



**STRATEGIC
DISCIPLESHIP**



PHASE 3

TEACHER MANUAL

by Robert Laidlaw

StrategicDiscipleship.com

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SESSION 1: THE MISSION

When you think of the Old Testament, do you typically think about it as having an evangelistic focus? Why or why not?

What do you think was God's intent or strategy in the Old Testament with regard to mission?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Since the fall of man, society continued to grow, not only in size but also in unrestrained sinfulness. This sinful mindset was represented through characters such as Lamech.

Genesis 4:23-24 (ESV)

²³ Lamech said to his wives: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. ²⁴ If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold."

Civilization had become so wicked God chose to destroy it with the flood to provide any hope for mankind's survival. However, after the flood, man's sinful nature continued to drive him away from God and live contrary to the creation mandate given to Adam and Eve.

By Genesis 10 there are 70 nations or people groups in existence on the earth. All present-day nations stem from these seventy nations.

Genesis 10:32 (ESV)

These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.

THE TOWER OF BABEL

Genesis 11:1-9 (ESV)

¹ Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." ⁵ And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing

that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." ⁸ So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

What was so evil about what these people were doing that God had to come down, change their language and disperse the people?

The goal of this early civilization was to build a city with a great tower so that they might make a name for themselves and not spread through the whole world. There were numerous problems with their plan.

1. ***The tower would reach to the heavens.*** *This does not literally mean they thought they could reach heaven, but most likely, it would be a high place of worship to the starry host. As such, it was a rejection of God's rule and the embracing of false religion.*
2. ***The tower would be made with clay and tar,*** *causing some to theorize that this waterproof construction might be designed to protect them from future flooding and judgment. This is despite the fact that God promised that he would not destroy the earth by flooding a second time.*
3. ***They desired to make a name for themselves.*** *They were more focused on being great in the eyes of man than they were on the greatness of God. Success would be "their" achievement with no glory attributed back to God. It was all about control of their destiny, their future, and their glory. It was the ultimate expression of humanism.*
4. ***They planned not to fill the whole earth*** *but to stay as one great community. On the surface, this might not sound too negative until we remember the creation mandate was to fill the earth and subdue it. God desired mankind to spread out over the whole earth so that his image would represent his rule over all creation. This civilization was not interested in God's mandate nor desired in any way to represent God's rule. They were creating their own kingdom with their own rule.*

THE CALL OF ABRAM

Genesis 12:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Summarize the ways in which God promised to bless Abram?

- *I will make you into a great nation*
- *I will make your name great*
- *All peoples/nations on earth would be blessed through you*

In what ways was the call of Abram in direct opposition to man's goals expressed at the tower of Babel?

- *God declared that there would be a great nation, not one created by a rebellious people, but by God himself. To emphasize this point, he chose an old couple incapable of having children as the starting point for this new, great nation. (God first appeared to Abram when he and Sarah were 75/74yrs, and they had Isaac at ages 100/99)*
- *This new family would become a faith-based, worshipping nation instead of a rebellious, independent, humanist nation. This would be a nation that existed in covenant relationship with God, with the goal of representing his rule and bringing glory to him.*
- *Instead of focusing on himself to make his name great, Abram was to focus on God's great name, and in return, he would make Abram's name great.*
- *Where the tower of Babel community was self-focused, God's community was to have the best interests of the whole world in mind.*

What was the ultimate goal of Abram's blessing?

The ultimate goal of Abram's blessing was that the whole world would be blessed.

In what ways does God still desire all nations on earth to be blessed?

God's original intent for all people was that they be in a relationship with him and represent his rule over all creation. Through creating Abram into a great nation, God established a model community to demonstrate what it meant to enter into a relationship with God and be his people. By always having a community of faith on the earth, there would always be hope and means of people turning back to him.

In what ways does God bless us that might encourage others to turn back to him?

Fruits of the Spirit, freedom, relationship, spiritual family, purpose, confidence, faith, hope, etc.

Exodus 19:3-6 (ESV)

³ ...while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ⁴ You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

What did it mean when God said that Israel, as a nation, would be a kingdom of priests? In what ways was this consistent with the idea of “image”?

Priests were people who were to act as a mediator between God and the people. They were to represent his character and will and help people know how to relate to a holy God. God also introduced the idea of the kingdom, once again suggesting the idea of rule on the earth. The concept of Priest and King appears consistently through scripture and rightfully so. The “Image of God” was to be a ruler (appointed king) on the earth representing the Great King’s rule AND representing relationship with him. We were all supposed to be kings and priests in God’s design. Israel is now appointed that role to reveal to the rest of the world what it means to live under the reign of the king, but also in an intimate relationship with him.

REPRESENTATIONAL RULE + RELATIONSHIP

THE TEMPLE

Read the following verses regarding the temple.

Isaiah 56:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ “And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant— ⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

Haggai 2:7 (ESV)

And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts.

What role was the temple to play in the world? Is this different from what you previously understood?

The temple was not just a location for Israel to seek a restored relationship with God. It was a symbolic place for all people/all nations to come to worship God. The temple was never simply for Israel’s benefit but for everyone’s benefit.

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.

Why did Peter use the descriptions applied to Israel in the Old Testament to describe believers in the New Testament?

God’s mission has not changed; he has simply expanded the team of those who represent him to include all nations. Now, anyone who places faith in Jesus becomes his royal priest to proclaim God to the rest of the world.

Psalm 67:1-7 (ESV)

¹ May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, Selah ² that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. ³ Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!

⁴ Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Selah ⁵ Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!

⁶ The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, shall bless us. ⁷ God shall bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear him!

Why did the psalmist ask God to bless Israel as a nation?

The goal of the blessing was that, as a result, God would be known among all nations. This would be evidenced through the nations singing with joy in worship to God.

What do you think about the psalmist asking God to bless him? How do you feel about asking God to bless you? Is that a selfish request?

When you ask God to bless you, do you find it is usually more for mission or your personal comfort? Why is that?

What does God's desire to bless you say about his desire for "your" impact in this world?

In what ways did Israel perhaps misunderstand their role in God's kingdom mission?

In what ways do we tend to forget our role in this 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.

Dissect the above passage. How many truths can you discover?

- The Holy Spirit desires to come into our lives.
- When the Holy Spirit comes into your life, he empowers you to witness for Christ.
- God wants us to take witnessing to the world very seriously.
- We are not to be content with just our local community hearing about Christ. We are to passionately care that God's name be spread through the whole world.
- We start where we are and then move out from there, etc.

Matthew 24:14 (ESV)

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Why do you think Jesus will wait until all nations have heard the gospel before he returns?

How does this relate to Abraham's blessing?

What does this communicate about what our life focus should be?

How can we personally speed up the return of Christ?

Romans 10:12-15 (ESV)

¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

What are the implications of this passage for us?

Revelation 7:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

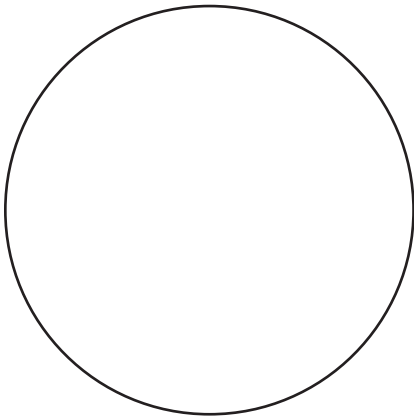
Jesus will accomplish his mission, and he will do so through his people. What are some reasons we personally need to take up this call?

God has placed each of us in various communities where he desires that we represent him and his love to the people around us. These circles of influence include family, work, school, neighborhood, sports teams, choirs, etc. **Draw these circles on the following page.**

Have the group share the various types of communities they are a part of.

CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE

Draw a large circle for every circle of influence God has placed you within. Write the names of the people within each circle. Ask God to show you how you can represent him in each of these areas of influence and point people to Jesus Christ.



THE MISSION

What can you do this week to act on God's passion for all people to know him as you engage in your various circles of influence?

Encourage your students to start praying for God's leading as to how to have a spiritual impact in their various realms of influence. They may want to identify specific people and start praying for them daily.

THE MISSION

SESSION 1: THE CORE MESSAGE

If you had the opportunity today to help someone embrace a relationship with Jesus Christ, would you feel confident in your ability to communicate what they needed to know? Explain.

What truths did you understand at the time you became a Christian that enabled you to cross that line of faith?

What do you think are the essential core truths a person needs to understand in order to become a Christian?

***Teacher:** Write out all answers for the group to see (on paper board, whiteboard, projector, etc.) and have them evaluate whether or not they think a person “must” understand that truth to be saved. Work it down until you have only the critical pieces necessary for salvation.*

Read the following verses and determine the requirements for salvation.

Romans 3:10-12 (ESV)

¹⁰ ...as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

Acts 16:31 (ESV)

And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

1 John 1:9 (ESV)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Acts 3:19 (ESV)

Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out...

Romans 10:9 (ESV)

... if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

In light of the above verses, would you modify any of the “essentials” you had previously listed?

THE MISSION

Acknowledge you have a broken relationship with God.

Romans 3:23 (ESV)

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

1 John 1:8 (ESV)

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us..

Isaiah 59:2 (ESV)

...but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

Believe Jesus Christ died and rose again for your sins.

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,

John 3:16 (ESV)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Confess your sins and repent.

Luke 13:3 (ESV)

No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

Luke 15:10 (ESV)

Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Acts 2:38 (ESV)

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Decclare Jesus is Lord.

Romans 10:9 (ESV)

... if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Why is it important to acknowledge that there is a problem in our relationship with God?

If there is no problem, then there is no need for a solution. This is significant because many people do not think there is a problem between themselves and God. Many believe that they are a basically good person who will be admitted into heaven on judgment day due to the good life they lived. Anyone with this perspective does not feel compelled to seek out God for forgiveness and new life.

What exactly is it about Jesus that we are to believe in order to be saved?**What do the following verses reveal about what we must believe about Jesus?****John 20:31 (ESV)**

...but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

1 Peter 3:18 (ESV)

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

1 Corinthians 15:3-6 (ESV)

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

- *Jesus is the Son of God*
(God in human form, Philippians 2:6-8, John 1:1, Colossians 1:15)
- *Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sins*
- *Jesus rose from the grave to new life*

Why is it necessary to believe Jesus is God in order to be saved?

Turning to Jesus, as God, is what everything is all about. We're not simply using Jesus as a "means" by which to get to God. We are turning to Jesus because that's who God is. To embrace "God," but not Jesus as God, is a rejection of the very God we are to worship.

Everything in scripture points to us bowing our knees before Jesus and worshipping him through eternity (Philippians 2:11). Our very relationship with God is based on the Spirit of Christ in our lives. If he is not God, he does not have an eternal spirit that can indwell all believers through all time and around the globe. His spirit would be finite. The only reason his death and resurrection can be applied to the lives of every believer is that his spirit is the Holy Spirit. If Jesus is not God, then we are still trapped in our sin nature.

Below are two ways to explain our dilemma and how to be restored to relationship with God. (We have already discussed the Bridge to Life presentation in the Foundations series.)

MARRIAGE:

ONENESS

God created us to be in intimate relationship with him, where he would enjoy us, and we would enjoy him forever. His Spirit was to live within us, making us literally “one” with him. This was the way it was at the beginning of Creation.



DIVORCE

In time, we became unfaithful and rejected our relationship with God. We declared independence from him and went our own sinful way. Because we separated ourselves from the source of goodness and life, we ended up only with death. The life we had hoped to gain was revealed to be a deception and we lost everything we had. We are now in the process of dying physically, but we have already died spiritually.



RECONCILIATION

In spite of all this, God still loves us deeply and wants to restore our relationship with him. In order to do so, the death penalty for our unfaithfulness needed to be paid. God came as a man (Jesus Christ) to die on the cross to pay that price and make forgiveness possible.



REMARRIAGE

For those of us who desire to be restored to relationship with God, all we need to do is ask God to forgive us for our sins (in light of the fact that Jesus paid the death price on our behalf), turn away from sin (repent) and accept his Spirit into our lives to direct and lead us.

Heaven is then described as a huge wedding feast prepared for all those who choose to enter this new covenant relationship with God. (Matt 8:11, 22:1-2, Lk 13:29, 14,15)

Have you ever chosen to enter this type of relationship with God?

LEGAL SYSTEM:

Our relationship with God can be described in terms of a legal system.

Picture a person brought before a judge for a very serious crime they committed. They are guilty. They know it, and the judge knows it.

**GUILTY**

The guilty verdict is given, and the person is sent to prison to await the death penalty. The person is then about to be led away in bondage to wait for that fateful day.

**PARDON**

The judge then makes an astounding and absurd offer. He declares that he will send his own son to prison for the time allotted and then face the death penalty for the guilty person. On top of that he will offer the person a complete pardon and an opportunity to be adopted by the judge himself.

**DECISION**

The guilty person then has a decision to make. Does he/she accept the gift of adoption and the pardon, or does he/she decide to pay the consequence himself/herself? Either way, the judge's son still pays the price; the only question is whether the person will allow it to be applied to his/her life.

**ANALOGY EXPLAINED**

We stand guilty before God for all our sin. Because he is a righteous and just God, he must declare us guilty and give our sins the consequence they deserve – death. But because God is also limitless in his love, he came to earth to pay the death price for our sin to provide us with a pardon for all wrongs done.

He has now already paid the price on our behalf. The only question is whether we will allow the death and resurrection of Jesus to be applied to our lives or not. To accept this incredible offer, all we need to do is confess our guilt and accept the free gift of grace God offers us. This action, when authentically done, will be evidenced through a turning away from sin and accepting the leadership of God over our lives.

Have you ever confessed your sin to God, received his forgiveness, and made a decision to let him completely direct your life?

Which illustration do you find it easiest to relate to?

Which illustration would you find easiest to explain to others?

TEACHER NOTE: *If you have time, encourage the students to choose one of the Illustrations and explain it to another student.*

Is there anyone in one of your circles of influence with whom you could share one of these illustrations? If so, who? When?

Is there some other way you can develop relationships with people this week that might reveal God's love and truth to them?

Each week, try to make "mission" an intentional focus of your life.
Look for practical ways to represent God's heart passion.

SESSION 1: KNOWING YOUR STORY

What is the most significant thing Jesus changed in your life when you embraced a relationship with him?

What specific ways might each story that was told be of value to a non-Christian to hear?

Have the students share specific ways each other's stories would be meaningful to non-Christians?

What exactly is a testimony?

A testimony is a story relating one person's perspective of an event. If you watched a car accident, you would be asked to give the police officer your testimony about what happened. The police officer is not interested in your life story but only your perspective of how the events unfolded.

When we give our spiritual testimony, we are not so much talking about us but about how God has been at work. We are simply sharing our personal experience of how we have seen God at work in us or the life of another person. The desired result of a testimony is that people would say, "Wow, God is amazing. I would like to see him work in my life in a similar way."

Psalm 66:16 (ESV)

Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul.

Why do you think hearing people's stories is so impacting?

*Stories of life experiences touch the heart in ways that "teaching" cannot. That's why people love novels, TV and movies. We cannot resist a good story. Stories bring a sense of possible victory and hope. **No one can argue with your story.** They may disagree with your theology, but they can't deny what you experienced.*

If each of us were to take time to share with a non-Christian the difference God made in our lives, what type of things do you think you would want to share?

THE MISSION

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF TESTIMONY SHARING

Describe a testimony principle for each of the sections in Paul's testimony.

Acts 26:1-29 (ESV)

¹ So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: ² "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, ³ especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

1) *Seize any opportunity you can to tell your spiritual story*

⁴ "My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. ⁵ They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. ⁶ And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, ⁷ to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! ⁸ Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? ⁹ "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

2) *Describe life before you encountered Christ*

¹² "In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴ And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' ¹⁵ And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

3) *Describe how you were introduced to Christ*

¹⁹ "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. ²¹ For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. ²² To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: ²³ that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles."

4) *Describe how you responded to Jesus and how that changed your life*

²⁴ And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.”

5) *Provide opportunity to react or raise questions*

²⁵ But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.

²⁶ For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.” ²⁸ And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” ²⁹ And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.”

6) *Invite a response*

In point form, write down the parts of your story that you think would be meaningful in pointing another person toward God. Use the principles mentioned above.

Ideas might include:

- What were some ways you had tried to find answers or fulfillment apart from God?
- What was going on in your life that made you realize you needed God in your life?
- How were you introduced to Christ?
- What made you decide to give your life to Christ? How did you go about this?
- What difference has Christ made in your life?

For those who became Christ-followers as a child, it may be more impactful to simply express how Christ has been at work in your life lately or through difficult times.

TIPS:

- Keep your story short and to the point. It should be very practical.
- Keep your story natural. Don't use “churchy” words or expressions that people will not understand or resonate with.
- Allow people to see how meaningful this experience was for you.
- Do not put down other churches, denominations, or people.
- Your story is ultimately to be more about God than it is about you.
- Once you are done your story, ask for their reaction. If appropriate, ask them if they are interested in knowing God in a similar way.

YOUR STORY OUTLINE:

Be prepared next week to share your story with someone else in the group.

Teachers: If your church has a website, it might be worthwhile to have the students place their story on the site in either written or video format.

Knowing your own story and sharing it with others are two completely different things. What are some possible scenarios where it would be natural to share your life-changing story?

- *When someone is going through a similar situation you went through*
- *When someone is wondering why you chose to become a Christ-follower*
- *When someone is simply asking about your life*
- *When any other opportunity we can't anticipate reveals itself*

What are some tactful ways you might be able to bridge into telling your story?

Examples:**After someone shares a struggle they are facing:**

"I've had a similar sort of struggle in my life. Would you be interested in hearing how I made it through it?"

When someone comments on some positive aspect of your life:

"I've definitely had some downtimes, but can I share with you what made a world of difference for me?"

When people are questioning God's role in their life:

"I've had times when I questioned God too. Can I tell you a story of how God changed my life?"

We often feel we do not have a story to tell. However, the reality is that it is highly likely that there is someone within your circles of influence who is in a similar situation you were in before you came to Christ. Hearing your story and why you chose to embrace Christ might be exactly what they need to hear to give them hope. It may be why God placed you alongside of them.

Is there anyone within your circles of influence with whom you could share your story in the near future?

If a person responds with a desire to have a relationship with God, that is when you will want to explain the truths necessary to understand in order to become a child of God.

What are the four essential truths we discussed in session 2?

A*cknowledge: you have a broken relationship with God*

B*elieve: in Jesus Christ that he died for your sins and rose to new life*

C*onfess: your sins and repent*

D*eclare: Jesus is Lord*

THE MISSION

SESSION 2: S.A.I.L.

Share your short, personal, spiritual story with one other person in the group.

REPRESENTING GOD

We can freely talk about sports, movies, events, etc., with no problem whatsoever. Why do we sometimes find it challenging to share how God has worked in our lives?

How can we overcome insecurity of talking to others about Christ?

When you hear the word “evangelist,” what image pops into your mind? Is it a negative or positive image, and why?

Who are some people you know in your church that seem to be especially effective at connecting others to God or bringing them to church? Do they fit the evangelist stereotype? Why or why not?

We are not all necessarily gifted evangelists, but we are all called to have a spiritual impact in our world, helping others know Christ. **Look at the following passages to determine various ways we are to have influence.**

INFLUENCE 1

Matthew 5:13 (ESV)

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

Influence: SALT

SALT FACTS:

- *Salt was valued so highly it was even used as a form of currency and, in some cultures, had greater value than gold. The word “salary” referred to soldiers who were paid in salt. The saying “worth his salt” referred to someone worthy of the wage they were paid.*
- *There are over 14,000 known uses for salt.*
- *The word “salad” comes from the Roman practice of putting salt on their vegetables.*
- *The human body contains 250 grams (1/2 pound) of salt.*
- *There is a 1500 acre salt mine over 1000 ft. below the city of Detroit with 100 miles of roads.*
- *Salt was to be added to some offerings in the Old Testament.*
- *Christopher Columbus was on a journey to bring back salt when he discovered North America.*
- *Consumption of salt is necessary for survival.*
- *Many of Napoleon’s soldiers died from lack of salt as they returned from Russia.*
- *Too much salt contributes to heart disease and many other ailments.*

Describe the effect salt has on food.

Salt is used to preserve food by limiting the growth of undesired bacteria and season food to bring out its flavor. It only takes a small amount of salt to influence an entire meal.

When Jesus tells his disciples they are salt of the earth, what do you think he means?

When salt is used, you do not necessarily see it, but evidence of its presence becomes quickly apparent. The disciples’ lives were to be in contrast to the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law who taught the message but didn’t live out the heart of God. The disciples were to bring a savoring effect to the world, influencing it to reflect God’s character.

We represent: God’s Character

For salt to be effective, it requires Proximity – it needs to rub up against something

In what practical ways might we have a savoring influence in the world around us?

What might cause us to lose our saltiness?

In Palestine, there are various forms of salt. Some salt could lose its flavor and effectiveness by breaking down and blending with the dust and sand. Though it looks like regular salt, this type of salt has none of the desired impact or flavor. This would be representative of the Pharisees, who had an appearance of righteousness, but no godly impact in the world.

Christ was essentially saying not to be this “type” of salt. We become un-salty when we blend with the world to the extent that our distinctiveness is gone. If we embrace a life of sin, then there is no righteousness that we bring to the world to help make it more Christ-like. If our lives look no different from our coworkers, who do not know God, then what do we have to contribute?

What are some practical ways you could have a savoring influence within the circles God has placed you that might reflect the love of God?

INFLUENCE 2**2 Corinthians 5:18-20 (ESV)**

¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

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.

Influence: [AMBASSADOR](#)

How would you define the role of an ambassador?

“A diplomatic official of the highest rank, sent by one sovereign or state to another as its resident representative.” <http://dictionary.reference.com>

The role of an ambassador is to represent the voice and will of the ruler of his/her home country.

We represent: God's love and forgiveness

To be an effective ambassador requires: Opening our mouths

According to these verses, what is the message that we are to represent to this world?

Why is opening our mouths necessary as an ambassador?

You will sometimes hear that your actions are the biggest testimony to the non-believer. This is sometimes true, as they need to see the Christ-life lived out before they will value and respect it (SALT). But even if the Christ-life is lived out, we still need to be able to verbalize that God loves them and that they can receive his forgiveness. If you stay silent, you will not be a very effective ambassador. You will miss out on the privilege of representing God in a life-changing way.

Do you think the people within your circles of influence see you as an ambassador for Jesus? Why or why not? How could you represent his message of reconciliation to them?

If you truly understood your role as an ambassador, how might that affect your life?

INFLUENCE 3

Genesis 1:26-28 (ESV)

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Colossians 3:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Influence: IMAGE

What does it mean to image God in this world?

The context of image in the Genesis passage has everything to do with rule. God had just created a beautiful planet with all its plants and wildlife and now placed mankind on it to care for it on his behalf. Everything that God created has been entrusted to our rule and care. What an incredible privilege and responsibility.

We are to represent God's rule wherever we go. We are also to treat others as God's representative rulers, whether they act like it or not.

We represent: God's rule

To be an effective ruler requires: Courage

What are some practical ways we can live out "image" from day to day?

- *Care for creation:* *Environmentally aware*
- *Respect for wildlife*
- *Be creative as God is creative*
- *Bring order to any chaos*
- *Treat everything and everyone with God's love and grace*
- *Promote God's values*
- *Push back the realm and influence of Satan wherever we go*

How did Jesus exercise "image" rule?

- *Calmed storms*
- *Healed the sick*
- *Raised the dead*
- *Cast out demons*

What does it mean to represent God's rule in this world?

The first place we need to represent God's rule is in our own lives. We are to model complete submission to the Father and seek his will versus our own. Jesus expressed this in the garden when he said, "not my will, but yours be done." As people watch how we relate to God and how he works through us, they will understand more about who God is.

As well, Jesus expressed God's authority wherever he went. Everything he did was to counter the effects of the fall. He preached obedience to the King, healed disease, raised the dead, and exercised authority over the evil spiritual realm. Jesus then told his disciples that they would do the same things (and greater things) as they placed faith in him and were restored to image. As we go through this world, we are to exercise God's power and authority and counter the effects of the fall as we bring people to Christ.

John 14:12 (ESV)

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

1 Corinthians 4:20 (ESV)

For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.

How might you exercise God's rule within your circles of influence?

This might include praying for healing for people, dealing with spiritual warfare or allowing God to do the impossible through your faith, etc. This is a trickier concept to grasp, but it is one we deeply need to consider if we are going to image God as Adam was commanded to.

INFLUENCE 4**Matthew 5:14-16 (ESV)**

¹⁴ You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Acts 13:47-48 (ESV)

⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." ⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Ephesians 5:8 (ESV)

...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light

Influence: LIGHT

We represent: God's truth

To be effective as a light requires: Visibility

Light, as a symbol, has two main connotations in scripture:

1. *It refers to the glory of God*
2. *It is truth that reveals what is hidden in the darkness*

How might we help people see the glory of God?

1 Timothy 2:3-4 (ESV)

³ *This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect...

Have you had opportunities in the past to help clarify some misunderstanding about God or faith? Share your story.

How might you be able to lovingly bring truth about God into your circles of influence?

SALT

AMBASSADOR

IMAGE

LIGHT

We are to SAIL into the world, bringing each of these forms of impact. Much is entrusted to us as we are God's means of changing this world. He did not create a "PLAN B." We need to take our job description very seriously.

God respects you so much that he leaves his kingdom impact resting in your hands. Realize your significance, embrace your calling, go out with courage and authority and represent Jesus Christ well.

THE MISSION

THE MISSION

SESSION 2: STRATEGIC AND INTENTIONAL

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

What are some goals that you strategize for in life?

What changes do you need to make in your life to accomplish these goals?

Why do you plan ahead for these things? How many goals would be reached if you just played things by ear and hoped for the best? Why?

Do you think Jesus had strategies for his ministry? Explain.

Teacher's Note: Jesus developed incredible strategies for ministry, what he taught at various stages, who he taught, and who he developed as leaders. Below is merely a very rough sketch of some of his strategies.

- *Jesus identified with John the Baptist's ministry, so people understood where he stood with regard to his view of the Kingdom of God.*
- *Jesus started ministering locally, calling people to listen to his teachings.*
- *He encouraged people to follow him as disciples.*
- *He recruited twelve disciples to train them to be future leaders (apostles).*
- *Jesus expanded his ministry across the Jordan River.*
- *Jesus expanded his ministry influence to Jerusalem.*
- *He gave his disciples missional experiences without him.*
- *Jesus gave his disciples direction on how to expand his church to the world after his death and resurrection.*

What sort of things might Jesus have had to give up in order to have accomplished his mission?

Do you think the Apostle Paul developed strategies for his mission impact? In what ways?

- *Paul specifically chose to focus on reaching Gentile territories where the gospel had not yet been preached*
- *Paul focused on urban centers and places where people were likely to gather*
- *On his first missionary journey, he mapped a course, which he traveled with Barnabas, planting churches over a one year*

- *On his second missionary trip, he traveled for three years planting churches but also discipling other leaders who would, in turn, build up churches.*
- *On his third missionary journey, he went to various towns to strengthen the disciples. He stayed longer in Ephesus to equip that church to support others in the area.*

What sort of things do you think Paul might have had to give up in order to have had such a mission impact? Why do you think he did it?

If you are to truly have a missional impact in the world around you, what might you have to change or give up? Why might you do this?

We often feel ineffective and inadequate to be kingdom builders. In the following passages, look at the various types of people God used as Salt, Ambassadors, Image, and Light.

A SERVANT GIRL

2 Kings 5:1-3, 15 (ESV)

¹ Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. ² Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

[After being healed by Elisha]

¹⁵ Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant."

The girl was a slave, forcibly taken from her home in Israel by Naaman's army (he was the captain of the army.) Why do you think she was willing to help Naaman?

The captain of an enemy's army came to faith simply because a servant girl suggested he go to a man of God to ask God to heal him.

What similar opportunities might we be able to take advantage of in our circles of influence?

There may be people who are struggling with health issues, marriage breakdowns or emotional problems that could really use some prayer and advice. If you do not feel adequate in these areas, there are probably people in your church God could work through to bring healing to their lives. Consider how you could connect hurting people in your circles to the broader body of Christ.

A HITCH HIKER

Acts 8:26-31 (ESV)

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place. ²⁷ And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

³¹ And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Acts 8:35-36, 38 (ESV)

³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”

³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

Have you ever had a prompting from God to witness to someone? If so, share your story.

What principles can you learn from this story regarding sharing truth with others?

A FRIEND

John 1:45-49 (ESV)

⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” ⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you

were under the fig tree, I saw you.”⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

What did it take for Philip to convince Nathaniel to follow Jesus?

What principle can we take away from this passage?

A DEBATER

Acts 19:8 (ESV)

And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

Acts 17:2-4 (ESV)

² And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” ⁴ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.

Why was Paul so effective in outreach?

What can we learn from Paul?

A HOST

Luke 5:29 (ESV)

And Levi [Matthew] made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them.

What approach did Matthew use to bridge his friends to Jesus?

How might we apply this principle today?

Do these stories give you any ideas about how you might introduce people to Jesus? If so, how?

Do you think the church grows most when it has dynamic outreach programs or when everyday Christ-followers represent Christ within their circles of influence? Why?

What does this teach us about individual or team roles in building the kingdom?

The Apostle Paul, one of the greatest evangelists of all time, gives us some tips on connecting others to God.

Colossians 4:2-6 (NIV)

² Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

³ And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

1. Devote Yourself

NOTE: Paul is concluding his letter where he has discussed several different issues. When he tells us to be watchful, the question is, what are we to be watching for? It could be referring to false teachers, but the context of the paragraph seems to focus more on being watchful for opportunities to represent Christ. This also fits with Paul's introduction, which is focused on the gospel increasingly bearing fruit.

Why did Paul feel he needed to encourage us to devote ourselves to prayer and being watchful for opportunities?

What would it practically mean for us to devote ourselves to prayer and to look for opportunities? How would it change our daily perspective?

2. Pray for an Open Door

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What did Paul mean by an “open door,” and why did he ask us to pray for one?

How are we to recognize an open door?

Does an open door imply we have no responsibility to create opportunities? What are your thoughts on this?

An open door means that people will be receptive to the opportunities we either seize or create - to present the gospel..

3. Pray for Clarity in Communicating

Have you ever blundered your way through telling someone about Christ?

Paul was an incredible teacher; why do you think he felt he needed prayer help for communicating the gospel clearly?

4. Be Tactful

Paul says:

- To be wise in the way we relate to non-believers
- To make the most of every opportunity
- To be full of grace in how you talk, seasoned with salt

What does it mean to use grace/salt in how we communicate?

2 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment...

If the only reason God has not yet brought judgment and placed believers on a new earth is that he is waiting for everyone to hear the gospel, what does that say about how we should align our life priorities?

As you evaluate your life, are you able to identify some mis-ordered priorities? How far down your list of priorities has sharing Christ dropped over time?

**We encourage you to be strategic and intentional in sharing your faith with others.
There is nothing else you can do in all of creation that will have eternal impact.**

Daniel 12:2-3 (ESV)

² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,
some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

³ And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above;
and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

THE MISSION



SESSION 3: HEARING GOD

AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIP

In your relationship with God, who does most of the talking?

Do you think God has things he would like to say to you personally? Share your thoughts.

Does God still speak to his people in direct ways today? Explain.

In what various ways did God speak throughout scripture?

We know that the primary way God chooses to speak to us is through his word, but sometimes he chooses other ways as well.

Read the following scenarios and discuss whether or not you believe God might still speak that way today.

Samuel

1 Samuel 3:1-10 (ESV)

¹ Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.

² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was.

⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵ and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down.

⁶ And the LORD called again, "Samuell!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

⁸ And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuell! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." ¹¹ Then the LORD said to Samuel...

Means of Communication: *Voice in the Night*

Do you think God may still speak through an audible voice? Have any of you had an experience with hearing God speak audibly to you?

Abimelech

Genesis 20:1-7 (ESV)

¹ From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. ² And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. ³ But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." ⁴ Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people?" ⁵ Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." ⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her." ⁷ Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."

Means of Communication: *Dream*

Have any of you ever had a dream where God communicated a message to you?

Peter

Acts 10:1-16 (ESV)

¹ At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, ² a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. ³ About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." ⁴ And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God." ⁵ And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, ⁸ and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. ⁹ The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. ¹⁰ And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." ¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

Means of Communication: Vision**What is a vision?**

A vision often refers to a vivid mental image that one sees while awake, whereas a dream occurs while one is asleep. However, in scripture, the words “dream” and “vision” are often interchangeable, and visions are also spoken of as occurring in dreams. In each case, though, they refer to a divine message given to the person through a visual representation. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Have any of you ever experienced a vision from God? What did you see?

Peter**Acts 10:17-20 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate ¹⁸ and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. ¹⁹ And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.”

Means of Communication: Voice of the Spirit**What do we mean when we talk about the “voice of the Spirit”?**

When we hear words spoken in our mind as opposed to audible, external words, we refer to that as being the voice of the Spirit.

**Have you ever had the Holy Spirit speak distinguishable words into your mind?
What was spoken?**

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.

Paul

Acts 20:22 (ESV)

And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there...

Means of Communication: Prompting

What do we mean when we talk about promptings of the Holy Spirit?

A prompting is a compelling sense that God is directing us to do something. It's not so much a message as it is a heavy burden that must be responded to.

Have you ever experienced a prompting of the Holy Spirit? What happened?

Agabus

Acts 11:27-28 (ESV)

²⁷ Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).

Means of Communication: Prophecy

Prophecy is not always about foretelling the future; it is more often a message God wants to be communicated to a specific group of people regarding a specific issue.

Have you ever had a prophetic message given to you, or have you been given a prophetic message to pass on to someone else? Share your experience.

Acts 2:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

Why might God choose to speak in some of these more dramatic ways?

- *To be a sign of God's presence to both believers and unbelievers*
- *To be very clear on a specific point*
- *To tell us to do something we wouldn't normally do*
- *To tell us something we need to know*
- *To give a word of warning*
- *To give a word of encouragement, etc.*

How does talking about this sort of communication make you feel? Does it make you feel uneasy, excited, or curious? Share your thoughts.

Do you think this type of communication should be evident in the church today?

Is it something people should seek after?

In scripture, these messages were never something people sought after; in fact, they often came as a complete surprise. We are never told to chase after the dramatic but to pursue a steady relationship with God through prayer and scripture. When God wants us to know something, he will let us know. However, there are some things that can prevent us from ever hearing the voice of God.

What are some hindrances that might keep us from hearing from God?

- *Disbelief that God still communicates in such ways*
- *Lack of an intimate relationship*
- *Disinterest in hearing from God*
- *Busyness and distraction*
- *Sin, etc.*

Mark 1:35 (ESV)

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.

Jesus was led by the Spirit and knew every step of the way what the Father wanted him to do, what the Father wanted him to say, and how the Father wanted him to say it.

What does the above scripture passage reveal about how Jesus developed such an ear to hear? What principles can we learn?

- *Talking with the Father was a priority with Jesus*
- *Praying in the morning set the stage for being led through the rest of the day*
- *When life got too busy, Jesus took extreme measures to make alone time with the Father*
- *Solitary places give opportunity to listen as opposed to just talking*

Acts 13:2-3 (ESV)

² *While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* ³ *Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*

How can we develop a sense of “listening” to God within our group prayer times?

If you sense the Holy Spirit speaking a message for the group during a prayer time, how should you respond to that?

This week, in your prayer times, try to find a quiet place where you can talk to God and spend time listening to see if there is anything he wants to communicate to you. Sometimes it simply involves asking questions and being ready to listen in case God chooses to speak in such a way.

1 Samuel 3:10 (ESV)

And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant hears.”

CAUTION: God’s primary way of communicating with us is through his word. It must always be a priority in our lives. Always seeking a “special revelation” can lead to some dangerous opportunities for the evil one to counterfeit God’s voice. Next session, we will discuss how to discern between the spirits and discern whether messages are from God.

SESSION 3: DISCERNING THE MESSAGE

Have there been times when you heard someone say, “God told me...” or “God led me...” and then it became evident God hadn’t directed them in such a way?

How do we evaluate whether a message/prompting is from God, our imaginations, or an evil spirit?

Keep in mind that Satan also wants to send messages and direct our paths according to his purposes. See the following scriptures:

1 John 4:1-3 (ESV)

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

1 Timothy 4:1 (ESV)

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons...

With this in mind, we need to be very discerning not to listen to just any voice or message we hear. If Satan can masquerade as an angel of light, it will require spiritual wisdom for us to distinguish between what comes from him and what comes from God.

What are some ways you can think of to help us discern if a message is from God or not?

Evaluating a Message:

- 1) Is it consistent with scripture
- 2) Does it represent God's purposes
- 3) Is it just a passing idea or an unrelenting burden
- 4) Is there a unity of the Spirit with other godly people?
- 5) Does it stretch your faith

Let's explore these tests to understand them more deeply.

1) Is the message consistent with scripture?

Why would it be a problem for God to say something now that is different from what he spoke previously?

God does not CONTRADICT himself

Numbers 23:19 (ESV)

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

When all is said and done, our final authority is always the Word of God.

2) Does the message represent God's purposes?

What are God's two purposes for us?

- a) To bring us into deeper RELATIONSHIP with him and his family.
- b) To empower us to REPRESENT his rule and love to the rest of the world.

Every message from God is to help us fulfill the two greatest commands of loving God and loving our neighbor.

Matthew 16:13-17 (ESV)

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 16:21-23 (ESV)

²¹ From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

In the first example, Jesus says that Peter’s statement is divinely inspired.

In the second statement, he is saying it is satanically inspired.

In what way do these two statements of Peter contrast?

Peter’s First Statement:

Peter’s first message affirmed the identity of Jesus and the nature of his relationship with him. Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, the Promised King and Saviour of the world.

Peter’s Second Statement:

Peter rebuked Jesus, implying that Jesus had it all wrong and needed to be corrected in his perspective, teaching, and theology. Peter’s framework was such that he believed people doing the will of God should not suffer. He believed that Jesus, being the Christ, was to set up a powerful kingdom on earth, and therefore, talk of his imminent suffering and death was absurd. He could not conceive how suffering and death could play a role in the kingdom work of God.

How was Jesus able to discern which message was from God and which was not?

Peter’s first declaration affirmed what scripture taught about Jesus as prophesied in the Old Testament.

However, Peter’s second declaration was in total contradiction to the purpose for which Jesus came as laid out in Isaiah 53 about the Suffering Servant.

Jesus came to give his life as a sacrifice for all, to bring others into eternal relationship with him. Peter’s statement did not at all represent God’s purpose in the world; in fact, it worked directly against it.

What are some examples of a message that would not represent the purposes of God?

- *It's okay to do something the Bible says is wrong - your situation is exceptional*
- *It's the other person's responsibility to make the relationship right*
- *Don't bother going to church*
- *Avoid other Christ-followers*
- *Do not share your faith with that other person; they will just reject you*
- *You're worthless and shouldn't inconvenience others*
- *Don't go to others for help; don't share your needs*
- *You're not good enough for God., etc.*

Jesus will never call you to do something that does not represent his purposes or love as he modeled in scripture.

3) Is the message just a passing idea or an unrelenting burden?

If you're an "ideas" person, you've probably had many ideas that you were passionate about one week and forgot all about the next week. Can you share some examples?

Have you ever had what you thought was a strong conviction from God about something but then had that feeling fade within a short time? What do you make of these experiences?

Daniel 2:1 (ESV)

In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him.

Daniel 7:15 (ESV)

As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me.

How were Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel affected by the messages they received?

When God wants you to know or do something, he will impress it heavily on your heart.

Jeremiah's Dilemma

Jeremiah 20:9 (ESV)

If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

Can any of you relate to Jeremiah? Can you share some experiences where God placed a heavy burden on your heart that would not go away until you responded?

4) Is there a unity of the Spirit with other godly people?

Why is unity within the body of Christ an important test of a message from God?

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.

What does this passage imply is the priority – the unity of believers or prayers being answered? Why?

Jesus says explicitly that some prayers may not be answered unless believers are united together on the same page. More important than the task is the relationship. When God's family is united in all that it does, it will become the means by which God will accomplish his purposes in the world.

What should you do if other believers are seeking God's direction as well, but are not in agreement with you?

1) **STOP**

Don't move ahead as there is no unity within the body. If there is no unity, Christ is not behind what is going on.

There are times when other believers may NOT be united with you because THEY are not spending time seeking God's will, and they miss what he wants to accomplish. In this case, the person needs to be obedient to God and still do what he/she is called to do. BUT be very careful in this – if the other spiritual leaders ARE sincerely praying, we need to trust that the Holy Spirit will put everyone on the same page. Be careful that YOU are truly seeking God's leading and not your own agenda.

2) **WAIT**

Sometimes it is the right direction, just not the right timing. God knows that some people need more time to assimilate an idea, and he gives them that time. In other words, you might get a message now and share it, but it may take a year before God brings everyone else to the same conclusion. He gives that advance message so that other people have time to get on board.

If you barge ahead without the unity of the Spirit, you will probably misjudge God's perfect timing, and you will not accomplish his intended purpose.

Philippians 1:27 (NIV)

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then...I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel

5) Does the message stretch your faith?

Why would God's message to us often involve us taking some step of faith?

God's ultimate desire is that we grow into a deeper, more trusting relationship with him. When he calls us to action, he invites us to partner with him in what only he can accomplish. In so doing, we step out in faith, trusting that he will protect and provide for us in every way. When we experience the thrill of seeing God at work, our joy and excitement in our relationship with him greatly increase.

Also, if God needs to speak in a dramatic way to lead us, it is because we would never have gone that direction in and of ourselves.

If God gives you a message or call to action, it is because YOU need that in your life in order to grow in your walk with him. Otherwise, he would have given that message or prompting to someone else.

Jonah 1:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ² "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." ³ But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

Why did God call Jonah to take the message to Nineveh, knowing what his response would be?

God called Jonah to the task because there were lessons Jonah needed to learn. God could have sent any prophet to Nineveh, but God loved Jonah and knew that there were biases in his life that were barriers to his own walk with God.

What kept you from obeying at times when you felt the Holy Spirit prompting you?

What was the result in your relationship with God, or the family of God, when you did obey a prompting from the Spirit?

There are many deceiving voices, and we need to carefully discern which voices are from God and which are not. Take comfort in the fact that Jesus says his true sheep will recognize his voice.

John 10:3-5 (ESV)

³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.

LIVING YOUR FAITH

SESSION 3: SPIRITUAL FOCUS

Before we begin, think of all the different ways you spent your time in the past week. Write them below, and we will refer back to this list later.

Following his baptism, Jesus started his Spirit-empowered ministry.

Luke 4:14-21 (ESV)

¹⁴ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. ¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because
he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

What exactly was the mission that the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to do?

Jesus came to set the spiritual captives free, restore spiritual life, and bring people back to the joy of the Lord.

What is the common denominator between the above passage and next two passages?

Disciples

Acts 1:8 (NIV)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Phillip**Acts 8:29, 36-40 (NIV)**

The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

³⁶ *As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?"* ³⁷ ³⁸ *And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.* ³⁹ *When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.*

⁴⁰ *Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.*

Do you get the sense that the Holy Spirit is on a mission? What gives that away?

If the Holy Spirit is on a mission, what is the implication for everyone he fills and leads?

**The question is not whether our lives should be mission-focussed,
but where and how we will carry out that mission.**

Paul & Peter**Galatians 2:8-10 (ESV)**

⁸ *...(for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles),* ⁹ *and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.* ¹⁰ *Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.*

What was Peter's mission? *Witness to the Jews*

What was Paul's mission? *Witness to the Gentiles*

What is your mission?

Do any in the group have a clear sense of how they are to carry on the Holy Spirit's mission through their lives?

The Holy Spirit is very focused on finishing the mission of bringing people to Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus will not return until the Holy Spirit has sent the gospel message to every people group around the world.

Matthew 24:14 (ESV)

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

If someone were to look at your description of how you spent the past two weeks (your list at top of study), what would they determine is your life focus or mission?

As a group, discuss what you think a mission-focussed life looks like.

1 Corinthians 3:10-14 (ESV)

¹⁰ *According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.* ¹¹ *For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* ¹² *Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—* ¹³ *each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.*

¹⁴ *If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.*

As you reflect on how you are investing your life, what things from the past two weeks do you believe will go through the flames and come out on the other side? (Refer back to the list at the beginning of the study.)

Burned in the Fire

Purified in the Fire

What are some of the challenges or hindrances we face in living a mission-focussed life?

What is the difference between living a mission-focussed life and doing a ministry?

A mission-focussed life says my whole life is centred on allowing the Holy Spirit to fulfill his mission through me in everything I do. Doing a ministry is simply something I do that helps the kingdom of God. It is possible to do a ministry, but have that as just one of many things I do in my week, and not necessarily flow from a life of mission focus.

Can you think of some people that are living a mission-focussed life? What is it about their lives that make that evident?

If we are “truly” disciples of Jesus, then we must embrace his mission.

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.

We are directed by Jesus to:

- *Introduce people to him*
- *Baptize them*
- *Disciple them by teaching them to obey everything he commanded*

How can we move from simply having a ministry we “do” within the church to living a life with a mission focus?

Are there some ways we need to simplify our lives so that we can have a greater spiritual impact?

How might our lives change if we truly surrender to the mission of Jesus and the Holy Spirit?

What is the alternative to NOT embracing a life of mission?

Luke 10:17, 21 (ESV)

¹⁷ The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!"

²¹ In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

Why do you think the disciples were filled with joy as they embraced the mission?

Why was Jesus filled with joy?

It is always exciting to see God work mightily through us in positively influencing the lives of others. The disciples were filled with joy because they got to partner with God in his mission to set people free from Satan and sin's bondage.

Jesus was filled with joy because he was seeing his followers embrace his kingdom mission and begin to represent his love and rule in the world. The walls of Satan's kingdom crumble and people are set free as Jesus' followers move forward in faith, confidence, and boldness for the kingdom of God.

There is no greater joy for God than to see people enter into a relationship with him because his present children are intentionally representing him well to the world.

THIS SAME JOY IS AVAILABLE TO YOU AS YOU EMBRACE HIS MISSION IN YOUR LIFE.

LIVING YOUR FAITH

SESSION 4: RESPONDING TO GOD

Exodus 5:1-2 (ESV)

¹ Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’” ² But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.”

Pharaoh raised a very important question, “Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?”

The whole book of Exodus is set out to answer that question, not just for Pharaoh, but for the Israelites who had only heard stories about him passed down from their ancestors. It is interesting to flip through Exodus and see how many times God says, “So that they may know.” (Ex 8:10, 22; 9:14, 29; 10:2; 11:7; 31:13, etc.)

Even Moses did not know God at first.

Exodus 4:10-13 (ESV)

¹⁰ 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.” 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.” ¹³ But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.”

Why did Moses respond the way he did?

Moses was consumed by his failure when he first tried to set the Israelites free. He fled Egypt for his life and had hidden the past forty years as a shepherd in the wilderness. At age eighty, he does not feel very qualified to rescue the Israelites from Pharaoh’s hand.

What did Moses not understand about God?

What are your thoughts about the following quote?

“We will only respond to God to the degree that we ‘know’ God.”

Every time we choose to disobey God, it is because there is some character trait of God we distrust. We go our own way because we do not trust God to provide what we think we need for provision and life. If we only fully knew God, we would never walk away or rebel against his words.

THE NAMES OF GOD

Exodus 3:14-15 (NIV)

¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob--has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.

God's Name: YHWH - I Am

What does God mean by the name “I AM”?

God is saying that he is the self-existing one. Whereas everything else was created by him, he alone has always existed. He alone is God; he is ALL-SUFFICIENT for every need.

SIDE NOTE:

The Hebrew writing for the name of God in this passage is YHWH.

Because the Hebrews feared misusing God's name, they determined they should never pronounce it at all. Instead, they would use the name Adonai (Lord or Master) whenever YHWH occurred. As a result, no one really knows how to pronounce God's name.

In an attempt to come to an understanding of the pronunciation some have added vowels to YHWH to create:

YaH-WeH or

Ye-Ho-VaH (Jehovah – the W in YHWH is often expressed by a V)

Many Bibles simply translate the name YHWH as “LORD” using small capital letters.

If Moses truly understood God as being I AM, how would that have changed his reaction?

Moses would have understood that it didn't matter who he (Moses) was; it only matters who God is. We fear life because we look at our limitations, but God is limitless. There is no issue that he cannot overcome because he is the source of all life.

YHWH COMBINATION NAMES

Yhwh was combined with other terms in order to stress God's attributes at times of specific need. Look at each name of God and discuss how understanding that name would bring greater freedom to your life. Also, notice how Jesus fulfills each name.

Genesis 22:14 (ESV)

So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

Yahweh Jireh: *I AM will provide*

Implication: *We do not need to worry about our needs being met. We spend so much time fretting and striving because we fear our needs will not be met. If we truly understood God would meet our every need, we would not be anxious or have to strive for anything.*

Matthew 6:25-33 (ESV)

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Judges 6:24 (ESV)

Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.

Yahweh Shalom: *I AM is Peace*

Implication: *The one thing we truly want is a sense of peace. The problem is, we tend to look for peace from our circumstances, and therefore, peace is always uncertain and threatened. No matter how much we strive for peace, it always evades us – because the very aspect of striving for peace says we do not have it. God tells us through his name that peace does NOT come from our circumstances but from HIM.*

John 14:27 (ESV)

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

1 Samuel 17:45 (ESV)

Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

Yahweh Sabbaoth: I AM of the Hosts (Lord of the Army)

Implication: *Whenever we feel threatened or in danger, God is there to defend us. He will only allow anything to happen to us that he plans to use for his purposes. There is no enemy or challenge too great for him to conquer. Therefore, I can approach life confidently, knowing the Lord of Heaven's armies is at my side.*

Romans 8:31 (ESV)

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Psalms 23:1-4 (ESV)

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ 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.

Yahweh Ro'i: I AM is my Shepherd

Implication: *God is my protector and provider. He already knows where he is leading me for provision and life. All I need to do is follow his lead. When threat of danger looms over me, he is more than adequate to deal with any situation.*

John 10:11 (ESV)

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Jeremiah 23:6 (ESV)

In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

Yahweh Tsidkenu: I AM is our Righteousness

Implication: *Our greatest struggle is being righteous before God. We quickly discover in life that no matter what we do, our sin nature is always present, preventing us from*

being holy. Fortunately, God tells us he will be our righteousness – his righteousness placed on us. As a result, we do not need to strive or prove ourselves worthy in any way. We merely need to rest calmly and enjoy his righteousness in and through our lives.

Romans 3:21-22 (ESV)

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

Ezekiel 48:35 (ESV)

And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The LORD Is There.

Yahweh Shammah: I AM is there

This name is given to Ezekiel as he receives a vision of the future Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God. When Christ returns, he will permanently live among his people, and the place of his dwelling will take on the characteristics of his rule.

Implication: *Everything that frustrates us about our disconnection with God will be fully resolved as we will live forever in the presence of Christ. The hope that we have of the future radically impacts how we live in the present. We do not need to worry about our future because our future is already secure in Christ.*

Revelation 21:3-4 (ESV)

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.”

Which name of God speaks the most strongly to you? Why?

Which name of God might give you confidence to do what he calls you to do?

What fears do you presently have that you now identify are rooted in a misunderstanding of who God is?

What steps of faith have you resisted taking because you did not understand who God is?

John 17:3 (ESV)

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

SESSION 4: SUBMISSION TO GOD

UNDERSTANDING REDEMPTION

1 Peter 1:18-19 (ESV)

¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

What does it mean to “redeem/ransom” someone?

To redeem someone means to pay a ransom price to set them free.

In biblical days, if someone was sold into slavery they could be redeemed by either:

- 1) paying off their debt, or*
- 2) offering another person as a slave who was of greater value*

1 Corinthians 6:19 (ESV)

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,

Romans 6:22 (ESV)

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.

If Christ has paid the price for our freedom, how does that affect his right to determine the course of your life in the following areas?

Your career:

Your relationships:

Your health:

Your money:

Does his right to direct our lives, as he sees fit, create any tensions for you?

The story of Job brings the tension of God's right to handle our lives as he sees fit to a climactic tension.

Read Job 1:1-19

If this happened to you, how would you react to God?

What characteristics of God would you be inclined to challenge?

Job's Response:

Job 1:20-22 (ESV)

²⁰ Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹ And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." ²² In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

Why do you think Job was able to respond in such a way after these intense tragedies?

What truths is he holding on to?

The fact that Job fell to the ground and worshipped reveals that he still viewed God as holy and that his life was centered on him. He did not understand why things happened the way they did, but he had a strong relationship with God which brought him through that trial.

Job understood that everything he had came from God. Everything was a gift which could come and which could go at any time. Just because his family and livelihood were taken away, it did not change what he understood about God's nature and sovereignty.

Read Job 2:1-8

Job's personal health is now attacked by Satan under God's sovereign oversight.

What is the basic premise Satan was arguing?

Satan argued that men would only be faithful to God in the good times while he is blessing them. Satan believes that once you remove the ideal circumstances from someone's life, they will turn against God, proving that he was never really their God in the first place. It was always just about them and their happiness.

Job's Response:

Job 2:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." ¹⁰ But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

How might Job have been tempted to sin in what he said?

Job might have been tempted to curse God and renounce his relationship with him. In other words, he could have declared that God was only worthy to be worshipped if he served Job in ways he expected. This was Satan's precise challenge.

Satan was stressing that Job only worshipped God for the benefits of health and wealth that he received from God. Take those away, and Job would no longer be loyal to God. Satan's original sin was to become discontent with the position God assigned him and, in pride, revolted. Satan was trying to prompt Job to join him in his denouncement of God.

What truth did Job cling to that kept him from falling?

God is sovereign! If we only accept good things from God, then we are essentially "using" God for our own purposes. Job understood that God is worthy to be worshipped regardless of our personal experiences, as drastic and sorrowful as they may be.

Job's three friends come to grieve with him, but instead, they end up frustrating him with their claims as to why he is suffering.

Job 4:7-9 (ESV)

⁷ Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? ⁸ As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. ⁹ By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.

What is the premise on which Job's three friends are operating?

"God blesses the righteous and brings punishment on the wicked."

They were implying that Job and his children must have some sin in their lives, causing them to deserve the treatment they received. This is how they understood the justice of God to be at work. They are arguing that YOU GET WHAT YOU DESERVE.

What do you think about this line of reasoning? Do you agree or disagree?**Job 42:7-8 (ESV)**

⁷ After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. ⁸ Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has."

Did Job's loss and illness have anything at all to do with his lack of faith or some hidden sin in his life? What was the cause of Job's suffering?

Job's suffering never had anything to do with his sin; it had everything to do with his righteousness. It is, unknowingly to him, based on a spiritual confrontation between God and Satan. Satan attacked Job because God held him up as an example of righteousness. He claimed that Job was only faithful to God because of how he was blessed by God. To prove Satan wrong, God allows Satan to remove all blessing from Job's life.

How do you feel about God's decision to let Satan destroy Job's life in such a way?

How do you reconcile this with the holiness, justice, and love of God?

As Job struggled to understand the cause of all his suffering, he defended himself before God by challenging the justice of God. God responds...

Job 38:1-11 (ESV)

¹ Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: ² "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? ³ Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. ⁴ "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. ⁵ Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? ⁶ On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, ⁷ when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? ⁸ "Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, ⁹ when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, ¹⁰ and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, ¹¹ and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed'?"

(This is just a small example of a huge barrage of questions with which God assaults Job – Job 38-41)

What was God's response to Job's challenge of his justice?

God essentially said, "Job, you accuse me of not understanding life and justice. What do you really understand about life, Job? What do you understand about the intrinsic ways life should operate? What do you understand about perfection? You essentially know nothing about the nature of life and how things should take place, and yet you stand there to accuse and judge me, the creator of all things."

Job's Response:

Job 40:3-5 (ESV)

³ Then Job answered the LORD and said: ⁴ "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. ⁵ I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further."

Job 42:1-6 (ESV)

¹ Then Job answered the LORD and said: ² “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ³ ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ⁴ ‘Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.’ ⁵ I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; ⁶ therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

What changed in Job’s perspective? What realization did he come to that caused him to humble himself and approach God in awe and a worshipful manner?

God knew why Job was suffering and allowed it to continue for his divine purposes. Though Job did not understand those purposes, how did God want Job to continue to relate to him through the experience?

God still desired that Job would be faithful in the midst of his suffering. This was the whole point of the challenge. God wanted to reveal to us and the satanic realm that true faith sustains RELATIONSHIP regardless of one’s circumstances.

Why did God allow Satan to act in such a way toward his faithful child?

God never does explain his reasons for allowing Job to suffer in this way. However, there are a few reasons that are readily apparent:

1) God was exalting faithfulness

Those of the angelic realm, who rebelled against God, did so because they were discontent with their position before God. Job’s life is a complete contrast against the angels who rebelled, and his faithfulness ultimately sends them a message of condemnation.

Despite his suffering, though confused and upset, Job does not curse God or walk away from him. The very fact that Job is allowed to suffer for righteousness is an incredible statement of God’s deep respect and love for him. Job would have never suffered in such a way if it were not for his steadfast view of God.

2) Job needed a deeper understanding of God

Job came to the realization that he did not understand the scope of God’s sovereignty. God never did explain to Job why he suffered, and Job could never have understood it even if he had. Job didn’t need to know WHY – he needed to know God. In the midst of his suffering, he needed to trust that God was still in control; God was still just; and that God’s ways were perfect and simply beyond his understanding. Job also needed to know that God loved him amid his suffering. In the same way, God the Father loved Jesus amid his suffering, yet he still called for him to endure it.

3) We need to learn to trust God in the midst of our suffering

Christians throughout the ages have had to suffer deeply, and every time there is suffering, there is always the compelling desire to yell out to God, “Why?” God never tells us why; he states it will be a fact of life in this world. He knows it is happening, and he permits it to take place for his sovereign purposes, which are beyond our comprehension. Job is a message to us that we will experience suffering for reasons we cannot comprehend. We will not always understand WHY God allows us to suffer - it may be for condemnation of the angels, it may be because we need to learn to trust him, it may be because we simply live in an evil world. Whatever the case, our response to suffering will reveal what we truly understand about God in ways that blessing never can.

What do you think this statement means?

“How we go through suffering is an indication of our belief about redemption.”

If we have been purchased by Jesus Christ, then we have handed our lives over to God to do with as he wishes. Submission is not something we do “in order” to get what we want or even to be effective in ministry. Submission is the surrender of our lives to the one who purchased us, trusting he has a sovereign plan he is working out through us.

As we go through suffering yet maintain a strong faith in God, we acknowledge that our faith is not based on our circumstances but on a confidence that God holds our future in his hands. We proclaim that we have died to ourselves and entrust our lives to the One who understands the big picture. We proclaim our confidence that he will accomplish his purposes through us, even through the worst of circumstances.

Luke 22:41-44 (ESV)

⁴¹ And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, ⁴² saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” ⁴³ And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. ⁴⁴ And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

What are the most powerful words of this passage?

“not my will, but yours, be done”

If we truly believe that Jesus has authority in and over our lives, how does that change how we should view our circumstances?

How should we react to God at times when we discover he is letting us suffer?

What does it truly mean to trust God to be “God” in our lives?

Not my will, but yours be done!

LIVING YOUR FAITH

SESSION 5: NAVIGATING SUFFERING

The early church faced significant persecution. For many, it meant the loss of their jobs and means of supporting themselves and their families. For others, it meant the rejection of their families and friends, or it meant torture and death. Many were questioning where God was, why he let this happen, and whether it was worthwhile to remain loyal to Jesus Christ.

What would you want to say to these early believers to encourage them?

James writes to Christ-followers who were struggling with this tension.

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.

Why is our natural tendency to shrug off these words as being too idealistic?

If we remember that these words are actually written by God through James and that God is very serious in what he speaks to us, how might we view these words differently?

What perspective is God adding here that could allow us to embrace suffering differently?

God tells us that suffering will occur but that he can take the suffering this world throws at us and turn it into something that accomplishes his divine purposes. How does suffering make us mature and not “lacking anything”?

Suffering causes us to take a stand on what we believe versus what we experience. It challenges us to determine whether we live for our present or future, whether we live for God’s purpose or our own. As we go through suffering, everything that is not pure in our faith gets stripped away, and we can see where we truly stand concerning God’s role in our life. It is often disturbing to see how much of our relationship with God is rooted in what he “does” for us.

When we come to the place of complete surrender of our lives to God’s purposes, then we will be mature and will lack nothing in our relationship with God.

Hebrews 2:10 (ESV)

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

How was Jesus made perfect through his suffering?

Perfection comes from complete surrender to the will of the Father in the face of death to self and to our desires. By suffering in the extreme way he did, Jesus surrendered fully to the will of the Father. It is easy to submit when blessings are being received, but the true test of faith is submission in the face of intense suffering. In suffering, we either call Jesus Lord, or we choose to center our lives on ourselves.

Have there been times in your life when you felt tempted to abandon God due to the suffering you were experiencing?

Have there been times in your life where, in hindsight, you see that God used your trials to strengthen your faith in him and to make you more mature?

God continues to speak through James:

James 1:5-8 (ESV)

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

In the midst of this discussion on suffering, what prayer request is blatantly missing?

Prayer that the source of the suffering be removed is not mentioned at all. If God has a sovereign purpose for our suffering, whether as a statement to the spiritual realm or for our maturity, then to remove it would be counter to his purposes for our life.

Why should we ask God specifically for wisdom when in the midst of suffering?

If God isn't necessarily going to remove the suffering, then what we need is wisdom to know how to navigate it in ways that continue to strengthen our relationship with him and to allow us to represent him well to others. God tells us that he will shepherd us through the "valley of the shadow of death" as long as we follow his lead (Psalm 23:4).

Asking for wisdom is much more practical than knowing "why" suffering is occurring. Even if we could understand the reason for suffering, it would not show us how to get through it. God promises that he will give us wisdom to get through the circumstances he allows us to face. He will teach us how we should respond to crises, make decisions, and understand how to sustain our relationship with God through it all.

Why does James stress the issue of not doubting?

Our tendency is to ask God for wisdom and then continue to be anxious.

Have you ever asked God for wisdom and then continued to fret about what to do?

What is the inconsistency in that?

It conveys that we don't really believe God is giving us wisdom. If we ask God for something he specifically tells us to ask for (i.e. wisdom) and then question whether or not he will give it to us, we challenge the very character of God. That type of prayer doesn't travel very far. James says that when we ask God for wisdom, we need to trust that he is giving it to us and then, act accordingly.

Nothing we are experiencing has caught God off guard or unaware. He knew before we were born that we would face this trial, and he has promised to walk us through it if we will turn to him for support and wisdom.

There are some questions which we need to ask in discerning God's leading:

- 1) Have you been asking for wisdom?
- 2) Have you been seeking direction through the Bible?
- 3) Is there unity in the Spirit within the family of God on this direction?
- 4) Has God opened a way for you to go?
- 5) Is there a sense of peace once you've made your decision?

If we believe God is giving us the wisdom we need, how will we approach the situation differently?

- *We will not keep second-guessing ourselves*
- *We will proceed with confidence, trusting God is leading us each step of the way*
- *We will not be anxious because we know our lives are in his hands, and we know God knows the way through the wilderness*
- *Instead of becoming angry with God, we learn to rely on him more deeply*

Summary of Daniel 3:

King Nebuchadnezzar made a statue of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on a plain in Babylon. Everyone, when indicated, was to bow down and worship the golden image or be thrown into a blazing furnace. Choosing to stay loyal to God, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to the image and were consequently reported to King Nebuchadnezzar. The king once again issued the instructions to them about what they were to do and added the ominous endnote, "But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were three young Hebrew men taken captive as slaves from Israel and brought to Babylon.

What type of frustrations could they have potentially had with God during this time?

If they bowed down to the golden image under duress, could anyone have blamed them?

Why were they willing to suffer being burned alive instead of “insincerely” bowing before a statue?

Their response:

Daniel 3:16-18 (ESV)

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

- 1) Do you think they had issued some prayers up to God as they were being taken before the king?
- 2) Was their decision consistent with scripture?
- 3) Was there a unity in their spirits to the course they chose?
- 4) Did they believe God would prepare a way?
- 5) Did they have a sense of peace about their approach to this moment of suffering?

What is so powerful about their statement in verse 18?

They were declaring that God comes first and foremost in their life and takes priority even over intense suffering, torture, and death. They were fully submitted to the will of the Father, even if it meant extreme suffering. God first - self second.

How do you think standing together helped them through this trial? What lessons can we learn from their friendship?

When we are united with spiritual friends, we have the strength to stand firm in the midst of whatever suffering we may endure. When we are all alone, it is easier to give in to pressure and to allow our thinking about life, God, and holiness to become distorted. Spirit-filled friends hold us accountable and keep us on the right track in our thinking and actions.

If God had allowed them to be burned in the fire – would it change your perception of what they should have done?

Would God still be holy, just, and loving had he not rescued them? Explain.

How do you “feel” about God when you or loved ones are going through suffering?

If we have given our lives completely over to God, then the question can never be “WHY?” It must simply be, “WHAT?”

“WHAT, God, do you want me to do, as your servant, in the midst of this pain?”

If we ask for WISDOM, he promises to give it to us.

Is there any area in your life where you need to surrender the need to know “WHY” and be willing to embrace only the “WHAT”?

Spend time praying as a group for the various struggles each one faces and ask God to give his wisdom to know how to navigate through the suffering in a way that will glorify him and build his kingdom.

LIVING YOUR FAITH

SESSION 5: SUBMITTING TO OTHERS

Colossians 3:3 (ESV)

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

If we have died to self, how should that affect how we interact with other people?

Exodus 21:23-25 (ESV)

²³ But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

Matthew 5:38-42 (ESV)

³⁸ You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

What was God's intention when he told the Israelites "eye for an eye"?

God was setting parameters on how far someone could go in getting justice. Lamech was an example of taking things too far.

Genesis 4:23-24 (ESV)

²³ Lamech said to his wives: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. ²⁴ If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold."

Lamech's version of justice was perfect revenge. If a man wounds you, you kill him. In the Law, God was restraining how far someone could go in exercising justice. You could never go further than the injury someone gave you.

Have there been times when you've been tempted to get revenge? Did you give in or show restraint?

Was Jesus contradicting what was written in Exodus 21?

By saying, “You have heard that it was said...” Jesus was informing his listeners that the way that this scripture was used was not the way that it was intended. Instead of being the maximum punishment one could exert, and a restraint of evil, the religious leaders were stressing that an eye for an eye was what should always be practiced in every situation. They pushed for the maximum sentence whenever they could.

Jesus declared that the maximum punishment should not always be sought, but rather grace and a willingness to love in the face of adversity.

Why would Jesus say these things? Isn't there a danger of the person being taken advantage of?**Have there been times when turning the other cheek turned out not to be the best solution?****Is Jesus saying we should give in to every oppressor?**

Jesus was not a walking mat for anyone who wanted to trample him. However, he did deny “self” whenever there was an opportunity to build up others and bring them to a closer walk with God. If Jesus fought for justice for himself, he would never have gone to the cross.

It was not justified that Jesus should die, nor was it fair that he should be treated in such a way. Jesus put his love for us, his spiritual enemies, above his own need to be treated justly and, as a result, we can now be rescued by him.

Being a walking mat implies we're a victim. Jesus' response raises us above the role of victim to one who is free to make choices and proactively love others. We make choices, not because we are forced to, but because we choose to. We know that Christ will meet all our needs, so we do not have to struggle or fight for anything. Jesus' teaching moves us from a position of victim to over-comer. We are free; as a result, we can go beyond what others expect.

Were there times when Jesus did not turn the other cheek?

There were plenty of times when Jesus was very harsh with the Pharisees and often turned the tables on them. It was not beneficial for the kingdom of God or the Pharisees at those moments for Jesus to let himself be taken advantage of.

What did Jesus raise as a priority in each of the Matthew 5 verses?

Jesus desired that we be more concerned about loving others than we are about getting justice for ourselves. Our lives will be taken care of by God. If we have died to self, then there is nothing we need to fight for ourselves. Every issue we face regarding justice becomes God's concern, not ours. Because we have died to self, instead of fighting for what we deserve, we are free to fight with unconditional love for others.

The early church struggled with dying to self:**1 Corinthians 6:1-7 (ESV)**

¹ When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? ² Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! ⁴ So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? ⁵ I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, ⁶ but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? ⁷ To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?

What is the main point Paul is trying to communicate?

Paul says that when believers prioritize justice for self over their relationship with other believers, they are already defeated by Satan's deception. Lawsuits among believers reveal that they have no concept about the grace of God and the priority of unity within the family over "rights."

Does that mean we should just always give up and never work things through?

No. The point in this passage is that we "do" work them through, but within the family of God, and along with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To have to go to a secular court to solve disputes within the body of Christ suggests that the Holy Spirit is not present to give his people wisdom and guidance. It makes a mockery of the church and works against God's purposes to redeem the world. For Christians to place their rights ahead of the glory of God's name reveals spiritual immaturity and a complete departure from the values God would have us live by.

Ephesians 1:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ 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, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

How might this scripture free us to not worry about having our needs or expectations met?

If our future reward is guaranteed, we don't need to focus on having things go our way. We are free to focus on helping others find their reward in Jesus Christ. If we have to put up with being wronged along the way, we have still lost nothing but might possibly gain the salvation of

another person. Because Jesus knew who he was and what was waiting for him in heaven, he did not have to strive after anything. When other people didn't live the way they should, it did not change his joy, his freedom, or his response to them. He was free to respond in whatever way was most appropriate.

SPIRIT-FILLED SUBMISSION

Ephesians 5:18, 21 (ESV)

¹⁸ *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit...*

²¹ *[Submitting] to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

Wives submitting to husbands	Eph 5:22
Husbands submitting to wives	Eph 5:25
Children submitting to parents	Eph 6:1
Parents submitting to children	Eph 6:4
Slaves submitting to masters	Eph 6:5
Masters submitting to slaves	Eph 6:9

Why do you think submitting to one another is an outflow of the Spirit-filled life?

Submission is about loving others and doing what is best for them. That describes precisely the very work God wants to accomplish through us. The second greatest command is to love your neighbor, and that can only be done through an attitude of submission.

Also, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. Whatever Christ did on earth is the very thing his Spirit wants to continue to do through us. Jesus lived the Spirit-filled life, which he demonstrated by constantly setting his preferences aside out of a desire to serve others.

Why do we find submission to others so difficult?

Jesus' Example of Submission

John 13:3-15 (ESV)

³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you?” ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

Why did Peter struggle with the idea of Jesus washing his feet?

Peter was still operating on the principle that those who are great should be served. Since Jesus was “above” them in position, it was very inappropriate (in Peter’s mind) that Jesus should serve him in such a way. It also reflected that, at some point in time, Peter would expect that he would be in a position for others “under” him to serve him.

Why did Jesus wash his disciples’ feet?

Jesus was communicating that his kingdom worked precisely opposite of Satan’s kingdom. Satan’s kingdom says that you need to keep rising to a position where others serve you. Jesus was teaching that in his kingdom, you keep rising to the point where you serve others. The greatest in the kingdom of God is the greatest servant. This is the person who sets aside their agendas, their preferences, their expectations, their needs, and their desires for the building up of others in Christ Jesus.

How can we translate the principle of feet washing into today’s culture?

Why is it sometimes easier to serve someone else as opposed to letting someone else serve you? What sinful barriers must we allow the Holy Spirit to break down in our lives so we can allow ourselves to serve and be served?

Pride

What would our church be like if it were filled with non-complaining, servant-hearted “feet-washers”?

Do you find it is easy to slip back into a perspective of an “others should serve me” mentality? How can we prevent that from happening?

How can we cultivate this attitude more deeply within our church?

How can we personally commit this week to being a feet-washer?

Possible Exercise: Feet washing time

Have two basins of water and two towels.

Have the men and women separate into two groups and then take turns washing each other's feet.

- *What was your experience in this process?*
- *In what ways did it feel awkward?*
- *In what ways did it help you identify with Jesus?*

SESSION 6: JUDGING OTHERS

Tensions will always occur between people, whether it be at work, at home, in public, or even at church.

What causes tensions or conflict between you and others? Are there any consistent patterns or commonalities in the types of tensions you experience?

Discuss the following quote: *(keep this a humorous dialogue)*

“The only consistent feature in all of your dissatisfying relationships is you.”

<http://www.despair.com/viewall.html>

When conflicts occur, how do you typically handle them? Are you more inclined to want to confront the conflict right away, or are you more prone to withdraw? Why?

Can you think of any biblical examples where relationship conflict was handled badly?

Some Examples:

<i>Cain and Abel</i>	<i>Genesis 4:8</i>	<i>Cain killed Abel</i>
<i>Lamech</i>	<i>Genesis 4:23-24</i>	<i>Killed anyone who wounded him</i>
<i>Jacob and Esau</i>	<i>Genesis 24:41</i>	<i>Esau was determined to kill Jacob until many years later</i>
<i>Judas Iscariot</i>	<i>Luke 24:12</i>	<i>Betrayed Jesus</i>

Can you think of any biblical examples where relationship conflict was handled well?

Some Examples:

<i>Joseph and his brothers</i>	<i>Genesis 45:5</i>	<i>Forgave his brothers</i>
<i>Jesus and Peter</i>	<i>John 21:15</i>	<i>Reaffirmed his relationship with Peter</i>
<i>Zacchaeus and others</i>	<i>Luke 19:8</i>	<i>Made restitution to those he wronged</i>

Can you share an experience where a broken relationship was restored in your life? How did that restoration happen?

What are some biblical principles we can apply to resolve relational conflict in our lives?

Following are some scriptures that give us wisdom regarding restoring our broken relationships. Reflect on the significance of each passage.

Matthew 7:1-5 (ESV)

¹ “Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

In what ways do we tend to judge others? Think through the past week and try to recall some times when perhaps you “judged” someone.

Why is it so easy to spot shortcomings in other people but ignore our own at the very same time?

What does Jesus say we should do at these times?

Jesus states that at the very moment we feel inclined to judge someone for their shortcomings, we had better first stop and reflect on our own lives. If we are going to choose to be critical about another’s approach to life, we need to make sure we have no issues in our own lives. It is a contradiction to set a standard of righteous behavior for someone else which we don’t even meet ourselves.

Why is it so difficult to admit that we also have flaws, and instead of condemning, choose to support the other person?

Pride! Pride is our greatest enemy when it comes to relationships. Finding faults in other people is just a way to feel better about ourselves. We try to hide or ignore our flaws because we don’t want to be confronted with our inadequacy, but finding faults with others affirms we’re better than they are.

When we humble ourselves and realize we all struggle, we can empathize with other people’s faults instead of judging them. We can then try to be a loving support that encourages and helps people instead of lowering their worth and significance.

If we truly understood that we will be judged by the very standard we judge others, how would that affect how we would judge others?

When we judge someone, we also tend to hand out a punishment to them in some way. These punishments may be blatant or very subtle. What are some examples of ways you have punished people you have judged in the past...or present?

- *Gossip*
- *Silent treatment*
- *Avoidance*
- *Anger*
- *Accusations*
- *Belittling*
- *Violence*
- *Gestures*
- *Grumbling*
- *Withholding kindness*
- *Any expression in which we do not show love*

Psalms 75:7 (NASB)

But God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another.

What does it mean to declare God is Judge?

To declare God is Judge is to affirm that he alone sits in the position to judge the actions of others. I can no more declare myself the judge of another person's actions than I can walk into a courtroom and sit on the judge's bench. I have not been granted that position or authority.

Romans 14:10-13 (ESV)

¹⁰ *Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹ for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." ¹² So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

¹³ *Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.*

What are some reasons as to why God is the only one who can rightly judge?

- *No one else can rightly judge because everyone is guilty themselves of wrong-doing, except God.*
- *When we judge we do so based on what we see or know, which is always limited. God, however, sees all and knows all; there is nothing hidden from his sight.*

- *When I judge, my sinful perspectives come into play. I may show favoritism; I may not see some sins as wrong; my moral compass is misaligned.*
- *I am in no position of personal authority over anyone else. God alone is the one who is over all and therefore has authority to judge those under him.*

Romans 12:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰ To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”

What does the above verse imply about our role in judging and condemning others?

If we are not to be judges, then we are also not the ones to hand out the guilty verdict and the accompanying consequences. In other words, I am not responsible for venting wrath towards the guilty party. When we judge and condemn others, we are “playing God” and assuming a responsibility we were never meant or equipped to carry out. Judging and condemning others will not only hurt them but will also hurt us.

Share some examples of times when you assumed responsibility to judge and condemn someone, but in the long run, you found it only hurt yourself instead.

Judging others is an incredible responsibility that carries a heavy burden. God tells us he is freeing us from this responsibility so that we never have to worry about judging or condemning another person at all – he will take care of that for us.

If we truly believe that we are not responsible to judge or condemn any other person, in what ways might that free us?

If we are not responsible to judge or condemn anyone, we are free to LOVE that other person without any hindrance, regardless of what they may have done wrong. When we judge others, it often takes a negative toll on us emotionally and removes joy from our lives.

Consider the times when you have carried a grudge against someone – how did that affect you?

What does Romans 12:20 say our response should be, instead of condemnation?

Paul writes that we are to go out of our way to show love to those we would normally condemn.

What might be some practical results of feeding our enemy?

- 1) *We open a door for reconciliation through our acts of unselfish love*
- 2) *We strengthen him so that he is able to continue attacking us*

Why would we show love to others if they only continue to seek to harm us?

Their behavior does not control our love and actions. The will of God determines our actions. We don't have to worry about judging them because we know God is already taking care of that. Therefore, it is not our responsibility to hand out condemnation in any way.

If we are not to judge that person's actions or condemn them, then there is nothing to stop us from loving them, even if they continue to attack. If they continue to harm us in the midst of our continued love, then it will go very badly for them on the day God does judge them. Justice will be served.

God is giving you permission this week to not judge or condemn anyone; you are freed from that heavy burden. If you are free from this responsibility, how will it practically affect how you relate to people this coming week?

CHALLENGE: Try to go through this next week without judging or condemning anyone.

Consider:

- Are there any people you need to treat differently?
- Are there any people you need to ask for forgiveness for how you've judged them?
- Are there any people from whom you have been withholding love? (avoiding, silent treatment, gossip, grumbling, etc.)

Relationship is what we were created for; relationships, therefore, needs to be our highest priority. There are times when God will choose to judge "through us," but we will discuss that in a few weeks.

Matthew 5:9 (ESV)

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

LIVING YOUR FAITH

SESSION 6: RESOLVING CONFLICT

Just because we are not to judge others does not mean we are not to acknowledge and resolve problems. What is the difference between judging someone and acknowledging a problem that exists between people?

Judging implies that I am setting myself above the other person as their judge and have the responsibility to hand out a consequence for their behavior. In so doing, I am putting myself in place of God as judge, and I become proud, unloving, and blind to my own inadequacies.

However, that does not mean we do not see issues that create tensions between us and others. One can be discerning of what is going on without judging the other person. Discernment sees there is a problem, and love compels us to resolve tensions that divide relationships.

The goal of this study is to look at a biblical approach to resolving conflicts as they potentially occur within the family of God. Though the focus here is within God's family, many of the principles will be applicable to life outside the church as well.

PEOPLE YOU HAVE WRONGED

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.

Why does Jesus say to make things right with another believer before you come to worship God?

What is the role of the altar?

The altar is the place where our relationship with God is restored, and it is symbolic of the ultimate sacrifice Jesus would pay to make that happen. Jesus took the first step towards reconciliation even when he had done absolutely nothing wrong. We sinned, yet he sacrificially did everything in his power to make things right with us.

If we have wronged someone else, or at least know that someone feels we have wronged them, we need to be responsible, take initiative and go to them to make things right. How can we receive forgiveness from God at his expense if we are not willing to assume responsibility for the way we have wronged others?

Once we have done everything within our ability to bring about reconciliation and peace, then we can return to God and receive the peace he is offering us.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE WRONGED YOU

Matthew 18:15-17 (ESV)

¹⁵ “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

What is the four-stage process for reconciliation when a believer has wronged you?

- 1) *Talk to the other person alone*
- 2) *Take one or two other witnesses with you*
- 3) *Take it to the church*
- 4) *View him as an unbeliever*

Why should we always approach the person on a one-to-one basis first?

If you can handle a relationship tension in private, that is the best process. The more people you involve, the bigger the issue becomes, and the more pride the person will have to overcome in admitting his fault. How would you prefer someone to handle a situation with you if they felt you had wronged them? All of us would prefer the person to come and talk with us personally in a calm, loving way. That is what Jesus is calling us to do with others; treat them as we would like to be treated.

Why are we inclined to talk to others about a person who has wronged us instead of talking to the person involved?

We often gossip about another person as opposed to talking to them for a variety of reasons:

- *We have already judged them and feel they should be condemned by us and others.*
- *We want others to take our side on the issue and make us feel justified by their agreement with us.*
- *We are not comfortable confronting conflict.*
- *We feel the other person should be the one to make things right.*

What is wrong with this approach?

- *This approach does not solve the relationship tension; rather it spreads it.*
- *The others we have communicated to have only received one side of the story – the side that supports our perspective. It is always an incomplete perspective.*
- *Even if we resolve the conflict, everyone else we have talked to is still left with the initial tension and bias against the other person.*
- *It works against the unity of the church.*

- *It does not express the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.*
- *It places us in the position of judge and executioner.*

What should we do if someone starts to vent to us about another person?

If someone starts to talk to us about another person, we need to make sure we are not the recipient of gossip. We need to lovingly tell the person they need to go personally and talk to the offender before mentioning it to anyone else. If they are spiritually immature and feel incapable of confronting the person, we may need to suggest that we go with them. But the priority is that they first try to resolve the conflict one on one with the other believer.

If people have built a habit of coming to you with their problems, it may be an indication that you have already established an unhealthy pattern of “listening.” It sometimes makes us feel good to know others want to come to us for advice, but sometimes in so doing, we are actually enabling the other person to sin. We enable them to gossip without first following Jesus’ directions on how to resolve conflict lovingly. Sometimes we need to tell people we cannot listen to their frustration until they have followed Jesus’ commands.

Who is the one who should initiate reconciliation?

You! Always! Even when the other person is at fault!

Why is it beneficial to take a witness along if the first approach doesn’t work?

What are the witnesses witnessing to?

The witnesses are not people who are coming along to give support, wisdom and to watch the proceedings. The witnesses in this scenario are people who have first-hand knowledge of the offense and can give testimony that a wrong has been done against the plaintiff. It is no longer just “my word” against “their word” or “my perspective versus their perspective.” They are witnesses in a judicial sense.

Witnesses indicate the severity of the offense. We are not talking about a mere little tiff, but a significant offense that is in complete contrast to God’s character, which, if not resolved, will result in the offender being asked to separate themselves from the church and the name of Christ.

The role of the witness is very critical here. If the offender refuses to repent, the witnesses are to testify before the church as a whole. If the church is unsuccessful in bringing about repentance and reconciliation, they are to ask the offender to leave their community of faith.

NOTE: *In relationship tensions of lesser significance, it may still be wise to bring others along, not as witnesses, but to provide extra wisdom and advice in situations where it is difficult for two people to get on the same page. Whereas the offender may not take you seriously, they may*

be willing to listen when others are present and giving their input.

It is usually wise to bring along someone the offender already respects. Having additional people tends to lower the intensity of the emotions, but keep in mind that the person may feel ganged up on.

Why should an unresolved issue between two believers be taken to the church?

John 17:20-23 (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.

Unity among the body of Christ is paramount. In John 17, Jesus prays that the church would be unified so that the world would know who Jesus was. Love within the family of God was to be the pronouncement to the world that God's kingdom was present in their lives.

John 13:34-35 (ESV)

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

What is the problem with holding on to grudges?

To hold on to rights or grudges, continuing to hurt someone, or to resist reconciliation is inconsistent with being a follower of Jesus Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Every relationship tension should be resolved within the family of God. This does not mean that we will always agree, but we will be united if the Holy Spirit is central to our lives.

Every significant issue in the life of the church requires unity of the Spirit. The role of the church is to ensure that the Holy Spirit is guiding the situation and that all relevant scriptures are effectively considered in the issue. The ultimate goal is to receive the Holy Spirit's leading, discernment, and wisdom to lead the two believers back to a peaceful relationship with one another and the church family.

We will discuss the meaning of the last step during the last session and what happens if the offender refuses to submit to the church.

Resolving conflict is a significant aspect of learning to submit to one another.

OTHER BELIEVERS WHO ARE WRONGING GOD

Galatians 6:1-5 (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. ³ For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵ For each will have to bear his own load.

Why would we ever confront someone else about their sin? Isn't that being judgmental?

It's not about being judgmental; it's about love. If we truly care about someone, we will speak into their lives about things that are destructive to them in their relationship with God and others. To not speak into one another's life in such a way is to NOT love them.

***Judgment** is about our pride and condemnation of others.*

***Confronting Sin** is about loving the other person and the concern about how the name of Christ is represented.*

Keep in mind, Paul is writing here to believers about their interactions with other believers. We are not expected to hold non-believers accountable for living the Christ-life.

What are some reasons we might not feel comfortable approaching another person regarding their sin?

- *We might not feel worthy because of our own sin*
- *We might be concerned people would think we are self-righteous and judgmental*
- *We might be afraid the person will not respond well, and a bigger tension will be created*
- *We fear confrontation of any kind*

Why are all these reasons insufficient?

All of them ignore what is best for the other person. They are rooted in a deeper concern for self-preservation than caring about the other person's spiritual well-being. God never calls us to avoid doing the hard thing of loving others, but rather to speak the truth in love – “in love” being the operative words.

What should be the basis when confronting sin?

The Bible always has to be the basis for confronting sin. If it is not clear in scripture that this behavior is a sin, you may be arguing based on your own perspective or traditions handed down to you instead of God's truth. The other person should be able to clearly see from scripture that their behavior is indeed sin and, as a result, be convicted by God and turn away from that sin.

Why does Paul stress that we should restore others gently and to watch ourselves so that we won't be tempted?

The temptation when confronting sin in another believer is to not do so in love. In those moments, we need to question our motives. If we are not responding to the person with gentleness, then our motives are more rooted in pride and arrogance, and we forget that we, too, have struggled with sin. When we start comparing ourselves to others, we tend to look down on the other person and in so doing, raise ourselves in our own eyes in pride.

Our goal for the person is not that they start living up to some "righteous standard" but that they are restored to a healthy relationship with God and his family.

Even if the other person does not change their behavior, they should know from your approach that you love and value them.

Romans 12:14-21 (ESV)

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another.

Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.

Never be wise in your own sight.

¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Dying to self and submitting to others is an all-encompassing commitment.

Which of the above phrases in Romans 12 do you find the most difficult?

TIME FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Pray for the group that God would reveal any relationship where there is an unresolved tension that he wants them to address. Then give them a few minutes to allow the Spirit to speak if there is any relationship restoring or building they need to initiate.

Write down any names that come to your mind that you believe the Holy Spirit is prompting you to talk to.

Make a commitment to connect with that person within the next week or at the earliest time possible.

LIVING YOUR FAITH

SESSION 6: JUDGING VS. FORGIVING

REVIEW: JUDGING

In the previous studies, we discussed how we are NOT to JUDGE or condemn others. What do you recall were the reasons for this?

- *We are not to judge because we are not THE judge. God alone is judge, and he will take care of evaluating everyone's behavior.*
- *We are not in a position of personal authority over anyone else.*
- *We are not to judge because we are spiritually guilty, and our perspective is limited.*

*If we are not responsible for judging, then it is also **not our responsibility to condemn** and punish others for their actions. (We are discussing relationships and personal interactions – not societal justice). How can you give a consequence if the person has not yet been judged? It is God's responsibility to take vengeance and punish wrongs – not ours.*

If we are not responsible to JUDGE or CONDEMN others, how are we told to relate to them?

If we trust God will take care of all the judging and condemning and that we are freed from this heavy responsibility, then we are free simply to LOVE, showing people the grace of God.

Only this type of freedom can make it possible for us to LOVE our ENEMIES as Christ commanded.

In what practical ways does judging trap us in our personal lives?

When I choose to judge and condemn another person, I am bound to them and the hurt they caused me.

I can never let it go because I must remain the one who continually judges and punish them. In my mind, I am thinking, "If I don't punish them, who will?" We demand justice and feel we must be the ones to continually enforce that judgment against them.

This act of judging and retaining anger against a person is extremely stressful and takes away the joy available to us in the present. Sustaining such emotions requires a great deal of energy and can be emotionally exhausting. Holding on to anger can not only affect our emotional and spiritual health, but we may discover it affects our physical health as well.

By refusing to be another person's judge, I am freeing myself from the responsibility to condemn them. When I let go of judging, I am also making a decision to let go of bitterness against the other person, as bitterness is simply a form of punishment we feel the other person deserves.

Personal freedom comes through not being bound to another person's actions against us by not sustaining judgment against them. It was never our position to judge, never our position to condemn, and never our responsibility to do anything but LOVE.

James 4:12 (ESV)

There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

NOT JUDGING must be rooted in the theological understanding that GOD IS JUDGE, and he will take care of justice.

Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

How have you heard forgiveness explained in the past?

Often forgiveness is explained as something necessary for “us” to do to find freedom, that unless we forgive, we stay trapped to the other person. It describes forgiveness as a decision we make to “take the hooks” out of ourselves to become free from the bondage to the past hurtful event and offender.

How might our understanding of being free through “not judging” change our perspective on forgiveness?

We have discovered that freedom comes through the decision to trust that God is judge, that he will take care of any offense against us, and therefore we don't have to worry about the outcome; we don't have to make sure justice is served against our offender. Through not judging, we are free then to love our enemies.

Forgiveness – whatever it is, has nothing to do with setting us free because we are already free before we even come to the issue of forgiveness.

**FORGIVENESS is NOT about setting ourselves free because we are already freed by the act of not judging and choosing to love our enemies.
This happens before we come to the concept of forgiveness.**

If “NOT JUDGING” sets us free, then what is the role of forgiveness?

What DOES Forgiveness mean?

To forgive means to:

- *offer a pardon to someone who is guilty or*
- *release a person from a debt that they owe you*

Go through the following checklist and see if you have embraced any of these beliefs in the past.

Forgiveness does NOT mean:

- ☐ Approving of what someone else did
- ☐ Pretending that evil never took place
- ☐ Making excuses for other people's bad behavior
- ☐ Ignoring abuse
- ☐ Letting others walk all over you
- ☐ Pretending that you were never hurt
- ☐ All negative consequences of sin are canceled

What are some times when you may forgive a person, but LOVE will not let the past behavior continue?

- *A wife who continues to be abused by her husband.*
- *A person asking for money only to use it in destructive ways: gambling, drugs, etc.*
- *Any situation where it is not beneficial for the other person to continue in a destructive life pattern. Love for the person compels us to intervene.*

BENEFITS OF FORGIVENESS***Psalms 32:5 (NLT)***

Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

Psalms 51:8-12 (ESV)

⁸ *Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.*

⁹ *Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.*

¹⁰ *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

¹¹ *Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.*

¹² *Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.*

What is the benefit for the one who is forgiven?

The one who is forgiven is set free from their guilt and restored to a joyful relationship. There is no barrier between the offender and the offended any longer. Since we have been set free from our refusal to judge and condemn, the goal of forgiveness is to set the other person FREE.

Forgiveness is about setting the OTHER PERSON free.

Can you recall a time when you felt emotionally free, even though someone wronged you; they, however, were plagued by guilt and shame?

You were already free because you chose to let God be the judge. They, however, were not free due to the guilt of their actions. What would they need to do for THEM to be free from the wrong THEY perpetuated against you?

Luke 17:3-4 (ESV)

³ Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, ⁴ and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

What is the relationship between REPENTANCE and FORGIVENESS?

Repentance paves the way for forgiveness. Only through repentance can a person be freed from the guilt of their sinful actions. When a person repents and asks for forgiveness, then forgiveness can be received, and healing in the relationship can occur.

Ezekiel 18:30b-31 (ESV)

³⁰ Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. ³¹ Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?

What does it mean to repent?

- 1) To acknowledge personal wrongdoing
- 2) To feel regret for the wrong behavior
- 3) To humbly and sincerely ask for forgiveness
- 4) To change one's mind and turn from sin and to live righteously

**If the goal of forgiveness is to set the other person free,
they can only become free when they come to the point of repentance.**

Colossians 3:13 (ESV)

...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.

What is the example God gives us with regard to forgiveness?

- 1) God acknowledges the wrongs we have committed against him.
- 2) God understands that those wrongs have created a barrier in the relationship.
- 3) God initiated healing in the relationship by paying the consequence for our wrongs – even when we didn't care.
- 4) God offers us the gift of forgiveness at expense to himself.
- 5) God lovingly waits for us to receive his forgiveness through repentance and restore our relationship with him.

Note: *God offers forgiveness, but he cannot convey forgiveness apart from repentance.*

Why do you think people in relationship with God are told to forgive others?

- *We are to represent God's character and love so that he can bring grace to people through us.*
- *Forgiveness recognizes God's desire for peace in relationships, especially within the family of believers. Offering forgiveness declares that we long to remove every obstacle that prevents love from flowing to others.*

Why would we be willing to forgive someone if they repeatedly wrong us?

We are to forgive in the same way we have been forgiven. We have repeatedly sinned against God (much more than seventy times seven), yet we are willing to receive God's gift of forgiveness to cleanse us and set us free to approach an unhindered relationship with him. Only through forgiveness can we receive joy and peace in our relationships.

What if the person refuses to repent?

If a person refuses to repent, they stay trapped in their guilt and shame, yet we will be free because we have chosen not to judge. Unfortunately, there will be no relational peace or joy when a sin barrier still exists, but that cannot stop us from loving and serving the other person as Jesus did for us when we were in rebellion against him.

Can you share an example of how others have forgiven you?

Romans 5:8 (ESV)

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

How have you typically responded when you've been relationally hurt?

- *Did offering forgiveness play a role?*
- *Were you willing to initiate forgiveness?*
- *Did you wait for the other person to come to you?*
- *Why do we often wait for the other person to initiate?*
- *What process did Jesus use? He initiated even when we were still his self-declared enemies.*

Forgiveness is not about ignoring history, nor is it about ignoring changes that need to occur. Forgiveness is about giving the other person the opportunity to move forward in their relationship with you as opposed to being trapped in their past sin.

Matthew 6:12-14 (NLT)

¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

How would you paraphrase what Jesus is saying?

- *Father, forgive me in the same way that I forgive others*
- *Forgiveness is something to be Received and Given*
- *Unless we show a forgiving spirit we can't expect to be forgiven*

Why does Jesus connect God's forgiving us with how we forgive others?

When we say that we have received God's forgiveness, but cannot forgive another, we declare that the other person's sin against us is worse than our sin against God. We trivialize our sin against God and elevate their sin against us, reversing the two greatest commands' order. In so doing, I am making myself out to be God, Judge, and executioner against the one who would dare sin against me. Jesus is implying that such an attitude reveals that we had no real sense of repentance for our sin against God, and as a result, we remain unforgiven.

Jesus has set us free, and he doesn't want us to be bound again by hate and unforgiveness. His grace is something to be received and shared. He established the model of freeing others when it is not deserved, and he expects us to follow his example.

When we refuse to forgive, what does that imply about our view of God as Judge?

When I refuse to forgive, I declare that God is not to be trusted to be Judge, so I must take on that role. I declare that God is unreliable as judge, and therefore I must vent my wrath at the offending party to have justice. I become very proud, arrogant, and blind in my perception of life, my own guilt, and my self-righteousness. A person who sustains this perspective does not understand God or his forgiveness in their life.

Additional reading:

Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor (Matthew 18:21-35)

Personal Reflection:

Who has wronged you that you are still judging and condemning and have not offered forgiveness.

Pray for the group that God would reveal any relationship (God, themselves, others) where there is unforgiveness he wants them to address. Then give them a few minutes to allow the Spirit to speak regarding any relationship reconciliation they need to address.

Write down any names you believe the Holy Spirit is prompting you to stop judging and offer forgiveness.

LIVING YOUR FAITH

SESSION 7: HOW TO FORGIVE

Proverbs 20:22 (ESV)

Do not say, “I will repay evil”; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you.

What should you do when you discover you have been judging and condemning someone?

1) Consider your relationship with God

Understand that this is, first of all, an issue between you and God.

What truths do we need to acknowledge about God that would set us free from the need to judge others?

- *God is Judge*
- *God is Just*
- *God will meet my needs*

How should you resolve the distrust you have with God in these areas?

- *Confess and Repent*
- *Step down from the Judge’s bench and let God do his job*
- *Approach the relationship as Jesus wants you to through you*

1 Peter 2:23-24 (ESV)

²³ *When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*

Why did Jesus act the way he did?

2) Consider your relationship with the other person

Luke 23:33-34 (ESV)

³³ *And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*

Why did Jesus not respond in anger to those killing him?

Why were the soldiers doing what they were doing? What were their perspective and motivation?

Why is it important to understand the other person's perspective?

When we start to view life through the eyes of the other person, we can begin to understand their behavior toward us. This can accomplish several different effects:

- *It may reveal how our behavior has contributed to the problem*
- *It may reveal a misunderstanding that can be easily corrected*
- *It may evoke in us sympathy rather than anger*
- *It will convey respect and value to the other person*

Ephesians 4:2, 31-32 (ESV)

²...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love...

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.

What role does humility play in offering forgiveness?

Matthew 18:35 (ESV)

So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

What does it mean to forgive from the heart?

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.

What role should thankfulness play?**2 Corinthians 5:17-21 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

What role should mission play?**If we are free, what then is the motivation for offering forgiveness?**

Offering forgiveness means we proactively look for ways to free a person from bondage to their past actions. Our interpersonal acts of forgiveness become living pictures of the forgiveness Christ offers everyone.

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.

What do the above verses teach us about how we should seek reconciliation with people who have wronged us?

God took the first step in restoring our relationship with him, even though we were the ones to break the relationship. At his own expense, he took the initiative to remove any relational barriers and show how much he desired a restored relationship with us. We should always be willing to take the first step even when others have wronged us.

Luke 15:11-24 (ESV)

¹¹ And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in

that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!’ ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.’ ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’” ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.’ ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

In this case, why do you think the father did not go chasing after the son when he left?

There was no point in chasing after the son, because the son was not repentant and ready to return. Had the father chased the son, the son would not have responded and continued to run away.

What determines when you should chase after someone versus waiting for them to come to you?

When the son did return, what was the significance of the gifts the father gave him?

Robe: *reveals him to have a position of an honored son*

Genesis 37:3 (ESV)

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors.

Isaiah 61:10 (ESV)

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Ring: reveals him as having family authority. He could make sales, make purchases and take out loans, all because he carried his father's seal..

Genesis 41:41-42 (ESV)

⁴¹ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." ⁴² Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck.

Sandals: revealed him as a son as opposed to a servant. Though the son was willing to return as a servant, the father forgave him and restored him to the full relationship he had before, even better.

What principles might we carry from this story into our own relational conflicts?

CAUTION: The above story is a parable, and as such, it is designed only to illustrate one key point and cannot be taken to extremes.

In what ways do we need to be careful about using this as a sole model for forgiveness?

In this story, the father represents God, who willingly and lovingly forgives his son and raises him to restored status within the family. It is true that God will only forgive once we come to the point of repentance and return to him; however, we also know that in the big picture of eternity, our Father aggressively worked on our behalf to make salvation possible before we became repentant.

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."

Why do you think Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him?

Jesus was giving Peter the opportunity to counter the words of denial he spoke when Jesus was arrested.

How was this approach to restoring the relationship different than our typical approach?

Jesus knew Peter was repentant and desired to be restored to the relationship. At this moment, it did not need to be a direct conversation about the past betrayal. Peter needed a deep affirmation of love and a commitment to walk in that love in an ongoing way.

Instead of chastising or punishing Peter, he called him to a higher level of responsibility within Jesus' kingdom. He called him to assume responsibility to mentor and equip Jesus' disciples.

What principles might we carry from this story into our own relational conflicts?**What are some practical ways one might initiate reconciliation with someone who has wounded them and does not seem repentant?****2 Corinthians 5:18 (ESV)**

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...

What does the above verse indicate about how we should approach life?

The above verse says that our lives should be all about entering into damaged relationships and bringing about peace. First, between others and God, but then on the horizontal plane in our earthly relationships: Love God and love others.

As scary as this sounds, it means we should always run to relational conflict, not away from it. We should always bring with us the hope of peace into every relationship we enter.

Go and be a minister of reconciliation this week!

SESSION 7: CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Review: What is the four-stage process for reconciliation when someone has wronged you?

- 1) *Talk to the other person alone*
- 2) *Take one or two others with you*
- 3) *Take it to the church*
- 4) *View him as an unbeliever*

Matthew 18:15-17 (ESV)

¹⁵ If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

What should the church do if someone refuses to repent and continues in a sinful direction?

What do you think Jesus means when he says to treat such a person as you would a Gentile or a tax collector?

1 Corinthians 5:1-13 (ESV)

¹ It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat

with such a one.¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?¹³ God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

What is your initial reaction to this passage?

GOING DEEPER

1 Corinthians 5:1 (ESV)

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.

What is the nature of the man's sin?

He is sexually immoral with his stepmother.

Leviticus 18:7 (NLT)

“Do not violate your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother; you must not have sexual relations with her.

1 Corinthians 5:2-3 (ESV)

² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. ³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.

Why might the church have been proud of such a situation?

Perhaps they were proud of the fact that they were tolerant. Maybe they believed that since they were forgiven by grace, it didn't matter how you lived.

*In this passage, Paul doesn't say very much about the man's sin itself; he is more shocked by the church's reaction or lack of response to the man's sin. The church is headed in a perilous spiritual direction that will destroy it unless they repent and embrace God's holiness. **Holiness demands a separation from sin, not a proud embracing of it.***

1 Corinthians 5:4-5 (ESV)

⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

What is the ultimate goal of delivering the man over to Satan?

The goal is that he might truly repent, submit to the lordship of Jesus, and be saved. The goal of church discipline is ALWAYS restoration.

What does it mean to “deliver someone over to Satan”?

The community of Christ is to be a place of love, support, encouragement, strengthening, and safety. By separating the man from the community of Christ, he is being unleashed into the spiritual and physical realm that is under Satan’s influence and control. The contrast of experiencing life apart from the body of Christ and left to the destructive life of the world would hopefully cause the man to repent and turn back to Christ. The goal is that he would put away/off the sinful self, repent of it, and embrace the holiness of God.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 (ESV)

⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

What is the comparison to the Passover Feast?

Leaven is different from yeast in that leaven is a portion of dough that is kept from the loaf to influence the new loaf. The old fermented dough blends with the fresh dough, causing it to ferment and rise.

In the Passover Feast, the Israelites were to clean their house from any leaven whatsoever entirely. Leaven became a picture of the old sinful life, and Paul is saying that they must get rid of the man who is living out that old sinful life in their midst.

The association with the Passover lamb is the understanding that it is the sacrifice of the Passover lamb that made the new life possible.

Get rid of the old life so that you can live the new life. This applies in a personal way, but also within the family of God. The church could not live out their new identity as the new community or the people of God if they kept embracing the old sinful life.

Paul is concerned about the man’s sin, but what is his greater concern?

Paul’s ultimate concern is the health of the church.

Paul is concerned that the church’s holding on to the old sin would cause it to blend with the new community of Christ, causing every aspect of it to become tainted with sin. Sin spreads through a community causing the entire community to become infected, much like a contagious virus.

By getting rid of the “old leaven,” they are now free to start a “new loaf” of bread without all the old dough’s harmful bacteria.

Paul is concerned that the church be a new and holy community.

Have you seen situations where you could see sin sweeping through a community of people?

What would happen if the church continued to turn a blind eye to this sin?

If the church continued in this course of action, it would become no different than the sinful community around it. The freedom that comes through repentance and holiness would be lost. The victorious life Christ made available through his death and resurrection would evade them. They would continue to remain trapped in their sin, set apart from the Lordship of Jesus Christ in their lives. The community itself would become fragmented.

Worst of all, there would be no leading of the Spirit, no unity in the Spirit, and no blessing from the Spirit. It would be a church where Christ was absent. In Revelation, Christ threatens to remove from his presence any churches that embrace sin.

How damaging would it be to the church’s representation of Christ if they allowed evil to run through it unchecked?

The name of Christ would be slandered, and there would be no accurate representation of Christ in that community. In fact, the name of Christ would become a mockery. One of the world’s biggest complaints about the church is hypocrisy, where we teach one thing but live another. Why would someone embrace Christ when there is no difference reflected.

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (ESV)

⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

How should we relate to a person who claims to be a Christ-follower but defiantly chooses to continue sinning?

This is a difficult passage to know exactly what the parameters are Paul is setting in place. Does it just mean the person is to not celebrate the Lord’s Supper?

Does it mean that individual believers should not even have this person over for dinner? It does at least imply that whenever the community of Christ gathers as an “identity,” this person should not be included in that group. In the New Testament, that would have included the Love Feasts, the Lord’s Supper, prayer gatherings, etc. He is not to be considered part of the Christ-community.

If we are not to dissociate with non-believers, why should we dissociate from a believer acting like a non-believer?

It is important that the rest of the church family understand that this type of continuous, defiant sin is unacceptable within the family of God.

It is important that the rest of the world understand that the church does not embrace the values being proclaimed by that person; that his actions do not represent the character of Christ. It is important that they understand the church does not view this way of living as being “righteous.”

How many times in this entire passage does Paul say they are to put the man outside the community of faith?

- 1 Cor 5:2
- 1 Cor 5:5
- 1 Cor 5:7
- 1 Cor 5:13

Matthew 7:1-5 (ESV)

¹ “Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

How are we to reconcile the above passage with Matthew 7:1-5?

Paul is not addressing a situation where someone is arrogantly finding fault with another while at the same time being oblivious to their own sins. This is a situation where a “believer” is flagrantly sinning and has no intention of abandoning the sinful old life. He is defiantly rejecting the holiness of God in his life.

The “church” is to judge within the family of God; we are to hold one another accountable; we are to call sin - sin. We all sin; we all struggle; we all stumble and need help getting back on solid ground. However, when one “brother” chooses to unrepentantly continue in sin, that puts everything into a whole new scenario that potentially affects the entire church and the name of Christ.

Why do we find it hard to apply this teaching?

**Has anyone seen this practice of church discipline applied in a church?
How was it applied, and how did it conclude?**

The following passage may or may not refer back to the man in 1 Corinthians 5, but it does reveal how the church is to respond to the believer who repents of his sin.

2 Corinthians 2:5-11 (ESV)

⁵ Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. ⁶ For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, ⁷ so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. ⁹ For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. ¹⁰ Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, ¹¹ so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

If the person eventually repents, how are we as a church to respond?

We are to embrace that person, forgive them, and restore them to full standing within the family of God. We need to assure that person of our love and complete acceptance.

What are Satan's designs/schemes?

Satan's schemes are always to permanently separate people from Jesus Christ. He does this both through:

- 1) tempting us to embrace sin and*
- 2) condemning others without concern for restoration*
- 3) withholding forgiveness and discouraging reconciliation*

How do you think the church community would be affected if we had to exercise discipline within the church?

Church Discipline is always a “last resort” after every other step has been pursued to bring the person into a healthy walk with Jesus Christ.

Personal Reflection:

Is there some area in my life where I am giving into Satan's schemes?

SESSION 8: WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

John 4:19-24 (ESV)

¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

How would you define what “worship” is?

What was the woman’s focus with regard to worship?

The Samaritan woman was focused on the proper place to worship.

Jesus indicates there was an old way and now a new way to worship. What was the “old” way to worship?

Worship was always centered on the temple, which was located in Jerusalem. The temple was the place to bring sacrifices and offerings as a means to restore one’s relationship with God. Along with the temple came the rest of the Law, which set before Israel a holy standard of worship that they continually failed to live up to.

Because the temple in Jerusalem was the focal point, it created tension for the Samaritans who believed in God yet were considered outcasts by the Jews.

Why does Jesus say there is now a new way to worship? What brought about that change?

John 2:18-19 (ESV)

¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

What is Jesus referring to in the above verse?

His body is the true temple - the representation of God’s presence among his people.

WORSHIP

Revelation 21:22 (ESV)

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

Jesus replaced the temple as the focal point of worship. Worship is no longer focused on a place but a person, Jesus Christ.

How might focusing worship on a person change one's approach to worship?

How might this affect where, when, and how we can worship?

In what ways might we be tempted to forget this principle in our worship?

- *We might forget this principle when:*
- *We can only worship in a certain manner*
- *We can only worship comfortably in a certain place, building, etc.*
- *We can only worship to a certain musical style*
- *We cannot worship during our day at work or school, etc.*

What do you think it means to worship in “spirit”?**John 3:3-7 (ESV)**

³ Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’

Note: The Greek word (anōthen) translated “again” can also mean “from above.” In this story, Jesus is playing with words, and Nicodemus is getting very confused. Jesus says that no one can get to heaven unless he is born “from above,” but Nicodemus is hearing born “again.”

What determines whether one is born from below or born from above?

The deciding factor as to whether or not someone is born from above is the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. If someone does not have the Spirit, they are of the earth. If someone does have the Spirit, they are of heaven.

How does this understanding of the Holy Spirit affect our understanding of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman?

John is once again separating life into the earthly and the heavenly. Under the Mosaic Law, there was an earthly approach to worship, but now through Jesus and his Spirit, there is a new spiritual reality to worship. It is a spiritual issue and can only be realized on a spiritual level through the Holy Spirit's presence in one's life.

It no longer has to do with a geographical location but a relationship with Jesus through the indwelling of his Spirit. In other words, only those with the Spirit are capable of truly worshipping God.

TEACHER'S NOTE: *The following is written to give you a broader perspective of what is happening in John's writing. John is very progressive in his gospel. It would be very beneficial to familiarize yourself with the Gospel of John chapters 1-4 (the whole book in fact) to see how, through Jesus, there is a whole new way to understand and relate to God, the Father.*

- Chapter 1:14** *Jesus is the true tabernacle, the presence of God among his people.*
- Chapter 2** *Jesus turns water to wine revealing his glory, the same glory that filled the tabernacle. Then Jesus declares that he is the true temple.*
- Chapter 3** *Salvation does not come through going to the earthly temple, but by receiving the Holy Spirit through the work of Christ.*
- Chapter 4** *Jesus is the one who gives the Holy Spirit, which makes it possible to truly worship God.*

Why is it necessary to worship in spirit?

God is spirit. Therefore, earthly worship (buildings, style, form) has no real connection to him. Worship must first and foremost be rooted in a spirit-based relationship with God as our spirit unites with his Spirit. This does not mean we do not have earthy expressions that flow from our worship, but that worship can only happen when we become indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

How does the presence of the Holy Spirit allow us to worship God as Father?

The presence of the Holy Spirit allows us to be born "from above," bringing us into a new, intimate relationship with God as our Father. We are no longer simply a community of faith but a family adoring our heavenly dad.

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In what ways might we be tempted to not worship in spirit?

This could happen in a variety of ways:

- *When we worship/live out of routine, with no focus on Jesus.*
- *When we are more concerned about externals (music, expectations, style etc.) than praising God.*
- *When our lifestyle contradicts our praise*
- *When I am more concerned with how I look/sound than I am with giving God honour, etc.*

What do you think it means to worship in “truth”?

Old Testament worship was centered on the temple and all the symbols attached to it. This included the altar and sacrifices, the temple furniture, the Holy of Holies, the priests, and even Israel itself. All these, however, were not the “real” thing. They were a shadow of the real focus of worship that was to come. Each “picture” or “type” prophesied about the coming Messiah who would fulfill all the requirements of God’s holiness and offer forgiveness to all people.

Colossians 2:17 (ESV)

These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Hebrews 9:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ *(which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, ¹⁰ but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.*

Hebrews 10:1 (ESV)

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

How might knowing this help us understand what it means to worship in truth?

Jesus is calling us to worship the real thing, not the shadow. We easily get distracted by the earthly dynamics of worship and forget “who” it is we are to worship. The shadow was rooted in the earthly; the real thing is rooted in the heavenly and is only accessible through the spirit/Spirit. Worship in the Kingdom only happens when one turns to Jesus and receives his Spirit. Only then do we qualify to walk into the Holy of Holies (the throne room of God) and worship before his throne.

John 14:6 (ESV)

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

How would understanding this have changed the Samaritan woman's perspective about worship?

Instead of being preoccupied with where she should worship, she would have turned to Jesus as the focal point of her worship. Salvation did not come from the "pictures" but from the person whom those pictures represented - Jesus.

Hebrews 1:6 (ESV)

And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."

When we think of Old Testament worship, we think of the temple, sacrifices, priests in flowing robes, and animals being led through the crowds. What picture comes to your mind when you think of worship today?

When Jesus talked about a new way to worship, do you think he was limiting it to a one-hour worship service each week? How would you define worship in a broader sense?

In what way is every aspect of our life to be an act of worship?

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.

How would you paraphrase the above verse?

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Colossians 3:22-24 (ESV)

²² Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

How were slaves to show worship to God?

If we do not do whatever we do as if we were doing it for the Lord, what does that say about our understanding of worship?

How might this perspective of worship influence how we work and relate to others?

Ephesians 5:18-21 (ESV)

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

If we have not worshipped God in this way through our week, how might it affect how we worship on Sunday mornings?

How can we make everything we do an expression of worship this week?

What is one specific way you can change this week to bring glory to God through your life?

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SESSION 8: WORSHIP AND INTEGRITY

The following story of King Saul relates a tension we might experience in our worship of God. Saul was appointed by God to be the first king over Israel. Outward appearances would make one think Saul would make a wonderful king, however, inner character flaws worked against what God had called him to do.

King Saul was commanded by God to destroy the Amalekite nation (all people and animals) as God's act of judgment against them. Saul did as he was told except that he brought back their king alive along with the best of the sheep and cattle.

Read the rest of the story and consider the worship tension that is revealed.

1 Samuel 15:12-31 (ESV)

¹² And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal."¹³ And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD."

¹⁴ And Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?"

¹⁵ Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction."

¹⁶ Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night." And he said to him, "Speak."¹⁷ And Samuel said, "Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. ¹⁸ And the LORD sent you on a mission and said, 'Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' ¹⁹ Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?"

²⁰ And Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction."

²¹ But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal."

²² And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. ²³ For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king."

²⁴ Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. ²⁵ Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the LORD."

²⁶ And Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel." ²⁷ As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸ And Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. ²⁹ And also the Glory of Israel will not

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lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.”

³⁰ Then he said, “I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the LORD your God.” ³¹ So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul bowed before the LORD.

What worship tension do you see in this story?

How would you define the word “integrity”?

One of the definitions for integrity from Dictionary.com is “the state of being whole, entire, or undiminished.” For the sake of this study, we will define integrity as being “undivided” in character.

Explain how integrity could be understood as being “undivided”?

If someone has integrity, we understand them to be who they say they are all the time. They don’t act one way in one situation and differently in another. Wherever they go, you always see the same person with the same values. They are consistent. The only way this is possible is if the person acts as a whole all the time. For someone to only present a certain aspect of their character is to lack honesty and integrity. It creates in those around them a sense of relational distrust. An undivided person is consistent in their character.

In what ways does Saul reveal that he lacks integrity? In what ways is he divided in his character?

What internal struggle is Saul experiencing? What is some evidence of this?

Saul is insecure. He is always afraid of what other people will think of him and his performance. This drives him to seek respect and affirmation in various ways.

- *setting up a statue in honor of himself (vs. 12)*
- *appeasing the soldiers by letting them keep the best animals (vs. 15)*
- *bringing the defeated king back alive as evidence of his victory (vs. 20)*
- *insincere repentance (vs. 24)*
- *desire to be honored before the elders (vs. 30)*

Other previous examples revealing Saul’s insecurity:

1 Samuel 10:20-22; 10:27; 13:11-13

What is Saul's greatest concern in verse 30?

Saul is more concerned with himself being lifted up than God. He poses as someone who wants to live as God wants, but his actions betray him. Though he desires to “worship” God, he is more concerned with how others perceive him.

Matthew 22:37-38 (ESV)

³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment.

How does integrity relate to how we worship God?

God desires that we love him with ALL our heart, ALL our soul, and ALL our mind. Anything less, and we are coming to him with a divided heart. Part of us wants to worship God, but another part wants to glorify self.

Have you ever discovered that while singing a worship song, you were more preoccupied with how you sounded to the people around you than you were declaring the content of the song to God? Or, did you not sing out loud out of personal insecurity?

Provide some additional examples of times when a divided heart prevents us from worshipping God in spirit and truth. Don't just focus on “worship services,” as worship is so much more.

Possible examples:

- *Any time we hold on to sin and refuse to repent*
- *Unforgiveness*
- *Pride in our worship (singers, instrumentalists)*
This may happen when one is more concerned about the professional quality of the music than the heart attitude God values.
- *Preachers concerned with how well they preached*
- *Unethical business practices through the week*
- *Anger, Judgment*
- *Unreconciled relationships*

There were many times in the Old Testament when God was frustrated with the worship of the Israelites. What was the source of frustration in the following passages?

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Amos 5:21-27 (ESV)

²¹ “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. ²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. ²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. ²⁵ “Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? ²⁶ You shall take up Sikkuth your king, and Kiyyun your star-god—your images that you made for yourselves, ²⁷ and I will send you into exile beyond Damascus,” says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts.

Though they worshipped on the Sabbath, they were unrighteous in how they lived through the week. They embraced and worshipped the false Gods of the surrounding nations. They were divided in their hearts.

Malachi 1:6-14 (ESV)

⁶ “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’ ⁷ By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the LORD’s table may be despised. ⁸ When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts. ⁹ And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts. ¹⁰ Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. ¹¹ For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts. ¹² But you profane it when you say that the Lord’s table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. ¹³ But you say, ‘What a weariness this is,’ and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD. ¹⁴ Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

How would you summarize the above tension?

The Israelites were to bring the best of their flock as a gift to God. The animal was to be spotless, without defects of any kind.

Leviticus 22:19-22 (ESV)

¹⁹ ...if it is to be accepted for you it shall be a male without blemish, of the bulls or the sheep or the goats. ²⁰ You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable for you. ²¹ And when anyone offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering from the herd or from the flock, to be accepted it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it. ²² Animals blind or disabled or mutilated or having a discharge or an itch or scabs you shall not offer to the LORD or give them to the LORD as a food offering on the altar.

The tension for the Israelites was purely economics. Good animals were worth the most money. Blemished or defective animals were worth the least. They rationalized that if the animal was simply going to be slaughtered anyway, they might as well give the poor animals and keep the good ones for more personal income. Instead of giving their best to God they prioritized getting the best for themselves.

In what ways might we struggle with a divided heart on this issue? When are we tempted not to give God our best?

What was the original purpose of offering the sacrifice, and what perspectives did the Israelites forget?

Sacrifices were a substitute death payment for their sin. God was communicating that they really deserved to be the ones paying the death price, but he devised a plan where a substitute could be provided in their place. When one realizes that they are to pay the death penalty, the option of offering an animal without blemish instead would evoke pure joy and excitement. Who wouldn't be willing, with joy, to offer a perfect lamb in their place on the altar?

The fact that the Israelites were bringing blemished animals meant they had:

- *Lost sight of the reason for the sacrifice and had gotten into a legalistic routine of worship*
- *Become blind to their own sinfulness*
- *Forgotten they truly deserved the death penalty*
- *Forgotten that offering a lamb in their place was a wonderful trade-off*
- *Forgotten who God was and the worship he deserved*

What perspectives are we sometimes guilty of forgetting?

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In what ways might neglecting the Lord's Table create a similar tension?

Not seeing the celebration of the Lord's Table as a priority may place us in a very similar situation as these Jewish worshippers. The point of the Lord's Table is to remember the tremendous cost paid on our behalf by Jesus Christ to give us life. Sometimes our schedules and busyness of life may hinder us from prioritizing this time of reflection in our lives – it becomes an inconvenience. Or, when we do celebrate it, it may simply become routine, and we forget the significance of what we are celebrating.

The sacrifices looked at the cost to be paid; the Lord's Table looks back at the cost that was paid. Both have the same sense of priority but from opposite sides of the crucifixion.

Isaiah 29:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men, ¹⁴ therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden."

Why does God so detest people going through the motions in their life of worship?**What are some ways Jesus revealed peoples' divided hearts?****Examples:**

- *The rich young man challenged to give up his wealth (Matthew 19:16-22)*
- *When Jesus declared the cost of following him (Matthew 8:18-22)*
- *The disciples who were not willing to fully accept Jesus' teachings (John 6:65-66)*
- *When Jesus allowed the woman to pour expensive perfume on his feet, the disciples were indignant, and it prompted Judas to betray him (Matthew 26:8-16)*
- *When Jesus healed the man's withered hand on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:13)*

Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV)

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.

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.

In what ways do fear and anxiety reveal a divided heart?

Fear and anxiety ultimately reveal distrust in God's love and provision. It attacks the very nature of God himself, viewing him as neither loving nor good. When one embraces fear and anxiety, they then create defenses to protect them from a God who does not care for them. We say we believe in God, yet we react to crises as if there is no God. We become divided in our minds and emotions.

When we do this, we live with a tension between what we believe with our heads and value in our hearts. How might this affect how we worship God?

It is difficult to worship in spirit and truth when we distrust God. On a practical level, it affects how we relate with others, work at our jobs, care for our families, minister in church, and step out in faith. A lack of personal wholeness means we live daily with a lack of personal integrity.

How can we begin to be people of integrity, free to worship God in spirit and truth?

- 1) We need to begin to distinguish those areas where our behavior and reactions contradict what we claim to believe and what the Bible teaches.*
- 2) We need to repent of areas of sin in our lives.*
- 3) We need to affirm the truths about God that will set us free in those areas of fear and anxiety.*
- 4) We need to act on God's truth and not on our deceptive feelings.*
- 5) We need to be consistent and honest before God and others.*

Are there some areas where you know that you have lacked personal integrity, and it has interfered with living a life of true worship to God?**Can you see how living a life of integrity and worship will strengthen your relationship with others?****Are there some steps you can take this week to become a person of greater integrity?****What are some barriers you can anticipate facing?****Are there some ways this week you can joyfully offer your lives as living sacrifices to God?****How might walking in integrity create a deeper joy in your walk with God?**

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SESSION 8: WORSHIP AND PRAISE

Psalm 100:1-5 (ESV)

- ¹ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!
² Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!
³ Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his;
 we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise!
 Give thanks to him; bless his name!
⁵ For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever,
 and his faithfulness to all generations.

We've spent two weeks discussing worship. How would you define worship now?

Worship technically involves the declaring of one's worth. However, this is not simply an intellectual assent but a life focus. We are to center our lives on the worship of God, affecting every aspect of our lives. Declaring God's worth through our lives will demand all of eternity, and even then, we will fall far short.

Why do you think praise is so important to God?

Is worship for God's benefit or ours?

This is a tricky question. God is to be the sole object of our worship, and all praise is to be directed toward him. However, God does not need our worship. He does not lack in any way that he needs anything from us. God is not suffering from low self-worth such that he desperately craves our adoration.

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.

God calls us to worship because "we" need to worship him.

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Why is it so essential for us to worship God?**1) Worship implies relationship****What do you think this means?**

When we worship something/someone, we give that object a place of priority in our lives. We cannot worship God apart from a relationship with him. One cannot rebel against God and truly worship him at the same time. Worship brings us to oneness with what we worship, and as a result, it has the ability to shape our lives.

2) Worship defines the nature of our relationship**What do you think we mean by this?**

Our biggest challenge is that we constantly forget who God is. As a result, we begin to elevate ourselves and demote God to a lesser role in our lives. True worship corrects that misperception.

Psalm 100:3 (ESV)

Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

What truths does worship help us remember about God and our relationship with him?

- *God is our creator, and we are the creation*
- *I am not God*
- *God owes us nothing, but in his grace gives us life. Everything we have we owe to God*
- *God is our provider and protector*
- *God alone is worthy of praise*
- *He is holy; I am sinful*
- *He is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and unchanging*
- *I am created for him, not he for me*

Worship restores us to a proper perspective of God.

What is the ultimate expression of worship in the New Testament?

The ultimate expression of worship is to identify Jesus as Lord over our lives. True worship comes in the form of complete surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and being filled with his Spirit. Any area of our life not surrendered to him indicates a divided heart and incomplete worship.

Romans 10:9 (ESV)

...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Philippians 2:9-11 (ESV)

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.

In what ways did Jesus change the nature of the relationship we can have with God?

Jesus invites us to call God “dad”; to understand that he is our true father and we are his children. We can approach God with safety and confidence as a little child does with a loving father.

Romans 8:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ 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!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

How did this contrast with the Old Testament?

In the Old Testament, God was to be worshipped from a distance. Every aspect of the temple was symbolic of the barriers between a holy God and us. The exterior wall, the gate, the altar, the washbasin, the building, the lamp, the bread table, the altar of incense, the curtain, the Holy of Holies, the ark of the covenant, and even the priesthood itself. All of this pictured separation from God.

Exodus 24:1 (ESV)

Then he said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar.

Can you think of some times when Jesus revealed this new relationship approach with God?

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Matthew 6:9 (ESV)

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Matthew 19:14 (ESV)

...but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus revealed that God is not a distant God, but they could now approach God as a little child approaches their father through his presence. Worship takes the shape of a little child running to the dad they adore, throwing their arms around him and saying, "I love you, daddy!"

This concept of worship could never be embraced before the work of Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We truly are the children of God, and that changes everything.

How does our perception of God tend to change how we worship?

When we buy into lies about the character of God, it becomes impossible to worship him in spirit and truth. At these times, we feel God is undeserving of our worship, so we withhold it as a punishment. Or, in fear of his judgment, we cower from God and do not dare enter his presence. Whenever there is a distorted picture of God, we cannot fully enter his gates with thanksgiving or joy.

What is wrong with our perspectives at these times?

God does not change. How I choose to perceive my personal experiences does not determine the character of God and his worthiness of worship. The problem comes when we, from our limited perspective, judge the actions of God and find him wanting.

Job suffered with this dilemma, and the solution was not found in any explanation from God, but a revelation of who God was in Job chapters 38-42.

Psalms 33:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright. ² Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings! ³ Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

Psalms 47:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! ⁷ For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm!

1 Chronicles 25:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ They were all under the direction of their father in the music in the house of the LORD with cymbals, harps, and lyres for the service of the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were under the order of the king. ⁷ The number of them along with their brothers, who were trained in singing to the LORD, all who were skillful, was 288.

Why do you think music plays such an important part of worship to God?

Music breaks through our intellectual defenses and touches our emotions. When we worship without emotion, we once again divide ourselves and do not worship with integrity. How can we honor the very character of God and not be touched emotionally in some way?

God desires that all of us (heart, soul, and mind) embrace him in adoration. Anything less means we are coming to him with a divided heart.

Music allows us to become emotionally open to our relationship with God. We are not to be controlled by our emotions, but neither are we to ignore them.

Why do you think we see men get more emotional at a football game than we do in a worship service?

How do you know when someone is excited at a sports game? How does it reflect in their body language?

How might Spirit-filled worship be expressed physically?

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Circle the various forms of worship in the following passages.

Psalm 95:6 (ESV)

Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!

Psalm 134:2 (ESV)

Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the LORD!

Psalm 47:1 (ESV)

Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!

Psalm 149:3 (ESV)

Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!

Revelation 4:10 (ESV)

...the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying...

Why do you think we are sometimes hesitant to worship in some of these ways?

What are some ways we could begin to have greater integrity in our worship with regard to “how” we physically worship?

Psalm 96:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! ² Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. ³ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!

Psalm 18:49 (ESV)

For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing to your name.

Why do you think there is such a strong connection between worship and declaring God to the nations in scripture?

When one comes to God, adoring him for who he is, they start embracing the heart-passion of God for others. God’s passion has always been that people would turn back to a relationship with himself. We were all created to be loved by God and to love God. Those who authentically love God will love others.

Discuss the following quote:

**“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church.
Worship is.
Missions exists because worship doesn’t.”
John Piper**

How do worship and missions relate to our understanding that we were created for Relationship and Representation?

They are two ways of saying the same thing. You cannot have worship without a relationship, and you cannot have a relationship with God without worship. If you find your delight and joy from your relationship with God, you will desperately long for others to encounter and know him.

What does a lack of mission in one’s life indicate about the nature of their worship?

What does a lack of worship reveal about one’s mission focus?

How can we take steps to go deeper in both our worship and mission focus?

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