



DISCIPLE MAKERS



FARMSTEAD
BAPTIST CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF DISCIPLE MAKERS?

We are called to be disciple makers. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commands His disciples to go and make disciples. This is a command that continues to us today. A church that is effective is a church that is **purposeful** in making disciples. Disciple making does not happen accidentally or by chance. *Disciple making occurs when we purposefully choose to invest in the lives of others and work to see them grow in their faith and in their understanding of God and trust in Him through the person and work of Jesus Christ.*

The goal of this workbook is two-fold. We want to build or shore up your foundation of faith and we want to equip you to be involved in making disciples. **First**, we want to invest in you as you go through the Disciple Makers material. We want to invest in you and your faith. We want to make sure you have a solid, biblical foundation for your faith that will guide you and impact you in loving and following Jesus. **Secondly**, we want to prepare and equip you to be able to walk with someone else through this material and disciple them. Part of the goal of this curriculum is to be reproducible. We want to encourage and challenge you, once you have completed this curriculum, to take the things you have learned and invest them into others.

2 Timothy 2:2

and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

This workbook can be done a few ways. It can be done by yourself, but we encourage it to be done with someone else. The most beneficial way for this material to be used is with an older or more mature believer walking through it with a newer or younger believer. This way they can answer questions and be an encouragement. Couples can go through this together or even families. The goal of this material is to equip believers to make disciples and to encourage newer or younger believers in their faith.

WHY DISCIPLESHIP MATTERS

If you think about discipleship in terms of a military strategy, Sunday morning worship services are the air attack. God's word is opened, and big truths and themes are addressed. It is like God dropping bombs on the lives of those listening to convict, encourage, and challenge; to build up or tear down. God speaks through His word and the Holy Spirit begins to work in our lives.

If this is all we had, it would be enough for God to work in our lives and teach us and confront or comfort us, but it wouldn't be the most effective way to learn about God, fight our sin, and grow in our faith. To continue our military illustration, after the air attack, you need the ground attack. Once the bombers have dropped their bombs, the ground attack comes in to take care of the smaller issues. They go through the buildings. They check the nooks and crannies to clear the area. This is discipleship. Discipleship takes the truths of God word and seeks to apply them in the everyday areas of our lives. Discipleship seeks to apply God's word in all the areas of our lives in order to see us grow in our faith. In discipleship, we take the big truths of scripture and God and work to apply those to our lives.

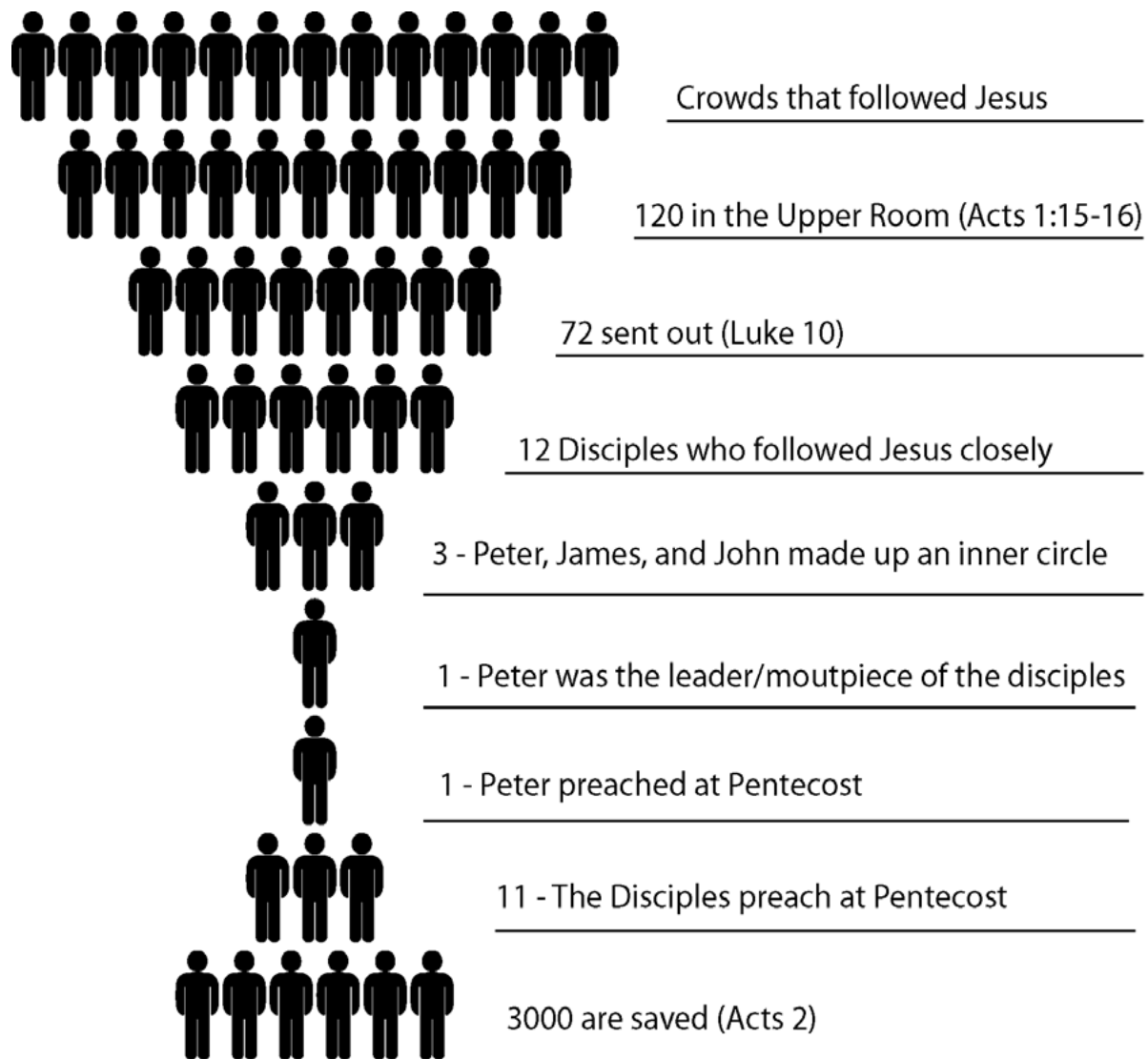
Funnel of Growth

In the ministry of Jesus, we see a funnel of growth or closeness occur throughout the four gospels. As people get closer to Jesus, the numbers get smaller, but then these smaller numbers are strengthened to go out and reach more people. In Jesus' ministry, you start with the **crowds**. These are the people following Him around listening to Him teach and watching His miracles. They are interested in Jesus, but many don't go beyond this casual level of interest.

As you move further within Jesus' ministry, you see the numbers begin to get smaller as Jesus invests more deeply in people. In the Upper Room at Pentecost, you had **120** people waiting with the disciples. Twice in the Gospels, we see Jesus send out pairs of people to proclaim the good news of Jesus. In Luke 10, He **sends out 72** people in pairs telling them the *harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few*. In Luke 9, he **sent out the 12 disciples** 2 by 2 with the power to cast out demons and heal diseases. Even within the 12, **there are three**, Peter, James and John, who were closer to Jesus than the others and were allowed to experience things the others weren't. It was these three who saw Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration, they saw Jesus raise Jairus's daughter, and they were called closer to Jesus at the garden of Gethsemane. Even within these three, **John** is called the one Jesus loved and **Peter** is given the responsibility of the being the leader or the mouthpiece of the disciples.

As the funnel gets smaller as Jesus invests more in these groups, and once Jesus ascends back into Heaven and they go out, we see it begin to expand back out. At Pentecost, Peter and disciples begin to proclaim the good news of Jesus and thousands get saved. Those who Jesus invested in begin to proclaim the truth of Jesus and invest in others and, we see the kingdom begin to expand. This sets up a pattern of discipleship where when we invest in others, they begin to invest in others, and they begin to invest in others, and the kingdom of God expands (see Fig A).

Fig. A



WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

Discipleship is the purposeful work of investing in the life of another believer with the goal of seeing them grow in their understanding of God and His word and walking with them as they live God's commandments out in faith. Discipleship is working to see people move through this funnel to go from a member of the crowd to someone who is working to produce more disciples. Discipleship does not happen accidentally. Even if the extent of your discipleship is going to church, you have to choose to get up and go and you have to choose to listen to God's word preached. You have to choose to apply God's word to your life.

We see discipleship practiced in the New Testament when Jesus chooses His disciples. He chooses them and calls them to follow Him.

Matthew 4:18–19

[18] While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. [19] And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Mark 2:14

[14] And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

John 1:43

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

As His disciples walked away from their lives to follow Jesus, for three years He invested in them. He taught them. He pulled them away from the crowds to invest in them and prepare them for what their life was going to be about.

We also see discipleship in the life of Paul and in his relationship with Timothy. Timothy joined Paul on his missionary journeys and Paul invested in him. He taught him. He showed him what it meant to love Jesus and walk with him. In **2 Timothy 1:13**, as Paul is writing to encourage Timothy, he reminds him to follow the things he had been taught by Paul.

Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Discipleship happens in many ways. If you simply show up to church on Sunday mornings for service, you will be discipled as God's word is preached. If you attend a small group (Sunday School, Bible study, etc) you will be discipled. Anytime we are

confronted with the truth of scripture, discipleship is happening, whether in a group setting (like church) or alone (devotional times, reading books, listening to sermon podcasts).

While all of these are forms of discipleship, if this is all we get, we will miss out on the more personal parts of discipleship. Discipleship is more than acquiring knowledge. It is also the application of that knowledge. The book of James tells us that if we are not applying the truths of God's word to our lives, then we're missing the point.

While we are responsible for applying God's word to our lives, the Bible does encourage us to have others around us that hold us accountable in our walks with God. **Proverbs 27:17** says,

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

As we look at being discipled and discipling others, we want to be as effective as we can. We don't want to just have a Bible study where there is no accountability, and we also don't want to have a group where we just complain about our struggles without seeing what God would have for us to learn from His word. In order to be as effective as we can as disciples and disciple makers, there are three components we must embrace in discipleship. *Effective disciple making requires knowledge, application, and accountability.*

KNOWLEDGE

We cannot get away from the fact that discipleship requires and starts with knowledge, specifically the knowledge of God given to us through His word. In **Colossians 1:9–10**, Paul shares with the Colossian church his prayer for them.

*[9] And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be **filled with the knowledge of his will** in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, [10] so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and **increasing in the knowledge of God**;*

As Paul lists out the aspects of walking in a way that is *fully pleasing to God*, he says that part of that means increasing in the knowledge of God.

As Peter closes out his second letter in **2 Peter 3:18**, he encourages his audience to

... grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We don't gather Biblical knowledge just to have knowledge or to win trivia contests. We are told that knowledge, even Biblical knowledge, for its own sake creates pride (1

Corinthians 8:1). But this does not discount the need and necessity of understanding the Bible and the truths laid within. We are called to increase in our knowledge of God and our knowledge of Jesus Christ. This means learning things about God; who He is, what He has done, what He has commanded, how He works, and what His expectations for us are.

The only place we can get solid, objective truth and knowledge of who God is and what He has revealed about Himself is through His word. God has revealed His existence in creation, but to know Him and learn about Him, the Bible is our only source. **2 Timothy 3:16** tells us the Bible is God breathed, meaning it is His very own words and thoughts given to us. **2 Peter 1:21** tells us that God spoke to and through those who recorded His words so that we have His words in written form. Growing in our knowledge of God means spending time in His word. It means reading it. It means studying it. It means hearing it taught.

If we are going to grow as disciples of God through Jesus, then we have to learn more about who He is. We have to know His characteristics. We have to know His heart. The Bible gives us God's commandments, but it gives us so much more than that. It tells us who God is. It tells us that He is trustworthy and good. The stories in scripture show His faithfulness and His power and His wrath towards sin. It is through God's word that we learn of His grace and His love and His patience. It is in the Bible that we learn of our need for Him and all that He has provided for us in Himself.

APPLICATION

As we learn about God, we don't stop there. **James 1:22-25** calls us to apply God's word to our lives.

[22] But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. [25] But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Application simply means that we take the things we learn in God's word, and we do them. We don't just allow biblical knowledge to exist as facts in our head, but we allow it to change who we are. We are to take the truths we have learned and submit our lives to them. When we learn that God's word says we are not to lie, we stop lying. When we see in God's word that we are to tell others about Jesus, we start trying to tell others about Jesus. Application is not just about the things we do, but also about what we believe. We are to take the characteristics of God He has revealed in His word, and we believe in them. When the Bible tells us that God is good, we trust that when life is hard, He is still good and must have a purpose for what we are going through. When

the Bible tells us that God is in control, we believe that to be true even if our life seems out of control. We apply God's revelation about Himself to our faith.

The more we learn about who God is the more our faith is strengthened. *Our faith does not grow because we believe harder; our faith grows when we understand more of the greatness of God and we trust in that greatness.* Our faith is not a blind jump into nothing but a trust and dependance based on what God has revealed of Himself.

As we spend time in God's word growing in the knowledge of Him, we apply that knowledge to strengthen and grow our faith and to change our lifestyle so that we live in a way that honors and glorifies God.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The great thing about discipleship is that we're not doing it alone. Inherent in the discipleship modeled in scripture is relationship. Jesus with the disciples. Barnabas with Paul. Paul with Timothy. One of the key elements of effective discipleship is the relationship formed between two people striving to grow in their faith. In this relationship there is teaching, but there is also accountability. Accountability is when we watch over each other's lives in grace and humility to encourage each other to apply God's word to our lives and to have the freedom to speak truth into our lives when we need to hear it.

Hebrews 10:24–25

[24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

James 5:16

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

We hold each other accountable by encouraging each other to love and follow Jesus. We pray for each other. We are honest with each other, even confessing our struggles and our imperfections so we can help/encourage/pray for each other as we battle our sins and temptations.

God did not create us to be alone. He created us to be in relationship with Him but also with each other. He didn't create the Christian life for us to do it alone but to have others walking along side us. Us encouraging them and them encouraging us. Us encouraging them to confess their sin and them encouraging us to confess our sin. For this to work we have to be both honest and trustworthy. We have to be willing to be honest, believing that we will not be left or condemned for our failures, but

encouraged to repent and trust in the grace of Jesus Christ.

For that honesty to exist, we have to also be trustworthy. People have to know we are not going to judge them for their imperfections. People have to know we are not going to shame or talk about them and their flaws. People have to know we have their best interest at heart, and we want to walk with them through their sins and struggles. They have to know we want to move them toward confession and repentance and grace. We have to remember that when someone shares their sin and their temptations, we are sinners as well and apart from God's grace, like Paul, we are the chief of sinners. If we fail to be trustworthy, then the accountability portion of discipleship falls apart, and if it falls apart, the whole discipleship relationship fails.

The beauty in accountability is that we are reminded that we are never alone. We have someone(s) with us who will pray for us, encourage us, and bear with us our struggles and our hurts and our imperfections. Yes, we have that in Christ, but we also have that in each other. Jesus ushered in the church that we could fulfill the Great Commission and worship God but also so that we would have others with us to help us walk in grace. In Christ and in the church, we are not alone.

As stated earlier, the goal of this material is twofold. First, we want each one going through this to be discipled and encouraged in their faith. Second, we want to equip you to be a disciple maker from here on out. We want you to be able to teach another believer the material in this study. We want you to be able to help others think through how we apply the truth of scripture to our lives. We want you to hold others accountable to their faith and to be held accountable yourself. If we are to be effective in our disciple making approach, we have to build our process around knowledge, application, and accountability.

WHO GOD IS

As we look at who God is it is important to remember God's proclamation about Himself in **Isaiah 55:8-9**.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. [9] For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

There are a few things we can take from this. **First, God is different from us.** We are not the same. We cannot approach God or think of God as though He is human. We cannot assume that just because something is true of or for us then it must be true of God. Because of this, as we study the nature and attributes of God, there will be things that might be difficult to understand or fully grasp because we have nothing else to compare them to. When we look at God as Trinity or eternal, there is nothing else in all of creation like God in these ways. We have to accept that our comprehension of who God is can only go so far because God is so much greater and bigger than we are, and because of that there is much we will have to take on faith.

How does the fact that God is bigger than us and different from us make you feel?

Second, because God is different from us, His revelation of Himself in the Bible is our only objective source for understanding who He is. Creation and our conscience are natural evidences that God exists (*Romans 1:18-20; 2:14-16*), but if we want to know more about God and learn who He is and what He desires, scripture is our only sure source. *Scripture is sufficient for us to know who God is, and we should be content with it being our only source of divine revelation to gain understanding of God.*

As we study who God is, we will look at two different aspects of who He is. First, we will look at His trinitarian nature. When it comes to doctrines that are essential, the doctrine of the Trinity is one of our essential doctrines. As we study it, we will see why it is so important even though it is one that ultimately has to be taken by faith. Second, we will look at the attributes of God. These are the characteristics that define who God is. These give us an understanding of how God operates and how we are to respond

to Him. Understanding these attributes ultimately strengthens our faith as they help us trust God more and see the need to bend our lives to who He is.

THE TRINITY

In his systematic theology, Grudem defines the trinity as *God eternally existing as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God*. Based on this definition, there are three statements Grudem gives that summarize our understanding of the trinity.

God eternally exists as three persons.
Each person is fully God.
There is one God.

Before we dive into these statements, let's look at the history of this doctrine.

History of the Doctrine of the Trinity

As Christianity began, it faced great persecution. From Saul and the Pharisees in the book of Acts to the Roman government after. For the first 300 years of Christianity (and even after) it faced widespread persecution. The first reprieve from persecution the church experienced was when Constantine, the Roman Emperor at the time, converted to Christianity. After his conversion, he worked to unify the scattered Christian church. Because there was so much persecution and the church was scattered, you had different groups teaching different things about God, Jesus, and Christianity. In 325 AD, Constantine called the First Ecumenical Council. At this council, he called together over 300 Bishops from all over the Roman Empire to debate and settle on theological issues for the church.

One of the most important and most discussed topics from this council was the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity and the nature of Jesus was the main focus of what is now known as the **Arian Controversy**. The Arian Controversy was a debate on the nature of Trinity and in this debate, there were two sides. On one side, you had Arius who was a presbyter (pastor or teacher) out of Alexandria. He taught that Jesus was *not* coeternal with the Father. One of his key statements was that "there was when He was not." He taught that Jesus was the first created being, and that Jesus was not coeternal with the Father and that He was not God. On the other side you have Athanasius, the bishop in Alexandria. He argued that Jesus existed eternally with the Father and that He was not created.

Now, the idea of the Trinity did not begin with Athanasius. We see Trinitarian thought in the early church well before this council. Justin Martyr, who lived from AD100-AD165, used Trinitarian thought and theology when baptizing new believers. He

would say, *"In the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they (new believers) then receive the washing with water."* (Historical Theology, Allison, p232) When Polycarp, an early church leader who was a disciple of the apostle John and lived from AD69 to AD155, was killed for his faith, he prayed, *"I glorify you, through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved Son, through whom to you, with him and the Holy Spirit, be glory both now and for the ages to come."* (Historical Theology, Allison, p233) There are numerous examples of the belief of the Trinity existing well before this council was convened, but controversy over the eternal nature of Christ had risen to such levels that the church had to come together to make a statement on the most biblical view.

The debate was serious and at times got very heated. Fun fact, things got so heated it is said that St Nicholas of Myra, the basis for Santa Claus, punched Arius in the mouth for his views on Jesus. Ultimately, the council agreed with Athanasius that Jesus was coeternal and coequal with the Father and crafted the Nicene Creed, which was built off the Apostles Creed, which has been accepted as the orthodox statement of faith on the Trinity. Creeds are simply statements of belief used to summarize biblical truths. The Nicene Creed states:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one holy catholic (universal) and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

3 Trinitarian Statements

There is nothing else in all of creation like the Trinity. There is nothing else that exists

as three in one like the Trinity. Every illustration we can come up with to try to explain the Trinity falls apart at some point. **The Trinity has to be taken by faith.** Now, just because it has to be taken by faith does not mean that we just blindly accept it without any understanding or evidence. The Bible gives us much evidence of God's triune existence. So, while the concept is foreign enough that we cannot fully grasp all of it, there is enough truth about the Trinity that we can know it to be true. We stated earlier that there were three statements that Grudem uses to summarize the biblical teaching on the Trinity.

1. **God eternally exists as three persons.**
2. **Each person is fully God.**
3. **There is one God.**

Now, let's look at these three statements and the verses that teach these truths and see why the truths these statements present are so important and what happens if we negate or cut out any of these three statements.

1. **GOD ETERNALLY EXISTS AS THREE PERSONS**

The first fact about the Trinity we will examine is that while God is One God, He exists eternally in three distinct persons. This distinction means that while being perfectly unified and being One God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are *distinct in their existence, their work, and their function*. While each person exists as God, the Father is neither the Son nor the Spirit, the Son is neither the Father nor the Spirit, and the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son.

Where do we see this distinction spelled out in scripture?

WE SEE THE DISTINCTION IN THEIR PERSONS.

What this means is that the Bible presents the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as separate from each other and interacting with each other. If we never saw the Father, Son, or Spirit existing simultaneously, you could argue that God just reveals Himself in three different forms but is not Triune (this is called Modalism, and we'll look at it more in a bit). But we do see the persons of the Trinity as distinct persons at the same time.

John 1:1-2

[1:1] *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God.*

In this passage, we see a distinction between the Son (*the Word*) and the Father (*God*). This does not mean that Jesus was not God, it obviously says that *the Word was God*. What this does is affirm Jesus' deity while at the same time showing us a clear

distinction between the Father and the Son. *While they are the same in nature and deity and eternity and in perfection, there is a distinction in person and in work.*

We also see this in the baptism of Jesus. When Jesus is baptized, the Holy Spirit descends on Him like a dove, and the Father proclaims His pleasure in the Son. Each person of the Trinity is present at the same time proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah.

Matthew 3:16–17

[16] And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; [17] and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

WE SEE THE DISTINCTION IN THEIR ACTIONS.

Not only are the persons of the Trinity distinct in their persons, but they are distinct in their actions. While working in unity, each person of the Trinity has a distinct role to play in creation but also in the life of the believer. We see the work of the Trinity in our salvation. **Salvation originates with the Father.** He is the author of salvation and oversees its work. *Ephesians 1:3-6* tells us that the plan of salvation originated with God before the foundation of the world. *John 6:44* says that no one comes to the Son unless the Father draws them. While salvation originates with the Father, **it is the work of the Son that makes salvation possible.** It is the Son, Jesus, who came to earth to live as a man. It is Jesus who suffered and died for our sin and conquered sin and death by resurrecting from the dead. The Father plans salvation and the Son does the work of salvation. **It is then the Holy Spirit who applies salvation to our lives.** It is the Holy Spirit who convicts our hearts of our separation from God because of our sin and applies God's work to our lives. It is the Holy Spirit who seals us as our guarantee. It is the Holy Spirit who dwells within us to work in our lives and help us fix our eyes on Christ to the glory of the Father. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, helps us understand scripture, and works sanctification into our lives.

Jesus serving as our advocate before the Father shows us a distinction in their work.

1 John 2:1

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

We have an advocate with the Father in Jesus Christ the Son. Jesus goes between us and the Father, making intercession for us, advocating for our salvation and forgiveness through His person and His work. This distinction of activity helps us to see and understand that God exists in three persons.

The Holy Spirit intercedes for us, indicating a distinction between God and the Holy Spirit.

In *Romans 8*, Paul lays out the distinction between the Spirit and the Father. As the Father searches hearts, the Spirit interceded between us and God, bringing unity between God and man and even helping us pray that we can align our hearts and our desires with God's.

Romans 8:26–27

[26] Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. [27] And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Here we see the unity of the Father and Spirit but also their distinction in their work. In our prayers, when we don't know what we ought to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, helping us pray God's will over our own lives.

For Jesus to leave and the Holy Spirit to come shows distinction.

When Jesus had his final time with the disciples before His crucifixion, He told them He was leaving but that when He left, He would send the Helper. This is the Holy Spirit.

John 16:7

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

This shows their distinction in their work and their persons that while Jesus left, the Holy Spirit came. While on Earth, Jesus was limited by space and time, when the Holy Spirit came, that limitation was gone and the Holy Spirit can then exist in every believer's heart simultaneously.

All of these distinctions are meant to show us that God exists eternally in three distinct persons. Our next trinitarian statement shows us the nature of the persons of the Trinity.

2. EACH PERSON IS FULLY GOD

The doctrine of the Trinity is a good example of a doctrine that is progressive in its revelation; meaning, instead of telling us everything at the beginning, God reveals more of this truth as His story progresses. Throughout the Old Testament, we mostly see and deal with the Father. There are times we see Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament (*anytime we see THE angel of the Lord it is typically accepted to*

be Jesus; the Spirit comes upon Samson to give him his strength and King Saul to prophesy), but the majority of our Old Testament interactions with God are the Father. As we progress through time and scripture, God reveals more of Himself to us.

GOD THE FATHER IS CLEARLY GOD

We see the Father as God throughout the Old and New Testaments. We see it in **Deuteronomy 6:4** as God gives His command for parents to teach their children who He is.

[4] "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

We also see it spelled out for us very succinctly in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 8:6

yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

The Bible very clearly spells out for us the deity of the Father.

THE SON IS FULLY GOD

We see the deity of Jesus spelled out for us in John 1:1-4.

John 1:1-4

[1:1] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. [4] In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Jesus was not simply a good teacher or God's first created being, He is God and has existed eternally with the Father. Islam calls Jesus a great teacher and prophet. Mormons and Jehovah's Witness believe Jesus was a god, lesser than the Father. But the Bible teaches us that Jesus is fully God.

We see this also in the book of Hebrews where the author, speaking of Jesus, tells us that Jesus is the exact imprint of God's nature.

Hebrews 1:3

*He is the radiance of the glory of God and **the exact imprint of his nature**, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*

Jesus is the earthly representation of God. He put on human flesh but did not lose His deity. He is the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature. Jesus is not a copy or a creation. Jesus is God in His very nature.

In Titus, Paul declares Jesus to be God.

Titus 2:13

waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

Jesus is our great God and Savior. The Bible is clear that the Father is God, but the Bible is also crystal clear that the Son is God. He is not partially God but fully God.

Not only does the rest of scripture show Jesus to be God, but Jesus Himself claimed equality with the Father. In **John 10:30**, Jesus makes a declaration of His deity.

[30] I and the Father are one.

And, just so people can't make the argument that He's not saying He's God, the next three verses in **John 10:31-33** shows that is exactly what the crowd thought He meant and they wanted to stone Him for it.

[31] The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. [32] Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" [33] The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS FULLY GOD

The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is also God. We see this throughout scripture. We see it in trinitarian expressions like Matthew 28:19.

Matthew 28:19

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

When Jesus gives us this commandment known commonly as the Great Commission, He tells us to baptize people in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This grouping signifies sameness. It is a statement that lays out the unity within the persons of the Godhead.

In 1 Corinthians, the Holy Spirit is attributed with God's divine characteristics.

1 Corinthians 2:10-11

[10] these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. [11] For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

Here we are told the Holy Spirit searches the depths of God and knows and comprehends the thoughts of God. This is a verse that teaches us that the Spirit is God because He knows things of God that only God would know.

In Acts, we see The Spirit and God used synonymously.

Acts 5:3-4

[3] But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? [4] While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God."

In v3, Peter says Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit. In v4, he says Ananias lied to God. He makes this connection because the Holy Spirit is God. Within the Trinity, there is a distinction between the persons but each person is completely and fully God. This brings us to our third trinitarian statement and the one that ties them together...

3. THERE IS ONE GOD

The three distinct persons of the Trinity are one not only in purpose and in agreement on what they think, but they are one in essence; one in their essential nature. In other words, God is only one being. This is the statement that ties everything together but also adds the greatest level of difficulty to understand. If God was three distinct persons that all acted as God and shared the title, we can understand that, but that's not what the Bible teaches us. The Bible tells us the three distinct persons of the Trinity who are all God all exist as one being.

Deuteronomy 6:4

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

1 Timothy 2:5

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus

Romans 3:30

since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised

through faith.

The Trinity has to be taken by faith. There is nothing else in all of creation where three distinct persons or things also exist as one. We have to take the Trinity by faith, even if we cannot fully comprehend it, because that is what the Bible teaches. If we deny the Trinity or we remove one of these three trinitarian statements, we destroy the work of the gospel and create a God who is not the God of the Bible.

If we deny the Trinity, then we deny in some capacity the deity and unity of the Father, Son, or Spirit. **If the Father is not God, then we have no need to be reconciled to Him; He is neither creator nor perfect.** His love is flawed, and His plan is broken. **If the Son is not God, then His death and resurrection mean nothing.** People have given their lives for others throughout history and it does not provide salvation. People like Lazarus have been raised from the dead and they didn't conquer sin and death. What makes the death and resurrection of Christ unique and special is that Jesus is God. Only God could be righteous enough to pay for our sins and strong enough to stomp out sin and death. **If the Spirit is not God, then His seal and promise of salvation is meaningless.** Our sin and our choice could eradicate the salvation applied to our lives. If the Spirit is not God, then He cannot intercede with God or draw us closer to God.

If we deny the biblical Trinity, then we deny the gospel and its saving power. The Trinity is a closed fist belief, meaning it is a belief that we do not budge on because of its necessity and importance. **The three trinitarian statements we looked at help us understand the complexities of the Trinity** but if we negate any of those three statements, we get doctrines and beliefs that do not line up with the Biblical view of the Trinity. The Trinity is a belief that we would call orthodox. This means it is accepted as a core foundational belief and is required as part of the Christian faith. To deny the Trinity is to deny Christianity as we understand it.

If we deny that God exists in three distinct persons, we get Modalism. Modalism claims there is one God who appears to us in three different modes or forms. It says in the Old Testament God presented Himself as Father, in the Gospels He presented Himself as the Son, and in the remainder of the New Testament, He presents Himself as the Spirit. Modalism says these three do not coexist, it is just the three ways God shows Himself. Oneness Pentecostalism holds to Modalism. TD Jakes holds to Modalism. This is a belief that is alive today but because of its dismissal of the Biblical Trinitarian view, we would say that those who believe this are heretics that do not present a biblical gospel.

If we deny that each person is fully God, we get Arianism. Arianism denies the full deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Tracing its roots back to the arguments of Arius, this belief sees the Son and the Spirit as important, even as the first created things, but

not as coeternal or coequal with God the Father. Mormons and Jehovah's Witness still believe this. Among other things, this is what makes them heretical religions and not Christian.

If we deny that there is one God, we get Tritheism. Tritheism is the belief that there are three Gods. We know this is untrue and not what the Bible teaches. There are many religions that have a multitude of gods and deities. What separates Christianity is that we believe in one God, not a multitude.

The Trinity is an essential doctrine. Our understanding of the gospel is built upon the Trinity. The Bible is clear in its teaching that we serve a triune God. By faith, we believe that we serve one God who exists eternally in three distinct persons who are all equally God.

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

God's attributes are characteristics that are true about God. His goodness and His love and His holiness are all attributes that explain to us who God is and what makes God God. The goal of this section is to help us understand who God is and how He has revealed Himself in His word. As we see who God is, we will look at how these truths about God affect our faith and how we respond to God.

(For further study, check out *Attributes of God* or *Knowledge of the Holy*, both by AW Tozer, *Knowing God* by JI Packer, or Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*.)

THE KNOWABILITY OF GOD

Let's start with the fact that God is knowable. Though **Isaiah 55:8–9** tells us that God is different than us, it does not mean that God is unknowable.

[8] For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. [9] For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

GENERAL REVELATION

Because God is different from us, for Him to be known, He has to reveal Himself to us. God has revealed Himself through creation and His word. In creation, there is a **general revelation** that shows God's existence to humanity.

Romans 1:19–20

[19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Through creation, God has revealed enough about Himself for His creation to know He exists. In the same way you would look at a child and know they have to have parents; creation is proof that there is a creator. If there is a creator, we know He has to be strong and powerful to create us and the world and the cosmos and to hold it all together. If He can do this, then He must be greater than us and stronger than us and we owe Him some form of worship or devotion. All of this is known simply through creation.

We know this to be true practically. Every people group has a religion. They have some form of deity that they worship. It may look like a person or an animal; it may be physical or spirit, but every people group has a religion. It is because there is a natural

understanding that there has to be a deity or god of some sort for us to exist. If we look at atheists as an example, we can see in their constant arguing about god that internally, there is an understanding that God exists, but they have no desire to admit it because to admit it means they must admit someone has moral authority over them. There is a battle within themselves to fight against this natural understanding from this general revelation that God exists.

SPECIFIC REVELATION

Through the Bible, God has given a **specific revelation** of Himself. **2 Timothy 3:16** tells us that the Bible is God's word, given and breathed out by Him. They are His words that tell us who He is and who we are to be.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

In **John 5:39**, while teaching the Jewish people, Jesus tells them the Bible gives revelation of Him.

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,

After the resurrection, Luke 24 records a conversation between Jesus and some of His followers where He reveals to them that the Bible tells them who He is.

Luke 24:27, 44–45

[27] And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. ... [44] Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." [45] Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

Through the Bible, God has given us more than a general understanding that He exists. He has told us who He is. He has told us what He values. He has told us what is important to Him. He has told us what He dislikes and hates. He has told us how He loves us. He has told us how we are to come to Him. He has told us how we are to worship Him. The Bible is God's self-revelation of who He is and who He wants us to be. The Bible is the self-portrait God has painted to show us who He is in all of His beauty and power.

While God is different from us, God is knowable. While it is true we will not completely or fully understand all of God, we can know what God has revealed of Himself through His word. Though we may not know God exhaustively, we can still know Him truthfully

and confidently.

How does God's knowability affect our faith? How does it affect our trust in Him and our worship of Him?

If God were not knowable, if He hadn't revealed truths about Himself, how would that impact our trust in Him?

GOD'S INCOMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

We will start by looking at God's incommunicable attributes. These are attributes of God that He does not share with others. These are attributes that we cannot mimic in some way. These are the attributes that set God fully apart from His creation in who He is.

GOD'S INDEPENDENCE

In his *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem defines God's independence in this way. *God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything, yet we and the rest of creation can glorify Him and bring Him joy.* God is independent in that He does not need us. God is totally self-sufficient. Within the Trinity He has fellowship, He has perfection, He has order, He has completeness. **There is nothing God needs outside of himself.** He does not need our worship. He does not need our love. He does not need our help. He does not need our obedience. He does not need us to complete His plans. We are not a necessity for God to do anything. The great thing is that even though He does not need us, He still wants us and He still allows us to bring Him glory and joy.

We see God's independence in His response to Job in **Job 41:11** when He tells Job that nothing was given to Him and that everything in creation is His.

Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.

In **Acts 17:24–25**, we see Paul addressing the people of Athens, who had an altar to "the unknown god." Using this altar to introduce the God of the Bible, Paul describes God this way.

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

We are God's children, and He is the parent. The child is dependent on provision and love and care of the parent, not the other way around. When a baby is born, though the parent loves them with all their heart, the child cannot offer anything to the parent and the parent is not dependent on the child. Often, we hear people say that God needs us to do this or that. While a lot of times it is an innocent misuse of words, God's independence states that as our Father and Creator, God does not need us for anything, but in His love and grace, He still chooses us.

How does it affect your view of God to know that even though He does not need us because He is independent, God still longs for a relationship with us and He still chooses to use us?

What would it mean if God weren't independent, and He did need us or others to be complete or whole or useful?

GOD'S IMMUTABILITY

God's immutability simply means He is unchangeable. Grudem defines it as *God is unchanging in His being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations.* In *Attributes of God, Volume 2*, AW Tozer simply defines God's immutability as *not subject to change*. God does not change in His character or His person. This is evident within scripture.

Malachi 3:6

For I the LORD do not change

Hebrews 6:17

*[17] So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the **unchangeable character of his purpose**, he guaranteed it with an oath*

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

God does not and cannot change. Tozer argues for God to change; one of three things would have to happen. God would have to go from better to worse, or He would have to go from worse to better, or He would have to change from one kind of being to another. God cannot get better as He is already perfect. God cannot go from better to worse as it would make Him imperfect. God cannot change from one kind of being to another or He would cease to be God. Even in the incarnation, when Jesus

became man, He did not cease to be God.

How does it affect your willingness to trust in God knowing that He never changes?

GOD'S ETERNALNESS

God's eternal nature is one of the attributes that might be one of the hardest to wrap our minds around because, like the Trinity, there is nothing else like it in all of creation. Everything we know of and have experienced has a beginning and an end. Even if humanity will exist forever in eternal life or eternal judgment, we all have a definitive starting point. This is not true of God. Grudem defines God's eternity as *God having no beginning, end, or succession of moments in His own being, and He sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time.*

God's eternal nature means He has no beginning or end, but it also means that He experiences time differently than us. While we experience time linearly, God sees all time equally. He exists outside of how we experience and think of time. In spite of that, He still acts in time for our benefit and our being able to understand Him and to see and experience His working.

Isaiah 57:15a speaks on the eternal nature of God.

For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:

Psalms 90:2 tells us that God has existed from everlasting to everlasting, which is another way the Bible describes His eternal nature.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

God has always been and He will always be. He has no beginning and no end. He was not created nor birthed. He is the one, perfect constant in all of creation.

How might the truth that God is eternal, having no beginning and no end, impact how we view God and affect how we trust Him?

GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE

Not only does God exist outside of time, but He also exists outside of space. Grudem defines God's omnipresence like this: *God does not have size or spatial dimensions and is present at every point of space with His whole being, yet God acts differently in different places.* Tozer describes God's omnipresence like this:

Omnipresence means that God is all-present. God is close to (for that is what the word means – "close to, near to, here") everywhere. He is near to everything and everyone. He is here; He is next to you wherever you may be. And if you send up the furious question, "Oh God, where art Thou?" the answer comes back, "I am where you are; I am here; I am next to you; I am close to everywhere." That's what the Bible says.

One of the best illustrations of God's omnipresence is found in **Psalm 139**.

Psalm 139:7–12

[7] Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? [8] If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! [9] If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, [10] even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. [11] If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," [12] even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

Because God is omnipresent, we can never go where God is not. We might distance ourselves from God relationally by our sin and disobedience, but we cannot distance ourselves from God's presence and existence. Even when it feels that God has left us or that He is nowhere near, that is just not true as God is all present. This is one of the truths about God that can really impact our faith if we let it. There are times for all of us where we feel alone. There are times when we don't feel God's presence and it almost feels like He has left us. The reality is God is with you. God is present. God is here with us.

Our problem is that we have let sin come between us so that even though He is close, we are miles away from each other. Kind of like when a husband and wife might be in an argument or fight and are not talking but they're in the same house or car or bed. If

we are confessing and battling sin, it is good to remember that God is present with us. It is a great reminder that God is always with us, and we are never alone. When we are faced with temptation, it is good to remember that God is there as well, and it might be an encouragement in our battle with sin to know that God is present.

It is also good to remember that while God is omnipresent, our enemy is not. While we battle our flesh daily and we daily live as strangers and aliens in a world that despises our God and Savior, Satan and his minions are not omnipresent. They can be in one place at one time. This is a reminder for us that 99% of the time when we face difficulties or hardships or temptations, we are not fighting the Devil, we're fighting our own flesh. We are dealing with the reality of living in a fallen world that has made itself an enemy of its creator. Satan is limited not only in his power, but also in his presence.

How does it impact your faith in God to know that He is not limited by space and that He is everywhere at all times?

How can God's omnipresence give us comfort or encouragement?

GOD'S UNITY

God's unity means that *God is not divided into parts, yet we see different attributes of God emphasized at different times* (Grudem). What this means is that God is not 100% divided into equal or unequal parts. He is not 10% love and 15% holy and 20% gracious. All that God is, He is fully. He is 100% love and 100% holy and 100% gracious and 100% just and 100% wrath all at the same time. God does not have one attribute that trumps the others. He does not have one attribute that is less than any others. What God is, He is perfectly.

When we see the description of God in **Exodus 34**, we see Him described in many ways and all of them are equal.

Exodus 34:6–7

[6] The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, [7] keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

While there might be times or stories when one of God's attributes is focused on or magnified over the others, it does not mean that it makes up more of Him than any other does. When **John 3:16** focuses on God's love, it does not mean His justice and wrath toward sin have waned or been placed aside. All of God's attributes exist completely and fully at the same time and they work in unison to make God who He is.

Why is it important for God to have this unity in Himself?

How does God's unity in His attributes affect our faith?

GOD'S OMNISCIENCE

God's omniscience simply means that He knows all things. There is nothing that is hidden from His knowledge. Tozer says that *God's understanding is limitless, that His knowledge is perfect, and that there isn't a creature anywhere in the universe that isn't plainly visible to His sight*. Grudem says that *God's omniscience means that God fully knows Himself and all things actual and possible in one simple eternal act*. God's knowledge is infinite.

We are finite. We are finite in our knowledge and our understanding and in our abilities and in our existence. Finite simply means we have limitations. We have borders to what we can know and do. God is infinite. That means that God has no limitations in what He knows or what He chooses to do. We see this all throughout scripture.

Job 37:16

*Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of **him who is perfect in knowledge**,*

1 John 3:20

*for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and **he knows everything**.*

Psalms 147:5

*Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; **his understanding is beyond measure [infinite]**.*

Hebrews 4:13

*And **no creature is hidden from his sight**, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

When we look at God's omniscience in conjunction with His omnipresence and His eternal nature, then we know there is nothing in all of time and space that is unknown or hidden to God. Not in the past or the future. Not in this nation or another. All things are known by God.

When we think about what this means for us or how this affects us, there are many ways we approach it, but let's focus on one right now, our sin. Sometimes, when we sin and fall short, we do not confess because we don't want to confess to God we messed up. We think that if we don't admit it to God, then maybe God won't find out. We are embarrassed by our sin, and we are repulsed by our sin and the last thing we want is for the God of the universe who saved us and loves us to find out. The reality is He already knows. He knew before we even did it. The great thing about this is even though He knows, He has still chosen to love us with the greatest love ever known. We can confess and repent because it is not a surprise to Him. He already knows and He still welcomes us into His presence through the sacrifice of Jesus.

How does it impact your view of God to know that He has no limitations in His knowledge?

How can God's omniscience give us comfort or encouragement?

GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE

God's omnipotence means He has all the power to do whatever He wills. Just like God has no limitations in his knowledge, God is not limited in his power. It also means that God has no limits in His strength. God is limitless in His power, but His power is also limitless in its strength. Not only does it mean that God is unlimited in His power and strength, but it also means nothing can thwart the plans and purposes of God. There is nothing and no one stronger or more powerful than God. Whatever God wants to do He can do, and there is no one that can keep Him from doing it.

The Bible is chock full of verses that speak of His power. When the Bible refers to God as Almighty, that is a term that speaks to God's possession of all power.

Luke 1:37

For nothing will be impossible with God.

Matthew 19:26

But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Psalms 115:3

Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

When we talk about God's power and what He can do, we must remember that it is tied to His will and who He is. What I mean is that God will not do anything contrary to who He is and what He has declared about Himself. Both Titus and Hebrews tell us that God cannot lie.

Titus 1:2

*in hope of eternal life, which **God, who never lies**, promised before the ages began*

Hebrews 6:18

*so that by two unchangeable things, in which **it is impossible for God to lie**, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.*

2 Timothy tells us that God cannot deny Himself. In this passage, Paul is referring to God taking back the promises that He has already made. God cannot renege on His promises.

2 Timothy 2:13

if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

James tells us that God cannot sin. God cannot be tempted by sin and He never leads anyone else to be tempted by sin.

James 1:13

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

Whatever God chooses to do, He does. Looking at God's omnipotence in light of His immutability (He does not change) and His unity (what God is, He is fully), we know that God's power will never run out. When we put a new battery in our car or the remote control, we know at some point it will have to be replaced because as its power is used, it lessens and lessens with each use until it is tapped out. That is not true of God. His power is limitless in its strength and its continuance.

How does it impact your view of God to know that He has no limitations in His power?

How can God's omnipotence give us comfort or encouragement?

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

When you look at both God's omnipotence and His omniscience, you get God's sovereignty. God's sovereignty means He rules over all of His creation in knowledge and power. Tozer says that God being sovereign means there is no one above Him,

that He is the absolute Lord over creation; there is nothing out of His control, nothing that God hasn't foreseen and planned. God has the knowledge, power, and freedom to do whatever He chooses to do.

Psalm 115:3

Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

Jeremiah 18:6

O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

Romans 9:21

Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?

Because God is sovereign, there is nothing that happens that God does not either allow or cause to happen. God's will triumphs and nothing can cause it not to. So often we get caught up in trying to determine God's will for our lives. When the Bible speaks of God's will, it is almost always about His moral will, which He has spelled out for us. When it comes to decisions about what we do in life, God gives freedom for us to make those decisions, and we have to trust that our choices cannot usurp God's plans. We just don't have the power to do that.

God's sovereignty should give us peace. It should give us rest. It should be comforting to know that God is in control. When difficulties come, it is peace inducing to know that God hasn't somehow lost the throne or lost control. To know that God has a plan for everything that is happening in my life, good or bad, should encourage me to trust Him. To know that God can take the bad in my life, as He did with Joseph, and use it for His good and His glory should give me rest in the most difficult of storms. God is in control because He knows all things and because He has all power and this is a beautiful blessing.

How does it impact your view of God to know that He is sovereign?

What are things we do that show a lack of trust in His sovereignty?

What are some ways we can show trust in God's sovereignty?

GOD'S COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

God's **Communicable Attributes** are the attributes and characteristics of God that are shared with us or that we can mirror, in a less than perfect manner. The first three attributes we will look at are attributes that encourage trust in God's plan, purposes, and working.

Wisdom

Grudem defines God's wisdom as Him *always choosing the best goals and the best means to those goals*. Tozer says *wisdom is the skill to achieve the most perfect ends by the most perfect means*. This is the same definition in different words. God's wisdom is the attribute that says all of God's plans are best and good and God accomplishes those plans in the best way possible. We see God proclaimed as wise throughout scripture.

Proverbs 3:19

The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens;

Romans 16:27

to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Ephesians 1:7–8

[7] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, [8] which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight

Wisdom says everything that God does is always the best thing that can be done. For some, they scoff at God's wisdom. They say if God's ways are always best, then why is there pain in the world? If God is wise, then why is there suffering? If God is wise, why is there heartbreak? Surely pain and suffering and sadness can't be the best way. God's wisdom must be taken by faith and when we do, we find stability and comfort in the midst of sadness and suffering and pain.

Accepting God's wisdom means we understand that God is greater and bigger than us. Because God is not us and God is outside of time and sovereign, He sees time and life's experiences different than us. While we might be shortsighted and simply want an easy life, God uses the difficulties of our lives to draw us closer to Him and to cause us to see how great He is. When Adam and Eve sinned, God could have started over. Instead, He allowed them and humanity to exist in an imperfect, fallen world with the plan and the purpose of offering salvation through Jesus. When Joseph's brothers wanted to sell Joseph into slavery, God took him through some hard things to bring

him to a place of power that allowed Him to bring salvation to his family and help a pagan Pharaoh who knew nothing of God to see how great God truly is. Joseph even tells his brothers that what they meant for evil, God meant for good.

Genesis 50:20

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

God's wisdom comforts us and strengthens our faith when difficulties come, but it is also a communicable attribute which means it is an attribute we should strive to emulate. We should strive to choose the best way to live and strive to figure out the best way to carry out that way of life. This brings up questions about where we get wisdom from. Proverbs tells us that wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 9:10). To fear God means to recognize His greatness and His power. If we are to be wise, we have to recognize God as good and powerful and recognize the best way to live is to live surrendered to Him. Wisdom is all about us following and obeying God because His commands for our life is best.

How does it affect our trust in God to know that He is wise?

How can we practice wisdom in our lives?

Truthfulness

John 18 tells us the story of Jesus before Pilate before Jesus goes to the cross. In their conversation, Jesus tells Pilate that He came into the world to bear witness of the truth and that everyone who is of the truth listens to Him. Pilate responds with a question that still rings in the hearts of people today, "What is truth?" Philosophers and people in general have been asking this question before Pilate and since. The reality is truth is found in God. Grudem defines God truthfulness as *God being the true God and all His knowledge and words are both true and the final standard of truth.*

If we want an answer to the question, "What is truth?" we simply look to God. God is truth. He is true. He cannot lie. Everything He says and everything He reveals is true and there is no falsehood in Him.

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Hebrews 6:18

so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

God's truth impacts us in two ways. **First, we understand that God and His word are true and anything that comes into conflict with His truth is false.** If we want to base our lives or live our lives in what is true rather than what is a lie, we stand on God and His word. We find comfort and strength in the reality that not only is God true, but that He cannot lie. What God has said is true, whether our culture or world accepts it or not, and whether our feelings agree or not. When our world or our own hearts tell us that God is not good or the commandments of God are not good, we have to choose to stand on the truth of God's word rather than siding with anything else. Recognizing God as true means acknowledging His authority in being the final word on what is true and good.

Secondly, we are people who are shaped by God's truth in what we say and how we live. This means that we strive to mimic God by being people who tell the truth and speak what is true and we also allow God's truth, His words, to be what defines our lifestyles. The Bible tells us that Satan is the Father of Lies (John 8:44). Because Satan is the Father of Lies and God is true and declares the truth, we understand that when we tell the truth we reflect the nature of our Father, but when we lie, we reflect the nature of who we used to be and the nature of who used to be our master. If God only speaks what is true, it should be our goal to mimic that by only speaking what is true.

Not only do we model God's truthfulness in our speech but also in how we live. The goal of the enemy is to get us to buy into lies about what is good and beneficial and satisfactory in life. If you go back to Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve listened to the lies of the serpent and ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Satan's temptations started with the question, "Did God really say?"

Genesis 3:1

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree

in the garden'?"

He calls into question God's truthfulness. *Did God really say that? Why would God want to keep something good from you? I bet if you ate the fruit, it wouldn't be that bad.* If the enemy can get us to question the truthfulness of God, then he can get us to believe that God's ways might not be the best ways. We have to choose to believe what God says is true and it is where life is found. If God says not to lie, then we believe telling the truth is the best way because God has said it. If God says not to covet, then we fight against our desire for stuff and materialism because we recognize God's way as true. When the enemy lies and tells us our hope and joy are found outside of God, we stand on what is true to combat the lies of the enemy.

While God only speaks truth, because it is an attribute of God we can emulate, we are to be truth speakers. This means a couple of things for us. It means we should be people we speak truth and not lies. If the sky is blue, we don't say that it is green. It also means that we are people who are to be trustworthy. Being people of truth also means that we build our life on the truth of God's word and that we speak truth. We are to boldly proclaim God's word as truth, even in a world and a culture that constantly denies God's word as truth. We speak truth in love, but we still speak truth. We cannot allow culture or peer pressure to move us away from what God has said.

How does it help you trust and follow God knowing that He is true and truthful?

In what ways do we trust and copy God's truthfulness?

Faithfulness

Because God is truthful, He is also faithful. Grudem defines God's faithfulness as *God will always do what He has said and fulfill what He has promised.* Tozer says that God's faithfulness is *that in God which guarantees that He will never be or act inconsistent with Himself.* God's faithfulness means He will not change from who He is, and He will

always do what He has said.

1 John 1:9

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

2 Timothy 2:13

if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

1 Thessalonians 5:23–24

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. [24] He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

God is faithful in who He is. Along with God's truthfulness and wisdom, faithfulness is one of God's attributes that encourage trust in Him. God can be trusted because of who He is and one of the things that makes him trustworthy is faithfulness. He is consistent. He doesn't change based on culture or circumstances. He doesn't change because He was influenced by someone else. He doesn't change because He got something wrong. God never changes. In His character and person, He is faithful in who He is.

God is also faithful in what He says. We saw in God's truthfulness that God cannot lie. Not being able to lie means that God only speaks truth, and He must be faithful to do what He says. If He didn't follow through, He would not be truthful. God's attributes often interact and build on and within each other and this is one of the ways we see this. God's truthfulness and His faithfulness are dependent on each other and both encourage us to trust God in spite of what our circumstances might tell us.

This is one of many reasons why it is so important for us to know God's word. The Bible is where God has spoken His promises and declared what is true. If we are going to trust that God is faithful, we have to know what He is faithful to, His character and His word. In the three verses quoted above, there is great encouragement found in trusting the faithfulness of God to keep His word. He has promised to forgive us. When you confess, even if you don't *feel* forgiven, the Bible tells us that God has done it. Because He is true and faithful, it is done. We can trust in that. 1 Thessalonians tells us that He will not let us go, but that He will keep us. He is faithful so even if we feel unloved, if we have trusted in Him for salvation, we are His and that never changes.

As we emulate faithfulness in our lives, it means we have to be people of our words. We need to be people who are trustworthy. When we say something, we are faithful to follow through. In **Matthew 5:37**, Jesus commands us to let our yes be yes and our no be no. The call here is to be a person of your word. In **Psalms 15:4**, in response to the question, "Who can dwell in the house and on the hill of the Lord," one of the

characteristics is the *one who swears to his own hurt and does not change*. When we are faithful in our character and our word, we reflect the nature and character of God.

How does God's faithfulness encourage us to trust Him?

How can our lack of faithfulness reflect back on God to others?

The next set of communicable attributes are sometimes called **God's moral attributes**.

LOVE

John tells us in 1 John 4:8 that, "God is love." In his book *Knowledge of the Holy*, AW Tozer says, "Love is an essential attribute of God." So much of our life as Christians is wrapped up in the commandment to love. In **Matthew 22:37–39**, Jesus says to love God and to love others are the greatest two commandments.

[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.

In **John 13:34–35**, we are told that people will know we are God's disciples by how we love each other, specifically loving each other the way God has loved us.

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

If love is so important, then how do we define it. Grudem says that *God's love means that God eternally gives of himself to others*. Tozer gives three ways that love manifests itself. He says that it shows itself in good will, meaning that love seeks the good and benefit of the object being loved. He says that, "Love is also an emotional identification. It considers nothing its own but gives all freely to the object of its affection." Love has feelings and affection connected to it. His third way that love

manifests itself is that love “takes pleasure in its object.” In a sermon, Voddie Baucham once defined love like this, “Biblical love is an act of the will accompanied by emotion that leads to action on behalf of its object.”

In 1 John, we get a definition of love. Love is shown by God sending His Son and in that action, love is defined like this...

1 John 4:10

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

In this verse, we see that love is initiated by the one doing the loving, not earned by the one being loved. We see in this verse that love is an action. God didn't just say that He loved us, but He showed us His love by sending Jesus to perform the greatest act of love. We see in this verse that love has a cost. Jesus sacrificed Himself to the satisfaction of God's wrath toward our sins. Because God chose to have affection for us, He initiated love toward us through giving of Himself so we could experience God's love.

All the definitions above have this essence to it. Love seeks the benefit of others through action and sacrifice on behalf of the one doing the loving because they take pleasure in and have affection for the one being loved.

God has loved us with the greatest love we could ever experience through Christ, but He also calls us to love Him with all our hearts and to love others in a similar way. When Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is, He responds by telling us to love God and love people.

Matthew 22:37–39

[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.

We love God through worshipping Him and trusting Him, but we also love God by obeying Him. Jesus tells us this very bluntly in John 14.

John 14:23–24

[23] Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. [24] Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

To love God is to obey God. If we know the things that God has commanded and we

choose to disregard those and rebel against his will and His nature, then we cannot say that we love Him. Sin, or disobedience to God, is a declaration that some other way is better than God. It is an act of hatred and rebellion, not love. If we love God with all our hearts, then we surrender all of who we are to Him.

Because love is an essential attribute of God and if we are known as Jesus' disciples by how we love, then love should be an essential attribute or characteristic of our lives as well. We love each other by sacrificing for each other. We love each other by serving each other. We love each other by seeking and striving for good things for each other. We love each other by forgiving each other. While we should strive to emulate all of God's communicable attributes, it definitely seems that God has established love as one that is foundational to our faith.

How does thinking on God's love for you affect your love for Him?

Are there times when it is hard to love others the way God has loved us? Why?

How can focusing on God's love for us help us love others who might be hard to love?

Goodness

As we look at the attributes that help us understand God's morality and thus define morality for His creation, maybe the best place to start is His goodness. *Good* is a word we use often and understand but might have a hard time defining off the top of our heads. If one looks up the definition of the word good, *it is defined as something to be desired or approved of*. It can be defined as something that is morally right and

beneficial. Grudem defines God's goodness as *Him being the final standard of good and that all God is and does is worthy of approval.*

I think the best way to look at God's goodness is found at the end of Grudem's definition. All He does is worthy of approval. God being good means everything He does should be recognized as worthy and beneficial. He shows His goodness toward creation in general through His provisions for life. He shows His goodness through sending Jesus to come and die and rise again to provide salvation. God shows His goodness to those who trust Him in all He does.

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Everything that God does in and for us, even the things that seem hard to us, is good and He is worthy of approval and worship for it. God does not work evil in people's lives. When hard things like death or loss or sorrow or betrayal come into our lives, it might be hard to see how these can be good. While they may not be good in themselves, how God will change us or teach us or help us experience Him in the midst of them are good. Sometimes to experience the good, you have to walk through the bad. But if God is good, no matter how difficult things may be, we know that God will use them for our benefit and cause us to glorify Him.

We emulate God by striving to be good. We are good when we do things that are worthy of approval. This means righteousness and obedience to God's commands. This means kindness and generosity towards others. This means forgiveness and patience. So many things can be wrapped up in the big picture term good, but we cannot live lives that proclaim God's goodness if we are wrapped up in disobedience or selfishness or being unkind towards others.

How does thinking on God's goodness change the way we see and approach the hardships in our lives?

How does knowing God acts in goodness towards us affect how we perceive His actions and what happens in our lives? How does God's goodness help us deal with different situations that come up in our lives?

What are ways we can reflect and show goodness in our own lives?

MERCY

God's mercy is a beautiful thing. Along with God's grace and His patience, mercy is often seen as an aspect of God's goodness or as a way God's goodness is shown to us. In his Systematic Theology, Grudem points out that often we see God's mercy, grace, and patience paired together.

Exodus 34:6

*The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God **merciful** and **gracious, slow to anger**, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,*

Psalms 103:8

*The LORD is **merciful** and **gracious, slow to anger** and abounding in steadfast love.*

It is when we see people cry out to God for His mercy that we begin to get a sense of what God's mercy is. In **2 Samuel 24:14**, David cries for God's mercy while being convicted of sin and a lack of trust in God.

Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man."

In **Matthew 9:27**, we see two blind men cry out to Jesus for mercy.

And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David."

These verses begin to help us understand God's mercy, seeing that God's mercy refers to Him helping those in need. Grudem defines God's mercy as *God's goodness toward those in misery and distress*. In *Knowledge of the Holy*, Tozer says that *mercy is the goodness of God confronting human suffering and guilt... It is human misery and sin that call forth the divine mercy*. God's mercy is His goodness and love shown to those suffering with heartache, hardship, and guilt.

With this definition we see God's mercy play out in many areas of our lives. We cry out to God, seeking His mercy in salvation. Our sin makes us guilty before God and guilty to our own conscience. Our sin makes us worthy and deserving of justice and judgment. God shows us mercy by not giving us over to our guilt and His justice. He shows us mercy by forgiving us because of the person and work of Jesus. He shows us mercy by not giving us the justice we deserve.

Not only does God show us mercy in salvation, but He shows us mercy as His children. When we are sad or struggling, God shows us goodness. He continues to love us in our imperfection. He cares for us when we hurt. He hears us when we cry out to Him in prayer and desperation. Yes, we receive God's mercy at salvation, but He also shows us His mercy throughout every day of our lives with Him and His mercy is never ending. Because God is immutable and He does not change, God will never stop being merciful to us. When we sin, He is merciful. When we hurt, He is merciful. When we feel alone, He is merciful. When we are sad, He is merciful. God shows us His goodness when we are dealing with the misery and distress of life, whether we caused it ourselves or it is just the effect of living in a fallen, imperfect world.

In the same way God shows us mercy, we are to show mercy to others. Sin causes misery in people's lives. Mercy calls us to help people in their misery. It might mean praying for someone. It might mean helping someone up whose sin has beaten them down. It might mean forgiving someone whose misery has impacted your life and affected you personally. As God has shown us mercy, we are to show mercy to others as well.

How does God's mercy encourage you to trust God day in and day out?

Do you ever feel like God's mercy is going to run out? How does knowing that not only is God merciful but immutable help you trust God in spite of your feelings?

GRACE

As equally as beautiful as God's mercy is His grace. Like God's mercy, His grace is an expression of His goodness. Grudem defines grace as *God's goodness toward those who deserve only punishment*. Tozer says in *Knowledge of the Holy* that God's grace is *His goodness directed toward human debt and demerit. It is by His grace that God imputes merit where none previously existed and declares no debt to be where one had been before*. Noticeably, both of these definitions apply God's goodness towards our sin. Almost explicitly in Paul's letters, he connects God's grace to the salvific work of Jesus on the cross and through the resurrection. In the New Testament, grace is just another word for Jesus's death and resurrection to provide salvation for those who cannot provide it for themselves.

The Bible teaches us that we are sinners and our sin makes us guilty. **Romans 3:23** says...

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

We have failed to meet God's standard of righteousness and in failing to meet His standard, we have sinned against Him. Here's what makes sin so detrimental for us. God's standard of righteousness is not based on some arbitrary list of rules He randomly made up; they are based on who He is. God's standard of what is good and right is based on His own personal character and nature. So, when we sin and we go against God's standard of righteousness, we don't just break a rule, we personally attack and reject the person and nature of God. Because sin is directly against the nature and person of God, it brings a stout punishment with it, death. This is something the Bible clearly teaches and is maybe most plainly seen in the first part of **Romans 6:23**.

For the wages of sin is death...

What we have earned for our sin is punishment, which is death and Hell. As we look back at our definitions, this is our debt and demerit. We are those who deserve only

punishment. This is our natural state, people who have rebelled against God and His commandments and have placed themselves in guilty opposition to who God is. How great is God that He does not leave our standing with Him in this state.

In contrast of who we are in comparison to who He is, God has shown us grace. He sent His Son to live a perfect life and to die in our place so we can experience the forgiveness of sin, resurrection of the dead (spiritually and physically), and adoption into His family if we just turn to Jesus in grace and repentance.

Romans 5:8

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

Ephesians 2:4–5

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

Ephesians 2:8–9

[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

In His grace, God showed His goodness to those guilty of sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It wasn't because of what we could do or had done; it was simply because God is a God of grace. It is in His nature to love those and forgive those who have turned from Him. We don't deserve His grace and sadly, not everyone will experience God's grace, but that He would show even a single person grace makes Him worthy of praise as a good and gracious God.

When we think of God's grace it is often in light of Jesus's work for salvation because of our sin. The whole reason we need God's grace is because we are sinners. We have rebelled. We have rejected God. We have turned away. This is sin. Sometimes, we can be overwhelmed with the immensity of our sin. If we sat and thought about just how sinful we are, it would be enough to drive any of us into a deep depression. But the great thing is, no matter how much or how great our sin might be, God's grace is always greater.

Romans 5:20b

but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more...

No matter how much we struggle, or how much we fall, or how many times we mess up, God's grace is infinitely greater than our sin. It is greater than our sin at salvation and it is greater than our sin every day after. In His grace, God continually shows us His goodness even though we will continue to battle our imperfection until we get to

Heaven.

As a communicable attribute, grace is something that we are to show as well as experience. We show others grace the same way God has shown us grace, by showing goodness to those who deserve punishment. We show God's grace to others by forgiving them. When people wrong us or mistreat us or speak ill of us, we have options on how we respond. We can seek vengeance and get them back. We can respond in anger to how they treated us. We can cut them out of our lives. We can become bitter toward them. Or we can show them the same grace God has shown us and forgive them.

At salvation, we surrender all we know of ourselves to all we know of Christ. One of the things we know about God and Jesus is that not only do they forgive us, but they expect us to forgive others.

Ephesians 4:32

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

When we are wronged or hurt by another person, God's desire and expectation for His children is to respond how He has responded to us, with forgiveness. We are to forgive others as God has forgiven us in Christ. This is a lofty call by which we need God's help and strength, but it is also one of the greatest ways we can show how great God is and reflect His incredible nature.

How does thinking about God's grace affect your love for God?

How does it encourage you and help you move forward knowing that God's grace is greater than our sin?

How does reflecting on God's grace shown to us help us show grace to others?

Are there people in your life that you need to extend grace to?

PATIENCE

The third way we see God's goodness shown to us is in His patience. Grudem defines patience as *God's goodness in withholding of punishment toward those who sin over a period of time*. Maybe one of the more overlooked attributes of God that we should be most thankful for is God's patience. God has every right to apply justice and punishment to us when we first sin or when we become old enough to understand obedience and disobedience, but He doesn't. He gives us time. He patiently waits for us to grow and learn and hear the gospel and to respond, all the while patiently enduring our sin and rebellion.

God's patience is on display throughout the whole Bible. In the Old Testament, we are told on numerous occasions that He is slow to anger.

Psalms 86:15

*But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, **slow to anger** and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*

Jonah 4:2

*And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, **slow to anger** and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.*

In the New Testament we are reminded of God's patience.

Romans 2:4

*Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and **forbearance and patience**, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*

1 Timothy 1:16

*But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his **perfect patience** as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.*

How incredible is it that God is patient. How incredible is it that God waits and endures our sinfulness so that He can show us grace. He isn't patient because He needs us; God needs nothing. He isn't patient because He owes it to us; God owes no one. He is patient because He is good and loving and gracious and merciful to us who have rejected Him and deserve only punishment.

In an exercise to think about the greatness of God's patience, think about this. I was raised in church. From an infant on I was in church pretty much every Sunday and Wednesday. I was in Sunday School and Bible Drills and RA's as a child and youth group as a student. I accepted Christ when I was 15 years old. Now, for math's sake, let's say that from the time I was 5 years old until I responded in faith to God's grace at 15, I heard the gospel a minimum of once a week. (It would've been more than that but for simplicity, we'll say once a week.) That means I heard the gospel at a minimum of 52 times a year for ten years. That's a bare minimum of hearing the gospel 520 times before I accepted Christ (it was definitely a lot more than that) and not accepting Christ until the 520th time. That is patience. That is withholding punishment that I had earned and deserved for 15 years until I responded to God's grace in faith.

God is not just patient towards us in our response to the gospel, but He is patient with us as we struggle with sin and temptation every day. He is patient with our imperfections. He is patient in our struggles. He is patient with our weaknesses. Understand, God's patience doesn't mean He doesn't care about our sin, or He doesn't think our sin is a big deal. It means that even though He hates our sin and He knows obedience and righteousness are infinitely better for us, He knows we are slow to understand and slow to obey and like a parent with a small child, He patiently helps us learn what is best and live a life that follows and glorifies Him.

As God is patient, we are to strive to be patient. Like God, we have to learn to be patient with others in their struggles and their sins. In reality, patience should be easier for us since we are as sinful as the people we strive to show patience towards. We should understand their weaknesses and freely show them the same patience we want to be shown, but often we put our own hurt or feelings or desires over understanding we all need patience. No one on this earth is perfect and if we are going to love each other and live among others, we have to be patient with other people's mistakes, imperfections, failures, choices, and sin. This doesn't mean that we say sin is ok, but we strive to forgive and walk with others through their struggles and patiently work and wait for others to grow and mature in their faith.

Also, we understand that according to God's word, patience is a fruit of the Spirit. As we grow and mature spiritually, our faith will produce certain fruit in our lives. These are characteristics that reflect a heart saved by grace and a life surrendered to Christ. We see this fruit listed in Galatians 5:22-23. It says, *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.* Right in the middle of that list is patience. If we are growing in our faith and walk with God, patience is part of the change that God brings to our lives.

Name some ways God has shown or is currently showing you patience?

Why is it important for us to show patience to others?

What are ways that you can strive to show patience to others?

How does showing patience reveal our understanding of God's grace shown to us?

HOLINESS

There are three times in scripture when someone has a vision where they are brought to the throne of God, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and John in the book of Revelation. In two of their recountings, Isaiah and John, they tell of the angels surrounding the throne of God record what they say.

Isaiah 6:3

And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

Revelation 4:8

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

*"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!"*

In both accounts, we hear the angles crying holy, holy, holy. When something is repeated three times like that, it is done to show importance and intensity. It adds greater weight to what is being said. In all of scripture, the holiness of God is the only one of His attributes that is repeated like this. If God's holiness is this important, it seems that it is something we should understand the best we can and know how it affects us and our faith.

Grudem defines God's holiness as God being *separated from sin and devoted to seeking His own honor*. Tozer has a harder time giving us a simple definition. For Tozer, God's holiness is something that cannot be fully comprehended and it is the attribute that should be the hardest for us to comprehend because of our fallen world. Here is how Tozer attempts to describe God's holiness in his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*.

God's holiness is not simply the best we know infinitely bettered. We know nothing like the divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible and unattainable. The natural man is blind to it. He may fear God's power and admire His wisdom, but His holiness he cannot even imagine.... He is the absolute quintessence of moral excellence, infinitely perfect in righteousness, purity, rectitude [integrity], and incomprehensible holiness. And in all this He is uncreated, self-sufficient and beyond the power of human thought to conceive or human speech to utter.

God's holiness means God cannot sin and cannot be in the presence of sin, or better stated, that sin cannot be in His presence. Out of all of God's attributes, it might be

the one that separates Him more from us than any other. While we are fallen creatures whose whole existence is influenced by our fallen world and nature, God is absolutely sinless and totally other compared to us.

While God's holiness means He is separated from sin, it also means His pursuit is His own glory and honor. Holiness means that because God is perfect in His sinlessness and righteousness, He deserves all honor and glory in all of creation. Multiple times in the Old Testament, God tells the Israelites His grace and working and forgiving them is for His glory.

Isaiah 48:11

For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.

If God were to seek anyone or anything else's glory and honor first and foremost, He would be seeking to worship something less than Himself. Because God is holy He is the greatest and most perfect person in all of creation and because of who He is He deserves all honor and glory and veneration.

Now, if God's holiness is so great and so lofty and makes Him so different from us, why is it not an incommunicable attribute? Why is listed in the attributes that we are supposed to mirror in our own lives? Here's why, because that's how God lists it.

1 Peter 1:14–16

[14] As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, [15] but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, [16] since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Hebrews 12:14

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Holiness is incredibly important in the life of the believer. Man's holiness in relation to God is the theme of the book of Leviticus. The word holy is used 78 times in the book of Leviticus describing the temple and the commandments of God and the people's response to God. It is Leviticus that Peter is quoting in the above passage when he calls us to be holy because God is holy. We cannot be as holy as God, but if He is our God, then God desires for us to pursue holiness.

The author of Hebrews says that without holiness we will not see the Lord. When it comes to our personal relationship with God, the measure of our holiness lived out impacts the closeness we experience with God.

If holiness is this important, how do we pursue holiness in our lives? We do so by copying what holiness means for God; we separate ourselves from sin and we seek God's honor and glory first in our lives. To be holy means that we fight against sin in our lives. We don't make excuses for it and we don't make room for it. We see it as against God so we flee from it. When we fall short and give in to sin and temptation we turn to God's grace and mercy in brokenness because our sin has been against the perfect, holy God.

Not only do we fight against sin, but we make the goal and passion and pursuit of our lives God's glory. We strive to live lives that tell the world around us that God is good, and that God is great. We obey Him. We worship Him. We put Him before everything else. We forgive others. We love others. We do this because it makes much of who God is. To live a life of holiness means we make less of sin and more of God. We fight against our sin, and we surrender to God. When this marks the habit and practice of our lives, we will grow closer to God and experience His presence and love Him more.

How does God's holiness give us a bigger view of Him?

How does understanding God's holiness motivate us to obey and follow God?

RIGHTEOUSNESS

God's righteousness ties into God's holiness but it also ties into God's justice. In fact, Grudem says that the words righteousness and justice in both the Hebrew and the Greek come from the same root words in both languages, meaning that both concepts are tied together. Grudem defines God's righteousness as *God always acting in accordance with what is right and is Himself the final standard of what is right*. Simply put, not only does God always do what is right, but He defines and declares what is right by His own nature. We see all of this throughout scripture.

Deuteronomy 32:4

*The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are **justice**. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, **just** and **upright** is he.*

Isaiah 45:19

*I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek me in vain.' I the LORD speak the truth; **I declare what is right**.*

Because God is righteous, He also defines what is unrighteous and He must punish unrighteousness. Someone who stands for righteousness must at the same time stand against unrighteousness and declare it to be wrong. Imagine someone breaks into your home and steals from you. When that person is caught and stands before a judge, you want that judge to declare them guilty and apply some measure of punishment. That is the right thing to do. The thief has broken the law and caused you hurt and fear. Some measure of justice is deserved for the one that breaks the law and hurts others. If the judge looked at the criminal and said, "No biggie. You can go," and they did not declare what they did as wrong and worthy of punishment, you would be appalled. That would not be a righteous and just judge. Because God is righteous, He must not only declare sin to be wrong, He must judge sin.

For us, God's righteousness operates two ways. One, in salvation, we are promised that Jesus's righteousness, which is equal to the Father's, is added to our account. This is called **imputed righteousness**.

2 Corinthians 5:21

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

What this means is that at salvation, an exchange occurred. God took all of our sin and guilt and put it on Christ. He suffered our punishment on the cross. At the same time, God took all of Jesus' perfect righteousness and added it to the account of everyone who would ever trust in Jesus so that when God looks at us, He no longer sees the sin He has already judged in Jesus, He just sees Jesus' perfect righteousness. We went from being in the red millions of dollars to being in the black by trillions of dollars. Because of this we can stand before God in worship and prayer and obedience and not be rejected by His holiness or judged by His righteousness because the righteousness of Jesus is all He sees.

Two, while we have been clothed in Jesus' righteousness and that is how God views us, we are not practically perfect. We still struggle with sin and temptation, and we will until we get to Heaven and are made perfect. Until then, we are to strive and fight to live righteously. This means we allow God through His word to define for us what is

right and what is wrong. It means we believe that God's standard and declaration of righteousness trumps what our world says or what our own hearts might say.

There is a theological idea that helps us understand this, it is the idea of *Already, Not Yet*. What this means is that there are some things that from God's perspective are already completed, even though we haven't fully experienced them. Because God has declared them completed, they are as good as done. Even though God views them as completed, we have not yet fully experienced them. God has declared us saved when we place our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. We experience aspects of that salvation, life forgiveness and relationship, but we won't fully experience them until we get to Heaven. In the same way, God has declared us righteous, even though we still struggle with our imperfection. This should motivate us to obedience as we strive to live as God has already declared and promised us. One day, we will be perfectly righteous, so we want to aim for that as much as we can here on earth.

As Christians, we have the ability in Christ through the empowering of the Holy Spirit to obey God's commands and to choose to surrender to sin or righteousness.

Romans 6:13

Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

As Christians who strive to live lives that bring glory and honor to Jesus, we are to strive to live a righteous lifestyle where our morality and understanding of right and wrong are shaped by who God is.

How does God's imputed righteousness encourage you to trust God and to follow Him?

What are some reasons it is important for us to strive to live righteously?

JEALOUSY

When we think of jealousy, it is often with a negative connotation. When we think of someone that is jealous, we think of them being envious or suspicious of someone else. While that is one way the word jealous can be used, there's also a more noble definition for the word. To be jealous can also mean to be fiercely protective over someone else or something of value. In this, I can be jealous over my marriage and my spouse. I can be jealous over my children, being fiercely protective over them spiritually, emotionally, and physically. We see Paul use the word in this way when he talks about the church.

2 Corinthians 11:2

For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

It is this definition of jealousy that applies to God. Grudem defines God's jealousy as *God continually seeking to protect His own honor*. Because of all that God is (see previous attributes), He desires worship and honor and devotion. He alone should be the one we worship. He alone is worthy of our praise. He alone should be first in our lives. Nothing should come before God in worship or importance.

Exodus 20:5-6

[5] You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, [6] but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Exodus 34:14

(for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God)

God is a jealous God. He is not envious of false gods or things less than Him. That would make Him weak and shallow. God is a jealous God because He is fiercely protective of His own glory but also His children. He knows that if we turn to false gods, not only does it rob Him of His worship, but it also harms us. It means we are looking in other places or to other things for life and hope and joy that can only be found in Him.

For us, we mimic God's jealousy by seeking to protect and proclaim His glory in our own lives. We make sure we are fighting against the temptation of idolatry and keep our worship and our focus on Him. We also love our families and the church jealously, striving to protect them from sin and things that destroy.

How does it make you feel to know that God is jealous for Himself but also for you?

What are some ways we can show a good jealousy for others?

WRATH

While the Bible definitely talks about wrath and tells us that God is a God of wrath, it's not one of the attributes of God we talk a lot about, but it should be. Grudem defines God's wrath as *He intensely hates all sin*. If God is holy and righteous and good, it only makes sense that God would hate sin. Sin is not just the breaking of arbitrary laws, but it is going against the very righteous nature of who God is. Sin is a personal attack on God that brings death to His creation. God's wrath towards sin is not presented lightly in scripture.

Jeremiah 10:10

But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation [wrath].

Romans 2:5

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

Revelation 6:16–17

[16] calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, [17] for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

God's wrath is associated with His judgment. It is something that nations cannot endure. In Revelation people would rather be crushed by rocks than to face God's wrath. As righteous and loving and gracious and merciful as God is, He is equally

wrathful towards sin and sinners.

When we think of God's wrath, there are three main ways it affects us. **First, when we think of God's wrath it should cause us to worship and be thankful.** That might sound odd but let me explain. One, because God is a God of wrath, it means He is consistent, and He does not allow sin to escape. This means He stays righteous, and He stays holy. It means that God is God. Two, as Christians, thinking on God's wrath should cause us to recognize that Jesus took God's wrath for us. On the cross, God exhausted His wrath and judgment on Jesus. The biblical word for this is *propitiation*.

Romans 3:25

whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

1 John 4:10

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

Jesus became our propitiation and became the object of God's wrath for us. Because of this, we have been saved from God's wrath and we no longer have to fear facing His wrath. Paul speaks about us being children of wrath in the past tense in Ephesians when he talks about what Jesus has done for us.

Ephesians 2:3

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

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul says that Jesus saved us from God's wrath.

1 Thessalonians 1:10

*and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who **delivers us from the wrath to come.***

When we think about God's wrath as believers, it should move us to worship because God has no more wrath for us because Jesus has taken it all.

The second way thinking on God's wrath affects us as believers is it should move us to holiness and righteousness. If we are going to mimic or follow in these attributes of God, God's wrath means that we should intently hate all sin. We should hate our sin and our struggle with it. We should hate the sin of our nation as it is paraded around as good and right. We should love people and show grace to people lost in their sin, but at the same time we should not look at sin longingly or with

kindness. Our response toward sin should be understanding what is and what it brings and despising it.

If we hate sin that means we move away from it and to righteousness. Sadly, often we don't hate our sin. We like our sin. Sometimes we love our sin. Our sin makes us feel comfortable. Our sin makes us feel like we have some kind of control. Our sin entertains us. Sometimes we get comfortable with sin that we should be hating so we let it live in our lives. If God is a God who intensely hates all sin, we should be followers of God who intensely hates our sin as well.

The third way understanding God's wrath affects believers is that it should give us a heart for the lost. We understand that if people die apart from God's saving grace, they will spend an eternity paying the wages of their sin. Knowing that God is a God of wrath who hates and judges sin should move us to share the gospel all the more, hoping and praying that people don't have to face the punishment we all deserve. It should move us to beg people to accept Christ, knowing what an eternity without Christ means.

If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for.

— Charles Spurgeon

How does it make you feel to call God a God of wrath?

What are some ways we or reasons we love our sin rather than hating it?

BEAUTY

God's beauty is what is often called a Summary Attribute. It is an attribute that is the result of all His other attributes. Grudem defines God's beauty as *that attribute*

of God whereby He is the sum of all desirable qualities. Often when we talk about beauty, we say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. What we mean by this is that beauty is subjective. What one person might find beautiful in bone structure or art, another might not, but when it comes to God, He is objectively beautiful. That God is knowable make Him beautiful. That He is independent and immutable and eternal and omnipresent and omniscient and omnipotent and unified and sovereign makes God beautiful. That God is wise and true and faithful and loving and good and merciful and gracious and patient and holy and righteous and jealous and wrathful makes God beautiful.

God's beauty is not defined by His appearance. We can't see God, He is spirit (John 4:24). What makes God beautiful is who He is. God's beauty is the culmination of everything He is and everything He does.

We model God's beauty by being His ambassadors who strive to live our whole lives with Him as our focus. We strive for righteousness and holiness because of who He is. We love others because He first loved us. We tell others about Jesus that they may know His grace and mercy. When we live for Christ with all of who we are, it shows the world just how beautiful He is.

How does God's beauty encourage your faith and love for Him?

THE GOSPEL

As we look at the gospel, the first thing we want to do is ask *what is the gospel* and *what does it do*? We will take a more detailed look at the gospel in just a bit, but quickly, *the gospel is a historical event where Jesus died to pay the penalty of the sins of anyone and everyone who would place their faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior and He rose again three days later to defeat the death sin brings*. It makes a way for people who are separated from God in sin to have a restored relationship with Him. We experience the grace and glory of the gospel by responding to its truth in faith. We believe who Jesus is and what the Bible said He did, and we surrender our lives to these truths in faith that He will save us from the punishment of our sin based fully on His work. We are not saved by works or by effort or by religious fervency, we are saved from the punishment of our sin by the person and work of Jesus.

The gospel is the fulcrum of our faith. Without the gospel we have no way to get back to God. Without the gospel we are separated from God's grace and love for all eternity and will only experience His justice and judgment for all eternity. With the gospel and responding to it by faith we are made righteous before God even though we sin. We are changed from being His enemies to being His children. Instead of experiencing His justice and judgment for all eternity, we experience His grace and His love.

Ever since Jesus ascended into Heaven, the nature and foundation of the gospel has been under attack. When Paul ministered in the book of Acts, he was hounded by the Judaizers, men who followed Paul's ministry and told people that while Jesus could bring salvation, it was only after they became Jews and followed the Law, adding to salvation. The Roman Catholic church added many works to the gospel, saying that one must complete several sacraments, including being part of the Catholic church, to be saved. Some modern Pentecostals say that in order to be saved you have to show different ecstatic and miraculous signs to prove your salvation. Because there are so many "false gospels" out there and because "getting the gospel right" is imperative to salvation, it is important for us to have a right understanding of the building blocks of the gospel and how it operates in providing for our salvation.

As we look at the building blocks of the gospel, we will break the gospel down into statements of fact. If we understand these truths, then we will understand the gospel and be able to tell others about the salvation the gospel brings us.

Why is it necessary that we “get the gospel right?”

GOSPEL BUILDING BLOCKS

The building blocks of the gospel are the essential truths that define and shape the gospel. These are the essentials when it comes to gospel belief and gospel presentation.

GOD IS SINLESS, BUT WE ARE NOT.

As we saw previously, the Bible tells us that God is holy. Because God is holy, He is separated from sin. God does not sin. He is not tempted to sin. He is perfect in His righteousness and morality. God is holy.

We are sinful. We sin. We break God's commandments. We do what He has declared as wrong and opposite of Him. Just as the clearly as the Bible tells us that God is holy, it tells us that we are sinners.

Romans 3:10

as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one;

Romans 3:23

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

Romans 5:10

For if while we were enemies *we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*

The study of our sinfulness is called Hamartiology. Hamartiology comes from the Greek word hamartia, meaning to miss the mark. The term was first used in the 1870's with hamartia being often used in archery signifying when one missed the mark or the center of the target. This illustrates for us what sin is. Sin is us missing the mark of righteousness that God has laid out for us. We have failed to measure up spiritually to who God is. This makes us sinful and separates us from God.

The question we must ask is, “Just how sinful are we?” We have an answer to that in scripture.

jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

According to scripture, our hearts are desperately wicked. We are sinful to the uttermost. That doesn't mean that we are always as sinful as we can be, but it means we are imperfect in all we do and naturally there is no desire for righteousness in our lives. It means that even the good we do is often tainted by selfishness or pride or envy or greed or some other sinful influence. In all we do we are tainted by sin.

Ephesians 2:1 says before salvation we were dead in our trespasses and sin. Apart from Christ, our sin makes us spiritually deceased. We are spiritual corpses because of our sin. There is no spiritual life in us. There is no desire to please God. There is no desire for holiness. Apart from Christ and salvation our sin inhabits every arena of our lives, taints every aspect of who we are, separates us from God, makes us guilty before a righteous God, and makes us spiritually dead.

How would you describe the depth of your sinfulness? Are we just a little sinful or massively sinful? Why is it important to realize how sinful we are?

OUR SIN MAKES US GUILTY OF GOD'S JUDGEMENT AND WRATH.

Guilt and judgment are things people really don't like talking about. If we're being honest, a lot of churches don't like talking about them either, especially when we're talking about God. We are much more comfortable with God's love and His grace than we are His wrath and His judgment.

As we said earlier, God's wrath is His hatred and anger toward sin. God's judgment is the punishment sin deserves because it goes against God's righteousness. This puts us in a bad spot because as we just saw, **God is sinless, but we are not.** We are sinners because we go against God's standard of righteousness. Because God is creator, He gets to decide what is good and bad and what is right and wrong. God defined good and bad, right and wrong, by looking at Himself. God basically said that He would use His righteousness to define what it meant to be good or right and everything that was anti or against His righteousness would be bad or wrong. Our understanding and definition of what is good and what is bad is based on God's very being and nature.

Because of this, when we sin, our sin is not just against a random set of rules God pulled out of nothing. Our sin is not just in a vacuum where we don't affect or impact anyone else. Because goodness and righteousness is based on God's very being, every sin is a personal affront to who God is. This is why God hates sin. Sin says there is a way better than God. Sin says God isn't great. Sin says God's way is flawed. Sin is rebellion against who God is.

Not only does this help us understand God's wrath toward sin, but it helps us understand why God must judge sin. Because God is holy and because God is righteous, sin must be judged. Because God has defined sin as bad and going against Him and the standard He has set, sin has to be judged or punished. As a general rule, we all agree with this. If someone steals our stuff, we want them punished because they broke the law and they hurt us. If someone harms our family, we want them punished because they broke the law, and their actions were a personal offense to us. When we're the one's deserving of the punishment is when we have a problem with it.

This is why our sin is a big deal. Our sin is a personal offense against a holy, sinless God and that makes us guilty and deserving of judgment. Scripture confirms this.

Romans 1:18

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Romans 2:8

but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

Romans 6:23a

For the wages of sin is death

What we have earned for our sin and rebellion against God is punishment and that punishment is death. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve sinned and brought sin into the world. Their sin introduced physical death, but it also introduced spiritual death. All people die as a result of Adam and Eve's fall but also because of our own imperfection. Once we die physically, we face spiritual judgment or spiritual death. This is what we have earned for our sin. Because God is sinless and we are sinners who have rebelled against God's perfect righteousness, we deserve only God's judgment and His wrath.

Why do you think the punishment of sin is so great?

What does sin's punishment tell us about what our reaction to sin should be?

GOD REMOVES OUR GUILT AND SHOWS US HIS LOVE AND GRACE THROUGH WHO JESUS IS AND THROUGH WHAT JESUS DID.

It is a sad spot to be in to only deserve God's justice and not His love and forgiveness. Sadly, there is nothing we can do to be good enough or deserving of God's forgiveness. Nothing. We can't go to church enough. We can't give enough. We can't do enough. We can't be good enough. We are totally hopeless in ourselves to do anything to change our standing before God from guilty to innocent. For us to have any hope at all we would need someone else to do something to make us right with God.

Thankfully, God is the one that intercedes on our behalf. He is the one that did something to make us right with Him. In order to make us right with Him, God sent Jesus. Because God chose to love us, not based on who we are or what we could do, He sent Jesus to create a way for us to go from guilty to innocent.

Here's the great thing about God's love. It is totally selfless. God didn't love us because He needed us. He didn't love us because of what we could give Him. He didn't love us because He was lonely. God chose to love us simply because He is a God of love and He desired a relationship with us just because He wanted a relationship with us.

For that relationship to exist, God had to take care of our sin problem. Because God is sinless, He couldn't just sweep our sin under the rug. He had to do something to remove our guilt from us. He couldn't ignore our sin. He couldn't pretend it didn't happen. Our sin still had to be judged. Someone still had to be punished. God being holy and righteous and just meant that someone had to suffer the eternal punishment of sinning against an eternal God.

John 3:16

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

Enter Jesus. Jesus stepped out of Heaven and put on the flesh of His creation so that He could take our place. Our faith centers around who Jesus is and what Jesus did

for us. The person and work of Jesus is the foundation of our faith. To understand the gospel means we need to understand some things about who Jesus is and what He did.

How does knowing that God initiates and completes the work of reconciling us back to Himself affect your worship and obedience?

As part of the Trinity, Jesus is God.

It might be easy for some to assume that Jesus just shows up on the scene in Matthew chapter one, but in reality, Jesus has always been. The Bible presents God in a way that is totally unknown to us in any other way in creation. God exists as one God in three distinct persons. This is why we refer to God as triune, or as the Trinity. I know this can be hard to grasp, but it is one of the truths about God that remind us that He is different from us. Without getting too far into the weeds, the Bible tells us that the three persons of the Trinity are the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

Each person of the Trinity is fully God, with each having different ways they interact with humanity and different roles they fulfill within the Godhead (another term for Trinity). Because Jesus is God, He has always been. He existed before Matthew. He existed before creation. In fact, the Bible tells us that Jesus was active in the process of creation.

John 1:3

All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

As much as the story of Jesus is about Him on Earth as a man, we must remember that Jesus is God. Believing that Jesus is God is a necessity for our salvation. If Jesus were not God, if He were just a good teacher or a spiritual man, He would not have been able to take away our guilt and judgment from God. The claim that Jesus was God is not something that theologians and pastors have created over time. Jesus Himself claims equality with the Father.

John 10:30

I [Jesus] and the Father are one.

For there to be someone who could intercede for us and remove our guilt before God,

He would have to be equivalent with God. He would have to match His power and righteousness. To take the fullness of God's wrath, He would have to be as righteous as God. God knew the only one who could do that was Himself. So, the Father sends the Son to earth, to become a man, so He could be the sacrifice for men and women to take our punishment on Himself for our sin so our guilt could be forgiven and we could be made right before God.

What does it tell us about God that He stepped in to fix our problems caused by our sin?

The virgin birth sets Jesus apart from the rest of humanity.

When Jesus came to Earth, He didn't come the way the rest of us did. Yes, He was born from a woman and spent 9 months in her womb growing the way the rest of humanity does, but His birth was different. He wasn't born from the union of a man and a woman. Mary became pregnant miraculously by the power and will of God.

Luke 1:35

And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God."

Mary was a virgin when she became pregnant, and God caused a baby to form in her womb outside the normal way babies are born. Why did God do this like this and why is it important? One reason God did it like this was that Jesus was more than a normal man. Jesus is the God-man. He is 100% God while at the same time being 100% man. Much like the Trinity, this is a characteristic of Jesus that can be hard to grasp, but is still true.

The Bible presents Jesus with certain aspects of being God. He can know people's hearts and their thoughts. He can heal the sick and lame. He casts out demons and they know who He is. He can heal the dead. He can calm the stormy sea with just a word. None of these are things that man can do. They are the work and power of God who is ruler over all creation.

The Bible also presents Jesus with certain aspects of being a man. Jesus got tired. He slept. He got hungry and ate. He had to travel by walking around. Jesus wept over

people. He felt happy and He felt sad. Jesus bled. Jesus died.

Jesus had to be both God and man. He had to be fully God because only God could suffer the punishment and wrath to eradicate the sin and guilt for all who would believe. Mankind is not strong or powerful or righteous enough to satisfy God's wrath and justice toward sin. That is why punishment and Hell is eternal; because we can never satisfy the guilt we have incurred by offending and sinning against a perfectly holy, eternal God.

At the same time, He had to be man because His sacrifice was for mankind. He had to be a man because only man could pay the price that man earned. If He were not a man, then He could not be our substitute because He would not be one of us. Jesus had to be both God and man so He could be our substitute and take our punishment so we could be forgiven and made right with God.

Why is it important that Jesus is both God and man?

Jesus lived a perfect life so He could be a perfect sacrifice.

Where we are sinners, Jesus, being God, was perfect. We know He was perfect while He was in Heaven, but He was also perfect while He was on earth. He never sinned. He never disobeyed His parents. He never had an impure thought. He never lacked self-control. He never said something that He later regretted. He was perfect.

Jesus had to be perfect so He could be our substitute. In the Old Testament, the sacrifice was a major part of the Jewish religious life. When the Jewish person offered a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, the sacrifice was supposed to be flawless. It was to be a lamb with no spot or blemish and no ailments. It was to be something that had value to them. It was to be the first and best of their crop. The sacrifice had to be worthy of the One they were offering it to.

Jesus is the greatest sacrifice. All the sacrifices that occurred before Him in faith find their fulfillment in Him. We look back to Him in faith and on the sacrifice He provided for the forgiveness of our sins. For Jesus to be the sacrifice that the Father would accept on our behalf meant that He had to be flawless. He had to be sinless. He had to be perfect.

This is actually the second reason the virgin birth is important. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, Adam's sin was passed down to all of humanity. Just as Jesus acted as the substitute and representative for all who would believe when He suffered for us on the cross, Adam acted as the representative for all humanity when he sinned in the garden. Because of Adam, we are all born guilty. We are born with the inherited guilt of Adam and with a nature that is bent towards sin.

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned

1 Corinthians 15:21–22

*[21] For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.
[22] For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*

With Jesus being born miraculously through God's power seen in the virgin birth, it negated Adam's influence and means He was born without the guilt of Adam and without a sin nature. Jesus was not marred by sin the way the rest of humanity is. Passively and purposefully, Jesus was perfect so He could be our sacrifice and our substitute.

If Jesus wasn't perfect, could His death and resurrection provide salvation? Why?

Jesus died on the cross to suffer the judgement of our sin.

So, God, in His love for us, sent His Son, the second person of the Trinity, to Earth in the form of a man, to live a perfect life so He could be our sacrifice. Jesus came so He could die. Multiple times in the gospels (the story of Jesus), Jesus predicted His death.

Mark 8:31

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Matthew 17:22–23

[22] As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, [23] and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.” And they were greatly distressed.

John 10:17

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

The whole purpose for Jesus’ coming was so that He could die for us. When Jesus died on the cross, God poured out all of His justice and wrath towards the sin of everyone who would ever believe in Jesus so that whosoever places their faith in Jesus would never face that spiritual death but have life eternal in Christ. God exhausted His wrath on Christ so that anyone who places their faith in Christ will not have to face or experience God’s wrath or judgment.

2 Corinthians 5:20–21

[20] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [21] For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

According to these verses, we can be reconciled to God, or have our sins forgiven and be made innocent in His sight, because Jesus, who was sinless, became sin for us. This means in Christ, God placed all of our sin and guilt on Jesus and poured out every ounce of justice and wrath on Jesus, so that there is no judgment and wrath left for us. Because of that, when we place our faith in Christ, we become the righteousness of God. This means God takes Jesus’ perfect righteousness and clothes us in it. He took our moral checking account that was in the negative deeper than we could ever imagine because of our sin and He voided that out and added to our account all the righteousness of Jesus, which put us in the positive in a way that we could never exhaust it. In God’s eyes, when He looks at us, He only sees the perfect righteousness of Jesus.

What does it mean for us that God sees us through the lens of Jesus’ perfection?

Jesus rose from the dead to conquer sin and death.

Most people have come to place of understanding, if not accepting, that death is a part of life. Plants die. Our pets die. Our loved ones pass away. At some point, we will die. Death has become so common place and a part of life that sometimes I think we lose sight of the fact that death is a result of sin. In the creation account in Genesis 1, we are told that everything God made was good.

Genesis 1:31

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

Everything was good in the world until Adam and Eve sinned and then death entered. They had to leave the garden. God killed an animal to make clothes to cover their nakedness. They were promised that at some point their lives would end. Without someone to make them right with God again they would face a spiritual death as well. Without sin there would be no death. Sin and death are forever linked.

When Jesus died, He paid the price for our sin, but He didn't stop there. Three days later He rose from the dead. In doing so, He conquered sin and He conquered death. He canceled sin's guilt through His death and He canceled sin's power through His resurrection. He beat sin and sin's byproduct death by raising from the dead.

In the death and resurrection of Jesus, He provides salvation for all who will believe by wiping out sin's guilt and by conquering sin's power by beating death by rising from the dead.

What does it mean for us today that Jesus overcame sin's penalty and sin's power?

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus provides forgiveness and a new relationship with God for all who trust in Him.

When we accept who Jesus is and what He did as true and we entrust our lives to Him through faith and following Him, we will be forgiven and have a new relationship with God. We call this salvation. The Bible tells us that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 1:18) and that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9). We show our faith in Jesus when we surrender our lives to Him

because of who He is and what He has done. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus came to earth as the God-man. Jesus lived a perfect life to be our sacrifice. Jesus died and rose again to conquer sin and death to give us forgiveness and life.

When we place our faith and trust in Jesus for who He is and what He has done we are promised salvation. We are promised forgiveness. We are promised to be part of His family. We are adopted as sons and daughters into God's family. We are promised that He responds to us as our Father. We are promised that He hears our prayers. We are promised that God no longer sees our sin and that they are separated from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12).

When confronted with the truth of the gospel, that Jesus came, died, and rose again, every human has an opportunity to respond to God's love shown through Jesus. The Bible is clear that apart from Christ, our sin makes us enemies of God.

Romans 5:8–10

[8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [9] Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. [10] For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Being an enemy of God means that we are still under His wrath, which means we are headed towards the punishment of eternal death in Hell. The only way we can escape that guilt and judgment is through placing our faith in Jesus for who He is and what He has done. When we do this, our lives are changed. When we do this our eternity is changed. When we do this, we go from being the enemies of God to being His children.

How does focusing on the promises of salvation encourage us to love and follow God?

RECLAIMING THE GOSPEL

Unfortunately, throughout history, the church did not always hold to the gospel. The first 300 years of the church saw a lot of growth but also a lot of persecution. It was during the church's infancy that Christians were killed in the Colosseum and that Nero and Diocletian persecuted the church to great extents. In 313, with the Edict of Milan, under the reign of Constantine, Christianity became recognized as an official religion and in 330, it was made the official religion of Rome. While this brought peace to the church, it also began a downfall of the church that would last for 1200 years.

When the church became the official religion of Rome, there was no separation of church and state. In fact, the state and the church somewhat merged together so that the kings wanted the church on their side for power. If ever the state and the church disagreed, there were battles for authority with the state winning sometimes and the church winning others. During this time the Catholic church rose to power. Popes became more powerful than kings and the theology of the church took a nosedive. Instead of salvation by grace through faith in the person and work of Jesus, the church began to teach salvation by works and the necessity of human priests to intercede for man before God. While the church had wealth and power, it was a dark time in the history of the gospel.

This all began to change in the year 1517. It was then that a monk who had begun to lecture on scripture at the University of Wittenburg, Martin Luther, was having a crisis of faith that God used to bring the church back to the gospel. In 1505, at 21 years old, Martin Luther joined an Augustinian monastery. In his studies, he became overwhelmed by his own sinfulness. The Catholic church taught that he should do good works and confess his sin to find salvation, but he found he could never be good enough and that as much as he confessed, he wasn't sure that he was confessing it all.

As he battled with what it meant to be saved and if he could do enough to save himself, his mentor had him begin to teach scripture at the University of Wittenburg. As he began to study the book of Romans, he became entranced and freed by the doctrine of justification by faith. This simply means that we are saved by faith in Jesus, not by our good deeds. Luther began to spread his findings in Romans to the rest of the University and found others that became enamored by the idea, but it didn't make impact on the overall structure or theology of the church.

In an effort to reform the theology of the Catholic church, Martin Luther began to attack the practices that went against scripture through debate. One of the practices of the church he fought against was the selling of indulgences. According to the Catholic church, if you paid the church enough money, you could buy your loved one's out of purgatory (not a real place) and into heaven. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses, which were 95 arguments against the selling

of indulgences, on the door of the church of Wittenburg. This is often seen as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

For the next roughly 120 years, the Protest Reformation was a movement that sought to move the church from Catholicism back to the biblical roots. It was fought by men like Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, and Huldrych Zwingli, among others; and it had its foundation laid by the teachings of men like Jan Has and John Wycliffe. As the gospel was reclaimed and the church moved back to its biblical roots, there were 5 foundational truths that emerged from the Protestant Reformation that set a basis for biblical doctrine and explain the work of the gospel.

5 SOLAS

Sola is a Latin term that means “only” or “alone.” Each of the 5 Solas describe some aspect of our faith that is necessary and singular, meaning there’s not many options, just these. The 5 Solas are *Sola Scriptura* (scripture alone), *Solus Christus* (Christ alone), *Sola Fide* (faith alone), *Sola Gratia* (grace alone), and *Soli Deo Glori* (to the glory of God alone). These lay out a foundation and necessity for the Christian faith.

Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone)

Each of the solas is not only a declaration of our faith but a statement against what the church was at the time. The main church at the beginning of the Reformation was the Catholic Church. While it is safe to assume that God kept remnants of Christians and churches faithful to His word, the vast majority only knew of the Catholic church and the false gospel they proclaimed. One reason the Catholic church had gone off the rails was because they had allowed the church, specifically the Pope, and tradition to take superiority over scripture. Instead of allowing God’s word to be their guide and sole source of authority over their faith, they allowed church tradition and the words and teaching of the Pope to supersede the Bible.

Sola scriptura says that the Bible is our only authoritative, objective source of truth. If we desire to know who God is and what God desires and what God has done for us, it is only found through His word. The Bible is our only source of divine revelation. Not teachers. Not the church. Not men or women. Not dreams or visions. It is the Bible and the Bible alone. We believe this because God authored the Bible and commanded men to write His words.

2 Timothy 3:16–17

[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.

2 Peter 1:21

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

While books and Creeds and Confessions can be beneficial helps when it comes to learning the Bible and learning Biblical truth, they are only as effective as they are built on God’s word. Scripture must be our final authority on what we believe to be true about who God is and how God works.

Solus Christus (Christ Alone)

The Catholic church had exalted the role of the church to be necessary for salvation. From birth (baptism) to death (last rites, extreme unction) the church was the vessel through which salvation was delivered. The Bible does not teach us this. The Bible teaches that because God so loved His creation, He sent His Son to provide salvation for all who would believe in Him. Salvation is found through Christ and Christ alone.

Jesus completed the work of salvation through His death and resurrection. We might be tempted to think that something we do adds to or somehow provides for our salvation, but we'd be wrong. Our salvation does not rest on us one iota. It fully rests on the person and work of Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:21

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus died for us and took our sin and shame and guilt on Himself and in exchange, He clothes us with His righteousness. Our righteous or innocent standing before God is not dependent on us. It is not dependent on our abilities or our effort. It is 100% dependent on who Jesus is and what He did for us. That is what makes us right before God.

Sola Fide (Faith Alone)

As mentioned earlier, justification by faith alone was the truth from Romans that captivated Martin Luther. The idea that we are justified or made innocent before God through faith rather than works was foreign to the Catholic church. For them, salvation or justification was achieved through keeping the sacraments. Baptism was necessary for salvation. Confession was necessary for salvation. Being part of the Catholic church was necessary for salvation. Communion was necessary for salvation. The Catholic church added so much to salvation that it was no longer biblical salvation.

The Bible declares that we are saved by grace through faith alone. It is faith in the person and work of Jesus that gives us access to the salvation that He provides.

Ephesians 2:8–9

[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We are not saved by our church attendance or our knowledge or through any religious actions. We are not saved by being good people or saying the right words or keeping the right celebrations. We are saved by faith or trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Sola Gratia (Grace Alone)

Mankind is often described as people drowning at sea, fighting to stay afloat, and we just need the life preserver of salvation to help us out. It is almost as though salvation is 50/50 partnership between us and God. Unfortunately, this does not come close to painting the picture of where humanity stands apart from God. Not only does the Bible tell us that Adam's sin has made us all guilty (Romans 5:12-19) and that our own personal sin makes us guilty before God (Romans 3:10, Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23) but the Bible also says that our sin problem makes us not just guilty, but spiritually dead.

Ephesians 2:1

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins

Before salvation, our sin makes us spiritually deceased. We are not bobbing out in the sea hoping for help. We have drowned. We are dead, needing someone to breathe life into us. We are God's enemies, deserving only His judgment. We aren't decent people who just need a helping hand, we are rebels who are spiritually deceased, and we need someone to resurrect us.

Previously, we said God's grace was His goodness toward those who deserve only punishment because of our sin. It is by God's grace alone that we can be forgiven. It is by God's grace alone that we are brought from death to life. It is by God's grace alone that we are saved. It is not a combination of our work and God's work. We are not halfway good people who just need a little help. By nature we are not the friends of God, but the enemies of God (Romans 5:10, Colossians 1:21). We need God's grace if we are going to have any hope of going from death to life.

Ephesians 2:8-9

[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

It is by God's grace that we are saved and we respond to that grace by faith. That is how salvation works. It is not a partnership where God does part of the work and we do part. It is an act of God where He chose to love us by sending His Son to die for us and rise again to show His grace so that if we respond in faith, we are saved. This and this alone is how salvation works.

Soli Deo Gloria (To the Glory of God Alone)

God gives us His word to show us who He is and what He has done for us and He has provided for our salvation through Jesus for us to live lives that glorify and honor Him. The fifth sola means "to the glory of God alone." As believers, the focus and direction of our lives changes to glorify and honor God. His glory and honor is what drives us.

We don't live selfishly for ourselves. We live our lives to proclaim to the world that God is great.

1 Corinthians 10:31

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

If we boast in anything, let it be God's love shown through the person and work of Jesus. He is worthy of our lives. He is worthy of our worship. To live for God's glory means to live with Him being first and foremost in our lives.

SECURITY OF SALVATION

We have seen that salvation is a work of God that we respond to in faith. One of the great things about this is that it means our salvation is secure. This has been phrased many ways throughout the years. Security of salvation. Once saved always saved. Perseverance of the Saints. These all mean the same things. Because God made promises of life and forgiveness and eternity at salvation, and because God cannot lie, our eternity is secure in Christ.

There are many ways that the Bible confirms for us that our salvation is secure. One, because it is a work of God and not a work of man, we cannot lose what we did not earn. If we earned our salvation, it would be ours to lose or even walk away from, but since we did none of the work of salvation, we cannot lose what we did not earn.

Also, inherent in the promises of God is that the life He provides us is eternal life.

John 3:16

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

John 10:28

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

For life promised and given to be eternal, it has to last for an eternity. If we are promised eternal life and then have it taken away from us or even if we were able to walk away from it, it would no longer be eternal, and God would not have kept His promises.

Another way we know our salvation is secure is by the promises God has made about our salvation being completed or fulfilled. When we place our faith in Christ, our whole salvation is promised to us but only partly delivered. We experience a new relationship with God through Christ. We experience forgiveness of sin. We receive the Holy Spirit who works in our lives. There are a ton of promises that we experience at the moment of salvation and as we grow in our faith, but there are some that we won't experience until we get to Heaven. We will be made whole when we get to Heaven. We will have bodies that are no longer marred by sin when we get to Heaven. We will see Jesus face-to-face when we get to Heaven. There are some aspects of our salvation that we will not experience until our life on earth is done.

The term for this concept is already, not yet. God has already promised our full salvation and from God's perspective, it is a done deal. It is already completed, fulfilled, and guaranteed even if we have not yet fully realized all of it. The promises

of God are solid because they are made by God. Because God exists outside of time, His promises are already fully fulfilled, even if we are still waiting to experience the total fulfillment of them.

In His word, God has promised to fulfill these promises of our salvation.

Philippians 1:6

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Jude 24

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,

What God has promised and what God has started He will complete.

Not only has God promised to complete what He started and fulfill His promises made to us, but He has also sealed us with the Holy Spirit. This means that one of the reasons God gave us the Holy Spirit upon salvation was to be our guarantee that God will carry out His promises. The seal was used by a king or authority to show guarantee to those that read his words that he stood behind them and that he would complete them. The Holy Spirit is our seal that says God will fulfill His promises.

Ephesians 1:13–14

[13] In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 4:30

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

These verses tell us that God has sealed us for when our salvation is completed.

On top of God's promises that He has guaranteed us with His seal, God has made promises that no one can separate us from His love or snatch us from His hands.

John 10:27–29

[27] My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. [28] I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. [29] My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Romans 8:38–39

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

There is nothing that can separate us from God's love. There is nothing that can cancel out God's promise of salvation once He has made it and applied it to us through faith.

PUSHING BACK ON SECURITY

One of the arguments against the security of the believer goes something like this. "If our salvation is secure and it's not something we can lose, then what is to keep someone from just living how they want to knowing that they'll still go to Heaven?" While this is a logical question, it is one that is answered in scripture.

The Bible is clear that grace is never an excuse for sin. In Romans chapters 4 and 5, Paul talks about justification by faith in Christ. He then starts chapter 6 cutting off the very question of, "If I'm forgiven, why don't I just keep on sinning?"

Romans 6:1–2, 6-7, 12-14

[1] What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? [2] By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ... [6] We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. [7] For one who has died has been set free from sin. ... [12] Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. [13] Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. [14] For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Paul says that by no means should we continue in sin just because there is grace. He then continues this by saying we should fight against sin because it can still enslave us and we should strive to be slaves to righteousness, not sin.

Romans 6:15–18

[15] What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! [16] Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? [17] But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, [18] and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

The heart of the believer is a heart for righteousness. The heart of the believer is to live for Christ and glorify Him. The heart of the believer is to love the things that God loves and God does not love sin. We strive for righteousness. We strive for holiness. Grace is never an excuse to sin. Are we perfect? No. Do we still struggle with sin and temptation? Yes. But is that an excuse or a freedom to engage in sin without conviction or confession or repentance? Absolutely not.

Paul closes out the book of 2 Corinthians by challenging the church to deal with the sin in their midst. In the context of calling them to deal with their sin, he challenges them to examine their hearts to see if their faith is real or if they are just playing along.

2 Corinthians 13:5

[5] Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

The idea that Paul is presenting is that if you can go about sinning and not care and not be dealing with conviction, then that is evidence that your faith is not real. He's not saying that struggling with sin means we aren't saved. We all deal with our own sin and temptation. He is saying that if you can live a lifestyle of sin and you aren't convicted and you aren't fighting and you aren't confessing, the fruit and evidence says that you might not be a Christian.

John says the same thing in **1 John 1:5–10**.

[5] This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. [6] If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. [7] But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. [8] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [10] If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

John says that we should walk in the light as He is in the light. The idea of walking here doesn't mean perfection, but that the pattern and habit and pursuit of our lives should be striving to obey and follow Jesus. If the pattern of our lives is to walk in sin (darkness) and we are not fighting and confessing, John says we don't have fellowship with God. He says that if we sin and we confess, God will forgive us but if we ignore our sin or justify our sin by saying we have none, then we make God out to be a liar.

Once a person places their faith in Christ, their salvation is secure. The salvation shows itself in a life that is being changed. The Christian should never make excuses for

our sin but fight against it and confess it and repent of it, knowing that God always forgives. Eternal security is not an excuse to sin, but a guarantee that we will be rescued from sin.

THE BIBLE

Outside of our personal relationship with Jesus (achieved through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ), the Bible might be our greatest tool and blessing as believers. The Bible is God's word given to us so that we may know more about who God is and how we are to live so that we might glorify Him. For Christians, the Bible is our only holy book, and we would say it is the ONLY holy book that has come from God for His people.

WHY THE BIBLE CAN BE TRUSTED

Now, this might bring up the question of, "How can we be sure the Bible is God's word?" Most, if not all, major world religions have some form of book or books that they claim comes from their god and is authoritative for faith and life. Islam has the Qur'an. Mormonism has the Book of Mormon. Sikhism has The Adi Granth. Hinduism has The Vedas. On and on it goes. So, if all these different religions claim to have a holy book, how do we know the Bible is THE holy book and why should we trust it to teach us who God is and how to live a life that pleases Him? How can we be certain the Bible and the Bible alone is the inspired and authoritative word of God?

WE TAKE IT BY FAITH.

Anytime God is involved, faith is involved, as it takes faith to please God and trust God. While there is evidence that backs up the truth that the Bible is God's word, because God is its author, we have to accept and believe by faith that the Bible is the authoritative word of God. In the book of Genesis, we see the story of how God created the Heavens and the Earth, and in **Hebrews 11:3**, we are told, *"By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible."* The Bible tells us the God created the world and by faith we believe what the Bible says to be true. We have to believe by faith that what the Bible tells us is true. We cannot go out and verify every story of the Bible, so we must accept by faith that it is God's word.

What are some reasons it is necessary that we believe the Bible by faith?

We believe the Bible's internal evidence.

One of the reasons we believe the Bible is God's word is because that is the Bible's declaration about itself. The Bible's internal testimony is that it is God's word.

2 Timothy 3:16–17

[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.

2 Peter 1:20–21

[20] knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. [21] For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

There are some that would try to argue that internal evidence shouldn't be counted but that's simply not true. Sometimes, internal evidence can be some of the simplest and most effective at proving something to be true. What is the easiest way for someone to prove you live at your house? Sure, they could go to the courthouse and pull the deed or find a lease agreement as external evidence, but the easiest way would be to go to your house and open the door. They would find you living in your house. They would find pictures of you and your family on the walls. They would find mail addressed to you. All the internal evidence would declare that you live there, even without external evidence to back it up.

When we look at the internal evidence of the Bible, its claims about itself, like in the verses above, serve as internal evidence but that is not all. The fact that the Bible has no contradictions is internal evidence. The fulfilled prophecies are internal evidence of the Bible's truthfulness. The Bible is full of internal evidence that validates its claim of being God's word.

How does faith working along with the internal evidence of the Bible encourage us to trust it as God's word?

THE UNITY OF THE BIBLE SHOWS US ITS UNIQUENESS AND CONSISTENCY.

Some religious works in other religions have all been written by one person. Joseph Smith wrote the book of Mormon. Muhammed wrote the Qur'an. Both of these books have flaws and major discrepancies, even though only one man wrote each. In the Bible, we have 66 books, written over a span of 2000 years, by 40 different authors, on three different continents and in 3 different languages. Even with all of these seeming "obstacles", the Bible has no contradictions, no discrepancies, and no falsehoods. As we have seen, this is because the Bible ultimately has one ultimate author, God Himself.

How does the unity or cohesiveness of the Bible give us assurance that it is true?

GOD USING THE BIBLE TO WORK IN OUR LIVES PROVES IT IS GOD'S WORD.

One of the claims the Bible makes about itself is that God uses the Bible to work in our hearts.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

When you read the Bible and it convicts you of sin, that is evidence that God is speaking and working through it, which is evidence that it is God's word. When you read the Bible and it encourages you, that is evidence that it is God's word. When the Bible gives you understanding of who God is and your faith is strengthened, that is evidence that it is God's word. The fact that God does speak and work through the Bible is another piece of evidence that it is God's word.

What are some ways you've experienced God work in your life through His word?

Not only is there internal evidence that tells us the Bible can be trusted, but there is **external evidence** as well. While external evidence is not required to believe the Bible is God's word, it can give extra encouragement to our faith to trust that the Bible we have is God's word protected throughout time and given to us so that we may know and trust Him more. It is not essential, it is simply the cherry on top of the sundae that is the Bible.

THE CANONIZATION OF THE BIBLE ENCOURAGES US TO TRUST IT.

While there is much external evidence that is historical and literary and archeological that helps back up the internal evidence that the Bible is God's word (*The Case for Faith* by Lee Strobel is a good starting point), one of the most beneficial pieces of external evidence is to look at how the Bible was put together. Not only is this solid external evidence, but it helps us know why we have the Bible we have, and it can encourage us in our faith that God has given us His word.

The **canon of scripture** is simply the collection of 66 divinely inspired books that make up the Bible. Most discussion about canonization (the process of figuring out which books are from God, and which are not) revolves around the New Testament. Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, was written in 435 BC and there is not much debate on which Old Testament books are considered valid, and which are not. The only real debate revolves around the Apocrypha, which Catholics accept, and Protestants do not. Most Jewish scholars and teachers view the Apocrypha as beneficial historical writings, but not on the level of scripture.

Regarding the New Testament, once Paul or Peter or John or Luke would write a letter (or book of the Bible), it would be passed around from church to church and region to region.

Colossians 4:16

And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

At the very beginning of Christianity there was an effort to differentiate real letters from real apostles that were divinely inspired from counterfeits and fakes. One of the ways that was done was by seeing which books the early church recognized as authentic. Some of these early church fathers knew the apostles or were disciplined by the apostles, so they would be more intimately aware of which letters were authentic, and which were not.

In AD 95, Clement of Rome listed 8 books we have in our New Testament. In AD 108, Polycarp, who was a disciple of John, recognized 15 of our New Testament books. In the hundred or so years after Jesus ascended into Heaven, different church fathers

would list books they believed to be divinely inspired. In the late 300's, AD 393 and AD 397, the Councils of Hippo and Carthage both recognized the 27 books we have in the New Testament as the only books we should acknowledge as God's word.

This brings up the question of how they made this decision. Did they pick books at random? Did they draw straws? Did they just pick the one's they liked the most? No, no, and no. There were qualifications for which books were selected to be part of the New Testament canon.

The first qualification was that it was apostolic in origin. This means it was either written by an apostle or under the authority of an apostle. Paul was an apostle, so the books bearing his name as author fit this criteria. Luke was not an apostle but spent much time with Paul and the apostles recording their stories and Paul's journeys. Mark was not an apostle, but his gospel is Peter's telling of the Gospel. James was not an apostle, but he was a brother of Jesus and the leader of the church in Jerusalem and would have had the Apostles stamp of approval.

This brings up the question of what validated someone as an apostle? There were three main questions that needed to be answered for this. **The first question was, *had they been taught by Jesus?*** In **Acts 1:21–22**, we see the disciples trying to figure out who would replace Judas, who had betrayed Jesus and committed suicide. One of the qualifications they look for is someone who had been with them throughout Jesus' ministry and heard the things He taught and saw the things He did.

[21] So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, [22] beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection."

The second question that needed to be answered to validate someone as an apostle was *had they seen Jesus post resurrection?* **The third question** was, *did the early church as a whole recognize them as apostles?* In Galatians 1, as Paul defends his apostleship, his point is proven by answering these questions. First, he says that he did not receive his understanding of the gospel through man, but from Christ.

Galatians 1:11–12

[11] For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. [12] For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul later says in v15 and 16 that after his salvation experience, he went away into Arabia for 3 years to be taught through this revelation of Jesus Christ. In a miraculous, post resurrection way, Paul was discipled by Jesus for three years before he began his

ministry. This was not the only time Paul saw Jesus after His resurrection. In Acts 9, on his way to Damascus, Paul is blinded by Jesus' glory. So, Paul was taught by Jesus, he saw Jesus after His resurrection on two recorded occasions, and he was recognized by the early church as an apostle.

The second qualification for if a book was considered part of the canon was if it was recognized by the early church as God's word. Did the earliest churches, those whose timeline were closest to the letters being written, see these letters as being authoritative and from God? Writings from early church leaders show that they recognized a difference in their own writings and the writings of the apostles. Ignatius, an early church father, wrote in AD 110, "I do not order you as did Peter and Paul; they were apostles, I am a convict; they were free, I am even until now a slave." Ignatius recognized the authority and specialness of Peter and Paul and the things they wrote, and he differentiated between his writings and theirs.

The third qualification was does the teaching of the writing match what the apostles taught when they were alive, and did it fit with the rest of scripture?

Now, this is partly something that can only be answered by looking at the writings of early church fathers. Did they notice any discrepancies between the written words of Paul and the spoken words of Paul. This is why some of those lists of books the early church fathers mentioned are important. These are people who could have heard the teachings of the apostles either first or second hand, so when they mentioned a book or quoted something, it validates that what Peter and Paul wrote, they also spoke.

Not only did they have to make sure it matched up with the apostle's teachings, but they had to make sure if they included James, that it didn't contradict Romans. They had to scour and study the letters to make sure there were no contradictions in things taught in the letters.

The fourth qualification was to make sure it fit the timeline of when the apostles were alive. Revelation was the last book of the Bible written. It was probably written somewhere between AD 90 and AD 95 with John, the last apostle to die, dying around AD 99. This is the cutoff for when a book could be written. Anything written after AD 99 could not be written by an apostle or under their authority.

Books that did not meet these qualifications were not included in what we have as the New Testament. Take the Gospel of Thomas for example. The Gospel of Thomas was allegedly written by the disciple, Thomas. Here are some of the problems with this letter some say was written by the disciple Thomas. First, it was written in the second century. This means it was written after the AD 99 cutoff and could not have been written by Thomas or under his authority; so, it misses the first and fourth qualification. The Gospel of Thomas is also disqualified by its unbiblical teachings. According to the Gospel of Thomas, Simon Peter said to them: "Let Mary go away from us, for women

are not worthy of life.” Jesus responded, “Lo, I shall lead her, so that I may make her a male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself a male will enter the kingdom of heaven.” This obviously does not line up with the rest of scripture, so it misses out on the third qualification. Because it does not line up with these qualifications, it was not considered a valid letter that was divinely inspired by God.

Those who crafted the canon of scripture used these guidelines to shape the books allowed in the New Testament. On top of that, we have to recognize that God, in His sovereignty, surely oversaw the gathering of these books. Since God authored and gave us His word and since God is sovereign and king over all things, by faith we can believe that God has protected His word and given us what He has wanted us to have for our benefit and so we can know Him.

THE MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE GIVES US ADDED ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE BIBLE.

Manuscript evidence is the number of copies we have of the original writings that let us know what the original said. What that means is that we don't have any of the original letters that Paul or Peter or John wrote, but we have copies that have been reproduced. Now, this is not something that should cause us to question the Bible or something that should shake our faith. Any work of antiquity (really old books) is put together by looking at the oldest manuscripts or copies that are available. Very rarely, if ever, does the original exist. We don't have original copies of the *Iliad* by Homer. We don't have the original copies of the teachings of Plato or Aristotle. Overtime these originals have been lost or destroyed.

The way we know what was written in the past is by looking at copies that have been reproduced. The more copies you have and the older they are, the better. The more copies you have that you can compare to each other, the more positive you can be of what was originally written. Also, the closer in time to the originals the copies were made, the more positive you can be they are authentic.

With all of that said, let's look at a few works of antiquity and see how they stack up with the evidence we have for the New Testament. Take the works of Plato for example. The earliest copies we have of Plato are from 1300 years after Plato originally wrote and we have about 200 copies. So, when people study the works of Plato, they are studying writings that were gathered by looking at these 200 copies, seeing if there are any discrepancies, putting more weight on the older copies, and then compiling them into a comprehensive or modern format so people can read Plato. With the *Iliad* by Homer, there are around 1800 copies (second most of the works of antiquity), with the earliest copy being from 400 years after Homer first wrote.

Here's how the Bible stacks up and compares to these works. We have over 5800 copies of the books of the New Testament, more than any other work of antiquity by a long shot, and the earliest copies can be dated 50 years after the originals were written. There is far more evidence for the New Testament than any other ancient writing. On top of that, the consistency between the copies holds an accuracy of 99.5%. Most of the discrepancies are articles here and there and the ending of Mark. No foundational doctrine is influenced by these discrepancies. Once again, this should encourage us that the Bible we have is what was written by the apostles. It should also encourage us to see God's hand protecting His word so we know we have the message He has given.

How does the canonization process and the manuscript evidence encourage your faith in the authenticity of God's word?

THE METANARRATIVE OF SCRIPTURE GIVES US CONFIDENCE IN ITS PURPOSE.

The idea of the metanarrative of the Bible means that the Bible is ultimately one story. The metanarrative is the overarching storyline or the big picture storyline that the whole Bible fits in to. Since the Bible is made up of 66 books, it can be easy to see the Bible as a collection of works or stories instead of one big story, but the Bible is one big story that all 66 books of the Bible fit into. The most common way the story of the Bible is broken down is into the themes of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.

Creation starts in Genesis. It tells of God creating the world and mankind for His pleasure. We were not created out of need or desperation but out of love. God created mankind to have a relationship with Him. He created us to know Him. We see this personified with Adam and Eve in the garden. After they sinned, they hide when God came to walk with them in the garden.

Genesis 3:8

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Before Adam and Eve sinned, they experienced a physical closeness to God that we won't know until we get to Heaven. They had this relationship because it is what they

were created for; to know God and to love God. They were created to worship God. Creation tells us that God desires a relationship with us and that our purpose in life is wrapped up in knowing and following Him. Anytime we see people worshipping in scripture and doing what they were created for, we see the theme of creation. Anytime we see God drawing people to Himself, which is where we find our purpose, we see the theme of creation.

How do we see the theme of creation throughout the Bible story?

The Fall also happens in Genesis. In fact, we see the Fall occur just three chapters into the story of the Bible. Genesis 3 tells us of Adam and Eve listening to the lies of the serpent and doing the one thing God had commanded them not to, they ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In that moment, everything changes. Mankind is separated from God, and they are removed from the Garden of Eden. Because of their sin, death enters the world. The New Testament teaches us that the guilt and death of Adam's sin transfers to everyone who follows in his lineage, so, everyone. The Fall is what makes us sinners. Yes, we sin ourselves, but we are also sinful and imperfect because of Adam's sin.

The Fall creates the conflict in the story of the Bible. There is now conflict between God and His creation instead of peace and unity. Humanity is now in rebellion against God. The Bible tells us that we are the enemies of God because of our sin. The Fall introduces the conflict of the story, but it also introduces the goal of the story. The goal of the story of the Bible is God working and moving to bring His people back to Himself. Sin separated us from God but in the story of the Bible, God works in His sovereignty throughout history to draw His people back to Himself. The Fall tells us we are people separated from God because of our sin.

How do we see the theme of the Fall throughout the Bible story?

We see Creation and the Fall play out throughout the rest of the Old Testament. We see people like Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Deborah, Moses and a host of others seek

after God. We see the desire and pursuit of a relationship with God throughout God's word. We even see God working to draw His people to Himself. He uses Abraham as the Father of the Jews to make a nation for Himself. He gives Moses the Law so His people can follow Him, but time and time again we see the Fall in Israel's rebellion against God and in their choice to pursue the idolatry of the surrounding nations.

Throughout the Old Testament we also see the theme of **Redemption**. Within the Law given to Moses, not only do you have a moral, civil, and religious code for Israel to follow, but you also have the establishment of the sacrificial system. While we see hints of this in Genesis 3 when God kills an animal to make clothes for Adam and Eve and in God calling Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice and the Israelites putting the blood on the doorpost at the Passover, it isn't until we get to the Law that we see it laid out for us. The sacrificial system was set up for the people of Israel to offer up sacrifices for their sin. Because sin brings death as its ultimate punishment, there must be a death for sin to be forgiven. This is why **Hebrews 9:22** tells us...

Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

The sacrificial system called for the people to offer the best they had for a sacrifice to God, in faith that God would receive the sacrifice made in obedience with repentant hearts and forgive their sins. The thing about the Old Testament sacrificial system is that it was insufficient. This isn't because God messed up. No, the sacrificial system of the Old Testament was meant as a place holder until the true sacrifice was offered. Hebrews 10 calls the Law a shadow of what is to come and says that it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. The Old Testament sacrificial system was established to pave the way for what Jesus was coming to do.

When Jesus came, He came to die. He came to live a perfect life so He could be the perfect, spotless sacrifice. He came so that He could die in our place. He came so that in His death and resurrection, He could redeem us or buy us back from the slavery of sin. When Jesus died, He took on the wrath and justice of God for everyone who had come before who had believed in the promises of God by faith and all who would come after who would look back on who Jesus is and what Jesus had done and believed in faith and repentance. If Creation is the beginning of the story and the Fall contains the conflict of the story, then Redemption is the heart and climax of the story. Since the Fall, Redemption is what God was moving creation toward, culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus for God to buy a people back to Himself. Sin had made us slaves, but God adopted us as sons and daughters through Jesus.

How do we see the theme of redemption throughout the Bible story?

The story ends with **Restoration**. This is when God makes all things new again. This is when our salvation is fulfilled. Ever since sin marred everything God had made good at creation, He has been working through Redemption to restore everything back to how it was supposed to be. In Restoration, we are made new. In Restoration, we are given new bodies no longer tainted by sin. In Restoration we are given homes in the New Earth that is no longer groaning under the strain of sin. In Restoration, our relationship with God is restored to being even better than what Adam and Eve had. God is working to restore to us what sin had broken and to restore us fully back to Himself.

How do we see the theme of restoration throughout the Bible story?

WHY STUDY THE BIBLE?

Now that we have a basic understanding of why the Bible can be trusted, let's ask the question, "Why should I study the Bible?" It is one thing to believe the Bible is trustworthy, it is another thing to believe that we should read, study, and listen to the Bible. As a Christian, why should I allow the things revealed in scripture to impact who I am? Why don't I just live the way I think and feel is best? Why is it important that I commit my life to the study of God's word?

WE STUDY THE BIBLE BECAUSE IT IS THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD.

The Bible being inspired means that even though it was written down by men, it has its original source from God. **2 Timothy 3:16** tells us that the Bible is inspired or breathed out by God.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...

This means that God is the one that has spoken the content of the Bible. Just like the words you say are breathed out by you, the Bible is breathed out, or spoken, by God. So, if God spoke or breathed out His word, how did we get it in written form? **2 Peter 1:20–21** tells us that God spoke to men who wrote down His words.

[20] knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. [21] For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit carried God's word to men who recorded it so we would have a written form of God's word. In His sovereignty, God used men in their personality and experiences and knowledge to record the message He wanted us to have. Though each man wrote in their own understanding and words, what they wrote was inspired and given to them and breathed out by God.

GENERAL REVELATION AND SPECIFIC REVELATION

Believing and understanding the inspiration of scripture is important because it is one of the primary ways God has revealed Himself to mankind. There are two ways we categorize God's revelation of Himself to mankind; General Revelation and Specific Revelation (also called Special Revelation or Particular Revelation).

General Revelation is God's revealing of Himself to all mankind. There are two ways we see God's general revelation spelled out in scripture. First, God has revealed Himself through creation. There are verses like **Psalms 19:1** that tell us creation is

proclaiming the glory of its Creator.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

This means that the beauty of a sunrise and the majesty of the mountains and the peacefulness of the oceans and the vastness of space are proclaiming God's handiwork. The beauty of this creation tells us just how incredible our God is.

There are also verses like **Romans 1:19–20** that tell us creation itself is enough for us to understand that there must be a creator.

[19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Creation declares there must be a creator. God inspired Paul to write these words that declare creation reveals God's power and divinity. God has revealed enough of Himself through creation that He says people have no excuse to say, "Well, I didn't know God existed." God's general revelation through creation is enough to show and prove to all mankind that God is real and that He is powerful.

The second way we see God's general revelation is through mankind's conscience. **Romans 2:14–15** lays out a basic understanding of humanity having a moral understanding of right and wrong.

[14] For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. [15] They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them...

These verses tell us that even without the Law, God's commandments given to the Israelites in the Old Testament that spell out for us God's definition of righteousness and obedience, people have a base understanding of good and bad through God writing the law on their hearts in the form of a conscience. Having a conscience doesn't make us innocent or mean we always follow it, but it does reveal to us when we have done something bad or wrong. There are things all humans understand to be good and right and bad and wrong because God has given us a natural understanding of His righteousness. This common understanding is another way God has revealed Himself to us. That we have a common understanding of right and wrong is further general proof there must be a righteous creator.

How does General Revelation remove any excuses people might make of not knowing there is a God to be accountable to?

While general revelation is enough for us to know that God exists, it is not enough for salvation. That is why we need specific revelation. **Specific Revelation** is God revealing more about who He is and what He desires in a more definitive and direct sense. Where General Revelation is enough for humanity to know that God exists and to see some of His attributes, Specific Revelation is where God more thoroughly reveals who He is and what it means for us to know Him and love Him and follow Him. God has given us His Specific Revelation in two forms, Jesus and the Bible.

Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Jesus is God revealing Himself to mankind.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Jesus was the exact representation of God's nature and power and glory in human form. Jesus came and lived and taught and died and rose again to show God's power, strength, wisdom, righteousness, justice, wrath, love, grace, and mercy to the world around Him. As we read about Jesus in the Bible, we learn about who God the Father is by seeing Jesus the Son.

The Bible is the other way God has revealed Himself to mankind. The Bible is God's self-revelation of Himself to us. It is through the Bible that God has shown us who He is. It is where we learn about God's love for us shown through Jesus. It is where we learn the specifics of creation and God's power and His standard of righteousness. The Bible is truth. It is God's words breathed out and recorded by men who were led by the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.

Because God spoke His word, He still speaks through His word. **Hebrews 4:12** tells us that God uses the Bible to cut through our thoughts and desires to lead us closer to Him.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Romans 10:17 teaches us that our faith in Jesus begins by hearing God's word.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

While God has revealed Himself in essence through creation and conscience, it is through His word that He speaks to draw us to Himself and to build faith based on His Specific Revelation.

In Jesus and the Bible, we have the word made flesh and God's word breathed out for us. Jesus had human parents and was birthed when Mary was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit. The Bible has human authors and was birthed when God through the Holy Spirit led men to write. Jesus was without sin or error and the Bible is without falsehood and without error or mistake.

What are the benefits of God's specific revelation compared to His general revelation?

WE STUDY THE BIBLE BECAUSE IT IS THE INERRANT WORD OF GOD.

Inerrant or inerrancy simply means without error. Another term people use is infallible. The inerrancy of scripture means that in the original manuscripts, scripture has zero flaws or error. It doesn't teach anything that is untrue, and it has no errors. The Bible always declares what is true and it has no contradictions.

When it comes to the Bible, inerrancy is necessary for belief. If we begin to doubt the inerrancy of scripture it brings up huge questions in our faith. If the Bible is God's word and it is God breathed and it has errors, then God is flawed. He would no longer be perfect or sinless. In fact, if the Bible is God's word and it is flawed, then God is flawed, and He is no longer God. Along these same lines, if the Bible as God's word is flawed, then we have to question if God can be trusted. If He lies or lacks knowledge in what He has given us, why should we trust Him in other areas of life.

If the Bible is not inerrant and it has flaws, it throws all of our faith into chaos. If we argue that it is just a few small stories like creation or Adam and Eve that cause us to doubt the Bible's truthfulness, then how can we be sure it is true when it talks about the cross and the resurrection. When we question the veracity or truthfulness of one part of God's word, it opens the door for everything else in God's word to be questioned. Also, when we doubt the truthfulness of God's word, we end up exalting our own

understanding and knowledge above God's word, and since the Bible is God breathed, we exalt ourselves above God. We allow our pride to win out over faith.

How would it affect your faith if God's word had errors?

WE STUDY THE BIBLE BECAUSE IT IS THE AUTHORITATIVE WORD OF GOD.

The authority of scripture means that God's word has the credentials to speak on every topic it addresses because of who its author is. When the Bible tells us who God is, it has the authority to define God's attributes. When the Bible speaks on creation, it has the authority to say this is how creation happened. When the Bible speaks on salvation, it has the authority to define Jesus as the ONLY way to salvation. When the Bible speaks on righteousness, it has the authority to define what is good and right and to label those who do not follow this righteousness as sinners.

The Bible has authority because of who its author is. Because God is creator and the one who spoke scripture, the Bible carries His authority with it. When I would get home from school, most days my dad would have left a note with a list of chores to get done before he and my mom got home. That note had the same authority as if he had spoken those words to me himself. To disobey or disregard the note was to disobey him. It is the same with the Bible. Because God is its author and God has given it authority, to disregard and disobey the Bible's commands and truth is to disobey God.

One of the more practical ways we see the Bible's authority is in its authority to guide our lives and define our beliefs. The Bible should be our sole source of doctrine and theology. Everything we believe should be filtered through God's word and anything that does not line up with God's word should be disregarded. The Bible has the authority to define our beliefs but also our lifestyle. Our understanding of good and bad, right and wrong, emanates from God's word, not our feelings or our thoughts or our culture. God's word teaches us what it means to be righteous and to live a life that follows and is obedient to God.

Why is it important that we recognize the authority God's word has over our lives?

Why is it important that we recognize the authority God's word has in our lives over the authority other influences have over our lives (culture, politics, friends, social media, etc)?

WE STUDY THE BIBLE BECAUSE IT IS NECESSARY.

The Bible is necessary. It is necessary for us to understand the gospel. It is necessary for us to maintain a walk with God. It is necessary for our spiritual maturity. It is necessary for us to know God's will. We have seen that God has revealed Himself through creation and conscience, so the Bible is not necessary to know that God exists, but to know about Jesus and salvation and what it means to walk with God, we need the Bible.

THE BIBLE IS NECESSARY FOR UNDERSTANDING AND SPREADING THE GOSPEL.

Romans 10:14–17 spells out for us the necessity of the Bible for the sharing and spreading of the gospel

[14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? [15] And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" [16] But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" [17] So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

The Bible is necessary for us to understand the gospel. While God reveals His

existence and power and some of His attributes, the gospel is revealed through His word. It is in the Bible that we learn of God's love for us shown through His Son. It is in the Bible that we understand that Jesus came, died, and rose again to provide the way of salvation. It is through the Bible that we learn that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord can and will be saved. Scripture is necessary for us to understand the gospel. In that sense, scripture is necessary for our salvation. In the above passage, Paul asks the question, "*How can they believe in whom they have not heard?*" Without the Bible, we do not know of who Jesus is or what He came to do.

Our testimonies of our salvation and God's working are great tools to point to how God changes lives, but our testimonies do not speak louder than God's word. While our testimonies are good, we are reminded in Romans 10 that *faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ*. God's word is powerful, because its author speaks through it, and as God speaks through His word, He works to draw people to Himself.

What are the benefits of sharing the gospel with scripture versus just using our testimony?

THE BIBLE IS NECESSARY FOR OUR SPIRITUAL MATURITY AND SANCTIFICATION.

Once we have responded to the gospel in faith, we are put on the path of sanctification. Sanctification is the process where we begin to follow and obey God more and fight against our sin more and more. If we are going to grow in our faith and continue in sanctification, the Bible is a necessary part of that process.

When we talk about the Bible being necessary for our sanctification and maturity, there are multiple scriptures that give us insight into this. **John 17:17** tells us that sanctification occurs in part through the truth of God's word.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

When Jesus is being tempted in the wilderness, He quotes the book of Deuteronomy and says this about God's word.

Matthew 4:4

But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

John says in chapter 14 and in the book of 1 John that our love for God is tied to our obedience.

John 14:23–24

[23] Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. [24] Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

1 John 5:3

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

If we love God, we will obey His word. If we want to be spiritually nourished, we will spend time in God's word. If we want to grow spiritually in sanctification, we will do so according to God's word. The Bible is necessary for the life of the believer.

How effective will we be at following Jesus if we do not spend time in His word or base our beliefs off of His word?

WE STUDY THE BIBLE BECAUSE IT IS SUFFICIENT.

The sufficiency of scripture means the Bible contains all God has chosen for us to have to reveal Himself and His will and that scripture provides all the information we need to know of salvation, to trust God and to obey Him. We do not need any other source to define for us who God is or what Jesus has done for us or for how we are to follow Him.

While books and commentaries and sermons are beneficial to our faith and can help us understand the truth of scripture, they are not necessary to add to anything the Bible has to say. If any author or preacher adds to the Bible or claims a new revelation, they are going against the sufficiency of scripture. The same goes for those seeking some kind of experience to validate their faith. The truth revealed in scripture is greater than religious or emotional experiences. The Bible tells us **in 2 Timothy 3:16–17** that the

Bible is sufficient in and of itself for us to know God, please God, and grow in God.

[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.

If we doubt the sufficiency of scripture, we face the temptation of adding to scripture or taking away from scripture. The Bible gives us plenty of warnings against this.

Deuteronomy 4:2

You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.

Proverbs 30:5–6

[5] Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. [6] Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.

Revelation 22:18–19

[18] I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, [19] and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

God's word is enough. Authors and preachers we listen to should always take us back to the truths of God's word. We do not need added visions or thoughts that step outside of God's revealed truth. Scripture is sufficient.

What are some ideas or sources that try to challenge the Bible's sufficiency?

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

When it comes to studying the Bible, is there a right way and a wrong way to study the Bible? Does everyone come to the Bible with whatever preconceived notions they may have and any rules, conscience or unconscious, that they want? Because the Bible is spiritual in nature, some approach scripture with a certain freedom to interpret scripture in light of their current feelings or situation. We need to ask ourselves, "Do we have freedom in how we approach the Bible or are there rules that should be followed in how we handle God's word?"

If we're being honest, everyone has rules for how they study scripture, even if they aren't well defined or structured. Hermeneutics is the theological word for the rules of interpretation when it comes to the Bible. Having a good set of rules helps make sure we don't misinterpret scripture and cause it to say something it doesn't really say. When it comes to the Bible, we want to be careful not to misuse it or get its meaning wrong since it is God's word. When Paul is encouraging Timothy in his ministry in **2 Timothy 2:15**, he tells him that handling God's word correctly is a big deal.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

We want to handle God's word accurately and correctly so that we don't have to be ashamed because we mishandled God's word.

WHY DO WE NEED RULES FOR INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE?

We need rules for interpreting scripture because the meaning of scripture is already set. It is not our goal to create a new meaning for different verses of the Bible based on our experiences or situations. It is our goal to understand the meaning of scripture already set and apply those truths and meanings to our lives.

2 Peter 1:20–21

[20] knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. [21] For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

We have already seen how these verses tell us how God inspired men to record His words, but they also give us insight on how we study God's word. These verses tell us that the interpretation or meaning of scripture is not up to us, but to understand the meaning God had when the Holy Spirit spoke the Father's words to be recorded. Each reader does not get to decide their own meaning for a passage of scripture. Scripture has a meaning behind it and it is our responsibility as students of the Bible to figure out what its already established meaning is and how to apply that meaning to our lives.

When God authored the Bible through men, they wrote to certain people and they wrote with certain messages and meanings. We want to make sure in our studying that we understand what the original messages and meanings are so that we don't get God's words wrong and say something that God never meant to say. Let's say it's one of my kid's birthdays, so my wife, Jessica, sends me to the grocery store with a list of ingredients to bake a cake to celebrate. When I get to store and look through the list, I see she wants flour, sugar, baking powder, eggs, oil, milk, cocoa and cream cheese. As I begin to walk down the baking aisle, I spot pancake mix. I think to myself, "Pancakes are like cake. They even have cake in the name. It would be cheaper and save my wife time to just get some pancake mix, so she doesn't have to measure and mix everything. Also, I can just get some pancake syrup instead of my wife having to make an icing." When I get back home with pancake ingredients and not birthday cake ingredients, not only will my wife be frustrated that I didn't get what she needed, but she could potentially be hurt that I disregarded her words and interpreted them for my wants and not hers. Ultimately, I did what I wanted and not what she wanted, and that's not very loving.

This is what we do when we study God's word without concern about God's original meaning and we try to create or search for our own meaning. Cake and pancakes are a lot alike but they're not the same. If we don't rightly handle God's word and we go to scripture trying to force meaning or overly spiritualize meaning and we move away from God's intended purpose and message, then we create a new message as we move away from God's. Not only does this not glorify God, but it can create some false teachings that don't move people closer to God.

Now, let's clarify this a little more. A passage of scripture has a main point or message being conveyed, but in that message, there might be a multitude of other truths included. Let's illustrate this with a simple sentence and then with a passage of scripture. Look at this sentence: *Yesterday, I went to the store to buy ingredients to make Jessica, my wife, a cake for her birthday.*

What is the main idea of that sentence?

The main idea of the sentence is that I'm baking a cake for my wife. The goal of that sentence is to express my desire to bake a cake. Now, even though that's the main idea, there are a bunch of other truths we can glean from that sentence about me.

What are some of the other truths we see in this sentence?

Jessica is my wife. Since I have to go to the store, we know that I don't have the ingredients in my house. I must have some knowledge or experience in baking if I'm going to make her a cake. My wife likes cake. It's her birthday.

Even though the sentence had a main idea or main message behind it, there are other truths scattered throughout it. Now, let's look at a passage of scripture to see how this can play out as we study the Bible. Read Luke 15:1-2, 11-32.

How would you describe the main message of this passage in one or two sentences?

We often focus on the prodigal son when we look at these verses. In fact, just about every Bible titles this *The Parable of the Prodigal Son*. While there are a lot of truths in the story of the prodigal, he's not the main focus of the passage. When we look at v1-2 of chapter 15, it gives why Jesus tells the story. Verse 2 says, "And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'"

The fact that the Pharisees were so upset at Jesus showing love and grace to sinners is what drove Him to tell this parable. The focus of this parable is not the prodigal; it's the older brother. The story of the prodigal is meant to set up and show the legalism and lack of love in the hearts of the Pharisees through the older brother. It is meant to challenge and convict the Pharisees who are arrogantly self-righteous.

What are some of the other truths we see in this parable?

This parable is filled with multiple truths of who God is and how God operates with humanity. We see God's love and His grace towards both sons. We see the forgiveness God offers. We see the restoration God's salvation brings. There are so many truths here in this passage that support and build the main idea of grace over self-righteousness. This is just an illustration of how scripture has a main idea but also many truths that support the main idea but also reveal to us who God is and how God operates that helps us build out theology and trust in Him.

Not only can there be multiple truths in a passage of scripture, but there can also be multiple ways of applying that scripture. If you look back on the Parable of the Prodigal (and the Older Brother), how are some ways you can apply the main idea or truths to your life?

What are some ways you can apply the main idea and supporting truths of the above passage to your life?

Depending on who you are and where you are in life impacts how the truth(s) of God's word will be applied in your life. As you read the Parable of the Prodigal (and Older Brother), maybe it's the truth of God's forgiveness that grasps you, and your application is remembering God's grace in the sins you have committed in the past, that you are forgiven. Maybe you find yourself as the older brother, and your application is examining the judgment and legalism in your heart versus the compassion and grace that should dominate. Maybe your application revolves more around confession and repentance instead of reminding yourself that God has forgiven you. The truths of God's word are set but God applies His word to our lives in a multitude of ways.

So, if scripture is not open for interpretation, then there must be a set of rules that help us uncover and apply the objective truths of God's word. Next, we'll begin to look at some of those rules.

RULES FOR STUDYING THE BIBLE

The Hermeneutic or set of rules we will use to study God's word is a Historical, Grammatical, and Contextual Hermeneutic. That simply means that to get the best understanding of scripture, we want to know the history of the book we are studying, we want to look at the grammar of what was written, and we want to make sure we keep verses in the context of the surrounding passage.

HISTORICAL HERMENEUTIC

Understanding the history of the book we are studying in the Bible is important. If we believe that when Paul wrote a letter or Moses recorded the first five books of the Bible they were writing to a specific audience, with a specific purpose, then knowing that audience and the world they live in will help us understand the passage. With the historical hermeneutic, we are asking the question *What did it mean to the original audience?*

While there are some aspects of history that we can find out in scripture, like who wrote the book and who it is written to, this is the step where we will probably need some extra biblical help, especially with the New Testament. Extra biblical help or sources are simply resources used outside of scripture like a commentary or maps or the notes in a study Bible. There are plenty of resources that you can buy and that are free. A Bible dictionary, like *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, will give you historical background of the book you are studying, where it was written, and who wrote it. John MacArthur's *MacArthur Bible Handbook* and *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* are also good resources. If you have a study Bible, a lot of this information will be in the introduction to the book. There are also free resources online like *Gotquestions.org* and *The Bible Project* on YouTube has video overviews of each book of the Bible.

Understanding the history of the person writing or being written to or the region they lived helps us understand some of the specifics they might have been dealing with. When Paul wrote the Ephesians, because of things in their city like the temple to Artemis and the temple prostitutes that filled the city, he will address different things than he does with the letter to the churches in Galatia. Knowing that Timothy is a young pastor and not a 15 year old affects how we view passages like 1 Timothy 4:12, where Paul encourages Timothy as a pastor and church leader to *Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.*

Having even a cursory understanding of the history and culture of the audience and the human author will help us understand what is being written and why it is being written which will help us understand the truth of God's word.

GRAMMATICAL HERMENEUTIC

The grammatical hermeneutic looks at the grammar of the passage we are studying. It asks the question *What does the grammar of the passage reveal?* I know for a lot of us we thought we were done with grammar once we graduated, but studying the Bible is a spiritual exercise because God speaks through His word, but it is also an academic exercise because God used human language to have His words recorded. As we think about the grammar of a passage, there are a few things to look for.

TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE

The version of the Bible you use is important when it comes to studying. All of our English versions of the Bible are translations from the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. When scholars translate from these languages to English, they aim to make it understandable while at the same time staying faithful to what was written in the original language. As they translate, there are three classes or philosophies of translation Bibles fall in; word-for-word, thought-for-thought, and paraphrase.

Word-for-word translations are the most literal translations from the original languages into English. They aim to follow the original writings as closely as they can and still have it make sense in English. They are going to be the most accurate representation of the original writings. Word-for-word translations include the Interlinear Bible, New American Standard Bible, the Amplified Bible, the English Standard Version, and both the King James and New King James translations of the Bible.

Thought-for-thought translations aim to convey the truth of the passage while not holding as strictly to a word-for-word translation. Instead of looking at each word in the translation, they might aim to for phrases or groups of words to translate the idea instead of a direct translation. Because of this these might add or subtract words in order to convey the idea. Thought-for-thought translations include the Christian Standard Bible, the New International Version, and the New Living Translation.

Paraphrases are the loosest translations. While fidelity to the original text is the priority of word-for-word translations, the reader is the priority of the paraphrase. Seeking to help people understand, they make the most changes from the original languages. The danger with this is you end up getting more of the interpretation and bias of the translator than you do from the other translation types. While word-for-word and even thought-for-thought aim to take the bias of the translator out of the picture, paraphrases are dependent on the interpretation and biases of the translator. These can be beneficial when read alongside a more faithful translation. Some examples of paraphrases include the New International readers Version, the Contemporary English Version, the Good News Translation, the Living Bible, and the Message. Even using a

more faithful translation as a guide, it might be wise to disregard the Message and the Passion translation in totality.

Example: *Romans 3:25*

Interlinear (direct translation)

Whom set forth as God a propitiation through faith in His blood for a showing forth of the righteousness of Him because of the forbearance of the having taken place beforehand sins in the forbearance of God.

English Standard Version

whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

King James Version

Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God

New American Standard

whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in God's *merciful* restraint He let the sins previously committed go unpunished

Amplified Bible (adds synonyms and adjectives for deeper understanding)

whom God displayed publicly [before the eyes of the world] as a [life-giving] sacrifice of atonement *and* reconciliation (propitiation) by His blood [to be received] through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness [which demands punishment for sin], because in His forbearance [His deliberate restraint] He passed over the sins previously committed [before Jesus' crucifixion].

New International Version

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished

New Living Translation

For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past,

The Message

God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin. Having faith in him sets us in the clear. God decided on this course of action in full view of the public—to set the world in the clear with himself through the sacrifice of Jesus, finally taking care of the sins he had so patiently endured. This is not only clear, but it's *now*—this is current history! God sets things right. He also makes it possible for us to live in his rightness.

How can the version of the Bible we use impact the way we interpret and understand scripture?

DESCRIPTIVE AND PRESCRIPTIVE PASSAGES

One of the first things we want to think about as we study a passage is see if it is a **descriptive passage** or a **prescriptive passage**. A descriptive passage is telling a story. It is describing something that is happening. Much of the Old Testament, especially the stories of the men and women of faith, are descriptive. These show how God interacts with people and how people should respond to God, but they aren't necessarily commanding us to do something. If you read the story of Joshua and the Battle of Jericho, it is a story telling us something that happened historically that teaches us about God's power and faithfulness; it is not commanding us to go march around a city or neighborhood. The promises that God made to the Israelites can teach us about who God is and encourage us to trust Him, but the promise that the walls would fall down were not made to us, they were made to them.

On the other hand, a prescriptive passage prescribes some kind of action or obedience. It is telling us something to do. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is prescriptive. Much of Paul's letters are prescriptive. When John tells us to walk in the light as Christ is in the light in 1 John, that is prescriptive. It is a commandment given to us that we are to follow and obey.

How can recognizing whether a passage is descriptive or prescriptive affect how we apply scripture to our lives?

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Often the Biblical authors will use figurative language to help make a point or illustrate a truth they are conveying. In Ephesians 6:17, when Paul calls the word of God the sword of the Spirit, he's not calling the Bible a literal sword, but He is using figurative language to help us understand how the Spirit can use God's words in our lives and in our battle against sin. When we see figurative language, we want to work to make sure we understand the point it is illustrating.

WORDS MATTER

Words are important. As you study, you want to look at the words that are used and their importance and their impact. This is where the English we learned in school comes into play. **What is the main noun and the main verb of the sentence?** This helps us understand the purpose of the sentence. **Are there any transitional words like therefore, for, because, and, or but?** These words help us see the connection between ideas. **Are there words that are repeated in a sentence, paragraph, chapter, or even book?** Often when we see words that are repeated it means they are important and hold weight. Repeated words will help us understand the point the author was making. **Are there prepositional phrases?** Most of us probably haven't thought of prepositional phrases since we left school, but they are often used to add meaning to the main idea of a sentence. As a quick refresher, a prepositional phrase is a group of words that begin with a preposition and end with a noun or pronoun (this noun or pronoun is the object of the preposition). These phrases are not essential to the sentence but add insight and depth to the sentence.

Example: 1 Corinthians 8:6

yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

If we made this verse/sentence as simple as we could, with just the main nouns and verb, it would be *There is one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ.* When we look at our prepositions (*in this verse, they are from, for, and through*) and prepositional phrases, we see how they expound on those nouns and add more depth to the verse. Not only is there one God, but He is the creator of all things (*from whom are all things*) and He is the one we live for; He defines our purpose (*for whom we exist*). We also see the same prepositional phrases describing Jesus with a different preposition, *through*. We exist by and for God and that relationship is through the person and work of Jesus.

How can looking at words and paying attention to grammar (nouns, verbs, prepositional phrases, etc) help us understand God's word better?

CONTEXTUAL HERMENEUTIC

The contextual aspect of our hermeneutic reminds us that the verses in the Bible do not exist in a vacuum. What that means is that verses rarely, if ever, stand alone. They are part of a larger paragraph, which are part of larger sections, which ultimately make up a book. The contextual hermeneutic answers the question, *What does the context of the surrounding text reveal about a passage?* It is important that we keep a verse in the context of its surroundings, so we don't skew or miss the meaning.

Take **Philippians 4:13** for example. This verse says, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." If we take this verse by itself, we can make it mean all kinds of things. Athletes use it to say that through Christ's strength they can win a game or a championship. Those in the business world often use it to say how they can be successful in their endeavors. A motivational speaker could use it to tell you that you can achieve all your dreams through Jesus. Taken out of its context, this verse could mean all kinds of things and be very open ended, but as we've said, scripture was written with a solid meaning and purpose. Keeping verses in context helps us understand that meaning and purpose.

If you go to Philippians 3 in your Bible, you see that verse 13 comes at the end of the paragraph, so we really want to look at the preceding verses to help us understand its context. Philippians 4:10–12 says this.

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

The context of Paul writing v13 is not in his ability to achieve or be successful, it is his ability to be content. Verse 10 starts by saying the Philippian believers were concerned for Paul but they didn't have an opportunity to help him. Why were they concerned for him? Verse 11 tells us that Paul had needs but that regardless of his need, he had learned to be content no matter his situation. Verse 12 tells us that he has been

in situations when he had much and he has been in situations when he had little to nothing. But no matter his situation, he has found the secret of contentment. That secret is verse 13, that he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him. Paul is content and joyful no matter his situation because He has Jesus.

How does looking at the context of a verse help you understand the verse?

How can removing a verse from its context cause us to get God's word wrong?

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLES

Inductive Bible Study is an approach to studying God's word that seeks to find the truth of scripture by starting with the building blocks of the passage to get to truth of the passage. Inductive Bible Study seeks to find the big (the truth and purpose of the passage) by starting with the small (words, sentence structure, etc). Instead of coming to a passage with an idea already in mind, you allow scripture to explain itself through studying the passage. There are four steps we will use to gather information and draw a conclusion using Inductive Bible Study. They are Preparation (preparing our hearts and minds to study God's word), Observation (What does the passage say?), Interpretation (What does the passage mean?), and Application (What does the truth from the passage mean for my life and faith?).

PREPARATION

As we said earlier, studying the Bible is both an academic activity and a spiritual activity. The Preparation stage addresses both of those. Let's start with the spiritual aspect. Whenever we begin studying God's word, before we even open the Bible, it is best to start with prayer. We need to pray for God's wisdom. We need to confess that we might get things wrong, so we need Him to guide us and protect us. We want to make sure that we are acknowledging that God is the author of scripture and that we need His help in understanding what He has said.

Academically, the preparation stage is where we read. If you are studying a specific passage, maybe a few verses or a chapter, then you want to read your passage several times to get a general idea of what is going on while also reading the preceding and following passages in order to know your context. If you are studying a book of the Bible, before you begin to get into the specifics of studying, you want to make sure you read the whole book at least once if not a few times. Reading the book, then surrounding passages, and then the passage you are studying several times helps you know either the storyline that is playing out or to see the arguments being made.

The preparation stage is characterized with praying, reading, and rereading. Why are these activities important when beginning to study the Bible?

OBSERVATION

The Observation stage is where the work is done. This is when you roll up your sleeves and get to work on rightly dividing the word of truth. In Preparation, we go from big to

small or from general to specific. You look at the book as a whole, then you move to a section, and then to a specific paragraph or sentence. In Observation, you are starting with the small and the specific, a word or a sentence, and you are moving outward and building to understand the argument being made and the truths that are being conveyed.

This is the stage our hermeneutics come into play. We ask the historical hermeneutic questions like; who wrote this? Who did they write it to? Where was it written? This is where we do the best we can to put ourselves in the shoes of the original audience so we can best understand the original, and only, message of the story or letter.

Next, we work through our grammatical hermeneutic. Have we picked a version of the Bible that is going to be specific enough in its translation that I can do serious study with it? Is the passage I'm studying descriptive or prescriptive? As I study the passage, what are the main nouns and verbs that drive the message of the passage? Are there prepositional phrases that add description to the nouns? Are there words that are repeated? Are there words I need to look up? Are there words that seem important? Are there illustrations? Are there contrasts or comparisons?

One thing that helps if you are studying a narrative passage, a passage that tells a story, is asking who, what, where, when, and how. Who are the people in the story? What do I know about them or what does the story tell me about them? What action is being done in the story? What is happening and what is being said? Where is the story taking place? Does the location add anything to the story? When is the story taking place? Is this during creation or is it during the time of the judges or kings? Is this taking place when Jesus is alive on the earth or when the church is growing and spreading? Finally, how does this story fit into the surrounding stories and even into the bigger story of the Bible?

After working through the historical and grammatical hermeneutic, we look at the contextual hermeneutic. How do the surrounding verses or passages set the context or theme for the verse(s) I am studying? How do the surrounding verses or passages help me understand the verse(s) I am studying?

The observation stage might be where we spend the most time in studying as we break down the passage to better understand it? Why do you think we would spend the most time here?

INTERPRETATION

The interpretation phase is where our conclusions are made. We gathered all the information in the observation stage, now this is where we put it all together to see what truths are present in the passage. This is where we ask the question, what does this passage mean? Remember, we want to see what the meaning was to the original audience. Meaning does not change over time. If I wrote a love letter to my wife and then I passed away five years later and someone reads the letter, they don't get to assign new meanings to my words. I wrote what I wrote to who I wrote it to for a purpose and none of that changes.

This is where we determine what the main idea of the passage is. This is where we point out what the supporting truths in the passage are. This is when we bring our study home. This is the part we are working towards, to see the truth of God's word.

As we practice these three aspects of Inductive Bible Study, we are putting scripture through a funnel or hourglass in order to get a proper interpretation. In the preparation stage, we are going from big to small. We start big, looking at whole book or a passage of scripture. This is where you read the book, then the chapter, then the paragraph, then the verse. In the observation stage, we go from small to big. We look at words and then phrases and the verses and their context in order to lead us to the overall meaning of the passage. Once we have looked at all the pieces of evidence, we can properly interpret the passage, or we can determine what the meaning of the passage is (see Fig B).

It is almost like looking at a car engine that needs fixing. You begin to take apart the engine into smaller parts to get to the part you are looking for. Once you've taken it apart, you take those smaller parts, joining them back together to get the engine whole again. We start with a part of scripture we might not have studied and break it down into its most basic parts so we can then use those parts to understand its meaning.

APPLICATION

Once we have interpreted the meaning of the passage and the truths contained within the passage, the final step is the most intimate. We have to apply those truths to our lives. This requires obedience. This might require confession and repentance. This is where we take action on what God has said or what He has revealed.

There are three steps to keep in mind when we apply God's word. Step one, be honest with the text and yourself. Sometimes, we can ignore the truth of God's word if it is getting a little too real for us. When we study God's word, we have to be honest with what God has said but also with who we are. Be honest with your struggles. Be honest with your shortcomings. If God convicts you, then confess and repent. We have to

make sure we are conforming to scripture and not trying to conform scripture to what we are comfortable with.

Step two, relate the truths in the passage to your life. There are a whole host of questions we can ask to help us apply God's word to our lives. Are there examples to follow? Are there commands to obey? Are there sins to confess or avoid? Are there promises to claim or principles to live by? Does this passage teach me anything about God? In light of what this passage teaches me about God, how does that affect how I live or view the world? Does this passage reveal to me anything about myself or humanity in general? These questions help us take the truths of scripture and apply them to our lives.

The final step of application is to live out the truths revealed in God's word. If there is a sin to confess, confess it and repent. If there is something you should be doing that you're not, then make the changes. If there is something you should actively believe about God that you're not, then repent and ask God to help you. The goal of Bible study is not knowledge for knowledge's sake. It is to be changed by the work of God through the word of God. The goal is to love God more and to be conformed to His image.

PREPARATION

Context of the book/passage
Read the Book
Reread the paragraph
Reread the passage you are
studying

Looking at words and
sentence structure, begin to
build an understanding of
what the passage is teaching.

Build from the small pieces of
evidence to the big truth of
the passage.

OBSERVATION



INTERPRETATION

RESOURCES

Studying the Bible can be as basic or exhaustive as we want to make it. The simplest way we handle God's word is simply to read it. This is a good thing, but if that is as far as we go, then it's like swimming in the ocean and sitting on a float; you're in the water but you're also missing out on the beauty of what's below. What follows are several different worksheets meant to be resources for studying the Bible. Some are more basic and some are more intensive. We want to give as many options as we can since we all have different amounts of time to devote to study, and we are all built differently. Some might be more analytical when they look at God's word and they get excited about the nuts and bolts of nouns and prepositions while others might be challenged to think through things more thematically. Whichever way helps you study God's word and get the most out of it you can, we want to help and encourage you to do so. We encourage you to work through each of these and then figure out which one is most beneficial for you.

As we begin to practice studying the Bible and looking at different ways to do so, let me encourage you to find a way that will encourage you to spend time in God's word and commit to it. Sometimes it can be difficult to start something new, and it might seem overwhelming, but you can do it. You can study the Bible and get truth from God's word and listen to God speak through His word. Don't be intimidated. Also, know that just like with anything else, it takes practice. Think back to when you took a math class, even simple addition. You had to open your book and do the work. You had to practice until you learned how to add. Then we went from adding numbers with 1 digit to 2 digits to 3 and so on, then you started multiplying and dividing. In the same way, studying the Bible is a skill that grows as you do it.

As we lay out these different ways to apply the Inductive Bible Study principles, we will begin with some that are very simple and basic and then move to some that are more intensive. Find where you are comfortable and start there. You might move to the more intensive later or you might not. The goal is to start going deeper in our understanding and applying of God's word in our lives. Whatever helps you reach that goal is what we want for you.

JOURNALING

Journaling would be the simplest form of Bible study. If this is the route you would want to go, this is what it would look like. Start by getting a notebook or a journal, as fancy or as basic as you would want. Each day, start a page like this:

- Write the date and the scripture you are reading.
- Pray that as you read, God would give you insight on the passage.
- Read the passage. (I would probably read it 3-5 times to help you think about

it.)

- In one or two sentences, write the main thought or idea of the passage.
- List any other truths you see in the passage.
- Write out how you can apply this truth to your life.
- Pray that God would help you apply this truth and keep it at the forefront of your mind.

THE SWORD METHOD

The Sword Method was part of a resource developed by pastor Steve King and published by the C.S. Lewis Institute. The Sword Method is built around 6 application questions to encourage you to think through the passage and apply it to your life. It plays off the Bible being called a sword in Hebrews and Ephesians. As you hold the sword, the blade points upward, so you ask, "What does this passage teach me about God?" The handle sits in your hand, so you ask, "What does this passage teach me about myself (humanity)?" Then, you look at the blade and how a sword both attacks the enemy and protects us, and you ask these four questions, "Is there a sin to avoid? Is there a promise to trust? Is there a command to obey? Is there an example to follow?"

4 PHASES

This is just a simplified form of the Inductive Bible Study format called 4 Phases because it has 4 boxes. This one is a bit more intensive from the others we have seen as it asks for a bit more work to be done. You would begin by putting the passage you are studying at the top of the page. Next, you fill in your context information. If you are going through a book, then the information on the left will stay the same each sheet. The good thing about going through a book is that you can fill out the passage context section by listing the main idea from your previous passage work.

Next, you go through and list any key words or phrases. Nouns. Verbs. Any words that are repeated. List any words you don't know and look them up. Write any descriptive words in the passage or words that help illustrate the point the author is making. In the third box, you write out the main idea of the passage and list any other truths you see in the passage. If you're having a hard time figuring out the main idea, sometimes if you try to paraphrase the passage in your own words it can help you think through and figure out the main idea. Finally, you write down your application. Now that you know the truths in the passage, how do these truths apply to your life?

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY WORKSHEET

The next way is the most intensive. It has a spot for everything we have looked at. This is most beneficial if you are studying to teach a class or preach a sermon. It is

beneficial for regular study as well, but it will require the most time devoted to it. Not every blank will be filled out, especially in the application section as not every passage has a sin to confess or promise to claim, and not every passage will teach us something about the Holy Spirit or Jesus. The benefit to this worksheet is that it will challenge you to think the most thoroughly through the passage.

As you use any of these worksheets, the more you use them the less you'll need them. As you use them and practice studying, you will more naturally just begin thinking these questions as you read. They will build up a new natural response to reading and thinking through God's word to learn from it and apply it. Also, it is worth noting that if you go from simply reading the Bible to studying the Bible, it will take you longer to move through the Bible, and that's ok. If you spent 20 minutes reading, you might get through several chapters of a book in the Bible, and with some books, you might read the whole thing. If you use these sheets to study the Bible, in that same twenty minutes, you might only get through a few verses. That's not a bad thing. It's a good thing.

META NARRATIVE THEMES WORKSHEET

When we looked at the idea of the meta narrative of scripture, we said the meta narrative was the one story that ran throughout all of scripture. All the smaller, individual stories in the Bible serve the greater narrative of scripture of God creating and saving a people for Himself. We said this meta narrative was built around 4 main themes: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. As you read through scripture, these themes are constant in all of scripture. For some, it might be more natural to look for these themes throughout God's word.

We see the theme of creation when we see stories talk about God's relationship with mankind, God coming close to man, worship, and commandments. All of these fit within the story of creation. We see the theme of the fall in sin, judgment, justice, punishment, and consequences. Redemption shows itself in themes like grace and forgiveness and mercy and the person and work of Jesus, and restoration is seen in stories that talk about the promises of God or broken things being made new.

As you read narrative passages of scripture, we can see these themes. After you recognize these themes, you want to ask how they affect your life.

THE SWORD METHOD

Passage: _____

What does this passage teach me about God?

Is there a sin to avoid?

Is there a command to obey?

is there a promise to trust?

Is there an example to follow?



What does this passage teach me about myself?

4 PHASES

VERSE/PASSAGE:	
<p>LITERARY CONTEXT</p> <p>AUTHOR:</p> <p>AUDIENCE:</p> <p>DESCRIPTIVE OR PRESCRIPTIVE</p>	<p>CONTEXT</p> <p>BOOK/PASSAGE CONTEXT</p>
<p>KEY WORDS/PHRASES</p> <p>MAIN NOUNS:</p> <p>MAIN VERBS:</p> <p>REPEATED WORDS:</p> <p>NEW WORDS:</p> <p>DESCRIPTIVE WORDS:</p>	
<p>MAIN IDEA/TRUTHS</p> <p>WHAT IS THE MAIN IDEA OF THIS PASSAGE/VERSE?</p> <p>WHAT TRUTHS DO WE SEE IN THIS PASSAGE/VERSE?</p>	
<p>APPLICATION</p> <p>HOW DO I APPLY THESE TRUTHS TO MY LIFE?</p>	

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY WORKSHEET

PREPARATION

Passage: _____

Who wrote it? _____

Who is the audience? _____

Is the passage descriptive or prescriptive? _____

STUDY

Are there words or phrases that are repeated?

Are there any words that stuck out as important or that you need to look up?

Are there things that are related? (look for words like and, therefore, because)

Are there things that are alike? (look for synonyms, metaphors, similes, comparisons)

Are there things that are contrasting? (look for antonyms and words like but)

Does the author use any illustrations?

INTERPRETATION

What was the meaning for the original audience?

How does this meaning impact me today?

APPLICATION

What do I learn about God?

What do I learn about Jesus?

What do I learn about the Holy Spirit?

What do I learn about myself?

Are there any examples to follow?

Are there any commands to obey?

Are there any sins to avoid?

Are there any sins to confess?

Are there any promises to claim?

Are there any principles to live by?

How can I practice the things I've just learned?

Meta Narrative Themes Study Sheet

CREATION (relationship, purpose, worship, commandment, God, etc)

--

FALL (sin, judgment, punishment, justice, consequences, etc)

--

REDEMPTION (grace, forgiveness, mercy, person and work of Jesus, etc)

--

RESTORATION (broken things made new, promises, salvation, etc)

--

SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification is not a word we use much outside of the church, but it is an important word for us to understand because in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, we are told that our sanctification is God's will for our lives.

1 Thessalonians 4:3

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;

Specifically in this verse, Paul says that one of the ways sanctification is practiced is by abstaining from sexual immorality. This gives us a clue to understanding what sanctification is. Sanctification is linked to holiness, and it carries the idea of being separated to and for God. Sanctification is us living out our faith. It is us fighting against sin, striving to obey and follow God, and living our lives to please Him. Sanctification is a process of change and transition. We are changing from a person who lived like someone who didn't know Jesus to living a life like someone who has been saved by Jesus.

It is God's will that His children, those who have responded to the person and work of Jesus in faith, are sanctified. We saw it in the above verse. We see it in John 17. John 17 is often referred to as Jesus' high priestly prayer. In this prayer, prayed immediately before he was betrayed and taken to the cross, Jesus prays not only for His disciples with Him, but also for all who would believe through their ministry. That includes us. In John 17:16, Jesus prays this for us.

John 17:17

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

Jesus' prayer for you as a Christian is that you would be sanctified. Jesus' prayer for you is that you would grow in your love for God. Jesus' prayer for you is that you would grow and mature in your faith and that your lifestyle and your values would be changed to honor Him. His prayer is that you would find your life and your joy in Him.

In Colossians 1:9–14, we see Paul's prayer for the sanctification of the Christians in Colossae. What are some of the characteristics of sanctification we see in this passage?

Colossians 1:9–14

[9] And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, [10] so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; [11] being strengthened

with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; [12] giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. [13] He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, [14] in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Every Christian is in the process of sanctification. The order of our Christian life goes like this: justification, sanctification, and glorification. Justification is when we respond to the gospel in faith. We trust in the person and work of Jesus, and we surrender our life to Him in faith and repentance. Glorification is when we get to Heaven. We receive our perfected, glorified bodies and we are made whole and complete in Christ. Sanctification is what happens between the two. It is the journey from becoming a baby in Christ to being made whole in Christ. It is the process every believer is in now as we fight against sin and strive to walk with God in faith and love.

It is important to remember that sanctification is a process. It does not happen overnight, and it is never finished until we get to Heaven. I heard someone once describe it as spiritual rehab. If you are rehabbing from an injury or a surgery, your goal is to go from broken, to fixed, to healthy. In order to do so, you have to engage in the exercises prescribed by your physical therapist. If you do what they tell you, you get healthier. If you do not, you struggle.

If we follow the commandments laid out by our Physician and we pray, read the Bible, confess/repent of sin, strive to obey, fellowship with other believers, etc, we will begin to be strengthened and increase in spiritual health. That is what sanctification is.

ALREADY, NOT YET

Another way you can look at sanctification is thinking of it as living out the future we've already been promised. God has made some big promises to us that we haven't fully realized yet, but from God's perspective, they are already done. For example, God has declared us righteous in Christ. He has imputed Christ's righteousness to us so that when God looks at us, it is through the perfect righteousness of Jesus applied to us through the sacrifice of Jesus. Even though we are not perfect yet and we still struggle with sin, God has already declared us innocent and justified in Christ. It is already a done deal and complete from God's perspective, but we have not yet fully realized it. God declares us innocent and has removed all condemnation from us even though we are not practically innocent and we still struggle with sin.

In the same way, God has applied holiness to us in a way that we are positionally holy, meaning we are His and we are righteous, and we can stand with Him, even though we are still wrestling with holiness and obedience in our lives. Positionally, we are holy and righteous, but practically we are still striving to live it out. Sanctification is realizing what God has declared of us and how He views us positionally and striving to live that out practically. Because God views me as righteous and because of His great love for me and mine for Him, let me strive as best I can to have my present match my future.

How does the fact that God already views us as completely righteous and holy impact our worship and obedience?

OUR “WHY” MATTERS – LEGALISM VS WORSHIP

As we think about sanctification, there is one important point to make, the *why* of our obedience matters. If sanctification involves obedience and doing the things God has called us to do, the reason we are doing it is just as important as what we are doing. There can be a temptation when it comes to sanctification to turn it into legalism. This happens when obedience becomes a check list of the things we are supposed to do in order to make God happy or so that God will love us. We build our standing and relationship with God on our ability to keep all the rules instead of the person and work of Jesus. Not only does this affect us spiritually, but it typically affects how we interact with others as well. We have to guard our hearts to make sure we don't conflate God's love for us with our obedience.

Remember, God loved us when we were His enemies. He saved us through the death and resurrection of His Son. He views us through the lens of Jesus' perfect righteousness. We don't obey because we have to. We don't obey because we are trying to earn something from God. We don't obey because we are trying to prove our worth. We don't obey because we are trying to show God how good we really are.

We obey because God has loved us with a love we could never imagine or fathom. We obey out of worship. We obey because we love God. We obey in response to all God has done for us. Our obedience does not earn us anything from God. We aren't loved more or less because we do good or don't do good. God's love for us is based on who He is and what Christ did for us. Our obedience doesn't change God's view of us. Our obedience impacts God's worship. Our obedience impacts us. Our obedience can impact how close we are to God, but never how God loves us.

In light of this, we obey and strive for practical righteousness not to “get” from God, but in response to who God is and what God has done for us. Our obedience is not done out of obligation; it is done in worship. We serve not so that God will love us more, but because He has already loved us with all the love He can even when we were His enemies.

In order to guard ourselves, it is important to ask ourselves this question in regard to our obedience: What is the goal or heart of my obedience, to keep the rules or to love God? If my goal is just to keep the rules because that makes me a good person or because rules are meant to be followed, then the likelihood of legalism increases. But if we can strive to keep loving God because of His love for us as the motivation for our obedience, then the whole focus and purpose of obedience changes.

Our motivation for reading the Bible goes from doing it because we are supposed to, to reading because we want to learn more about who God is and how we can live lives that glorify Him. Our motivation to fight sin goes from being a good person to loving the God who saved us. Our fighting against sin goes from “just try harder” to loving

God more than we love our sin. Our obedience and choices matter but so does the motivation for why strive to obey.

How do legalism and legitimate obedience look the same? How are they different? How do we guard ourselves to make sure our obedience doesn't become legalism?

As we strive for sanctification, there are certain activities that we can engage in that help us. They help remind us that we are not in this alone. They remind us to rely upon God's help and strength. They strengthen us as we go through this journey of spiritual growth. The activities that help us in our sanctification are **Spiritual Disciplines** and **Accountability**.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Spiritual disciplines are the habits we build that strengthen our faith. These are activities we engage in consistently and repeatedly to help us stay focused on Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the people God has called us to be. We will look at seven spiritual disciplines that we can and should engage in on a regular basis to encourage and strengthen our faith. If we can practice these, it won't make life perfect, but it will help us keep our eyes set on Christ.

PRAYER

As we go through these spiritual disciplines, while they are in no particular order, there will be more said about some than others. This is because there is more said about them in scripture and the frequency and fervency of their practice is more intense. With that said, let's begin with prayer. Prayer is one of the greatest gifts and tools God gives us as believers. Prayer is simply talking to God. It is the opportunity to go to God in worship or in thankfulness or in need and knowing that God hears us. While the Bible is filled with illustrations and promises that God hears us, one that hammers home this promise is Hebrews 4:15–16.

Hebrews 4:15-16

[15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. [16] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

In these verses, we are promised that in Christ, we have the opportunity to approach the throne of grace with confidence that God hears us and that God promises us the grace and mercy and help that we need. So, how do we approach the throne of grace with our needs to request grace and help? We pray.

Prayer doesn't have to be anything formal. You don't have to have a prayer language or use proper grammar. In prayer, we can be honest. We can honestly tell God how we feel and how we are struggling. We can be honest with God about the temptations we struggle with. We can go to God and confess our weaknesses or our needs, knowing that God is not going to clutch His pearls and be shocked. Remember, God is omniscient, He already knows it all. Prayer gives us the opportunity to be honest with God and confess our dependence on Him and our need for His help.

The Bible is clear that God wants His children to pray. In Matthew 6, before Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer, He begins by saying three times, "when you pray." There is an expectation of prayer in the life of the Christian. In **1 Thessalonians 5:17**, we are encouraged to *pray without ceasing*. God has ordained prayer to be a tool that He uses in our lives and in our spiritual journey. **James 5:16** tells us that *the prayer of a*

righteous person has great power as it is working. God uses our prayers to carry out His plans and purposes in this world.

This might bring up questions of how we pray. In Matthew 6, when Jesus is giving His first sermon, He includes prayer. Before He gives them a model prayer that illustrates what prayer can or should include, He tells them some things that prayer is not.

Matthew 6:5–8

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

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

First, Jesus tells us that prayer is not meant for our glory. This is not a commandment not to pray in public, Jesus prays in public throughout the gospels; it is a commandment to check our hearts and our motives as we pray. We don't pray so others will think we are super spiritual. We don't pray so others will think more of us. Prayer's purpose is to approach God in worship and in need, not to inflate our self-importance.

Secondly, not only do we not try to impress others through prayer, but we don't try to impress God with our prayers. Jesus says that the Gentiles throw out words and repetition and chants in order to get their deities to hear them. We don't have to get God's attention, and we don't have to use special or fancy language for God to hear us. God knows our needs. Just go to Him in honesty and simplicity, declaring His power and your needs.

How does using prayer as a way to impress God or impress people miss the value and purpose of prayer?

So, if that's how we don't pray, how do we pray? Jesus gives us the model in Matthew 6:9–13.

First, we want to acknowledge that there are times when you don't have the words to pray. The situation you are in is too hard and too difficult and you don't even know

what to pray. Maybe you are too filled with grief or anger and you can't even get any words out. In those times, the Holy Spirit who dwells within us intercedes for us in a special way.

Romans 8:26

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

One of the great things about having God live with us in the third person of the Trinity is that He intercedes for us to the Father when we can't get the words out. He takes the groanings of our hearts to the Father in a special, loving way. But, for the times when we pray and our minds and hearts can come up with the words, how should we pray then? What does the Bible teach us about that? We see it in Jesus' model prayer in Matthew 6:9-13.

Matthew 6:9-13

[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.

While there's nothing wrong with memorizing this prayer, the commandment is not to recite this as a daily prayer. In this prayer, Jesus gives us some aspects of how prayer is used or what should be in our prayers. First, our prayers should remember God's position as holy, righteous, sovereign, creator of the universe. Sometimes people like to make prayer so relational they remove the respect and reverence that God deserves. Yes, He is our Father and yes, He is our friend, but He is still God. When Jesus says hallowed be your name, that is both a declaration and a request. It is a declaration that God is greater and different from us and it is a request that we and others live as though He is holy. While we do want to be honest and genuine in our prayers, we also want to make sure we don't lessen God's awesomeness.

Next, prayer should be submissive. Verse 10 once again makes a declaration and a request that God's will and His purposes take precedence. While we take our requests to God in prayer, it should always be our hope and our goal that God's will wins out over ours. If we are praying for healing for a loved one, we must ultimately recognize that God's will in and for their lives wins out over ours. We pray honestly but we also pray submissively. One of the best illustrations of this is one of Jesus' own prayers. Praying in the garden before His crucifixion, Jesus prays this.

Luke 22:42

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

Jesus knew what was about to happen. He was in on the plan. He knew He was about

to suffer God's wrath and justice for the sins of everyone who had or would put their faith in Him for salvation. If there was any other way for this happen, let this cup pass on. But, knowing this was the triune God's plan, He prays that God's will wins out. We should be honest about our feelings and fears and desires in prayer, knowing that ultimately, we should want God's will to win out. This is one way we see sanctification happening in our lives through prayer. Not just in depending on Him and trusting in Him, but in surrendering our wants and our wills to His, knowing that God's wants and God's will is greater and better than our own.

What could the downside be of not being submissive in our prayers?

In v11, we see that prayer does include going to God for our needs. Prayer is dependent. It recognizes that God is sovereign over all things, and it recognizes that we need God and His provision even in the simplest things in our lives. There is nothing too small or too common place that we can't bring it to God in prayer.

V12 reminds us that prayer is a tool of forgiveness. We go to God, in prayer, when we have sinned to confess and repent of our sins. As we confess and repent, it should also be a reminder that we are to forgive others when they have wronged us.

Jesus' prayer ends by telling us that prayer helps us in our battle against sin. We all face different temptations when it comes to sin. Instead of facing them alone, God has given the Holy Spirit, but He has also given us prayer. When we are tempted to sin, we can cry out to God for help. He will not respond by telling us to toughen up and handle it ourselves. He will work to strengthen us against temptation. We still have to make the choice to say no and because of our weaknesses we might have to pray a lot, but God has promised to hear us and help us when we come to Him.

While prayer might sound or look differently from person to person since we are all different, these are the things that should shape the direction and practice of our prayers. If you still don't feel comfortable in praying or how to pray, you can remember this simple acrostic to guide you in your prayer time: A.C.T.S. It stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. It means when you pray, start by adoring God for who He is and what He has done for you. Praise Him for His attributes. Recognize His holiness. Once you've recognized God's holiness, you spend time confessing and repenting of sin. Honestly, focusing on God's greatness should make us more aware of our own sinfulness and God's grace to forgive sin. Then, in thankfulness for His forgiveness, you spend time thanking God for how He has blessed you and worked in your life. Finally, you bring your requests before God. This is a simple guideline to help direct our prayer time.

FASTING

In Matthew 6, right after Jesus talks about prayer, He talks about fasting.

Matthew 6:16

And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

Fasting is tied to prayer. Whenever you fast, your prayer time should increase. Fasting is to go without something, usually food, in a time of focus or desperation before God. Fasting does not somehow make our prayers more powerful, but it is a way of declaring our need or desperation or sorrow before God. It declares that we need God to work or move, and we are willing to go hungry in order to show that. Food is essential to life, so in fasting we are saying we need God to do something more than we need the building blocks of life.

The Bible never tells us how often to fast. Here, Jesus does say, “when you fast,” like He did with prayer. It seems there might be an expectation that there might be times when we need to fast, but there is no verse that tells us to fast without ceasing. What we have pictured in scripture is that we fast in times of great need or distress. In Ezra 8:21-23, Ezra, a priest, was leading a group of Israelites out of captivity back to Israel. He is taking a group of people who will serve in the newly rebuilt temple, and he is not taking any soldiers or protection with them. He had already told the king that God would protect them, so as they leave, they stop to fast and pray.

Ezra 8:21–23

[21] Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. [22] For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, “The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.” [23] So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

In a moment of importance and stress, he and the people fast and pray, imploring God to help. In **Matthew 17:21**, in response to the disciples asking why they could not cast out a demon from a young boy, Jesus responds by telling them *this kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting*. There are times where we desperately need or want to see God work or move or heal or save. There are times we are overcome by fear or grief or sorrow or worry. These are times that call us to sacrifice something of value to us in declaration that we need God.

What are some situations where you feel fasting would be beneficial to practice?

CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE

While not always included in lists of spiritual disciplines, confession and repentance is a spiritual activity that we need to practice daily (if not hourly or minute by minute). Confessing our sin means agreeing with God that our sin is wrong and that it transgresses His character and law. We see confession modeled in Psalm 32.

Psalm 32:5

I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

Repentance means turning from our sin and walking in righteousness and obedience. Repentance is making a U-turn in life and it is seen in a change in how we live and what we value. In **Luke 3:8**, John the Baptist tells the Pharisees to *bear fruit in keeping with repentance*. In **Acts 3:19**, Peter tells his audience to *repent therefore and turn back, that their sins might be forgiven*. Repentance is more than saying we are wrong, it requires effort on our part in partnership with the Holy Spirit, to change. We stop doing what is wrong and we do what is right.

Confession and repentance are the pathways to experiencing forgiveness and are incredibly important in the life of the believer. In spite of God's incredible love and grace, in our weakness and humanity, we still sin as believers. We should never aim for sin or excuse our sin, but at the same time we are aware that we will not be perfect until we get to Heaven. Because of our continued imperfection, we need to make sure agreeing with God about our sin and striving to turn away from our sin is a regular practice in our lives. It is necessary for us to consistently recognize our sin and to fight against it because even in our repentance, we are imperfect.

It is also important to remember that it is confession AND repentance, not confession OR repentance. Confession and repentance are different sides of the same coin. They go together like peanut butter and jelly. When we confess our sins, we are agreeing with God that our sin is sin. When we repent, we are saying we are wanting to turn from that sin and walk in righteousness. You won't repent if you don't agree with God that your sin is sin. If you confess but don't repent, you're just telling God you think your sin is wrong, but you have no desire to change and you're going to keep doing it. Neither of those honor or please God. Even in our repentance we're imperfect, meaning we will still struggle with sin and sometimes fall short, but our hearts and our efforts should be to go and sin no more.

Why do we need to make sure we are practicing both confession and repentance?

We see this relationship between our sin and our obedience and confession/repentance play out in 1 John 1.

1 John 1:5–10

[5] This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. [6] If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. [7] But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. [8] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [10] If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Let's walk through this passage. Verse 5 lays out for us who God is. He is light (holy, righteous) and in Him there is no darkness (sin). God is our Father. He is the one we want to emulate and glorify. Because of that, we want to live a life that glorifies Him, we want to walk in the light as He is in the light. According to v6, if we say we love God and have fellowship with Him and walk with Him, but the practice and pattern of our life is sin, then we lie and aren't living out God's commands. As Christians, we can't say that we love God while living a life of unconcerned, unconfessed sin. If sin is the pattern of our life, then to say we love God while purposefully practicing a life that is opposed to who God is means that we really don't love God the way we say we do.

In contrast to walking in the darkness, if we walk in the light, we actually have fellowship and closeness with God. Walking in the light is not perfection. It means the pattern, direction, and goal of our lives is to obey and glorify God. This means we are striving to obey in thankfulness and worship. It means we are fighting against sin. It means we acknowledge when we do sin in confession and repentance, and we are forgiven of that sin and cleansed by Jesus.

Not only does v7 says that walking in the light means we are in the light as He is in the light, but it also says that we have fellowship with each other. For Christian fellowship to exist, a healthy relationship with God must exist. When two Christians are both walking in obedience to Christ, there is fellowship with them in the light, but if one or both are in unconfessed and unrepentant sin, the Bible says it will affect their fellowship. It will hinder their closeness and their relationship.

How does sin affect fellowship between Christians?

Here's where things get a little interesting. In v8, it says if we say we have no sin, we lie to ourselves and we are missing out on the truth. There's a connection between v6 and v8. In v6, John says that if we walk in the darkness we do not practice the truth and in v8, he says if we do not admit that we still struggle with sin, the truth is not in us. The truth is we are sinners. We will struggle with sin every day we are on this earth. This truth is not an excuse to sin more. It is a truth that should cause us to realize our need for Christ and to be thankful for His sacrifice.

That leads to v9, where we are promised if we confess, then Jesus forgives. We cannot cover up our sin. We cannot justify our sin. We cannot pretend we didn't sin. Whether it is shame or ego or self-righteousness, there are times we struggle with confessing our sin. Instead of trying to hide our sin from God and making ourselves out to be liars (and according to v10 making God a liar), we are to trust His grace and mercy and come to His throne of grace confident that He forgives. Confession and repentance require us to be honest about our sinfulness and our need for God's grace. The great thing is when we are honest and repentant, God always forgives.

Why do we sometimes struggle to be honest about our sin, to ourselves and to God?

BIBLE STUDY

While we've spent time on how to study the Bible, let's devote a little bit of time to why we study the Bible. We said earlier that prayer was how we talk to God. Well, the Bible is how God speaks to us. It is through the Bible that God reveals His character, His heart, and His will. It is in God's word where God shows us how we are to live and who we are to be. When Jesus prays that His followers would be sanctified in truth, He follows that up by saying that God's word is truth.

John 17:17

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

Sanctification comes through God's word. Reading, studying, and applying God's word

to our lives leads to us being sanctified. Learning who God is and believing in who God has revealed Himself to be strengthens our faith. The Bible is the only resource we can objectively say is God's word. The truth in God's word trumps our feelings, our ideas, and our perspectives. If we want to walk in the light as God is in the light, we do so by living according to the truth God has revealed in His word.

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible with 176 verses. It is also all about God's word. It is telling that the longest chapter in the Bible is telling us the benefits of the Bible. Seems important. Instead of reading the whole chapter right now, let's just look at a few verses.

Psalm 119:9–11

[9] How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

[10] With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!

[11] I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

The Psalmist says that our way is kept pure by obeying and following God's word. They also say that storing up God's word in our hearts strengthens us in our battle with sin. Reading, studying, and memorizing God's word stores it up in our hearts. When temptation comes, this give us ammunition and an offense to fight against sin.

How does God sanctify us with His word?

The Bible gives us a few examples of how God's word helps us with sanctification. In John 14, Jesus tells His disciples that if they have His commandments and they obey them, it shows they love Him. If they have His commandments and do not obey them, then it shows they do not love Him.

John 14:23–24

[23] Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. [24] Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

To love God is to obey Him. We obey Him by following His commandments laid out in His word. In Romans 12, Paul calls us to not be conformed to the world around us but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Romans 12:2

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

If we are not going to be conformed to this world, or if we are going to be sanctified, then one of the starting points or foundation for that is having our minds renewed. We renew our minds by moving the old thoughts out and replacing them with a new way of thinking. How do we change our way of thinking? We read God's word. We study God's word. We allow God's word to dictate for us what is good and acceptable and pleasing and right before God. We change our way of thinking and what we value to fit what God has said. When we do this and we are constantly renewing our mind with God's word, then it helps us stand against the beliefs and values and influence of the world around us.

GIVING

Giving works in our sanctification by challenging us to trust in God. Giving to the church also helps us fight against the temptation to make money into an idol. Ultimately, we give because God has commanded us to give. Whenever giving is discussed, how much we are to give is a logical question to ask. Many churches teach that believers should give 10% of their income to the church. This comes from the Old Testament teaching of the tithe. Tithe means tenth. In the Old Testament, Israelites were commanded to give a tenth of crops and income to the church and to the state. This was actually a tax system for their Theocracy. Actually, there were three tithes in the Law, two annually and one to be given every three years, so, Israelites actually gave roughly 23%. On top of that, they had to leave the corners of their fields for those who didn't have their own fields to harvest so they could provide for their families.

In the New Testament, giving a tithe (tenth) is never commanded. In the New Testament, tithing is mentioned **7 times**. There are three times in the gospels where Jesus uses it as a way to show the hypocrisy and self-righteousness of the pharisees. Four times it is used in Hebrews 7 to illustrate the relationship between Abraham and Melchizedek and between Jesus and Israel's priests. Paul never commands the churches he writes to tithe. Neither does Peter. Neither does John.

Now, just because the New Testament doesn't command a tithe doesn't mean the New Testament doesn't command us to give. The New Testament commands giving to pay for the leadership and function of the church.

1 Timothy 5:17-18

[17] Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. [18] For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

In 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul gives more detailed instruction on how believers are to give.

1 Corinthians 16:1–2

[1] Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. [2] On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

According to these verses, giving is commanded to all churches. Paul says that he is not only directing the Corinthians, but also the churches in Galatia. This is a common commandment, not specific to just Corinth. Verse 2 tells us that giving should be consistent. He says on the first day of the week, set some aside. Basically, as you get paid, set money aside to be given in worship to God through His church. Also, our giving should be based on income. When Paul says *as he may prosper*, that could also be translated as *God has prospered* or *in keeping with your income*. Whether it is 10% or 7% or 20% or 30%, your giving should be based on what you make.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul continues his teaching on giving.

2 Corinthians 9:6–7

[6] The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. [7] Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Here, Paul encourages his listeners to give bountifully and to give joyfully. The Old Testament is about Law, while the New Testament is about grace, and that is true of our giving as well. In the New Testament, there is grace in what we give. If you can't afford 10%, but you can give 7% as a bountifully, joyful gift in faith, then give 7%. If God has blessed you to the point that giving bountifully is not 10% but 20%, then give 20%. Seek God's wisdom and direction and give in worship, trusting that God is in control.

How does giving help us grow in our faith?

Worship

Often when we think of worship, our minds quickly go to singing. We call certain styles of music praise and worship. In our church services, we typically title the singing part of the service as worship. While singing is definitely part of worship and proclaiming God's worth and His faithfulness, it is not all that worship is.

Romans 12:1

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

When Paul wrote to the church of Rome, he encouraged them to worship by presenting themselves as living sacrifices to God. This is a bit of an oxymoron since a sacrifice is typically deceased. The lamb or the goat that is to be offered as the sacrifice is typically killed and that is what makes it a sacrifice. God calls us to live our lives as though we are sacrifices. Not literally killing ourselves but laying aside our will and our way and our wants in surrender and loving submission to God. We die to ourselves and our sin and we strive to live in honor and commitment to God. This is worship. Worship is living a life of devotion and commitment to loving and obeying God.

This is an important distinction to make since the Bible warns us throughout that we can perform righteous activities and be far from God. In David's psalm of confession, he declares that God is not pleased with empty sacrifices, but a heart that is humble before Him.

Psalms 51:16-17

[16] For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. [17] The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

In Titus, Paul is reminding Titus of his mission in Crete by describing the Cretans in this way.

Titus 1:16

They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

They said the right words. They presented a religious lifestyle, but their hearts were far from God. Singing can be worship. Teaching God's word can be worship. Memorizing God's word can be worship. Serving God and His church can be worship. Proclaiming the gospel can be worship. While all of these CAN be worship, what makes them actually worship is when they are done with hearts surrendered and submitted to God in love.

Before we move on from worship, let's look at one more aspect of worship; it is to be based in truth. As Jesus tells the woman at the well, true worshipers worship in spirit and in truth. Worship is a spiritual activity that requires us to submit our hearts to Him, but it also requires that we worship in truth. This means that feelings do not drive our worship, but the truth of who God is and what God has done drives our worship. Worship is not about how we feel, but about who God is. Worship is not about a sensation; it is about declaring to God that He is worthy. If we move away from the truth of who God is, revealed in His word, then we quit worshiping the God of the

Bible.

There are stories in the Bible that remind us of this. There are stories where worship services are held and it is not the singing that drives the services, but the truth of God's word. In Nehemiah 8, the temple and the walls of the city have been rebuilt. The descendants of the Israelites who had been taken captive by the Babylonians about 160 years prior have now returned. In this moment, Ezra, the priest and scribe, stands before the people and begins to read the Law.

Nehemiah 8:1–3, 5-6

[1] And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. [2] So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. [3] And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. ... [5] And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. [6] And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Ezra reads God's word, and the people bow and worship. There is no mention of music, just the truth of God's word. Their worship is driven by truth and accompanied with emotions. Truth first and emotions second. Whatever we are doing to worship God, we have to make sure we are being grounded and guided by God's word. It is what God has said and revealed in His word that dictates what is good and pleasing to Him, not our feelings or our wants.

How can we guard ourselves so that do don't find ourselves going through the motions of worship without having a heart of worship?

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is the practice of believers coming alongside each other to bear each other's burdens, seek help in walking with God, and encouraging each other to persevere. We are not in this fight of faith alone. We are not meant to be alone. Yes, we have the Holy Spirit, but God has also given us each other. The church isn't just meant for us to come together as a big group and that be it. We are to be involved in each other's lives in order to encourage each other in our walks with God. The Bible calls us to trust each other and to depend on each other.

In Proverbs, we are told that we are to be involved in each other's lives so that our faith is sharpened.

Proverbs 27:17

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

James encourages his readers to confess their sins to each other and to pray for each other. This is not to be done in lieu of confessing our sins before God, but sometimes we need to confess to each other because we need help fighting our sins. Sometimes we confess because our sin is against another believer, and we need to seek their forgiveness.

James 5:16

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

James goes on to say that if we see a fellow Christian engaged in sin, we are to go to them and encourage them to repent and pursue Christ.

James 5:19–20

[19] My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, [20] let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

In Galatians, Paul encourages the believers there to strengthen each other in their battles with sin and to bear each other's burdens. This means praying for each other. It means listening to each other. It means asking for help from other believers. Paul says when we do this, we fulfill the law of Christ. I think it is fair to say you can find the law of Christ when He sums up the whole Old Testament in two commandments, Love God and Love People. When we bear each other's burdens, we are doing just that.

Galatians 6:1–2

[1] Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

[2] Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

In Hebrews, we are commanded to seek ways to encourage each other and to figure out how to walk alongside each other in our spiritual journeys.

Hebrews 10:24–25

[24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

The value of accountability is that it reminds us that we are not alone. We aren't the only one's struggling with sin and temptation. It gives us someone to talk to who will pray for us and encourage us to push forward. This is important to remember because loneliness can sometimes open the door for sin. The goal of accountability is not to commiserate over sin or just complain about life, but to encourage each other to love and follow Jesus. The existence of the church reminds us that we are not meant to be solo Christians.

For accountability to work, there must be honesty, humility, and grace. For the one that needs help in the moment, you must be honest about your weaknesses. You have to be honest about your struggles. You have to be humble enough to admit that you don't have it all together. For the one who is doing the encouragement in the moment, you have to speak truth filled with grace. You can't clutch your pearls and condemn someone for their struggles and their sin. You can call sin sin, but you also want to push people to the cross and to the forgiveness we have in Christ.

For accountability to be effective, find one or two people of the same gender that you trust, that you believe are mature enough to encourage you in your faith and who are trustworthy enough that you can confess your struggles and they won't blab them to the world. When done well, accountability can be a huge blessing as we live out God's word in each other's lives. If it is done poorly, without honesty or without grace or without trust, it does more damage than it does good. Strive to hold each other accountable in grace and in love.

What are the benefits of having people in your life to hold you accountable in your walks with God?

Why is it sometimes difficult being honest and open with someone else about our sins and our struggles?

SERVING

Every believer is called to serve. We are called to serve God, His church, and the world around us. Serving is more than just doing social work projects. Serving is about showing God's love through practical acts so either the gospel can spread, or believers can be reminded of God's love for each other. Serving could go under spiritual disciplines, but we're going to give it its own special section.

The main reason we are giving *serving* its own special section is because God has gifted every believer with what the Bible calls *spiritual gifts* so that we can serve God and serve each other.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Paul discusses spiritual gifts in depth in 1 Corinthians. Before he gets to what the gifts are, he lays out their purpose.

1 Corinthians 12:4–7

[4] Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; [5] and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; [6] and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. [7] To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE GIFTS OF GRACE THAT GOD GIVES US AT SALVATION.

In v4, Paul begins to explain what spiritual gifts are by associating them with each person of the Trinity. He begins by addressing the Spirit's role in our gifting. In the Greek, the word Paul uses is *karismatōn* and it translates as *gift*. The root word for this is *charisma* and the base word for *charisma* is *karis*. In the Greek, *karis* is the word for grace. The spiritual gifts God gives us have their foundation in the grace God gives us. When you respond to the gospel in faith and repentance and you are saved by God's grace, you receive the Holy Spirit as a seal of our salvation and with the Holy Spirit comes spiritual gifts. A gift that comes with God's grace and a gift that allows us to show God's grace.

Spiritual gifts are not talents. Being able to sing is not a spiritual gift. Being able to play an instrument is not a spiritual gift. Public speaking is not a spiritual gift. These are talents that can be used to glorify God, but spiritual gifts are acts of grace that God gives us at salvation to be used for His glory. They come with the Holy Spirit at salvation and they are empowered by the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

What is the difference in a talent and a spiritual gift?

SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE TO BE USED IN SERVICE TO JESUS.

The next thing Paul says about spiritual gifts is that they are tools in service to Jesus Christ. In the Greek, the word Paul uses for service is the same root word that is used for deacons. It is a word that is translated as servant in the English. We are given spiritual gifts to serve Jesus. They are opportunities for us to serve Christ. Whether it is acts of service or leadership or teaching or administration, we are given spiritual gifts as an opportunity to serve Christ.

How does us using our spiritual gifts serve Jesus?

SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE MADE EFFECTIVE BY THE WORK OF THE FATHER.

We are given our spiritual gifts through the Holy Spirit at salvation to use in service to Jesus and the work of those gifts are made impactful through the working of the Father. It is God that uses our service through our spiritual gifts to make it have an impact in the lives of others and in His kingdom. Since we've looked at the Greek for the previous explanations of spiritual gifts, let's look at a little play on words that is in the Greek. Paul says that there are a variety of effects that come from our service but the same Father that makes them effectual.

Our service and its outcome is not by our power. God takes the efforts of our serving and adds the power to make it have a lasting effect. Because God is at work, our serving is more than us just going through motions or doing something, but God uses our actions to impact people in a real and life affecting way. When a preacher preaches, it is not the cleverness of their words that has real impact. It is God speaking through His word to people's hearts that has any effect. Without God speaking and working, the preacher is just giving a 30 minute TED talk each week. With God empowering and working, hearts are encouraged or convicted, and people are challenged in their faith and love for Him. It is God that uses our gifts and our service to make a spiritual and eternal impact.

We are given gifts to be used in service to Christ so that God will use them to facilitate effectual results. Basically, if you want to know what it is like to be used by God, you practice the gifts God has given you in service to Jesus for God to use. How God has gifted us is how we are to serve and when we do, we fit into the body how God has made us and we find joy and satisfaction because we are being used how God has created us to be used.

How does it encourage you that the effectiveness of our service is not us, but God?

SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE NOT FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PERSON, BUT FOR THE GOOD OF THE CHURCH.

Often, people think about how different things affect them. Does it validate them or their feelings or their emotions? Does doing certain things make them feel fulfilled? Notice that in v7, Paul says the gifts we are given are for the common good. Spiritual gifts are not for us to feel a certain way. They are gifts given to us to use in service to Jesus for the value and benefit and building up of the church.

Using your spiritual gift can be a blessing to you but it's not guaranteed. It can be tiring to serve. It can take you out of your comfort zone to serve. It can add something to your schedule to serve. Serving can be difficult, but we don't serve for ourselves. We serve because we see beyond ourselves. We serve because we love Jesus. We serve because we love the church. We serve so we can be used to see others challenged or comforted in their faith. We serve not because of how it makes us feel but because of how God uses it to impact the church around us and for those who need to hear the gospel.

If our focus on service is how it makes us feel, we probably won't serve long term. We will get tired or frustrated or we won't get the pat on the back we're looking for and we'll get upset and we'll quit. We'll say I need to be fed or I need to focus on myself or I'm too tired. But if our focus on serving is shifted from ourselves to Christ and the church and we understand I'm not serving because of how I feel but because of my love for Christ and love for the church, then we will find motivation to serve, even when it is difficult or tiring.

How does it affect our service if our motivation is right or wrong?

The spiritual gifts are listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. There are 19 gifts listed in these passages. We are going to gather all the spiritual gifts mentioned in scripture and give a definition to them. Some we'll spend more time on than others but for most of them, we will give a brief explanation of what they are and a short illustration or example of how they might play out in the church and then we're moving on.

Before we list out the gifts though, there's some things about gifts that we need to discuss because when it comes to spiritual gifts, there are a whole lot of different interpretations or understandings about certain gifts and how they operate and if they're still in existence or has God canceled out some of these gifts. The biggest debate when it comes to spiritual gifts is how do you handle what are typically called the Miracle Gifts. Since you have so many gifts, many people try to categorize them to help people understand them better. It could be argued that Peter viewed spiritual gifts existing in two categories, speaking gifts and serving gifts. **1 Peter 4:10–11** says

*[10] As each has **received a gift**, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: [11] **whoever speaks**, as one who speaks oracles of God; **whoever serves**, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

We are going to break them down into three categories; *Miracle Gifts, Service Gifts, and Speaking Gifts*. Since we said the biggest disagreements center around the Miracle gifts, let's take a minute to look at these and why there is such disagreement over them. Before we list them out, I just want to take a big picture view of them and discuss miracles in general in the Bible and then we'll look at what we are calling the miracle gifts.

CESSATIONISM VS CONTINUATIONISM

The big question surrounding these gifts are does God still give believers these gifts or has God caused these gifts to cease to exist. This is not a question of whether God still performs miracles or not, this is a question of, "Does God still give Christians the miracle gifts?" The two sides of the argument are called Cessationism and Continuationism. Someone on the cessationist side would argue that the miracle gifts ended with the apostles and while God does still perform miracles, He does not empower people to perform these miracles anymore. A continuationist would argue that the miracle gifts did not end with the apostles and that God still empowers people to perform miracles, heal people, speak in tongues, and that the role of apostle still exists today.

Before we begin defining the actual lists, we will take a moment to focus on the cessationist view. One, the continuationist view is simple, the gifts still continue. Two, we need lay out the reasons why some believe the miracle gifts have ceased. Let's

begin with the definition of cessationism we will use. **Cessationism is the belief that while God can still empower believers with the miracle gifts, it is by no means the normal way God works where scripture and the church are prevalent.**

Now, let's look at some reasons for the cessationist view. **First, miracles were never the normal way God worked in scripture.** Growing up we all learn all the Bible stories of these awesome miracles that happen that might cause us to think miracles are on every page of the Bible. While there are some one-off miracles scattered throughout the story of the Bible, like Samson, most miracles occurred in mass really during 4 time periods of scripture.

The first period we see large scale miracles is in Israel's exodus from Egypt until they enter the Promised Land. This is a 40-50 year span where we see the plagues in Egypt, the splitting of the Red Sea, manna and quail from Heaven, water from a rock, and God bringing some military victories in some pretty miraculous ways. In this roughly 50 year span, you have somewhere around 20 miracles.

The second period is the time when Elijah and Elisha were prophets in Israel. Elijah served as a prophet for about 20 years and performed 8 miracles. Elisha, Elijah's follower, served as a prophet for about 60 years, and because he had asked for a double blessing of what God had given Elijah, he performed 16 miracles. So, for an 80 year period, you have 24 miracles.

The next period is Jesus' ministry. Depending on how you count them, most will say Jesus performed anywhere from 37 miracles to around 40 during His 3 ½ year ministry. That is by far the most miracles in a short period of time. Plus, you have to consider John who says that Jesus performed many other miracles that were not recorded. So, when Jesus, the Son of God, God in the flesh, was on the earth, He performed a lot of miracles.

The last period is the time of the apostles. These are recorded in the book of Acts which spans 30-35 years. In the book of Acts, there are about 18 miracles recorded. Even in the times when a lot of miracles are performed, outside the time of Jesus, it is still around 20 miracles for decades of time. When churches who are more charismatic or continuationist are claiming to heal the blind and the deaf and perform miracle after miracle Sunday after Sunday, they are claiming something that has not happened any other time throughout history, outside of Jesus walking on the Earth.

Biblically, the purpose of a miracle is almost always to validate a message or a messenger. The plagues and miracles that Moses brought to Egypt were to show Pharaoh that the God of the Israelites was the one true God and that Pharaoh should listen to Him. When Elijah and Elisha were performing their miracles, the nation of Israel was steeped in idolatry, and it was a validation of their message of repentance. When Jesus came, He claimed to be the Son of God. His miracles were signs that He was the Messiah. The purpose of the miracles was to validate His declaration of

deity. The Apostles were on the front lines of the beginning of Christianity. They were presenting a new message of salvation. Their miracles gave authority to their claims of who Christ was and how people were to be saved.

In the book of Mark, in 8:29, Peter makes the confession that Jesus is the Christ, and it is the turning point of the book. Before Peter's confession, Jesus either casts out demons, performs a miracle, or gives His disciples the authority to do so at least 19 times. After Peter's confession, from Mark 8 through Mark 16, Jesus does this 6 times. The reason the miracles either slowed down or Mark quit recording them was because the disciples had gotten the message and they believed in the Messenger.

In **2 Corinthians 12:12**, Paul says that the apostles, with their position and message, were proven through miracles.

The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

In **Acts 2:22**, in Peter's sermon, he points to the miracles of Jesus being validating signs proving He was from God.

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know

In **Acts 14:3**, speaking of Paul and Barnabas, it says that they were gifted to perform signs and wonders to prove the message they were speaking.

So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

These are just a few examples to show that one of the main purposes of miracles was to prove the message and validate the messenger. We don't need this anymore because we have God's word. The Bible, the message, was being written during the time of the Apostles. Now that it is written and it is the living and active word of God that God speaks through, the need for miracles lessens immensely. Where the Bible is prevalent and the church is active, we don't need the message validated. It has already been validated.

Now, if someone goes as a missionary to a people group who doesn't have the Bible translated for them or their language isn't known, is it more likely that God may temporarily gift people with these miracle gifts to validate the gospel? Sure. But does God give these gifts in America where the church, the gospel, and the Bible are prevalent? Probably not. The purpose of the miracle gifts, as seen throughout scripture, doesn't lead one to believe that they are necessary for the expansion of God's kingdom in America.

How might miracles be effective in validating a message or messenger?

As we said, we would split the gifts into three categories: Miracle Gifts, Speaking Gifts, and Service Gifts. As we go through these gifts, we will spend more time on some than others, but for all, the purpose of this is to give a quick definition of each and not much more.

MIRACLE GIFTS

Tongues

Tongues is the spiritual gift to speak in a known (legitimate foreign language) language that is unknown to the speaker for the purpose of communicating the gospel. We see this best pictured in Acts 2 when the apostles are preaching, and people are hearing them speak in their native languages.

Interpretation of tongues

The gift of interpretation is the ability to interpret a language unknown to the hearer that a tongue speaker was speaking for the edification of those listening. The idea here is that if someone spoke in a tongue in a setting like the church, it would not be beneficial for anyone present if the speaker spoke a language the congregation didn't understand. For their words to be beneficial at all, you would have to have someone interpret their words for the rest of the church.

Miracles

Miracles are the spiritual gift to perform acts that operate outside the natural order for the purpose of pointing others to God's power and His message. This would be God giving someone the ability to perform miraculous works. Usually, those miraculous works are associated with people being healed, which leads us to our final Miracle Gift, healing.

Healing

Healing is the spiritual gift to heal others through God's power. We see this mostly with Jesus and the apostles. Peter told lame people to get up and walk. When Peter's shadow would fall on people, they would be healed. People would take handkerchiefs that Paul had touched to those who were sick, and they would be healed.

With all the Miracle Gifts, they were temporary and their use was not based on the will of the gifted, but God. When we look at the service gifts, you choose to enact those gifts that God has given you. You choose to give or serve or encourage. With the speaking gifts, you choose to teach or tell people about Jesus. With the Miracle Gifts, even when they were in full force, Peter or Paul didn't choose to do miraculous

works, God empowered them for specific acts and specific moments. While all gifts are empowered by God and given effectiveness through God, the activity of the Miracle Gifts was 100% up to God and not the person.

SPEAKING GIFTS

Prophecy

Many people associate prophecy with telling the future. While we do see that sometimes in the Old Testament, where a prophet would tell Israel that if they didn't repent, God would take them into captivity or bring some kind of judgment on them, the focus of prophecy is not telling the future, but it is proclaiming truth. That is what the prophet did. They said, "Thus says the Lord." The Greek word translated prophecy literally means "to speak forth." Prophecy is the spiritual gift to boldly proclaim the truth of God's word.

Teaching

Teaching is the spiritual gift of explaining the meaning and context of scripture and applying it to one's life. Teaching is expounding on God's word. And if you have the gift of teaching, it doesn't mean you don't have to study and prepare. It doesn't excuse effort, it just means with your effort and study and preparation, God has gifted you to explain His truth. Teaching means you have the ability to comprehend and explain God's word.

Knowledge and Words of Wisdom

Words of wisdom and knowledge are the spiritual gifts of being able to speak the truth of scripture into someone's life. Biblically, wisdom is about doing what God has called us to do. Knowledge is understanding God's word and His truth. Someone with knowledge and wisdom is going to help you understand God's word and point you to truth. These are probably going to be more in the context of discipleship, counseling, or advice.

Evangelism

Evangelism is the spiritual gift where one has a passion and desire to see the gospel spread and freely takes opportunities to tell others about Christ. Those with this gift seem to always see opportunities to share the gospel and they tend to take those opportunities without reservation. If you don't have this gift, it doesn't mean you have an excuse not to tell others about Jesus, but for some, sharing the gospel is almost second nature.

SERVICE GIFTS

Apostleship

This is not to be confused with the office of apostle, which no longer exists. The spiritual gift of apostleship is given to those who take the gospel out to see God's kingdom expand. This differs from evangelism because the focus isn't on the speaking,

but on the going. This would be like a missionary or church planter who leaves home to start a new work in spreading the gospel.

Faith

The spiritual gift of faith is seen in those who have an unshakeable trust in the promises and power of God. This is seen in those who have a confident and active prayer life. It is seen in those who have confidence that God will come through or do something powerful regardless of what logic and circumstances dictate.

Discernment

The spiritual gift of discernment gives one the ability to discern between truth and lie, solid theology or bad, and that which is godly and that which is not. We can all build our discernment, but there are some who see clearly when things are of God or not.

Exhortation

Exhortation is the spiritual gift of encouraging people and seeking to build up the faith of others. This is encouragement that seeks to push people closer to God in Christ. This isn't just telling someone their hair looks nice, it is seeking to see their faith and their walk with God strengthened and encouraging them to know and love Jesus.

Shepherd/Leadership

A shepherd or a leader acts as a guide, which is what the Greek word for leader means. It carries the idea of steering a ship. The spiritual gift of leadership shows itself in those that God uses to lead a church or organization to love and glorify God in what they do.

Service

Those with the spiritual gift of service look for opportunities or jump at opportunities to minister to others. They are content being behind the scenes. When they see someone with a need, they are compelled to help and be of assistance, even if no one ever finds out.

Mercy

Those with the spiritual gift of mercy are compassionate to those who are hurting or struggling or in distress and they have a desire to help them or lessen their burden. They just want to help. When they see someone struggling, they naturally want to step in to lighten the load or lift up those who are downtrodden.

Giving

The spiritual gift of giving means one is quick to give of their time, money, or talents in order to benefit or bless someone else. When they see a need they can give to, they do so usually without hesitation.

Administration

Those with the gift of administration help to organize the people and activities of the church so that the church is ministering as efficiently as it can. This is a gift that is

sometimes overlooked, but super necessary in the life of the church. Those with this gift might be seen as micromanagers or nitpicking, but that is not at all what they are doing. They desire to see the church be as effective as it can be by crossing all the *t*'s and dotting all the *i*'s.

Helps

Much like mercy and giving, the spiritual gift of helps seeks to aid those who are in need. It is probably safe to say helps is more action based where mercy might be considered more emotional or simply being present for someone. It could be helping those who are struggling financially or with doubt or struggling spiritually. Whatever the need, you have a desire to help in any way you can.

Why do you think God has given such a wide array of gifts to believers?

DETERMINING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

There is no biblically defined way to determine your spiritual gifts. To determine your gift, start with prayer. Ask God to reveal to you how He has gifted you. You can also look to see where you are naturally drawn. If you get joy or satisfaction from giving to others, then maybe serving is your gift. You can also ask other believers for input. Asking someone what characteristics they see in you can lead you to discover your gifts. If people praise your lesson after you teach, maybe that's where you're gifted. If people naturally follow you, maybe it is leadership. There are also tests that are designed to examine the bent of your heart in serving that can be beneficial. The goal is to figure out how God has gifted you and use those gifts in service to Him.

EVANGELISM

After Jesus rose from the grave and before He ascended back to heaven, He gave His followers (us included) a charge. In Matthew 28 and Acts 1, we have Jesus' final words before He goes back to Heaven.

Matthew 28:18–20

[18] And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Acts 1:8–9

[8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." [9] And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

Jesus' final words, often called the Great Commission, sets part of our purpose as Christians. We are to be involved in making disciples of Christ across the street and around the world. Matthew 28 tells us what we are to do and Acts 1 tells us how and where we are supposed to do it.

WHERE WE SHARE

In Matthew 28, Jesus tells us to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them the person and commandments of Christ. As Christians, this is part of our mission. We are to be worshippers, and we are to live lives of obedience to Christ, but we are also to be involved in the process of making disciples. We make disciples when we see people grow in their faith and in their love for Jesus. The first step of the disciple making process is evangelism. This is telling other people about the person, death, and resurrection of Jesus in hopes that they place their faith and trust in Jesus for salvation.

Evangelism is an essential in the life of the believer and the life of the church. In Acts, Jesus calls us His witnesses. A witness tells what they know to be true. We are to tell what we know to be true about Jesus, that He came as the Son of God to live a perfect life that we could not so that He could die in our place and rise again so that if we place our faith in Jesus, we would be saved.

What is the purpose of Jesus calling us to make disciples and not just create converts?

Evangelism happens in every aspect of our lives. In fact, when Jesus says *go therefore* in Matthew 28:18, a more precise translation is *as you go*. The idea is that as you are going about your life, be a witness that proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ. Be intentional to make disciple making and evangelism a natural part of your life. As you go, as you live your life, let the proclamation of the gospel and encouraging people to love Jesus more be a natural part of your existence.

This really isn't a new idea in the Bible. If you go back to Deuteronomy, when Moses is giving the Law, he commands the Israelites to tell their children who God is and to teach them to love and follow Him. As you read these passages, notice how God commands them to carry this out.

Deuteronomy 6:4–7

[4] "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. [5] You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. [6] And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. [7] You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

As they went about everyday life, as they sat in their homes, when they were walking down the road, in the morning and at evening, they were to be pointing their children to love the one and only God. In a very similar way, as we are telling people about Jesus and encouraging believers to love and trust Him, we are to be doing so as part of our everyday life. It should become normal to us to proclaim the greatness and goodness of Jesus.

If evangelism should be part of our lives, what are some things we can do, taking advantage of our everyday life, to share the gospel with others?

HOW WE SHARE

In Acts 1, Jesus tells us two things about how we are to make disciples and where we are to make disciples. First, let's look at the how. In v8, He says *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you*. Jesus was talking to His disciples who would receive the Holy Spirit in just a few short days at Pentecost, but for believers today, we receive the Holy Spirit the moment we place our faith and trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. God has given us the Holy Spirit for many reasons, one being to empower us to be who God has called us to be and do what God has called us to do.

Making disciples can be a tough process. Not only are you teaching people, but you are helping them apply God's word to their lives and walking with them through the ups and downs of living out their faith. It takes God's help and strength through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to make disciples. God does not expect us to do this alone, but He has given us Himself to carry out the calling He has given us.

In the same way, when we share the gospel, we do so with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can strengthen us when we get nervous. He can give us the words when we don't know exactly what to say. It is important to remember that it is the Holy Spirit who draws people to Christ. We tell people about Jesus, but we cannot save anyone. God in His grace allows us to be the means He uses to spread the good news of Jesus, but it is the Holy Spirit working in someone's life and drawing them to the Father that brings about salvation. In Romans 10, Paul says people cannot believe if they do not hear and they cannot hear if no one tells them.

Romans 10:14–15

[14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? [15] And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

God has not placed the burden of saving people on us. He takes that responsibility and, in His grace, He allows us to be a part of seeing people's lives and eternities changed.

Why is it important to remember the role of the Holy Spirit in the evangelism process?

When it comes to where we make disciples as Christ's witnesses, Jesus tells us in Acts 1:8. He says *you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*. So, does that mean we have to move to the Middle East to be witnesses. Not at all. Jerusalem is where they were. It was home. They were to start where they were at. When we engage in evangelism and disciple making, we need to start where we are. We should make sure our families know about Jesus. We should tell our neighbors about who Jesus is. We should tell our coworkers. As we go about our lives as witnesses for Christ, those we are in contact with on a regular basis should see our testimony for Christ.

Jesus then tells his disciples to move outward to Judea and Samaria. These were neighboring areas. It would be like us going to other cities or states to tell them about Jesus. We often call people who leave their homes for the purpose of spreading the gospel missionaries. Sometimes, God calls us to leave and go so the gospel can spread, and the kingdom of God can expand. The original disciples at times left Jerusalem with the purpose of telling others about Jesus and today, we still do this. It might not mean that you have to leave permanently, it might be that you go on a short term mission trip to help another church to tell others about Jesus.

The mission doesn't stop in our country, but Jesus finishes by telling the disciples (and us) to be His witnesses to the end of the earth. This means we take the gospel around the world. Once again, sometimes people leave their home and their country and travel to other parts of the world for the purpose of sharing the gospel. They leave family and friends and comforts and everything they know so they can see God's kingdom expand and see lives changed by Jesus. We can be involved with global missions by going as missionaries, going on short term mission trips, giving towards missions, and praying for those who are going. In any way we can, we should strive to be a part of taking the gospel across the street and around the world.

What are some ways we engage in evangelism at home but also to the ends of the earth?

WHAT WE SHARE

There are numerous ways to share the gospel and a number of outlines that help you present the gospel. Whatever outline you use, there are a couple of things to keep in mind when telling people about Jesus. First, God is the one at work. Remember, you don't have to convince someone to trust Jesus. Present the truth and allow God to work. Second, include as much scripture as possible. The reason we want to include scripture is three-fold. One, it points back to the Bible as the source of truth. It tells our listener that this did not originate with us. Two, it reminds us that it is not our cleverness or wording that will convince. Sometimes we might be tempted to think if we can say the right words in the right way that we can break through to someone so they can be saved. Remember, it's not us that does the saving and convincing, it is God. That brings us to the third reason, scripture is God breathed and living and active. God's word has a power that ours don't because the Bible is God's words and He still actively speaks through them.

Whatever plan you use to tell people about Jesus, remember, the plan isn't what is most important, Jesus is. The gospel really consists of just a few pieces. If we get those pieces down, then it will help us share the gospel with or without an outline. First, we need to make sure we convey the need for the gospel; God is perfect, and we are not. Our imperfection (sin) separates us from God and makes us deserving of punishment or justice. This punishment is an eternal punishment in Hell.

Next, we need to convey the meat of the gospel. This is God's provision of salvation through Jesus. Even though we were deserving of judgment, God loved us enough to send Jesus. Jesus, God, came to earth as a man. He lived a sinless life. He died so He could pay the penalty of our sin. He rose from the dead three days later so He could conquer sin and death. He then ascended into Heaven where He operates as the go between for us and the Father.

Finally, we close with what the gospel does and how we accept it in faith. The Bible promises that everyone who calls on the name of Jesus will be saved. We call on Jesus by placing our faith or trust in who Jesus is and what Jesus did. We acknowledge our sin and our need for a savior. We confess our sinfulness before God and ask His forgiveness. We confess Jesus as Lord and Savior, and we surrender our lives to Him. When we do this, the Bible says we are forgiven and adopted into God's family.

That's the gospel. Sure, you can go deeper into details, but if you're sharing the gospel with the purpose of them understanding their need for salvation and God's provision for salvation, that is all you need. We will give two outlines you can follow but they are both just presenting the same thing we have just laid out.

Before we get to the two outlines, it helps to think through opening questions. These are just questions that help us initiate a conversation to introduce the gospel in. It can

be as simple as, "Can I talk to you about Jesus?" It can be probing, like, "What do you think it takes for someone to get to Heaven?" You can ask to pray for someone and then ask something like this, "Can I share with you really quick why God hears us when we pray?" It can be a theological question like, "What do you believe about God/Jesus? Can I share with you what the Bible says about God/Jesus?" Sometimes the opportunity to talk about Jesus presents itself when someone else brings it up and sometimes we have to bring it up, so having a question or two ready is a real benefit.

What are some other questions you can think of that might help start a gospel conversation?

ROMANS ROAD

One of the most time tested outlines is called the Romans Road. It is called this because it relies on scriptures in the book of Romans to present the gospel. As you begin sharing the gospel with this outline, you could start by saying something like this, "In the book of Romans, there is a pathway or a road that shows us how to get to God." Then you could just walk them down this road.

The first step down the road to God is admitting that you are a sinner.

Romans 3:23

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

The second step is understanding that you deserve death for your sin.

Romans 6:23a

"...The wages of sin is death..."

The next step is recognizing that even though we sinned and we deserve death, God has loved us by sending His Son to provide salvation.

Romans 5:8

"God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us!"

As we continue down the road, we understand that Jesus died to give us eternal life with God.

Romans 6:23b

"...But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Trust in faith that Jesus is who He said He is and He did what He said He did. Know that if you believe this and you surrender your life to Him in faith as your Lord, you will be saved.

Romans 10:9,10

"...If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

The final step is trusting that Jesus has saved you and restored your relationship with God.

Romans 10:13

"Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved!"

If someone wants to place their faith in Christ, instead of leading them in a prayer, just encourage them to pray. Encourage them to just admit to God their need for Him and have them ask God to forgive them and save them. Remember, it is not a prayer that saves. It is faith in the person and work of Jesus that saves. The prayer is simply a way to express that faith in Christ. After someone places their faith in Christ, encourage them to go to church. Encourage them be baptized. Not because baptism saves, that's already done. Baptism is a public declaration that they have been saved. Encourage them to read the Bible so they can learn who God is and what it means to trust Him.

GOD AND THE GOSPEL EVANGELISM PLAN

This outline is built on some of the attributes of God we looked at at the very beginning of this material. Since God's attributes define our need for the gospel and His provision for the gospel, it can be a good way to share the gospel.

Three opening questions:

Do you believe in God?

What do you believe about God?

Can I share with you what the Bible says about God?

The Bible says God is holy.

Because God is holy, He is perfect and different from us. This means God is perfect in all He does and He never sins and He is different from us.

Isaiah 46:5

To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike?

Isaiah 46:9

for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me,

This might bring up the question, "How is God different from us?"

The Bible tells us God is righteous.

This means God is the standard of what is good and right, and He always does what is good and right. God's standard of goodness is perfection, and we have fallen short of that standard.

Romans 3:23

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

The bible also tells us that God is a God of wrath.

This means God hates all sin and is angry about sin.

Romans 1:18

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Because God is righteous and hates all sin, He must judge sin

Romans 6:23

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

Because we have broken God's law and sinned, we deserve judgment for our sin; this means Hell.

But the Bible also tells us that God is love.

Love is the free choice God has made to seek out what is best for us at His own expense in a way that we could never earn or manufacture.

Romans 5:8

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

The Bible teaches that God is gracious and patient. Exodus 34:6

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

This means that God does not give us what we deserve, but offers us something far greater. It also means that He gives us time to make a decision for Him.

The Bible tells us that God forgives.

Because Jesus died for us and rose again, God is willing and able to forgive us of our sins if we will repent and trust in Jesus as our Savior.

Romans 10:9

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

If someone wants to accept Christ, everything said above is true. Have them pray in their own words as an exercise of faith. Encourage them to read the Bible, get involved in church, and be baptized. Also, this begins your journey with them to not just pray a prayer, but to grow as a disciple of Christ.

However you share the gospel, it is important to recognize that to share the gospel, we have to be intentional. This means we usually have to make the decision to move a conversation to Jesus and the gospel. The odds of someone walking up to us and asking how they can be saved are slim. We have to be intentional in choosing to tell others about Jesus. We have to look for natural opportunities and sometimes we have to create opportunities and conversations, even if they make us feel awkward. Intentionality is essential in telling others about Jesus.

THE CHURCH

When we talk about the church, there is a lot that can be discussed and a lot of debates that can be had. There are things that are definitive about the church, like its necessity and purpose, and there are things that are up for interpretation, like leadership structure and how much input the congregation has. The goal of this workbook is not to get bogged down in the weeds, but to take a big picture look to help set a foundation for what we believe. Because this is the goal, we will focus on what the church is and the things that are more definitive rather than discussing things like whether a church should be congregationally affirmed or elder led.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The church is the gathering of believers. When we talk about the church, there are two things we can be referring to. The Universal Church refers to all Christians around the world. This is the Kingdom of God. Whether you live in the Alabama or California or Uganda or Korea, if you have placed your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior then you are part of God's kingdom and His church. There is a bond we have with other believers all over the world in Christ that is greater than nationality or skin color or cultural upbringing.

The Local Church is a reference to the local body of believers that gather weekly to worship together, study God's word together, and reach out to the world with the gospel together. When the vast majority of people talk about the church, this is what they refer to. In this section, as we discuss the church, this will be our focus. While we are all part of the universal church, it is the local church where we are discipled and where we fellowship and where we partner with other believers to see the kingdom of God expanded.

What are the benefits of knowing we are part of the Universal Church and the Local Church?

NECESSITY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

It may seem self-serving for a pastor or a church to say the church is a necessity, but it is, and not just because pastors say so, but because God does. While discussing spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians, Paul compares the church to a body.

1 Corinthians 12:12–18

[12] For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. [13] For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

[14] For the body does not consist of one member but of many. [15] If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. [16] And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. [17] If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? [18] But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

In this description, we see that the church is made up of individual parts working together, just like a body. Let's sit with this illustration for a minute. If we do, we will see the necessity of the church for people and the necessity of people for the church. Paul says we are all part of one body, and the body is not made up of one part but many. If you cut off a finger from the human body and toss it away from the body, what happens? The finger begins to die. The individual parts of the human body, foot, eye, ear, finger, etc, cannot exist away from the body. If you remove them, they begin to die. It is the same for church members. If we remove ourselves from the church, we will begin to die spiritually. It will not negate our salvation, but we will not thrive spiritually, and we will find ourselves moving away from intimacy with God and toward sin and self. God created us to need Him but to also need others.

If you remove a finger from the body, not only does the finger begin to die, but it impacts the effectiveness of the body. To lose a body part means the body is not operating at peak performance. If you remove enough pieces of the body, then the body ceases to exist. For the church to exist, it needs the individual people that make up the church. Every Christian who is part of the local church is essential to the health of that church. For the church to thrive, it needs people to serve. It needs people to share the load in teaching and discipleship. It needs people to invest in others. It needs people to be active in praying for each other. The church needs more than just the pastor on the stage; it needs everyone serving how God has gifted them.

How does a Christian not being involved in the local church impact them and the church?

People make all sorts of excuses for why they don't go to church. They say they can worship by themselves in their homes or out in nature. We can 100% worship by ourselves, and we should, daily, but that doesn't negate the truth that God created us to be part of the church and if we are not, then our walk with God will struggle. People say they don't go to church because it is filled with hypocrites. That's not an untrue statement. The church is filled with people who proclaim faith in Christ and a love for Jesus, but they still mess up. That's true for those going to church and those who use it as an excuse not to go. None of us are perfect. There is not a perfect church because there aren't perfect people. If we are looking for the perfect church to go to then we'll never go to church. The imperfection of the church reminds us of God's grace, but it also gives us opportunities to live out our faith with others. We get the opportunity to pray for imperfect people in their struggles. We have the chance to ask other people to pray for us in our imperfection. We get the opportunity to love like Jesus by loving people who are hard to love. We get the chance to live out God's call in Ephesians 4:32 to forgive others as we have been forgiven in Christ. Being part of the church, filled with imperfect people, gives us the chance to be the people God has called us to be.

How does the church being filled with imperfect people actually help build a stronger church? (see 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 for extra help in answering)

PURPOSE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Much of what we have looked at in this workbook is fulfilled through our participation in the local church. We are disciplined in the church. Whether it be Sunday School or small groups, preaching on Sunday morning, Sunday night, or Wednesday night, or through one on one discipleship. The church helps us in our sanctification. The church should train and equip us in carrying out spiritual disciplines. The church should equip us and encourage us to proclaim the gospel. It is through the church that we find fellowship with other believers that encourages and strengthens our faith. The church provides us with the accountability we need to strengthen our faith. We gather with the church to worship God together.

The purpose of the church is to glorify God by encouraging believers to love Jesus more and to take the gospel out to the world around us. We gather to worship God for who He is and what He has done. God is our audience of one as we worship. We gather to study God's word to see who He is and how we can live lives to please Him. We are sent out from the church to live as light in a dark and fallen world to point people to Jesus. The goal of the church is not to entertain and make us feel good. The church aims to please God, not man. The goal of the church is not to insulate people from the world. The church aims to impact and change the world with the gospel. The goal of the church is not political involvement, as we seek to expand God's kingdom and not men. The church is an organization instituted by God to glorify His name across the world and to point all people to Him that they may find life in Christ.

How do we make sure we keep the focus and that we don't turn our focus as a church to something else?

LEADERSHIP OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

There are two leadership roles presented in scripture for the church, elders/pastors and deacons. Elders/pastors are the leaders. They are the ones that the author of Hebrews talks about in **Hebrews 13:17**.

[17] Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

The Elder/pastor has specific duties in the life of the church. As Hebrews showed us, they have care over the souls of the congregants. This does not remove personal responsibility from individuals, but the pastor is more than a hired gun who preaches and teaches. He is to care for the spiritual well-being of those under his charge. One of the ways he does this is through teaching. In 1 Timothy 3, being able to teach is listed as one of the requirements of a pastor. In Titus 1, another passage that teaches us the requirements of a pastor, it says the pastor must not only teach the Bible but confront false teachings.

Titus 1:9

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

The pastor is also supposed to set an example of what it means to love and walk with Jesus. If you look at the passages in 1 Timothy and Titus that list the qualifications for the elder, the vast majority of the qualifications deal with the character of the pastor.

1 Timothy 3:1–7

[1] The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. [2] Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, [3] not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. [4] He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, [5] for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? [6] He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. [7] Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Titus 1:5–9

[5] This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—[6] if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. [7] For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above

reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, [8] but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. [9] He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Outside of teaching and managing his household, all the qualifications deal with the elder's character and their walk with God. The elder must have a walk with God that is shown in a changed life so he can model what it means to walk with God and so his life does not hinder God's work in and through the church.

Why do you think most of the qualifications for pastors are character focused and not productivity focused or talent driven?

The role of the deacon is to lead through service. The first deacons are introduced in Acts 6. A conflict had arisen in the newly instituted church between widows who were Christians of a Jewish decent and those who had been living in Rome. The disciples did not want their focus taken off of teaching and praying, so they had the church choose 7 men to serve these widows.

Acts 6:1–4

[1] Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. [2] And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. [3] Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. [4] But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

It was their duty to serve the church. In fact, the word deacon (that is introduced later) comes from the Greek word that means *servant*. Not only are deacons supposed to serve in this capacity, but they are to serve in spreading the gospel and telling others about Jesus. Deacons are introduced in Acts 6 and then Acts 7 tells us of Stephen, one of the deacons chosen in Acts 6, who was the first to be killed for telling people about Jesus. Then, in Acts 8, we have the story of Phillip telling the Ethiopian eunuch about Jesus. The deacons were active in spreading the gospel and expanding the kingdom.

In 1 Timothy 2, after Paul gives Timothy the qualifications for the elder/pastor, he gives the qualifications of the deacon. They are very similar to the elder/pastor with the exception of being able to teach.

1 Timothy 3:8–13

[8] Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. [9] They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. [10] And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. [11] Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. [12] Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. [13] For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Deacons are not ones that make decisions for the church. They help the pastor by serving church members in numerous ways and by helping in the spread of the gospel. These two positions handle much of the work of the church. When it comes to the business of the church (finances, bills, hiring/firing, etc), different churches handle things differently. Some churches are part of a larger organization that controls those parts of the church. In some churches, there is a board of elders that make those decisions. In some, the congregation handles those things through committees and voting in business meetings. This is an area that is open to interpretation, so we show grace to those who view things differently than us.

How can a church be strengthened by having deacons do the job the Bible shows them doing?

ORDINANCES OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

In the church, an ordinance is a practice instituted by Christ that serves as a symbol of a believer's faith in Christ and a declaration of what Christ has done for us. The church has two ordinances it practices, baptism and the Lord's Supper.

BAPTISM

Baptism is instituted in the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:19

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

As we go and make disciples by sharing the gospel with people, we are to also baptize. So, what is baptism. Baptism is often called the first step of obedience after someone places their faith in Christ. Baptism as an ordinance is a public declaration to a local church that the one being baptized has placed their faith and trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. In baptism, one is submerged under the water and brought back up to picture how we have died with Christ to our sin and guilt, and we have been born again as a new creature in Christ. In fact, the word baptism comes from a Greek word meaning *to submerge*.

Baptism does not save you. Baptism does not wash away sin. Baptism is an act of obedience for believers to declare their faith in Christ. It comes after salvation; it does not affect salvation. Baptism simply proclaims your salvation to a body of believers. It is one of the first ways we declare our faith to others.

LORD'S SUPPER

Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper in Luke 22.

Luke 22:19–20

*[19] And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."
[20] And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."*

The Lord's Supper is done in remembrance of Jesus' death on the cross. The bread represents His body that was broken for us on the cross and the blood represents the new covenant of salvation that is ushered in through the gospel. The New Covenant is the promise of salvation for all who put their faith in Jesus for who He is and what He has done. **1 Corinthians 11:26** tells us that we take the Lord's Supper to proclaim the death of Jesus until He comes.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The Catholic Church teaches that the bread and juice literally transform into the real flesh of Jesus and the real blood of Jesus. That is not what is going on here. The Lord's Supper is done in remembrance of the promise of salvation made through the death of Jesus. It is a worshipful experience that glorifies God. God is present with the church when they worship through the taking of the bread and juice, but He is not the bread and the juice.

How do these ordinances proclaim the gospel and help Christians focus on the gospel?

CONTINUING DISCIPLESHIP

You've finished this workbook, now what? Does this make you a fully formed disciple of Christ. No. Does this mean we are done growing in our faith? Absolutely not. We continue to grow in discipleship for the rest of our lives. Discipleship is a lifelong process with the final destination being Heaven. Hopefully this workbook has helped lay a foundation of truth that will encourage and strengthen your faith and equipped you with some tools to help you continue growing in your faith.

Why is it important to remember that discipleship is a lifelong process?

So, if we are going to continue growing as disciples, what does that look like? What does maturing spiritually entail? First, know that Christianity is not that complex. Sometimes we make it harder than it needs to be, but Christianity is fairly simple. We become Christians by placing our faith in the person and work of Jesus, believing that He is the Son of God and that He died and rose again to provide us salvation. While there is a lot of truth and depth in the gospel, it is simple enough that children can comprehend it and believe it.

The simplicity of Christianity is seen in its greatest two commandments, to love God and love people. In Matthew 22, Jesus is asked by a lawyer, or one who was skilled in the study of the Old Testament Law, which was the greatest commandment in the Law? We see His response in **Matthew 22:37–40**.

[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."

Love God with all you are and love others as you would love yourself. Not only did Jesus say these are the greatest two commandments, but He says the whole Old Testament structure of the Law and the Prophets rests on these two commandments. All 613 Old Testament Laws were built on the call to love God and love people. God's communication with His people through the Prophets was all so His people would love Him and love each other.

CONTINUING DISCIPLESHIP IS PRACTICED BY LOVING GOD AND LOVING OTHERS.

Loving God and loving others is paramount to the Christian life. We are to be known by our love. It is our love for others that proclaims the greatness of our Savior to others. As we strive to love God and love others, we have to make sure we do not get these two switched in their importance. Loving God always comes first and it influences how we love others. Because we love God first, we know that sin is against God, and it is never loving to encourage someone in their sins. Often Christians can be tempted to be accepting of sin on the grounds of loving others, but our love for others is guided by our love for God. If God says sin is destructive and He loved us enough to send His Son to die for our sins, we can not love God and love people by saying sin is good or ok.

Also, we have to make sure our love for people never takes precedence over our love for God. Sometimes we can be tempted to value people over God. When we do this, it becomes idolatry. People sometimes place their spouse or their children or their friendships over God. While the motivation to love might be what drives this, if people come before God, then relationships and people will take on a position they are not meant to take.

What could some of the negatives be if we got the order of loving God and loving people flipped?

So, if continuing discipleship is seen in loving God and loving others, how does that actually play out in our lives? How does that become more than just words but actual practical actions that help me grow in my faith?

WE LOVE GOD THROUGH A COMMITMENT TO GROW AND A COMMITMENT TO WORSHIP.

Being a disciple takes commitment. It takes commitment to do the things that God has called us to do and committing to keeping God first in all areas of our lives.

WE MODEL A COMMITMENT TO GROW BY PRACTICING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES.

When we looked at spiritual disciplines earlier, we said they are activities we engage in consistently and repeatedly to help us stay focused on Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the people God has called us to be. Spiritual disciplines keep us

focused on Christ. They are not just activities we do to mark off on a daily checklist, but they are things we do that actively help us live out our faith.

When we obey God's commands, it shows our surrender to God.

When we confess and repent of our sins, it shows humility before God.

When we pray, it shows our dependence on God.

As we study our Bibles, our faith is strengthened as we see who God is and how we respond to Him.

When we give, it shows our trust in God.

Spiritual disciplines are not just empty activities, but they are a way for us to live out our faith and dependence on God in a very real way. Also, if we forego practicing these disciplines, it will cripple us spiritually. If we do not give, it is a declaration of selfishness or not trusting that God is big enough to provide for our needs. If we refuse to obey God's commands, it shows a heart that is not surrendered to God and a heart that is in rebellion against God. Practicing these disciplines gives us opportunities to live out our faith, and in doing so, our faith will be strengthened.

Why do you think practicing spiritual disciplines help us grow spiritually?

A COMMITMENT TO WORSHIP AIMS TO PLACE GOD FIRST IN EVERY AREA OF OUR LIVES.

Romans 12 defines worship as presenting your bodies to God as a living sacrifice. A sacrifice is something that's life was offered to God in full surrender to show God's greatness and worth. We are to surrender our lives to God, dying to self and sin, sacrificing all we are to Him. When we do this we proclaim His greatness and we find joy and life in Him. What are some practical things we can do to keep this commitment to worship?

Remember that our why matters. Let who God is and what He has done be our motivation for loving and following Jesus. We obey because God has loved us, not so that He will love us.

Find your identity in Christ. There are a lot of ways we can identify or categorize ourselves. Husband. Wife. Mother. Father. Grandparent. Employee. Fan. The

list goes on. While it is important to recognize our role in all of these identifiers, for Christians, our chief identity is the fact that we are the children of God through the sacrifice of Jesus. If we keep this first, it will impact how we live as married people or as parents or as grandparents. It will affect how we interact with our neighbors and how we perform our jobs. Above all else, we are the sons and daughters of God.

Keep the gospel front and center in your life. It is important to remember that the gospel is not just for salvation, but something we should dwell on daily. Dwelling on the gospel reminds us of God's love for us. It reminds us of our sinfulness and our need for a daily relationship with God. It keeps us humble, so we don't think we are better than anyone else. It keeps our hearts soft towards those who don't know Jesus and hopefully motivates us to tell others about Jesus. It reminds us of God's grace that we need daily. It calls us to confess and repent when we sin.

Why is it important to keep the Gospel front and center in your life?

What could be the outcome if we "forget" the gospel on a daily basis?

If we remember Christ as our motivation, our identity, and our Savior, it will help us live a lifestyle of worship where He is exalted above all else and we are fully surrendered to Him.

WE LOVE OTHERS BY LOVING LIKE JESUS LOVED AND BY TELLING OTHERS ABOUT JESUS.

Jesus says the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. Ultimately, this means loving others in the same way you love yourself or wanting for others what you would want for yourself. You typically want the best you can get for yourself and that is how we are to love others. We don't give them second best or whatever is left over. To love someone like this means we have to put ourselves last in order to put others first. To love your neighbor as yourself means ultimately, we give others what we would want for ourselves and place ourselves last.

LOVING OTHERS THIS WAY MEANS WE ARE LOVING AS JESUS HAS LOVED.

Jesus tells us in John 13:34 that we are to love others as He has loved us. While our love will never measure up to God's love shown through Christ, we can model that love in how we treat others. **We love like Jesus when we serve others.** In Matthew 20:28, Jesus said He did not come to be served, but to serve others. If we love like Jesus, we serve like Jesus.

We love like Jesus when we forgive others. God forgives us completely in Christ and remembers our sin no more. This is an incredible truth that we are hopefully incredibly thankful for. In Ephesians 4:32, we are called to forgive others as God has forgiven us in Christ. We love like Jesus when we forgive like Jesus.

Loving like Jesus means humbly putting others first. Paul describes Jesus' humility in the book of Philippians like this...

Philippians 2:3–4

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

Jesus put us first when He left Heaven and came to earth in the form of a man to provide salvation for us. It doesn't mean He worshipped us, but He was willing to put our needs and what was valuable and important to us above what was easiest for Him. In coming, He not only left Heaven but He lived a life less than what He was worthy of for us. He suffered for us. He died for us. If we want to love like Jesus loved then we have to humble ourselves and put others first the way Jesus did.

Why is it important for us to love as Jesus has loved?

WE LOVE OTHERS BY POINTING THEM TO JESUS.

This might be the best way we can love others, by pointing them to Jesus. For unbelievers, this means proclaiming to them the gospel and the salvation that is offered through Jesus. It means praying for them. It means loving them like Jesus loves so they can get even just the smallest glimpse of His love. For the lost, we should aim to genuinely love them with the goal being to see them turn to Christ in faith since that is what is best for all people.

For other believers, we point them to Jesus by encouraging them. We speak truth to

them. We pray for them. We challenge them to walk with Jesus. We make sure to do the best we can to make sure our interactions encourage them to love and know Jesus more.

How can we point unbelievers to Jesus? How can we point believers to Jesus?

WE CONTINUE IN DISCIPLESHIP BY INVESTING IN OTHERS AND MAKING MORE DISCIPLES.

The last step of continuing discipleship is participating in the disciple making process with others. The discipleship process does not stop with us. We are commanded to make disciples. That means we tell people about Jesus and when they trust Him for salvation, we help them grow in their faith. We help them build a foundation. We pray for them. We walk with them. We encourage them. We partner with them. We hold them accountable. We are called to be involved in each other's lives. We are called to help point each other to Jesus.

As we go about life, let us go about telling people about Jesus and helping those who know Jesus know and love Him more. There is joy found in walking with others in their faith. There is maturity that happens in our lives when we invest in the lives of others. There is encouragement found in walking with someone as they grow spiritually. Making disciples does as much for the faith of the one investing as it does the one being invested in.

Let's be a part of expanding God's kingdom, one life at a time.