



PHASE 1

by Robert Laidlaw

StrategicDiscipleship.com

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STUDENT NOTES

Historically, a disciple was a person who studied under a master teacher to learn both his knowledge and approach to life, with the goal of passing that knowledge and lifestyle on to others. As disciples of Jesus, we long to understand everything Jesus taught, live by it, and teach others to do the same. Discipleship ALWAYS has the intent of passing what you have learned on to others.

Jesus was very clear his intention was that we would spread his teaching throughout the world so that people of all nations could enter a relationship with him and experience his forgiveness and life. So discipleship is not an accidental by-product of going to church; discipleship is to be strategic and intentional, with a kingdom-impacting goal in mind.

God has called others to disciple you, but that does not negate your personal responsibility for your growth. No teacher can make a student grow spiritually. The student needs to assume responsibility to do the hard work of learning, developing disciplines, and stepping out in faith in ministry and missional experiences.

To grow as a disciple, four areas need to be developed:

- 1) Truths you need to understand and embrace
- 2) Disciplines you will need to embed
- 3) Ministry responsibility to a local church family
- 4) Missional focus, both locally and globally

This curriculum merely raises the “issues” we believe are beneficial to address in the discipleship journey. It is your job to work on practical expressions of your growth through developing disciplines, experimenting with various ministries, and finding ways to share your faith with those in your spheres of influence.

The challenge of discipleship is learning to die to self and allowing Christ to live in and through us. This means putting an end to our expectations and priorities and learning to allow his agenda to direct our days. Living by faith takes on a whole new understanding as we follow the Spirit’s leading, not knowing the outcomes or how he will provide. We follow anyway because we have declared Jesus is Lord.

The outflow of the Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered life is an incredible sense of joy, peace, and purpose as we partner with Jesus in the adventure of reconciling the world to him. There is no life like it.

Let the adventure begin!

INTRODUCTION:

We suggest having name tags for everyone if they are new to one another.

Have everyone share a bit about themselves.

Have everyone share how they came to your church.

Have everyone share a bit about their spiritual background.

Sample questions:

Did they grow up going to church?

Did they stop going at some point?

Have they ever been to a church before?

Was their experience a negative or positive one?

Teacher: Share the history and mission of your church.

Any questions regarding the church?

Teacher: Share your spiritual journey

SESSION 1: WHO IS GOD: PART A

If God exists, then what do you think he is like? What is the first characteristic that enters your mind? Why do you think that attribute came to your mind first?

Of all of God's attributes, which one do you think is the most significant in that it will influence all the others?

Many people will often refer to God's love as being the most significant. It is almost as though God is a big Grandpa in the sky who warmly loves everyone. However, the Bible also refers to God's wrath. Take the story of Noah, for instance. Civilization became so wicked and violent that eventually, all righteousness would have been abandoned, and life on earth become very short-lived (see Genesis 6). To save civilization, God had to choose a wrathful response, judge evil, and start over with Noah. He was the one man who had faith in God and desired to live righteously.

How can wrath and love work together?

They must be determined by some other overriding factor.

Isaiah 6:1-5 (NLT)

¹ It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. ² Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³ They were calling out to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Heaven's Armies! The whole earth is filled with his glory!"

⁴ Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke. ⁵ Then I said, "It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the LORD of Heaven's Armies."

What characteristic do the seraphim see as being all significant? Why?**God's holiness**

Holiness is the one attribute of God that influences all his other attributes.

If we want to emphasize something in the English language, we often use the word "really", as in, "It was really big". We might even go so far as to say, "It was "really, really, big."

Likewise, in the Hebrew language, if you want to emphasize something, you simply repeat the adjective. Here, the seraphim are not merely saying, "God is holy." They are not even saying, "God is holy, holy." They are saying, "God is holy, holy, holy." Do you get the sense they are trying to stress a point?

What does the word "holy" mean?**Holiness consists of two concepts:****Separate**

God, by his nature, is separate from anything created. The opposite of that which is holy is that which is "common" or "earthly."

In the Old Testament, people and objects dedicated to him were also considered to be "holy" as they were made distinct from everything else and set apart for God. For example, the temple priests were declared holy by God and set apart from the others for his service. They alone could enter the Holy Place of the tabernacle and into the presence of God (Also: Ark of the Covenant, the temple utensils, etc.).

Moral Purity

To say God is holy means that he is completely righteous, separate from anything imperfect or impure. There is no hint of sin or evil associated with him. Because he is holy, he can in no way embrace what is evil or sinful.

Matthew 5:48 (NLT)

But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Why do you think Isaiah responds the way he does in verse 5?

When a person encounters the true holiness of God, he becomes distinctly aware of his own sinfulness. It induces an overwhelming sense of guilt, shame, and judgment. Our natural response is to want to retreat from it – like insects under a rock suddenly being exposed to the light.

Isaiah's response was to say he was "ruined" by that experience.

Why did Isaiah think he was doomed? Isaiah felt naked and exposed as he stood before his holy God. He felt there was no possible way he, a sinner, could survive such an encounter. We can never completely understand the full extent of our sinfulness until we see the nature of true holiness.

Isaiah became painfully aware of his sinfulness as he stood before the Holy God. How would you define sin?

Sin is anything that does not reflect the absolute moral purity of the holiness of God.

The actual Greek word has reference to the realm of archery when the arrow misses the target.

Sin is compared to missing the target of God's glory and holiness (Romans 3:23). Anything that falls short of hitting the target of holiness is sin. We might think sins have varying degrees of severity, but all sin is a moral rejection of him from God's perspective.

Hebrews 12:14 (NLT)

*Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life,
for those who are not holy will not see the Lord.*

How does understanding the holiness of God affect how you see your current relationship with God?

SUMMARY:

What are the positive aspects of God's holiness?

God is good.

God can never be evil or do evil to you.

God can be trusted to do what is morally right in every situation.

You can trust God.

Have there been times when you have questioned the goodness/ holiness of God?

What is the negative side of God's holiness with regard to us?

God cannot be united with evil.

If we have any sin in our lives, we cannot be in a relationship with God or dwell with him through eternity.

Don't worry. Over the next few weeks, we will resolve the tension and reveal God's solution to the problem of our sin.

What are some examples of times we tend to question the goodness or holiness of God?

Is there any concept from this study that might affect your perspective about God or self?

FOUNDATIONS

SESSION 2: WHO IS GOD: PART B

Last week we discussed that God is Holy, meaning he is morally pure and completely set apart from creation. When we stand before his holiness, we become shamefully aware that we are sinful and finite (limited by our humanity). Yet, it is also comforting to know that God can never do anything wrong or evil.

Are there any questions with regard to God's holiness that have been raised in your mind as a result of last week's study?

We have discussed God's holiness, but there are also a few other characteristics that we want to look at to help us better understand our relationship with him.

1) God is Just

Psalm 9:8 (ESV)

...and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness.

What does it mean to say God is just?

God will always give the appropriate (correct) response to every situation and judge according to his holy standard. God can never turn a blind eye to evil and, ultimately, will only allow righteousness to prevail.

Imagine a judge who presides over a case that proves a man maliciously raped and murdered a young girl.

How do you want that judge to react to such a crime?

How would you feel if the judge merely put the man on probation?

We want a judge who: hates injustice, gets angry with wrongdoing and who will ultimately deal with evil in such a way that it is removed from our presence so that it can do no harm again.

If God is just, then what are the implications for us with regard to our sin?

God needs to declare us guilty and give a proper response to our sin.

What do you think is a proper response to sin from God's perspective?

Isaiah 59:2 (NLT)

It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore.

Romans 6:23 (NLT)

For the wages of sin is death,

SUMMARY:

Our sin cuts us off from a relationship with God

Our sin demands the consequence of death

Review of the Implications:

God is HOLY

Good News: *God is morally pure and can do no evil.*

Bad News: *If we have sin in our lives, we are eternally separate from God.*

God is JUST

Good News: *God will always judge rightly and respond appropriately to evil.*

Bad News: *If we have sin in our lives, the appropriate penalty God must deal out is death.*

What is your reaction to these statements?

Fortunately, there are other characteristics of God that come into play that bring us hope. God is not merely HOLY and JUST; he is also LOVE.

2) God is Love

How is God's love different from our love?

Our love is almost always "conditional."

I love you because of how you treat me or because of how you make me feel.

What do you think is the best example of non-conditional love we might experience on earth?

A frequent response is often the love of a parent with their brand new baby – but even then, we discover that love is very conditional. I love "my" child – not yours. The parental love for the child is "conditional," based on the fact that it is "my" child. If I had unconditional love for a baby, I would have to have that same love for every baby – and not just babies – but everyone. Otherwise, the conditions I have set are that it must be a baby, and it must be mine.

What is God's love based on if it is not based on our performance?

Romans 5:8 (NLT)

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

1 John 4:8 (NLT)

But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

God is love. He doesn't merely act lovingly...he is love.

Any love we experience originated in and flowed from his character. It is rooted in who he is.

Therefore, when God loves us, it has nothing to do with us but everything to do with him. His love for us, therefore, is not based on our performance but on his character.

God's love is not an emotional reaction to us, but is in fact, a choice. He chooses to love us, and we call that free gift - grace. We receive love from God even when it is not deserved or earned.

What sort of things might I do that would cause God to love me less?

Nothing!

What can I do to ensure God will continue to love me or to love me more?

Nothing!

How do you feel about the fact that you can't increase or diminish God's love for you?

There is one more characteristic of God we want to touch on quickly.

3) God is Sovereign

Daniel 4:34-35 (NLT)

³⁴ “After this time had passed, I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up to heaven. My sanity returned, and I praised and worshiped the Most High and honored the one who lives forever. His rule is everlasting, and his kingdom is eternal. ³⁵ All the people of the earth are nothing compared to him. He does as he pleases among the angels of heaven and among the people of the earth. No one can stop him or say to him, ‘What do you mean by doing these things?’

What do we mean when we say God is sovereign?

He is in absolute control over the affairs of heaven and earth. He has determined the course of events of life, and nothing happens without his permission or outside his ultimate purposes.

In what ways might it bother us to confess that “God is sovereign”?

It is easy to look at the world and question whether or not God is in control. It makes one wonder why God would allow all the evil that happens.

If God is truly sovereign and in control, how might that affect how you approach this next week?

*Free from stress or anxiety
Prayerfully dependent on him to provide everything I need for life
Confident, Obedient, Humble, etc.*

We may never understand why God does things the way he does, but because God is sovereign, he can ensure righteousness prevails.

Romans 8:28 (NLT)

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

Does this passage comfort you in any way? If so, how?

One of the significant challenges to belief in God is the question, “If God exists, why does he not do something about all the evil in the world?” Every life tension we experience can cause us to challenge or question God’s character.

Appearance:

God seems incapable of stopping evil
God seems to permit evil
God seems unwilling to judge evil
God seems indifferent to people’s suffering

Character Challenged:

His sovereignty
His holiness
His justice
His love

Which of God's attributes do you struggle with the most?

This series aims to show you that God does have a plan; he is working it out, and you are a part of it. God is approaching things the way he does because he is holy, just, loving, and sovereign. As you grow in a deeper understanding of God, you will begin to see more clearly how he is at work in the world and your life.

FOUNDATIONS

FOUNDATIONS

SESSION 3: WHO ARE WE

Are there any questions concerning God's holiness, justice, love, or sovereignty that have been raised in your mind as a result of last week's study?

If God is complete in every way, perfect in every way, why do you think he would choose to create people like us? What was his motivation?

God created us for two significant purposes. Read the scripture below to discover the first one.

Matthew 22:37-40 (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. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Purpose 1: To be in RELATIONSHIP with him and his family

Do you tend to think God will judge you based on how you serve him, or how you love him?

We tend to think that "God is most concerned with how I live."

We think God will primarily judge us based on what we do.

This is not true. We will be judged with regard to how we have loved him.

Why do you think loving God is the greatest commandment?

Compare to our own children: Do we want children just so they can serve us and do more things around the house? Why do people tend to want to have children?

We desire to express love in intimate community, because God is that way! Remember, we are created in his likeness! Because God is relational, we are relational. Because God is community-oriented, we are community-oriented. Family is the most intimate form of community.

Do we want our children to obey us? Yes, but which would you prefer –children who simply obey because they have to, are forced to, and will get a consequence if they don't? Or, would you prefer to have children who do what you ask because they love you?

The truth is, if we love God, that will in fact, influence how we serve him.

What then, from God's perspective, is the greatest evil we could ever commit?

Our greatest evil act would be to not love God with our hearts, souls, and minds.

How is “not loving God” viler than murder, rape, genocide, etc.?

To not love God is to turn away from your very reason for existence. To not love God is to actually work in opposition to his purpose in creating you.

We have a sinful tendency to invert (or reverse) these two commands. When people talk about whether they are a “good person”, they always refer to how they have historically interacted with other people. It rarely reflects on their relationship with God.

When we place loving others above loving God, we actually embrace humanism. Humanists believe that your relationship with your fellow man should play a more critical (higher) role than your relationship with God.

If we love God first and foremost, he will give us a greater capacity to love others.

If we love others more than God, then we will not be able to love them with the capacity or fullness of God’s love. This will cause our love to become very limited, conditional, and self-serving.

Which father can love his children more?

a) A father who is limited by his own needs for respect and acceptance or

b) A father who has experienced God’s unconditional love and is allowing that love to flow through him to his children?

In the following verse, what is the basis for not being accepted into Heaven?**Matthew 7:22-23 (NLT)**

²² On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ ²³ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’

To “know” in the Bible does not merely mean to “know about” something. It means to know through experience and intimacy (i.e., Adam “knew” Eve and, as a result, had a baby named Cain). Jesus is not saying he didn’t know “about” the people. He is saying that he was never invited into an intimate relationship in their life, where they knew each other both personally and in a spiritual way. That is the deciding factor in who goes to Heaven.

IT’S NOT WHAT YOU DO – IT’S WHO YOU KNOW!**What point are the following verses trying to stress?****Psalms 37:4 (NLT)**

Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart’s desires.

Romans 5:8 (NLT)

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT)

For I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

How do you feel when you hear how much God loves you and only wants the best for you?

How could trusting these verses make a practical difference in your life?

What does the following verse indicate about our second purpose?

Genesis 1:26-28 (NLT)

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like ourselves. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.” ²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

Purpose 2: To REPRESENT God

The very first statement about mankind in the Bible is that we were made in the “image and likeness” of God. What do you think that means?

In olden days, kings would sometimes set up a monument in a conquered land saying, “this is my image/likeness”. The monument didn’t necessarily look like the king – so what do you think the point was in leaving it there?

It was a physical reminder to the nation that even though the king wasn’t visibly present, he still ruled in that land. Every time the people passed the monument, they would be reminded of that fact and be motivated to live accordingly under his rule.

People will often refer to personality traits or other characteristics to explain the image concept. While these are somewhat valid, it would be better to have them look at the context of the Genesis passage.

God is looking for someone who can rule the earth on his behalf and to care for this creation in a manner reflective of his holy and creative character. As people who are made in the image of God, we are God’s visible representatives on earth. Instead of merely creating a stone monument, God created a living, walking, talking image to represent him. Every time we look at another person we are to be reminded that God exists and rules over creation.

Why does God say in the Ten Commandments that we are not to make an image of him?

Exodus 20:4 (NLT)

You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea.

God has already established his image – Us! To create another image is to discredit the image God has already created and to severely limit the picture God wanted to present. He didn't want a rock or piece of wood to represent him. He wanted you, a living being who was indwelt and led by his Holy Spirit, representing his holiness, justice, love, and creativity. How can we compare a person to a hand-crafted rock?

When we create another image to represent God, we devalue ourselves and the role God called us to perform (live-out). It is no wonder then that we have a world filled with people walking through life plagued by low self-esteem. A sense of low-worth is rooted in the fact that we have lost sight of who we were created to be.

**“As no coin is so small that it cannot bear the image of the emperor,
so no man is so humble that he cannot bear God's image...”**

Soren Kierkegaard writing on Radical Discipleship

What do you think are some implications of having been given this incredible responsibility?

We should consciously choose to represent God in everything we do:

- *To model his holiness, justice, love, and creativity in everything we do and say*
- *To care for creation on his behalf and in his way*
- *To respect others as God's representative – even if they are not acting like it*
- *To respect life because it is God's creation, God's design, and God's picture for us*

How would the world change if everyone treated each other as the image of God?

How might your relationships at home and work change if you took this approach?

Summary: As God's Image we are his Representatives on earth, caring for creation on his behalf.

God created us for two purposes:

- a) To enjoy RELATIONSHIP with him and his family
- b) To REPRESENT him in this world

How might understanding these purposes make a practical difference in how we live our lives this next week?

SESSION 4: WHO IS JESUS: PART A

All of Christianity hinges on the one question, “Who is Jesus?”

It is the most vital question we can ever answer in life because the implications, either way, are simply staggering. Jesus actually raised this very question for all those who thought they would follow him.

Matthew 16:13-15 (NLT)

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.” ¹⁵ Then he asked them, “Who do you say I am?”

If Jesus asked you that question, how do you think you would respond?

When trying to understand who Jesus is, the best place to start is to look at what he said about himself.

1) JESUS’ CLAIMS ABOUT HIMSELF

Read the following statements about Jesus from the Bible and discuss their importance and the implications regarding who he was.

John 8:58-59 (NLT)

⁵⁸ Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I AM!” ⁵⁹ At that point they picked up stones to throw at him. But Jesus was hidden from them and left the Temple.

**Did the Jews pick up stones to kill Jesus simply because he used bad grammar?
What really motivated this violent reaction to his words?**

Jesus was referring back to Exodus 3 when God spoke to Moses from a burning bush and told him to go back to Egypt to free the Israelite people. Moses asked God what name he should give the people regarding who was sending him.

Exodus 3:14 (NLT)

God replied to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you.”

What is the significance of the words “I Am”?

By using the title “I am,” Jesus is declaring himself to be the very same God that appeared to Moses from the burning bush. This was the statement that prompted the Jews to pick up rocks to stone Jesus. Jesus’ claim was considered to be blasphemous in their eyes – he, a mere man, claiming to be “I AM.”

Jesus never merely claimed to be God – that would have been far too vague. The people in the Roman Empire worshipped many different gods. Jesus claimed to be the very same God that appeared to Moses, was the God of Abraham, and was also the God who had formed the Israelite nation. He made it very clear who he believed he was, and the Jews responded accordingly.

John 10:27-33 (NLT)

²⁷ *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, ²⁹ for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father’s hand. ³⁰ The Father and I are one.”*

³¹ *Once again the people picked up stones to kill him.*

³² *Jesus said, “At my Father’s direction I have done many good works. For which one are you going to stone me?” ³³ They replied, “We’re stoning you not for any good work, but for blasphemy! You, a mere man, claim to be God.”*

Which of the statements Jesus made led the Jews to believe he was claiming to be God?

- *My sheep*
- *I give them eternal life...*
- *The intimate reference to God as “My Father”*
- *I and the Father are one.*

Each of these would have created problems for his listeners.

Jesus doesn’t refute their assessment. In fact, he goes on to elaborate further, at least until they try to seize him, and then he escapes.

Revelation 21:6-7 (NLT)

⁶ *And he also said, “It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. ⁷ All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.*

What insights does this passage give regarding the identity of the speaker?

Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and Omega is the last. This means that God is over all things. There is nothing that came before him and nothing that will outlast him. He is the source of all things.

“I will be his God.”

The same person continues to speak:

Revelation 22:13-16 (NLT)

¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” ¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes. They will be permitted to enter through the gates of the city and eat the fruit from the tree of life. ¹⁵ Outside the city are the dogs—the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idol worshipers, and all who love to live a lie. ¹⁶ “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this message for the churches. I am both the source of David and the heir to his throne. I am the bright morning star.”

What new insights does this passage give with regard to the identity of the speaker?
“I, Jesus...”

Regardless of what you have ever thought about Jesus, what does Jesus appear to have believed about his own identity?

If Jesus is speaking the truth about himself in each of these passages, what are some implications for us?

2) OTHERS’ CLAIMS ABOUT JESUS

John 1:1-2 (NLT)

¹ In the beginning the Word [Jesus] already existed. The Word [Jesus] was with God, and the Word [Jesus] was God. ² He existed in the beginning with God.
(See John 1:14 to see that this is referring to Jesus)

John 1:14 (ESV)

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 20:26-28 (NLT)

²⁶ Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!”

²⁸ “My Lord and my God!” Thomas exclaimed.

Isaiah 9:6 (NLT)

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. And the government will rest on his shoulders. These will be his royal titles: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Jesus is called God

Genesis 1:1 (NLT)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

John 1:3 (NLT)

God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.

Colossians 1:16 (NLT)

...for through him [Jesus] God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see— such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him.

Hebrews 1:2 (NLT)

And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son [Jesus] he created the universe.

Jesus is the Creator**Is this a new insight and understanding concerning the person of Jesus for any of you?**

Jesus is the physical expression of the invisible God.

Whenever God appears in scripture, we would understand that to be the second person of the trinity, Jesus.

Whenever God does anything of a physical nature, it is done through the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the work of making a physical creation would also have come under the responsibility of Jesus.

How do these verses change the way we view the person of Jesus?**Matthew 4:10 (NLT)**

"Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.'"

Who is allowed to receive worship and why?

Only God is allowed to receive worship. Jesus acknowledged this when tempted by Satan.

- *He is the only one worthy to be the centre of our attention*
- *He is the only one to whom all credit is due*
- *He is the only one who could rescue us from our sinfulness*
- *He is the only one who is God*

Hebrews 1:6 (NLT)

And then, when he presented his honored Son to the world, God said, "Let all the angels of God worship him."

Revelation 5:11-13 (NLT)

¹¹ Then I looked again, and I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders. ¹² And they sang in a mighty chorus: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered— to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.” ¹³ And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They sang: “Blessing and honor and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever.”

Jesus receives Worship

Is there any doubt, at least from the Bible’s perspective, that Jesus is God in human form?

What do you think about this perspective? Is it new to you? Is it difficult to believe?

If Jesus truly is God who took on human form and came to earth, what are some of the implications for us?

Personal Study: Other relevant passages to look up on your own.

Authority to forgive Mark 2:1-12

Jesus’ Glory John 12:41, Matthew 17:2

The Good Shepherd John 10:14 (see Psalm 23)

Meets Spiritual Needs John 14:1, John 17:3, Acts 4:12, John 14:6-11, Matthew 11:25-27

FOUNDATIONS

SESSION 5: WHO IS JESUS: PART B

Any questions resulting from the last study's discussion about the deity of Jesus?

THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

If Jesus was God in human form, wouldn't that give him an unfair advantage over all the rest of us? Can we really identify with Jesus? Can Jesus really identify with us?

Hebrews 4:15-16 (NLT)

¹⁵ This High Priest of ours [Jesus] understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

What are all the “humanly” challenges Jesus would have faced that we all face?

How might the above passage give us comfort?

Jesus understands every temptation we face and why we fail.

Jesus overcame every temptation that ever came his way by submitting to the will of the Father, giving us an example to follow so that we too can escape temptation in a similar way.

Jesus will give us the strength to stand firm when temptation arises if we turn to him.

How might this passage help us in times of testing and temptation?

How might this understanding of Jesus encourage us to support others when they are struggling, instead of condemning them?

Philippians 2:5-7 (NLT)

⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. ⁶ Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. ⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.

What “divine privileges” did Jesus give up by becoming a man?

Jesus gave up his position and adoration of heaven on the throne to take the form of a servant.

Jesus essentially restricted himself to that which the “image of God” was to experience in the Garden of Eden. This would include such things as being omnipresent (the ability to be everywhere at once). Part of being human is that he was limited to being in one place at one time. Other ways Jesus may have limited himself might have been his ability to know everything (omniscience). This means that Jesus, as a man, would have had to learn how to walk, talk, read & write, etc. In other words, Jesus, as a three-month-old baby, was not necessarily talking multiple languages and writing out calculus equations. This in no way diminishes who Jesus was by nature, as God, but merely reveals how he chose to represent himself in this world as a man.

List all the things you can think of Jesus doing on earth that we would normally have credited simply to the fact that he is God.

Walking on water, calming the storm, raising the dead, etc.

Read the following verses:**Matthew 4:1 (NLT)**

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil.

Matthew 12:28 (NLT)

But if I am casting out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has arrived among you.

Luke 4:18 (NLT)

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free,

What was the power and the drive behind all that Jesus did?

In these situations, because Jesus had restricted his divine privileges, he needed to now rely on the Holy Spirit to:

- *Empower him*
- *Set the agenda*
- *Speak*
- *Heal, Cast out demons*
- *Live a joy-filled life*
- *Minister to others*

Again, we need to emphasize that Jesus was fully God through his whole earthly existence, but that he limited his activity to that which the “image of God” was commanded to do in the Garden of Eden. In other words, Jesus lived out the Holy Spirit empowered and dependent life we all, as the image of God, were supposed to be living since the garden of Eden.

If Jesus, through his humanity, chose to limit his divine attributes and rely on “his” Spirit for all he did, then what are the implications for us if we have his same Spirit within us?

The implication then is that everything Jesus did, we as the image of God, united with God’s Spirit, should have been doing as directed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus fulfilled the creation mandate to rule on this earth that we failed to do. In this way, he modeled God’s image he now restores to us when we receive his Spirit.

Take note that when Jesus sent out the twelve and the seventy-two, they were told to do the same things.

John 14:12 (NLT)

“The truth is, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.

Everything Jesus did while on earth, we can also do if empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit.

What are the “greater works” we are told we will do?

How can one do greater works than Jesus? Who can top raising Lazarus from the grave? Keep in mind, Jesus had not yet been crucified and raised to new life. He had not yet sent his resurrected Spirit into our lives. The greater work we can do is proclaim the resurrected Christ and invite people to receive his Holy Spirit to be renewed and adopted into the family of God. We can now fill the whole earth with this message, seeing people of all nations respond be reconciled to the Father. Giving people eternal life even trumps restoring the dead to physical life.

In what ways does this excite you to know God can similarly work in you as you develop an intimate relationship with him?

Back to Philippians 2

Philippians 2:5-7 (NLT)

⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. ⁶ Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. ⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.

Why do we find it so difficult to give up our positions of respect and authority?

What perspective did Jesus have that freed him to humble himself in such a way?

Jesus knew who he was. His sense of identity did not come from what he did or what others thought about him. It came from his identity, which is unchangeable. He is God. Even though he became a man, he did not lose his identity as God. As a result, he was free to do whatever the Father called him to do, without being controlled by the opinions of others.

If we were truly secure in our identity as the “Image of God”, how would that change how we approach life?

How might it affect how we serve instead of looking to be served?

Jesus is very complex. He is both fully God and fully man. What sort of other questions might this raise for you?

Understanding the full person of Jesus, how might that affect your relationship with him moving forward?

SESSION 6: WHY DID JESUS COME

The goal of this study is to put the past five studies together in such a way that they create a big picture of what God has done to bring us back to relationship with himself.

<p>We were created:</p> <p><u>Holy</u> for <u>Relationship with God</u> to <u>Represent God</u></p>	<p>God is:</p> <p><u>HOLY</u> <u>JUST</u> <u>LOVE</u></p>

① WHO GOD IS: *(see if they can remember the characteristics and what they mean)*

Holy completely righteous, pure – no evil, can't be in the presence of evil

Just hates injustice, will do what is right – judges against his holy standard

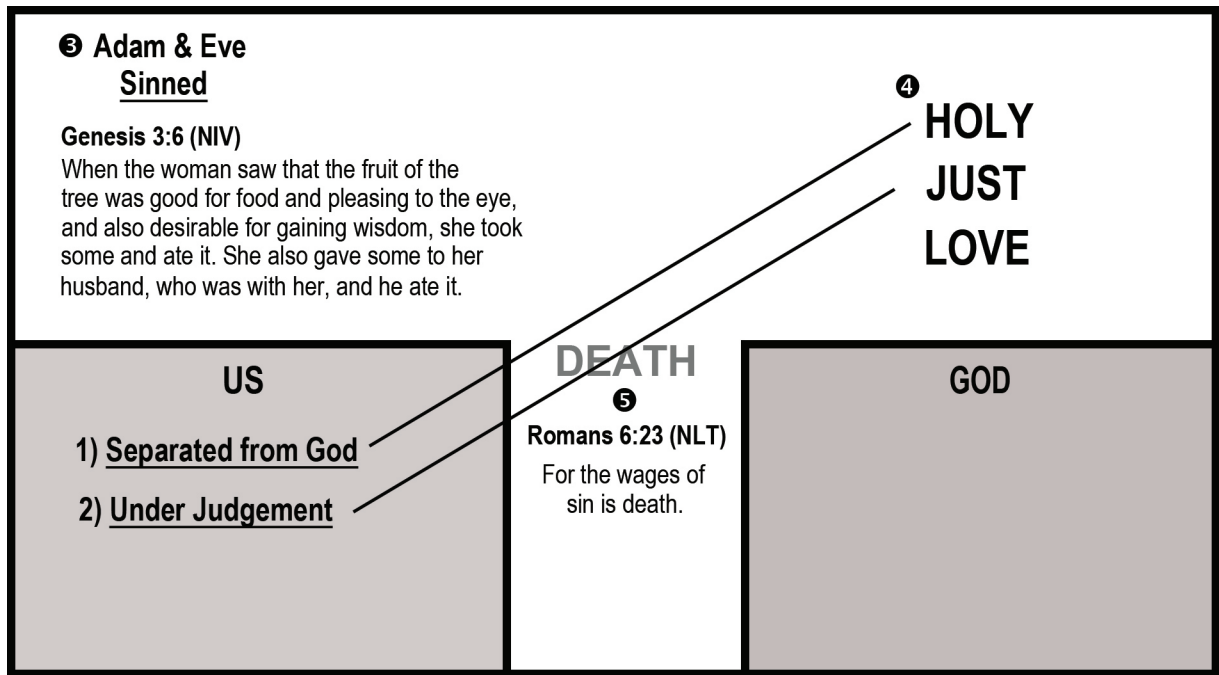
Love unconditional

② WE WERE CREATED:

Holy / Perfect Morally pure, righteous

for Relationship with God Us enjoying God, God enjoying us – intimacy with God

to Represent God Represent his rule and character to the rest of creation



③ ADAM & EVE: Sinned

Adam & Eve chose to rebel against God by eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good & Evil, which they were told not to.

Genesis 2:16-17 (NLT)

¹⁶ But the LORD God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—
¹⁷except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."

Genesis 3:6 (NLT)

The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too.

④ BECAUSE GOD IS...

1) HOLY: we are now Separated from God

God cannot be united with that which is sinful.

By disobeying God, Adam and Eve brought sin into their lives, thereby cutting themselves off from the presence of the Holy God.

Isaiah 59:2 (NLT)

But there is a problem—your sins have cut you off from God. Because of your sin, he has turned away and will not listen anymore.

2) **JUST:** we are

Under judgment

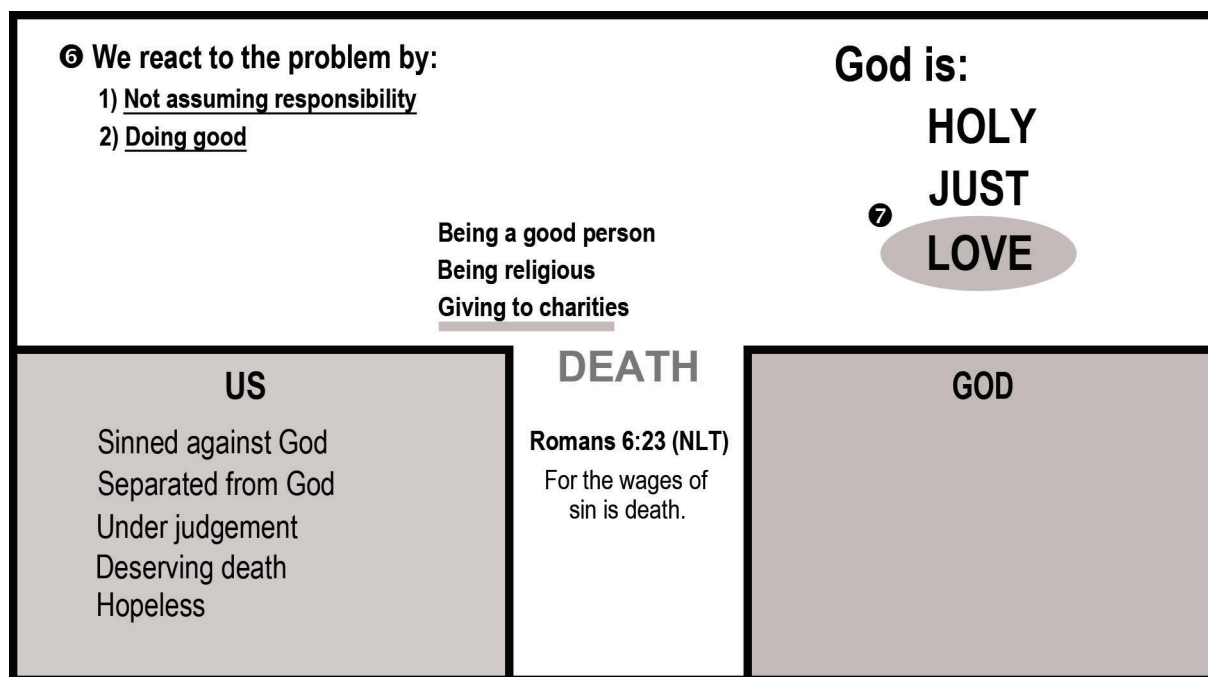
God's justice demands that he acts against sin, giving it the only appropriate consequence – death. God cannot let any evil go undealt with that would work against his standard of absolute perfection and holiness. Anyone who separates himself from the life-giving God is only left with death.

Romans 2:5 (NLT)

But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

5 THE CONSEQUENCE: **Death**

Romans 6:23 (NLT) For the wages of sin is death



6 WE REACT TO THE PROBLEM BY:

a) **Not Assuming Responsibility**

Genesis 3:12 (NLT)

The man replied, "It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it."

God's response:**1 John 1:8 (NLT)***If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth.***b) Doing Good***"If only my good deeds outweigh my bad ones, then I'm safe."***God's response:****Isaiah 64:6 (NLT)***We are all infected and impure with sin. When we proudly display our righteous deeds, we find they are but filthy rags. Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall. And our sins, like the wind, sweep us away.***EXAMPLE:** *A police officer pulls you over for speeding**You explain that you have been driving for the past five hours and only speeding for the past 30 minutes. In fact, you stopped at a crosswalk and let an old lady cross the street; you even slowed down and stopped for a yellow light. In lieu of your driving for the day, you explain that your good driving far outweighs your bad; therefore, you should not receive a ticket.***How do you think the police officer will respond? Why?***Good driving is the expected norm – that's just the way we're supposed to drive. The problem isn't how much good driving we do, the problem is when we **BREAK** the **LAW**. No amount of good driving will make up for the fact that the law is now broken and there needs to be a consequence.**We can try to bridge our way back to God by doing good things (going to church, serving in church, reading your bible, praying, giving to the poor, helping others, etc.) but these are just good things we are to do anyway. Even when we do good – if it's still outside a relationship with God, then God still calls them evil acts.***Romans 3:23 (NLT)** *For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard.***Extra support verses****Romans 3:10-12 (NLT)***¹⁰ As the Scriptures say, "No one is good—not even one. ¹¹ No one has real understanding; no one is seeking God. ¹² All have turned away from God; all have gone wrong. No one does good, not even one."*

Matthew 7:22-23 (NIV)

²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Romans 3:20 (NIV)

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

We are entirely Hopeless

There is absolutely nothing we can do to change our situation. There is no way we can make ourselves righteous or holy. We are separated from God and are under his righteous condemnation.

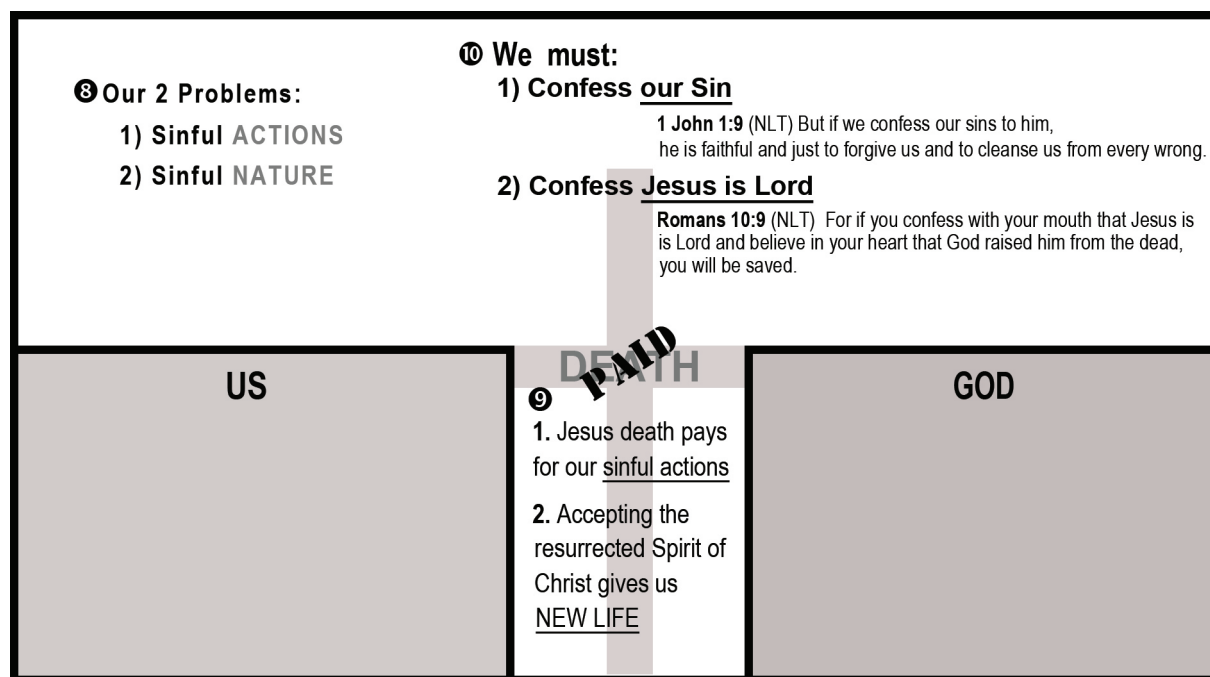
This is the BAD NEWS...BUT

7 GOD IS Love

*God knows our REBELLIOUS HEARTS (sin nature)
God knows he must JUDGE SIN (death consequence)*

BUT God still LOVES US

*God devised a PLAN to bring us back to him – a plan that would come at GREAT COST.
This is a plan he takes very seriously, and we probably should too.*



8 OUR TWO PROBLEMS:*Sinful Actions*

All the morally wrong things we've done and thought throughout our lives leave us under God's wrath and judgment.

Sinful Nature

We don't just sin – we are sinful. Our very nature is to sin. In any given circumstance, the most natural thing for us to do is sin.

What are we like first thing in the morning after a terrible night's sleep?

What is our most natural response if someone insults us?

What comes out when I'm caught off guard or hit my thumb with a hammer?

In times when we have less self-control, our "nature" is most clearly shown.

9 GOD'S SOLUTION: *Jesus comes to earth as a Man*

*God chose to take on the FORM OF A MAN (JESUS) and come to earth for one purpose
- To live a sinless life and DIE as our SUBSTITUTE on the cross.*

I couldn't die for you because I'm guilty of my own sins & vice versa.

No one else on earth is sinless. The only one who could be the perfect, sinless sacrifice would be God himself, who became man.

BY COMING TO EARTH, JESUS DEALS WITH OUR 2 PROBLEMS**1) JESUS' DEATH PAYS FOR OUR *Sinful Actions***

By dying on the cross, Jesus paid the price for our SINFUL ACTS.

Justice is served, our crimes are paid for, and God's holy wrath is appeased.

We can now be forgiven and set free from the consequence of our own sin.

PROBLEM 1 SOLVED***Romans 8:1-4 (NLT)***

¹ So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ² And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. ³ The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. ⁴ He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

2) ACCEPTING THE RESURRECTED SPIRIT OF CHRIST GIVES US New Life and New Nature

Because Jesus conquered death and rose to new life when we receive his Spirit into our lives, his death is applied to us and we are forgiven, but the Spirit of Christ also restores life to our spirit, giving us NEW LIFE and a NEW NATURE.

PROBLEM 2 SOLVED

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

With my sin and sinful nature dealt with, I am now declared HOLY (morally perfect) in God's sight and can once again be restored to intimate RELATIONSHIP with him.

Romans 5:1 (NLT)

Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.

I can now once again start REPRESENTING him to the rest of creation. I'm not practically perfect yet, but that will happen on the day Christ returns.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (NLT)

⁵¹ But let me tell you a wonderful secret God has revealed to us. Not all of us will die, but we will all be transformed. ⁵² It will happen in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, the Christians who have died will be raised with transformed bodies. And then we who are living will be transformed so that we will never die.

By dying on the cross, Jesus bridged the gap between God and us. He removed the barrier of sin. He is the BRIDGE TO LIFE.

This is the message we are committed to sharing with the world. The message is that through faith in Jesus Christ, we can receive forgiveness and be brought back to an intimate relationship with God as his child. We can now go through life sharing this good news with others, representing God's love wherever we go.

Now that Christ has died on the cross to pay the consequence for our sin – does that mean everyone goes to heaven?

No!

Revelation 20:15 (NLT)

And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.

What does one have to do to cross over to God, to get their name written in the Book of Life?

10 WE MUST *confess 2 things (which are really two ways of saying the same thing)*

CONFESS Our Sin**1 John 1:9 (NLT)**

But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.

Confession here implies repentance. It means that one is genuinely sorry for a life of sinful rebellion and independence and has a heart and mind change regarding a relationship with him. They desire to be forgiven and restored to an intimate relationship with God. As a result, they turn from sin and live in a way that represents God's holy character.

CONFESS Jesus as Lord (Life Leader)**Romans 10:9 (NLT)**

For 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.

If I am truly sorry for removing God from the picture of my life, the implication is that I want him restored to a proper position in my life. This means I am willing to surrender control of my life and let him be in charge. It is now his life to do whatever he pleases. I'm content to follow his lead through whatever circumstances he chooses to lead me.

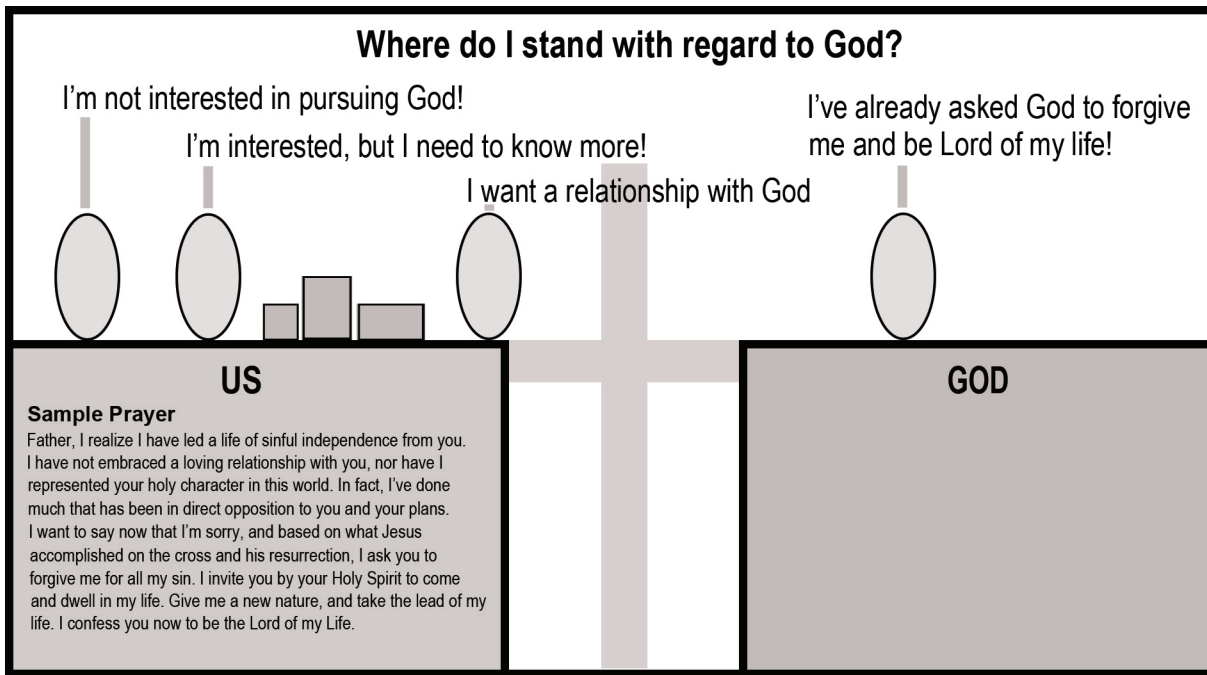
Entering this type of relationship is a lot like getting married. When a proposal is given the other person needs to make a response. It could be:

No, I don't want to marry you

I need time to think about this

Yes, I'd love to marry you

When it comes to God, God has extended the invitation to a covenant relationship with himself. We need to decide where we stand with regard to that relationship.



Where do you place yourself on this diagram?

To the far left saying – “I’M NOT INTERESTED IN PURSUING GOD”

In the middle of the left side saying “I’M INTERESTED, BUT I NEED TO KNOW MORE”

This implies that some hurdles need to be dealt with. They could be intellectual (why should I believe Jesus is God, etc.), or they may be rooted in past hurts with churches. Most likely, it will be a control issue (Am I really willing to trust God and let go of the reins of my life?)

On the edge saying, “I WANT TO CROSS OVER, I SIMPLY HAVEN’T DONE IT YET”

Right side – “I’ve already asked God to forgive me and be Lord of my life”

Have the people check off on their sheet where they believe they are on their journey.

- *Some may say that they believe they’re on the Bridge crossing over, but this is not the case. Their name is either written in the book of life, or not. They are either forgiven, or not. They have either declared Jesus Lord of their life, or not. When they die, they’re either in heaven or not. There is NO MIDDLE GROUND.*
- *It is up to you to determine whether your group is a safe enough place for everyone to share where they place themselves.*
- *For those at stage 3 you can cross over tonight if you wish.*
- *This can take place by a simple heartfelt prayer. Here is a sample prayer you could say to God.*

SAMPLE PRAYER

“Father, I realize I have led a life of sinful independence from you. I have not embraced a loving relationship with you, nor have I represented your holy character in this world. In fact, I’ve done much that has been in direct opposition to you and your plans. I want to say now that I’m sorry and based on what Jesus accomplished on the cross and his resurrection, I ask that you forgive me for all my sin. I invite you by your Holy Spirit to come and dwell in my life. Please give me a new nature and take the lead in my life. I confess you now to be Lord of my life. In the name of Jesus, I pray this. Amen”

When someone prays that prayer – all heaven stops what it is doing and celebrates that person.

Luke 15:10 (NLT)

In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels when even one sinner repents.

The rejoicing is in front of the angels – guess who is doing the rejoicing? Jesus himself!

SESSION 7: THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS

Review: Everyone explain the Bridge to Life illustration with someone in the room.

What do you think it means to declare Jesus as Lord?

Matthew 19:16 (NLT)

Someone came to Jesus with this question: “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”

If someone asked you this question, how would you answer?

Matthew 19:17-18 (NLT)

¹⁷ “Why ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. But to answer your question—if you want to receive eternal life, keep the commandments.” ¹⁸ “Which ones?” the man asked.

Why do you think Jesus answered this man’s question by saying, “There is only One who is good”?

The man believed that if he were good enough, he would get to heaven. Jesus immediately corrects this assumption by saying that no one is good except God alone. In other words, if he is hoping to get to heaven based on being good, he has already fallen short.

Psalms 14:3 (NLT)

But no, all have turned away; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not a single one!

To make his point, Jesus says that someone would need to be able to keep the commands of God to live a holy life. The man asks which ones, which seems to indicate there are some commands that he perceives are negotiable or less critical than others. So Jesus lists some of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20.

Matthew 19:18-22 (NLT)

¹⁹ And Jesus replied: “You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother. Love your neighbor as yourself.”

²⁰ “I’ve obeyed all these commandments,” the young man replied. “What else must I do?” ²¹ Jesus told him, “If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” ²² But when the young man heard this, he went away very sad, for he had many possessions.

Which commands did Jesus leave out?

Below is a system of using your fingers to help remember the Ten Commandments in order. Have fun with the group seeing if they can remember them next week.

TEN COMMANDMENTS ON FINGERS:

1: One God

Hold one finger up.

Worship God only

2: Scissors

Two fingers held like scissors cutting paper.

Cut out all idols

3: W

Three fingers forming a W.

Watch your Words /Walk

Don't take the Lord's name in vain - more than swearing
Don't claim to be God's child and live contrary to that name

4: Family going to church

Four fingers representing Dad, Mom & 2 kids going to church.

Keep the Sabbath day holy

5: Hand salute

Five fingers together to make a salute.

Honour your Parents

6: Finger stabbing hand

One open hand with fingers together being stabbed by one finger of the other hand.

Do not kill

7: Two leaving the other five at a party

Five fingers in one hand, two in the other. The two leave to be by themselves.

Do not commit adultery

8: Hide thumbs

Four fingers on each hand, with thumbs hidden. In some countries if you steal they cut off your thumbs. In other countries they put you behind bars (the 8 fingers looking like bars).

Do not steal – cut off your thumbs

9: Pinocchio's nose grew

Eight fingers with thumbs hidden. As Pinocchio lied his nose grew. Gradually extend one thumb out to mimic the growing nose.

Do not lie

10: Hands on top of fence

Place all ten fingers and thumbs as if they are holding on top of a fence and you look over into your neighbor's yard.

Do not covet – love your neighbor

The first four commands relate to:

Loving God

The last six commands relate to:

Loving Others

Which commands did Jesus leave out of his list?

Jesus left out the commands directly related to loving God above everything else.

Why do you think Jesus left out these specific commands?

The man would have known the Ten Commandments. They would have been taught and embedded into him as he grew up going to the Jewish synagogue. He should have become very suspicious then when Jesus left these very important ones out. But, because he was so eager to be declared “righteous” and worthy of heaven he focused solely on what he did versus what he did not do. By leaving them out, Jesus is revealing the very area that the man is neglecting in his life.

Why does Jesus respond by telling him to give away everything he has to the poor and follow him?

Jesus knew that this man’s god was his wealth. As long as his money remained the most important thing to him, God could never be God in his life, and God will not take second place. Whatever we value the most is what we declare to be our God. This is why the greatest commandment is to LOVE GOD with ALL your HEART, ALL your SOUL, and ALL your MIND.

Why did the young man walk away sad?

The young man’s wealth gave him an illusion of success, significance, independence, comfort, and status. People in that culture were considered blessed by God if they had material wealth. For him to give up his wealth would be to forfeit everything he relied on to give his life meaning. His wealth had such a grip on him that when it came to choosing between following Jesus and his money, his money won. The reason he went away sad was that he knew that even with all the money he had, his life was empty and unfulfilled. He knew that there was some disconnect between him and God, but taking a step of faith and trusting God with his life was a step he was unwilling to take. His money was his God, and he was not willing to let it go.

Does this mean we need to give away all our money to the poor in order to go to heaven?

Jesus knew that money was this man’s idol and that it was a barrier between him and God, so he challenged him on this point. Each of us has different things we give priority to in our lives. The question is, “Is there anything in our lives that takes a higher priority than God himself?” If there is, then Jesus would come to us and ask us to surrender that issue to him.

What might be some things we might be tempted to value more than God?

Relationship, Family, Career, Hobby, etc

What might Jesus want to say to us in each of those examples?

If the man had been told merely to pray a prayer, asking for forgiveness for his sins, he would have likely done that and then walked away, feeling he was now secure and going to heaven. Would his assumption have been correct?

His repentance would have been superficial and incomplete. In his heart, he was not willing to let God be God; he was not ready to let Jesus be Lord. There was still a rebellion in his spirit that did not trust God, and he valued what his money offered him more than Jesus. He would have walked away deceived, believing he was a child of God, but in for a major disappointment on the day of judgment.

How can we be sure we trust Jesus as Lord?

When Jesus calls us to do something, we obey. Even if we don't understand or don't see how he can protect us, we obey him, knowing that he loves us and has our best interests at heart.

Luke 6:46 (NLT)

So why do you keep calling me 'Lord, Lord!' when you don't do what I say?

Read the following scenarios and consider how Jesus challenges their perception of his Lordship.

Matthew 8:19-20 (NLT)

¹⁹ Then one of the teachers of religious law said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."²⁰ But Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head."

Why do you think the teacher might have been motivated to follow Jesus?

Teachers love listening to good teachers. In this case, the teacher was obviously enthralled with Jesus' teaching and expressed he would be willing to become his disciple and follow him everywhere. Surely, to train under a great teacher like Jesus would assure this teacher a position of honor and prestige among the people.

How might Jesus' response have made him think otherwise?

Jesus never declared that life would be easy for his followers. Following him was never a guaranteed passage to a comfortable, wealthy, or even respected life. This man's claim was a rash decision that was made without considering the cost or what he would be called to surrender. Jesus was ultimately asking him if he felt it was still worth it to follow him, even if it meant having to live by faith for a place to lay his head.

What are some of the costs we might face if we truly choose to call Jesus Lord?

Matthew 8:21-22 (NLT)

²¹ Another of his disciples said, “Lord, first let me return home and bury my father.”²² But Jesus told him, “Follow me now. Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead.”

What would have been so wrong with Jesus letting the man go and bury his father?

Again, this is a situation where Jesus is challenging the priorities of the man.

Let the dead bury their dead: Jesus describes those who are separated from God as being spiritually dead. Their spiritual death ultimately culminates in physical death and eternal judgment. Jesus is not in the “death” business; he is in the “life-giving” business. He is challenging this man to consider whether he is more interested in dealing with death, or is he more interested in giving life?

True, it is the man’s father, and Jesus calls us to honor our parents. Still, when Jesus calls us to follow him, we have to decide as to whether our life centers on our earthly family or whether it centers on Jesus and his mission to rescue people from death. As important as burying family members is, obeying Jesus and giving life to others takes a higher priority. When God calls us to follow him and obey it is not always convenient, but if he is truly Lord, we obey.

Matthew 10:32-39 (NLT)

³² “Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.”³³ But everyone who denies me here on earth, I will also deny before my Father in heaven.

³⁴ “Don’t imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring peace, but a sword.”³⁵ “I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”³⁶ Your enemies will be right in your own household!”³⁷ “If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine.”³⁸ If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine.”³⁹ If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.

Which phrases in this passage do you find hard to accept?
What point is Jesus stressing in the above passage?

Jesus says that we need to understand our relationship with him is to come before any other relationship. The greatest command is to LOVE GOD first, then LOVING OTHERS follows from that. If those two are reversed then God is not God; your family or friends are your god.

When family members choose to set Jesus as their priority, it will often create tensions within a family. Suddenly your values are different; your priorities are different; where and how you spend your time and money, who you enjoy being with, all change. Not everyone will be thrilled that you have chosen to follow Jesus, and it may create divisions within a family.

Have any of you had to pay a price in your relationships because you chose to follow Jesus?

What does Jesus mean when he says to pick up your cross and follow him?

When Jesus picked up his cross, he was saying to the Father, "Not my will, but yours be done." Jesus did not want to die a painful, torturous death on a cross, but he knew that it was the Father's will for him to do so in order to rescue all humanity. Jesus put to death his own will and preferences and chose to embrace the Father's will despite the great suffering it would bring him. When he tells us to pick up our cross, he calls us to follow his example of dying to self and embracing God's will, whatever the cost.

Why do we find it hard to surrender our lives to the rule of Jesus?

Two common reasons:

- 1) **Pride** *We like to be in control. We like to think we are self-sufficient and that we are capable of doing everything on our own. Pride says I can do a better job with my life than God can.*
- 2) **Fear** *A distrust that Jesus will meet all my needs. Fear of where he will lead me and what he might call me to do. It is ultimately rooted in a questioning of God's true love for me.*

In all of the above scriptures, the question is raised, "What role will Jesus play in your life?"

To declare Jesus is Lord is to say that he is now the Owner of your life; he can do with it whatever he wishes. It is HIS! To declare Jesus is Lord requires a huge step of faith, trusting that he is HOLY, JUST and that he LOVES you fully.

If Jesus is truly Lord of your life, what aspects of your life may need to change this week?

SESSION 8: UNDERSTANDING BAPTISM

In the New Testament, the idea of baptism is introduced by John the Baptist, developed by Jesus, and later by the Apostle Paul. Read the following verses to determine what each explained about baptism.

What do you think is the whole meaning behind baptism?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Mark 1:4-5 (NLT)

⁴ This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had turned to God to receive forgiveness for their sins. ⁵ All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

What was the focus of John's baptism?

What do you think being baptized in water symbolized for all these people?

Focus: Repentance

Symbolism: Being washed clean

John was preparing people for the coming of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God. He warned them of their need to see how they had drifted away from God and to seek forgiveness for their sin. As people came, repenting of their sin, they were baptized as a public confession, denouncing their old, sinful way of life and affirming their new loyalty to God. They were preparing for life under the coming Kingdom of God.

JESUS CHRIST

Matthew 3:13-17 (NLT)

¹³ Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to talk him out of it. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?"

¹⁵ But Jesus said, "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires." So John agreed to baptize him. ¹⁶ After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."

Obviously, Jesus, being perfect, didn't need to repent of any sin, so why do you think he might have chosen to get baptized?

1) What statement would Jesus' baptism have made regarding John's ministry and message?

Affirmation

It would declare that Jesus affirmed John's ministry and message, which was ultimately about him.

When John first saw Jesus coming to him he stated, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29 (NLT). By getting baptized by John, Jesus was saying, "John is right. I am the Messiah. I have come to take away people's sins, and I have come to bring the Kingdom of God. Follow me!"

2) Why did Jesus say he needed to do this to "fulfill all righteousness"?

Affirming his mission

Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was to die as a substitute sacrifice for our sins. In order to do so, he needed to live a sinless life in complete submission to the will of the Father. He could only accomplish this by fulfilling completely the demands of law as laid out in the Old Testament. When Jesus talks about fulfilling all righteousness, he is not merely talking about the act of baptism, but about living a sinless life that will make it possible for him to die in our place. His baptism is merely the starting point of his mission.

Jesus is also affirming baptism as the initiation rite into the Kingdom of God. By getting baptized himself, he is setting an example for all believers to act out their new faith and relationship with God. It is right for us to be baptized because Jesus calls all of his disciples to follow his example.

3) Why would God the Father say he was pleased with his Son at this point?

Submission to the Father's will

By getting baptized, Jesus was declaring that he was accepting the mission that the Father set before him – going to the cross. Jesus, obviously, did not look forward to the great suffering he was about to experience. The human part of Jesus dreaded the pain, both spiritually and physically, he was about to endure and his personal preference would have been to avoid it. But Jesus was committed to doing the will of the Father ahead of his own personal preferences and desires.

Luke 22:42 (NLT)

"Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."

Jesus' ministry starts and ends with the tension of whose "will" will actually prevail. Jesus affirms submission to the Father at the beginning of his ministry and then at the end.

Baptism is the point of letting go of the control of your life and handing the reins over to God. Jesus had to battle with this, just as we all do, yet he obeyed, despite the immense suffering and death it would cost him. Because of this act of submission, the Father responded with his affirmation of love. In a sense, it is equivalent to saying, "Son, I'm proud of you!"

4) In what stage of Jesus' ministry did his baptism take place?

Launching Point

Jesus' baptism took place at the very beginning of his ministry. It was the moment he was empowered by the Holy Spirit for the ministry that was now set before him. Baptism for us is the launching point into our new life of ministry, also empowered by the Spirit. It is from this beginning point that we live with a whole new purpose, new set of priorities and life goals.

JESUS BUILDS ON THE SYMBOLISM

Mark 10:38-39 (NLT)

³⁸ But Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with?"³⁹ "Oh yes," they replied, "we are able!" Then Jesus told them, "You will indeed drink from my bitter cup and be baptized with my baptism of suffering."

Luke 12:50 (NLT)

I have a terrible baptism of suffering ahead of me, and I am under a heavy burden until it is accomplished.

Jesus adds a deeper symbolism to baptism.

What do you think he is really referring to when he talks about the baptism he'll have to undergo?

He is referring to his upcoming death. He will be immersed into death.

APOSTLE PAUL

Romans 6:3-4 (NLT)

³ Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death?

⁴ For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

Colossians 2:12 (NLT)

For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to a new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.

According to these verses:

What is the symbolism of being lowered into the water?

Death and burial of your old self

By uniting ourselves with Christ, his death and burial is applied to us and the death consequence for our sin is now paid for. In baptism we are acting out the fact that, through Christ, our sinful nature has died and we have been set free from its control. The old nature no longer plays a role in our life – it's gone! Though we are given a new life with a new nature, we still struggle with sin because we have a body and mind that have been corrupted by sin. On the day when Christ returns the Bible tells us we will be given new bodies and the picture will be complete.

1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

What is the symbolism of coming up out of the water?

Rising to new life

Coming out of the water denotes resurrection. As we unite with Christ in his death, just as the Spirit raised him to new life, so will his Spirit give us new life. This new life, empowered by the Holy Spirit, gives us a whole new identity, set of priorities, and life purpose. The Spirit guides us, transforms us, guards us and shows us how to experience intimacy with God. It's a whole new life.

Marriage Example: *When a person gets married the old single life instantly dies. They have become one with another and live their lives in light of that new relationship. Certain things from their old life no longer play a role in their new life and new relationship. In fact, some of those old things would be very destructive to the new relationship (dating, spending money however you wish, going away on the spur of the moment on your own, working long hours at the office, etc.) This new life has new priorities, new habits, new goals and a new lifestyle.*

Read the following passages. Focus on why people were getting baptized.

Acts 2:36-41 (NLT)

³⁶ “So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!”

³⁷ Peter’s words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”

³⁸ Peter replied, “Each of you must repent of your sins, turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to show that you have received forgiveness for your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ This promise is to you, and to your children, and even to the Gentiles—all who have been called by the Lord our God.” ⁴⁰ Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation!”

⁴¹ Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

Acts 8:34-36, 38 (NLT)

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?” ³⁵ So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus. ³⁶ As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?” ³⁸ He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

Acts 16:29-34 (NLT)

²⁹ The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹ They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household.” ³² And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. ³³ Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. ³⁴ He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.

According to these verses, who should get baptized and when?

Those who have come to a point where they:

- **BELIEVE** Jesus to have died for them and rose again, offering them forgiveness and new life.
- Confess their sin and **REPENT**.

People were baptized at the point they placed faith in Jesus Christ and received new life, the point in time when they died to their old self and received the Holy Spirit.

PICTURE SUMMARY:

WATER:	<u><i>Being washed clean</i></u>
GOING INTO THE WATER:	<u><i>Death and burial of your old self</i></u>
RISING FROM THE WATER:	<u><i>Rising to new life in Christ</i></u>
WALKING OUT OF THE WATER:	<u><i>Launching into a new life of ministry</i></u>

SESSION 9: THE LORD'S TABLE

Matthew 26:17-20 (NLT)

¹⁷ On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal for you?" ¹⁸ "As you go into the city," he told them, "you will see a certain man. Tell him, 'The Teacher says: My time has come, and I will eat the Passover meal with my disciples at your house.'" ¹⁹ So the disciples did as Jesus told them and prepared the Passover meal there. ²⁰ When it was evening, Jesus sat down at the table with the twelve disciples.

What do you know about the Passover Feast?

God sent Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, where they had been slaves under Pharaoh. Through Moses, God performed nine miraculous signs to convince Pharaoh to let the people go, but each time Pharaoh refused to comply. The following passage reveals the tenth and final warning to Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt.

Exodus 12:1-20 (NLT)

¹ While the Israelites were still in the land of Egypt, the LORD gave the following instructions to Moses and Aaron: ² "From now on, this month will be the first month of the year for you. ³ Announce to the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each family must choose a lamb or a young goat for a sacrifice, one animal for each household. ⁴ If a family is too small to eat a whole animal, let them share with another family in the neighborhood. Divide the animal according to the size of each family and how much they can eat. ⁵ The animal you select must be a one-year-old male, either a sheep or a goat, with no defects.

⁶ "Take special care of this chosen animal until the evening of the fourteenth day of this first month. Then the whole assembly of the community of Israel must slaughter their lamb or young goat at twilight. ⁷ They are to take some of the blood and smear it on the sides and top of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the animal. ⁸ That same night they must roast the meat over a fire and eat it along with bitter salad greens and bread made without yeast. ⁹ Do not eat any of the meat raw or boiled in water. The whole animal—including the head, legs, and internal organs—must be roasted over a fire. ¹⁰ Do not leave any of it until the next morning. Burn whatever is not eaten before morning.

¹¹ "These are your instructions for eating this meal: Be fully dressed, wear your sandals, and carry your walking stick in your hand. Eat the meal with urgency, for this is the LORD's Passover. ¹² On that night I will pass through the land of Egypt and strike down every firstborn son and firstborn male animal in the land of Egypt. I will execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt, for I am the LORD! ¹³ But the blood on your doorposts will serve as a sign, marking the houses where you are staying. When I see the blood, I will pass over you. This plague of death will not touch you when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴ "This is a day to remember. Each year, from generation to generation, you must celebrate it as a special festival to the LORD. This is a law for all time. ¹⁵ For seven days the bread you eat must be made without yeast. On the first day of the festival, remove every trace of yeast from your homes. Anyone who eats bread made with yeast during the seven days of the festival will be cut off from the community of Israel. ¹⁶ On the first day of the festival and again on the seventh day, all the people must observe an official day for holy

assembly. No work of any kind may be done on these days except in the preparation of food. ¹⁷ “Celebrate this Festival of Unleavened Bread, for it will remind you that I brought your forces out of the land of Egypt on this very day. This festival will be a permanent law for you; celebrate this day from generation to generation. ¹⁸ The bread you eat must be made without yeast from the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month until the evening of the twenty-first day of that month. ¹⁹ During those seven days, there must be no trace of yeast in your homes. Anyone who eats anything made with yeast during this week will be cut off from the community of Israel. These regulations apply both to the foreigners living among you and to the native-born Israelites. ²⁰ During those days you must not eat anything made with yeast. Wherever you live, eat only bread made without yeast.”

What is the point of the Passover Feast?

The Passover Feast was a meal that God commanded the Israelites to celebrate once a year as a reminder of their dramatic rescue from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12). Their freedom came about as each Israelite took a lamb, slaughtered it, put the blood on the doorposts of their home, and then ate the roasted lamb as part of the meal. As they did this, a destroying angel went through Egypt, killing the firstborn male of every household that did not have the blood applied to their house. In such a way, God finally convinced Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave.

Over the years, the Israelites added symbols to the feast to help every generation remember the dramatic way God rescued Israel from slavery. These symbols are still used in Passover celebrations today.

What do you think is the meaning of each symbol?

Roasted lamb shank bone:

It is a reminder of the lamb that was sacrificed in place of the firstborn male of the family. When the angel saw the blood of the lamb applied to the doorposts, he passed over that house. Since the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, Jews do not sacrifice lambs at the altar. The shank bone looks forward to the day when the temple will be rebuilt.

3 Loaves of unleavened bread called the Unity:

The Israelites were not to make bread with yeast, to emphasize how quickly there would be a turn of events, and they would soon flee from Egypt. Yeast takes time to rise – they would not have that time. That is why they were even instructed to eat in haste with their cloaks and sandals on and their staff in their hands



During the feast, the middle piece of bread is taken and broken in half. One half is wrapped in a cloth and hidden behind a pillow until later in the meal. The upper and lower pieces are eaten at various stages in the meal. The hidden piece is brought out near the end of a meal, broken, and each participant is given a piece to eat.

Horseradish (bitter herb):

A reminder of the bitterness of slavery and the way of life they experienced in Egypt.

Charoseth (chopped apple and cinnamon):

A reminder of the bricks and mortar they used to make bricks as slaves in Egypt.

Parsley dipped in salt water:

A reminder of passing through the Red Sea to become a free, growing, and independent nation.

A hard-boiled egg splashed with saltwater:

This is sometimes used to symbolically represent a full meal. It is a reminder of the hardness of Pharaoh's heart and the tears of the Israelites who slaved under Egyptian taskmasters.

Sometimes a bitter vegetable (romaine lettuce) is also used, instead of saltwater, to represent the bitterness of slavery.

4 Cups of Wine:

The pouring of each cup of wine initiated the start of a new phase of the feast. The cup would be poured at the beginning of each section and then drunk to conclude that section.

1. The Cup of Sanctification

Celebrates that they are a people set apart to God to be holy

2. The Cup of Instruction

Explains the meaning of the Passover symbols. Children were to ask four specific questions regarding the meaning of the symbols. The Father would then explain the significance of each, relating the whole exodus story.

3. The Cup of Redemption

Celebrates their freedom from bondage.

What does it mean to “redeem” something?

To redeem something means to pay the price to purchase something back.

For example: *If you pawned your watch, you could redeem it by paying the debt owed. If a family owed a debt they couldn't pay in biblical days, a child/servant could be taken as a slave for compensation. The Father could redeem his child/servant by paying the ransom price or by offering a servant of greater working value.*

4. The Cup of Praise

Celebrates God who set them free.

Matthew 26:26-29 (NLT)

²⁶ As they were eating [the Passover Meal], Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “Take this and eat it, for this is my body.” ²⁷ And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, “Each of you drink from it, ²⁸ for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many. ²⁹ Mark my words—I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new with you in my Father’s Kingdom.”

Jesus, during his last supper, reinterpreted these elements as symbolically referring to himself.

Why do you think Jesus would compare his life to the Passover experience of the Old Testament?

The Passover was all about an escape from bondage and death through the substitute sacrifice of a pure, spotless lamb. He is essentially saying the Passover experience was simply a picture of the “real” escape from bondage and death caused by our sin. By dying on the cross, he would become the substitute sacrifice for our sins and create a new “exodus” to true freedom.

Our modern-day church celebration focuses on two main elements: the bread and the wine.

As we take a closer look at each element, try to determine the symbolism from a “New Testament perspective.”

THE PASSOVER BREAD:

Why are there three pieces of bread called a Unity?

We understand this to be representative of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Why is the bread made without yeast?

Yeast often carries the symbolism of sin, which grows and spreads. In this case, the bread is without yeast to depict Jesus, who is without sin.

What is the significance of the middle loaf being taken, broken, wrapped in a cloth and hidden behind a pillow?

This second piece of bread represents Jesus, the Son of God, whose body was broken on the cross, wrapped in burial cloths, and then laid in the tomb behind a great stone.

What, potentially, is the symbolism of the bread having holes and stripes?

The stripes could represent the lashings Jesus received on his back and the holes could represent the nail holes in his hands and feet.

Isaiah 53:5 (NASB)

But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. [and with his stripes we are healed - . KJV]

THE WINE

The cup Jesus referred to in the last supper was the third cup called the Cup of Redemption. What is Jesus saying is the symbolism of this cup of WINE?

Jesus declared that through his death on the cross, he is the substitute sacrifice whose blood would be shed so that we may be forgiven and set free from bondage to sin. In other words, he paid the ransom price (death) on our behalf. We could also consider that he is the “greater one” given on our behalf, to set us free. The wine became a symbol of his blood that was shed to set them free.

In scripture, wine has both the symbolism of God's wrath being poured out and in complete contrast, a picture of his abundant provision and joy. In what ways does Jesus' death fulfill both of these pictures?

God vented his wrath against all sin through Jesus' death on the cross. His blood that was shed satisfied the demand for justice against sin. However, through the blood that was shed, we can also receive the joy of forgiveness and the abundant blessing God wants to pour into our lives.

1 Corinthians 11:24 (NLT)

Then he broke it in pieces and said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me.”

1 Corinthians 11:26 (NLT)

For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again.

Why do you think Jesus wants us to continue to celebrate this feast?

If escaping from another country was an important cause for celebration, how much more so is escaping our bondage to sin and judgement? It is all about remembering what Christ has done for us on the cross, the price he paid, and the freedom he has purchased for us.

It is easy for us to forget. We quickly forget the good things others have done for us, we quickly

lose perspective, we quickly lose sight of where we came from and where we need to go. It also reminds us of where we are headed and encourages us to live out that reality in our lives now. You are a child of the King who is coming back to claim you as his own; live a life worthy of that calling and look forward to Christ's return.

Why do you think it might be important for a church to celebrate this together?

In the same way that Passover was celebrated as a family, it is important for the "Family of God" to celebrate it together. It is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that has pulled us together and created us as a family. As we all eat and drink the symbols together, we are proclaiming that Jesus has redeemed us, he is worthy of our attention, and we will stay true to the life and relationship he has called us to.

There is a spiritual bonding that takes place among us as a church celebrates this feast together. To miss out on this experience is to miss out on a deeply significant celebration that Christ has given to us as a gift to bless and strengthen us.

How often do you think we should celebrate the Lord's Table?

- *The Passover was celebrated by the Jews once a year.*
- *Some churches celebrate the Lord's Table every week as a continual reminder.*
- *Some churches celebrate once a month so as not to make it routine and become immune to its significance.*

The New Testament does not tell us how often to celebrate it. It only says that "whenever" you do it, do it remembering who Jesus is and what he has done for you.

What do you think are some of the personal benefits you might receive from celebrating the Lord's Table with your church family?

What might be lacking in your life should this ceremony be neglected in your life?

SESSION 10: THE HOLY SPIRIT

If someone asked you to explain who the Holy Spirit is, what would you say?

Do you typically think of the Holy Spirit more as a “force/energy” or as a “person”?

What do the following verses teach us about the Holy Spirit?

Matthew 28:19 (NLT)

Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is equal with the Father and Son.

Acts 5:3-4 (NLT)

³ Then Peter said, “Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. ⁴ The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren’t lying to us but to God!”

The Holy Spirit is God.

Romans 8:11 (NLT)

The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us new life.

Ephesians 4:30 (NLT)

And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he is the one who has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

The Holy Spirit can experience sorrow

Think of the idea of a person, not so much in terms of a being with a physical body, but as an individual who has personality, can think, talk and feel, etc.

SUMMARY:

The Holy Spirit has characteristics of a person vs. a force.

The word “Spirit” is gender-neutral, and so sometimes the word “it” is used, but it is more in line with the term “person” or “child,” which has no gender qualification but is still a person.

Illustration of understanding the nature of the Holy Spirit:

One of the best ways to understand the nature of God is to look at his image – us. When God designed us, he made us both spiritual and physical beings. Apart from our body, our spirit will still have memory, intellect, and personality – it is still us – just absent a body. However, our bodies and spirits are finite and must remain together while on earth.

Jesus, in his body, was also limited physically and geographically. However, his Spirit was still eternal and omnipresent. Even now, though Jesus reigns in heaven, his Spirit is free to be in all places at all times. His Spirit is not just a force, but part of his personhood, in the same way, our spirits are fully us (only minus the body).

Read the following passages and discuss the Holy Spirit’s activity.

John 16:8 (NLT)

And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God’s righteousness, and of the coming judgment.

The Holy Spirit Convicts us of Sin, Righteousness, and Judgment**How does the Holy Spirit convict us?**

When we do wrong, the Holy Spirit convicts us through our conscience to steer us back to the right path. The Holy Spirit’s convicting work brings us to the point of repentance and a restored joy with the Father. This means we should always listen to our conscience.

John 14:26 (NLT)

But when the Father sends the Counselor as my representative—and by the Counselor I mean the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I myself have told you.

The Holy Spirit Teaches us**How does the Holy Spirit teach us?**

Have you ever met someone who has read the Bible, but nothing sinks in or makes any real sense to them? How is this possible?

The Holy Spirit helps us to understand spiritual truths that don't seem to make sense apart from Christ. Once we enter into a relationship with God, his Spirit speaks to our spirit, helping us to grasp concepts that never seemed to click or make sense before. God himself becomes our teacher.

Romans 8:14 (NLT)

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

Matthew 4:1 (NIV)

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

The Holy Spirit Leads us

How does the Holy Spirit lead us?

The Holy Spirit leads through:

a) The Bible

As we prayerfully read God's word, the Holy Spirit is able to bring certain passages to life that will help guide us through life. This is not a mysterious encounter but an open conversation whereby he can lead us through his word.

b) Promptings

We will sometimes receive a strong burden, conviction, or message about something we need to do or stop doing. This will always be in sync with Scripture and the character of God to bring glory to Jesus Christ and strengthen the church.

c) Dreams, Visions, Messages

On occasion, God will use an extraordinary means to convey an important message. These may require spiritual discernment from others within the family of God. Be aware, not every vision is a message from God.

d) Other believers

Sometimes, to strengthen the community, God gives someone else a message he wants us to hear. We believe this takes place at church services, small groups, etc., but also on an individual basis.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NLT)

And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more.

Philippians 3:21 (NLT)

He will take these weak mortal bodies of ours and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same mighty power that he will use to conquer everything, everywhere.

The Holy Spirit Changes us – spiritually and physically

He immediately changes our nature when he indwells us.

He continues to renew our minds to make us increasingly like Jesus Christ.

He changes our bodies when Christ returns.

Acts 1:8 (NLT)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The Holy Spirit Empowers us

What are some of the different ways the Holy Spirit enables and empowers us for life and ministry?

To date, we have looked at the Father, the Son, and now the Holy Spirit. How might you explain the difference between the roles of all three in how they relate to us?

The Father: *God as sovereign architect, overseeing the plan for humanity.*

All authority in heaven rests in the Father’s hands.

We pray to the Father, through the Spirit, in the Son’s name.

The Father sends the Son and the Spirit.

The Son: *The visible expression of God, dealing with humanity on the physical level.*

The Son fulfills the Father’s purposes in creation and redemption of humanity.

The goal of the Son is to bring us to the Father.

The Son also sends the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit: *God dealing with humanity on the spiritual level.*

The Holy Spirit convicts us with regard to sin, righteousness, and judgment.

The Holy Spirit gives us new life by applying the death & resurrection of Christ to us and renews us to be like Christ.

He fills and empowers us to walk the Christ-like life.

SESSION 11: THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

**And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,
*Ephesians 5:18 (ESV)***

What happens when one is “filled” with alcohol?

Alcohol influences the body and mind to such a degree that people no longer act as they normally would. Instead, they act according to the amount of alcohol they have consumed. The more they drink, the more they lose control over their life. Unfortunately, this is usually for the negative and has a destructive effect.

What does it mean to be “filled” with the Holy Spirit?

Keep in mind, Paul is writing to believers who already have the Holy Spirit in their lives, yet they still need to be “filled” with the Holy Spirit.

To be filled with the Spirit implies that the Holy Spirit is in our life in such a way that his presence influences every aspect of our lives. As we come under his control, we start to think differently about life and the world; our behavior changes to become more Christ-like. Unlike alcohol, which decreases our control, the Spirit’s presence actually increases our degree of self-control so we can live the way God desires us to. This occurs because the Spirit restrains our sinful nature, helping us to resist temptation and, as a result, make godly choices instead of choices that are being driven by sinful impulses.

A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE IS A SPIRIT-CONTROLLED LIFE.

How does one become “filled” with the Holy Spirit?

Car Bumper Sticker: “God is my Co-Pilot”

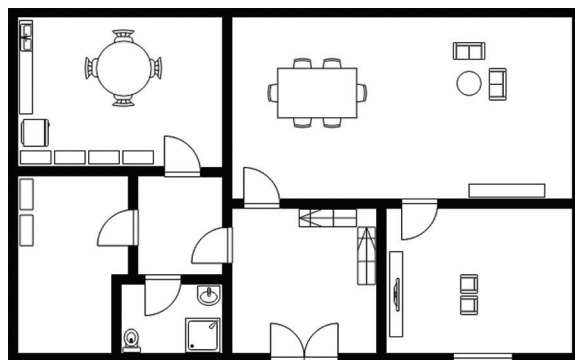
Next Bumper Sticker: “If God is your Co-Pilot, you’re in the wrong seat!”

We are filled with the Spirit when we surrender all areas of our life to his control.

Who is on the THRONE of your life?

Some people like to set their watches to beep on the hour. Whenever the beep goes off, it is a reminder for them to evaluate their life to see who is sitting on the throne – them or God. Being filled with the Spirit is an act of obedience. In Ephesians 5:18, the verb is an imperative from God, not a “request” to God, meaning it is something we are commanded to do. This may create tension in some people when their perspective leads them to “plead” with the Holy Spirit to fill them. The Spirit fills us when we align our lives with his character and purposes and surrender to his daily control.

*You may want to show the video: “The Stool” by One Time Blind
http://onetimeblind.com/resources_videos.html (Also on YouTube)*



THE HOUSE ILLUSTRATION

We invite the Spirit into the “house” of our life, telling him to make himself at home. However, we sometimes knowingly or unknowingly, keep some areas of our life off-limits (locked doors) to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit-filled person is the one who goes through his life, unlocking all the doors allowing the Spirit to enter that room, clean it up, and use it for God’s glory. As we release the control of our lives and submit in obedience to his will, we will be led and directed by the Spirit.

We are filled with the Spirit when we surrender our will, agenda, pride, and life to the will of God – as Jesus modeled at his baptism and in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Spirit then has full access to our life and will accomplish his purposes in our lives.

What are some areas of our life we might keep closed off to the Holy Spirit?

What are some of the results of being “filled” with the Spirit?

Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT)

²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

Why are these traits called “fruits of the Spirit”?

These are not characteristics we need to strive to achieve; these are character traits that accompany the Spirit when he comes into our life. The more we allow the Holy Spirit to permeate every area of our life, the more we experience the evidence of these fruits.

If you could experience one of these traits right now, which one would you like to experience most?

What do you think is the key to experiencing this fruit in your life?

LIVING THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

How might we relate to others if we are filled with the Holy Spirit?

Look at the remainder of the Ephesians 5 passage.
Underline what the Spirit-filled person starts doing.

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.*

Why do you think singing worship songs tops the list?

We are created for praise. When filled with the Spirit, music becomes a powerful expression of our love and adoration of God, for who he is and what he has done. It is a bonding experience when we can gather with other believers to join us in praise and worship. Note that we actually sing to one another.

Why would we give thanks for everything?

If the Spirit is in control, he will only allow us to experience what he wants us to experience for his purposes. We simply need to rest, confident that God is in control and that he loves us.

Corrie Ten Boom and her sister Betsy were placed in a Nazi concentration camp because of their commitment to help rescue the Jews. As Christians, they read that they were to give thanks in all circumstances. So, they started to thank God for everything they were experiencing in the camp: the bible they were able to smuggle into the camp, the fact that they had freedom to hold bible studies in the room without being disturbed by the guards and the crowded rooms, so more could hear about Jesus. Betsy even gave thanks for the fleas, although Corrie struggled with that and was convinced Betsy was wrong about that one. Later Betsy discovered that the main reason they had so much freedom to hold bible studies in the large room was because of the fleas. The guards would not go anywhere near the room. (*The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boon)

The Spirit-filled life finds its joy from a relationship with God, surpassing any circumstances we might encounter. Circumstances, then, simply become a means by which God will accomplish his purposes in our lives.

What does it mean to submit to one another?

Submission does not mean obedience. It means putting the needs and well-being of others ahead of your own.

Philippians 2:3-5 (NLT)

³ Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. ⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Give some examples of how you think Jesus modeled the Spirit-filled life?**Read the following verses and discuss how Jesus modeled the Spirit-filled life.****Matthew 4:1 (NIV)**

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

John 12:49 (NIV)

For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.

John 14:31 (NIV)

...but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

Jesus followed the Spirit's leading whenever it prompted him.

The Father was able to direct Jesus because Jesus was open to being led by the Spirit.

He only said what the Father told him to say

He only did what the Father directed him to do

By developing an intimacy with God, Jesus learned to recognize the voice and leading of the Spirit. The more time we spend with God, the more we step out in faith, trusting him in whatever he brings our way, and the more we focus on his purposes, the more we can identify his will.

Galatians 5:25 (NIV)

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

How can we live in step with the Spirit tomorrow? How can we live the Spirit-filled life?

1) By reading the Bible

If the Holy Spirit primarily teaches us by bringing the Word of God to life in our lives, it makes sense that we need to be reading it daily to allow him to teach and lead us.

2) By praying

Through prayer, we ask God to lead us and guide us through all life's challenges. The Holy Spirit leads as we invite him to show us the way.

3) By taking seriously the mission of Jesus

The Holy Spirit is continuing the ministry of Christ on earth through his people. If you are not interested in carrying on this mission, there will be a disconnect between what you are doing and what the Spirit desires to do through you.

4) By obeying the Holy Spirit's promptings

The Holy Spirit convicts and leads us through promptings to our spirit.

This can be entirely subjective, and caution needs to be exercised. Sometimes our promptings can be evoked by our desires, fears, or insecurities. Sometimes our promptings can be produced by, or initiated by, Satan. In every case, whenever we sense a prompting that we believe may be from God, we need to test it.

If it is from God, it will:

Be in complete harmony with God's moral will as expressed in scripture

Be a continuation of the work and mission of Jesus Christ

Bring glory to God

Require a step of faith

SAMPLE MORNING PRAYER

"Father, I hand over control of my life to you today. It is yours to do with whatever you wish. Help me recognize and follow your Spirit's leading, both in what I say and what I do. I will trust that whatever circumstances I experience, you have allowed to come my way for your purposes. I will choose to be thankful at all times, knowing you love me and are watching over me. May I simply live in a way that is pleasing to you, and may I represent you well today."

FOUNDATIONS

SESSION 12: THE BIBLE

How would you explain the nature of the Bible to someone else? What is it?

The goal of this study is to understand the Bible's perspective of itself.

Read the following passage together.

Underline each of the effects the Word of God can have on our life.

Psalm 19:7-11 (ESV)

⁷ *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
⁸ *the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
⁹ *the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.***

¹⁰ *More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.*

¹¹ *Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is
great reward.*

What do you think about these statements?

If we invented a pill that could revive your soul, make you wiser, give you joy, and give you greater understanding of life, how well do you think it would sell?

Such a pill would fly off the marketplace shelves instantly. It would create mass mobs of people desperate to get their hands on it. It would be backed up with orders from around the world. We would make billions of dollars on its sale.

Why don't we gravitate to the Bible with the same enthusiasm as the Psalmist?

The Bible doesn't evoke that type of response because people don't believe it will really produce those results. We want change instantly and are not willing to allow the Word of God to do a gradual transforming work in our life.

The main reason is that the Bible must be read from a relational perspective – these are God’s words to us. Apart from an intimate relationship with God, the words of the Bible will fall empty. We may still get some good advice from the Bible, but new life, wisdom, joy, and understanding come as we hear and surrender to these words from God himself.

*If we read the Bible as **God’s love letter** to us, then the words take on a whole new impact and meaning. They become more precious than gold and sweeter than honey. It’s not difficult to get someone with that perspective to find time to dive into God’s Word.*

How can we claim the Bible is the Word of God, when we know it was written by people?
Get your students’ input.

How do the following verses provide confidence that God’s Word actually is God’s word?

Deuteronomy 18:18-22 (NLT)

¹⁸ I will raise up a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I command him. ¹⁹ I will personally deal with anyone who will not listen to the messages the prophet proclaims on my behalf. ²⁰ But any prophet who falsely claims to speak in my name or who speaks in the name of another god must die.’ ²¹ “But you may wonder, ‘How will we know whether or not a prophecy is from the LORD?’ ²² If the prophet speaks in the LORD’s name but his prediction does not happen or come true, you will know that the LORD did not give that message. That prophet has spoken without my authority and need not be feared.

God says that the words are his, not theirs, and backs it up with action. No person making up the words himself would have added the whole bit about unfulfilled prophecy bringing the death sentence. That would not have been a clever move!

God authenticated his word by making promises and prophecies and then fulfilling them.

Mark 16:20 (NLT)

And the disciples went everywhere and preached, and the Lord worked through them, confirming what they said by many miraculous signs.

God used signs of healing, casting out demons, raising the dead, and other miracles to authenticate the message that was being delivered.

2 Peter 1:19-21 (NLT)

¹⁹ Because of that experience, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets. You must pay close attention to what they wrote, for their words are like a lamp shining in a dark place—until the Day dawns, and Christ the Morning Star shines in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet’s own understanding, ²¹ or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.

What do you think it means when it says they were “moved by the Holy Spirit”?

The words didn’t originate with men, but with God. Men merely communicated what was given to them by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit inspired them in such a way that they wrote or spoke the Spirit’s words, even though it came through their specific dialect, personality, and grammatical skills. The writers themselves declared that what was expressed did not come from them but God.

According to the verses below, how did the Bible writers view what was written?

1 Thessalonians 2:13 (NLT)

Therefore, we never stop thanking God that when you received his message from us, you didn’t think of our words as mere human ideas. You accepted what we said as the very word of God—which, of course, it is. And this word continues to work in you who believe.

The Bible should never be understood to be man’s message, but rather, God’s.

2 Peter 3:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ *And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.*

The words “other scriptures” here is key. Peter is expressing that Paul’s writings are also “Scripture” and have been given to him by God.

What is the benefit of reading the Bible?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

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

It TEACHES truth ----- **It REFUTES false teaching.**

The translated word “reproof” is better understood in this context as “refute.”

It CORRECTS ungodly behavior----- **It TRAINS us to live righteously**

to bring us back to righteousness and accomplish all God has prepared for us.

Hebrews 4:12 (NLT)

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

The Word of God is ALIVE and POWERFUL. This is because the Word of God is the means by which God communicates with us. Through his word, he teaches and convicts us. God's word will speak to us personally because God speaks through the words. He brings his word to life in a way that will impact us and change our relationship with him.

What are the implications for anyone who purposefully distorts the Word of God?

Revelation 22:18-19 (NLT)

¹⁸ And I solemnly declare to everyone who hears the words of prophecy written in this book: If anyone adds anything to what is written here, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book. ¹⁹ And if anyone removes any of the words from this book of prophecy, God will remove that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city that are described in this book.

Plagues - Judgment

Loss of Life Eternal

What is the safeguard that the Bible won't be destroyed or distorted throughout history or that we won't ever lose God's Word to us?

Matthew 5:18 (NLT)

I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.

Every little stroke of the pen will remain throughout time until everything has been fulfilled. God will not let his word be exterminated or distorted in such a way that we should worry or lack confidence in the Bible we have today. He is actively involved in guarding his word.

Isaiah 40:8 (NLT)

*The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands **forever**."*

His promise.

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE TIPS

Start with a Proper Attitude

View this as an opportunity to spend time with God and learn from him. This isn't like reading a textbook; it's far more relational than that. This is God writing a letter to you, and he desires to reveal to you something about himself, something about your relationship with him, and something about how to live. Read the Bible with a sense of expectation.

Select a Specific Time

General principle: Try to give God the best time of your day vs. left over time. For some, it's in the morning, for others, it's in the evening. If you're approaching God when your mind and body is tired, don't expect to get as much out of your time together – that's true with any relationship. Value this time and try not to let it get crowded out by less important things in life (i.e. TV, social media, books, etc.). Don't focus on how long you're meeting with God - don't watch the clock. Remember, some days the time will be short, other days longer; the key is to focus on the relationship.

Choose a Special Place

It's best if you can get off by yourself somewhere where you won't be disturbed or distracted. Choose a location with good lighting and a place where you are comfortable talking out loud to God (but not so comfortable that you fall asleep, i.e., bed).

Read Conversationally

We're not talking in-depth theological studying at this point. We're talking about you and God getting to know each other. As you read through the passage, dialogue with God about what you're reading. If something sounds confusing, let him know and ask him to help you figure out the meaning. If you come across a statement that hits home to you – make special note of that and spend some time talking to God about it. Some questions will drive you to a deeper theological study on the issue.

Apply it

"What am I going to do about what I've just read?"

The time you spend will only be as beneficial as the application of what you are learning to your daily life. Test God in this to see if what he says actually works. Find ways to remind yourself throughout the day of the truth you're trying to apply. This will help it sink in. Remember, if you read the Bible but don't apply it to your life, it is absolutely useless to you.

***But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says.
Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.
James 1:22 (NLT)***

Even if you're not sure what you believe about God, start off by asking him to reveal himself to you through the passage you're about to read, then read it with that sense of expectation.

BIBLE STRUCTURE (66 books)

Old Testament (39 books)			
History (17)	Poetry (5)	Prophecy (17)	
The Law (5) Pentateuch	Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs	Major Prophets (5) Large	
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy		Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel	
Historical books (12)		Minor Prophets (12) Small	
Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther		Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi	
New Testament (27 books)			
History (5)	Paul's Letters (13)	Other Letters (8)	Prophecy (1)
The Gospels (4) Story of Jesus Christ	Letters to Churches (9)	Hebrews James 1 Peter 2 Peter 1 John 2 John 3 John Jude	Revelation
Matthew Mark Luke John	Romans 1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians		
The Early Church (1)	Letters to Individuals (4)		
Acts	1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus Philemon		

Bible Authorship

The Bible was written by more than 40 different authors over 1500 years.

Authors: Shepherds, Fishermen, Kings, Royalty, Tax Collectors, Doctors, Tent Makers, Priests, Prophets, brother of Jesus, etc.

Historical Reliability

The closer the writing to the event's actual date, the more reliable it is considered to be. The more documents that are in existence, the greater the weight that is given to the authenticity and accuracy of the documents.

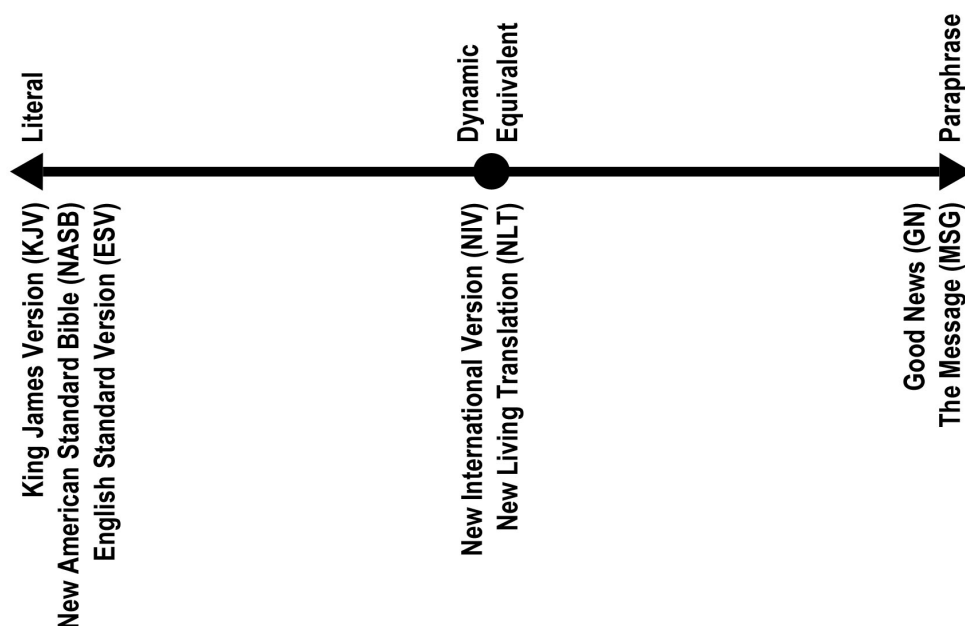
Out of the ancient historical documents that are universally accepted as reliable, the Bible dramatically outshines them all. The Bible was written within a lifespan of the actual events and has far greater numbers of documents available than any other literary works. Due to the vast number of copies written in diverse locations, it is easy to determine if and when any copying mistakes were made in a specific location.

Bible Translation

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and a little Aramaic.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek.

When translating into English, translators have to determine whether they give the exact literal translation of the word or write the essence of what was trying to be communicated. If they write the exact translation, it may not mean the same in our present culture. If they provide the meaning, they make some decisions of interpretation and move away from the exact wording. It is a challenging balance to strike. Present-day translation of the Bible can be anywhere on that spectrum.



FOUNDATIONS

SESSION 13: PRAYER

What's the point of prayer?

Prayer is about building a relationship. It is a conversation, a dialogue between you and God. We tend to approach prayer as a task list of things we want God to do, but that misses the point of what it is really about.

If you only talked to an individual when you wanted something from them, you would essentially be “using” that person for your own purposes. This type of prayer is not so much about a relationship with God, as much as it is viewing God as a resource to be tapped into and used when you need him. Surprisingly, this is how we often tend to approach our prayer life with God. We spend the vast majority of our time giving him our list of all that we want him to do for us, then we say Amen and go about the rest of our day. This is not an effective way to approach any relationship, let alone our relationship with God.

Consider your best friend or any other person you spend a great deal of your leisure time talking with. Why do you speak with that person, and what does a typical conversation consist of?

You talk to that person because you enjoy sharing the events of your life with that person, and he listens with interest.

You share the exciting times, and they get excited with you.

You share the bad times, and he cries with you.

You share your dreams and aspirations, and he encourages you.

You share some of the wrong decisions you've made, and he rebukes you.

At times you make requests of him, and he eagerly helps you out.

He is interested in your life, and you are interested in his.

You talk with him simply because you enjoy his presence and his company.

If God is in control and does whatever he deems best, does prayer actually change anything?

James 4:2 (NIV)

You do not have, because you do not ask God.

James' bold statement is - prayer does change things!

By asking God for something, we get something we would not normally have received if we had kept quiet. Those who do not bring their hearts' desires before God miss out on the blessings God wants to bestow upon them.

As we come to God in prayer, we are affirming our relationship as well as seeking his will and direction in our lives. His purposes become our purposes, and our prayers become expressions of what God has already placed on our hearts. To not pray is to

rob ourselves of both the blessing of relationship and the changed life God wants to generate in us.

People who feel unworthy to ask God for anything are actually living independently of God, relying on themselves to make it through life. This is exactly the opposite of what God desires for us. He wants us to bring every concern and desire before him and to rely on him for life.

PRAYER KEYS

Look at the following scriptures to discover some keys to effective prayer. Why is each key significant?

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NLT)

Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.

Key: *Humble yourself, Seek God, Repent*

Mark 11:22-24 (NLT)

²² Then Jesus said to the disciples, "Have faith in God. ²³ I tell you the truth, you can say to this mountain, 'May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and it will happen. But you must really believe it will happen and have no doubt in your heart. ²⁴ I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you've received it, it will be yours.

Key: *Faith in God*

John 14:13-14 (NLT)

¹³ You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴ Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!

Key: *Ask in Jesus' name / It must glorify God*

Using Jesus' name is not a secret formula that evokes a positive answer from God. When we ask for something in Jesus' name it means that we are coming as a Representative of Jesus asking for that which will help accomplish Jesus' purposes here on earth.

Everything Jesus accomplishes ultimately brings glory to the Father. This means we need to think carefully about what we are praying for. Does it advance the purposes of God, does it bring glory to God, or is it purely selfishly motivated?

Psalm 37:4 (NLT)

Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires.

Key: *Delight in God*

What are some things that might hinder your prayers from being answered?

PRAYER HINDRANCES

What are some things that might hinder your prayers from being answered?

Discuss why each issue raised below hinders prayer.

Psalm 66:18 (NLT)

If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, my Lord would not have listened.

Hindrance: *Sin*

It only makes sense that if I am determined to live against God's holiness and go my own way, my prayers will not reflect a desire for God's purposes to be fulfilled but will instead represent my own purposes and desires. Prayer is not so much about accomplishing things as it is about building intimacy with God, thus allowing him to fulfill his purposes through our lives and prayers. To come to God with requests apart from submission to his will and Lordship is to treat him like a Genie in a Bottle who grants our wishes while maintaining control.

Unfortunately, that is how we often live. We choose to live independently of God and his purposes, and then, when we find ourselves in trouble, we send out an SOS, expecting him to respond immediately. We are then "god," and he is serving us. Fortunately, God does not respond to us under those conditions.

However, if we repent and turn back, reentering into a proper relationship with God, he will forgive us and he is especially eager to hear the concerns of his children.

James 4:3 (NLT)

And even when you do ask, you don't get it because your whole motive is wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

Hindrance: *Wrong motives* *Not glorifying to God*

What are some examples of wrong motives in your prayer life?**James 1:6 (NLT)***But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to answer, for a doubtful mind is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.***Hindrance:** *Lack of Faith***What are some of the answers that God gives to prayers?****NO***Though the request seems to make sense to us, God knows the big picture of what he is accomplishing and understands this request is not the best course of action.***GO***We are in sync with what God wants to accomplish, and we are fulfilling his purposes for our lives.***SLOW***Right prayer request - wrong timing. Sometimes God is far more patient than we are, waiting for the perfect time to arrive. In our quick-serve, drive-thru society we often become very impatient, wanting immediate relief, immediate blessing and immediate answers. God says to simply trust him and rely on him for all you need – he will take care of you.**Sometimes the answer to prayer takes time to develop. Start praying now and it may begin a chain of events that bring about the desired outcome sometime, somewhere down the road.**Sometimes God wants you to demonstrate just how important the prayer is to you by praying for it frequently and consistently over time. If you drop the prayer request after the first little while, it may be an indicator that you weren't that serious about it. God tells us to be persistent in prayer.***Prayer is not ultimately about getting things done.****IT IS ABOUT BUILDING AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.****Luke 11:1 (NLT)***Once when Jesus had been out praying, one of his disciples came to him as he finished and said,*

“Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

Why do you think Jesus’ disciple asked him how to pray?

Jesus responded by giving what we call “The Lord’s Prayer”.

Matthew 6:9-13 (ESV)

⁹ *Pray then like this:*

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ **Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

¹¹ **Give us this day our daily bread,**

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

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

How is this prayer an instruction on how to pray? Do you think this was ultimately intended to be a prayer that gets recited over and over?

If this is a model prayer, what are the concepts that Jesus is modeling for us?

What does each phrase teach us?

Have students discuss what they think each phrase models for us.

Our Father in heaven:

This expression of God as our Father emphasizes his desire for an intimate relationship with us, but it also keeps in perspective the nature of that relationship – he is the Father, we are his children.

There must be a healthy balance between the fact that God is the Holy King of Kings, Author of Life and Creation, and that he invites us into friendly intimacy with himself. He does this through the imagery connected to the word “Father.” It evidences a level of respect, an awareness that he is greater than us, and a knowledge that he is the one to whom we are accountable.

How does the idea of God as “Father” resonate with you?

This imagery may stir up some painful emotions for those who have not had a good representation of fatherhood in their own lives. The problem is that their father did not accurately represent the character and love of the true Father, and as a result, we get a distorted picture of God. The key is not to abandon the idea of God as Father, but instead to understand that we do have a perfect Father in Heaven who will meet our needs of love and security.

Hallowed be your name:

This is not so much a statement of praise in the original language as it is a request: Father...sanctify your name. “To paraphrase, ‘Father, lift up, single out, exalt, manifest,

and reveal your name to the people of earth. Become famous for who you really are. Cause the people of earth to know and adore you!’” by Hawthorne, The Story of His Glory.

God desires that his name be embraced as holy and held in awe by all peoples, but he has given us the responsibility of declaring his name to the nations. His name will only be embraced as holy when we do our task of promoting it. If we are going to pray this prayer, then we must also be willing to fulfill our role in its answer by proclaiming God’s glory to the entire world.

Your kingdom come:

When Jesus came, he said that the Kingdom of God had also arrived. God’s kingdom is not about controlling a piece of land, but rather, it is an expression of his right and authority to rule wherever he goes.

Jesus expressed the coming of the kingdom as having two different stages. The first stage is when he came to earth, as we have recorded in the gospels. The second and final stage of the kingdom’s coming will occur when Jesus returns to earth with power and glory. However, Jesus stated that this day would not come until all the peoples of the earth have had an opportunity to hear and respond to the message regarding his kingdom.

In expressing our desire to see his kingdom come, we must realize that God calls us to take his message to the world’s unreached peoples. You cannot sincerely pray this prayer without having a passion for the world to know about this kingdom.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven:

How is God’s will carried out in heaven? Perfectly! Jesus says that we should desire God’s will be carried out by his servants on earth in a similar manner. This statement is a humble submission to the purposes of God and a denial of self. If we desire that God be completely obeyed and faithfully responded to, then that prayer must first find its fulfillment in our own lives. Are we truly willing to submit perfectly to God by allowing him to rule our lives in the ways he deems best? Are we willing to surrender our agendas so that he will ultimately be glorified?

Give us this day our daily bread:

This request is a confession that everything we need for life comes from God as a gift. It focuses on bread because it is symbolic of the most basic need we have in life.

We have a strong sinful tendency to want to be self-sufficient and independent of God. We don’t want to have to rely on anyone, including God. This prayer is a statement of our daily commitment to trust God to provide us with everything we need for life. We don’t have to worry about anything because God will sustain us in every way as long as we seek first him and his kingdom.

Jesus elaborates on this point in Matthew 6:25-34. It is also interesting to note that later in his ministry, Jesus even defines himself as the Bread that we need for Life (John 6:35).

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors:

This may not be a safe verse to pray because it is requesting God to forgive us in the same manner that we have forgiven others. This is such a critical issue that Jesus gives an explanation to it after the prayer is finished.

Matthew 6:14-15 (NLT)

¹⁴ "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

When we refuse to forgive others yet are willing to accept God's forgiveness, we are really saying that we view the other person's sin against us to be much greater than our sin against God. This approach reveals that we don't truly understand the severity of our own sinfulness, it devalues Christ's death on the cross, limiting the fullness of God's grace.

Jesus seems to imply that this degree of spiritual blindness may indicate a person's eternal standing before God. (Parable: Matthew 18:23-34)

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil:

The word for temptation here means: period or process of testing, trial, test, temptation, or enticement. (Newman, Greek Dictionary)

This is a callout to God to protect us from wandering into a situation where we might succumb to Satan's deception. It is not asking that we never have to go through trials, for we know that we will. It is not so much concerned with having to endure pain or sorrow as much as avoiding spiritual failure and sin. It is an ongoing request that God protect us from the wiles and deadly darts of the evil one.

What is a common theme that runs through the following verses?

Acts 1:14 (NLT)

They all met together continually for prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.

Acts 2:42 (NLT)

They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer.

Acts 4:24 (NLT)

Then all the believers were united as they lifted their voices in prayer: "O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them..."

The Believers prayed Together

Why do we ask others to pray for us? Is it because the more people we can get on our side, the more God will pay attention and perhaps answer our prayer?

No! It all comes back to the fact that God is our Father, meaning we as his children are family. God wants us to come together as his children and be united about what is important to Him and us. Sometimes God holds off answering a prayer until his children come together in unity, desiring a common outcome.

SESSION 14: THE FAMILY OF GOD

What is a church?

Historical use of the word “Ecclesia” (We translate “church”)

MILITARY:	<i>used in reference to calling an army to assemble.</i>
POLITICS:	<i>used to define the gathering of city citizens together in order to make judicial and political decisions.</i>
OLD TESTAMENT:	<i>referred to the Israelite people God had summoned together to enter into a covenant with himself and live according to his Law.</i>
NEW TESTAMENT:	<i>referred to the global people of God and also the local gathering of God’s people.</i>

What does church never refer to?

Church never refers to a building.

What do you think about the statement, “You don’t have to go to church to be a Christian”?

The goal here is merely to provoke discussion. We will return to this question at the end of the study to see if opinions have changed.

Reflect on these scriptures to understand the significance and role of the church.

Matthew 16:18 (NASB-U) (Jesus speaking to his disciples)

I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

How might this passage affect our view of the church?

We should not take the church Jesus builds lightly. If the church is Jesus’ creation, then it must have enormous significance and purpose. It is God’s plan for the message of salvation to be spread into the world. It is his only plan; there is no Plan B. The church is it.

How might that affect how we speak about the church?

We should be very slow to criticize the church, and when we speak concerning it, it should be with reverence, respect, and awe. This is true in spite of the fact that the church has flawed people who bring their baggage with them into it. From God’s perspective, the church is his beautiful bride - and grooms don’t like it when people speak negatively about their bride. Remember though, we are talking about the true church of Christ, and not necessarily all representations of the institutional church.

How does Jesus accomplish building his church?

Christ builds his church, but he does it through us as he invites us to partner with him in his work. We are his hands and feet that he directs to accomplish his purposes.

What does it mean when it says the gates of Hades will not overcome it?

The church will grow – and nothing will be able to stop it.

Hades is a reference to the place of the dead. In other words, even death itself will not be able to stop the church. Christ proved this when he rose from the dead and proceeded to build his church. All believers who die will also conquer death and rise as the bride of Christ.

Ephesians 5:25-27 (NLT)

²⁵ And you husbands must love your wives with the same love Christ showed the church. He gave up his life for her ²⁶ to make her holy and clean, washed by baptism and God's word. ²⁷ He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.

In light of the above verse, how important is the church to Jesus?

Jesus came to earth for the sole purpose of creating the church. It was of such intense significance that God himself was willing to limit himself to come to earth as a man, be rejected by mankind, and die a horrendous death on the cross, all to make it a reality.

He then sent his Holy Spirit to indwell the church, give gifts to the church, lead the church, guard the church, and mature the church until the day he returns.

He then entrusted to the church the sole responsibility of bringing the message of life and death to the rest of the world.

To say the church is of importance is an extreme understatement.

Colossians 1:18 (NLT)

Christ is the head of the church, which is his body. He is the first of all who will rise from the dead, so he is first in everything.

What is the significance of Christ being the head of the church?

Christ is the head of the church. It is not to be a democracy where the masses vote and come to their own conclusions. The church is to be guided and directed by Jesus Christ himself.

What role is church leadership to play?

The church is to seek his will through the leading of the Holy Spirit and being obedient to what Christ calls it to do. Church leaders have the responsibility to pray and seek the unity of the Spirit with regard to his leading. With this being the case, there should never be power struggles, church splits, or disunity. We are not to strive for our personal agenda, but to seek first Jesus and his will.

Some may argue that the word “head” merely means “source” and has no authoritative connotation to it whatsoever. Although the term may imply source, there is an understanding that the “source” always has a responsibility for what comes from it. (For example, Parents are the “source” of their children, but in so being, they also have the responsibility to care for them and the authority to lead them.)

According to the following verses, what are the purposes of the church?
Romans 15:5-6 (NLT)

⁵ May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. ⁶ Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise and glorify God
Ephesians 4:11-13 (NLT)

¹¹ He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, ¹³ until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.

Equip God’s people to build up the church
Unify God’s people
Spiritually mature God’s people
Matthew 28:19-20 (NLT)

¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Make disciples of all nations

What is the future of the church?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (NLT)

¹³ And now, brothers and sisters, I want you to know what will happen to the Christians who have died so you will not be full of sorrow like people who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus comes, God will bring back with Jesus all the Christians who have died.

¹⁵ I can tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not rise to meet him ahead of those who are in their graves. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, all the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. ¹⁷ Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever. ¹⁸ So comfort and encourage each other with these words.

As a spiritual family, we will be united with Christ

Revelation 22:4-5 (NLT)

⁴ And they will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.

As a spiritual family, we will reign with Christ forever

Ephesians 3:20-21 (NLT)

²⁰ Now glory be to God! By his mighty power at work within us, he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope. ²¹ May he be given glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever through endless ages. Amen.

As a spiritual family, we will bring glory to God forever

Why do we need to be a part of the church?

1 Corinthians 12:7-11 (NLT)

⁷ A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church. ⁸ To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another he gives the gift of special knowledge. ⁹ The Spirit gives special faith to another, and to someone else he gives the power to heal the sick. ¹⁰ He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and to another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to know whether it is really the Spirit of God or another spirit that is speaking. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, and another is given the ability to interpret what is being said.

¹¹ It is the one and only Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

Why doesn't the Holy Spirit give each of us all the needed gifts?

God delights in community, and God delights in diversity. Even within the Godhead itself, God structured himself in such a way that the Father, Son, and Spirit all play different roles that complement one another. God desires that we come together as a family and pour our lives into each other with love. We need each other, and that's precisely the way God designed it.

It also means that we have a special and unique role to play within God's purpose. No one can say they don't have a place of significance in God's kingdom. As we carry out the purposes for which God has uniquely crafted each one of us, we grow in faith and maturity.

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NLT)

¹¹ He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, ¹³ until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.

What happens if we cut ourselves off from the giftings within the local church?

We will not be equipped to do God's work

We will not partner with Christ in building his church

We will not become unified with other believers as God desires

We will not grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ

We will not mature spiritually

We will not become what God desires us to be.

What happens if I sit back and don't use my giftings in the local church?

Others will not be equipped to do God's work, etc. See above.

How would you respond now to the person who says they don't need to be part of a local church to be a Christian?

FOUNDATIONS