



**STRATEGIC
DISCIPLESHIP**



**STRATEGIC
DISCIPLESHIP**
TRAINING RESOURCES

PHASE 2

TEACHER MANUAL

by Robert Laidlaw

StrategicDiscipleship.com



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SESSION 1: DISCIPLINING YOUR LIFE

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Discuss the following quote.

“Superficiality is the curse of our age.
The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary problem.
The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people,
or gifted people, but for deep people.”

Richard Foster (Celebration of Discipline, p.1)

What do you think he means when he says, “Superficiality is the curse of our age”?

In what ways, spiritually speaking, do we tend to expect instant satisfaction?

What does Foster mean when he says our desperate need for today is to have more “deep” people?

How does one become “deep”?

Churches will often talk about spiritual disciplines? What is your gut reaction to the words “spiritual disciplines”? What are spiritual disciplines?

Spiritual disciplines are activities we come to value as essential for spiritual life. They are the key to deeper intimacy with God, and without them, we will die spiritually. The goal is to learn to see their value and embrace them in such a way that we structure our lives around them and pursue them wholeheartedly.

Example: EATING

Eating is an activity that we make a natural part of our daily routine. We understand the importance of it, we schedule our day around it, and we actually enjoy doing it. In fact, we raise it to the level of a “special occasion” when we go out to eat. But it is also a physical discipline. If we did not embrace it, we would die. Eating is not something we view as onerous, a hassle, or

even a burden (cooking might be, but not eating). We understand its value; we enjoy it; we see it as essential to living. Eating has become a natural part of our day that we do not even think of it as a discipline.

We desire to not just “teach” about spiritual disciplines but to embed them into our lives so they become as natural a part of our daily routine as eating.

There are many different spiritual disciplines, but the ones we will focus on in this series are:

- a) **Studying the Bible** – learning to let God speak to you through his word.
- b) **Prayer** – learning how to pray, how to pray with others, and how to be victorious through prayer.
- c) **Giving** – learning how to surrender everything to God.

Getting Spiritual Control over your life

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (ESV)

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

What motivates a serious athlete to change their daily routine, change their diet, train rigorously and spend money on equipment and training?

A strong desire to reach a goal. To win the first place prize.

What is the goal that we are to be striving for in Christ?

Every believer’s goal is to live the Christ-life to its fullest extent, to live out the righteousness God has given us in Christ, and to be holy and blameless before him. Living the Christ-life requires self-control and discipline, so we are not swept away by our evil desires or by influences of the world we live in. Paul used this race analogy to stress the importance of disciplining our lives to be holy. He is concerned that we never stop trying to live out the righteousness he has in Christ Jesus.

Do athletes view these disciplines as obligations or expectations they have to meet?

No, they are a means to a goal – not a goal in and of themselves. They are not viewed as a list of rules. If we approach disciplines as a goal, then we miss the point; they are simply a means to get us to where we want to go. If we’re going to progress towards a goal, then disciplines are necessary to get us there.

What does Paul mean when he says he “disciplines” his body?

Our body and mind are tainted by a sin nature and a history of sinful life patterns. If we let our body/mind rule, we will always default to a sinful approach to life. Paul chooses not to let his “natural” preferences set the agenda or make the decisions for his life. He chooses to do only that which will bring him closer to God and make him more effective in representing Christ to others. He tells his body what he is going to do – not the other way around.

In what ways might we spiritually “beat” our body and make it our “slave”?

***Our Bodies** might feel tired and not want to get up to go to church, Bible study, or to read the Bible daily – WE DO IT ANYWAY.*

***Our Minds** might naturally wander throughout the day or during prayer times to things that are not beneficial – WE TAKE EVERY THOUGHT CAPTIVE TO CHRIST.*

- *It might involve setting the alarm clock earlier to spend time with God.*
- *It might involve not giving in to a bad habit that is not glorifying to God or your body.*
- *It might mean stepping out in faith to do something that terrifies you.*
- *It might mean going without something that is not beneficial: TV, certain foods, work overtime, excess sleep, certain friends, etc.*

What will it take for us to bring this type of spiritual determination and discipline into our lives? Discuss what each passage below reveals about developing spiritual disciplines.

Philippians 3:7-11 (ESV)

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

1. A deep desire to know Christ

Why did Paul view all his former accomplishments as rubbish?

In what way did all his previous efforts fail him in his pursuit of life?

Paul wanted to measure up to God’s standard. He strove beyond everyone else to live righteously according to the Law. Ironically, the very things he thought would give him the life and righteousness he longed for were the very things that created a barrier between him and God.

In what way was Christ the answer to all he was longing for?

Christ gave Paul the gift of righteousness. Where Paul could never measure up, Christ measured up for him and us. Paul did not have to strive after life anymore; he only needed to stay focused on Jesus Christ and experience Jesus' presence and power in his life.

Paul was always a much-disciplined man. The problem was, in his old life, he had the wrong focus for his disciplines. His disciplines were rooted in making him a more righteous person.

As you think about the disciplines in your life, are they taking you in the right direction?**What are some examples of disciplines that may be "good", but will not ultimately bring one the life they are hoping for?*****Examples:***

- *Work long hours*
- *Studying for school*
- *Exercise*
- *Diet*

It is not that we stop doing some of these earthly disciplines, but that we give higher importance to the spiritual ones that help us grow in Christ.

What are some ways we can strive to know Christ better?***Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (ESV)***

⁹ *Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰ For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!*

2. Accountability / Support**Why do we so often hate the idea of accountability?****Why is accountability so important?**

Spiritual disciplines appear difficult at first because they are something new we are trying to introduce into our lives. We have already established an old pattern of behavior. It will take some time, perseverance, and encouragement to put into place new spiritual habits that will bring about life transformation. Going deep takes determination.

***We're here to help.** Though they take some concerted effort at first, developing disciplines are like a musician first learning to play an instrument. Once they are practised over time, they become effortless.*

Accountability is a mark of maturity. We were NOT created to be independent but inter-dependent, relying on each other to grow into maturity. Accountability says we will keep asking you how the journey is going and will pray for your ongoing spiritual growth and encourage you in any way we can. You also are an accountability partner to others within the group, helping them grow in their disciplines. Without the support of God's family, you will continue to stumble and will eventually fade away like a burning ember cast from the blaze of the fire.

How good are you at being spiritually inter-dependent?

Why do we strive so much for independence?

How will a decision to become inter-dependent help everyone grow?

What are some steps we could take to become more inter-dependent as a group?

Bible Reading and Prayer Time

We suggest that you book an appointment with God at least five times each week, though we recommend daily. Many of you are already spending daily time with God, and we want to encourage you to continue to do that. These times do not need to be long, but for now, try to set aside half an hour, so your time with God does not feel rushed. You will need to determine the time and place that works best for you. We recommend that you try to find a consistent time each day so that it will more quickly become a habit, a regular part of your routine.

Book Memorization

It would be embarrassing for us to claim this is the "Book of Life" given to us by God, upon which we base our hope and eternal future, and we don't even know the basic structure of it. We hope to help you understand not just where the books are but also how they are categorized.

Old Testament (39 Books)		
History (17)	Poetry (5)	Prophecy (17)
The Law (5) Pentateuch/Torah		Major Prophets (5) Large
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs	Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel
Other Historical Books (12)		Minor Prophets (12)
Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther		Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

This week we encourage you to memorize the first five books of the Bible. Below is a brief explanation of the nature of each of these books.

GENESIS, EXODUS, LEVITICUS, NUMBERS, DEUTERONOMY

The first section of the Bible consists of seventeen books of History. They tell the story of how God is at work to create for himself a people of faith and ultimately image salvation through Christ. The first five books were written by Moses and are therefore often called the Books of Moses. They have some other names too:

- 1) **The Law**
- 2) **Pentateuch** (pent = 5, teuch = Law; the 5 books of the law),
- 3) **Torah** (Hebrew word for Law – this can refer to just the first 5 books, or may refer to the whole Old Testament)

Genesis: Genesis means “In the beginning”. It deals with Creation, the Fall, and God’s initiation of a plan to bring salvation to the ends of the world.

Exodus: Exodus deals with the “exit” of God’s people out of slavery in Egypt. It ultimately answers Pharaoh’s and Israel’s question, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?”

Leviticus: Leviticus details what it means for the Israelites to be a “holy” priesthood.

Numbers: Numbers relates the consequences of disobedience. The Israelites’ failure to enter the land resulted in their wandering through the desert until that generation passed away. There are consequences for sin.

Deuteronomy: Deuteronomy means “Second Law.” It is the recommitment to the Covenant before the Israelites enter the Promised Land.

DEVOTIONAL READING:

The Letter to the Philippians

As a group, we will spend four weeks working through the book of Philippians to help you understand how to better read and understand the Bible.

To understand Paul’s relationship to the church in Philippi, read Acts 16:11-40.

Paul is in prison for proclaiming Jesus Christ. While there, he is visited by Epaphroditus, a delegate sent from the church in Philippi to encourage Paul and bring him a financial gift to help support him during his imprisonment.

As Epaphroditus visits Paul, he shares about church life back in Philippi and all their issues. The church is being pulled in various directions by different people and different perspectives. There are Judaizers (people who claim you must still keep all the Old Testament ceremonial law) who are exerting influence. There are people who are claiming to be Christ-followers yet are living immoral lives. And then there are good old Euodia and Syntyche, women in the church who are having a quarrel with each other in a manner that affects the entire church. On top of all this, there is the constant challenge to represent Christ in a society opposed to the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

Paul is deeply concerned that the church maintains unity in Christ and does not forget why it exists. If the church continues in this manner, it will become ineffective in its mission to transform lives and its community. As he writes this letter to the Philippian church, Paul wants to thank the Philippians for their generous gift, but he also has a deep spiritual burden he wants to share with them. He knows he needs to be positive and encouraging yet forceful enough to break them free from their present perspective and to encourage them to start living life with a greater sense of purpose.

This is a powerful letter speaking of our ultimate purpose on earth and the peace that comes from trusting Jesus Christ. When we become more concerned about our personal agendas versus knowing Christ and representing him in this world, we start to experience anxiety, stress, and tension with others around us. If we, as a church, stay focused on Jesus Christ and his mission, allowing the Holy Spirit to direct each of us in unity, then we will experience his complete peace and kingdom effectiveness.

This is an extremely practical letter for us as a church. It is easy for minor issues to start to divide us and render us ineffective. It is easy for us to start focussing more on our preferences than the needs of others. It is easy for us to lose sight of the purposes God has for us as a community of faith. It is easy to value comfort more than mission. This letter, when fully embraced, sets us free!

FIVE DAYS OF DEVOTIONAL TIME

DAY 1 Read Philippians in one sitting (Relax, it's a small book)

Questions to consider:

- How many times do the words joy/rejoice occur in this letter? (Perhaps underline them in your Bible.)
- How is this striking in lieu of Paul's immediate circumstances?
- How is this relevant to you and your circumstances?
- How does your agenda sometimes create conflict with those around you?
- Are there some perspective shifts that need to occur in your life?

In the space below, write out the first 5 books of the Bible.

G _____
 E _____
 L _____
 N _____
 D _____

In what literary section of the Bible are these books found? _____

DAY 2 Read Philippians 1:1-2

As you read, look to see if you can spot these four effects of scripture.

- The questions merely show you the "types" of things you might look for.
- Not every passage will have every element.
- Each paragraph has a main idea; look to see what that main idea is and what it is trying to communicate.
- The key is to find some principles you can apply this week.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

TEACH

Teaching focuses on presenting truth.

Does the passage reveal any insight into the character of God or how he is at work?

REPROOF/REFUTE

Refuting focuses on exposing wrong beliefs.

Does the passage challenge any false beliefs people have?

CORRECT

Correcting focuses on changing a sinful lifestyle.

Are you currently doing something sinful in your life that God wants to correct?

TRAIN

Training focuses on embedding godly habits or spiritual disciplines.

Is there a behavior or life-focus that you can act on this week?

In the space below, write out the first 5 books of the Bible.

G _____

E _____

L _____

N _____

D _____

In what literary section of the Bible are these books found? _____

DAY 3 Read Philippians 1:3-11

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the first 5 books of the Bible.

G _____
E _____
L _____
N _____
D _____

DAY 4 Read Philippians 1:12-18

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the first 5 books of the Bible.

DAY 5 Read Philippians 1:19-30

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the first 5 books of the Bible.

What are the various names for this section of the Bible?

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

SESSION 2: PHILIPPIANS 1

Discuss how everyone did during the past week of devotions.

Encourage those who did not do it to work hard at establishing this spiritual discipline in their life – not out of a sense of “duty,” but for deeper joy and effectiveness in their relationship with Jesus.

Have them share ideas of what helped them to be consistent with their devotional time.

- *Are people using a specific time of day?*
- *What were some of the barriers to being consistent?*
- *How can we overcome some of those barriers this next week?*

What did they learn?

- *As they read through the passages, did anything stand out to them?*
- *Did they learn anything new? Gain a new insight?*
- *Did anyone consciously put into action something they had read?*

REMEMBER, THE GOAL IS NOT SO MUCH TO TEACH PHILIPPIANS AS IT IS TO EMBED THE DISCIPLINE OF READING THE BIBLE.

PHILIPPIANS 1

Would you describe Paul as a “driven” man? If so, what was his drive?

Paul was driven to share with others the good news of a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

What are some indicators of his drive from Philippians 1?

Have people share different ideas. As they raise points such as those below ask follow-up questions that draw out the implication of those points for us.

1:1 *He calls himself a “slave” of Christ Jesus. Some versions say “servant,” but the actual word is “doulos” which translates as “slave.”*

What are the implications of Paul calling himself a “slave” of Christ Jesus?
He acknowledges that Jesus is Lord and Master of his life and that he is committed to doing only that which is in obedience to God’s will.

Why do we seldom view ourselves as slaves to Christ?

1:5 Paul described his relationship with the Philippians as a “partnership in the gospel.”

What are the implications of us being “partners” in the gospel?

It is just as much our responsibility to build the kingdom of God as it was Paul’s. We all have a different role to play, and each of us needs to take it seriously and do our part.

1:12 Paul is in prison for preaching the gospel, and he is still preaching the gospel.

Why doesn’t Paul stop when he faces opposition?

There is too much at stake. Peoples’ eternal destinies depend on how we communicate to them the hope of forgiveness through Christ Jesus. Paul understands this, and as a result, nothing holds him back from speaking the truth.

1:14 Others are driven by his example to preach the gospel.

What encourages you to share the great news of Jesus Christ with others?

We hope you will encourage each other as you come and share stories each week about how God has been at work through you. Each week we will ask if you had any “God conversations” with other people you have met this past week. (Teachers – we encourage you to ask two questions at the beginning of every session. 1) How are you this week 2) Have you had any “God conversations” with people this past week?)

1:18 Paul doesn’t care who gets credit as long as the gospel is preached.

What is Paul’s overriding concern that even outweighs the opinions/approval of others?

Paul knows it is not about him. It is not about whether people like him, respect him, or want to be his friend. It is about Jesus Christ and people knowing him. Paul does not need to defend himself or condemn others; he wants people to meet Jesus.

1:25 Paul plans to continue sharing the gospel.

What is Paul’s plan when he gets out of prison?

To continue doing the very thing that put him there in the first place.

Do we sometimes avoid doing what is right simply because we have experienced negative consequences in the past? How can we get over that temptation?

Philippians 1:21-24 (ESV)

²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

If you had the choice to be taken up to heaven or stay here on earth, which would you choose? Why?

Get as much feedback as you can on the above question.

What statement does that make about what you believe about heaven?

What statement does it make about how you view life on earth?

What things on earth do we tend to hold in higher value than being in the presence of God?

Consider Paul's Experience

Paul has seen heaven

2 Corinthians 12:2-4 (ESV)

² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. ³ And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— ⁴ and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.

Teacher's Note: The three heavens are: 1) the sky where birds fly, 2) the place where the stars are, and 3) the abode of God.

How do you think this experience might have affected Paul's perspective of life on earth?

Paul saw what was waiting for him.

- *He saw life as it was intended to be: perfect. No sin, no misery, no pain, no shame.*
- *He saw what it is like to be in heaven, walking in the presence of Jesus Christ.*
- *He saw that life there is far superior to life here.*

THEN he was plunked back down on earth and the realities of his present situation.

- *He is in jail, in chains, for telling people Jesus loves them so much he died for them.*
- *He has probably been beaten and could be awaiting his execution for all he knows.*
- *Some "Christians" are discrediting him and his ministry.*
- *It is a battle simply to live the Christ-life in this world.*

It would be like returning to extreme poverty after having experienced extreme luxury.

Where do you think he would rather be?

After seeing heaven, what on earth would be worth sticking around for?

What on earth would provide more life and joy? NOTHING

Philippians 1:23-26 (ESV)

²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

What is the one reason Paul would forsake heaven and choose to stick around here on earth?

Was it so he could get a good job and make lots of money? Why not?

Was it so he could be with his friends and family? Why not?

Was it so he could spend time seeing the world? Why not?

It was for ONE reason: So that OTHERS could GROW in their RELATIONSHIP with JESUS CHRIST.

NO OTHER PURPOSE FOR LIVING IS SUFFICIENT TO WARRANT STAYING ON EARTH WHEN WE COULD BE IN HEAVEN.

Is this how we live? What does our focus in life reveal about our belief about heaven?

If we knew what was waiting for us, would we strive so hard after meaningless things here on earth? How might we live differently?

How would this perspective help solve the relational tensions in Philippi between Euodia and Syntyche?

It would cause them to realize that whatever they were fighting over paled in comparison to the greater purpose of being Christ to the world. They would be compelled to work together for the common goal of seeing others come to faith as opposed to wanting their own agendas met. They would be willing to sacrifice themselves and their agendas for the spiritual building up of others because they knew all their needs were met in Christ.

How might this perspective help guard the unity of our church?

What are some action steps we might take in light of this perspective?

Examples:

- *Evaluate and change what we are striving for in this world.*
- *Reconcile to others for the sake of the church and our mission to build up others in Christ.*
- *Stop worrying about the little stuff and focus on the eternal picture.*

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Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther		Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

This week we want to encourage you to memorize the rest of the historical books of the Bible.

JOSHUA - ESTHER

- Joshua:** Joshua takes over from Moses and leads the Israelites into the Promised Land.
- Judges:** After Joshua dies, God establishes a series of Judges to lead the Israelites.
- Ruth:** The story of a non-Israelite who has more faith than the Israelites. The meaning of the characters' names play a significant role in this book.
- 1-2 Samuel:** Israel is led by the prophet Samuel.
- 1-2 Kings:** The history of the kings up to the point of exile to Babylon.
- 1-2 Chronicles:** The history of the kings written AFTER exile to show why they ended up in exile.
- Ezra:** The return from exile to rebuild the temple.
- Nehemiah:** The return from exile to rebuild Jerusalem.
- Esther:** The story of how God used one woman, in exile, to save the entire Jewish nation.

The reason some of the books have parts 1 and 2 is that the scrolls they were written on would have been too long. To make them easier to read, they broke them up into two separate scrolls.

DEVOTIONAL READING

As you read, look to see if you can spot these four effects of scripture.

- The questions merely show you the “types” of things you might look for.
- Not every passage will have every element.
- Each paragraph has a central idea. Look to see what that main idea is and what it is trying to communicate.
- The key is to find some principles you can apply this week.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

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Teaching focuses on presenting truth.

Does the passage reveal any insight into the character of God or how he is at work?

REPROOF/REFUTE

Refuting focuses on exposing wrong beliefs.

Does the passage challenge any false beliefs people have?

CORRECT

Correcting focuses on changing a sinful lifestyle.

Are you currently doing something sinful in your life that God wants to correct?

TRAIN

Training focuses on embedding godly habits or spiritual disciplines.

Is there a behavior or life-focus that you can act on this week?

DAY 1 Read Philippians 2:1-4

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 12 “Other Historical” books of the Bible.

J _____	2K _____
J _____	1C _____
R _____	2C _____
1S _____	E _____
2S _____	N _____
1K _____	E _____

DAY 2 Read Philippians 2:5-11

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 12 “Other Historical” books of the Bible.

J _____	2K _____
J _____	1C _____
R _____	2C _____
1S _____	E _____
2S _____	N _____
1K _____	E _____

DAY 3 Read Philippians 2:12-18

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 12 “Other Historical” books of the Bible.

J _____

2K _____

J _____

1C _____

R _____

2C _____

1S _____

E _____

2S _____

N _____

1K _____

E _____

In what literary section of the Bible are these books found? _____

DAY 4 Read Philippians 2:19-24

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 12 “Other Historical” books of the Bible.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

DAY 5 Read Philippians 2:25-30

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 12 “Other Historical” books of the Bible.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

In what literary section of the Bible are these books found? _____

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

SESSION 2: PHILIPPIANS 2

Discuss how everyone did during the past week of devotions.

Encourage those who did not do it to work hard at establishing this spiritual discipline in their life – not out of a sense of “duty”, but for deeper joy and effectiveness in their relationship with Jesus.

What did they learn?

- *As they read through the passages did anything really stand out to them?*
- *Did they learn anything new? Gain a new insight?*
- *Did anyone consciously put into action something they had read?*

REMEMBER, THE GOAL IS NOT SO MUCH TO TEACH PHILIPPIANS AS IT IS TO EMBED THE DISCIPLINE OF READING THE BIBLE.

PHILIPPIANS 2

Philippians 2:1-2 (ESV)

¹ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the **same mind**, having the **same love**, being in **full accord and of one mind**.

What do you think is the connection between the underlined phrases and Paul’s desire for the Philippians expressed in bold?

We often think we have an okay relationship with God. Sure it could be better, but we do enjoy being united with Christ, we do take comfort from his love, we do have fellowship with his Spirit, and we do have a tenderness and compassion for Christ.

Those statements speak about my relationship with God. The bolded statements shift the focus to talk about my relationship with those in the church. To claim to be enjoying a relationship with Christ and the Holy Spirit, yet be out of relationship and unity with others in Christ is a spiritual inconsistency.

Why do you think this might be the case?

*If each of us is **UNITED** with Christ, then by nature we all must be united with each other. We become **ONE** body in Christ.*

*If each of us receives **COMFORT** from his love, then we are all comforted together. We won’t have to grasp after issues in life to feel good about things – we’re already comforted, we’re already at peace despite what the circumstances might be around us. The outflow of being comforted by Christ will be a desire to comfort others, meet their needs, and bring peace into their lives.*

*If each of us has **PARTICIPATION** with the Holy Spirit and is being led by him, then all of us will be guided in the same direction. We will have the same goals and the same purposes when it comes to his church. We will be unified, working together, supporting each other, and watching the kingdom of God grow together through our unity.*

To claim to have intimacy with God, yet not with his family, is a glaring inconsistency. It more likely reveals a problem in our walk with Christ and how the Holy Spirit is leading us. Paul encourages the Philippians to make sure the two thoughts line up.

What is it that causes fights and tensions in the church? How is this possible?

Take some time now and have a few people pray that God would guard the unity of our church. Pray that people would be united with Christ and the Holy Spirit in such a way that we would all work together to accomplish God's purposes.

Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV)

³ *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* ⁴ *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Why do we find these verses so difficult to apply?

We are too busy worrying about our own little worlds. Because of significant needs and insecurities in our life, there is no way we can be free to focus on others' needs. This is humanly impossible without Christ.

***The only possible way** to do this is to trust Christ to meet our needs and allow the Holy Spirit to fill us with his love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). If there is disunity in the church, it is because our walk with God has been limited, and the fruits of the Spirit are not working through our lives. We are striving after something God has not given us.*

If we approached people with this selfless perspective tomorrow, how would our day be different?

This next passage shows the ultimate example of submitting to the Father's purposes and loving others sacrificially - Jesus Christ. The last part of the chapter gives two examples that hit close to home for the Philippians, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Philippians 2:5-11 (ESV)

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Why would Jesus do this? What was his primary motive?

Why did Jesus not have to grasp after equality with God?

He already had it.

Why do we grasp after things such as love or respect?

We grasp after such things because we don't believe we already have them. What we don't have but desperately need, we strive after. Jesus knew who he was; he knew his life was in the Father's hands; he knew there was a plan in place; he knew he had a purpose to fulfill, and he knew the opinions of others changed nothing. He was free to do the Father's will as a result of what he knew.

Because Jesus submitted to the will of the Father, he had to go through an extremely painful trial. What is our tendency when following God becomes difficult?

We tend to complain, grumble, question God's love, question God's presence, or question God's power.

Jesus trusted his life to the Father's plan, and in the end, he was glorified for his sacrifice. Trusting our lives to God's plan can be challenging, yet what will be our reward if we are faithful?

The following are very powerful verses about how we should apply these principles in our everyday life.

Philippians 2:12-18 (ESV)

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works

in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. ¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷ Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

What does it mean to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling”?

This does not mean you must work for your salvation. It is saying you already have your salvation; now work it out. But when you work it out, do it with a sense of awe and responsibility. That now we “can” live out the new life is an incredible fact that should shake us to the core of who we are. To be given such an astonishing gift of new life and then not to work it out in our life is incomprehensible to Paul.

If we have already been “saved,” we don’t have to worry about anything; everything has been taken care of. It also means that we have the Holy Spirit to live the Christ-life on earth while we are here. That means we can live out Christ’s character and righteousness, carrying out his mission and proclaiming hope through his death and resurrection.

We have the Christ-Life (Relationship)

We have Christ’s Mission (Representation)

LIVE IT OUT!

Why does Paul say to do everything without grumbling or disputing?

Whenever we grumble or argue, we are saying to God that we are not content with the plan he has laid out before us.

What would Paul’s impact in prison have been like if he spent his time grumbling and complaining about why he was there?

- *The whole palace guard would not have heard the gospel or, if they had, they wouldn’t have been impressed*
- *Other believers would not have been encouraged and motivated to preach the gospel*
- *Paul would have had no credible basis for writing to the Philippians’ about their issues*
- *Paul would not have JOY*
- *He would not have written the book of Philippians to teach us*

What are some keys to going through life without grumbling or arguing?

- *Understand that God has a plan.*
- *God has placed you in (or has allowed you to be in) these circumstances for his purposes.*
- *Remember, God LOVES YOU.*

- *Know that your needs are ALREADY met in Christ.*
- *Remember, you are not here on this earth for your comfort but the eternal well-being of others.*
- *Focus on how you can meet the needs of others.*
- *Take joy in what God is doing around and through you.*
- *Don't allow Satan to sidetrack you with foolish arguments and desires.*

Philippians 2:19-24 (ESV)

¹⁹ *I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you.* ²⁰ *For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.* ²¹ *For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.* ²² *But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.* ²³ *I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me,* ²⁴ *and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.*

In what ways was Timothy another example of an others-centered life?

Philippians 2:25-30 (ESV)

²⁵ *I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need,* ²⁶ *for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.* ²⁷ *Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.* ²⁸ *I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious.* ²⁹ *So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men,* ³⁰ *for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.*

In what ways was Epaphroditus another example of an others-centered life?

How might their examples encourage us?

Goal: Strive this week to partner with Christ in his ministry to those around you. He has placed you in your family, your workplace, school, or whatever environment you find yourself in for HIS PURPOSES. His purposes are always about others knowing him.

You can grumble about your circumstances and complain about God's plan, or, like Paul, you can seize the opportunity to shine in a dark place and fulfill God's purpose for you! You get to choose. Choose wisely!

Old Testament (39 Books)		
History (17)	Poetry (5)	Prophecy (17)
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Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs	Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel
Other Historical Books (12)		Minor Prophets (12)
Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther		Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

This week we encourage you to memorize the Poetry section of the Bible

JOB – SONG OF SONGS

Job: The story of one man's struggle with the Sovereignty of God.

Psalms: A collection of songs and poetry.

Proverbs: A collection of wise sayings.

Ecclesiastes: One man's struggle with finding fulfillment and meaning in life.

Song of Songs: A romantic analogy of God's love for his people.

DEVOTIONAL READING

DAY 1 Read Philippians 3:1-3

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 5 Poetic books of the Bible.

- J _____
- P _____
- P _____
- E _____
- S _____

DAY 2 Read Philippians 3:4-7

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 5 Poetic books of the Bible.

J _____
P _____
P _____
E _____
S _____

DAY 3 Read Philipians 3:8-11

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the next 5 books of the Bible.

J _____
P _____
P _____
E _____
S _____

In what literary section of the Bible are these books found? _____

DAY 4 Read Philippians 3:12-16

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the next 5 books of the Bible.

J _____

P _____

P _____

E _____

S _____

DAY 5 Read Philippians 3:17-21

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out all 17 Historical and 5 Poetic books of the Bible.

Pentateuch/Torah/Law

Other Historical Books

<hr/>	<hr/>
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Poetry

SESSION 2: PHILIPPIANS 3

Discuss how everyone did during the past week of devotions.

- *As they read through the passages, did anything stand out to them?*
- *Did they learn anything new? Gain a new insight?*
- *Did anyone consciously put into action something they had read?*

PHILIPPIANS 3

Philippians 3:1-6 (ESV)

¹ Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. ² Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

What can you do to make yourself more righteous or worthy before God?

Answer: NOTHING. Nothing we can do can make ourselves righteous.

What made Paul think he was righteous before God in his old life?

- *His ancestry*
- *His teaching*
- *His position as a Pharisee – student of the Law*
- *His zealousness*
- *His strict obedience to the Law*

Did it work? Why not?

No! Despite Paul's (Saul's) zealousness for the Law and God, his heart was not in a right relationship with God. He was blind to what God was doing in the world, to the degree that he entirely missed the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Paul had found himself fighting against God and persecuting those who truly did follow him.

So was Paul "righteous" in God's eyes? Not even close.

Romans 10:2 (ESV)

For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

Self-righteousness is very deceiving. It makes us blind to our true spiritual condition.

What types of things do we tend to look at that might make us think we are more “righteous”?

- *Living the “Christian” lifestyle*
- *Regular attendance at church*
- *Serving in church (Have you ever said concerning a ministry, “I’ve served my time”?)*
- *Giving “sacrificially” of your time and money, etc.*

How can mankind “serve” God?**Acts 17:24-25 (ESV)**

²⁴ *The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.*

What does Paul mean by the statement God is not “served by human hands”?

How can we serve God? Can we benefit God in any way? Does God need us to do stuff for him so that he won’t be worse off? God doesn’t need serving because he is already complete. There is nothing he needs. The very fact that we can do anything at all is simply because of his grace.

If God does not need our service, then what role does serving God play?

Service is God’s invitation to join him in his life-giving work. God does not need us but blesses us with the privilege of partnering with him. It is God’s way of including us in all that he does. We (and others) are the ones who benefit when we serve God, not God. God could have done ministry without us, but because he loves us, he includes us in his work.

So even the “good” I do that makes me feel “righteous” is putting me more into the “debt” of God’s grace. It is not an issue of righteousness but privilege. My reaction shouldn’t be “God must be impressed now,” but rather, “Thank you, God, for allowing me to partner with you!”

Philippians 3:7-11 (ESV)

⁷ *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

Paul discovered that any other pursuit, other than knowing Jesus, was meaningless. What sorts of things have you personally pursued in the past that you now look back on as meaningless?

What does Paul mean by wanting to know the power of Christ's resurrection?

What are some of the effects of Christ's resurrection in our life?

First, have the students try to define the words.

We are **Justified**: *declared righteous/holy by the Father*

We are **Sanctified**: *washed clean and set apart for God*

We are **Adopted**: *we are made a child of God*

:

We are **Regenerated**: *we are given new life through the indwelling of the Spirit*

We are **Spirit-Filled**: *we are changed, empowered, and led by the Holy Spirit*

We are **Glorified**: *we will be given new bodies and, along with all the saints, spend eternity with Jesus as the restored image of God.*

What does he mean when he says, "I may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death"?

In suffering, Christ was fully submissive to the will of the Father.

Luke 22:42 (ESV)

...saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

To share in his sufferings and become like him in his death is to become totally committed to the purposes and the will of the Father, regardless of the cost. Suffering wasn't something to be avoided but viewed as a means by which to clarify your faith. When the pressure becomes intense, what is your life truly all about – your will or God's?

When people die to themselves, they become dead to sin. Sin no longer has any hold over them, and they are free as God intended them to be. It is not until we affirm the death of our old nature and pursue only the Christ-life that we experience true freedom.

Philippians 3:12-16 (ESV)

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Why does Paul say we are to forget what is behind us and strain toward what is ahead?

The old life is baggage. The stuff we carry around with us slows down our progress. We have died to the old life and have been given a new life. Instead of focussing on the same past principles of what gave you importance, significance and righteousness, move away from these and start living differently.

What did that mean, on a practical level, for Paul?

Paul completely abandoned his old life, made radical changes, and embraced an entirely new direction.

What are some things we have to forget and let go of?

- *Constantly striving for recognition and approval*
- *Constantly trying to meet some expectation*
- *Perfectionism*
- *Trying to keep everyone happy*
- *Striving for the perfect job/promotion*
- *Striving for financial independence/security*
- *Striving for more comfort*
- *Striving for someone to love you*
- *Trying to prove yourself, etc.*

What does Paul mean when he says, “Only let us hold true to what we have attained”?

We’re at different stages in our spiritual maturity and growth. We don’t expect a brand new believer to have everything down pat. However, each of us is accountable to live out what we already know.

We are not to judge where others are at in their journey. It is too easy to look at others and see their weaknesses while at the same time being blind to our own. Let’s focus solely on growing in our relationship with Jesus and becoming increasingly like him. “For to live is Christ.”

Philippians 3:20-4:1 (ESV)

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

^{4:1} Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

What drives us is our HOPE! We have a future waiting for us that is infinitely better than the present. What is it about this future hope that most excites you and keeps you going through difficult times?

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History (17)	Poetry (5)	Prophecy (17)
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Other Historical Books (12)		Minor Prophets (12)
Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther		Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

This week we encourage you to memorize the five Major Prophets.

ISAIAH – DANIEL

The Major Prophets are only called major because of their greater length.

Isaiah: Isaiah means “Salvation is of the Lord.” This writing is broken into two sections similar to the Bible. The first section of 39 chapters parallels the Old Testament and is filled with judgment against the nations for their sin. The second section of 27 chapters parallels the New Testament and declares hope and restoration through the coming Messiah.

Jeremiah: God calls Israel back to repentance before he brings judgment and sends them off into exile. They do not listen, and off they go. But even at this time, God still leaves hope of restoration and the promise of a whole new covenant to come.

Lamentations: Jeremiah laments about his people refusing to repent, and as a result, he watches the destruction of the temple and the city he deeply loves.

Ezekiel: Ezekiel prophesies among the Israelite exiles in Babylon. Despite the judgment that comes to the Israelites, God is still sovereign and in control. He shows Ezekiel through visions that the glory he has in heaven will be revealed on earth, and people will once again turn back to him.

Daniel: The Jews in exile in Babylon are shown that even though they have been defeated, God is still sovereign and in control over all nations. The first six chapters are in narrative form showing how God will still work on behalf of his people who trust him, even in enemy territory. The second part of the book is prophetic, revealing how God is at work over the nations and in his plan to bring about salvation.

DEVOTIONAL READING

DAY 1 Read Philippians 4:2-3

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 5 Major Prophets of the Bible.

I _____

J _____

L _____

E _____

D _____

DAY 2 Read Philippians 4:4-7

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 5 Major Prophets of the Bible.

I _____

J _____

L _____

E _____

D _____

DAY 3 Read Philippians 4:8-9

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 5 Major Prophets of the Bible.

DAY 4 Read Philippians 4:10-13

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 5 Major Prophets of the Bible.

DAY 5 Read Philippians 4:14-23

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out all 17 Historical, 5 Poetic, and 5 Major Prophet books.

Pentateuch/Torah/Law

Other Historical Books

Poetry

Major Prophets

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

SESSION 2: PHILIPPIANS 4

Discuss how everyone did during the past week of devotions.

- *As they read through the passages, did anything stand out to them?*
- *Did they learn anything new? Gain a new insight?*
- *Did anyone consciously put into action something they had read?*

PHILIPPIANS 4

Tensions will always occur among people and there are no exceptions within the church. What are the typical causes of tension between you and others?

What are some principles that you have recognized from the letter to the Philippians that will help keep conflict to a minimum in our church? (Quickly glance through Philippians)

See how many the group can identify.

- *Life Perspective: Nothing on this earth is worth fighting for other than sharing the gospel with the people around you. (Phil. 1:25)*
- *God's Specific Call to Unity (Phil 1:27, 2:2)*
- *Watch your motives (Phil 1:17, 2:3)*
- *Consider others better than yourself, look out for THEIR interests (Phil 2:3)*
- *Model the attitude shown by Jesus (Phil 2:5-8)*
- *Do everything without complaining or arguing (Phil 2:14)*
- *Sacrifice your life for the spiritual well being of others (Phil 2:17)*
- *Know what matters. Don't chase after meaningless things (Phil 3:7)*
- *Strain toward living the Christ-life (Phil 3:13)*

There will be other scriptures in Philippians in addition to these. The question is, "Do they get it?" Do they really see why we should never have unresolved tensions in the church?

This does not mean we ignore tensions, but we work hard to resolve them.

Philippians 4:2-3 (ESV)

² I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³ Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Why do you think Euodia and Syntyche have not been able to resolve their differences up to this point?

What are some ways the other church members could help them resolve their conflict?

How can you become a peacemaker without getting caught up in the argument?

Philippians 4:4-7 (ESV)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

We become anxious because we fear we may be deprived of something we “need” for a full, abundant life. We feel we need things to go a certain way for life to run properly and for us to feel good.

How do the above verses counter that thinking?

- *When I’m stressing, I’m not rejoicing. If I’m rejoicing, it’s hard to get into a stressed frame of mind.*
- *When I’m stressed, I’m probably not gentle. I will not represent the peace of God in my life to those around me.*
- *Bring any issues to God and trust him to handle them. They may be out of your control, but they are not out of his. Trust God to do what is right and best.*
- *Put yourself in a thankful mind-set. God only allows you to experience what he wants you to experience. If you are in a situation you don’t like, remember, God allowed you to be there. He could have stopped it. God can take what others intended for evil and use it for his glory. If you trust him, then approach things with confidence and assurance. Don’t stress over it and try to manipulate circumstances. Relax and enjoy his blessings. He will see you through to the other side. A thankful perspective keeps this forefront in their mind.*
- *God’s peace will then guard how you feel and what you think. You won’t be stressed AND you won’t be inclined to think up sinful, controlling solutions on your own.*

Do you have some stories to share about how you have seen this scripture passage actually work in your life?

Philippians 4:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ 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. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Many of our life issues are determined by what we choose to focus on. What are some things you have focused on in the past that have kept you from experiencing God's peace?

Paul says to focus on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy. Interestingly, those terms actually describe the character of Jesus himself. If we want to be like Jesus, we must begin to think like Jesus, act like Jesus, and accept into our thoughts only those things that move us in that direction.

What are some typical thoughts we should be cautious about allowing into our minds?

How might some of these things remove our peace?

Philippians 4:10-13 (ESV)

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ **I can do all things through him who strengthens me.**

The bolded phrase has often been used out of context to say that in Christ, we can do anything and everything; that nothing is beyond our capability. But is that really what Paul is saying? What is the real context of this phrase?

Paul is saying he can go through any circumstance and still be CONTENT. He can be content if he is hungry or full, in abundance or lacking, free or in prison. His contentment is not based on any life circumstance. He has discovered the secret of being content.

What was Paul's secret to contentment?

God is in control. Paul needs nothing nor desires anything from this life. It has all been taken care of for him in heaven, and he knows that. There is nothing worth fretting about on this earth. He is not here for comfort; he is here on a MISSION. His life is in the hands of God, and God has a plan. Paul knows that if he gets thrown into prison, God has a plan. God will give you whatever you need to accomplish whatever he wants you to accomplish. His purposes will not be defeated.

Are you able to go through whatever circumstances God allows you to experience this week and be content?

Are you able to go through this week without complaining or arguing about anything?

How can you prepare in advance to be content?

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History (17)	Poetry (5)	Prophecy (17)
The Law (5) Pentateuch/Torah		Major Prophets (5) Large
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs	Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel
Other Historical Books (12)		Minor Prophets (12)
Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther		Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

This week we encourage you to memorize the twelve Minor Prophets.

HOSEA – MALACHI

The Minor Prophets are only called minor because of their shorter length, not because they are less significant. This is the hardest section to memorize, partly because it is a list of unfamiliar names and partly because we tend not to spend as much time reading these books. Yet, they have a very significant role to play.

Hosea: A prophet’s divorce and remarriage serves as a metaphor of God’s judgment and reconciliation.

Joel: God’s judgment on Israel and the future day of judgment and restoration.

- Amos:** God's judgment on nations surrounding Israel, spiraling inward to Israel itself. Once again the message closes with a message of hope of restoration.
- Obadiah:** Judgment on the nation of Edom (descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother) who did not look out for their brothers when Jerusalem fell.
- Jonah:** Story of God's incredible mercy and Jonah's struggle with grace.
- Micah:** Judgment against Israel and Judah for their corruption and promise of future restoration.
- Nahum:** 125 years after Jonah, Nineveh returns to its old evil patterns. God says enough.
- Habakkuk:** Habakkuk questions why God isn't dealing with the evil in Israel. God reveals how he will use Babylon to punish Israel. Habakkuk questions how God can use a more evil nation to punish a less evil one. Habakkuk learns something about God's sovereignty.
- Zephaniah:** God's coming judgment on the nations with the promised hope of reserving a people for himself called the Remnant.
- Haggai:** After the exile, the Jews start to rebuild the temple. Work is interrupted because they stop to focus on their own homes. Because they stopped putting God first, they stopped experiencing God's blessing in the land. God calls them to return to him and rebuild the temple as a priority in their lives.
- Zechariah:** Zechariah encourages the rebuilding of the temple and relates it to the coming Messiah and the future Kingdom of God.
- Malachi:** At the end of the Old Testament spirituality has waned and religiosity prevails over relationship with God. As a result, the Jews are missing out on God's blessing and will face God's coming judgment. The prophesy ends with the promised return of Elijah to call people back to God (fulfilled by John the Baptist).

DEVOTIONAL READING

DAY 1 Re-read Philippians in one sitting to put it all together.

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 12 Minor Prophets of the Bible.

H _____

N _____

J _____

H _____

A _____

Z _____

O _____

H _____

J _____

Z _____

M _____

M _____

DAY 2-5 Over the next 4 days, memorize and meditate on the following verses.

Each day, try to focus on one specific phrase and reflect on how you can apply it to your life.

Philippians 4:4-7 (ESV)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Continually review the minor prophets of the Old Testament.

On Days 4 & 5 review all the Old Testament books on the following page.

In the space below, write out all the books of the Old Testament.

Pentateuch/Torah/Law

Other Historical Books

Poetry

Major Prophets

Minor Prophets

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

SESSION 3: PRAYING WITHOUT FEAR

Go around the group and have everyone pray, “Father, I want to thank you for...”

Follow-up questions:

- *What went through your mind when you were asked to pray out loud?*
- *Were you able to focus on what the others were saying or only on what you were about to say or how you said it?*
- *Did it create tension or discomfort for you?*

In this session, we want to talk openly and candidly about the whole idea of community prayer and why so many of us find it difficult to do.

What are some examples of times when we should pray silently?

Have everyone share their thoughts on this before you give any teaching.

Matthew 6:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ *“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”* ⁶ *But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

1) When we are tempted to pray only to impress others

Why should we pray silently in this case?

Do you sometimes find that you are concerned with what others think when you pray?

If you’re trying to impress people – don’t pray! You’re not talking to God anyway. You’re talking to those around you. It is a “making me look good” issue vs. building your relationship with God. The Father does not respect that form of communication.

Matthew 26:36 (ESV)

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.”

2) When we are praying personal, intimate prayers**Why should we pray silently in this case?**

Sometimes we just need to talk with God alone. The nature of what we want to talk about and the emotions involved are not appropriate for the ears of others. Jesus specifically separated himself from the others as he met with the Father regarding his upcoming crucifixion in this example.

1 Corinthians 14:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up.

3) When praying out loud does NOT build up the church**Why should we pray silently in this case?**

If my praying out loud does not benefit those around me, what is the point of praying out loud? In this case, Paul addresses praying in tongues and how if there is no interpreter, the congregation does not benefit at all. In fact, it would become a hindrance to effective corporate worship should it be practiced that way.

What are some examples of times when our prayers do not build up the church?

We might be guilty of this if we use prayer as a “news update” or as a spiritual form of gossip. Sometimes people are really just using prayer as a teaching time for the benefit of the listeners as opposed to really talking with God. When we are talking to others and not to God, we are not praying.

Matthew 6:7-8 (ESV)

⁷ “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

4) When you have nothing to say

Why should we pray silently in this case?

If you have nothing to say, don't try to make something up to impress God or others. Don't try to pray elaborate prayers. Pray simple, heartfelt prayers. Long, eloquent prayers tend to make people's minds wander and not focus on the content of the prayer.

What are some reasons to pray out loud?

Again, have everyone share their thoughts on this before you give any teaching.

Acts 1:14 (ESV)

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

1) Praying together was modeled by Christ and the early church.

Why did the church pray this way?

Family members share issues they are dealing with. There is a healthy desire to be part of a community where each shares one another's lives, bringing concerns before our Father in Heaven. The early church found praying together to be a powerful and bonding experience. The simple fact that Jesus prayed with his disciples and the early church prayed with one another conveys the value of corporate prayer.

Matthew 18:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

2) Praying together unites us with the family and purposes of Christ.

If we all pray silently, how might that hinder the unity of the church?

Obviously, Christ is always with us. When we come together to pray, it says that we are of one mind and purpose. When the church is focused on Christ and what he wants to accomplish in this world, our prayers become very powerful as we are now in sync with Christ and his family. When Christ says he is "with us," he says that his Spirit is in agreement with his church and will put their unified prayer request into action.

1 Corinthians 14:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up.

3) Praying together edifies/builds up the kingdom of God.

How does praying out loud build up the church?

How does it make you feel when you hear someone else take your name before the throne of God?

James 5:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

4) Praying together affects change

Why is praying together a key to effective prayer?

Sometimes, God chooses not to answer prayer until his whole family is unified and passionate about the same issue. God does not want us dealing with life on our own apart from his family. God has designed the church so that we need each other and need to be praying together. Perhaps many times, prayers are not answered simply because the church did not come together to pray for that issue.

What are some barriers to praying out loud?

Have everyone share their thoughts on this before you give any teaching.

1) Fear of inadequacy

What are some fears of inadequacy that might come up when praying out loud?

- *I don't talk very well in front of people.*
- *I might stumble over my words.*
- *I might start praying at the same time that someone else starts praying.*
- *I might get lost in my prayer and not know what to say.*

What might God have to say regarding each of these reasons?

Go through each excuse you are given and ask what God would want to say about that excuse.

YOU ARE NOT INADEQUATE - you know how to talk!

IF YOU NEVER TALK IN A GROUP, it is because you have not yet discovered how loved and valued you are to God. He holds you in higher esteem than you hold yourself, and he desires that you see yourself just as he sees you.

2) Fear of what others will think**What types of thoughts might people believe others are thinking about them?**

- *Super-spiritual*
- *Incompetent, etc.*

What might God have to say regarding each of these reasons?**Galatians 1:10 (ESV)**

For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

If you're trying to impress others, then you're not praying to God

The goal in prayer is not to make others think highly of you but for you to simply come to God in humility and share what is on your heart.

If someone else stumbles in their prayer or forgets what they are going to say, do you think less of that person? If someone prays a simple but heartfelt prayer, do you think less of them? Do you think less of anyone when they try to sincerely pray and don't do it perfectly?

Don't allow a LIE to prevent you from building the community of God. The LIE is holding you back from experiencing the community that God desires for you.

If others are evaluating you and not focusing on God, then they are not praying either. They have their own issues. Don't let them control your spiritual walk.

3) Distracted Mind

How might getting distracted keep us from praying out loud?

Sometimes it is hard to focus when others are praying, and our mind begins to wander. When this happens, we get out of the conversation and usually don't feel too motivated to jump back in. You will often find this the case if someone prays a really long prayer.

What are some helpful hints you've discovered to stay focused when others are praying?

Helps:

- Listen to what the other person is praying and pray the same request but in your own words.
- Affirm what the other person is saying with phrases like "yes God," "amen," "Lord, I agree with that," "thank you, Lord," etc. Anything that helps you stay a part of the conversation.
- Do not pray long prayers when in a group setting. Pray for one or two things and then let others jump into the conversation.

***For example:** If you have a list of things to pray for as a group, if you're the first person praying, don't pray through the whole list all at once. Give others a chance to comment on some of the prayer requests with their thoughts. If you pray for the entire list, then it is conversationally awkward for someone to jump back to something you prayed for earlier and pray about that. It kills the prayer time!*

4) Spiritual Oppression

How might spiritual oppression keep us from praying out loud?

- *Guilt*
- *Evil spirits*

Guilt: *If we know we have unconfessed sin in our lives, then that creates a barrier between God and us. It is difficult to talk with someone when you know you have tension in the relationship. The key here is not to stop talking but to make things right before you go further in your prayer.*

Evil Spirits: *It is possible for evil spirits to oppress your mind during times of prayer. Some have found that when they go to pray, their minds go blank and cannot pray. This may also occur when listening to someone else pray. Sometimes when someone starts to pray, intense fear or insecurity arises, and nothing comes out. Sometimes this is expressed through drowsiness whenever the person begins to pray.*

People have also struggled with spiritual oppression when trying to read the Bible and the pages go blank, or words get muddled when listening to messages.

There can be spiritual oppression in your life trying to prevent you from moving forward in your relationship with God. If this is consistently the case, then we recommend you speak with a pastor about this issue.

**One of the goals of Phase 2 is to turn our church into a PRAYING church.
That will ONLY happen when we learn to conquer our insecurities
and take community prayer seriously.**

Over the next few weeks, we will ask the group to pray very simple, easy prayers like “Thank you God for...”, “I praise you God because...”, “Father, I want to ask you to do this.... for so and so.” etc. Will some of you feel awkward? YES! Is that okay? YES!

If some of you have an issue attempting this as a goal, please speak to us (your teacher) privately.

You are in this group because you have committed to Jesus to grow as his disciple and be all that he created you to be. Corporate prayer is a foundational building stone of growing in maturity and building an effective church that is led by the Holy Spirit.

DEVOTIONAL READING

This week we will focus on prayers of the Bible that convey intense emotion. Often our prayers are dry and lack passion, touching neither our heart nor the heart of God. Let these prayers inspire you to pray to God from your heart.

DAY 1 Psalm 139:19-24

- The first 18 verses of this Psalm relate the wonders of God’s love for us. When we get an awe-inspiring perspective of God, it is sometimes easy to get angry when we see injustice. Can you recount times when you got mad at others because they violated righteousness?
- David suddenly shifts perspective in verse 23. Why did he do this?
- Sometimes in our righteous indignation, we can become judgmental of the sins of others. Here, David has just asked God to slay the wicked, but before he lets go completely of that thought, he suddenly stops to realize he too may have wickedness in him. Where would that leave him?
- It is easy to note the sins of others, but what about my own sin? Am I truly righteous or are there areas in my life I need to clean up?
- David then prays a prayer asking God to search his heart and root out the bad stuff in him.

This week is Old Testament review.

In the space below, write out all the books of the Old Testament.

Pentateuch/Torah/Law

Other Historical Books

Poetry

Major Prophets

Minor Prophets

DAY 2 Psalm 62:1-8

- What does it mean to me that God is my rock, salvation, and fortress?
- Which adjective in verse 2 speaks the strongest to you?
- What harm can man do to you if God is in control?
- What is the key to peace in your life?
- How can you practice “not being shaken”?
- Do you believe God is your salvation in all things? Is your life really, truly safe in his hands?

Recite from memory all the books of the Old Testament.

DAY 3 Psalm 22:1-11

- When is a time you have felt truly alone and abandoned?
- When did God not seem to hear or care? Did you honestly tell him your frustration?
- How does remembering the past help your faith in the present?
- Have you ever been ridiculed for your faith and hope in God?
- Have there been times when you’ve begun to wonder about your faith?
- When God seems distant, why should you still turn to him?
- If you don’t turn to God, to what might you be tempted to turn?

Recite from memory all the books of the Old Testament.

DAY 4 Psalm 88:1-18

This may be a song more meant to be felt than studied. Approach it that way on your first read-through.

We've all been there to some degree or other. The closing line is very forceful, "the darkness is my closest friend."

After reading through the psalm and trying to relate to what the psalmist is going through, go back to the starting point and read verse 1 again.

Why did the psalmist start this song/prayer with this verse?

What is your hope when you are in despair?

Recite from memory all the books of the Old Testament.

DAY 5 Psalm 108:1-5

- How do you express sincere, heartfelt gratitude to God?
- For the psalmist it starts with his soul and then spreads to proclaiming God to others. Why might this be a natural progression?
- When you are excited about God, do others hear more about him from you?
- Do you ultimately desire that the whole world praise God?
- How can you influence that?
- How can you glorify God today?

In the space below, write out all the books of the Old Testament.

Pentateuch/Torah/Law

Other Historical Books

Poetry

Major Prophets

Minor Prophets

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

SESSION 3: PRAYING FOR RELATIONSHIP

Group Prayer Encouragement Ideas:

- *Ask group members to pray short prayers of praise to God.*
- *If the group is large, break it into smaller groups to share life concerns and pray. People often find it easier to pray in small groups.*
- *Sometimes, depending on the group, breaking the men and women into separate groups sets people more at ease.*
- *After prayer requests are shared, ask if there are volunteers willing to pray for that concern when we all go to prayer. This way, people know exactly what they will pray for and can pray with confidence.*

Read the following verses:

Mark 1:35-37 (ESV)

³⁵ And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, ³⁷ and they found him and said to him, “Everyone is looking for you.”

Luke 5:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. ¹⁶ But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

Why do you think Jesus got up so early in the morning or headed off to lonely places to pray?

Jesus understood the challenge of people demanding his time. The only chance Jesus had to spend quality time with the Father was when everyone else was still asleep or when he could isolate himself. You can be sure that Jesus would have valued that sleep time as much as we do, and yet he valued time with the Father even more.

Can you relate to Jesus’ busyness?

Can you relate to how others demanded so much of his time?

How hard is it for them to find quality time with God apart from distractions?

Do you find it hard to relate to Jesus’ discipline to get alone with his Father and talk, especially when it was at very inconvenient times or places? Why is that?

Why do you think he was so compelled to spend time with the Father?

Jesus valued time with the Father because he loved the Father.

When a guy and girl are attracted to each other, they find the time to spend with each other. It doesn't matter how busy their day is or how long their "to-do" list is; they will find the time to connect. **WHY?**

Do they think it is an inconvenience to have to work their schedules such that they can spend time together? Why or why not?

What are some extreme examples when you have made time to spend with someone you were dating?

At what times are we most motivated to spend increased time with God?

- *Crises (death, illness, job loss, etc.)*
- *Confusion*
- *Decisions*
- *Concern for others, etc.*

If these were the only times you spent with someone you cared for, what would the relationship be like? How long would it last?

Relationships ultimately need to be built based on enjoying each other, not wanting to "use" the other for our purposes.

Psalm 37:3-6 (ESV)

³ *Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.* ⁴ *Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.* ⁵ *Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.* ⁶ *He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.*

What are three directions given in this Psalm to experience joy in your relationship with God and effectiveness in life?

- 1) *Trust in the Lord and do good*
- 2) *Delight yourself in the Lord*
- 3) *Commit your way to the Lord*

Why would prayer be less effective if any of these three approaches to God were missing?

1) Without trusting God and acting on it:

Without trusting God and acting in faith, our prayers lack conviction and confidence. If there is a distrust in God's goodness and faithfulness, then this relationship tension becomes a barrier to experiencing the life God has for us.

2) Without enjoying God:

Without enjoying God, there is a disconnect in the relationship, thus missing the primary purpose of prayer. It means we have placed focus on ourselves instead of Jesus Christ and are not experiencing the joy that relationship brings. We will tend to see God as a legalistic god to keep measuring up to get what we want.

It also means we will be out of sync with the heart-passion and desires of God. Our desires will be more influenced by our sin-nature as opposed to the Spirit's nature. Such prayers become a means to try and get what we want versus what God wants for us. When we enjoy God, his desires become our desires, and he eagerly grants those prayers.

3) Without committing our way to the Lord:

Without committing our direction to God, we seek our self-driven agenda, which has nothing to do with his purposes. The other purpose of prayer is to see God's purposes unfolded in this world. Self-determined agendas are a form of idolatry, as our lives center around something other than God. He will never bless a path different from the one he has prepared for us.

Before you start to pray, it might be good to ask yourself these three questions?

- 1) Am I trusting God will do what is right and care for me in the process?
- 2) Am I enjoying God?
- 3) Am I following God's path or my own agenda for this day, week, or life?

Jesus enjoyed a relationship with the Father, and because he did, he was in a position to hear the Father's will for his life.

John 12:49-50 (ESV)

⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."

Wouldn't it be amazing to hear from the Father what we should say and how we should say it? When do you think Jesus heard all this from the Father?

Jesus had to rely on prayer the same way we do. He spent time with the Father and, as a result, was able to discern his voice. He got away to quiet places so that the chaos of life would not drown out the voice of the Father and he could focus on the relationship.

Jesus also knew he was fully dependent on the Father to lead him and empower him to do what he wanted done on earth.

John 5:19 (ESV)

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

What do we mean when we say Jesus was dependent on the Father?

Though Jesus was fully God, he was also fully man and therefore was dependent on the Father for life and direction, just as we are. Everything Jesus did was directed and empowered by the Father and Holy Spirit. As a result, he did nothing apart from the leading of the Holy Spirit.

It means he did not set his own agenda, but met with the Father each day to enjoy his presence, hear his voice, and be empowered and directed by his Spirit.

Why do we tend to operate independently of God?

Jesus expresses the true nature of godly dependence.

John 15:1-11 (ESV)

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

What does Jesus mean when he says, “Abide in me, and I in you”?

To abide in Jesus means that we draw near to Jesus in loving relationship and submit to everything he calls us to do. Complete lordship and complete obedience. If we love Jesus and obey everything he commands, then we will experience his presence, his Spirit’s leading, and effectiveness in our life.

*It’s all about relationship. Notice verses 9-11. The result of abiding in Jesus is to experience the love of God in our life and the full joy that accompanies that. **God doesn’t want us to obey him so that he gets more things done. He wants us to love and obey him so that our lives will be full of his joy.***

How will this type of relationship affect our prayers?

If we are abiding in Christ and being obedient to his leading, our prayers become very impacting. In fact, whatever we ask will be granted to us.

Why is this so?

When we are closely connected to Jesus Christ, his Holy Spirit directs our thoughts and desires so that they align with the Father. This is what Jesus experienced. As he met with the Father, he learned to be led by the Holy Spirit in everything he said and did. As a result, whatever Jesus requested, the Father answered, and Jesus bore much fruit.

The Keys to effective prayer are:

- 1) **Trusting God** will always provide for you and always do what is right.
- 2) **Enjoying God** – focus on your relationship with Jesus Christ as you pray.
- 3) **Committing your day to God** – obey him in whatever he asks you to do.

**Prayer is not about getting what you want.
Prayer is about enjoying God and seeking his leading.**

How can you schedule your life in such a way to make your relationship with God a priority?

New Testament (27 Books)				
History (5)	Paul's Letters to Churches (9)	Paul's Letters to Individuals (4)	Others' Letters (8)	Prophecy (1)
Matthew	Romans	1 Timothy	Hebrews	Revelation
Mark	1 Corinthians	2 Timothy	James	
Luke	2 Corinthians	Titus	1 Peter	
John	Galatians	Philemon	2 Peter	
	Ephesians		1 John	
Acts	Philippians		2 John	
	Colossians		3 John	
	1 Thessalonians		Jude	
	2 Thessalonians			

MATTHEW – ACTS

- Matthew:** Matthew writes to a Jewish audience to show them that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament prophecies regarding the promised King. Note how the genealogy in Matthew 1 centers around King David (Matt. 1:1, 17) and that Jesus is a legal heir to the throne.
- Mark:** Written to a Jewish audience in Rome, Mark only includes information that speaks to that crowd. He sets out to show that Jesus' accomplishments, miracles and teachings authenticate him as the true Son of God.
- Luke:** Luke's goal is to set the record straight concerning an accurate history of Jesus Christ. He writes primarily to a Greek audience emphasizing the humanity of Christ, as the second Adam. Salvation is available to all people, not just the Jews. Note how his genealogy (Lk. 3:38) traces right back to Adam, the son of God. The title, Son of Man, is used frequently of Christ.
- John:** John states his purpose for writing in Jn. 20:31-32, to show that Jesus is the Son of God and that by believing in him, you can have eternal life. John uses much imagery from Genesis and Exodus to show how Jesus is initiating a New Creation and a New Exodus.
- Acts:** Also written by Luke, this book continues the historical account, after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, of how the Holy Spirit builds the church and launches the gospel to the nations.

DEVOTIONAL READING**DAY 1** John 14:27

- Take the simple phrase, “my peace I give you,” and allow it to embed in your mind.
- Think through every implication you can of those five simple words.
- Stress the various words as indicated below to gain new insights and perspectives. Allow this phrase to run through your mind all day.
- Whenever you feel stressed or frustrated, come back to the truth of this verse.

My peace I give you
 My **peace** I give you
 My peace **I** give you
 My peace I **give** you
 My peace I give **you**

This passage is very familiar, but don't be tempted to rush through it. Read it over and over again focussing on every aspect of what it says. This passage can be life-transforming!

In the space below, write out the 5 Historical books of the New Testament.

M _____

M _____

L _____

J _____

A _____

DAY 2 1 John 4:18

- Take the simple phrase, “perfect love drives out fear,” and allow it to embed in your mind.
- Think through every implication you can of those five simple words.
- Stress the various words as indicated below to gain new insights and perspectives. Allow this phrase to run through your mind all day.
- Whenever you feel anxious or afraid, come back to the truth of this verse.

perfect love drives out fear
 perfect **love** drives out fear
 perfect love **drives out** fear
 perfect love drives out **fear**

In the space below, write out the first 5 books of the New Testament.

M _____

M _____

L _____

J _____

A _____

To what category do these five books belong? _____

DAY 3 Colossians 1:21-22

Consider as many implications as you can from these few verses.

- How do these verses contrast with what you feel/believe about yourself?
- Which statement do you struggle with the most?
- If you truly believed these words, how would they transform your life?
- What would you stop chasing?

- How would your sense of worth be elevated?
- How would this affect your prayer life?
- Which phrase stands out to you today? Why do you think that is?

In the space below, write out the first 5 books of the New Testament.

M _____

M _____

L _____

J _____

A _____

To what category do these five books belong? _____

DAY 4 John 15:7-8

You might want to read John 15 to get the whole context of this passage. The first phrase is the key, “abide/remain in me”.

- What does it mean for me to abide in Jesus?
- How will that affect what you ask for?
- Are you bearing much fruit? Why or why not?
- Are you faithfully remaining in Jesus or trying to create life through your own efforts?
- Don't rush over this passage. There is a lot to absorb here.

Recite from memory the first 5 books of the New Testament.

DAY 5 **Matthew 18:19-20**

- Do you have some prayer requests that might not be answered because you have not had others pray with you?
- Has pride prevented you from humbly expressing your concerns to others who would lovingly pray with you?
- Have you given the body of Christ the opportunity to become unified over a matter that God does care about?

In the space below write out the first 5 books of the New Testament.

M _____

M _____

L _____

J _____

A _____

To what category do these five books belong? _____

SESSION 3: PRAYING STRATEGICALLY

Discuss how everyone did during the past week of devotions.

- *As they read through the passages, did anything stand out to them?*
- *Did they learn anything new? Or gain a new insight?*
- *Did anyone consciously put into action something they had read?*

Most of us pray for issues that directly affect us or the people we love. Often these prayers focus on meeting needs, health issues, or perhaps a friend turning his life toward God.

How often do we pray for the church and the way it expands the Kingdom of God? Many prayers in scripture have this high altitude perspective and are valuable for us to consider in learning to pray strategically.

PRAYING STRATEGICALLY 1:

John 17:20-26 (ESV)

²⁰ “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

This is Jesus’ prayer for you and me. We’re the ones he’s referring to when he says “those who will believe in me”. It is an incredibly significant prayer as it expresses what is most important to Jesus as he is about to head back up to heaven.

What is Jesus’ primary prayer concern for us as his church?

STRATEGY 1: Unity

Jesus’ concern is that we be unified with each other and with the Godhead.

What do you think the unity between Jesus and the Father might be like? How do they relate in perfect oneness? What must oneness in the trinity look like?

The unity or oneness between the Father and Son is absolute and complete. They are not at odds with each other in any regard. There is no disputing, opposing direction, or fighting for personal needs. There is nothing sinful whatsoever. The joy that exists in this relationship is constantly at its maximum capacity.

Discuss the implications of being invited to become one with Jesus and the Father, as they are one.

We are being invited as a church to partner in the Godhead – we are not God, but we become one with God, just as God is one.

What is mind-boggling about this invitation? How is this humbling?

How would our church look if we, as a church, took this prayer seriously?

What does Jesus say will be the impact of a unified church?

Vs. 21 so that the world may believe that you have sent me

Vs. 23 so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them

A unified church is the ultimate statement to the world that Jesus Christ truly is from the Father.

A non-unified church distorts the image and representation of Christ to this world.

Why is the unity of the church the most important thing Jesus chooses to pray for above everything else?

If Jesus believed this was the most significant thing he could pray for the church, how frequently should we be praying for the same unity?

We may often experience tension with someone within the church because of something they did or failed to do that did not meet our expectations. In light of Jesus' prayer, how should we deal with that disunity?

What do you think are the main barriers that might keep people from being unified in the church?

PRAYERS FOR THE CHURCH***Ephesians 6:18 (ESV)***

...praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...

The word “saints” is a reference to all believers. It means “holy ones”. Everyone who is in Christ is declared holy.

Do any of you consistently pray for the people of our church? If so, what do you pray for?

The context of Ephesians 6:18 is spiritual warfare. Paul knows that if believers are to stand firm against Satan’s schemes, we need to be praying for each other.

Underline everything that Paul desires for the church in the following passage.***Colossians 1:9-14 (ESV)***

⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. ¹¹ May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Which phrase do you most long to see fulfilled in our church? Why?

Perhaps part of seeing this prayer for the church answered is to pray it yourself, for your church.

PRAYING STRATEGICALLY 2:***Luke 10:2 (ESV)***

And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

STRATEGY 2: Pray for Workers for the spiritual harvest.

What does Jesus mean when he says the harvest is plentiful?

It means that God has been preparing people's hearts to be receptive to him. Is this true for us today? Why does it so often seem like that is not the case?

If the harvest isn't the problem, what does Jesus say is the problem?

The problem is the lack of workers who are interested in harvesting. All of us, as believers, are called to go and make disciples. The tendency, however, is to focus more on our comfort and "spirituality." Jesus reveals that the problem isn't just the lack of harvesters – it is the lack of prayers asking for harvesters.

How does Jesus say to deal with the problem?

Ask God to send out workers to reap a harvest.

Why ask God? Why not just go out and do it?

To be effective in harvesting, we need to have a passion for people far from God, and we need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. We cannot argue with people, guilt them or push them into the kingdom. It has to be the working of God through our lives.

By asking God to send out workers, we are already expressing that passion and dependence. We will become part of that answer, but it will go beyond us to a larger number of workers reaping a harvest. As God answers our prayers, more people in his church will rise with the burden to see the lost reached and the kingdom built. The church will become ignited with the passion of the great commission.

Ephesians 6:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Why did Paul want believers to pray this prayer on his behalf?

He was obviously tempted to remain quiet at times due to the fearful ramifications of speaking out. He is already in chains for doing so; he could perhaps even lose his life.

Have you ever held back sharing about Jesus out of fear? Share a situation.

How might having had others praying helped you?

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 (ESV)

¹ Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, ² and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.

Summarize what Paul is asking for in this request.

- *Pray for a good response to the message.*
- *Pray that its news would spread quickly between people.*
- *Pray that those who try to stop the message would not be successful.*

We encourage you to pray regularly for our church:

- a) For Unity
- b) For Effectiveness in proclaiming the Gospel

We encourage you to create a list of people who you consistently want to pray into the kingdom of God. You may want to share these names with the group so they can pray with you each week as well.

As a group, spend some time praying for our church on these points.

New Testament (27 Books)				
History (5)	Paul's Letters to Churches (9)	Paul's Letters to Individuals (4)	Others' Letters (8)	Prophecy (1)
Matthew	Romans	1 Timothy	Hebrews	Revelation
Mark	1 Corinthians	2 Timothy	James	
Luke	2 Corinthians	Titus	1 Peter	
John	Galatians	Philemon	2 Peter	
	Ephesians		1 John	
Acts	Philippians		2 John	
	Colossians		3 John	
	1 Thessalonians		Jude	
	2 Thessalonians			

ROMANS – 2 THESSALONIANS

Romans: The most systematic and comprehensive explanation about how we can become righteous before God.

1 Corinthians: Paul addresses 1) concerns raised by a church member about divisions happening in the church, 2) reports he hears about sexual immorality within the church, and 3) a list of questions sent to him by the church regarding such things as marriage and divorce, the Lord's supper, eating at pagan feasts, spiritual gifts, the resurrection of the body, etc.

- 2 Corinthians:** Some false teachers have entered the Corinthian church and are trying to discredit Paul as an Apostle. Paul explains his understanding of ministry, encourages the Corinthians to make a financial contribution to help the suffering believers in Jerusalem, and sets up a defence for his Apostleship.
- Galatians:** Some “Christian” Jews are arguing that in order to be righteous before God you must keep all the Law of the Old Testament AND have faith in Jesus Christ. Paul argues that the Law cannot save. It is through faith alone in Jesus Christ that you are justified and declared righteous.
- Ephesians:** This is a general letter, written by Paul to the churches that emphasizes the church as the body of Christ. As such, there is now a unity that can exist among all its members, even Jew and Gentile. As his church, we have a great blessing poured out on us that should reflect in how we live in this world.
- Philippians:** Written to a church that is experiencing some infighting, Paul emphasizes what our focus should be in life. He uses examples that include himself, Jesus, Timothy, and others to stress a servant heart attitude and a desire to be like Christ.
- Colossians:** Paul sets out to show that Christ is supreme over all things. He is head over creation and head over the church. Therefore, the only question is, “Is he head of your life?”
- 1 Thessalonians:** Paul writes to commend the Thessalonian church on their faithfulness, but to also encourage them to keep moving forward in morality and love as they anticipate the future return of Christ.
- 2 Thessalonians:** Some believers stopped working at their jobs because they believed Christ would return within a very short time. As a result, they ended up having to live off other believers. Paul writes to inform them Christ’s return will not be immediate and then describes what the days will be like leading up to that point.

DEVOTIONAL READING

DAY 1 Mark 12:41-44

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

- Why did she do it?
- Why was Jesus impressed?
- Do I rely on my wealth to give me security and to meet my needs, or do I rely on God?
- Is Jesus impressed with how I use my wealth?

See how rich you really are. Go to: www.globalrichlist.com

In the space below, write out the 9 New Testament letters Paul wrote to churches.

R _____
 1C _____
 2C _____
 G _____
 E _____

P _____
 C _____
 1T _____
 2T _____

DAY 2 Matthew 19:16-24

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 9 New Testament letters Paul wrote to churches.

R _____
 1C _____
 2C _____
 G _____
 E _____

P _____
 C _____
 1T _____
 2T _____

DAY 3 Matthew 19:27-30

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 9 New Testament letters Paul wrote to churches.

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
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<hr/>	<hr/>

DAY 4 Matthew 6:25-34

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 9 New Testament letters Paul wrote to churches.

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<hr/>	<hr/>

DAY 5 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 5 historical books and Paul's 9 letters to churches.

Historical Books

M _____

M _____

L _____

J _____

A _____

Paul's Letter to Churches

R _____

1C _____

2C _____

G _____

E _____

P _____

C _____

1T _____

2T _____

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

SESSION 4: GOD'S RESOURCES

Discuss how everyone did during the past week of devotions.

- *As they read through the passages, did anything stand out to them?*
- *Did they learn anything new? Or gain a new insight?*
- *Did anyone consciously put into action something they had read? What happened?*

The following is a parable that Jesus relates to his disciples to help them understand the nature of the Kingdom of God. A parable is a fictional story attempting to communicate one lesson. Hone in on the main point and be careful not to stretch lesser points too far.

Read the Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14-30 (ESV)

¹⁴ *“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.*

¹⁵ *To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.*

¹⁶ *He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more.*

¹⁷ *So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. 18 But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money.*

¹⁹ *Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ ²¹ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’*

²² *And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ ²³ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’*

²⁴ *He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’*

²⁶ *But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’*

A Closer Look**Matthew 25:14 (ESV)**

“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.

Understanding the Imagery:**The word “it” refers to the Kingdom of God. How would you define the Kingdom of God?**

The Kingdom of God is not a geographic rule but God’s rule in the lives of people. We are part of the kingdom of God if he rules in our lives. Anyone who claims to be part of the Kingdom of God declares that Jesus Christ rules in his/her life.

Who is the man going on a journey? *Jesus Christ*

Who are the servants? *Us*

What is the property he entrusted to our care?

Everything we have. All our resources, money, time, talents, and abilities are given to us for God’s purposes.

1) to bless us

2) to build his business

God’s business is the Kingdom of God. He is building for himself a community/family of faith, and we are to invest ourselves in that purpose.

What are some implications of this passage with regard to our lives?

If everything we have is ultimately God’s, then it is not ours to do whatever we wish. The resources given to us are to be utilized for his purposes and benefit (i.e., My car, house, money, time, abilities, etc.)

Matthew 25:15 (ESV)

To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

TALENT = 34 kilograms / 75 pounds of either gold or silver.

What is the significance of the owner giving his servants different amounts of money?

God will give us only the amount of responsibility he knows we can handle and enjoy.

***Too much responsibility** given to us is a recipe for failure. We will become burdened, overloaded, stressed, and unsuccessful.*

Too little responsibility will leave us bored, unchallenged, and unfulfilled.

The one with five talents could effectively handle that much. The one with two talents could effectively manage that much. It might have been disastrous for the person with two to have received five. The master knew what he was doing. That's also why he only gave the other servant one talent.

Should the person who received two talents be envious of the one who received five?

No, because he has been given the amount that can allow him to be successful. If he does what he is asked to do, fitting with his abilities, he will find more joy and fulfillment than if he was given more. To resent what he has been given and to feel he needs more is to buy into the lie that the more you have, the more valuable you are as a person. It puts us in a constant state of never being content. It also causes us to grumble about other people, our circumstances, jobs, income, etc.

Philippians 4:12-13 (ESV)

¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Matthew 25:16-19 (ESV)

¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷ So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

Why might the man with the one talent have buried it in the ground rather than investing it?

Ultimately, he did not have the master's best interest at heart. He perhaps resented the amount he was entrusted with or resented the master himself. But when all was said and done, he did not use the master's resources entrusted to him for the master's purpose. He did not lose it, but he did not advance the business.

What is God's business?

God's kingdom is about seeing the rule of God take place in people's lives and the realm of the evil one reduced. God is in the business of rescuing people from their sin and bringing them into his family as heirs. Since that is what he is most passionate about, all his resources are intended to be used for that purpose.

What is our normal perspective regarding how we use our resources?

We tend to view the resources we have as “ours” and that they exist for the purpose of making us feel good and comfortable.

What role does God typically play when it comes to the use of our resources?

We tend to look at our resources as existing primarily for our purposes, and then see how we can use what is left over for God’s purposes. Is there a problem with this view?

Matthew 25:20-23 (ESV)

²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ ²¹ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ ²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ ²³ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’

What do you note about the response to the two servants?

- *They both are commended for doing what they were asked to do.*
- *They both received the same commendation.*
- *Because they were faithful with the amount they were given, they could both be trusted with even more.*
- *Both of them benefitted when the master benefitted.*

What are the implications for us if we use the resources God has given us primarily for his purposes?

We will be commended by God. It doesn’t matter how much we have; it matters how we use what we have. Even if we are given little, as long as we use it for God’s purposes, we will be blessed and enjoy God’s happiness. If we are faithful with little, we prove ourselves capable of handling greater responsibility.

Matthew 25:24-30 (ESV)

²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed,’ ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ ²⁶ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed?’ ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

What did this servant fear? What was wrong with his perspective?

He was afraid of failure and incurring the master's wrath, so he decided to do nothing at all.

He questioned:**1) his own ability to do what the master called him to**

This reveals a lack of faith in the master and questions his discernment about what the servant could effectively handle. He thought he might fail, so he considered it was better to do nothing at all.

2) the master's character

He did not know his master. He considered him to be harsh, when in truth he was an incredibly trusting and loving master. The master wisely allotted his resources so that they could enjoy success in whatever they did. He questioned the master's wisdom of entrusting him with his resources.

3) why he was ultimately there

He forgot that he was working for the master's purposes. He lost sight of the WHY and, as a result, failed as to the WHAT.

In what ways are we sometimes like this third servant?**Do you think the master's response was too harsh?**

Keep in mind this is a parable Jesus is using to describe the nature of the Kingdom of God. God's purpose is to see his rule established and worked out in this world. Those who are truly a part of the kingdom embrace this purpose and use all their resources to make this become a reality. They love the master and are excited about the resources with which they have been entrusted. They look forward to the return of the master so they can show what they accomplished with the resources they were given.

The one who neither loved the master, embraced his purposes, or used wisely the resources given to him, was declared "evil." Whenever we do nothing, we hinder the work of God in this world. The resources God gave us could have been used by another to advance his purposes. God gives us what he knows we can handle; therefore, doing nothing is actually a rejection of God's purposes, hinders his work, and allows evil to prevail.

This type of person has no place in the Kingdom of God. Instead of commendation, this type of person will face judgment and separation from God and his kingdom.

How do you feel you are presently using the resources God has given you for his purposes?

What personal struggles do we face as we try to surrender our resources to the will of God?

What are some practical ways we can ensure that we will hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant”?

Take a practical look at how you budget your resources.

How much of my time each week is devoted to building the kingdom of God?
Is there some significant way I contribute to the church’s effectiveness?

What does my financial budget reveal about how passionate I am to see God’s kingdom built?
Can I free up more of the resources God has given me to advance his kingdom?

Am I quick to let my home resources (tools, car, rooms, etc.) be used in ways that build the kingdom of God, showing kingdom love to others?
Is there some tangible way I can share what I have to help others who have less?

New Testament (27 Books)				
History (5)	Paul’s Letters to Churches (9)	Paul’s Letters to Individuals (4)	Others’ Letters (8)	Prophecy (1)
Matthew	Romans	1 Timothy	Hebrews	Revelation
Mark	1 Corinthians	2 Timothy	James	
Luke	2 Corinthians	Titus	1 Peter	
John	Galatians	Philemon	2 Peter	
	Ephesians		1 John	
Acts	Philippians		2 John	
	Colossians		3 John	
	1 Thessalonians		Jude	
	2 Thessalonians			

1 TIMOTHY – PHILEMON

- 1 Timothy:** Some false teachers have found their way into the leadership of the church in Ephesus. Paul writes to authenticate Timothy's authority to establish proper leadership and to encourage him to fight the good fight.

- 2 Timothy:** Paul writes his last letter from prison as an encouragement to Timothy to continue ministering, despite persecution and hardship. He warns that the last days will be marked by increasing godlessness.

- Titus:** Paul writes this letter to a young pastor named Titus on the island of Crete. He encourages Titus to continue establishing spiritual leadership in the towns.

- Philemon:** Paul encountered a runaway slave by the name of Onesimus who eventually becomes a Christ-follower. Now Paul sends Onesimus back (at the risk of being put to death) to his master, Philemon, who also claims to be a Christ-follower. Paul's letter is the ultimate in tact and diplomacy that encourages Philemon to now consider Onesimus as more than a slave, but as a brother in Christ.

DEVOTIONAL READING

DAY 1 Hebrews 13:1-6

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 4 New Testament letters Paul wrote to individuals.

1T _____

T _____

2T _____

P _____

DAY 2 Psalms 23:1-6

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 4 New Testament letters Paul wrote to individuals.

1T _____

T _____

2T _____

P _____

DAY 3 Deuteronomy 8:10-18

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 4 New Testament letters Paul wrote to individuals.

DAY 4 1 Kings 3:5-14

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 4 New Testament letters Paul wrote to individuals.

DAY 5 Ecclesiastes 2:3-11

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 5 historical books, 9 Pauline letters to churches, and 4 Pauline letters to individuals.

Historical Books

M _____

M _____

L _____

J _____

A _____

Paul's Letter to Churches

R _____

1C _____

2C _____

G _____

E _____

P _____

C _____

1T _____

2T _____

Paul's Letter to Individuals

1T _____

2T _____

T _____

P _____

SESSION 4: EXPRESSING DEPENDENCE

Discuss how everyone did during the past week of devotions.

- *As they read through the passages, did anything stand out to them?*
- *Did they learn anything new or gain a new insight?*
- *Did anyone consciously put into action something they read?*

Why do you think there is a perspective in society that the church just wants your money?

What do you think the church should teach about money and giving?

Note: We have included this study not because our church wants nor needs your money. We have included it because giving is a spiritual discipline expressing dependence on God. We want to help you to develop “giving” as a discipline and as part of your growing relationship with Him.

What do you think was Jesus’ perspective on money and giving?

In the Bible, we encounter terms such as “sacrifice,” “tithe,” and “offerings.”

What do you think is the difference among these terms?

Sacrifice: *An animal sacrifice that acted as a substitute for the death consequence of our sin.*

Tithe: *10% of your annual income.*

Offering: *Any gift you give to God above and beyond the tithe.*

Why do you think God, throughout the Bible, expected people to bring gifts to him? Does he need them?

OFFERINGS

Read through some of the offerings God tells the Israelites they can bring to him.

Leviticus 1-7

Burnt Offering: a male bull, sheep, goat, or a bird without defect

Purpose: to provide atonement for sin and express dedication to God

Grain Offering: grains prepared without yeast and sprinkled with salt

Purpose: It was an expression of thanks for God's provision. It was given to the priests.

Fellowship Offering: a male or female animal without defect from the flock

Purpose: It was for:

- a) giving thanks to God for his provision
- b) used in making a vow
- c) an expression of devotion to God

Sin Offering: Young bull without defect

Purpose: to seek forgiveness for sins, whether intentional or unintentional

Guilt Offering: a ram without defect

Purpose: an expression of repentance for unintentional sins, focusing on confession and restitution for any wrongs committed

TITHES

Tithe 1: Annual Tithe: to support Levites (10%, but if solely in money, then 12%)

Leviticus 27:30-32 (ESV)

³⁰ "Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the LORD's; it is holy to the LORD. ³¹ If a man wishes to redeem some of his tithe, he shall add a fifth to it. ³² And every tithe of herds and flocks, every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman's staff, shall be holy to the LORD.

Tithe 2: Festival Tithe: for the Temple in Jerusalem (10%)

Deuteronomy 14:22-27 (ESV)

²² "You shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year. ²³ And before the LORD your God, in the place that he will choose, to make his name dwell there, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and flock, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. ²⁴ And if the way is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, when the LORD your God

bleses you, because the place is too far from you, which the LORD your God chooses, to set his name there,²⁵ then you shall turn it into money and bind up the money in your hand and go to the place that the LORD your God chooses²⁶ and spend the money for whatever you desire—oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household.²⁷ And you shall not neglect the Levite who is within your towns, for he has no portion or inheritance with you.

Deuteronomy 12:17-19 (ESV)

¹⁷ You may not eat within your towns the tithe of your grain or of your wine or of your oil, or the firstborn of your herd or of your flock, or any of your vow offerings that you vow, or your freewill offerings or the contribution that you present,¹⁸ but you shall eat them before the LORD your God in the place that the LORD your God will choose, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, and the Levite who is within your towns. And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God in all that you undertake.¹⁹ Take care that you do not neglect the Levite as long as you live in your land.

What were they to do with this tithe? (Note: Deut 14:26; Deut 12:17-18)

This tithe was used to make a huge feast possible among God's people.

Ten percent of their income was to be used for throwing a party to celebrate God's provision.

What do you think of the idea of asking people to use ten percent of their annual income to throw a party celebrating God's provision, in addition to the regular tithe?

How would that go over if we proposed that in our church?

Tithe 3: Poverty Tithe: Collected once every three years to help the poor

Deuteronomy 26:12 (ESV)

When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled...

Note:

A Jewish historian in the first century understood the poverty tithe as being a completely separate tithe in addition to the other two. "Besides those two tithes, which I have already said you are to pay every year, the one for the Levites, the other for the festivals, you are to bring every third year a third tithe to be distributed to those that want [i.e., lack]; to women also that are widows, and to children that are orphans" (Antiquities of the Jews, Book 4, chapter 8, section 22).

There is theological discussion over this point.

Why do you think God only focuses on the poor once every three years?

Total average of Tithes per year = 20% - 23 1/3% of their family income.
Plus, all the offerings

Why do you think God commanded all this?

- 1) It reminded the Israelites that God was ultimately the owner of the land, and they were on the land as his tenants.
- 2) God used this as a means to facilitate the costs of the temple and its servants.
- 3) It gave them opportunity to express praise and thanks to God for all he did for them.
- 4) It showed they were passionate about the purposes of God being worked out in this world. It acknowledged that all they had belonged to him and was to be used for his kingdom.
- 5) It expressed their dependence on God to continue to meet their needs.
- 6) It was an act of obedience to the will of the Father.

How does giving to God express our dependence on him?

By giving to God first, out of our income, we are stating that:

- 1) All we have comes from God
- 2) We are trusting in him to provide for us

When we look at our finances and say we cannot afford to pay God first, what are we saying?

We are declaring that we are ultimately responsible for meeting our own needs, and we cannot risk giving to God at this time. Everything takes priority over him and his purposes.

In those times, I declare:

- I am the REAL provider for my life.
- The money/resources are MINE to do with as I see best.
- I must make sure I meet my needs first; THEN, I can give to God out of what is leftover.

Malachi 3:7-12 (ESV)

⁷ From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?' ⁸ Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰ Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. ¹¹ I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. ¹² Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.

Why were the Israelites under a curse from God?

They were under a curse because they held back their tithes and offerings from God. As a result, their businesses (crops) were not doing well, and they constantly struggled to meet their needs.

Keep in mind that this wasn't solely about tithing; it was about their hearts moving away from God, which was expressed through how they contributed the tithe.

What did God say would happen if they TRUSTED him with regard to their finances?

- *He would pour out so much blessing on them that they wouldn't know how to handle it.*
- *He would prevent problems from affecting their businesses.*
- *Others would view them as being blessed by God.*
- *Their lives would be delightful.*

Haggai 1:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁶ You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

What does God say happens when we take our focus off him and stop trusting his provision; when we focus on providing for ourselves and forget his purposes?

Have you experienced times when no matter how hard you worked, there was never enough?

In the New Testament, we are no longer under LAW but under GRACE.

Therefore, we are not limited in the foods we can eat; we can worship together any day of the week, we don't have to offer sacrifices, and men don't need to be circumcised (whew!).

So then, what about tithing? If we are no longer under the law, how much should we give?

In the New Testament, we approach life with the understanding that everything we have belongs to God. None of it is our own because we gave our lives and "everything" we had to Christ when we decided to make him Lord (owner) of our lives.

Luke 14:33 (ESV)

So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

If everything we have is his, how much does God want us to give back to him?

It's a heart issue! Are we really as passionate about his kingdom and people being redeemed as he is, or are we more focused on our comfort? How can we tell? Look at our checkbooks. That will indicate where our priorities lie.

A good guideline is to start with the concept of the tithe (10-20%) and go from there.

The guideline, though not LAW, is a principle that God taught as a practical approach to help people balance an attitude of dependence on him as well as supporting the forward movement of the Kingdom.

What if you're struggling with debt?

What's the best way to get out of debt? Hand your problem over to God and let him deal with it. It means we live as he directs us, and we trust him to meet all of our needs. The deeper you've gotten yourself into debt, the more you need to allow God to be at work. Tithing is your way of declaring that dependence.

It is counter-intuitive and counter-cultural – that's why God specifically says in Malachi, "TEST ME!" Our natural tendency will be NOT to TRUST God and to assume control ourselves. It is that very attitude of self-reliance that prevents us from experiencing the provision and blessing of God in our lives.

What if I am on assisted living (disability, social assistance, etc.)?

You will need to check the terms of the agreement on this one. Some arrangements say the money is given to you solely for certain benefits and is not to be given away to charities or others. It is provided to you to meet your basic needs. If this is the case, then the money is not yours to do with as you see fit. It is the government's money, and they give it to you under certain conditions. They have a right to do that. If you are not allowed to give money to charities, you must respect the law.

If this is the case, you may want to find other ways to tangibly express your dependence on God. Give of your time, your creativity, etc.

As you reflect on how you direct your finances, does this study evoke any challenge for you?

New Testament (27 Books)				
History (5)	Paul's Letters to Churches (9)	Paul's Letters to Individuals (4)	Others' Letters (8)	Prophecy (1)
Matthew	Romans	1 Timothy	Hebrews	Revelation
Mark	1 Corinthians	2 Timothy	James	
Luke	2 Corinthians	Titus	1 Peter	
John	Galatians	Philemon	2 Peter	
	Ephesians		1 John	
Acts	Philippians		2 John	
	Colossians		3 John	
	1 Thessalonians		Jude	
	2 Thessalonians			

HEBREWS - JUDE & REVELATION

Hebrews: Some Jewish believers were starting to revert to the old Judaist teachings and laws, abandoning the gospel of Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews shows how the new covenant established by Jesus is far superior to the old covenant established under Moses.

James: A very practical letter that says true faith will be shown by how you walk and talk.

1 Peter: Some believers who are going through extreme persecution are starting to wonder if it is worth it. Peter writes to encourage them to continue living out their faith despite whatever suffering they experience, keeping their eyes focussed on eternity.

2 Peter: Peter warns about false teachers who will creep into the church and start leading people astray. He encourages them to stay focused on the basics of the faith and to endure until the time Christ returns.

- 1 John:** With many different doctrines starting to be taught in the churches, John writes a letter of warning and how to know if someone is truly a child of God. He gives three acid tests; 1) righteous living, 2) love for other believers, and 3) belief that Jesus is God in human form.
- 2 John:** John writes to remind believers to continue walking in obedience to the word of God and to not associate with any teachers who do not affirm the truth about Jesus Christ.
- 3 John:** John sets, in contrast, the servant heart of Gaius and the self-centeredness of Diotrephes. He encourages all believers to support and encourage others who are ministering on behalf of the kingdom.
- Jude:** Jude warned believers about false teachers in the church who taught a liberal perspective about morality and denied the lordship of Jesus Christ.
- Revelation:** The early church soon started to experience extreme persecution from the Roman Empire under such Caesars as Nero. It caused some to question how God could allow such evil to exist and whether or not he was truly in control. As a result, the faith of some was beginning to wane. In the revelation to John, God shows that he is indeed sovereign over all the earth; he has a plan that is being worked out and that all will be resolved in his perfect timing. He writes to let believers know that times will actually get worse before they get better, but if they stand firm to the end, they will prevail at the return of Christ.

DEVOTIONAL READING

DAY 1 Luke 9:23-26

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 8 Other Letters and book of prophecy of the New Testament.

H _____

2J _____

J _____

3J _____

1P _____

J _____

2P _____

R _____

1J _____

DAY 2 Matthew 10:37-39

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 8 Other Letters and book of prophecy of the New Testament.

H _____

2J _____

J _____

3J _____

1P _____

J _____

2P _____

R _____

1J _____

DAY 3 Luke 22:39-46

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 8 Other Letters and book of prophecy of the New Testament.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

DAY 4 Matthew 24:9-14

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 8 Other Letters and book of prophecy of the New Testament.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

DAY 5 Revelation 22:1-7

TEACH:

REFUTE:

CORRECT:

TRAIN:

In the space below, write out the 5 historical books, 9 Pauline letters to churches, 4 Pauline letters to individuals, 8 letters from other writers, and the one book of prophecy.

Historical Books

M _____

M _____

L _____

J _____

A _____

Paul's Letter to Churches

R _____

1C _____

2C _____

G _____

E _____

P _____

C _____

1T _____

2T _____

Paul's Letter to Individuals

1T _____

2T _____

T _____

P _____

Other's Letters

H _____

J _____

1P _____

2P _____

1J _____

2J _____

3J _____

J _____

Prophecy

R _____

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

SESSION 4: GIVING YOURSELF

Discuss how everyone did during the past week of devotions.

- *As they read through the passages, did anything stand out?*
- *Did they learn anything new or gain a new insight?*
- *Did anyone consciously put into action something they had read?*

LIVING SACRIFICE

In today's culture, what do we mean when we "sacrifice" something?

God initiated the Old Testament sacrificial system because the consequence of sin is death (Rom 6:23). The Israelites were told they could provide an animal to sacrifice to atone for their sins and remove God's wrath against them.

Do you think giving this sacrifice would have been approached with reluctance and a sense of loss? (Keep in mind, every animal sacrificed represented a loss of potential income.)

We tend to think of a sacrifice in terms of something we are giving up, but think about it from this perspective: A person guilty of sin was living under God's wrath. They would be rightly judged and sentenced to eternal death and separation from God. By one act of faith, they could now bring an animal, put it to death in their place, and receive the forgiveness of God.

Who would not joyfully embrace this incredible gift and opportunity to receive life and forgiveness? Done with a proper perspective would create nothing but great relief. If I could simply offer an animal, I would accept that option with great joy instead of dying myself. However, done with an attitude of indifference to my sin, it would become a burden and a hassle. A sacrifice would become something I "had" to do, and therefore it would become easy to resent.

Therefore, a true sacrifice is a gift to God whereby we are the extreme beneficiaries, really losing nothing. Even the animals the Israelites had to sacrifice were given to them by God. God is the one who provided for them and met their every need. They give an animal to God; God continues to give them more animals.

So even the very thing they are giving up was first a gift from God, and so they are out nothing.

Sacrifices and offerings were to be a joyful response to God's faithfulness and provision.

Fast forward to the New Testament**Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

What does it mean for us to be a living sacrifice?

We are invited to offer our lives to God as a gift of adoration to him. Since the death penalty has already been paid for us by Jesus, the offering we are to give him is a living gift. In other words, it is the manner in which we live our lives that is the gift to God. We allow him to take our lives and do with them as he wishes, for his purposes.

When we do this, we give up all control and allow him to “call the shots.” He can now lead us wherever he desires. He can give to us or take away from us. Though he may allow us to go through trying circumstances, he continues to love us deeply and has a purpose that he will fulfill in our lives if we continue to focus on him.

We don’t have to worry about any of that because everything about our lives is given to him as a gift. We simply need to remain faithful regardless of what situation we find ourselves in. It also helps to remember that God always has our best interests at heart.

It means everything about our life is now devoted as a gift to God, to be used for his purposes. Everything I do will be from a desire for his name to be glorified and his kingdom built.

An old saying goes, “The problem with living sacrifices is that they tend to keep crawling down off the altar.”

At what times are we inclined to crawl off the altar?**Romans 12:1 (ESV)**

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

What does it mean to present our bodies as holy and acceptable?**Galatians 5:19-21 (NLT)**

¹⁹ When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Jesus tells us to pick up our cross and follow him.

Luke 14:27 (ESV)

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

What do you think Jesus means?

Let's first think about Jesus' ministry. At what points did Jesus pick up his cross? In other words, when did Jesus express a willingness to die to self?

a) When he left heaven to come to earth

At that point, he understood why he was leaving heaven and what he had to accomplish on earth through his death. It must not have been an exciting departure, but one brought about out of necessity if we were to be saved. It was prompted by love but must have carried a certain degree of sadness as he left heaven.

b) When he got baptized

At his baptism, Jesus declared his willingness to accept the Father's will, which he knew would lead him to the cross. It was because of this act of "picking up his cross" that the Father responded:

Matthew 3:17 (ESV)

...and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

How are we to "pick up our cross" and follow Jesus?

Carrying your cross ultimately means giving your life in service to your God, no matter where that might take you, whatever he might ask you to do, and no matter what he asks you to give up, even death. It is the confession of "not my will, but yours be done." Everything I have, everything I do, is now for his purposes.

- *Am I really willing to be obedient to the will of God, whatever the cost?*
- *Am I willing to be ridiculed for my faith?*
- *Am I willing to suffer for the name of Jesus?*
- *Am I willing to give up my agenda?*
- *Am I willing to give up my desire for comfort?*

When are some times you've experienced persecution for following Jesus?

Is the "mission" you are currently living out worth dying for?

How do we know what it is God wants us to do?

Romans 12:2 (ESV)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

How can we renew our minds?

- *Immerse ourselves in God's word so that we understand what he desires*
- *Make sure we are living according to his principles and not the world's*
- *Discern the Holy Spirit's leading and conviction*
- *Respond well and immediately when another believer speaks truth to us in love about how we are living*
- *Stop doing what we know is wrong*

As we start listening for the Spirit's prompting and the word of God, we develop the ability to know how to discern and test whether or not something is the will of God.

**In light of offering ourselves to God as living sacrifices,
everything we do now becomes an expression of fulfilling HIS purposes on earth.**

Read the following verses that spur us on to take seriously the building of the kingdom of God through our lives.

Underline the phrases that encourage you to live with kingdom focus.

1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV)

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Ephesians 5:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

Colossians 4:5 (ESV)

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.

Galatians 6:9 (ESV)

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

What is stopping us from focusing our lives on building the kingdom of God?

How can we change that this week?

What do you think might be some of the benefits of being a living sacrifice?

Some possibilities:

- *We experience the joy of partnering with God in his mission*
- *We experience the joy of making a difference*
- *We experience the joy of hearing, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”*
- *We experience the joy of spending eternity with those whom our life has touched*
- *We experience the joy of sharing in the inheritance of Jesus Christ*

Revelation 22:12 (ESV)

Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.

In the space below, write out all the books of the Old Testament.

Pentateuch/Torah/Law

Other Historical Books

Poetry

Major Prophets

Minor Prophets

In the space below, write out all the books of the New Testament.

Historical Books

Paul's Letter to Churches

Paul's Letter to Individuals

Other's Letters

Prophecy

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

SESSION 5: TRUTH: GOD LOVES YOU

SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

Jesus Christ said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32)

The above verse implies that there are certain lies that we have bought into that are trapping us and preventing us from experiencing the life God created for us. This series hopes to expose some of those commonly embraced lies and replace them with the truth of God’s word. When we truly understand the significance of these truths and apply them to our lives, then fears, anxieties, anger, and the need to be in control will all fade away. This is the point when we are truly free.

The main truths we are going to address in this series are:

1. **God loves you**
2. **The work of measuring up is finished**
3. **God is changing you to become like him**
4. **You were created with significance**

*Some of the content of this series is adapted from “The Search for Significance” by Robert S. McGee
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Though you might think you agree with and believe each of these truths at first glance, we hope to show you that each of us has a tendency to distrust these deeply. As a result, our lives are hindered in many ways in our relationship with God and with others. As we explore these truths, we trust God will provide fresh insight, and you will see a newfound freedom experienced in your life and your relationship with him.

THE PROCESS

We will spend three weeks on each Truth and Lie.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
Explore the Truth	Expose the Lie	Apply the Truth

	1	2	3	4
TRUTH	God loves you	The work is finished	God is Changing You	You are significant
LIE	I am not fully loved	I must do more	I cannot change	I have nothing to offer

SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

THE WRATH OF GOD

Before we discuss the love of God, we need to first understand the anger of God. This may seem like a strange starting point, but until we understand the wrath of God, we will not fully appreciate his love.

Do you think God gets angry? If so, with whom does he get angry and why?

Do you think God gets angry with you? At what times and why?

Read the following verses:

Psalm 7:11 (ESV)

God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day.

Psalm 78:49-50 (ESV)

⁴⁹ *He let loose on them his burning anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of destroying angels.*

⁵⁰ *He made a path for his anger; he did not spare them from death, but gave their lives over to the plague.*

How do these verses make you feel? Do they bring you comfort or tension?

In each of the verses below, underline what it is that evokes the anger of God.

Romans 2:5 (ESV)

But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Deuteronomy 6:13-15 (ESV)

¹³ *It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.* ¹⁴ *You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you—* ¹⁵ *for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.*

Isaiah 13:9 (ESV)

Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.

In summary, what is it that evokes the anger of God?

God's anger is always evoked by sin. Sin is the evil rejection of God and his righteousness.

The Problem of Sin

Romans 3:23 (ESV)

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

Ephesians 2:3 (ESV)

...among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Romans 6:23 (ESV)

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Since we have all sinned, we are by nature under God's wrath and face judgment and death.

Have you ever argued with God that you "deserved" better than what you were presently experiencing or that you felt someone else deserved better than what they were receiving? Share with the group.

What is wrong with that line of thinking?

If I argue for what I deserve, all I will get is death. I cannot, with integrity, argue that I deserve anything from God except his full wrath and judgment. The "deserving" mindset is rooted in a sinful, self-focussed life that has lost touch with the reality of my spiritual state before God.

How are we to understand God's love when these passages seem to indicate that, in our natural selves, we are under his wrath? How do wrath and love co-exist?

God hates sin, all sin. He will punish and destroy even the slightest sin with the full extent of his holy wrath. Yet, even though he hates sin with all his being, he still created us as an expression of his love. Because God is love, he must keep on loving. God cannot stop loving even when we behave sinfully. Because God is love, he finds a way to turn his anger aside and draw us back to a relationship with himself in the midst of his anger.

Romans 3:25-26 (ESV)

²⁵ [Christ] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

How did the sacrifice of Jesus remove God's wrath from us?

God allowed Jesus to be a substitute, to pay the death penalty on our behalf. In the Old Testament, God continuously held off judging sin until the New Testament, when he unleashed the full fury of his wrath... on Jesus. As a result, there is no wrath left for anyone who is in Christ Jesus.

Romans 5:8 (ESV)

...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

If Christ died for us while we were still in the process of fully embracing sin, what does that have to say about the nature of God's love for you?

God's love for you is not conditional upon your behavior. You do not need to measure up to God's expectations to receive the greatest blessing he could provide.

Why do we find this so difficult to believe?

We are so conditioned to think we must earn someone's love or blessing that we cannot even begin to grasp the concept of unconditional love. We believe that when someone fails, they deserve to be condemned for their actions, and as a result, they do not deserve to be shown love but receive some form of judgment. Often we express this judgment through anger or withdrawal.

Who gets rescued from God's wrath?**John 3:36 (ESV)**

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

God's forgiveness is applied only to those who embrace the Spirit of Christ in their lives. It is at that point that the death and resurrection of Christ are applied to us. If someone has not embraced Jesus, then there is no declaration on their life that the death price has been paid. They are still responsible to face judgment and pay the full price for their sin.

**If you are in Christ, then there is NO BARRIER
between you and the full expression of GOD'S LOVE.**

Isaiah 12:1 (ESV)

You will say in that day: "I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me."

Because God's wrath has been removed from us, we are fully acceptable to God. Read the following verses and briefly discuss the implications of his acceptance.

Revelation 22:3 (ESV)

No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

Accepts us as his *Servants*

Implication: *Instead of working against God, we are free to join with him in fulfilling his purposes. This is not a negative concept of servanthood but an exciting partnership with Christ.*

Ephesians 2:19 (ESV)

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...

Accepts us as *Citizens of Heaven*

Implication: *We don't belong to this world any longer. Our place is in heaven, and we are here as missionaries until God calls us home. Instead of feeling we have to conform to this culture, we can understand we belong to a different culture, with different values. We can proudly live out our true citizenship in this foreign land.*

1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Accepts us as his *Royal Priests*

Implication: *We are God's representatives. We are the ones to whom God has entrusted the privilege of declaring him to the nations. We are the means by which others are to understand and connect to God. God has entrusted his "image" into our hands.*

John 15:15 (ESV)

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Accepts us as his Friends

Implication: *God not only loves you – he likes you too! He enjoys you and enjoys spending time with you. He loves having you share your life with him. He loves doing things with you. He loves going places with you; he just likes being with you. You get to be friends with the creator of the universe. How awesome is that?*

John 1:12 (ESV)

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...

Accepts us as his Children

Implication: *As close as friends are, family (true family) is even closer. There is a bond between us that can never be severed. God loves us more deeply than any earthly parent loves their child. Implied in this type of care is God's promise to provide for us, lead us, and love us intimately. We are God's treasure!*

Romans 8:17 (ESV)

...and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Accepts us as his Heirs

Implication: *An heir is entrusted with his Father's estate. It is given to him/her to care for, protect and enlarge. We are the ones God trusts to care for his creation. We are the ones to whom he gives the privilege of rule. We will receive "everything" that is God's, and we will reign with Christ as co-heirs throughout all eternity. We are given a role of great significance because God views us as significant.*

Ephesians 5:30 (ESV)

...because we are members of his body.

Accepts us as his Own Body

Implication: *How much more acceptance can one receive than to be declared the body of Christ himself. God does not do anything without including his body in the process. We are unified with Christ in all he does and accomplishes as he works out his purposes*

through us. He cares for us as his own body. What greater care could one possibly receive?

John 17:20-21 (ESV)

²⁰ I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Accepts us into the Godhead itself

Implication: *Believe it or not, we have been invited into an even deeper circle of God's acceptance. God is community (Father, Son, and Spirit), and now he invites us into the very midst of that Godhead community. We are invited to join and share in the love and acceptance that flows between the Father, Son, and Spirit.*

Which of the above verses or descriptions of acceptance speaks the loudest to you? Why?

If you fully believed and accept the love God has for you, how might that truth affect your life?

TRUTHS TO REFLECT ON:

- 1) God will judge all sin with the full extent of his wrath.
- 2) Through Jesus' sacrifice, God made it possible for his wrath to turn away from us.
- 3) Through repentance and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Christ's death is applied to our lives, and we are completely forgiven.
- 4) In Christ, we are fully loved and accepted by God.

SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

AT HOME:

Each day take one of these verses and spend time reflecting on all its implications. Ask God to help you understand the full extent of his love and to point out areas where you have difficulty accepting it.

John 3:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

1 John 4:10 (ESV)

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Romans 5:8 (ESV)

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 8:38-39 (ESV)

³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 2:4-5 (ESV)

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

1 John 3:1 (ESV)

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Jeremiah 31:3 (ESV)

I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

Which verse speaks the loudest to you? Why do you think that is?

Try to memorize that verse over the next week. It will be essential in conquering the lies we will face next session.

Try to start each day this week affirming the fact that God loves you and wants the best for you.

This is very key. If we are to defeat the lies in our life, we have to embed the truth of God's love. Strongly encourage everyone to memorize one verse declaring God's love. This will become more critically important as we start exposing the lies.

SESSION 5: LIE: I AM NOT LOVED

TRUTH: GOD LOVES YOU

His deep, passionate love for you is not based on your performance or personal sense of worthiness. You cannot influence God's love for you in any way. He loves you right now, to the fullest possible extent.

Did anyone memorize a verse affirming his love? If so, which verse?

How did you do this past week in remembering that God loves you? Did it make any difference in your week?

Was there a time this past week when you questioned God's love for you? Why?

What types of situations might one encounter that could possibly tempt them to distrust God's love?

DISCERNING THE LIE

Let's look at a variety of biblical scenarios to determine how the lie of not being loved fully by God impacts our actions.

EVE IN THE GARDEN

Genesis 3:1-6 (ESV)

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" ² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

What was the lie that Satan was subtly telling Eve in verse 5?

Satan was essentially telling Eve that God was withholding his best from her. He convinced her that her life would be better if she distrusted God's love and took responsibility for life into her own hands. Eve concluded that God was not giving her the full life she deserved and, as a result, ate the fruit.

Have you ever felt that God was withholding his best from you? Did you take matters into your own hands? Explain.

In what ways does Satan tempt us to be discontent with the life God has given us?

Eve thought she was getting “more” by disobeying God, and in the end, she got much less. Can you share a time when you turned from God thinking you could get more but ended up with less?

ISRAELITES AT MERIBAH

Exodus 17:1-7 (ESV)

¹ All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.

² Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”

⁴ So Moses cried to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” ⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

What lies regarding God’s love did the Israelites buy into while in the desert?

- They felt God’s love was short-lived, fickle, or insufficient. Because he was not meeting their needs as they expected him to, they began to question that God was even among them.
- They questioned God’s ability or care for them to provide and sustain them in the wilderness.
- They questioned his ability or commitment to fulfill his promise to take them to the Promised Land.

This is especially striking because just back in chapter 15 they had a similar tension with a lack of drinking water and they grumbled then as well. At that point, God showed them he had a plan in place and led them to an oasis that had twelve springs and seventy palm trees.

You would think the Israelites would have learned, from God’s previous provision, to trust him. Why do you think past experiences of God’s faithfulness fade so quickly? In what ways might we sometimes doubt God’s love and provision like the Israelites?

Philippians 4:19 (ESV)

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

What are we ultimately saying about God and our relationship with him when we worry about our needs being met?

At these times, we, subconsciously or consciously, believe God has either forgotten about us or that he simply does not care. We start thinking that we’re not important to God; he cares about other people, just not me. As a result, we start to put up emotional defenses that say to God, “I don’t trust you!” and that I must take care of myself.

Whenever we worry, we affirm the lie that God does not love us and will not provide for us. It is also in direct disobedience to the command of Jesus to trust God and not worry.

DEATH OF LAZARUS

Jesus had delayed coming to Bethany for four days when he heard Lazarus was ill.

John 11:17-21, 28-37 (ESV)

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

²⁸ When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” ²⁹ And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.

³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. ³⁴ And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”

³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”

Why do you think Mary stayed home when Martha went to greet Jesus?

Mary was hurt that Jesus did not come as soon as he heard Lazarus was ill. Had he truly loved them, he would have come immediately and healed Lazarus. As a result, Lazarus died. She is

in a state of grief, confusion and she's angry with Jesus. At these times of loss, it is very easy to believe that God does not care about our needs.

**Did Jesus' lack of action and refusal to heal Lazarus indicate a lack of love for them?
What indicators do you see that Jesus still loved them deeply?**

Jesus eventually came and wept over the loss of a friend and the grief Mary and Martha were experiencing.

Jesus eventually raised Lazarus from the dead; this was his plan all along. If he knew what he was going to do before he did it, why did he weep with Mary and Martha?

Just because Jesus knows the outcome of our circumstances does not mean he does not sympathize with us in our sorrow. Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and he too grieved with them in their loss and his loss of a good friend.

When we experience tragedy, the temptation is to think that since God did not intervene and stop it, he must be indifferent to our suffering. The precise opposite is true; God joins us in our grief and weeps along with us. He truly does love us and deeply cares about all that we go through.

JUDAS AND PETER

Matthew 27:3-5 (ESV)

³ Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴ saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself."⁵ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.

Matthew 26:69-75 (ESV)

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean."⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean."⁷¹ And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."⁷² And again he denied it with an oath: "I do not know the man."⁷³ After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you."⁷⁴ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed.⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

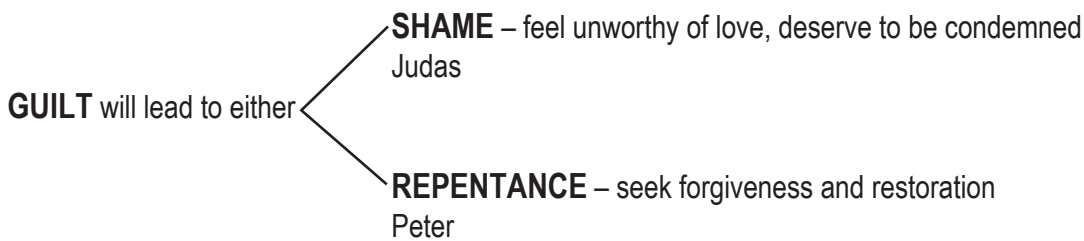
John 21:15-17 (ESV)

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."¹⁶ He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep.

Both Judas and Peter felt extreme guilt for how they betrayed their friend. How did their perception of the love of God influence how they dealt with their failure?

Judas felt that his sin was too great to be covered by God’s love. Judas operated on the principle that those who fail are unworthy of love and deserve to be condemned. Instead of waiting for God to condemn him, he judged and condemned himself. He did not apologize; he did not repent; he simply ended his life.

Peter knew he had failed his friend and, it too grieved him deeply. Peter, however, did not hide from Jesus and the rest of the disciples after his failure. He returned to the community of Christ trusting that there were forgiveness and hope of a restored relationship. Peter did not rely on his performance to determine God’s acceptance; he simply trusted God’s love was big enough to cover his sin. Later, Jesus gave him the opportunity to reaffirm his love for him, and the relationship became even stronger.



We all feel righteous guilt at times. How would you explain the difference between shame and repentance as a reaction to guilt?

***Shame** traps you in your guilt. With shame, there is neither repentance nor reconciliation. Shame demands the person continue to punish themselves with no possibility of forgiveness. It leaves you with a sense that you are a defective person.*

***Repentance** frees the person to receive forgiveness and be restored to relationship. The past wrongs are no longer held against them, and they can continue forward with joy.*

Have you ever questioned the limits of God’s love for you when you failed?

Have there been times in your life when you felt you were not a “good” Christian?

How do these perspectives hinder our lives?

1 John 4:18 (ESV)

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

What is the correlation between fear and love? How does God's perfect love cast out all fear?

Fear is present when love is not. If someone truly believes God deeply loves them and is looking out for their every need, then there is absolutely nothing to fear in life. Fear only comes into play when I do not believe God will take care of me.

What statement am I making to God every time I experience fear, worry, or anxiety?

At these times, I declare God to be unloving and not to be trusted to care for my future. I redefine the very nature of God himself.

Summary of lies and truths about God's love:

LIE	TRUTH
God is withholding his best from you	God created you to receive the fullness of his love
God will not provide what you need for life	God will meet all your needs when you trust him
God does not care about what you are going through	God cares about everything you go through
Your sin is greater than what God's love can cover	Christ's sacrifice covers all sin

As you go through this next week, start to notice how often you experience any of these emotions.

DISBELIEVE GOD'S LOVE: Fear Anxiety Anger

BELIEVE GOD'S LOVE: Peace Contentment Joy

AT HOME:

Each day take one of these verses and spend time reflecting on all its implications. Ask God to help you understand the full extent of his love and to point out areas where you have difficulty accepting it.

God will meet your needs

Philippians 4:19 (ESV)

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

God will be your safety

Psalms 23:4 (ESV)

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Psalms 46:1 (ESV)

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

God will comfort you

Deuteronomy 31:8 (ESV)

It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

God sympathizes with you in your trials

Psalms 103:13 (ESV)

As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

Hebrews 4:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

God loves you even when you fail

Romans 5:6 (ESV)

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Determine which verse speaks the loudest to you. Why do you think that is?

Start each day this week affirming the fact that God loves you and wants the best for you.

SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

SESSION 5: APPLYING THE TRUTH

REVIEW:

God was angry with you:

Romans 2:5 (ESV)

But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

God's love is not dependent on your performance:

Romans 5:8 (ESV)

...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus took God's just anger on himself:

1 John 4:10 (ESV)

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Through Christ, God is free to express the full extent of his love to you:

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

There are circumstances that we face that tempt us to question God's love for us.

1) When you perceive your needs are not being met, **BUT God will meet your needs**

Philippians 4:19 (ESV)

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

2) When you experience loss, **BUT God will comfort you**

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (ESV)

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

3) When you fail, **BUT God will love you despite failure**

Romans 5:6 (ESV)

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

How can we begin to spot when we believe a lie about God's love? What are some indicators in our life that something is amiss?

We can often begin to see the lies we embrace when:

1) We experience negative feelings of:

Anger

Anxiety

Fear

At these times, we feel we are threatened in some way and are no longer safe. As a result, these emotions get raised to put us on alert, and we put up defenses to protect us from the perceived threat.

2) We act in an ungodly manner

Can you spot any times through this past week when you gave into the lie that you are not fully loved by God?

- Did you condemn yourself at any point for personal failure?
- Did you withhold love from someone else because of their failure?
- Did you feel unlovable or unloved at any time?
- Did you harshly criticize yourself or anyone else?
- Did you feel compelled to pay someone back wrong for wrong?
- Did you talk negatively about a person to someone else?
- Did you at any time affirm the negative opinions of others (parents/bosses) about yourself?
- Did you avoid anyone this week?
- Did you express anger toward someone this week?
- Did you look down on anyone this week?
- Did you get angry with someone in traffic and devalue them in your thinking?
- Did you shy away from time with God due to a sense of shame and unworthiness?
- Did you find it hard to love someone who wanted to cause you harm or discredit you?
- Did God seem like a critical judge?
- Do you have low self-esteem or sense of worth?
- Did you worry about anything?
- Did you feel abandoned or alone?
- Did you start to take control and manipulate your personal safety or needs?
- Do you fear the future?
- Did you do something sinful, not trusting God to meet your personal needs?
- Did you refuse to step out in faith and surrender control to God in any way?

Each of the above thought patterns or behaviors are ultimately rooted in a distrust of God's love for you. Some are very subtle. **Are there any statements where you do not see the connection to the lie? Discuss these as a group.**

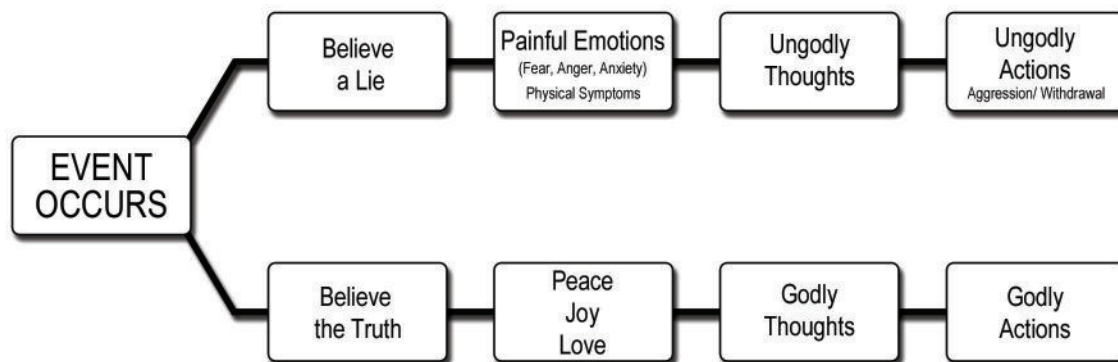
Spend time sharing one of the ways you "distrusted" God's love for you this week.

If you trusted God's love for you, how might you have acted differently?

The more you are able to identify the lies, the further you will be on the path to FREEDOM.

THE FREEDOM PROCESS

This process is adapted from an unknown author



What are some possible "ungodly actions" that might stem from the lie that you are not fully loved by God?

- *If someone insults you...insult them back*
- *If someone cuts you off in traffic...road rage*
- *If you failed at something...self-condemnation*
- *If you were abused...distrust and control*
- *If someone does not like you...avoid them*

The key to spiritual freedom is to:

- 1) Identify the LIE
- 2) CONFESS IT to God
- 3) Affirm the BIBLICAL TRUTH
- 4) Correct any UNGODLY ACTIONS
- 5) LIVE OUT the truth

1. IDENTIFY THE LIE

Identifying the lie is a critical step in becoming free. If you can't see where you are living the lie, you can't make changes to live in the truth.

At the end of each day, reflect on your behavior throughout the day and the various feelings you experienced. You may even want to keep a journal so that you can begin to see patterns.

Start with:

a) *Ungodly Actions and Thoughts*

Below are some examples of actions that might result from believing the lie that you are not fully loved:

When you perceive your needs are not being fully met:

- Start trying to meet your needs through your own efforts
- Prioritize your money based on your needs vs. God's priorities
- Invest your time and energy in ways other than God intended for you
- Abandon God
- Distrust others
- Over-control people and situations
- Turn to wrong sources for help
- Do not take steps of faith
- Embrace unhealthy relationships
- Sacrifice personal values to gain another's acceptance

When you experience tragedy or loss:

- Blame God for the crisis
- Accuse God of being unloving
- Turn to supports ignoring the family of God
- Create personal safety by putting up emotional barriers

When you fail:

- Condemn yourself or others
- Pass blame
- Withdraw
- Do not accept compliments
- Strive harder
- Be unforgiving

Can you relate to any of these ungodly actions? Can you share?

TWO TYPICAL RESPONSES TO THE LIE

AGGRESSION:

Do you act out of aggression toward self, others, or God?

What are various ways we might do this?

Do you strive to control an environment or relationship out of fear?

WITHDRAWAL:

Do you withhold love from self, others, or God?

What are various ways we might do this?

Do you allow fear or insecurity to make any decision today?

b) *Painful Emotions and Physical Symptoms*

What are some examples of painful emotions we might experience as a result of embracing the lie that you are not fully loved?

Anger, Anxiety, Worry, Fear

Painful emotions are the indicator lights that something is not going the way God originally intended. Events or people have a way of touching the buttons in our lives that expose our weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and inadequacies. When this happens, these painful emotions rise to the surface and remove peace and joy from our lives.

Some painful emotions are not ungodly. For instance, there is such a thing as godly or righteous anger. However, the majority of the time, anger is rooted in our own personal, unmet expectations more than it is based on the holiness of God.

The key here is to reflect to see if a lie is at work.

What are some possible “physical symptoms” we might experience resulting from believing the lie that we are not fully loved?

Obviously, physical symptoms may have many different causes. However, it is wise when we experience what medicine calls stress-related illness to examine our lives to see if there is some way we are buying into a lie regarding our value and significance.

2. CONFESS THE LIE TO GOD

Why is it important to confess the lie to God?

It is one thing to identify the lie; it is another to view it as a sin against God that hinders your relationship with him. Confession, in this case, also implies repentance; you see the damage of the lie, and you want to make things right with God. You want to be rid of the lie permanently and free from the hold it has on your life. Confession is a way of saying we assume responsibility for our actions and desire to live according to God’s word.

- a) *Confess the lie*
- b) Receive *God’s grace*
- c) *Renounce any spiritual hold* on your life that may exist due to the lie.

Whenever we embrace a spiritual lie, we open ourselves to being put into spiritual bondage to Satan. It becomes a foothold of influence and control in our life. This is especially true if we have held onto this lie since childhood.

3. AFFIRM THE BIBLICAL TRUTH

Why is it important to identify and affirm a specific Biblical truth?

You have to replace the lie with the truth. If you just acknowledge the lie and try to avoid it, you will continually fail because there is nothing else to hold on to. You will keep falling back into the old pattern. It is the TRUTH that sets you free, not an absence of the lie.

Find a scripture passage that speaks loudly to you about the truth you need to embed in your life.

What are some ways you can embed that truth in your mind?

- *Memorize the verse (highly recommended.)*
- *Put the verses on paper in places where you are most tempted to believe the lie.*
- *Have others hold you accountable for that lie/truth.*
- *Teach it to someone else, etc.*

What will ultimately happen if you do not replace the lie with a biblical truth?

We continually return to what we know. If you know the lie better than you know the truth, your mind will always revert to the lie. It is important to drown a lie under a flood of truth.

4. CORRECT ANY UNGODLY ACTION

Now that you have traced ungodly actions and painful emotions back to the lie and have replaced the lie with truth, now you need to return to the ungodly action and correct it.

Why is it important to go back and correct any previous, ungodly action from the past day or week?

a) True conviction and repentance obligate us to correct a wrong if at all possible.

What are some types of things you may need to do?

You may need to:

1. *Go back to some person to apologize and ask for forgiveness. This is a humbling thing to do, but it goes a long way to embedding that truth in your mind. If you do this a few times, it won't be long before you avoid that lie altogether.*
2. *Stop doing something you had started, that wasn't part of God's plan for you.*
3. *Stop pursuing certain things, positions, or relationships that are not part of God's plan for you.*
4. *Let down certain defenses that protect you from others and God. Defenses could be cloaked as "proving yourself," needing to be right, shyness, humor, being "peaceful," self-sufficient, etc.*

b) The more you correct any lie-based action, the more you will re-program your mind to not respond that way again.

5. LIVE OUT THE TRUTH

DO WHAT YOU DIDN'T DO HAD YOU BELIEVED THE TRUTH.

What are some other specific things you personally may have to do in the next week to live the truth?

- You may need to take a step of faith you had refused to take.
- You may need to stop judging someone who has offended you and offer forgiveness.
- You may simply need to trust God to meet your needs in some area of your life.
- You may need to show love to someone who doesn't love you.
- You may need to sit back and take a day of rest each week.
- You may need to tithe on your income as a statement of dependence on God.
- You may need to draw closer to Jesus Christ and spend more time enjoying God.



TIMELINE

Just because you have discovered the truth doesn't mean you will automatically apply it to your life. Your brain has been pre-wired over many years to respond to circumstances in a sinful way. These are so deeply programmed that your mind will not even consult you on many of these issues but will react subconsciously the same old way. Don't get discouraged; persevere.

As you go through the steps of freedom, the timeline between buying into the lie and correcting the behavior will keep getting shorter and shorter. Eventually, you will have re-programmed your mind to respond in a godly way, and you will be free at last. You will no longer believe the lie, experience the painful emotions, or act out in a sinful manner. Will you be perfect? No, because there are so many different ways we believe the lie. But, one by one, we can start removing the chains from our lives. This can take days, but usually weeks, months, and years to renew.

Don't give up; it is the process of becoming like Jesus Christ.

SESSION 6: TRUTH: IT IS FINISHED

REVIEW:

We falsely believe: I am not fully loved

The truth is: God fully loves you

What verse can you think of that affirms this truth?

	1	2	3	4
TRUTH	God loves you	The work is finished	God is Changing You	You are significant
LIE	I am not fully loved	I must do more	I cannot change	I have nothing to offer

IT IS FINISHED

John 19:30 (ESV)

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

What did Jesus mean when he said, "It is Finished."?

Jesus was indicating that the work of fulfilling the law and providing salvation was complete.

In order to make salvation possible, Jesus had to accomplish two things:

- 1) He had to *live a sinless, holy life*
- 2) He had to *die as a substitute payment for our sin*

Why was it necessary for us that Jesus lived a sinless life?

Deuteronomy 17:1 (ESV)

You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep in which is a blemish, any defect whatever, for that is an abomination to the LORD your God.

1) Jesus had to live a sinless life so that he could be a perfect, spotless sacrifice for our sins. Jesus could not have died as our substitute if he was guilty and needed to die for his own sin.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

1 Corinthians 1:30 (ESV)

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption...

2) If Jesus did not live a holy, sinless life, then he could not pass on to us the gift of his righteousness. We would still be trapped with our sin nature, unable to stand in the presence of our holy God.

THE STANDARD OF HOLINESS**What standard does “religion” typically call us to meet?**

Religions often tell us there is a standard of righteousness we must measure up to in order to be acceptable to God. This standard is often expressed in terms of things we must believe, things we must do, and things we must not do. Ultimately, false religion declares that our relationship with God is dependent on our performance.

What is the problem with this approach?

One problem with this approach is that we are never really sure when we have actually measured up to the standard. The standard is never quite clear. And once you have reached the standard, are you able to continually sustain life at that point? What happens if you fall?

*The real problem with this approach is that religion-made standards fall far short of the only standard God has set - holiness - absolute perfection and separation from sin. **There are no shades of holiness. We are either entirely holy or entirely sinful.***

Why is holiness the only standard we are called to meet?

Holiness is the only standard acceptable to God because anything less than holiness embraces evil. God is not content with a “little” evil entering his presence. A “little” rebellion is never healthy for any relationship that desires true oneness and intimacy. Holiness is the only acceptable standard because God is holy.

Hebrews 12:14 (ESV)

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

The Law and God's character demand holiness as the only standard. Once that is broken, holiness is out of our reach. Because we are born with a sin nature, holiness has always been out of our reach. There is nothing we can do to meet the demands of God's justice or change our sin nature.

What are the implications for us if Christ has done everything that needed to be done in order to bring us to God?

Jesus met the standard of holiness on our behalf. There is nothing left for us to do in order to make ourselves acceptable to God.

Galatians 2:21 (ESV)

I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

What are we essentially communicating if we still feel we have to “perform” to be acceptable to God?

We are communicating that Christ's sacrifice was insufficient to save us and bring us before God. We are declaring that the work of salvation is NOT finished and that it is now dependent on us to fill in the gap of what Christ was not able to accomplish on our behalf.

Paul writes to the Galatians, who were declaring that people needed both faith in Jesus and obedience to the law in order to be saved. Read Paul's reaction below.

Galatians 1:6-9 (ESV)

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Why was this so significant an issue for Paul?

To claim that we can still earn our way to God is to completely deny the work of Christ on the cross to pay for our sins and give us the gift of his righteousness.

Galatians 2:16 (ESV)

Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

In what ways does this truth bring freedom to our lives? How does it take some of the pressure off us to be good?

What are the implications with regard to how God views us if we sin this week?

God still views us through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. We have sin in our lives, but the Father sees that it has been dealt with and paid for by Jesus Christ. Though I still sin, I am covered by the righteousness of Jesus Christ and the Father views me as holy.

Romans 8:1-2 (ESV)

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

Why are these verses so powerfully freeing to those who believe them?

Have there been times when you felt God was not happy with you and judged you for some reason? Can you share?

How does this verse free us from that perspective?

If I do not need to be righteous by my own efforts to meet God's expectations, does that free me to do whatever I want? Can I freely embrace sin without guilt?

Romans 6:1-2 (ESV)

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

What does it mean that we died to sin?

To die to sin means that sin is to no longer to play a role in our new life with Christ. The reason Christ came was to set us free from bondage to sin and its consequence in our lives.

***Marriage Illustration:** When one gets married, a part of him/her dies – the single life. There are patterns in the old single life that are no longer appropriate in the new relationship. It is no longer appropriate to date other people; it is not appropriate*

to make major decisions independently; they should not spend money however they individually would like to spend money. They are now to act as one, only doing things that bring joy, peace, and relational safety to the other person.

When we come to Christ, it is because we are repentant of our old sinful life and wish to walk in a new relationship with him. To commit to continuing in the old life is to acknowledge we were not truly repentant and do not truly desire Jesus to be Lord of our lives.

Living for Jesus has nothing to do with Performance, but it has everything to do with Joy in Relationship.

If we do not need to do anything to continually earn our way into God's favour, then why does God call us to "serve" him?

Serving God is never for his benefit. Technically speaking, there is absolutely nothing you can do "for" God. He needs nothing, and there is no way you can make his life more complete.

Acts 17:25 (ESV)

...nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

Serving God is God's gift to us. It is not about performance, but about inviting us to partner with him in his mission on earth. God invites us to be his representatives in a world that has lost sight of him. God invites us to represent his love and truth, knowing that it will, at the same time, give us incredible joy and grow our relationship with him. Serving God is purely for our benefit and the benefit of those around us.

How does it make you feel to know you don't have to earn God's approval by your performance, that you are already approved by God?

How does it make you feel to know there are no rules you have to live up to in order to be saved, other than to place faith in Jesus?

How might these truths impact how you live and relate to others this week?

How might this perspective change how you approach ministry and mission?

AT HOME:

Each day take one of these verses and spend time reflecting on all its implications. Ask God to help you understand the full extent of his approval and to point out areas where you have difficulty accepting it.

Romans 8:1 (ESV)

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 1:21-22 (ESV)

²¹ *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,* ²² *he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,*

Colossians 2:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ *For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,* ¹⁰ *and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.*

Colossians 2:13 (ESV)

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

Colossians 3:3 (ESV)

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

1 Corinthians 6:11 (ESV)

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 (ESV)

²¹ *And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us,* ²² *and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*

Choose one verse that strongly communicates the truth of being approved by God and meditate on its implication.

We encourage you to memorize this verse to help you battle the lies we will reveal next session.

SESSION 6: LIE: I MUST DO MORE

REVIEW:

Truth: God LOVES you

Truth: The work of measuring up is FINISHED

What types of standards do people strive to meet to feel good about themselves?

- *Finances*
- *Job position*
- *Weight*
- *Attractiveness*
- *Being smart: good grades*
- *Talent*
- *Competition: winning sports, games*
- *Having the best of certain things*
- *Being “good.”*
- *Being “religious,” etc.*

Why do these accomplishments make us feel better about ourselves?

What is the problem of turning to these things to give us a sense of worth and value?

Whenever we place our sense of worth in our performance, we declare that our worth is constantly in flux. If I perform well, then I can feel good about myself. If I perform poorly, then suddenly, my worth crashes, and I am no longer as lovable or acceptable. We are then on an emotional roller coaster with our sense of value constantly manipulated by our circumstances or the opinions of others.

This approach to life is rooted in what we call the PERFORMANCE LIE.

**I must meet certain expectations to be accepted by others or myself.
I must measure up!**

We also project that lie on to others.

Others must measure up to my expectations in order to be approved by me.

We then add to that lie a consequence:

Those who fail do not deserve to be fully loved or respected.

What do you think God has to say about our striving for a sense of worth from all these achievements?

Jeremiah 2:13 (ESV)

For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

What does God mean with regard to “hewing out cisterns”?

People were abandoning God and attempting to meet their life needs through their own efforts and pride. God defined these attempts as faulty and incapable of giving them the life they longed for. They would never gain what they were looking for apart from him.

In what ways might we dig our own cisterns?

Colossians 1:12 (ESV)

...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

How does the work of Christ set us free from the performance lie?

Jesus met the only expectation we are truly called to live up to - holiness. There is no other benchmark for our lives. We could never have attained it by our own efforts, but he measured up for us. As a result, there is absolutely nothing we need to “strive” for in life to declare us lovable and acceptable. We are fully accepted and loved by God. Since we have already been qualified for eternity through Jesus Christ, no other test needs to be passed.

If the only standard that truly exists has been met in us through Christ, why do we still strive to meet other standards that don't truly exist?

1) We still want to think we are “good enough” by our own abilities, that we measure up, that we are adequate. Pride demands that we be self-sufficient and worthy of praise in the eyes of others. We want to believe that we can control our own lives and live independently of God.

2) We don't fully understand what Christ accomplished through his death and resurrection. We find it hard to change our thinking and trust that Christ has already qualified us, that the requirement for moral perfection has already been met for us.

Every other religion tells you there is something you can do to be “righteous” enough for God. Christianity is the only faith that says it is impossible to measure up by our own efforts and that we need righteousness to be given to us as a gift if we ever hope to walk into the presence of God.

How does the lie of performance bring fear into our lives?

When our sense of worth is tied to our performance, we will constantly live in fear that someday we will not perform well enough and no longer be worthy of love and acceptance. There is an epidemic of low self-esteem rooted in the fear that we do not measure up at the core of our being.

How might the lie of performance cause us to act in ungodly ways?

The lie of performance causes us to either:

- 1) Become aggressive and strive harder to succeed or,*
- 2) Avoid anything/anyone that might expose our inadequacy.*

Colossians 3:23 (ESV)

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men...

How does the above verse remove the pressure of the performance lie?

When we do something for God, we do it out of a joy of partnering with him. We are simply called to do our best, and he will take care of the results. God does not need us to perform to a certain level to be pleased with us; he simply wants us to do our best. If we seek to glorify him in all we do – that is success to God.

How might the lie of performance be subtly at work in the following scenarios?

And, if we believed the truth, what might be a contrasting approach to life?

A parent encouraging a child to get an A in school...

When we encourage children to reach a specific goal in order to feel good about themselves, we are embedding the performance lie. This is also true when it comes to sports and other competitions. It is often tempting to praise a child when they win the game and less so when they lose. This creates immense pressure for children to feel they have to perform in order to be approved by their parents, school, team or culture.

Godly Response: *We need to teach children to simply do their best and in a way that brings glory to God. This removes stress and allows a child to do what they do with joy to the fullness of their ability. This approach frees children from the fear of failure. If they lose at something, it does not affect their self-worth.*

A person striving for a promotion at work...

It is not wrong to get a promotion at work, no more than it is wrong for a child to get a good grade. The question focuses more on the deep motivation for the promotion and the need to “strive.” If the promotion is for a sense of affirmation and sense of accomplishment, then the performance lie is probably subtly at work. We are sinfully motivated to feel we need to be at the “top” to affirm our sense of identity and worth.

Godly Response: *Do the best that you can do and leave the results to God. It is not wrong to apply for a promotion, but the heart is often shown when one does not get the promotion. We often rationalize why we need a promotion, but the reality is, God will take care of our needs. We need to trust him with our lives. We are not called to be successful; we are called to be faithful. When we are faithful, God will bear much fruit through us.*

A person who cannot say “No” to helping others...

Sometimes what we do can have the appearance of godliness, but it can still be rooted in the performance lie. When people find it hard to say no, it is because there is a fear that if they do not help, they will not be respected or valued as much. These people will often start to feel burned out and resent the very people they are helping.

Godly Response: *Only do what you have a peace about doing. Set godly boundaries around your life even though other people may not value those boundaries. Do not give outward consent, but inwardly resent. Remember this behavior to avoid: Outward Consent/ Inward Resent*

Jesus did not please everybody. There were times when the crowds came to him expecting to be healed, but he left and went to another town instead. Those people who were left behind without being healed were probably not too impressed with Jesus (Mark 1:37-38).

Can you think of any other scenarios where the lie of performance might be subtly at work?

How many of you would identify yourself as a perfectionist? What is the root deception behind perfectionism?

Perfectionism is rooted in the belief that things must meet a certain standard for me to feel good about them and feel good about myself. If I don't reach that standard of excellence, I am not worthy of respect or love. I fear incompetency and inadequacy, so I must constantly perform above and beyond. When I can make things “just right,” I feel like I have a sense of control and adequacy.

In these moments, we need to ask, “Whose attention and affirmation are we striving to gain?” It can often be traced back to a parent, especially a father, who never affirmed you. You have lived your whole life trying to gain another’s acceptance and affirmation, trying to confirm that you are significant and loved. This very pursuit has controlled your entire life.

How might the lie of performance affect our relationships with others?

The lie erects defenses between us and others who might threaten our sense of worth. This is evident through:

- *Avoiding people who are upset with us*
- *Not being open to criticism*
- *Getting angry with others when they fail to meet our expectations*
- *Giving people the silent treatment*
- *Criticizing others*
- *Competing with others*
- *Having the last word*
- *Not being open and vulnerable with people*
- *Wearing masks to hide what is really going on in our life*
- *Judging others*
- *Unable to offer forgiveness, etc...*

Philippians 2:5-11 (ESV)

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Why did Jesus not need to “grasp” after his identity?

Jesus knew who he was, and, as a result, he did not need anyone to affirm him. We only need people to affirm our identity and worth if we are personally questioning it. If there is no doubt, then there is no need for affirmation.

How did Jesus’ secure identity free him to serve others?

Jesus could act as a servant without needing to be respected by others. He was free to LOVE others without needing to manipulate their approval. He was free from their opinions concerning his worth.

Why do people in high positions often find it hard to do menial tasks?

Galatians 5:1 (ESV)

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Why does Paul call a return to a performance-based faith a return to slavery?

When you do not rely on Christ to measure up for you, you are then driven to measure up yourself. The problem is, you will never do it. You will have to keep striving and striving, never reaching the point where you can stop and rest. Your life will be manipulated by fear of failure and inadequacy, constantly striving for the approval of others. You will be a slave. It completely misses the very reason Christ came to set us free.

If you choose to reject the lie of performance and the need to do more in order to feel good about yourself, how will that change how you approach this coming week?

How will it change how you relate to people and permit people to speak into your life?

How will it bring you peace?

AT HOME:

Each day take one of these verses and spend time reflecting on all its implications. Ask God to help you see areas where you buy into the performance lie and have put up defenses to protect you from feelings of inadequacy.

1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV)

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Colossians 3:23 (ESV)

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men...

Philippians 2:5-11 (ESV)

⁵ *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

⁹ *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Galatians 1:10 (ESV)

For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

John 6:66-68 (ESV)

⁶⁶ *After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life..."*

Philippians 4:12-13 (ESV)

¹² *I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

Acts 4:19 (ESV)

But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge..."

Which verse speaks the loudest to you? Why do you think that is?

Try to start each day this week affirming the fact that Christ has met every standard for you. You don't need to prove anything to yourself or anyone else.

Simply live for the glory of God.

SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

SESSION 6: APPLYING THE TRUTH

REVIEW:

Lie: I am not fully loved

Truth: God loves you

Lie: I must do more

Truth: The work of measuring up is finished

Which of the following applied to you this past week?

- Did you try to impress someone?
- Did you get defensive over anything?
- Did you worry or get anxious at any point?
- Did you get frustrated that you didn't perform in some way as well as you had hoped?
- Did you condemn yourself or anyone else for not meeting your expectations?
- Did you feel like a failure?
- Did you avoid an opportunity because you were afraid you might not do it well?
- Did you find it hard to love someone who wanted to cause you harm or discredit you?
- Did God seem like a critical, watching judge to you?
- Were you critical about your appearance?
- Were you unable to rejoice with someone else's success?
- Did you get angry with someone this week?
- Were you competitive?
- Were you afraid to speak in front of people?
- Were you afraid to confront conflict?
- Did you avoid talking to someone about God out of insecurity or fear of rejection?
- Did you need to get your way in a conflict?
- Did you avoid talking to God due to shame?
- Did you view your self-worth as less than 10 out of 10?

Spend time sharing one way you saw these lies at work in your life this past week.

Were you able to act on the truth instead of the lie in any situation this week? Share your experience.

Can you recall a time in your life when you feared failure? How did it determine your actions?

What types of scenarios might you AVOID for fear of failure?

What things might you WORK HARDER at for fear of failure?

Why are both of the reactions sin-based responses?

Both of these responses are rooted in a distrust of God's love and provision. When we choose to act based on a lie and reject God's word to us, we sin against God.

Romans 14:23 (ESV)

For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

At these times, fear is our motivation and guide. Protecting self becomes our main agenda. It is impossible to honor and glorify God when we reject his truth and take matters defensively into our own hands.

Why is trusting God to be a decision as opposed to based on a feeling?

Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

Luke 22:44 (ESV)

And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

If Jesus made decisions based on his emotions, how would that have affected his life?

Matthew 26:39 (ESV)

And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

On what did Jesus base his actions?

Jesus did not make decisions based on how he felt about things but based on the will of the Father. As a result, Jesus was not manipulated or hindered by fear. He was free to accomplish every purpose the Father set before him.

How has fear hindered you in the past in ways that you now regret?

How would trusting God's love and provision have freed you in that area?

If you chose not to be manipulated by fear, how might it change your life and ministry?

Review the freedom process:

- 1) Identify the LIE
- 2) CONFESS IT to God
- 3) Affirm the BIBLICAL TRUTH
- 4) Correct any UNGODLY ACTIONS
- 5) LIVE OUT the truth

Philippians 4:12-13 (ESV)

¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

What was Paul referring to when he said he could do “all things”?

Paul was referring to his ability to be in need or have plenty, to be well fed or hungry. It didn't matter in what circumstances Paul found himself; he was able to stay content. The “everything” refers to both good and bad scenarios in which we find ourselves. Paul could experience it all and still be content because he discovered a truth that sustained him.

What do you think was Paul's secret?

Paul discovered that he could hand his whole life over to the purposes of God and that God would be faithful to help him accomplish his purposes on earth.

Philippians 1:20-21 (ESV)

²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Paul knew that God would only allow him to go through those experiences that were necessary for changing him, building up others, or glorifying God's name. He didn't need to grasp after anything but relax and do whatever he did for the glory of God.

The key to contentment, then, is to surrender everything to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Only then are we free from the need to defend or protect our worth and value. Only then are we free from anxiety and worry, free to represent God's love in a world that does not value God or his followers.

Do you struggle with any of the following scenarios?

- Could you be demoted and still be content?
- Could you lose your job and still be content?
- Could you fail at something and still be content?
- Could you be content watching a co-worker get a promotion?
- Could you be content with a disability?
- Could you be poor and still be content?
- Could you be hungry and still be content?
- Could you have a car with scratches and dents and still be content?
- Could you be average and be content?
- Can you be content with the salary you are presently making?
- Can you be content in the job situation where you are presently?
- Can you be content with the relationships you currently have?
- Can you be content with the possessions (house, car, TV, clothes, etc.) you presently have?

Which of the above statements creates the most tension for you and why?

The issue is whether you believe things need to be "better" for you to feel good about yourself and how God is working through you.

One common reaction to our expectations not being met is anger/frustration. Read the following verses and discuss how we should handle anger.

Proverbs 29:11 (ESV)

A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.

Psalm 37:8 (ESV)

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

Ephesians 4:31-32 (ESV)

³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

James 1:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

What are some of the implications of these verses?

- *Anger that results from our unmet expectations is not glorifying to God.*
- *Anger is not to rule us; we are to rule and control our anger.*
- *We are to decide to set anger aside when it arises.*
- *We are not to act out of anger but in a manner consistent with God's grace.*
- *We are to communicate to people in ways that turn away anger...other's and ours.*

Ephesians 4:15 (NIV)

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Choosing not to vent anger at another person does not mean we do not acknowledge tensions, but it does affect how we work through those tensions. What difference does embracing God's truth have on how you resolve conflict?

How might you approach conflict differently this week?

AT HOME:

Psalm 4:4 (ESV)

Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.

As you reflect on your day, consider the moments when you became angry or frustrated with others. What insecurity in your life was threatened that allowed this emotion to rise to the surface?

What truth, if embraced, would have freed you from your anger?

Do you need to go back and apologize to anyone?

Do you need to ask anyone for their forgiveness?

SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

SESSION 7: TRUTH: GOD IS CHANGING YOU

REVIEW:

How successful were you this past week in identifying lies at work in your life?

Were you able to change any behavior as a result? Share your experiences.

	1	2	3	4
TRUTH	God loves you	The work is finished	God is Changing You	You are significant
LIE	I am not fully loved	I must do more	I cannot change	I have nothing to offer

YOU ARE BEING RENEWED

Psalm 51:5 (ESV)

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Psalm 58:3 (ESV)

The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.

The Bible is very clear about the fact that we have a sinful nature. In what ways do you see evidence of the sin nature at work in your own lives? Can you give some everyday examples where you find the most natural response is to sin?

Secular society sees these natural tendencies as well (though they will not refer to it as a sin nature). What are some ways society tries to counter the effects of the sin nature?

- *Laws – laws exists to restrain our sinful tendencies*
- *Medication – to subdue the sinful effects of the mind and body*
- *Drugs*
- *Exercise and diet*
- *Positive thinking*
- *Anger management*
- *Set goals and discipline your life to achieve them*
- *In some cases, it does not try to counter it but encourages the sin nature.*

Will any of these approaches actually change our nature and move us forward in freedom? Why or why not?

Through our own efforts, how much can we change our sin nature?

We may change some behavior through our own efforts, but we cannot ultimately change our nature. Our nature is what determines what we most naturally do in any given circumstance. By the grace of God, we can restrain our sin nature to a certain degree, but it is always there, manipulating our actions, motives, and thoughts.

To change the nature of anything would require a God-orchestrated miracle. When someone becomes a Christ-follower, what are some of the changes that immediately take place?

Read the following verses and discuss the implications of each change God has made in you through Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Implication: *When we receive the Holy Spirit, he puts to death our old, sinful nature, and he gives us a new life through a new nature.*

Romans 6:6-8 (ESV)

⁶ *We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.*

Implication: *Through the Holy Spirit, we now have the ability to live for God and his righteousness. We no longer “have to” sin; we can choose to do what brings glory to God.*

If we now have a new life through the Holy Spirit, why do we continue to sin? What is not yet finished in our transformation?

Romans 8:10 (ESV)

But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

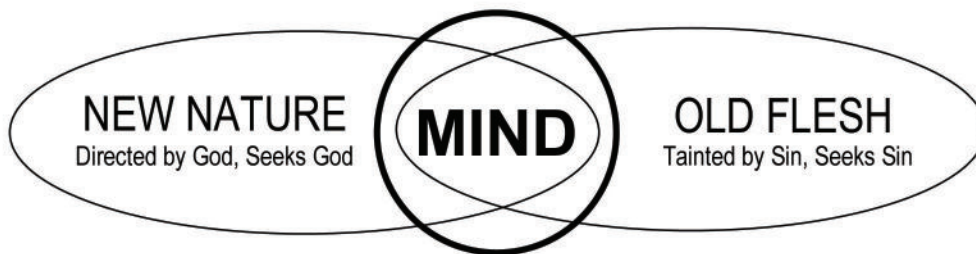
When we receive the Holy Spirit, our spiritual nature is changed immediately, but we still live in a body that is tainted by sin. It has been trained and conditioned to sin over many years, and those patterns do not immediately disappear.

In our spirit, we want to live to glorify God, but we have a body that is addicted to sin. It is used to sinning, it likes sinning, and it has been programmed to sin. It is in conflict with our new spirit and the Spirit of God.

Romans 12:2 (ESV)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

What is the mind's role when it comes to the tension between our new spiritual nature and our sin-tainted bodies?



The battle for our behavior takes place in the mind – the meeting place of the body and spirit. The mind needs to learn to think differently about God and life. It has spent so much time thinking a certain way that it will take time to get rid of old patterns and replace them with new ones.

If we want to change our lives, we need to change our thinking and control our bodies' impulses.

How will God ultimately deal with our sin corrupted bodies?**Philippians 3:20-21 (ESV)**

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (ESV)

⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

Romans 8:22-23 (ESV)

²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Eventually, when Christ returns, the dilemma of our sin-tainted bodies will be fully resolved.

If God accepts us as we are, then why is he at work to change us?

God accepts us as we are, but he loves us far too much to allow us to stay as we are. He created us to be holy, and he will continue to work in our lives until he brings us to that point. Anything less than holiness brings sorrow and death into our lives. God created us to experience joy and peace in our relationship with him. He created us to accurately represent his love to the world around us. He did all this not for his benefit but for ours. He is restoring us to the life he originally designed us to experience.

What processes does God use to bring change into our lives?

Discuss the implications of how God changes us in each of the following verses.

John 16:7-8 (ESV)

⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

Implication: *The Holy Spirit convicts us concerning sin and how to live righteously. It is his promptings that create the most significant change, for they come from within.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Implication: *The Holy Spirit works through the Word to change our way of thinking and our behavior. The more time we spend in the Bible, the more our minds will be transformed to line up with God's character and purposes.*

Galatians 6:1-2 (ESV)

¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Implication: *God provides us with each other to be catalysts of change and growth. As we become a community of faith, we encourage one another, build each other up and hold each other accountable. We need each other in order to mature and have the strength to live out the Christ-life.*

James 1:2-4 (ESV)

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Implication: *God provides "opportunities" to strip away issues in our lives that prevent us from maturing. These opportunities are not always pleasant, but they are necessary if we are to become the person we were created to be. The gardener prunes vines so that they will bear more fruit (John 15). Pruning is always a traumatic experience for a plant, but it produces great results.*

In hindsight, have you experienced a trial that was a very valuable learning and faith-strengthening experience for you? Share your experience.

What is stopping us from living the holy life God created us to experience?

The only thing stopping us from living a holy life is our decision to follow our own will and to not submit to the will of God. It is all a matter of choosing to live the Spirit-filled life where we surrender control to him, and as a result, he gives us greater self-control to rule our own bodies (Gal 5:23).

2 Peter 1:3-4 (ESV)

³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

What statements in these verses give you hope and encouragement?

We are complete, with everything we need to live a godly life. There is nothing more we need. All we have to do is apply God's truth and reject Satan's lies. The only things holding us back are the temptations of the flesh and the lies we choose to embrace. Give up the lie and embrace God's truth, and you will experience the freedom your spirit desires.

Are you able to identify and share any changes God has been making in you over the past year? Have you seen any godly changes in other group members that you could identify?

AT HOME:

Each day take one of these verses and spend time reflecting on all its implications. Ask God to help you trust that he is at work in you, changing you to be like him.

Colossians 3:10 (ESV)

...and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

John 8:36 (ESV)

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44 (ESV)

⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

2 Peter 1:3-4 (ESV)

³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

SESSION 7: LIE: I CANNOT CHANGE

REVIEW:

Truth: God LOVES you despite what you think of yourself.

Truth: In Christ, you already meet all of God's EXPECTATIONS.

Truth: God CHANGES you to be like him.

What do the following statements have in common?

"That's just the way I am. Deal with it!"

"I can't help myself."

"You can't teach old dogs new tricks."

"That's how I've always done it."

"I can't do it!" or "I could never do that."

Each statement declares that I am the way that I am and I cannot change.

What is wrong with each of those statements?

They excuse or justify our limitations and failings. They trap us in our present state and do not allow us to move forward or grow as a person. They say that we cannot choose our behavior and that we are limited by our failings. Each statement chooses to ignore that Christ has set us free to choose what we do and how we relate to people.

Can we excuse our reactions by claiming it is our personality? Why or why not?

Our personality is our natural way of relating to others, but it does not override our choice to determine how to relate to someone. We are always to choose a response that has the other person's best interests in mind.

Our personality is not an excuse for personal shortcomings or for not being respectful to others. To simply claim that we have only one way to relate to people is to deny our ability to choose love and God's Holy Spirit at work through us to build up others.

Why are we always responsible to adjust how we relate to others?

If all our needs are met in Christ, and we are fully accepted by God, then we are free to be whatever we need to be to minister to and love the other person. Because Jesus was confident in his relationship with the Father and his own identity, he was free to become a man and take the role of a servant.

Why do we sometimes feel like we're stuck and can't move forward in freedom?

- *We tried something before and couldn't do it.*
- *We have an addiction that we cannot break.*
- *There is a sin in our life that we keep repeating.*
- *We fear failure or rejection.*
- *We don't know how to change or move forward, etc.*

In what ways might believing we cannot change hinder our lives?

- *We might not take risks due to fear of failure when confronted with life stretching opportunities.*
- *We might continue with abrasive behaviors that we excuse as personality style.*
- *We will not have victory over areas of sin if we believe it is unavailable.*
- *We might become depressed and experience ill health.*
- *We will resent life/others whenever change is forced on us.*

What fears do you have that limit what you do in life?

Public speaking, missions, sharing your faith, praying out loud, confronting certain fears, etc.

What are we saying about God at these times?

We limit God because of the things we feel we cannot do. All the great events of scripture describe situations where God did more through a person than they could have ever believed possible. When we limit ourselves we are also saying that we believe God expects us to live with fear and insecurities, never able to move forward.

Paul's Tension**Romans 7:15-19 (ESV)**

¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

In what ways do you relate to this tension?**Romans 7:24-25 (ESV)**

²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

What does it take to become free of sin's grip?

In the **FREEDOM CIRCLE**, write down everything you can think of that describes your "position in Christ" and its implications for your life.

In the **TRAPPED CIRCLE**, write down everything you can think of that describes your life under the lies.

FREEDOM
Kingdom of Light

Examples: Loved, Forgiven, Declared Righteous, Reconciled, Accepted, Embraced, Don't have to sin anymore, Servant of God, Citizen of heaven, Priest of God, Friend of God, Adopted into God's Family, Heir, Body of Christ, Invited into the Godhead itself, Safe, Secure, Provided for, Future taken care of, Enjoyable to God, Celebrated, Significant, Status...

TRAPPED
Dominion of Darkness

Examples: Unlovable, Condemned, Guilty, Apart from God, Unaccepted, Rejected, Can only do wrong, Failure, Ashamed, Always striving – never reaching, Always trying to please, Stuck, Can't move forward, Nightmares, Angry, Hurt, Worried, Fearful, Uncertain, Not respected, Outcast, Sad...

What determines which circle you will live in from day to day?

CHOICE: Which statements will you "value" most - God's Truth or Satan's lies?

Whenever we find ourselves experiencing life in the Trapped circle, it is simply because we have chosen to believe Satan's lies.

Can you identify any past failures or lies you bought into in the past that are trapping you in the present? Are there any you can share with the group?

When you think about these past hurts, how does it make you feel in the present?

How does something that happened long ago still affect us many years later?

If we choose to still embrace the same lie we bought into many years ago, the same pain will stay with us. That is why many of us are hampered by childhood experiences. We relive the lie every time we think of it. We even carry it around with us in our subconscious when we are not actively thinking about it. The lie continues to trap us unaware, and we continue to live hindered lives.

If we go back to that lie and reject it, fully embracing God's truth, we will become free from the guilt and pain of that lie. We will be free to experience God's forgiveness and acceptance. We will also then be free to stop judging those who have wronged us so that their actions no longer bind us.

No event has a right to rob us of life unless we give it permission.

Sin was a Slave Master. We had to obey him; all we could do was sin.

Romans 6:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin.

Romans 6:11-14 (ESV)

¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

If we have been freed from sin's grasp, why do you think we still choose to submit to it?

1) Sin tells us it is still in control and we must do as it says.

We have listened to sin for so long, and we still buy into it as if we are still its slave. We act as though we are still in bondage despite the fact we are free. It is a matter of choice for us now, through Christ.

2) We enjoy the immediate "blessings" of sin.

We sometimes excuse sin and minimize its severity because we want to embrace it. We know we will always struggle with sin, and we know that we are forgiven, so what's the problem with giving in now and then? After all, I'm already forgiven.

***BUT**, we forget that every sin is an outright rejection of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Sin embraces evil and places us under the rule and influence of Satan's kingdom. We are re-submitting to the slave master, Sin, all over again. If we fully understood the implications of sin we would never return to it. We would never want to reject the rule of Jesus in our lives. Jesus gave his life to set us free from sin; how can we be content to live in sin any longer?*

Romans 6:16-18 (ESV)

¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

What does it mean to become a slave to righteousness?

All we do is what righteousness tells us to do. Obeying sin should no longer be an option for us – we have a new master.

Romans 6:19-23 (ESV)

¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If we are set free from the controls and effects of sin, how can we live differently this week as compared to last week?

You may have areas in your life where you have accepted “that’s just the way I am.” Are there any areas that God is now saying he wants to change in you and set you free?

Have you been relating to others in a sinful way, using the excuse of personality, which needs to change?

What is most exciting about the fact that God is changing you?

SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

SESSION 7: APPLYING THE TRUTH

REVIEW:

Lie: I am not fully loved

Lie: I must do more

Lie: I cannot change

Truth: God Loves you

Truth: The work of measuring up is finished

Truth: God is changing you

Were there any times in this past week when you were tempted to justify your fears or behavior based on the lie, “that’s just who I am”?

Can you spot times through this past week when you gave into the lie that you cannot change and are bound to your failings?

- Did you feel insignificant this week?
- Did you give in to an old sinful habit?
- Is there an addiction you have not been able to break?
- Did you let an insecurity limit your actions this week?
- Did you resist something this week simply because it involved change?
- Did you justify your tone or sarcasm as just part of how you relate?
- Did you feel unlovable this week?
- Did you sinfully react to someone without thinking about your actions?
- Did your emotions control your decisions this week?
- Did you feel like giving up on something this week?
- Did you feel unworthy this week?
- Did you minimize the seriousness of sin this week?

Everyone hates change! Change throws our world into the realm of the unknown and potential chaos. Even when change is good, we resist it because we feel out of control. When we do want to see change, we get frustrated because it takes so long, and we become impatient. As a result, often, our attempts to create change fail, and nothing seems to change within us.

What are some things you have tried to change about yourself in the past but failed in the attempt?

If we can’t change ourselves and God doesn’t force change on us, how do we experience change?

Read through the following verses and discuss what it teaches about the change process.

Hebrews 12:2-4 (ESV)

² ...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

What does it mean to look to Jesus?

To fix your eyes on Jesus means that you keep him in focus in everything you do. As you focus on your relationship with him, he will create change within you. The more we learn of Jesus, the more we will begin to pattern our lives after him instead of the pattern established by our sin nature.

List all the things you can think of that Jesus embraced due to trusting God, which our old pattern would have avoided?

- *Coming to earth and leaving the comforts and praise of heaven*
- *Acting as a servant as opposed to a powerful king*
- *Teaching truth in a way that caused others to reject him*
- *Choosing an itinerate ministry as opposed to waiting for people to come to him*
- *Being rejected by all in authority*
- *Staying quiet while unjustly accused*
- *Suffering death on the cross when he was innocent*

How does Jesus' example create an incentive for change in our lives?

James 4:8 (ESV)

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

What does James mean when he talks about being double-minded?

We are double-minded when we choose to embrace two opposing ideas. As Christ followers, we say we believe what God says about us, life and holiness, yet we still cling to the lies that Satan has thrown our way. The result of believing and living according to a lie is that we have wandered away from Jesus and experience painful consequences.

Because we believe and value the lies, we let them determine our choices, behavior, and reactions. The solution is to turn back to Jesus. When we turn to him, he will turn to us and embrace us, and he will replace those lies with his truth. However, we are still responsible to apply those truths to our lives.

How do we “draw near to God”? Whose court is the ball in, ours or God’s?

James implies that we must take steps to move toward God. Since we are the ones who have stepped away from God, we need to take steps to return to him. God will not force us – he wants us to come willingly, to choose him. This occurs not only when we first accept him as our Lord and Saviour but also during our ensuing relationship with him. To “draw near to God” means to spend time talking with him, praying, conversing with him throughout our day, listening to him through reading the bible and meditating on scripture, obeying him, doing what Jesus did, and listening to promptings from the Spirit.

The next time you feel that God is not changing you (or not changing you fast enough), you might want to consider how near you are drawing to God.

James 1:22-25 (ESV)

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

In what ways might we be guilty of reading the word and then forgetting what we have read?

What are some practical ways we can remember and act on God’s truth as we go through our day?

Ephesians 4:22-24 (ESV)

²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

How can we take off our old self, put on the new self and change the attitude of our mind? Why is our attitude so important?

Ephesians 5:18 (ESV)

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit...

What determines whether the Holy Spirit makes a change in our life or not?

Everything comes down to a matter of choice. Will I surrender my will to the will of the Holy Spirit, or will I stay in control? When the Holy Spirit prompts either through scripture or our conscience, we are responsible to be obedient to that prompting. If we reject the prompting and embrace the same old sinful pattern, we will not change. If we obey the prompting, the Holy Spirit will empower change in our lives.

What are we to do if the sinful pattern is too powerful to resist?**1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)**

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Hebrews 2:18 (ESV)

For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Do you have an example of a time when God helped you overcome a sinful pattern in your life? How did the victory come?**What are some practical suggestions for when you struggle with a deeply embedded pattern?**

When a sinful pattern is deeply established, one critical key to success is accountability. We often avoid accountability due to shame and a fear of others discovering what we are truly like. Still, accountability gives us support, encouragement, and prayer when we struggle to succeed on our own.

God's family is truly the "body of Christ." If Christ wants to come alongside you to help strengthen you, he will do it through his body. You need to be willing to be vulnerable and transparent with those you think could support you.

REVIEW OF THE FREEDOM PROCESS

1) Identify the LIE

How can we identify times we are buying into the lie that we cannot change?

a) When we expect people to adapt to or accept our manner of interaction

These are the times when we say, "That's the way I am. Deal with it."

b) When we continually fall into the same sin

We fall into the same sin either because we do not really want to change or try to change in our own strength, apart from the Holy Spirit and others' help.

c) Frustration of others with us

If numerous people share the same frustration with us, chances are there is some truth to what they are saying. Our fear of inadequacy prevents us from sincerely listening to others, and we get angry and defensive. As a result, people do not feel we are safe to talk with or address concerns.

d) When we have not grown spiritually

When we think we've gone as far as we need to go, we stop moving forward. At these times, we stop growing spiritually as we are resistant to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

2) CONFESS the Lie to God

3) Affirm the BIBLICAL TRUTH

Why is affirming the biblical truth so critical?

4) Correct any UNGODLY ACTIONS

James 4:17 (ESV)

So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

It is strange to think that doing nothing could qualify as an ungodly action. What types of ungodly actions might we need to correct from our past week due to the lie "I cannot change"?

5) LIVE OUT the truth

SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

Have you seen the time lag between when you believed a lie and when you confessed it getting shorter?

Have any of you found freedom with regard to any expressions of the lies?

SESSION 8: TRUTH: YOU ARE SIGNIFICANT

REVIEW:

You've learned so far that:

- You are loved by God
- In Christ, you do not have to measure up
- You are being changed to be like Christ

But, do you have anything meaningful to contribute to this world? Have any of you ever struggled with a sense of “what am I supposed to be doing here?” Have you hit times in your life when you felt you had nothing to offer? How did you feel at those times?

	1	2	3	4
TRUTH	God loves you	The work is finished	God is Changing You	You are significant
LIE	I am not fully loved	I must do more	I cannot change	I have nothing to offer

YOU WERE SIGNIFICANT BEFORE YOU WERE BORN

Jeremiah 1:4-10 (ESV)

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

⁶ Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.”

⁷ But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD.”⁹ Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰ See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

What was the basis of Jeremiah’s significance? What made him special?

Jeremiah was significant to the extent God created him with a unique purpose. He was not significant because of his abilities or even success, but because God “knew him” and chose him to accomplish a specific purpose – even before he was born.

Why did Jeremiah question the role God called him to fulfill?

Jeremiah felt he was too young and inexperienced to stand up against the rest of his culture. He was not confident in his ability to speak to the Israel nation and have them take him seriously.

Do you think God only had a special role for Jeremiah to play, or does everyone have a special role?

What is it that makes anyone significant?

Look at the following passages and discuss the basis for our significance.

Psalm 139:13-14 (NIV)

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

Basis: *We are fearfully and wonderfully made by God.*

What does it mean to be fearfully and wonderfully made?

To be fearfully and wonderfully made means that the way God designed us should evoke in us a sense of awe. Our design is wonderfully complex, and he uniquely made us for his purposes. To declare that we are fearfully made is to say we acknowledge God's perfect workmanship in our lives. We are awesome because he made us awesome – awe-inspiring.

Have everyone say together, out loud, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made!"

Did that create a tension for anyone to say those words? Did anyone actually avoid saying them?

We have an innate fear that we are worthless and without value. Some people have actually burst out crying because they cannot affirm this biblical truth in their life. They have been so conditioned to believe they have no value it is hard to suddenly embrace God's perspective of immense worth.

Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Basis: *We are God's workmanship – created by him for a specific purpose to fulfill.*

Our significance does not come from our actions – but from the one who created us with significance. We are his artwork. Our significance is to his glory.

How does fully understanding we are God’s workmanship impact our view of self?

Why do we struggle to see ourselves as God’s masterpiece?

Why does Paul stress that we are created “in Christ Jesus” for good works? Why not simply leave it as God’s workmanship?

God’s workmanship started in the garden of Eden in all perfection, but then sin distorted the artwork. Through Jesus, we are re-created in his image so that we can be restored to our original purpose and significance. The significance that was distorted in the Fall is now redeemed through the cross.

Acts 13:36 (ESV)

For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers...

Galatians 1:15 (ESV)

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace,

Basis: *God knew the role he created us to play before we were even born*

Do you think God has a specific role for you to play in his kingdom? If so, do you know what it is?

How can you know the purpose God has prepared for you?

1) Start with mankind’s general purpose: *Glorify God in everything we do*

1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV)

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Colossians 3:17 (ESV)

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

How might this have a practical impact on how we approach this coming week?

2) Embrace the church's missional purpose: *Be his witnesses to the world*

Acts 1:8 (ESV)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

What would our lives look like if we focused first and foremost on doing mission with Jesus and worked everything else around that goal?

3) Focus on your spiritual strengths: *Build the body of Christ*

1 Corinthians 12:7-11 (ESV)

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

How do spiritual gifts help us understand our significance?

Spiritual Gifts are simply the by-product of the Holy Spirit coming into our lives and completing the picture of who we were created to be. When sin entered the picture, the Holy Spirit left mankind and, along with that, its authority and power to affect meaningful change. Through the indwelling of the Spirit we are made complete and once again able to have an impact as God originally designed.

Spiritual gifts then are not a random placing of abilities, but a completion of God's design established before the creation of the world, as to how we would specifically and uniquely have an impact for God in this world.

4) Follow the Spirit's leading: *Step out in faith*

Isaiah 30:21 (ESV)

And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

What is the correlation between following the Spirit's leading and living out your significance?

The Holy Spirit is leading you to fulfill the purpose for which you were created. Apart from the Spirit's leading and empowerment, you can never fully discover or live out your calling.

1 Corinthians 12:14-25 (ESV)

¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

We often look at others and become envious of their abilities. As a result, we often diminish the role we play. How have you been tempted to do this?

Which roles do we tend to elevate in the church? Which ones do we tend not to appreciate as much? Why?

What is wrong with this thinking?

Why did God only give you what he did as far as abilities and resources?

God gave you what he knew would bring you complete joy as you partner with him. We might get envious of others' roles, but that is because we do not respect the role we have been called to play. The part we play is unique to who God designed us to be and what he prepared us to accomplish. We will experience fulfillment in what we were created to do, not by carrying out someone else's role.

How might focussing on the wrong things in life diminish our joy?

We are most fulfilled when we are being who God created us to be, doing what God created us to do. When we try to be or do something other than what we were created to do, it becomes wearisome and stressful. When we are living the life God created to live, it breathes life into us and energizes us.

Does that mean we should quit a job we do not enjoy?

Our work does not necessarily define our life focus or our joy. A job may simply be the means to support us as we do what God really called us to do. Sometimes we need to view our job as an opportunity to live out the Christ-life in that sphere of influence. We may be the only light of Christ people in that workplace will ever personally encounter. We want to make sure we represent Christ well.

This does not mean we can't look for other, more rewarding work, but this is a matter of prayer and seeking God's leading.

If you truly understood that you are a deeply significant person with an important role to play in life, how would it change your outlook and perspective this week?

How might it affect how you do your work?**How might it affect how you relate with others?**

We encourage you to live out your significance this week!

AT HOME:

Each day take one of these verses and spend time reflecting on all its implications. Ask God to help you understand the full extent of the significance with which he created you.

Psalm 139:14 (NIV)

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

Colossians 3:17 (ESV)

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Isaiah 30:21 (ESV)

And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

Joshua 1:9 (ESV)

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Isaiah 41:10 (ESV)

...fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Memorize one verse over the next week that encourages you.

Start each day this week affirming that you are significant and have a significant role to play on God's behalf.

SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

SESSION 11: LIE: I HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER

REVIEW:

Truth: God LOVES you despite what you think of yourself.

Truth: In Christ, you already meet all of God's EXPECTATIONS.

Truth: God CHANGES you to be like him.

Truth: You are SIGNIFICANT to God

What are some ways you have applied these truths in the past week?

Which truths are you struggling to apply the most and why?

What steps have you taken to embed these truths in your lives?

MOSES' CRISES OF SIGNIFICANCE

Moses left Egypt as a failure at age 40.

In an attempt to stand up for his people, Moses murdered an Egyptian and had to flee for his life in fear and shame.

Moses is 80 years old at this point in the story.

Moses has now lived in the wilderness for forty years, tending sheep.

He has had 40 years of embedding the lies about his worth and significance when God intervenes in his life and calls him to a task.

Exodus 3:7-10 (ESV)

⁷ Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

If God told you to:

- 1) go into hostile territory, confront the world's current, most powerful king, and demand that he let all his forced slave labor leave
- 2) then to lead approximately one million people through a wilderness to occupy another hostile territory

How would you respond?

MOSES' THREE EXCUSES**EXCUSE 1*****Exodus 3:11 (ESV)***

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

Excuse: *I am insignificant*

What lies was Moses embracing that would have prevented him from accomplishing significant things for God?

- *I'm a "nobody"*
- *I have nothing to offer*
- *I'm a failure*
- *Success is dependent on my ability to perform, etc.*

Exodus 3:12 (ESV)

He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

God's Response: *I will be with you*

Why was God's response so significant?

It is not who we are but who God is that ultimately matters. It is God who makes us successful, not our natural ability. Our success is already determined; we just need to do as God instructs.

EXCUSE 2

Exodus 4:1 (ESV)

Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'"

Excuse: *I will not be respected*

What lies was Moses embracing?

- *I do not have the leadership skills required*
- *My past failures determine my future success*
- *No one will respect or listen to me*
- *My worth is tied to the opinion of others*
- *I will never amount to anything*
- *I am trapped in a low self-image*
- *I have no influence*

Exodus 4:6-9 (ESV)

⁶ Again, the LORD said to him, "Put your hand inside your cloak." And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. ⁷ Then God said, "Put your hand back inside your cloak." So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. ⁸ "If they will not believe you," God said, "or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign." ⁹ "If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

God's Response: *"I" will be successful*

How does this passage give us comfort when God calls us to step out in faith?

We are to be faithful; God will take care of the results. He will bless us in everything he calls us to do.

EXCUSE 3

Exodus 4:10 (ESV)

But Moses said to the LORD, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue."

Excuse: *I don't have the ability*

What lies was Moses embracing?

- *Everything rests on “my” ability to perform*
- *I do not have the ability to do what God is calling me to do*
- *I must meet certain standards to feel good about myself*
- *I cannot represent God well*

Exodus 4:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?” ¹² Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.”

God’s Response: *I will give you everything you need to be successful*

Why is God’s response so convicting?

If God calls us to a task, he will give us everything we need to accomplish that task. Success is dependent on God’s ability, not ours. For every challenge we face, God has already provided a way around it or through it.

God told Moses his name is “I AM,” This indicated that God would be everything the Israelites needed him to be in every situation. There would be no challenge too great for I AM. There would be no enemy too strong, no need too great. This was very important to understand if they were to trust God to lead them through the wilderness to a place unknown.

Exodus 4:13 (ESV)

But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.”

Have you ever experienced fear when convicted by God to do something? Share your experience.

Has past failure ever prevented you from serving God in later years?

Has the condemnation of others ever prevented you from doing something you thought you should do?

If you truly believe you are significant in God’s eyes, how might that affect what you do and don’t do?

In the end, Moses chose to obey God despite his feelings of inadequacy. God can be very convincing!

What role should feelings play with regard to our actions?

Feelings should never be the determiner of our actions. Our feelings are often based on lies and, as a result, can lead us astray. We need to make decisions based on truth and trust that the feelings will follow behind at their own pace. The more we experientially trust the truth, the more our feelings will come in line with our convictions.

The biggest emotional barrier we face is FEAR.

Why is fear so counter to the purposes and love of God?

What are some examples of ways fear has prevented you from representing Christ this past month?

What can you do to start to counter this lie of insignificance in your life?

Why was God so determined that Moses be the one to go to Egypt to deliver his people?

- *God had prepared Moses through his whole life for the calling he was now giving him.*
- *God loved Moses and wanted him to understand that despite his past failures, he was significant.*
- *God was not so interested in what Moses did, as much as the relationship he knew it would develop between him and Moses.*

What experiences did God give Moses through life that prepared him to lead the people to the Promised Land?

- 1) *Moses was born an Israelite, which would be necessary to be accepted as a leader of the Israelite people.*
- 2) *Moses was raised in Pharaoh's court, which gave him an intrinsic understanding of the palace's workings and the mindset of the Egyptian rulers.*
- 3) *Moses worked in the wilderness for forty years, learning skills needed to care for the sheep and survive in a desolate land. These skills would prove essential as he led the Israelites through the wilderness for another forty years.*

Have you been frustrated by experiences in your past only to discover they more effectively prepared you for success in the future?

In what ways has your relationship with God grown when you've stepped out in faith?

How would the church be different if everyone was free from the lie of insignificance and understood they had an important role to play?

SESSION 8: APPLYING THE TRUTH

REVIEW:

Lie: I am not fully loved

Truth: God Loves you

Lie: I must do more

Truth: The work of measuring up is finished

Lie: I cannot change

Truth: God is changing you

Lie: I have nothing to offer

Truth: You are significant to God

Can you spot times through this past week when you gave into the lie that you are not significant?

- Did you give in to peer pressure this week?
- Did you fear the disapproval of others? Did it influence your actions in a negative way?
- Did you lack confidence and boldness at any time this week?
- Did you hold back from sharing Jesus with someone this week when an opportunity arose?
- Did you feel you could not be effective in connecting someone to God?
- Did you NOT use your gifts, abilities, resources for God's kingdom this week?
- Did you look down on yourself and your abilities?
- Did you lack confidence at any time to exercise God's authority?
- Did fear keep you from stepping out in faith?
- Did you hide your faith from others this week?
- Did you feel uncomfortable expressing God's perspective on a controversial topic this week?
- Did you put a lampshade over your light this week?
- Did you feel insignificant?
- Do you feel there would be no significant loss if you were gone?
- Do you feel others are more important and necessary than yourself?
- Do others who see you daily not know about your faith?
- Does your life lack purpose?
- Is your faith a private faith?

Is it difficult to see the lie in any of the above scenarios? If so, which ones?

THE NEED FOR VISION VS. OBLIGATION

Sometimes we still buy into the lie that we need to “do” things to please God. God does not invite us to do things; he invites us to “partner with him” as he changes the world.

What is the difference between doing something because you “should” versus doing something because you have a vision for what could be?

OBLIGATION

VISION

Responsibility	-----	<u>Privilege</u>
Sense of duty	-----	<u>Sense of excitement</u>
Bare minimum	-----	<u>Go the extra mile</u>
Little investment	-----	<u>Life investment</u>
Indifference	-----	<u>Passion</u>
Onerous	-----	<u>Life-breathing</u>
Guilt	-----	<u>Freedom</u>

When God invites you to represent him to this world, do you tend to view it as an obligation to fulfill or as an opportunity to partner with him?

God has general ways we are all to represent him, but he has also designed each of us to have a unique contribution in his kingdom.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (ESV)

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

What are the manifestations of the Spirit?

Manifestations of the Spirit are abilities the Holy Spirit empowers in our life the moment we accept the Spirit of Christ to rule in our lives. His presence in our lives completes the picture of who he created us to be with our unique contribution. These manifestations enable us to be effective in some area of kingdom work that results in either strengthening or expanding the church.

Are you able to discern where you are uniquely, spiritually effective in strengthening the kingdom of God?

Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

What good works do you think God may have prepared you specifically to do?

What changes do you feel you need to start making to represent God the way you were designed to?

Satan will attempt to hinder your Representational Effectiveness

Zechariah 3:1-5 (ESV)

¹ Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. ² And the LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?” ³ Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. ⁴ And the angel said to those who were standing before him, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” And to him he said, “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.” ⁵ And I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by.

Does anyone know what the name “Satan” means?

The name Satan means accuser or adversary.

As High Priest, Joshua was representative of the people of God. What do you think would have been Satan’s accusation against Joshua?

Satan would have accused Joshua of his sinfulness and unworthiness to represent God as a high priest. Satan’s strategy is to continually blame us for our faults and failings before God. He keeps raising the performance issue to condemn us.

How did God rescue Joshua from any accusation?

He rebuked Satan and declared Joshua rescued from the consequences of his sinfulness. He removed Joshua’s old filthy clothes and dressed him in new, clean ones.

What was the significance of changing Joshua’s clothes?

Joshua’s dirty clothes represented his sinfulness before God. The new, clean clothes represented the righteousness of God that was now placed on him. He originally had a basis for being accused by Satan, but because he was cleansed and his sin removed, there was no longer a basis for the charge against him.

The new clothes were priestly garments indicating God appointed him to represent him. Joshua was now clean, without guilt, and fully qualified to represent God. This was not by his own righteousness but because of God's righteousness placed on him.

1 John 2:1 (ESV)

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Satan no longer has any basis to accuse us before God and disqualify us of our representative role. Do you sometimes feel unworthy or inadequate to represent God?

What would Jesus want to say to you regarding this point?

- *He died to cleanse you and declare you worthy*
- *He died to qualify you for ministry*
- *He has specifically commanded you to represent him to the world*
- *He has a wonderful role for your life*
- *He wants you to believe his truth and act on it, as opposed to Satan's accusations against you*

Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

How can you personally play a role of going into all the world and making disciples?

If a church started with only one member but invited one person a year, and each subsequent person invited one person every year, how large would the church be in twenty years? Any guesses?

Year 1	2	Year 6	64	Year 11	2,048	Year 16	65,536
Year 2	4	Year 7	128	Year 12	4,096	Year 17	131,072
Year 3	8	Year 8	256	Year 13	8,192	Year 18	262,144
Year 4	16	Year 9	512	Year 14	16,384	Year 19	524,288
Year 5	32	Year 10	1,024	Year 15	32,768	Year 20	1,048,576

If everyone in our present church simply invited one person per year, how large would the church be in three years?

How doable do you think it is to invite one person over the course of a year if you were to make this a strategic goal?

What is preventing us from doing this?

What potential lies could we buy into in the process of inviting someone to church?

- *I need to invite someone to measure up to the church's expectation?*
- *I need to do this to measure up to my idea of what a good Christian "should" do?*
- *I need to do this so God will be happy with me and accept me?*
- *I need to do this to make our church more successful.*
- *I need to do this to prove my spirituality.*

What is a proper motivation for introducing people to God?

Who could you invite to church or engage in a spiritual conversation this week?

SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

SESSION 8: THE BIG PICTURE

REVIEW:

Truth 1: In Christ, You are LOVED.

Truth 2: In Christ, the work of measuring up is FINISHED.

Truth 3: In Christ, You are CHANGED and are being CHANGED.

Truth 4: In Christ, You are SIGNIFICANT.

	1	2	3	4
TRUTH	God loves you	The work is finished	God is Changing You	You are significant
LIE	I am not fully loved	I must do more	I cannot change	I have nothing to offer

One of the challenges is not to believe a lie, while trying to defeat the lies. At any time did you find yourself feeling you had to live up to the “expectation” of not believing the lies?

Can you share times when you felt like a failure, that you weren’t doing a good enough job conquering the lies, or that you would never be able to beat the lie?

If we don’t need to defeat the lies to be a “better” Christian if we are already loved and accepted by Jesus, why bother tackling the lies at all?

Discuss the benefits of not believing the lies, according to the verses below.

John 8:31-32 (ESV)

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,

³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

1) Freedom

Each lie traps us in sin and removes joy from our lives. We end up being controlled by the opinions of others and find that we are on a never-ending treadmill of performance. Lies are exhausting and completely unnecessary. God did not create us to live this way; he has planned a much better life for us than the one we choose to embrace when we believe the lies.

The amazing thing is, all it takes to be free is to believe what God tells us rather than what the world or Satan tells us. It is simply a perspective shift.

Romans 8:15 (ESV)

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

2) Relationship

When we embrace a lie, we are not just rejecting God’s truth; we are rejecting God himself. That is never good for the relationship. We are still accepted and loved, but we miss out on the joy of deeper intimacy with God simply because we choose not to trust him.

When we embrace his truth and become free of the trap of the lies, we grow deeper in the joy of our relationship with Jesus. We discover a new freshness to life and a more exciting walk with Christ.

**Defeating the lies isn’t about living up to expectations,
it is about enjoying God and life!**

These lies came into existence when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and embraced sin in their lives. The resulting break in their relationship with God left two deep voids in their soul. The curse that was pronounced on them reveals the nature of these voids and how they impact us specifically as male and female.

Discuss the nature of the curse for both Adam and Eve.

EVE**Genesis 3:16 (ESV)**

To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

What was the focus of Eve’s curse?

Eve’s curse was focused on her relationships. Eve would experience pain in the birth process, sorrow in the process of raising children, and sorrow in her relationship with her husband.

Why do you think Eve experienced this specific impact as a result of God’s Spirit leaving her life?

When Adam was first created, he discovered there was a relational void in creation. Eve was the answer to that void. She was specifically created to image the love and compassion of God in this world. Creation was incomplete until this great capacity of love and relationship was introduced through Eve.

When she broke relationship with God, she experienced loss in the very area she was created to experience life to the fullest: relationship. This was most painfully experienced when her husband, Adam, accused her of being to blame for the apple being eaten. At this time, Adam, to protect himself, not only tried to pass the blame to his wife but with it, the penalty of death. Eve was now abandoned by her husband to die in an attempt to save his own life.

What God-sized void would Eve have experienced in her life as a result?

LOVE: *Eve's relationships would never be what she longed them to be. She would always feel relationally unsafe.*

How do you think this void might have affected Eve as she went through life?

Eve would long for an intimate relationship but never fully experience it. As a result, she would strive for relationship, but at the same time, she would put up defenses to protect herself from possible future rejection.

What are some of the types of defenses we put up to protect ourselves from relational hurt and rejection?

- *We wear masks so people cannot reject the “real” us*
- *We withdraw from people*
- *We play the role of comedian*
- *We are critical of other people*
- *We control or manipulate relationships*
- *We do whatever it takes to please people*
- *We strive to perform, hoping people will value us*

ADAM

Genesis 3:17-19 (ESV)

¹⁷ And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

What was the focus of Adam's curse?

The consequence of Adam's sin affected his relationship with creation. Adam would now have to work hard against creation simply to survive. Creation would no longer bend to his will but would work in opposition to him. The result would be that he would ultimately fail and die. Death would be the ultimate significant threat that hangs over everyone.

Why do you think Adam experienced this specific impact as a result of God's Spirit leaving his life?

Genesis 2:15 (ESV)

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Before Eve was even created, God gave Adam the mandate to care for creation. Adam was specifically designed and equipped for this task. It was his God-given responsibility. Jesus said that, with faith, one could move mountains or plant trees in the ocean. Adam would have had perfect faith and, as a result, could have lovingly ruled over all creation. It was also that very work that would have given Adam a sense of fulfillment and joy as he modeled the earth after God's example of the garden.

When Adam broke his relationship with God, he experienced loss in the very area he was designed to find fulfillment: caring for creation. He lost his capacity to rule and now would struggle just to survive.

What God-sized void would Adam have experienced in his life as a result?

RESPECT: *Adam would have constantly struggled with his inadequacy, not simply to rule creation but to survive. His sense of significance and accomplishment would have been deeply diminished.*

How do you think this void might have affected Adam as he went through life?

Adam would constantly strive to prove himself competent and capable. He would yearn for the respect that was once given him by all creation but never find it. Fear of failure and not being respected would influence everything he did to regain his lost status.

What are some of the types of defenses we put up to protect ourselves from inadequacy?

- *We avoid areas of potential failure and exposed inadequacy*
- *We let others assume the risk of responsibility*
- *We strive hard to prove ourselves competent and worthy of respect*
- *We strike back at anyone who challenges our respect*
- *We criticize others for their failures, feeling better about our abilities*
- *We become competitive*

Our deep needs can be summed up in two words:

- 1) LOVE
- 2) RESPECT

How might striving to meet these needs cause harm to our relationships with others?

How might meeting these needs in others strengthen our relationships?

Ephesians 5:33 (ESV)

However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

How does the Apostle Paul's advice to married couples counter the effects of the fall?

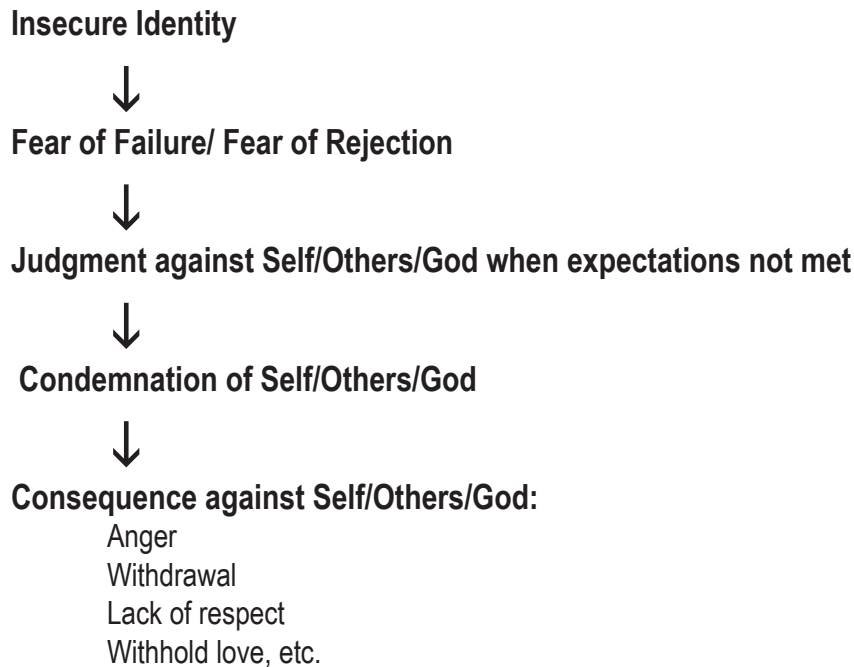
Paul's directive calls each spouse to stop focusing on their own needs and allow God to work through them to fill the void in their spouse. We can only truly do this if we surrender our lives to Christ and trust him to meet our personal needs. When we trust our needs to Christ, then we are free to meet the needs of others. If both spouses are focused primarily on how they can, through Christ, meet one another's emotional needs, then the voids created at the fall will be filled.

Paul's advice of showing love and respect does not just apply to married people; it applies to every relationship. How might Christ work through you, in practical ways, to meet the relational needs of those around?

In what ways might you build up men and women differently?

Our sin nature does not want to allow us to focus on others. Until we deal with our identity in Christ, we will always be manipulated by our insecurities. Follow the flow.

THE FLOW:



Why is simply trying to deal with the reactions at the bottom of the flow, ineffective for life change?

We can not truly change our behavior until we change what is driving that behavior. Someone might learn to “manage” their anger, but the very term “anger management” implies there is still an un-dealt-with source for that anger that will always find some way to negatively express itself.

Just because I change my behavior does not mean I am not still judging and condemning others, living in fear, and devaluing myself and others.

What is the ultimate solution that will set us free?

If we truly want to be free, we need to root out the lies about who we are and understand our identity in Christ. When God’s truth takes hold in our life, we are free to be who he created us to be with a full sense of worth, love, and purpose. We will not need to strive after these things because we will know who we are in the same way Jesus knew who he was.

Will we ever be completely free?

Revelation 21:1-4 (ESV)

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Revelation 22:3-5 (ESV)

³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

What excites you most about eternity with God?

What about this series did you find the most challenging?

What about this series did you find the most helpful?

The lies will take years to dismantle, but the more you embrace God's truth, the more freedom and joy you will experience. **Continue to persevere** in identifying the lies in your life and allow God to use whatever circumstances he may choose to expose them. Having lies exposed is always painful, but once rooted out, your emotional/spiritual healing will begin.

SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

SESSION 9: MINISTRY PARTNERSHIP

How many churches do you think exist in the world at present?

Trick question: Only ONE

The church is the entire people of God, the body of Christ; God's flock; his holy temple. There is only one true church, the church that Christ is building. There are not many churches, only many expressions of Christ's one church in various places.

Matthew 16:18 (ESV)

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.

Ephesians 4:4-6 (ESV)

⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

How might this understanding affect how we view and appreciate the role of each “local expression” of the church?

Romans 12:4-6 (ESV)

⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;

In the same way as individuals serve different roles in a local church, churches themselves have different strengths which impact the world in different ways. Because we have a variety of churches, we have a variety of ways of impacting this world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What are some ways various churches have unique strengths and impact?

(Either local churches in your area or denominations as a whole.)

Possible strengths of different churches:

- *Evangelism*
- *Ministry to the poor*
- *Prayer for the city*
- *Children's program*
- *Youth Program*
- *Single moms*
- *Men's ministry*

Examples of Denominational Strengths:

- *Salvation Army and Mennonite Brethren: Social justice*
- *Pentecostal: Emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit*
- *Presbyterian: Reformed theology*
- *Baptist: Evangelism & Missions*

Obviously, these are broad generalities and are not always accurate. There are many more denominations not listed here that also have strengths in these and other areas. This is merely a list to provoke thinking.

What do you think is the unique contribution your church offers?

How does one become a member of THE church?

Ephesians 1:13 (ESV)

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit...

1 Corinthians 12:13 (ESV)

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

One becomes a member of the church through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from one's works.

Baptism in this verse is referring to our immersion in Christ. It is not talking so much about "water" baptism, but more so what water baptism represents. When baptism is mentioned in most places in the New Testament, it refers to the spiritual reality of dying to self, being immersed in Christ, and rising to new life. Water baptism is simply an external picture of the true baptism we have already undergone in Christ.

The emphasis of 1 Corinthians 12:13 is that we are baptized into ONE BODY.

So regardless of our theology, traditions, or practices, if anyone has placed faith in Jesus Christ (apart from their works) and the Holy Spirit dwells within them, they are a part of the one church of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:23 (ESV)

For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

Colossians 1:18 (ESV)

And he [Christ] is the head of the body, the church.

1 Peter 2:25 (ESV)

For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

What does it mean to say Christ is the head of the church?

Note: Some will argue that the word translated “head” actually means “source,” implying Jesus is the source of the church. However, biblically speaking, whatever is the source of something also has a responsibility for what flows from it. In other words, Jesus, whether the head or the source, still holds responsibility for the church.

If there is only one church, and anyone who places faith in Jesus is a member of that one church, why do local churches have membership in addition to this?

Is there any biblical model of church membership apart from the larger corporate body of Christ?

Not really! If anyone was a baptized believer in the local churches, they were considered a member of “the” church. There was no biblical distinction between a believer who was a “member” and a believer who was “not a member.”

Every believer:

- was considered under the authority and care of the church leadership
- had gifts they were to use
- gathered to pray for the Spirit’s leading for the corporate church

There was no special class or privilege called the local “member.”

Churches today often utilize membership for a variety of reasons, none of which are wrong in and of themselves. The church structure was rapidly evolving within the New Testament as the church grew in size and complexity. Therefore, there is no one model we are told to embrace. We merely see what the church did at each stage of its development. Churches are free to determine what structure they deem best for caring for and discipling people.

In many countries, charitable organizations are required to have a membership. Scripture tells us to respect and obey our country's laws, and the idea of membership has some advantages.

Instead of the term “membership,” we recommend the concept of Ministry Partnership. What might be the differences between these two concepts?

Membership: *In North American culture, membership is more often about perks and privileges than it is about responsibility. You can be a member of a store, a gym or club, and benefit from all they have to offer, yet have no personal responsibility for that organization whatsoever.*

Ministry Partnership: *Partnership implies that we are a team of people joining together for a common goal. We have all embraced the same mission and are committed to seeing it fulfilled.*

What might be some of the advantages of a local church having a membership or partnership?

- *Just because someone attends or even serves in a church does not mean they are committed to fulfilling that church's specific mission. Membership/partnership helps determine who truly embraces the mission.*
- *It is beneficial to give people the opportunity to express that they are committed to their local church family.*
- *When one embraces membership/partnership, it communicates to the others they are now a part of the team.*
- *It helps determine who should be in leadership and teaching positions. Though membership/partnership, in and of itself, does not qualify someone for these positions, it does help filter the possibilities.*
- *In congregational church structures, it helps filter which has authority to vote on major church decisions.*
- *It calls people to higher levels of responsibility.*

What do you think should be the conditions for someone to be a member/partner of a local church?

Church membership/partnership causes a person to reflect on their commitment to the mission of Jesus Christ. Below is a list of the things that a person declares as they become a member/partner. Discuss how publicly affirming each point might help a person grow in their walk with Christ and effectiveness for the kingdom.

Membership/Partnership declares:

1) I am a *Follower of Jesus Christ*

This declaration is made through baptism and is simply recognized in membership/partnership.

2) I am *Committed to Growing*

Jesus commanded us to learn to obey everything he taught us.

Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

We encourage churches to make small group discipleship as a condition of church membership/partnership.

You are never too old or too spiritually mature to continue growing as a disciple.

3) I catch *the Vision of my local church*

Every church has its unique role to play. God has called us to fulfill a very specific mission within his kingdom, and it's not better or worse than any other church's calling; it's just different.

Membership/Partnership declares that you catch the mission your church is here to fulfill. It excites you, energizes you, and makes you say, “This is worth living for!”

Do you know what your church is trying to uniquely accomplish?

4) I am *Responsible*

As a member/partner, I am saying that I understand that I am the church. It is up to me to help make the church become what we desire it to be.

Standing on the sidelines watching everyone else work is not an option for those who catch Christ's vision to change lives.

We also understand that people at various life stages have different amounts of time and energy that they can commit (pregnancy, young children, illness, etc.). But a person with a mission-oriented heart is still looking forward to the day when they can be available to play a more significant role once again.

In what ways do you see yourself responsible for the church?

5) I am a *Servant*

John 13:14 (ESV)

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

A church member/partner is first and foremost a servant of others. It is exciting when people adopt a "whatever-it-takes" mentality to serve and build up others in the kingdom of God. Members/Partners seek out ways to serve!

Each person has been equipped in unique ways to advance God's kingdom.

We encourage each believer to be able to identify:

- a) Their area of *Ministry Passion*
- b) Their primary *Spiritual Ability*

If you cannot identify your passion and gifting, we encourage you to ask God to reveal these to you.

(Church programs to help people discern their passion and gifts do exist, such as NEWTWORK or SHAPE. We do not include this training in this discipleship curriculum because we feel this process needs to be offered by churches much more frequently and sooner than a discipleship curriculum would allow. Often people need to go through gift/passion discovery more than once.)

6) I am a Missionary

The Great Commission is your Mission.

Membership/Partnership declares that we have a passion for people to know Jesus Christ and will do whatever we can to help connect others to Christ. God has placed us in our specific families, jobs, schools, and neighborhoods so that we could be Salt, Ambassador, Image, and Light for him. Membership/Partnership takes this calling very seriously.

There is only one thing we will have to show Christ when we stand before him on that great day – the lives of other people who have entered his kingdom through our faithfulness; everything else pales in comparison.

Membership/Partnership says, “I care about people’s eternal destiny!”

Have you identified your mission field?

People could just as easily and rightly support another church in its unique way of carrying out its mission, but Membership/Partnership claims that God has called them to this specific church, for this season, to promote his work here.

Some churches have people sign a membership/partnership agreement as part of becoming a member. What might be some benefits to this process as opposed to just verbally agreeing to be a member/partner?

1) Words are too easily spoken. Jesus understood this when he commanded us to be baptized as a declaration of our faith instead of simply verbally announcing our identification. When we add a symbolic act to our commitment, it strikes it home to both the community around us and us in more ways than mere words can accomplish. It is similar to the wedding band or signing the marriage license at the wedding ceremony.

2) It clearly communicates to the community that you are committing to being fully with them in their vision and mission. It declares that you, too, will step alongside the team to do your part to help this little corner of God’s kingdom grow. It is now your church!

Whatever process a church uses, it is good to have some symbolic act to strike home the significance of what one is doing when they commit to being part of the team.

In a city with many churches, membership/partnership invites you to embrace your church’s specific ministry goals and become a servant in helping the church move forward in its vision direction.

Membership/Partnership is NOT about privilege or benefit, but about SERVING.

MINISTRY PARTNERSHIP

SESSION 9: PARTNER COMMITMENT

In the following document, we will refer to the concept of Ministry Partnership. You may prefer to substitute the words Church Membership instead.

We desire to be the type of community God intended us to be. The Ministry Partner Commitment below highlights some specific commitments we believe characterize the basic Christian life and responsibility to the local church. Each statement flows directly from scripture. It is important that anyone involved in any significant ministry or who influences the decision-making process is striving to align themselves with these principles.

TEACHER NOTE: *Below is a sample Ministry Partner Commitment. We recommend using your own church's documents regarding church membership and walk through those INSTEAD of using what we have provided. If you do not have such a document, then discuss the points raised below as a means to call people to a higher level of church commitment. Churches are welcome to adopt all, or portions, of the following commitment if they so desire.*

MINISTRY PARTNER COMMITMENT

Ministry Partnership implies that we are committed to seeing the kingdom of God grow through (*your church name*). It means that the church is not something we attend but something we are, and as such, we assume responsibility for helping it achieve its purpose and vision. We are all at different stages in our spiritual growth and, as a result, need to show each other great amounts of grace as we learn to bear with each other and our failings. This Ministry Partner Commitment represents my desire to continue growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ and see the community of (*your church name*) mature and fulfill its purpose.

- Jesus Christ is Lord of my life, and I have declared this through baptism.
- I am actively attending a discipleship small group.

I accept and affirm the church's:

- Statement of Faith
- Vision for this coming year

Do you agree with these prerequisites for church partnership? Why? Would you add or subtract anything?

I commit to:

Pursuing the Christ-like life wholeheartedly through:

1) Spending time regularly in God's word and prayer

Joshua 1:7-8 (ESV)

⁷ Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. ⁸ This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Why is this commitment statement important?

If someone is not in God's word, they will not grow in knowledge, wisdom, or understanding. God primarily speaks to us through his word, and if we are not in it regularly, then we have cut ourselves off from whatever God may want to say to us. To live lives too busy for reading God's word is to have wandered off in our own spiritual direction, in our own limited wisdom, unaware of God's purposes for our lives.

If someone is not in regular conversation with God, they are not growing in their relationship with God. They will not grow in maturity and will lack spiritual vibrancy. If there is little prayer, there will also be little guidance and life impact. They will be limited to their own abilities, accomplishing very little for the kingdom of God. Kingdom growth requires much prayer.

What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?

2) Surrendering my life daily to the control of the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 5:18 (ESV)

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit...

Romans 8:5 (ESV)

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

Why is this commitment statement important?

The Spirit-filled life is the “normal” Christian life. When the Holy Spirit is not in control, we become busy building our own little kingdoms and approaching life in our own strength. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us proper life perspective and the presence of the fruit of the Spirit. No Holy Spirit – no divine expressions of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Without the Spirit’s lead in our lives, we will inevitably wander into life patterns that rob us of peace and joy.

What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?

3) Living in obedience to the word of God

James 1:22 (ESV)

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Why is this commitment statement important?

It is one thing to read the Bible; it is another to live it out. That will always be a challenge. We want to know that ministry partners are committed to the Bible as being authoritative in how they are to live. Our goal is that everything in our lives aligns itself with the perspective of God as laid out in scripture.

What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?

4) Worshipping corporately, faithfully, and regularly

Hebrews 10:25 (ESV)

...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Why is this commitment statement important?

Church is community; church is family. We don’t just “go” to church; we “are” the church as we gather together. When we meet, the focus should be on worshipping God and building up others, as opposed to self-gratification. Come to church for the opportunity to serve others, and in the process, you will be blessed.

Community is only built through consistency. The less consistent someone is, the less they feel a part of things and the less impact they can have on relationships and people's lives. Authentic community looks for and seizes opportunities to meet.

What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?

Helping the church fulfill its mission by:

1) Praying for the church, its ministries, its ministry partners, and its leadership

Ephesians 6:18 (ESV)

...praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...

Why is this commitment statement important?

Ministries will only be as effective as the amount of prayer we put into them. Without prayer, ministries will lack the power and impact of God.

Ministry is hard. People are not always encouraging, and Satan strategizes ways of trying to render us ineffective. We need prayer! It is essential that the leadership be bathed in prayer, for if they go astray, the whole local church is in trouble.

What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?

2) Developing and using my abilities, talents, spiritual gifts, and resources within the church or its extension ministries

1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Deuteronomy 16:17 (ESV)

Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God that he has given you.

Why is this commitment statement important?

God has given every believer special effectiveness in some area of strengthening the body of Christ. God expects us to use whatever resources he has given us for his purposes. This statement acknowledges that we are to be actively serving in the church in the areas of our strengths and abilities.

What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?

If anyone holds back their area of unique contribution, the entire church becomes hindered and less effective. The church was designed in such a way that we “need” each other in order to mature and become like Christ.

3) Sharing with others about God’s purpose for their lives

Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Why is this commitment statement important?

The mission of the church is to connect people to God. This isn’t something the “institution” of the church does; this is something every believer does. God called people to make disciples, not programs. When everyone in the church understands that God has placed them in unique environments where they can connect with others, then the church will truly begin to grow.

The goal here is that people will understand who God is and that God wants a relationship with them. Once they discover God, they can then begin to see the wonderful purposes he has laid out for them. This is where true life-change and freedom begin.

What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?

Protecting the unity of the church by:

1) Refusing to gossip and disrupt the unity of the church

2 Corinthians 12:20 (ESV)

For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.

Why is this commitment statement important?

Gossip destroys relationships and unity. We need to make a commitment to try and guard this area of our lives.

What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?

2) Resolving tensions quickly by lovingly applying Matthew 18:15-17 and Galatians 6:1**Matthew 5:23-24 (ESV)**

²³ *So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,* ²⁴ *leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

Galatians 6:1 (ESV)

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

Why is this commitment statement important?

Tensions will always occur when you bring a bunch of diverse people together. The concern isn't the tensions; the concern is how we resolve the tensions when they arise. Jesus calls us to be proactive in bringing about reconciliation. He went to the cross to resolve all of the tensions that we created. How far will you go?

What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?

3) Being patient with and encouraging others within the body**Ephesians 4:2-3 (ESV)**

² *with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,* ³ *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Colossians 3:12-14 (ESV)

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Why is this commitment statement important?

The key to church unity is GRACE. Grace can be defined as “undeserved favour”, but it essentially means you show love even when it has not been earned or deserved. God's love can never be earned. This is why we are called to love even our enemies.

Even with this Ministry Partner Commitment, there will be times when everyone fails certain parts at different times. We need to show great amounts of grace with one another when we fail. As long as there is repentance and a desire to work things out, there is always the possibility of restoration.

What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?

Submitting to the church leadership with regard to:

Spiritual and moral matters
Church vision and direction
Church discipline

Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Why is this commitment statement important?

Church leadership is not an easy task. There are so many people with so many different perspectives, preferences, and degrees of spiritual maturity. Sometimes leadership is called on to do the hard things, make difficult decisions, and bring in church discipline whenever it is required.

Church leaders need to rely heavily on the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit, and this is why prayer for them is so critical. They are responsible to God for how they teach and lead and will one day stand before him accountable for all they have done.

God calls the rest of the church to listen to the spiritual direction they give and to place themselves under that authority. This does not imply church leaders are always right, nor should members submit in areas that are in clear disagreement with the word of God.

Ultimately, Jesus is the head of the church. Church leadership is responsible for carrying out Jesus' will for the church.

What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?

Are there any areas of this Ministry Partner Commitment that create tension for you?

A team of people committed to seeing the local church accomplish its mission is an incredibly exciting thing. Nothing on earth can hold it back.

**We encourage you to take seriously the purpose
of the church in this world and to realize
YOU ARE THE CHURCH!**