Holy Spirit. While some believe that this second work is initially evidenced through speaking in tongues, we believe that God is a God of diversity and speaking in tongues need not be the sole and only evident proof of this second work of grace after conversion and water baptism. This work may even precede water baptism depending on the believer. Randy Clark and Derek Prince both do extensive studies on this topic on YouTube. I would recommend that anyone that wants to go deeper into knowledge of this experience take a look at some of their excellent teachings on this topic. Derek Prince has since left us for eternity but his sermons and his bible studies are some of the best I've ever heard on this subject. A summary of the spiritual gifts bestowed according to 1 Cor. 12:8-10 is as follows: the word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, different kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues. Notice exorcism, or casting out demons is not a spiritual gift. Exorcism is a function of spiritual authority. We won't treat this topic today but Dr. Rob Reimer does an excellent study on this in his books. Again, spiritual gifts are not a competition, even though the Corinth treated it like that. They started to rank gifts above others which Paul disagreed with. According to Paul the greatest gift or “more excellent way” is love. We need to pray and spend time with God for the gifts.

## Structured Exercises

\*Read 1 Cor. 12 - 14. Summarize what you learn about the gifts from these chapters.

\*If you have not ever had a second experience of grace and received the gifts of the spirit, take some time in the next few days, weeks, and months dedicated to asking God for an outpouring of His spirit on you.

\*Ask your pastor, or find out if there is a service where they are doing impartation to

pray that people receive the second blessing of the filling of the Holy Ghost. See if you can attend.

\*Trying praying for others to receive spiritual gifts and pray for God to perform miracles.

**Review/Personal Application:**

- *What are some things you learned that you didn't know about before?*
- *What did you learn that you can apply today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Ask someone who has experienced the filling of the Holy Spirit what it was like.

***SPIRITUAL MATURITY-DAY 27***

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## Suffering

*How does suffering contribute to my spiritual growth?*

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**Key Theme Passage/Verse**

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

**Devotional Content**

Suffering is one of the principle character-building tools used by God for his children's maturation. In the physical world, pain is necessary for survival. One of the most dangerous sicknesses a person can have is Congenital Insensitivity to Pain and Anhidrosis (CIPA), a very rare and extremely dangerous condition that blocks the nerves from experiencing pain. The people who suffer it must constantly check for cuts, bruises, self-mutilations, and other possible unfelt injuries. They can be burning and not even know. Rarely do patients live past the age of 25. The inability to experience pain stops them from receiving nerve messages that serve to protect the body.

In the spiritual world, God uses our suffering and pain to warn us, teach us, humble us, guide us, and shape us for ministry. Pastor and author Nathaniel Demosthene identifies four principal forms of suffering that the believer faces in *The Prophetic Ministry: What Matters Most*. They are: The School of Adversity, School of Offense, School of Brokenness, School of Isolation and Rejection. The apostle Paul experienced everyone of these forms of suffering.

The School of Adversity refers to suffering we face because of our faith and our ministry. Paul was persecuted for his faith on many occasions including when Jewish leaders plotted to kidnap and kill him (Acts 23:12-35). He also faced shipwreck on several occasions. The School of Offense refers to the occasions when we are disrespected, betrayed or even abandoned in our walk often by close associates. Paul talks of Alexander who did him "great wrong" in 2 Tim. 4:14, or Demas, a former close friend who abandoned him (2 Tim. 4:10). The School of Offense teaches us to reject anger and bitterness, while embracing forgiveness. The School of Brokenness has various manifestations, but its essence is any type of suffering that teaches us humility. Paul testifies in 2 Cor. 12:1-2 that he was given a thorn in the flesh from God. He doesn't detail what exactly was the thorn, only that it caused him a lot of pain and

prayed several times to have it removed. However, it was not removed by God, and was extremely humbled and disappointed. God wants us broken to allow Christ to be exalted in us. Brokenness teaches us to wholly rely on God. The School of Isolation and Rejection teaches us patience. Paul was rejected after he got saved. He spent some time in the wilderness and isolation learning more about Christ. It was Barnabas that brought him into fellowship with the church. Suffering builds Christian character and spiritual maturation, without it we cannot grow.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Try to think of other examples from the Bible of people that God allowed to go through suffering so that they would spiritual mature.

\*Think of a time where you faced a serious trial or suffering. Did it help you grow? If not, how could you have used this time to grow spiritually? If yes, why and how?

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *What disappointed expectations are you dealing with?*
- *What did you learn that you can apply today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Share a testimony with someone about a difficult time God brought you or someone you know through.

### ***SPIRITUAL MATURITY-DAY 28***

## Soul Care

*What is the connection between soul care and spiritual maturity?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verses**

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thess. 5:23

### **Devotional Content**

When we speak of the soul we speak of the “spiritual” side of an individual that combines the thoughts, feelings, along with heart or will, along with its motivations and choices. Consequently, soul health and spiritual maturity cannot be separated. By definition an unhealthy soul causes unhealthy choices, immature thoughts, misaligned feelings, and a rebellious or unmotivated will. In this devotional we explore the factors that affect the soul as well as what kind of “care” aligns with biblical principles such that the soul is healthy.

Dr. Rob Reimer has two books that give an excellent explanation of this topic. Both *Pathways to the King: Living a life of spiritual renewal and power* and its sequel *Soul Care: Seven transformational principles for a healthy soul* are comprehensive guides that offer practical and biblical guides on revival, spiritual renewal and nurture of the soul. *Soul Care* in particular emphasizes the significance of addressing the condition of our souls and provides a framework for experiencing genuine transformation and spiritual growth. The book explores various aspects of healing and restoration, acknowledging the brokenness and wounds we may carry. Reimer teaches that it is important to delve into the process of forgiveness, both receiving it from God and extending it to others, as a vital step toward inner healing. He addresses the effects of trauma, pain, and shame, offering guidance on how to find healing and freedom through Christ. The book also emphasizes the significance of community in soul care.

Reimer emphasizes the value of authentic relationships, accountability, and vulnerability within the context of a supportive community. He provides practical tools for fostering healthy relationships and deepening one's connection with others.

Some of the major tools identified in *Soul Care* center on the role of God's Word, prayer, and the Holy Spirit in the process of soul care. We have dealt with these in past lessons. The practice of spiritual disciplines is also a major tool that helps address soul care. Reimer deals with obstacles to spiritual maturity that come from pride, spiritual underdevelopment, and biblical ignorance or lack of obedience in the following areas or topics: intimacy with God, lies, family sin patterns, forgiveness, fears, emotional wounds, and demonic oppression.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Performance (achievement), people-pleasing & control (power or status) are the three main lies that people battle in their soul. Reflect on whether you have felt that any one of these lies has at one time or another attempted to determine your value apart from God's love.

\*Determine which of the following sin patterns has affected you and pray that God break the curse: lying, hypocrisy, fear, favoritism/broken relationships, addictions (drugs, workaholic, pornography, media, gambling, religion), abuse, fighting, gossip, abortion, breaking promises, alcohol, bad debt, eating disorders, rage (lack of self-control), sexual immorality.

\*Consider: fasting, confession, solitude & silence, and giving as spiritual discipline practices to help you break family sin patterns and the obstacles to a healthy soul.

\*Read Matthew 22:34-40. How can religious rule keeping lead to an unhealthy soul?

### **Review/Personal Application:**

➤ *What virtues do you need to build into your life to help facilitate soul care?*

**Care and Reflection:** Like Jesus, start to designate regular times of rest and withdrawal for your soul care.

## ***RELATIONSHIPS & COMMUNITY-DAY 29***

# Relationships Part 1

*How does our relationship to others impact our spiritual growth?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

“Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”

1 John 4: 20(NIV)

### **Devotional Content**

Our relationship to others is important to God. God observes how we deal with others because it reflects on our love for Him and our witness to the world. How can we love God that we don't see and don't love the people we do see? (1 John 4:20). Apostle Paul told us that love is the greatest of all the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 13). It is the gift of love that helps us keep together the attributes of the fruit of the Spirit. It is the gift of love that makes every other gift relevant. It is the gift of love that exemplifies what Jesus Christ did for us by suffering and dying on the cross for our sins. The Rev. Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr., once gave a sermon on loving your enemies. He remarked how even Napoleon acknowledged that great empires like that of Alexander the Great or Charlemagne had faded away, but Jesus Christ built an empire based on love that continues to grow till this day. King believed that love had redemptive power if applied properly.

According to Dr. King there were some practical steps we could take to ensure that we placed love at the forefront of our relationships. He acknowledged that authentic love was extremely difficult. We know that the power to love doesn't come from within, but rather from above. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. King believed that true love required introspection, or looking at oneself. He said, "We must face the fact that an individual might dislike us because of something that we've done deep down in the past ... That is why I say, begin with yourself." We must realize that each one of us has things about us that people don't like and make it difficult to love. Secondly, he differentiated between like and love. We may not like someone we love. There are people who we find it difficult to like because of their actions or their personality and that's ok. Like, is a sentiment that deals with our affection, but love is a position that deals with our actions towards someone and our understanding of who they are. Another practical tip given by King was to help those we hate: easier said than done. David refused to kill Saul when he had a golden opportunity (1 Sam. 24) even though Saul was hunting him to kill him. King said, "When the opportunity presents itself for you to defeat your enemy, that is the time which you must not do it." Christlikeness is to be like Jesus on the cross who said about his enemies, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34). Finally, we need to see the good in all people, even our enemies. Find something about them, one thing that you can focus on to eliminate hate. Hate is destructive, but love builds. We need to pray that our relationships are led with the gift of love. The closer we are to achieving that goal, the closer we will feel to God who is love.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Read Matt. 18:1-35; 1 John 3:11-18; 4:7-21; Reflect on how these Scriptures impact your view of love to others.

\*Think of a time when you were hurt by someone. How can you move past hurt and pain to still love people that have done you wrong? What spiritual disciplines can help you?

### **Review/Personal Application:**

➤ *Who are the people in your life that find it most difficult to love currently? Why?*

**Care and Reflection:** Take some time to pray and fast about your approach to relationships.

## **RELATIONSHIPS & COMMUNITY-DAY 30**

# Relationships Part 2

*What makes loving some people so difficult?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen."

1 John 4: 20(NIV)

### **Devotional Content**

Since the Garden of Eden, our existence has been built around relationships, primarily to God, as well as to each other. The basic levels of relationships that Christians deal with include: families and neighbors at home, work with our employees/employers, church with fellow believers, and the community at large.

Although the Bible tells us to love our neighbor, many Christians limit this to family, friends, acquaintances, and strangers who need help like orphans in another country. However, loving our enemies is a very different story. What about family members who hate you and have even tried to kill or sworn to see you destroyed? What about family members who are toxic and negatively influence your immediate family or other close relationships, for example an abusive spouse or parent? Let's not ignore coworkers or business partners who undermine us, or just discredit and defame us at every opportunity. The more you think about it, preserving healthy, loving, and peaceful relationships isn't easy, especially when it doesn't just depend on you. You cannot account for someone else's faults, attitude, or actions. So what are we to do in these cases whether it be family or a stranger who becomes an enemy?

The following reasons are some of the attitudes and behaviors that cause others to come into conflict with us: (1) people who are jealous/envious of us for any reason like health, family, achievements, abilities, contacts, reputation, income/wealth (2) people ruled by selfishness (3) people who are more emotionally draining than encouraging (4) people who use people instead of loving them (5) dishonest and hypocritical people (two-faced) (6) people who are argumentative and like to fight (7) people who bring you into their mess or misery rather than bless others (8) controlling and manipulative people. Just thinking about one of these types of personalities leaves you triggered and emotionally distraught.

The good news is we can still overcome people like this and love them. The bad news is you can still get hurt. Don't do it on your own; you need the Spirit of Christ. If we depend on ourselves, we will fail. Only Christ will make up for our pain. Sometimes when we love others we will get hurt badly: Cain killed Abel, Joseph's brothers sold him, Jesus was betrayed, and crucified. Sometimes we'll overcome: David overcame King Saul, Mordecai overcame Haman, The disciples overcame Paul/Saul. Loving your enemies requires *agape* love, patience and discernment. We have to be like Jesus which means (1) always have compassion [be humble and remember we are not perfect], (2) take the high road when possible [this is what it means to offer the other cheek and seek peace] (3) use discernment to know when to walk away, keep your distance from others as Jesus did sometimes or knowing when to stand your ground as Jesus and Paul both did sometimes.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Read the lives of Joseph and David and meditate on how they overcame and forgave enemies.

### **Review/Personal Application:**

➤ What did you learn that you can apply today?

**Care and Reflection:** Take some time to pray and fast for strength to overcome hurt and forgive.

**RELATIONSHIPS & COMMUNITY-DAY 31**

## Loving People

*What does it look like to love my neighbor?*

### Key Theme Passage/Verse

“Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”

1 John 4: 20(NIV)

### Devotional Content

Loving people is serious business. The Bible says that if we don't, we don't know God. This is a very powerful indictment. There is no spiritual maturity to be attained without love. In 1 Corinthians 13 the Apostle Paul argues this point:

If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. 3 If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing. (1 Cor. 13:1-4, New Living Translation (NLT))

Paul explains that gifts such as tongues, prophesy, faith, alms giving (stewardship), which seem related to being a good person, a loving person actually are worthless if we don't prioritize the exercise of love in our lives. Think about that. Worthless. Is this a difficult teaching? Yes. But, it wouldn't be the gospel, it wouldn't be supernatural, we wouldn't need the Holy Spirit to do His work in us if it was any other way!

There are seven actions and dispositions that prove that we are loving others. (1) Seek the good of others. (2) Serve others. (3) Make sacrifices and compromises for others. (4) Seek peace with others. (5) Be kind and patient with others. (6) Forgive others (7) Finally, but most importantly pray for others.

One of the greatest barriers to loving others is that we either don't love ourselves first, or we love ourselves in the wrong way like narcissists and the world teaches. When we don't love ourselves first, we self-deprecate, that is, we put ourselves down or we constantly devalue or define ourselves by our achievements, the opinions of others, job/position/status. That is not biblical. God says we are fearfully and wonderfully made. We need to love who we are in Christ (period). Biblical self-love is to live peacefully, to set personal boundaries, to mind our business unless asked or needed, to be self-sufficient, independent, and a model to others ( 1 Thess. 4:11). Narcissistic self-love minimizes others, presents a false self-image, is

judgemental, proud and lacks humility. We need biblical self-love to properly love others.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Read 1 Cor. 13:1-13; Col. 3:1-25; Eph. 4:1-15; Rom. 12:1-21; 13:8-14. Reflect on how these Scriptures impact your view of self-love and love towards others.

\*Memorize the key verse.

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- Evaluate your current level of self-love. Is it biblical? How will you maintain proper self-love?
- What did you learn that you can apply today?

**Care and Reflection:** Take some time to pray and fast about how you will approach relationships differently.

## **RELATIONSHIPS & COMMUNITY-DAY 32**

# Building a Christian Home Part 1

*What is the foundation of Christian home?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

“And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Eph. 5:21(NIV)

### **Devotional Content**

From the beginning of time, before there were any large gatherings, any churches, there was the first family. God ordained that we live in a home. Building a family is a noble desire and requires prayer and planning to be successful. However, being single is not bad either. While this lesson will focus on planning and building the Christian home and what it should look like. The Bible has plenty of positive things to say about single people who are only responsible for themselves. In 1 Cor. 7:7, the Message Bible paraphrases Paul saying to the Corinthian church “Sometimes I wish everyone were single like me—a simpler life in many ways! But celibacy is not for everyone any more than marriage is. God gives the gift of the single life to some, the gift of the married life to others.” We should never harass or humiliate single people. Neither should we regard singleness as a lower status than marriage.

Paul believed that a single life is a simpler life. It is an independent life led between you and God. However, marriage is interdependent. Family is interdependent. Family forces you to grow, forces you to mature, forces you to be patient, and objective. A successful Christian family will need to use all the attributes of the Fruit of the Spirit.

Today, marriages are struggling. You may be aware of the statistics on divorce, and the statistics on people who just cohabitate rather than marry. They aren't good. Families aren't faring much better. We struggle with strained relationships between husband and wife, parents and children, spouses and in-laws and extended family. We must remember that God, not man, is the author of marriage and the family. Consequently, it is God who sets the parameters for the family's success.

There are several biblical principles we need to follow to build the foundation for a lasting and happy Christian home. We must pray and seek God's will. Just as Abraham's servant Eliezar prayed for God's direction to find a wife for Isaac, Abraham's son. We can also seek to hear from God. We must learn forgiveness and

forbearance as early as possible. We must understand that marriage is a partnership where we will work together, play together, and grow up together. Anyone who doesn't understand this shouldn't think about starting a family. We need to be discerning to avoid the little quarrels, and the big ones will take care of themselves. We must learn to compromise (give and take). Paul says in Philippians 2:4, "Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too" (NLT). A good sense of humor is a practical tool to help diffuse tension and keep up happiness. Learn to respect your "in-laws," but don't criticize them or take criticism from them. Build and establish boundaries, which means establish your own home, even in a one room flat. Always fight for each other, but not with each other. Christ is our example and He fights continuously for the church. Build your home on your faith, with love and forgiveness as the watchword. Keep the word centered in the home.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Read Proverbs 31: 10-31. Eph. 5:1-33 Reflect on how these Scriptures view the family

\*Reflect on your planning for where you are in building your home. (Married? Seeking children?). Write down your plan for your family and pray over it.

### **Review/Personal Application:**

➤ *What does a home built on Christlike principles look like to me?*

**Care and Reflection:** Interview an older Christian couple on the topic of marriage and family.

## **RELATIONSHIPS & COMMUNITY-DAY 33**

# Building a Christian Home Part 2

*What is the church's role in building a Christian home?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

Your job is to speak out on the things that make for solid doctrine. Guide older men into lives of temperance, dignity, and wisdom, into healthy faith, love, and endurance. Guide older women into lives of reverence so they end up as neither gossips nor drunks, but models of goodness. By looking at them, the younger women will know how to love their husbands and children, be virtuous and pure, keep a good house, be good wives. We don't want anyone looking down on God's Message because of their behavior. Also, guide the young men to live disciplined lives. Titus 2:1-6 (The Message Version)

### **Devotional Content**

Previously we explained that God loves the family. He created it. God understands that after the Fall we are far from perfect. He is a father of the fatherless, a defender of widows (Ps. 68:5, Ps. 146:9). He offers Himself as a loving Father (1 John 3:1-2). Christ serves as a faithful elder for us (Hebrews 2:9-13). He sent His Spirit so we could be born into this family (Titus 3:4-7; Ro 8:15-17). He designed the church to be an extended family with many mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters (Mark 10:29-30; 1 Timothy 3:15). This makes the church when it is aligned with God's purpose, the best redemptive instrument for the family.

The church should function as a tool to demonstrate God's plan for families. By teaching the word of God, the church helps families overcome the enemy. It teaches husbands to love their wives without bitterness, as Christ loved the church (Col 3:19;

Eph. 5:25-29). It teaches husbands to understand, honor, be tender, and treat wives as fellow heirs (1 Peter 3:7). It teaches wives to respond with love and submission (Titus 2:3-5; Eph. 5:22). It teaches parents not to provoke their children, but to raise them with love and discipline (Col. 3:21; Eph. 6:4). It instructs parents to nurture children in the ways of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). With proper discipline when needed (Pr. 13:24; 19:18; 29:17; Heb. 12:7-10). It teaches children to interact with their parents with obedience and honor (Col. 3:20; Eph. 6:1-3; Pr. 31:28). It teaches us that everyone in the home is dedicated to Christ above anyone or anything else (Matt. 10:37).

The world has led many to experience less than God's ideal for the family for many different reasons. For some it has been death, others disease, others divorce, others dysfunction and abuse beyond our control have left families broken, beaten, and bruised beyond repair. Still, in the midst of the chaos, God has a plan for the spiritual family designed for eternity. His Holy Spirit has the power and grace to help us experience it now through His church.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Find out if your local church has small groups to support the family. If yes, see how you can join it. If not, discuss with the leadership how we can begin one now.

\*Make a list of statements of affirmations for family members that you want to say and recite daily to build each other up and apply God's grace into your lives. For example, statements that express love for each other, support for each other, trust in each other, and forgiveness.

### **Review/Personal Application:**

- *Who are the family members in your life that need the most support? How will you try to support them more going forward?*
- *What did you learn that you can apply today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Take some time in silence to reflect on the positive aspects of your current family.

## **RELATIONSHIPS & COMMUNITY-DAY 34**

# Building a Christian Home Part 3

*How do we resolve conflict in the Christian home?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

“And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Eph. 5:21(NIV)

### **Devotional Content**

Previously we have discussed conflict between individuals and the difficulty in overcoming hurt. Conflict in the family can be one of the most disruptive forces in the church and the community at large. Sound and healthy families cannot avoid conflict. However, how we handle conflict will determine whether our families stay together, grow, or whether they fail.

Although conflict is unavoidable, we can learn how to avoid some conflict and peacefully resolve others by anticipating the sources of that conflict and apply biblical principles to the situation in coordination with the grace we get from living a life led by the Holy Spirit. The following are the most common causes of conflict in the family

that we encounter: personality, money, children, sex, chores, friends, relatives, entertainment, religion, expectations.

Most couples argue over bills, debt, spending and other financial issues. Children argue over allowances and purchases. Often the source of this conflict is the lack of a consensus plan on how to deal with money. Couples argue on having children, then disciplining them, and who is responsible for child care. Some couples also argue over educational and health care options to choose. For some couples sex and intimacy is a very sore point. Couples argue over frequency and quality of intimacy as well as suspicions of infidelity. They struggle with guiding their children's choices about entertainment, friends, and clothing in a sex-crazed world. The distribution of housework can also be a sore spot. Couples argue over cleanliness and the fair division of household responsibilities. Friends that are acceptable to each spouse as well as the children can cause conflict for various reasons. Couples can disagree on what to do with their spare time, vacations. Different interests can threaten family relationships. Religious differences also become a sore spot. Frequency of church attendance, as well as the impact on the children can lead to religious conflict. In-laws, grandparents, siblings, step-children, etc., are all people who can all create stress within a family. Dealing with these factors can threaten family unity of the nuclear family. Everyone enters marriage and family with certain expectations, and when those expectations aren't met, conflict occurs. More than anything, conflicting personalities can doom marriages or families to failure.

The key to navigating conflict in the family is to apply the previous lessons we have learned in our journey towards spiritual growth and maturation. We must have the Fruit of the Spirit. We must use discernment and plan spiritually, socially, and financially. We must pray consistently, and behave towards each other with Christlike qualities. Show concern, forgive and love each other as the Bible commands us to do.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*If you are currently in conflict with someone in the family, pray about it and schedule a time when you can try to resolve it together or with a neutral third-party if possible.

\*Reflect on a time when you have been in conflict, how could you have handled it differently? What changes can you make to avoid it in the future?

### **Review/Personal Application:**

➤ *Which of the sources of conflict resonates the most with you or your family?*

**Care and Reflection:** Take some time in silence to reflect on your personality impacts conflicts in your home and what changes are ready and willing to make to improve your family life.

## **RELATIONSHIPS & COMMUNITY-DAY 35**

# Building the Church Part 1

*How do we build the local church?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Acts 2:42 (ESV)

### **Devotional Content**

Christians have an obligation to be in fellowship with one another. This place of fellowship is their local church. The author of Hebrews tells us that we shouldn't abandon this obligation to our local church (Heb. 10:24-25). Wherever we decide to attend. We need to assure ourselves that the local church is providing and doing what the biblical purpose of the church should be.

The local church needs to preach and proclaim the gospel. The first church in acts was built on the word of God being preached accurately and consistently (Acts 2:41,47). It doesn't matter how many programs a church has. It doesn't matter how nice the people are in the church. If the gospel is not preached accurately, and consistently, the church is going to lead its members astray. The church needs to have qualified people who can teach and honor the word by their preaching and their lifestyle. The church must not promote social entertainment, social programs, and food above the gospel.

The church is a place for corporate worship. The local church gathers to exalt God, sing, share testimonies of God's grace, encourage one another in His Word, and send one another out into service. As long as its members are following the Bible's instructions for worship (1 Cor. 11, 1 Cor. 14, etc.), a healthy church is free to enjoy a wide range of variety, diversity, and creativity in their worship together. Worship is not about a style of music, or language. There are diversity of rhythms, instruments, and expressions in worship. These elements are secondary. Cultural expressions of worship are just that, cultural expressions. What is important is that regardless of the cultural expression the purpose of worship doesn't change, the spirit of worship doesn't change and they all have the same end result: God is glorified, his people edified.

The church is a place for support. Biblical leaders support us in our spiritual growth and journey. Leaders and other members keep us spiritually accountable. They encourage us, chastise us, pray for us, guide us, model for us the lives that we should live for God. They encourage us in pursuing things that make for peace, like love and unity (Jn 13:34-35; 17:20-23). The church is where we can also conflict. In the local church, at one time or another there will always be those who cause division and occasions to stumble. It is these occasions that give us an opportunity to grow and get beyond the conflict. Instead we focus on pursuing things that make for building up (edifying) brethren (1 Cor. 14:26).

Finally, the church is a place for service. It prepares us to spread the gospel to the lost.

It prepares us to help deliver those who are oppressed, pray for the sick, and spread the love of Christ to the world. The church cannot grow numerically without evangelization. God wants us to live a life that helps to grow His kingdom. We learn more about this in later studies.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Reflect on your current church. How would you evaluate the leadership, the preaching, the worship? How involved are you? How can you help your fellow church members build a better local church community?

### **Review/Personal Application:**

➤ *What did you learn that you can apply today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Write down some things you would like to see happen at your home church.

**RELATIONSHIPS & COMMUNITY-DAY 36**

## Building the Church Part 2

*What is my responsibility towards the local church?*

### Key Theme Passage/Verse

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matt. 16:18 (ESV)

### Devotional Content

In our materialistic, individualistic, and consumer driven worldview, most people join a church based on what the church can offer. We are not surprised to hear people are “shopping” for churches based on the programs the church can offer. The theology of the seeker-friendly church has made this even more popular as churches try to be more “attractive” to people like a hotel, mall, or sports venue. The reality is that churches compete for people’s time, loyalty, and finances with everything else in this world. However, that is not the biblical mindset. In the scriptures, God’s people are expected to have obligations and responsibilities towards their local congregation. No Christian is expected to have an attitude of a consumer towards their church. We cannot just come to receive. Too much emphasis is placed today on what we get, and not enough what we give. We can’t really give to God who has everything and to whom we owe everything. However, our contribution to building His kingdom by supporting and participating in the local church is a step in the right direction.

There are some obligations that we need to meet with the local church as we grow spiritually. First, we are expected to be faithful in our attendance and gatherings. We are expected by God to prioritize our attendance. We will plateau and not grow until we realize this (Heb. 10:24-25). We are to make sure that the gospel being preached is not distorted (Gal. 1:2,6-7). Obviously, not every member can be a master of systematic theology, but every member should be able to articulate and defend the substance of the gospel. The apostles assumed that every believer would mature in Christ, enabling them to discern true and false doctrine. We should be like the Christians that Paul trained at the church in Berea. The bible says “the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul’s message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth” (Acts 17:11, NLT).

We have an obligation as church members to also exercise discipline among the believers. In the Corinthian church, Paul was upset with the lack of discipline to the point where he advocated removing a believer who refused correction and to repent of his indiscretions (1 Cor. 5:1-13). We have an obligation to respect and submit to our leaders. Hebrews 13:17 says, “Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.” Finally, we have an obligation to reach the lost. This was the most important Jesus gave his disciples before he left (Matt. 28:19-20).

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Reflect on your current church. How are you meeting your obligations?

### **Review/Personal Application:**

➤ *What did you learn that you can apply today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Write down some things you can do to improve your congregation.

## **MISSION-DAY 37**

# TYPES OF EVANGELISM

*What are the different types of evangelism?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Mark 16:15 (NIV)

### **Devotional Content**

When I grew up it wasn't surprising to see someone on a busy street corner on the weekends holding a large sign with a message that said something like "Repent. Jesus is coming back soon." For many people this is their understanding of what evangelism is. However, if that is what evangelism is, most of us would never participate. Others remember Saturday mornings when you would receive a knock on your door. With this knock on your door, you would open and find Jehovah's Witness members asking for permission to come into your home to study the bible with you. Most people are too shy to practice this approach. I remember my friend saying with disdain and disgust, "Who does that?" because he thought that going to speak to perfect strangers' homes uninvited was rude, harassing, and embarrassing.

These are just two examples of what evangelism could look like. But evangelism is sharing the gospel as we were commanded by Jesus to do in Mark 16:15. How do we follow this command? Are there other methods besides the street corner? Do we have other choices? There are three types of methods of evangelism that we can participate in. We should be able to do at least one of these methods effectively. They are relationship evangelism, ministry evangelism, and missional evangelism.

Relationship evangelism is the type that we should participate in on a daily basis. Everyone can do relationship evangelism. In our next lesson, we will study how this type of evangelism can be effective and is the principle method for growing the church.

Ministry evangelism, and missional evangelism are both direct and indirect methods of evangelism. Ministry evangelism is a type of evangelism in which the whole church participates. This is a fairly common method of evangelism. In this type of evangelism, you invite someone to a church event. This church event could be a service, it could be a bible study, small group meeting, concert, pot luck dinner, barbeque and picnic, a field trip, or any event or program hosted by the congregation. At this event, the person is introduced to the church, and familiarizes with other members. The goal is for the guests to experience the body of Christ. They should

leave thinking, "There is something different about these people" and I'd like to get to know more or even join. If it's a service, perhaps they hear a sermon and respond to an altar call and give their life to Christ. Most of us have had occasion to invite someone to church for a special service, Christmas, or Easter.

Missional evangelism is when the church financially supports dedicated missionaries to go out to different parts of the world to preach the gospel to the unsaved. It could be street missionary teams in the local community, it could be overseas. The church finances this effort indirectly, and the missionaries do the evangelism directly. The role of the church is to train these "specialists" in evangelism, support them in prayer and any other resources these individuals need to do the task.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Reflect on your current church. How are you engaging visitors that may be unsaved? What could you do differently or better as a church?

### **Review/Personal Application:**

➤ *What did you learn that you can apply today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Write down people you could invite to church that you haven't.

## **MISSION-DAY 38**

# Relationship Evangelism

*What is my responsibility towards the local church?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verse**

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Matt. 5:16 (ESV)

### **Devotional Content**

Previously in our studies, we talked about the three different types of evangelism. In this study we will focus on relationship evangelism. There are two aspects to relationship evangelism. First aspect is steering conversations with others to the point where you are able to share the gospel with them. The second aspect is living a life that exemplifies the gospel to those around you.

Relationship or relational evangelism is an important tool because it helps us overcome some of the difficulties we have in evangelizing others. Sometimes, evangelism can seem overwhelming, too many people to talk to. Relationship evangelism is a method where we limit our efforts to a small set of people that are unsaved that we interact with, maybe in our neighborhood, maybe at our job. As technology has increased and gadgets make our lives easier, our lives have also become more complicated. We move around more, and life is too fast and complicated to have meaningful relationships. We need to slow down and focus on building relationships with others. This method also addresses the credibility issues we face as Christians. Often the media casts Christians in a negative light. This method gives others an opportunity to see up close and upfront who Christians really are. There was a preacher who worked for 28 years at a job for a manager who hated Christians and tried his best to annoy that preacher and get him fired from the job. After 28 years, two years before the preacher was to retire, a crisis in the manager's life led him to

give his life to Christ. The preacher said that the change was so awkward. This person who once saw him as an enemy, testified before all the workers that the preacher was a true man of God. He confessed how he had tried so many times to anger him, get him fired, and make his life miserable. Now he publicly asked for this man's forgiveness and began to evangelize others as a new Christian. It was amazing, soon the two were leading bible studies together with other workers during lunch breaks. Relationship evangelism may not be quick, but it is effective.

Many don't do relationship evangelism because we misunderstand "separation". The bible tells us to separate ourselves from the world in behavior, attitude and actions, but not in relationship with the exception of marriage. How can people see Christ in us without interacting with us? Sometimes, all it takes is reaching out to help people just because they need help and we are Christians. When we start to act like this we will make a difference.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Reflect on your current acquaintances. Do you have five people you can target to share the gospel with in a relationship style evangelization? Start to plan to do so and document.

\*Memorize the key verse and meditate on it.

### **Review/Personal Application:**

➤ *What did you learn that you can apply today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Write down some things you can do to improve your congregation's approach to evangelism.

## **MISSION-DAY 39**

# Discipleship Part 1

*Why is discipleship important in the local church?*

### **Key Theme Passage/Verses**

And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. 2 Tim. 2:2 (ESV)

### **Devotional Content**

Discipleship is the process that leads to spiritual maturation. This is why immediately after spreading the gospel Jesus told his leaders to make disciples. Jim Putnam once told the story of once meeting a former pastor who had given up on the traditional church. The pastor was a graduate of bible college and seminary but now he was working at a grocery store. He was still serving God in his church at home. The pastor blamed his disappointment on the organization of the church. However, Putnam tried to convince him that the problem was that the churches had lost their discipleship mandate. Discipleship, Putnam believes, is the vehicle for spiritual growth and maturity.

Jesus practiced discipleship. The first step of discipleship is relationship. Jesus spent time with his disciples. They got to personally observe him, and he got to see

them in their homes. Jesus went to heal Peter's mother-in-law when she was sick (Luke 4:38-40). Jesus sat and ate with his disciples on many occasions including when Mary anointed him after Lazarus died (John 12). Developing relationships gives others an opportunity to judge the authenticity of our approach. They can see if we care, if we know what we are talking about, and if we practice what we preach. Without authenticity there is no belief. Peter's declaration that Jesus was the Messiah was revealed by the Holy Spirit, but it was supported by the authentic evidence provided by Jesus' life on earth. Relationships lead to learning. In relationships people learn by observing and asking questions. Life change is clearer when there is a teacher/coach who is readily available to observe and ask questions. This has been the model of discipleship long before Jesus appeared on the earth. The Greeks were masters of this. Lastly, relationships lead to accountability. We cannot grow unless we are held accountable for our actions, and attitudes.

There are three things we can learn and imitate from Jesus' approach to discipleship. First, he was intentional. He asked specific questions, set specific goals and tasks for his disciples. He brought them along for specific experiences. Nothing happened in the relationship and the growth by chance. Jesus was completely intentional down to the last supper and picking a room to eat together before he died. Secondly, Jesus practiced intentionality in a relational context. Sports coaches understand this. Sometimes sports coaches are very harsh and abrasive towards their players. However, this rarely happens in a public environment. The most harsh and aggressive approaches happen in a practice when no one else is around and the player understands that the coach's motivation in this environment is the player's improvement and the good of the team. Coaches who are transparent, hold people accountable, and display sound and effective strategy are able to succeed. These coaches follow a process that makes them proven winners as Jesus did.

### Structured Exercises

\*Reflect on your current church. Does it have a process for discipleship? What is it?

### Review/Personal Application:

➤ *What did you learn that you can apply today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Write down some things you can do to improve your congregation.

**MISSION-DAY 40**

## Discipleship Part 2

*Where am I in my discipleship and spiritual maturation?*

### Key Theme Passage/Verse

And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. 2 Tim. 2:2 (ESV)

### Devotional Content

Over the past forty days, we have learned a lot about spiritual maturation, and what we learn should shape us to be better Christians. How do we informally reflect on where we are in this journey?

In our last lesson we learned that those who disciple others have to be intentional as Jesus was intentional with his disciples. Well, disciples have to be

intentional too. The word disciple has the same root as the word discipline. We talked about spiritual disciplines. Discipleship requires discipline and the use of spiritual disciplines to effect life change through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit provides the gas that runs our spiritual engine, but we have to keep showing up at the rest stops along the way to fill up on our journey. The intentional disciple has certain key characteristics. First, they respect their elders, their leaders. Second, they commit to a process. Recall that as Jesus left he told the disciples to stay in the Upper Room and pray there. That was an example of a process. By being faithful to this direction, the disciples were rewarded with the gift of the Holy Spirit. By following these forty days, you have committed yourself to a process that should bring life change. One mistake we should not make is equating spiritual gifting to spiritual maturity. Samson was gifted but lacked maturity. On a professional basketball team, the most talented player could also be the most immature. This was the case of a young Allen Iverson when he first came to the NBA. He was clearly the most talented person on the team but did not have maturity. He had to learn from a great coach, Larry Brown, what it meant to be a true player.

If we compare spiritual maturity to life stages, Larry Putnam's church has a great metaphor for self-evaluating our spiritual maturation progress. They divide the stages in the life of the believer into dead (unsaved), born again (new Christian), child, young adult, and parent. The Infant is characterized by ignorance and innocence. They don't know the word but are able to share. They share testimonies, new truths and new habits. The Child is characterized by self-centeredness. Everything about the spiritual journey revolves around them, their needs, their desires. They are in the connect stage. They connect to a ministry, a small group, and connect with God to start to see a spiritual purpose for their life. The Young Adult is characterized by Service, other-centeredness, and God-centeredness. They are ready to train and be equipped for service. The Parent stage is characterized by intentionality, reproduction, and strategy. They are able to explain discipleship, reproduce disciples, and help young ministers develop other disciples. Remember, everyone despite their maturity has their weak areas. Giannis Antetokounmpo is considered one of the best basketball players in the world. Yet one of his glaring weaknesses is his ability to shoot the basketball from far away. He keeps training. We need to identify our weak areas and continual work on them.

### **Structured Exercises**

\*Reflect on yourself? Based on this lesson where would you be in your spiritual journey?

\*Create a plan for advancing yourself to the next stage of discipleship. Use the lessons you've learned in this study to help you. Meet with your spiritual leader about this plan

### **Review/Personal Application:**

➤ *What did you learn that you can apply today?*

**Care and Reflection:** Write down some people who can help you go higher and people you can help.

Learning Experience 3: Curriculum Development