

Teacher Edition

BUILD

BELOW THE BASELINE

*Developing the Part of Your
Life that Only God Sees*

PAUL CHAPPELL

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Contents

How to Use This Curriculum	v
1. A Relationship with God	1
2. Trust in God	23
3. Repentance	47
4. Humility	75
5. A Good Conscience	97
6. Dying to Self	123
7. Filled with the Spirit	149
8. Spiritual Discipline	169
9. Forgiveness	193
10. Contentment	215

How to Use This Curriculum

Take a moment to familiarize yourself with the features of this Sunday school curriculum:

Schedule

The lessons contained in this curriculum are undated, allowing you to begin and end the teaching series at any time. There are ten lessons that may be taught weekly any time of the year.

Companion Resources

Companion presentations and printable outlines and are available for download through Striving Together Publications. The presentations are a visual tool for teachers sharing these lessons in a class setting. The outlines include blanks that students in a class or members of a group study

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may fill in as the material is presented and also provide support Scripture verses that are used throughout each lesson. These help provide engagement as well as giving study participants printed resources to review the truths they are learning.

Text

The verses from which the lessons are taken are included at the beginning of each lesson. These are provided so that you may read them through several times in prayerful preparation for your time in class. Many teachers choose to memorize their key verses. During the class hour, we suggest that you use your own Bible for Scripture reading and encourage your class members to do so as well.

Overview

The overview section is provided so that you may be aware of the overall emphasis of each lesson, especially as it relates to the other lessons in the curriculum. These brief statements provide a snapshot of where each lesson will take the students.

Lesson Goals

Bible teaching has a higher goal than the delivery of information. That goal is a life changed. Students want to know what they are to do with what they are given from God's Word. As you prepare for and teach each lesson, emphasize how those listening may apply its truths throughout the week.

Teaching Outline

The abbreviated outline enables you to view the entire lesson at a glance to see how the content fits together. Teaching with an organized outline increases the student's ability to understand and remember the lesson content.

Lesson Illustrations

Illustrations can be extremely helpful in communicating truth. Throughout the curriculum we have included various illustrations. These illustrations are provided as a guide for the teacher and can be replaced or used at the teacher's discretion. It is recommended that the teacher include some of his own personal illustrations.

A Relationship with God

Text

PHILIPPIANS 3:10–14

10 *That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;*

11 *If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.*

12 *Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.*

13 *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,*

14 *I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

Overview

The greatest privilege of life is knowing Christ. There are many benefits of the Christian life, and they are discovered through the course of a lifetime. In this study, we will look at the parts of the Christian life that no one else sees—the elements that comprise our foundation.

It may be easy for a while to portray an image of spiritual success when there is no real substance underneath. We may even have those closest to us fooled into thinking that everything is fine. In fact, one may be fooling himself

into thinking that everything is okay because the outward structure looks right. But long before the destruction of a life is seen on the outside, there are issues with the foundation developing below the surface. Every structurally-sound life has a common denominator—it is built on a solid foundation.

Lesson Goals

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should:

1. Recognize the importance of knowing Jesus.
2. Place a priority on their daily walk with God.
3. Consider the quality of their spiritual foundation.

Teaching Outline

- I. The Foundation of Relationship
 - A. Know His Person
 - B. Know His Power
 - C. Know His Presence
- II. The Formation of Faith
 - A. The Promise of Resurrection
 - B. The Process of Transformation
- III. The Fixation of Will
 - A. Paul Recognized His Position
 - B. Paul Rejected the Past
 - C. Paul Ran to Win the Prize

LESSON ONE

A Relationship with God

Text

PHILIPPIANS 3:10–14

Introduction

Salvation gives us the most wonderful relationship of life. When someone receives Christ as Saviour, new life is birthed within. It can never be taken away or lost. It is a relationship that changes our eternity, but it also has the potential to change our immediate lives.

Salvation means that we are declared righteous before God.

PHILIPPIANS 3:9

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

In our court system, a judge will drop his gavel and declare his verdict on the defendant. Likewise, God is our Judge. When we come before Him, we are declared righteous if we are saved. For those of us who have accepted Christ as our atonement, God declares us righteous by the merit of His Son's own blood.

TEACHING TIP

Bring a gavel to class, and as you describe the judge in a courtroom, use it on your podium. Likewise, as you describe God declaring us righteous because of Christ's death in our place, bring down the gavel and say, "Not guilty."

JOHN 15:5

5 *I am the vine, ye are the branches...*

Particularly in the culture of that day, one would have understood the significance of this agricultural parallel. A branch without a vine would soon shrivel and die. Likewise, without Christ, we have no strength or ability to bear fruit.

Salvation also makes Christ our cornerstone. The Apostle Paul used this analogy in his letter to the church at Ephesus.

EPHESIANS 2:19–22

19 *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;*
20 *And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;*
21 *In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:*

22 *In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

A Christian has the advantage of building his life on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ. The hymn “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less” written by Edward Mote adequately states, “On Christ the Solid Rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand.”

The amazing thing about many Christian lives is that we have mastered the art of giving the illusion of success, all the while ignoring the foundation that is designed by God to support the structure of our lives. It is possible to have the appearance of growing in Christ but have a crumbling foundation.

Illustration

Pisa, Italy, is the home of the well-known landmark, the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Though this tower draws tourists from all over the world, it is actually an embarrassing display of the ramifications of a faulty foundation. Construction of the Tower of Pisa began in 1173. It was built in soft soil and was given a foundation that was less than ten feet deep. Even before its completion in 1372, its infamous tilt was noticeable to the naked eye. The inadequate foundation was too unstable to support such a large structure.

From 1990 to 2001, the tower was closed to the public while a \$25 million project was conducted to stabilize the structure and reduce its lean. But even after these eleven years of reconstruction, the lean was only able to be reduced by sixteen inches.

Millions of people make their way to the Tower of Pisa and gaze with awe at the phenomenon of such a structure. But every day, we cross paths with souls whose structures

are just as much of a contradiction to functionality as that of the tower.

It does not matter how much effort is put into constructing a successful life. If we only take care of the outside and do not put effort into the part that no one else sees—the foundation—our demise will eventually become obvious.

I. **The Foundation of Relationship**

PHILIPPIANS 3:10

10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

When the Apostle Paul penned these words, he was not speaking of a casual knowledge of God or of simply knowing Jesus as Saviour. He was speaking of an intimate and deep knowledge of God. The Greek word used for *know* used in this passage means “to understand, to grasp or ascertain; especially to be familiar or acquainted with a person or thing.” It is to really *know* Jesus in an abiding relationship.

Philippians 3:10 highlights three ways of knowing Jesus:

A. **Know His Person**

“...*that I may know him...*” (Philippians 3:10).

This kind of knowledge of Jesus Christ is far more than intellectually knowing *about* Jesus. It is knowing Him personally. We have the opportunity to develop a relationship with Him. Knowing the person of Jesus Christ means that we spend time

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with Him. We are sensitive and obedient to His voice. We set aside time to know Him.

Religion alone is satisfied with ornate rites, systems, and regulations and is willing to pass these off as “knowing” God. But a Christian ought to desire to *know* Christ—intimately and personally. One can know biblical boundaries and spiritual preferences and yet not know Christ.

Do you *know* Him? Do you know the sense of His conviction? Do you know when He is burdening your heart to spend more time with Him? Do you know the prompting of the Holy Spirit to share the gospel with someone? This is knowing Christ.

EPHESIANS 1:15–18

15 *Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,*

16 *Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;*

17 *That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:*

18 *The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,*

Consider these words by F.B. Meyer:

We may know Him personally intimately face to face. Christ does not live back in the centuries, nor amid the clouds of heaven: He is near us, with us, compassing our path in our lying down, and acquainted with all our ways. But we cannot know Him in this mortal life except through the illumination and teaching of the Holy Spirit. . . . And we must surely know Christ, not as a stranger who

turns in to visit for the night, or as the exalted king of men—there must be the inner knowledge as of those whom He counts His own familiar friends, whom He trusts with His secrets, who eat with Him of His own bread.—F.B. Meyer

John Milton accurately stated, “The end of all learning is to know God, and out of that knowledge to love and imitate Him.”

Illustration

When a man and his wife have been married for a number of years, they know by instinct their spouse’s likes and dislikes. The husband knows what kind of flowers his wife loves, her favorite restaurant, and exactly how to brew her coffee. The wife knows her husband’s routine, how he likes to relax after work, and his favorite sports teams.

We would think it strange if a married person didn’t know anything about their spouse. But knowing one’s spouse isn’t developed merely by being married. It is gained by spending time with each other. It takes communication and making it a priority to get to know one’s spouse. Knowing the Person of Jesus Christ is like that.

If a Christian has been saved for a number of years but still does not know Jesus personally and intimately, there is a problem in his foundation. Eventually, the structure of that Christian’s life will crumble because no investment was made into building this foundation.

B. Know His Power

“...and the power of his resurrection...” (Philippians 3:10)

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The Greek word for *power* is *dunamis* from which we get our English word *dynamite*. It is a life changing power that comes through the Spirit of God living within us. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to you and me.

And here, we see that Paul states he wasn't content to merely know about this power; he wanted to personally experience it. Thus, he gladly exchanged his human impotence for experiencing divine omnipotence. He wanted to know the fullness of God's power.

2 PETER 1:3

3 *According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:*

1 CORINTHIANS 2:1–5

1 *And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.*

2 *For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

3 *And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.*

4 *And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, **but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:***

5 *That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, **but in the power of God.***

Below the baseline of each of our lives there must be God's power at work. We ought to be personally experiencing the manifestation of God's power working in us through our relationship with Him.

C. Know His Presence

“...and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:10).

The word *fellowship* speaks of communion. It means to partake with Christ, to commune with Him. Paul had such a deep abiding relationship with Christ that even as he penned these words from prison, he had come to realize that the sufferings of life gave him a venue of fellowship with Christ. Rather than complaining about his problems and looking for a way out, he looked at those sufferings as tools to experience the presence of God Almighty.

HEBREWS 4:15–16

15 For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

The deepest moments of fellowship with Christ can be the times of our most intense suffering. Suffering drives us to seek the presence of God. We find in Him a merciful High Priest and a faithful Friend who feels our pain. He is a sympathetic Companion who faced all the trials and temptations that we face. We can boldly come to God’s throne and find grace to help in time of need because He knows the feeling of our infirmities. Paul didn’t give up in his times of suffering because he recognized that it was through suffering that God’s presence became most real.

Illustration

In the early 1400s, John Huss was a Catholic priest appointed in Prague at the Bethlehem Chapel. Through the preaching of John Wycliffe, however, Huss began to see the error of the Catholic Church in preaching salvation by works. Huss began to boldly preach the truth of salvation by grace alone to his congregation. This gained the attention of his people, drawing crowds and resulting in many being saved.

Meanwhile, the Pope promised forgiveness of sins to all who supported his leadership. Huss did not cower from clearly pointing out the fallacy of the Pope's declarations, for only Jesus Christ can offer remission of sins. This caused great suffering for John Huss. He was burned at the stake because of his refusal to comply to the Catholic Church's teachings.

As the wood was lit and the flames licked his body, Huss cried out, "What I taught with my lips I now seal with my blood! Lord, I commend my spirit to you!"

John Huss knew the fellowship of suffering with Christ. Like Paul, he did not seek to elude suffering nor fold to the pressure. He had a foundation that was far deeper than what the pain of suffering could reach.

When we have an abiding relationship with Christ, we come to know Him in a way that is deeper than surface knowledge. His power and His presence become real in our lives in a way that sustains us. This is what it means to build a foundational relationship with God that will last for a lifetime.

II. **The Formation of Faith**

PHILIPPIANS 3:11–12

11 *If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.*

12 *Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.*

When a relationship with God becomes an intricate part of our foundation, we begin to grow in our faith. Of course, we are saved by faith, but our faith ought not stop with salvation. That is just the beginning. As our relationship deepens and we know the Lord more intimately, our confidence in Him will likewise grow.

Illustration

We get excited at the announcement of a newborn. Ladies, in particular, like to know the details: How much did the baby weigh? How long is the baby? We want to see pictures and share our admiration of this new life.

But six months down the road, if that baby still looked the same, weighed the same, and was just as helpless and needy as a newborn, we would be concerned. That is not natural. It goes against the cycle of a maturing life.

Our faith ought to likewise develop. Salvation—being born again—is an exciting moment. But we should not stay in that infant stage. Our faith should grow.

The maturing of our faith takes place as we continue to build upon the foundation of our relationship with Christ. Paul detailed why and how this takes place.

A. The Promise of Resurrection

At salvation, a believer experiences a spiritual resurrection. Our spirit, being dead in our trespasses and sins, is made alive through the new life that comes to live within us.

EPHESIANS 2:1, 5–6

1 *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;*

5 *Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)*

6 *And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:*

To “be quickened” means “to be made alive.” Understanding this truth ought to bring a “hallelujah” to our hearts! We who once were dead are now made alive through Christ.

Far too many Christians, however, are still spiritual babies because they never developed that relationship with the indwelling Holy Spirit.

GALATIANS 2:20

20 *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

Experiencing Christ living through us demands a reckoning of our own lives as dead unto sin and alive in Christ. This is where most Christians’ growth comes to a screeching halt.

ROMANS 6:11

11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul's testimony, recorded for us in Philippians 3:10–14, reveals that the forming of our faith will be noticeable by Christ's life through us. Paul desired to "attain unto the resurrection of the dead." He craved to experience God living through him.

COLOSSIANS 3:1

1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

So how does this take place? We find the answer in verse 12.

B. The Process of Transformation

To have *attained* as used in these verses means "to come to; to have arrived." This is not Paul bragging over his status with Christ, but is rather a statement of his humility. He recognized that he had not "arrived" nor was he perfect. A Christian's transformation does not happen all at once. It takes place over the course of a lifetime. It is aspiring to be more and more like the image of Christ.

Nearness is likeness. If a Christian is developing that foundational relationship with Christ, drawing nearer to Him, he will take on the likeness of Christ. Does your life remind others of Christ? When people are in your presence, can they sense God's presence in you? Or are they surprised when they find out you are a

Christian? We will each emanate a likeness of someone or something. Whatever or whoever we are *near* will be reflected in us.

Illustration

Consider the transformation of those who enlist in the military. A young man leaves home with his own likes and styles and generally with more than a hint of teenage immaturity in his attitude. But he returns home several weeks later from boot camp a completely different person. He walks with a confidence and rhythm in his step. He speaks with clarity and respect and looks you straight in the eye as you speak to him. And, above all, he is proud to wear his new uniform.

How did this transformation take place? In part, because he has been in an environment of structure where obedience and respect are demanded. His environment has rubbed off on him.

If we spend time with the Lord, in God's Word, and with godly people, Christ's likeness will begin to be reflected in our lives.

ROMANS 8:29

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

God's purpose is the same for every Christian—"to be conformed to the image of his Son." God desires for each of us to experience the process of transformation. Romans 8:29 says that even before you were born, God knew you. And before you were born, His predetermined plan for your life was that

you experience the process of transformation into His likeness.

Our transformation is complete at the moment of our death or the return of Christ, whichever occurs first. To *apprehend* means “to seize or be taken.” Paul is proclaiming in Philippians 3:12 that he is going after that goal of Christlikeness—to seize it. And he isn’t going to stop pursuing it until he is taken by Christ Jesus: “but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.”

How is the transformation process in your life? Is the likeness of Jesus becoming increasingly evident in you?

III. The Fixation of Will

PHILIPPIANS 3:13–14

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

From these verses, we see Paul’s overwhelming determination to finish strong. His will was fixed on the finish line. He was determined to be faithful to Jesus Christ and to finish his race well.

It is staggering how many Christians quit their race. It is perhaps the greatest heartbreak that a spiritual leader experiences. We invest in people, work alongside fellow Christians, and assume that everything is as it seems on the outside. But all of a sudden, someone

isn't in church anymore. Other matters of life fill their calendars, and they break fellowship with their Christian family. Although we are often surprised by these sudden changes, this falling away does not happen in a matter of a day or as a result of one offense. Somewhere below the baseline, before anyone else could see what was happening, their will to finish was snuffed out.

Fixating our will on finishing strong is not a decision that we make just one time. It is a repetitive choice we must make as we face our battles. Just because things look okay on the outside does not mean that all is well on the inside. If our foundation is faulty, the structure above will eventually crumble. It takes intentional determination to fix our will on finishing strong.

A. Paul Recognized His Position

"...I count not myself to have apprehended..."
(Philippians 3:13).

Paul was not complacent with the level of spiritual growth he had already reached. Though he would already be considered a great man of God, he wanted to constantly draw nearer to Christ. Paul knew he had to keep growing.

B. Paul Rejected the Past

"...but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind..." (Philippians 3:13).

Paul had a past of which any Christian would be ashamed. He had been responsible for actively persecuting Christians—putting to death innocent people. If anyone had a reason to hang his head

in hopelessness, it could have been Paul. But Paul wisely chose to forget those things that were behind him.

This is equally applicable to successes in life. We cannot live in the victories of past years. Far too many of us comfort ourselves with reminiscing of bringing someone to church with us years back. Or perhaps we were part of a great moving of God some time ago. Holding onto the victories of the past will lead to the same demise as holding on to the failures of the past. Both get our focus off the path set before us. What about *today*? What is God doing in your life *today*?

C. Paul Ran to Win the Prize

“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:14).

Press toward means “to run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing.” Paul had a goal in view—something toward which he ran swiftly, eliminating any possible distractions. That prize was attaining Christ Jesus. It was *knowing* Jesus.

HEBREWS 12:2

2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Illustration

A marathon race is 26.2 miles. This is not for those who have not put any effort into preparation. An effective marathon runner has trained and is

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determined to finish the race and successfully cross the finish line.

How foolish it would be if, in the thick of the race, a runner was oblivious to the track before him but was instead scanning the crowd of onlookers and waving at his fans. Likewise, how foolish it would be for him to slow down to a light jog in his last mile.

Just as a marathon runner is committed to finish strong and gives it all he has, we should fix our eyes on Jesus and commit to run well for Him to the end of our race.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of Paul's life, he could say he had been faithful to the end.

2 TIMOTHY 4:6–7

6 *For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.*

7 *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:*

This is the declaration of a man who built well below the baseline. He had a solid foundation of a growing relationship with Christ. His faith had taken form and strengthened over the years of his Christian life. And he had fixed his will on the prize of knowing Jesus.

Below the baseline is of utmost importance to the structure of our lives. Even if all looks well on the outside, it is the foundation that ultimately determines the success of our Christian walk.

Are you investing into your foundation? Do you have a real and growing relationship with the Lord below the baseline?

Although others can't easily see and don't readily notice the foundation of our lives, it is the foundation that makes the difference. No amount of effort or care invested into your relationship with the Lord is wasted. Build below the baseline in this most important area of life.

Study Questions

1. What is the greatest privilege of life?
Knowing Christ
2. What three ways to know Christ did Paul give us in Philippians 3:10?
Knowing His Person, His power, and His presence
3. What does Romans 8:29 tell us is God's ultimate goal for our transformation?
To be conformed to the image of Christ.
4. What are two or three ways you can purposefully grow in your relationship with the Lord?
Answers will vary but could include a daily time in His Word, faithful church attendance, beginning a prayer journal, etc.
5. God intends that we grow in our relationship with Him and, as a byproduct, in our Christian maturity. What is one way you see the Lord growing you as a Christian right now?
Answers will vary.
6. What has changed (transformed) in your life since the time you were saved?
Answers will vary.

7. At the conclusion of Paul's race, he could say that he had been faithful to the end. Have you made a deliberate decision to finish strong? If not, do so now and record the date below.

Answers will vary.

Memory Verse

PHILIPPIANS 3:10

10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

Trust in God

Text

1 KINGS 17:1–16

1 *And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.*

2 *And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,*

3 *Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.*

4 *And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.*

5 *So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.*

6 *And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.*

7 *And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.*

8 *And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,*

9 *Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.*

10 *So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there*

gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.

11 And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

12 And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

14 For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.

16 And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

Overview

Everyone possesses trust. It is the *object* of our trust that makes the difference when it is put to the test. It is at a time of trial that the source of our trust will be revealed.

As someone once said, “A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted.” In this study, we discover how to develop a faith that can be trusted. As we look in 1 Kings 17 at the prophet Elijah and a widow in Zarephath, we will see how their trust was tested, although in different ways. Both passed the test and experienced the incredible provision of God.

Lesson Goals

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should:

1. Identify areas in their lives where God is developing their trust in Him.
2. Understand that our trust is displayed by our obedience.
3. Be able to apply specific promises from God to their areas of need.

Teaching Outline

- I. The Trust of Elijah
 - A. To Go to Cherith
 - B. To Go to Zarephath
- II. The Test of the Widow
 - A. Her Residence
 - B. Her Resources
 - C. Her Reasoning
- III. The Triumph of Faith
 - A. The Request from the Prophet
 - B. The Response of the Widow
 - C. The Resource Supplied

LESSON TWO

Trust in God

Text

1 KINGS 17:1–16

Introduction

Long before builders erect walls or install windows or place a roof on a physical building, they start with a process most people never see once the building is completed—the foundation. Huge machinery rolls onto the property, digging up the dirt. Men with hard hats pour over paperwork and specs. Small colored flags are meticulously placed around the property. Appointments are scheduled to have inspectors visit the construction site, giving their stamp of approval for the seemingly most minor details.

All of this and more takes place before a building even begins to take shape. To the unlearned observer, one might

think this is ridiculous. “Let’s get this building under way!” But the builder knows an important truth—a structure without a firm foundation is useless, even disastrous. The most vital part to a structure rests on the investment into its foundation.

There is a similar truth in the Christian life. Without a solid foundation to the Christian activities or ministries in which we may take part, our lives will eventually crumble. In this series, we are investigating God’s Word for the elements of a solid foundation.

There isn’t a more important element than that of trust. In this lesson, we look at building trust toward God in our lives.

Illustration

Alaska and California are the two states that experience the most earthquakes.¹ Because of this, building codes have been put into place to ensure safety for residents in the event of an earthquake. Many beautiful buildings have crumbled to the ground because they could not withstand an earthquake.

Building according to the earthquake codes is costly in time and resources. It’s often frustrating as the timeline for building completion drags out. But it provides safety and protects the investment made in the rest of the building.

Challenges and tests in our lives are like earthquakes. They can shake us to the core and have the potential to destroy us. They also reveal the strength of our spiritual foundation. It is at these times when we can see where we have placed our trust.

First Kings 17 gives us an example of two people—a prophet and a widow—who both trusted God during one of

1. <http://homeguides.sfgate.com/california-building-codes-earthquakes-2592.html>

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the most difficult times in their lives. In this lesson, we learn from them how we can build trust in our lives.

The setting of this story is similar to that of our culture today. The country of Israel had forgotten the ways of God. Their king and queen—Ahab and Jezebel—had no interest in God’s laws or the consequences that would befall Israel by rejecting them. Just as we see prevailing in our world today, there was a flagrant rejection of the one true God and an acceptance of pluralism and idolatry.

In response to Ahab and Jezebel’s disobedient idolatry, God sent Elijah to proclaim His judgment. Many years earlier, God had already made clear to His people the consequence that would befall their land if they rejected Him.

DEUTERONOMY 11:13–17

13 *And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul,*

14 *That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.*

15 *And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full.*

16 *Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them;*

17 *And then the LORD’s wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you.*

Elijah’s proclamation of the coming drought was not just a crazy prophet trying to scare Ahab into submission to God. He was proclaiming the truth of God’s Word.

1 KINGS 17:1

1 And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

As always, God's Word came to pass. God sent a drought to the land. As we can imagine, this became a season of incredible testing in Elijah's life. It was also a time of testing for a widow and her son, who are introduced to us in this passage. During this time of extreme difficulty, their lives were shaken, and their faith was tested. Through their responses, the foundation of their trust was exposed.

I. The Trust of Elijah

Because Elijah preached the Word of the Lord to Ahab, he became the special target of Ahab and Jezebel's anger. It's likely that the people of the land were angry with him as well.

1 KINGS 17:2-5

2 And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,

3 Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.

4 And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.

5 So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.

Now more than ever, Elijah had to trust God for everything. God told Elijah to go, and Elijah "went and did according unto the word of the LORD." His obedience was proof of his trust in God.

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A. To Go to Cherith

1 KINGS 17:3

3 ...hide thyself by the brook Cherith...

Because Elijah trusted God's direction, he saw God's provision.

1 KINGS 17:5–6

5 So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.

6 And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.

Where God guides, He *always* provides. This account of God using *ravens* to sustain Elijah is miraculous. But if Elijah would not have trusted God's direction, he would have missed out on seeing His provision.

And so it is with us. Our human tendency runs contrary to trust. We like to analyze our options and *then* determine our direction. Far too many Christians, however, miss out on experiencing great acts of God's provision because they refuse to trust Him for their direction.

God promises to guide those willing to trust Him.

PROVERBS 3:5–6

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

PSALM 18:30

30 *As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.*

Our growth in the Lord is based on faith.

ROMANS 14:23

23 *And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*

HEBREWS 11:1, 6

1 *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

6 *But without faith it is impossible to please him...*

Trusting God is a lifelong privilege. Growing in our Christian walk will require our constant surrender to follow God's direction. And the moment we reject it, we will begin to digress in our Christian walk. There is nothing more important than each of us staying in the center of God's will. That means we must keep trusting God—even when He directs us to places, like Cherith, that seem unlikely and insignificant.

Cherith became Elijah's haven of protection from King Ahab. But a day came when this refuge could no longer provide for Elijah's needs. At this point, the Lord sent him to an even more unlikely location.

B. To Go to Zarephath

1 KINGS 17:9–10

9 *Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there...*

10 *So he arose and went to Zarephath...*

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If you were to look at a map of Israel during that time, you would see that going to Zarephath was not the logical choice of where to send Elijah.

Zarephath was a Mediterranean town, seven miles south of Zidon. This was also the hometown of Jezebel's father. Going to Zarephath would be equivalent to an American moving into the heart of a terrorist city. God's direction would not have made sense to Elijah, yet he obeyed.

But that's not all. Not only did God send Elijah to an unlikely location, but He sent him to an unlikely person—a widow.

1 KINGS 17:9

9 ...behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.

Elijah must have had plenty of questions for God regarding this manner of provision. The food service via ravens, while surprising at first, seemed to be working out just fine. Why must he now turn to a poor widow mother, expecting her to feed him? Aside from being extremely humbling for Elijah, there was surely a measure of feeling inconsiderate toward this woman. Yet, with simple trust in God, Elijah obeyed.

As the story unfolds, we see God taking care of Elijah *and* the widow and her son. He was answering this mother's prayers, blessing her faith in God, and all the while feeding Elijah. This unlikely plan was not God trying to create a difficult test for Elijah, although we often assume this to be the case in our lives when God's direction does not make sense.

Perhaps you're in a season right now when, like Elijah, you cannot see the full picture. Ask yourself, "Am I fully trusting God and obeying Him in every area? Is

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there anything I am holding back because I do not see the full picture?”

Over and over, God assures us of His love and care for us even when we can't see how He is working behind the scenes.

ISAIAH 55:8

8 *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.*

JEREMIAH 29:11

11 *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.*

LUKE 12:27–31

27 *Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

28 *If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?*

29 *And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.*

30 *For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.*

31 *But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

Elijah's test of faith was severe, but his trust shows us that God is trustworthy. Even when it made no human sense, Elijah followed God's direction, and through it, God revealed His power.

But Elijah was not the only one in this story who was experiencing difficulty. The widow to whom God sent him was also experiencing a test.

II. The Test of the Widow

We can only imagine how difficult the life of a widow with a child to support must have been during a time of drought. Although the Bible does not record her name, God certainly saw and cared for her needs.

1 KINGS 17:10–12

10 *So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.*

11 *And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.*

12 *And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.*

Elijah must have had a measure of uneasiness as he drew near to this pagan city. But God providentially placed the woman right there at the city's gate. Although we don't know a lot of details about her, let's take a look at what we do know.

A. Her Residence

As we saw a moment ago, the town of Zarephath was a pagan city. The people worshipped the false idol

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Baal. A follower of Jehovah God would not have fit in at all. Yet, as we often see throughout the Bible, God uses unlikely places to carry forth His will.

Illustration

Consider these Bible examples of God using unlikely environments to carry out His ways:

Joseph was a slave in Egypt and rose to leadership. God used him to rescue his family from the famine in Canaan. (See Genesis 37–50.)

The little town of Bethlehem became the birthplace of Christ. (See Luke 2.)

The Apostle Paul was imprisoned many times. Yet he recognized that the gospel was being spread through his imprisonment. (See Philippians 1:12–14.)

Although this widow lived among Baal worshipers and not in a location anyone, including Elijah, would have thought of as a place where God would bless, God saw her and cared for her needs.

B. Her Resources

This poor lady didn't even have enough to keep herself and her son alive. Scripture tells us that she had "but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and ... two sticks" (verse 12). We may ask, "What could God do with such meager elements?" But the question at hand is never about what we have that God could use. It is how tightly we are holding onto it.

In John 6, we find a throng of people following Jesus. It was getting into the evening hours, and

Jesus knew that the people were hungry. He told the disciples that He wanted to feed this massive crowd, but they couldn't figure out how He intended to do it.

But God is never limited by meager resources.

JOHN 6:8–13

8 *One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him,*

9 *There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?*

10 *And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.*

11 *And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.*

12 *When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.*

13 *Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.*

It is amazing what God can do when we simply give all we have to Him.

C. Her Reasoning

This widow had surely endured much through the drought. But her reasoning was not accurate.

1 KINGS 17:12

12 ...*behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.*

She told Elijah that her intention was to gather two sticks, prepare the meager bits she had, and then die. Although this might have been accurate reasoning *without* God, it lacked for two reasons:

First, her reasoning was without faith. Perhaps it was weariness of her daily battle to keep herself and her son alive that had distracted her from trusting in the Lord. But even though she couldn't see what God was going to do, He did have provision ready for her.

Second, her reasoning was without vision. Her current state of poverty had also robbed this widow from seeing life beyond the next meal. Though her reasoning was faulty, it was natural. But that is why trusting God is supernatural. And that is why He tells us to trust Him without leaning on our own understanding.

PROVERBS 3:5–6

5 *Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.*

6 *In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*

Each of us will experience our human nature pulling us away from trusting God. Thankfully, when Elijah proposed a better way, this dear lady did not yield to the beckoning of her reason, but rather obeyed her God. Far too many of us do not reject our human reasoning when we are at a crossroad decision of trust.

TEACHING TIP

Consider sharing a personal testimony of a time when trusting God did not make sense to you, but God gave you the grace to do it and blessed the outcome.

Can you look back at a time when you faced a choice to trust God or to yield to your own reasoning? The Bible tells us that, while our way may seem right to us, it doesn't lead to a right end.

PROVERBS 14:12

12 There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, But the end thereof are the ways of death.

Through the stories of both Elijah and the widow, we learn that God tests our faith. As someone once said, “A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted.” For both of these people, their confidence in God held little value until it endured a test.

Many Christians—in fact, *most* Christians—claim that they trust God. But it is only when the storms of life arise that we really know if our trust is in word only or real, at the very foundation of our hearts.

The story does not end here. As both Elijah and the widow exercised their trust in God, an amazing miracle transpired.

III. The Triumph of Faith

1 KINGS 17:13–16

13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

14 *For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.*

15 *And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.*

16 *And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.*

Sometimes we read this story and think primarily of the widow's need for faith. But remember that Elijah was in a humbling position as well, as God had instructed him to ask for provision from, of all people, a starving widow.

A. The Request from the Prophet

Not only did Elijah request provision, but he requested his provision *first*.

1 KINGS 17:13

13 *And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.*

Following God's instruction in this must have been a test of faith for Elijah. But Elijah personally knew God and His ability to care for His servants' needs in the most unlikely ways. He had just spent several months being fed by a raven's delivery service.

I believe a subtheme to this passage is an example of the principle of tithing and giving. Many Christians are happy to give God any leftovers they may have. But that is not what Scripture commands us to do, and it certainly is not an indication of faith in God.

God calls for our *first* fruits.

PROVERBS 3:9–10

9 *Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase:*

10 *So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.*

The reality is that all we have comes from Him and is already His. But our willingness to give back to Him first is a statement of our trust in Him.

MALACHI 3:10

10 *Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, **and prove me now** herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

Thus, Elijah asked the widow to feed him first and indicated that God would provide for her and her son.

B. The Response of the Widow

1 KINGS 17:15

15 *And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah...*

In an act of great trust and against human logic, the widow simply obeyed. And God brought deliverance.

JOB 36:15

15 *He delivereth the poor in his affliction, and openeth their ears in oppression.*

Although we never feel like it at the time, being in a place where our faith is tested is a good position to be in.

It was at this crossroads where the widow triumphed by faith. Although her barrel was nearly empty, she gave her one final scoop to God. And, as God promised, He took care of her.

PSALM 37:25

25 I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.

C. The Resource Supplied

1 KINGS 17:15–16

15 ...and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.

16 And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

For the length of the drought, these three—Elijah, the widow, and her son—never went without food. Surrounding them was a people group whom God was judging with a drought. But because of their trust in God they were safe from the agony of starvation. God had provided! God protected His own.

God's resources have not dwindled for us today. But He still calls us to trust Him.

LUKE 6:38

38 Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

PHILIPPIANS 4:19

19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Conclusion

Is your faith being tested? God's promises are true, and He is trustworthy.

Through the example of a prophet in need and an obscure widow from an unlikely place, we learn that God honors faith.

The storms of life will surely come. They will be different for each of us, but they will always expose the foundation of our trust. May we hold fast to God's promises and anchor our souls in His unchanging nature so we build trust below the baseline.

Study Questions

1. When Elijah told the Israelites that God would send a drought as judgment because they turned to other gods, from where did he receive that message?
Deuteronomy 11:13–17
2. In what ways did Elijah display his trust in God?
He obeyed what God told him to do and went where God told him to go.
3. What does Proverbs 14:12 tell us about taking the path that makes sense by our reasoning?
That the way that seems right to us is the way of death.
4. What are some scriptures (perhaps even in this lesson) that encourage us to trust God with our direction and provision?
Answers will vary but could include Isaiah 55:8, Jeremiah 29:11, Luke 12:27–31, and Proverbs 3:5–6.
5. In what ways was the widow woman’s reasoning faulty? How did relying on her reasoning almost cause her to miss God’s provision?
Her reasoning was without faith and without vision. She almost said “no” to Elijah and would have missed the miraculous provision of God.
6. Has there been a time when God has directed you to do something that did not make sense to you? How did He show you His power when you trusted and obeyed?
Answers will vary.

7. In Philippians 4:19 God promises to meet our needs. What does this verse say is the source from which He meets them? Can this source ever run dry?

His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. No.

8. One of the best ways to encourage our faith is to remember how God has provided in the past. What are some ways in your life that God has provided for you in a time of need?

Answers will vary.

Memory Verses

PROVERBS 3:5–6

5 *Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.*

6 *In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*

Repentance

Text

1 CHRONICLES 21

1 *And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.*

2 *And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it.*

3 *And Joab answered, The LORD make his people an hundred times so many more as they be: but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel?*

4 *Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab. Wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem.*

5 *And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David. And all they of Israel were a thousand thousand and an hundred thousand men that drew sword: and Judah was four hundred threescore and ten thousand men that drew sword.*

6 *But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them: for the king's word was abominable to Joab.*

7 *And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel.*

8 *And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing: but now, I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.*

9 *And the LORD spake unto Gad, David's seer, saying,*

10 Go and tell David, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things: choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee.

11 So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee

12 Either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me.

13 And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man.

14 So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men.

15 And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

16 And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.

17 And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.

18 Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

19 And David went up at the saying of Gad, which he spake in the name of the LORD.

20 And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat.

21 And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshingfloor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground.

22 Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of this threshingfloor, that I may build an altar therein unto the LORD: thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people.

23 And Ornan said unto David, Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all.

24 And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost.

25 So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight.

26 And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering.

27 And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.

28 At that time when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there.

29 *For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon.*

30 *But David could not go before it to enquire of God: for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD.*

Overview

As long as we are on this earth and battling our flesh, every one of us will have times when we sin. When we do, the Holy Spirit is faithful to convict us and to urge us to confess our sin and restore our relationship with God. At that moment of conviction, we choose between resisting the Holy Spirit in pride or responding with a heart of repentance. In this lesson, we will see such a time in David's life and how he displayed repentance from the heart.

Lesson Goals

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should:

1. Understand that God convicts and chastens us because He loves us.
2. Recognize the indicators of genuine repentance.
3. Purpose to respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction with tenderhearted repentance.

Teaching Outline

- I. The Rebellion of David
 - A. A Planted Thought
 - B. A Precise Count
- II. The Repentance of David
 - A. He Acknowledged His Sin
 - B. He Accepted His Consequences

- C. He Interceded for His People
- III. The Remembrance of David
- A. David's Sacrifice Was Costly
 - B. David's Sacrifice Was Personal

LESSON THREE

Repentance

Text

1 CHRONICLES 21

Introduction

Although I wish it weren't so, there is one thing every Christian has in common: we all sin.

We understand this, of course, in relation to our salvation. Indeed, without seeing ourselves as sinners in need of a Saviour, we can't be saved.

ROMANS 3:23

23 *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*

But the truth is, even after salvation, sin is an ongoing problem in each of our lives. All Christians, if they're honest, would admit that from time to time there are sin issues below

the surface of their hearts—sins such as pride, covetousness, lust, and others that are often unseen by others.

When we sin, the Holy Spirit convicts us, urging us to confess our sin and restore fellowship with God. But Christians often respond to the conviction of God in different ways. Some Christians reject the work of the Holy Spirit. They throw off His restraint, harden their hearts, and stubbornly stiffen their necks—intent on continuing in or hiding their sin. Scripture warns us against these responses.

HEBREWS 4:7

7 ...*To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*

ACTS 7:51

51 *Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.*

Other Christians, when the Holy Spirit convicts them of sin, soften their hearts and repent. This was ultimately (after a period of several months of resistance) the response David had when he was confronted regarding his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband (2 Samuel 12:13).

PSALM 51:1

1 *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

Please understand that the two different responses—resistance or repentance—often are not immediately apparent. A Christian may wear a suit, sing in the choir, serve as an usher, or engage in any number of outwardly “spiritual” activities—all the while holding onto unconfessed, unforsaken sin.

This is why we must build repentance below the baseline—at the point of our lives and the moment of

conviction that only God sees. This lesson is about developing a tender heart of repentance toward the conviction of the Lord.

Illustration

Skyscrapers built in areas susceptible to earthquakes are usually built with a foundation that sits on something like a ball bearing, allowing the foundation itself to respond to the force of seismic activity.

Repentance in the heart of a Christian is similar in that it responds to the moving of God’s Spirit, being sensitive to sin and quick to confess that sin to the Lord with a tender heart that desires restored fellowship.

In this lesson, we look at the closing days of David’s life, and we find that even a “man after God’s own heart” had need for repentance in his life.

I. The Rebellion of David

We’ve already mentioned the sins of adultery and murder in David’s earlier days as well as his contrite repentance in Psalm 51. You would think that someone who hit such a low peak and found such amazing grace through repentance would surely never sin again. Or at least you might think that he wouldn’t sin any “big sins” again.

Yet in this passage, we find David near the end of his life sinning in a way that greatly displeased the Lord. At first glance, the sin we’re about to look at seems small, yet, as we’ll see in this lesson, to God, it was an egregious, prideful act.

A. A Planted Thought

This sin began, as all sin does, with a thought planted in the mind. Scripture makes it clear that this thought was suggested to David's mind by Satan himself.

1 CHRONICLES 21:1

1 *And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.*

So why was numbering the people—taking a census of the available military power—considered such a sin? After all, it was important that Israel remain armed for their own security.

The Bible makes it clear from the beginning of this story that it was an act instigated by Satan. (The parallel passage in 2 Samuel 24:1 seems to indicate that God was withholding some of His protective guard from Satan's temptation in allowing him to so tempt David.)

It is also clear from the language of the text that David knew God did not want him to number the people. It seems that doing so was an act of pridefully putting trust in his kingdom's power—the number of soldiers, horses, and chariots that they had—rather than confidence in God.

The Bible says that Satan did two things: he *stood up against*, and he *provoked*. Defining these words would mean that Satan “rose up or against,” and he “incited, allured, instigated, and enticed” David.

Satan's tactics have not changed. His plan to destroy us always begins in our thoughts. Thus Scripture warns us to guard our thoughts with vigilance.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:5

5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

Satan places a temptation in front of us that allures to our flesh, and by this planted thought pulls us into sin.

JAMES 1:13–15

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

TEACHING TIP

Describe in detail a delicious dessert you enjoy. Talk about its appearance, taste, and how good you feel as you eat it.

Point out that while you cannot force class members to eat that dessert, you could suggest to their minds thoughts about how good it is. If they entertain those thoughts until the dessert is available to them, they will likely decide to eat it.

But also point out that you did not talk about how many calories the dessert has, how disappointed you may be later if you were on a diet and broke it, and how short-lived its pleasure is—all of which are just as true as the deliciousness of the dessert.

This is the way temptation works. Satan suggests thoughts to our minds that appeal to our flesh. But we are the ones who entertain the thoughts and make the choice to sin.

Every rebellious act we commit can be traced back to our thinking. Because no one can see into our minds, we become pros at covering up our thoughts or temporarily acting differently than what is going on inside. Eventually, however, those wrong thoughts will grow in strength, driving us to make choices we would have never otherwise considered carrying out.

We see this happen in the life of David. A thought planted by Satan that he should have immediately rejected, he instead allowed to linger. It eventually led him to rebel against what he knew to be right.

B. A Precise Count

At this point, David gave a direct order to his men to take a census.

1 CHRONICLES 21:2

2 And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel from Beer-sheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it.

Joab, David's senior general, was not so easily swayed to directly go against God's orders, and he raised his concern to the king.

1 CHRONICLES 21:3

3 And Joab answered, The LORD make his people an hundred times so many more as they be: but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? why

then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel?

Joab is a unique character in the Bible. He certainly had his flaws and wasn't always loyal to David. In this instance, however, Joab recognized the dangers of what David had commanded. In questioning David's decision, he was acting as David's friend, trying to reason with him to not do this wrong act.

This is a mark of a good friend! If you have a friend who will speak truth to you, even when it is awkward or when you don't want to hear it, praise God for that friend. Don't resist or push him away.

PROVERBS 27:6

6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Illustration

One of the most famous paintings of George Washington is of him crossing the Delaware River. The preparations for that attack actually were discovered in advance by a British spy, who tried to warn his commanding officer. Colonel Rall, however, was too busy playing poker to listen to the report. He was so sure that the British power was insurmountable that he failed to heed the warning. As a result, a surprise attack fell upon Colonel Rall and his men. One hundred of his men died in that battle, and nine hundred were captured. Of George Washington's men, only seven died. The story would have ended much differently for the proud colonel had he listened to the warnings of his spy.

How many of us are guilty of the same resistance as David? God uses His Word to identify sin in our hearts, but we ignore it. He may use a friend or a pastor or another spiritual leader in our lives to expose our sin. But in our rebellion, we ignore it and firmly hold fast to our own way.

PROVERBS 1:30–31

30 *They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.*

31 *Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.*

It wasn't that David didn't know what he was about to do was a sin. It was that he stubbornly refused to listen to the one friend who was bold enough to warn him.

1 CHRONICLES 21:4

4 *Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab...*

We all tend to have times of self will, but rather than brushing that under the rug, we should call it what it is—rebellion.

And our act of rebellion always has a root below the surface. In David's case, the *act* of rebellion (numbering the people) had a *root* of pride (a desire to glory in the size of his army). So often, we see only the outward actions of hidden sins. We see the outbursts of anger, illogical behavior, relational tension, and verbal battles. But these are simply a manifestation of a heart problem.

It is moments of temptation that expose these hidden sins in our lives, and it is at these moments

of exposure that we should forsake our sin rather than follow it through to an action.

Unfortunately, David followed through in rebellion, and sad consequences came as a result.

II. **The Repentance of David**

It must have been an unbelievably difficult day for King David when he began to see the consequences of his sin playing out.

1 CHRONICLES 21:7

7 And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel.

Have you ever been in this position? We have all been given the freedom of choice, and we can choose to rebel against God and His best. But once we make that choice, we lose control over the consequences. It is a helpless feeling to see others suffer because of one's own wrong choices.

Thankfully, the story doesn't end there. David finally responded as he should have initially—he repented.

What does repentance look like? Notice these three responses of David:

A. **He Acknowledged His Sin**

1 CHRONICLES 21:8

8 And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing; but now, I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.

This humble prayer of King David reflects his remorse and repentance. He went directly to the Lord for forgiveness.

2 SAMUEL 24:10

10 And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.

Repentance always begins with an acknowledgment of our sin. David did not try to excuse away his sin. In fact, the Bible says that his heart *smote* him. That literally means “to punch or give a blow.” The conviction David felt was as if he had been punched in the heart.

When someone is repentant, their proud attitude that is bent on doing life their way regardless of the warnings of others is broken, and in its place is a sense of burden over sin.

Illustration

I heard about a shoplifter who was saved and then found his conscience began bothering him for what he had stolen. Eventually, he wrote the manager of the department store from which he had stolen goods: “I’ve been saved, and ever since, I have felt guilty about what I stole from you. Enclosed, you’ll find \$100 that I stole from your store and want to return to you.” And then, after he signed his name, he added, “P.S. If I continue to feel guilty, I’ll send you the other \$100.”

Simply wanting relief from the feelings of having done wrong is not full repentance. Real repentance is fully acknowledging our sin.

In David's earlier prayer of repentance in Psalm 51, we see how seriously he took his sin as being an affront against God Himself and how earnestly he wanted his sin cleansed—not just the consequences removed.

PSALM 51:4

4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

It has been said that repentance is siding with God against self. It is acknowledging that God is right, and I am wrong. It is taking full responsibility without blaming others or excusing the wrong.

Scripture also uses the word *confess* to speak of this. It is agreeing with God that our sin is, in fact, sin. Thankfully, God promises that when we confess our sin to God, He does not leave us in our sinful state. He forgives and cleanses us.

1 JOHN 1:9

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

But remember, it starts with acknowledging our sin—accepting full responsibility for it and agreeing with God that it is, in fact, sin.

B. He Accepted the Consequences

Sin always comes with consequences. Even after David acknowledged his sin, God did not withhold the consequences. Even in His mercy, God knows we need chastisement to fully turn our hearts from sin.

1 CHRONICLES 21:11–14

11 *So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee*

12 *Either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me.*

13 *And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man.*

14 *So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men.*

God gave King David three choices of judgment: three years of famine, three months of being defeated by his enemies, or three days of pestilence throughout the land.

All three of these were tough choices, but David chose the pestilence. His reasoning was that he would rather fall into the hand of the Lord whom he knew was merciful versus the hand of his enemies. Even in David's choice, we see his humble acceptance of the consequences and his dependence on God's mercy.

Chastening is never pleasant, but yielding to it brings a sweet intimacy into our relationship with the Lord. A Christian with a heart of repentance will carry a genuine remorse for his failure to please the Lord. And though we don't particularly *like* chastening, it is part of God's love. When our

relationship with God is being mended, God’s love is poured out upon us in the midst of our hurting.

HEBREWS 12:5–6, 11

5 *And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:*

6 *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*

11 *Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*

God doesn’t chasten just for fun. He corrects us because He loves us too much to allow us to go on in our sin. And He instructs us to repent *zealously*—whole-heartedly.

REVELATION 3:19

19 *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.*

We see the sincerity of David’s repentance in his willingness to accept the consequences of his sin. But we also see it in his heart for those who were hurt because of his sin.

C. David Interceded for His People

After David confessed his sin before God, his next order of business was salvaging any measure of undeserved consequences that the Israelites would experience as a result of his sin.

1 CHRONICLES 21:16–17

16 *And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.*

17 *And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.*

David was devastated over the pain and agony that his people were enduring because of his sin. This is another vast difference between a resistant heart and a repentant heart. Someone who is so full of himself that he is determined to do things his own way is blind to the fallout of his choices upon innocent people around him. Yet someone with a soft, repentant heart will grieve for the consequences his sin has on others.

David, with no blame shifting or finger pointing, took full responsibility and asked God to spare those who were hurt by his wrong choices. His intercession for others was another indicator of a heart of true repentance.

III. The Remembrance of David

As David comes to spiritual consciousness, he begins the road back to restoration with God.

1 CHRONICLES 21:18–21

18 *Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.*

19 *And David went up at the saying of Gad, which he spake in the name of the LORD.*

20 *And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat.*

21 *And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshingfloor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground.*

The Lord used the prophet Gad to make His Word known to David. Today, God’s work should still be directed by His Word. We aren’t restored in fellowship to God by self-determined, self-inflicted acts of penance—that’s not what David’s sacrifice was. We are restored through the blood of Christ as we respond to the truth of God’s Word.

1 JOHN 1:7

7 *...the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

As we’ll see in a moment, David’s sacrifice was simply a response to what God told him to do.

Interestingly, there is much history wrapped up in this location of David’s sacrifice. This is the same mount where Abraham offered his son Isaac to God. And years later, after the 2 Chronicles 21 events, David’s son Solomon built the massive temple on the very same plot of land.

2 CHRONICLES 3:1

1 Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

We see the sincerity with which David responded from the heart in two ways:

A. David's Sacrifice was Costly

1 CHRONICLES 21:22–23

22 Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of this threshingfloor, that I may build an altar therein unto the LORD: thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people.

23 And Ornan said unto David, Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all.

In the Old Testament, prior to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God on Calvary, an animal sacrifice was to be made by the repentant sinner. This was a symbol of what God was going to do in the future by sending His spotless Son as the payment for our sin. This is why God instructed David to make a sacrifice.

David could have taken many shortcuts to *appear* repentant without really making things right with God. But David had repentance that was real at a heart level—below the baseline—that kept him from cutting any corners. He immediately went to the place where Gad had told him to go and prepared to make a costly sacrifice.

Illustration

There is an old story about a pig and a hen who walked by the church and saw the sign announcing a ham and eggs prayer breakfast. “How nice,” the hen remarked, “that we can help the minister.” The pig replied, “That’s easy for you to say; you’ll only be making a contribution, but I’ll be making a sacrifice.”

When our attitude is simply to give as little as we can, we’re not really honoring the Lord.

B. David’s Sacrifice was Personal

David’s sacrifice was not only costly; it was personal. He didn’t use tax dollars to pay for it or use his position as king to leverage a better cost. He gave personally.

1 CHRONICLES 21:24

24 And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost.

When Ornan, the owner of the land, understood that the king wanted his land, he offered to give David the land for free.

In our minds, this would have been a great money-saving opportunity. The owner of the land was willing to give it, and as king, David could have rightfully taken it.

But David refused the land without buying it. He didn’t even bargain on a price. He wouldn’t offer to God that which cost him nothing. His tender heart wanted to purely exemplify his repentance. He wanted to offer a sacrifice that truly was *a sacrifice*.

So David purchased the land for the sacrifice.

1 CHRONICLES 21:25–26

25 *So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight.*

26 *And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering.*

This heart attitude is extremely rare in our culture today. We put our needs above those of others. And if there is anything left over, we will consider giving it to God.

Contrast our tendency to cut corners in our giving with the churches in Macedonia of whom Paul spoke who gave freely and generously.

2 CORINTHIANS 8:2–5

2 *How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.*

3 *For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves;*

4 *Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.*

5 *And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.*

When our hearts are tender toward the Lord, we aren't filled with the self-sufficiency that was part of David's motive in numbering the people. We are filled with a desire to give in a costly way to God.

David's repentant heart got God's attention.

1 CHRONICLES 21:27–28

27 *And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.*

28 *At that time when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there.*

Repentance in the Christian life isn't just a one-time moment for that really terrible sin—like when David committed adultery. It is to be the sincere response of our heart every time the Holy Spirit convicts us.

Conclusion

A Christian who has built a tender heart of repentance below the baseline will have the power of God flowing through his life.

Look back at verse 26, and notice God's response to David's repentance:

1 CHRONICLES 21:26

26 *...and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering.*

You and I *need* the power of God—pictured here by fire from Heaven—on our lives. Thus, we must live with tender, repentant hearts toward the Lord.

Above the foundation of our lives, we can appear to be doing great. We may be faithful in church, serving in ministry, and seeing some blessing of God on our lives.

But if *below* all of the external factors, we are rebelling against the Lord—holding onto a private sin, resisting God's

conviction—eventually everything *above* the foundation will topple.

Somewhere in the foundational area of your life—not in what others see, but below everything, in your private relationship with God—there must be a heart of repentance.

God is looking for people who are lovingly, longingly, repentantly seeking Him. And on the sacrifices of these people, He puts His fire. But it all starts with repentance below the baseline.

Study Questions

1. Where does temptation and sin always begin?
In the mind
2. What is the mark of a good friend? Do you have friends like this in your life? Are you willing to be that kind of friend for someone else?
Willing to speak the truth, even if it is awkward or I don't want to hear it. Answers will vary.
3. We all sin, and God convicts all of us. But we don't all have the same response. What are the two ways that people respond to God's conviction?
Resistance or repentance
4. What are the three evidences of genuine repentance we saw from David's life in this lesson?
He acknowledged his sin, he accepted the consequences, and he interceded for his people.
5. What does 1 John 1:9 tell us God promises to do when we acknowledge (or confess) our sin to God?
He will forgive us and cleanse us.
6. Why does God allow consequences (chastening) of our sin even after we confess it to Him?
To fully turn our hearts from sin and restore us to Him.
7. How do we see the sincerity and tenderness of David's heart in his sacrifice?
His sacrifice was costly, and it was personal.

8. What is the result of living with a repentant, tender heart to the Lord?

God's power is on our lives.

Memory Verse

1 JOHN 1:9

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

Humility

Text

PHILIPPIANS 2:1–8

1 *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,*

2 *Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

3 *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*

4 *Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*

5 *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*

6 *Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:*

7 *But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:*

8 *And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

Overview

We live in a world saturated with pride. Yet, nothing will destroy our spiritual foundation so effectively as undetected pride in our own lives.

God calls us to walk in humility. He instructs us to allow the mind of Christ—described in Philippians 2 as a mind of humility—to be in us. In this lesson, we will look at the characteristics of a person who seeks to walk in humility.

Lesson Goals

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should:

1. Have a clear understanding of humility versus pride.
2. Understand the damage of contention and know how to separate from it.
3. Know why we want humility in our lives.
4. Have a desire to remove any pride from their lives.
5. Know how to solve conflict in a way that glorifies God.

Teaching Outline

- I. Seek a Walk of Unity
 - A. It Is Based on Our Fellowship in Christ
 - B. It Is Evidenced by the Character of Christ
- II. Separate from Contention
 - A. Refuse Strife
 - B. Maintain Lowliness of Mind
 - C. Esteem Others Better
- III. Serve Others in Need
 - A. It Is an Unselfish Look
 - B. It Is an Outward Look

LESSON FOUR

Humility

Text

PHILIPPIANS 2:1–8

Introduction

One of the desires of every growing Christian is to become more like Christ. In fact, as we “build below the baseline,” our goal is to cooperate with God’s work in conforming us to the image of Christ.

ROMANS 8:29

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

With this goal in mind, notice the trait of Christ revealed in Philippians 2.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5

5 *Let this **mind** be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*

We are to have the same mind as Christ. What is this mindset? The following verses eloquently describe it as a mindset of humility.

PHILIPPIANS 2:6–8

6 *Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:*

7 *But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:*

8 *And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

The definition of humility is “freedom from pride and arrogance; humbleness of mind; a modest estimate of one’s own worth.”

The opposite of humility is pride. Pride runs deep in our human nature and is not easily rooted out. Thankfully, God’s Word teaches us much about humility and pride.

PROVERBS 18:12

12 *Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility.*

PROVERBS 22:4

4 *By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life.*

PROVERBS 11:2

2 *When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.*

PROVERBS 16:18

18 *Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*

Illustration

Pride is like a small crack that begins to develop in a house's foundation. The crack may not be noticeable at first to the homeowner, but if it remains undealt with, it will grow. Eventually, something catastrophic happens such as a flooded basement or a rotted foundation. But it started with a small crack.

Pride puts self first. It can reveal itself in things we post on social media, in the things we say about others, even in the way we walk and live.

And yet, pride is almost always easier to see in others than it is to see in ourselves. When we get caught up in noticing other people's pride, that's almost always a sure sign that we're nurturing undetected pride in our own lives.

As we work through this study, I'd encourage you to set aside thoughts of the pride you see in others and specifically focus on your need for humility. Ask the Lord to reveal to you the pride in your own life and to help you develop humility below the baseline.

JAMES 4:10

10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

What are the characteristics and actions of a person seeking to walk in humility?

I. Seek a Walk of Unity

PHILIPPIANS 2:1–2

1 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,

2 *Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

A humble person is a peacemaker—someone who wants to walk in unity with others.

Disunity permeates our culture. It is what feeds the news and magazine tabloids. Talk radio hosts and Internet bloggers are good at raising issues—it’s how they get readers. They are great at keeping strife or gossip alive, but they are not so great at giving solutions.

Humility, on the other hand, *looks* for solutions. Humility will be quick to admit, “I was wrong. I am sorry.” Humility endeavors to bring unity and to work out the problem. Humility will seek like-mindedness. Humility recognizes that God is not as interested in assigning blame as He is in solving the problem.

Furthermore, a humble Christian’s motive for humility is deeper than a simple dislike of conflict. It is, rather, a reflection of the work of God Himself taking place below the baseline. Notice in Philippians 2, these two aspects of a Christian who is seeking a walk of unity:

A. It is Based on Our Fellowship in Christ

PHILIPPIANS 2:1

1 *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,*

As Paul begins his plea for humility in the church at Philippi, he reminds his readers of what they have experienced in Christ. It is these four attributes—always available to us in Christ—that should compel us to give the same to others.

Consolation—“*If there be therefore any consolation in Christ...*” The word *consolation* speaks of encouragement, comfort, and refreshment.

The word used here is also tied to the Holy Spirit’s work as our Comforter.

JOHN 15:26

26 *But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:*

We who have been encouraged in Christ, then, ought to have that same spirit toward others.

Love—“*If there be...any comfort of love...*” The word *comfort* means, “made for the purpose of calming and consoling.” We are to offer others the comfort of love that only comes from Christ’s love manifested in us.

This love is the *agape*, self-sacrificing love Christ gives to us. It is the kind of love the Holy Spirit produces in our hearts.

GALATIANS 5:22

22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,*

Fellowship of the Spirit—“*If there be...any fellowship of the Spirit...*” *Fellowship* means “communion; intimacy.” This is the type of relationship that we ought to endeavor to have with God. Not just head knowledge, but an intimate, personal relationship with Him.

We who know the Lord in this way, ought to have that same spirit toward others—a true desire for open communication and relational fellowship.

Bowels and mercies—“*If there be...any bowels and mercies.*” The literal meaning for the word *bowels* is “one’s abdomen.” Figuratively though, it is a reference to deep emotions within a person. Thus, *bowels and mercies* is speaking of possessing strong compassionate emotions. This is more than a surface ability to not say something unkind to someone. It is a genuine caring for their needs.

The point that Paul makes in these verses is that we have experienced the consolation, love, fellowship, and compassion of Christ; thus, we ought to give these to one another in the family of God. These four elements are the basis by which we can walk in unity with others.

B. It is Evidenced by the Character of Christ

PHILIPPIANS 2:2

2 *Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

To be “likeminded” with other believers, our love must be from the same source. We must draw from the qualities listed in verse 1 by the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 2:2 gives us three ways unity is achieved—having the same love, being of one accord, and being of one mind.

Same love—Spiritual unity is through love, not through controlling others. This is not about forcing everyone to think or act the same; it is about the love of God being manifested. It is about unity in the Holy Spirit bringing us together, having the same love.

1 JOHN 4:11

11 *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*

One accord—This refers to being united in spirit. Unity is not kept by accident. It takes purposed effort and real work.

EPHESIANS 4:3

3 *Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

TEACHING TIP

Before teaching this lesson, ask two or more people in your class to prepare to sing one verse of a song in multi-part harmony, and then ask them to sing for the class.

Explain to the class that it takes work—*endeavoring*—to bring those parts together. The same is true in our unity with other believers. We must invest intentional effort to live harmoniously.

One mind—Having one mind doesn't mean we have the exact same thoughts as one another, but that we direct our minds to the same focus and purpose.

Illustration

Sometimes seeing things the same way can be difficult. For instance, while cleaning out her dresser, a wife found two old black-and-white negatives tucked away in a drawer. She was curious to know what they were, so she dropped them off to be printed. When she got them back, she was pleasantly surprised to see that they were photos of herself in a younger and slimmer fashion. They had been taken on her first date with her husband.

When she showed them to her husband, his face lit up as he responded, “Wow! Look at that! It’s my old Plymouth!”

People see things differently because we have different focuses. When it comes to areas that matter, however, a humble person will seek to have the mind of Christ and thus be aligned with others who likewise share the mind of Christ.

Earlier in Philippians, Paul challenged this church that their “one mind” should be focused around working together for the faith of the gospel.

PHILIPPIANS 1:27

27 Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

The only way this kind of like-mindedness can be achieved is by everyone putting on the mind of Christ.

Illustration

When an orchestra tunes their instruments, they don’t tune to one another—second trumpet tuning from the first trumpet, third tuning from the second, oboe tuning from the trumpet, etc.—but to a single standard. (Usually, this is the first violin.) If they tuned to one another, discord would be the result. Even so, to be likeminded with other Christians, we must all tune to Christ.

In a church, unity is gained when its members are each walking with God—striving to gain the mind of Christ. In a Christian home, unity is gained as husband

and wife, parents and children walk with God. In Christian friendships, unity is gained when both people are walking with the Lord.

If I walk in the Spirit, and I am allowing God's Word to saturate my mind, then the way I live my life will be very similar to the way you live your life, if you are also walking in the Spirit and saturating your mind with God's Word.

Seeking to walk in unity is a characteristic of a person who is building humility below the baseline.

II. **Separate from Contention**

PHILIPPIANS 2:3

3 *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*

It is one thing to be walking in unity, but it is another thing to make the choice to separate yourself from contention. How is that done?

A. **Refuse Strife**

PHILIPPIANS 2:3A

3 *Let nothing be done through strife...*

Strife is “putting oneself forward, self-promotion.” Often one who desires to promote himself or his agenda will slander, backbite, or gossip about others.

PROVERBS 26:20

20 *Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.*

PROVERBS 26:22

22 *The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.*

JAMES 3:16

16 *For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.*

The world may use these tactics to elevate self, but a Christian ought to be different. We ought to be a people who edify and build up in the faith. Our speech ought to be used for the purpose of edification.

EPHESIANS 4:29

29 *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.*

It's worth noting that in our day, "corrupt communication" can apply just as easily to electronic communication as to verbal communication. Sometimes a contentious person stirs up strife through social media comments, harsh text messages, or firing off an email. We must guard against strife in every form.

Interpersonal strife distracts us from the real spiritual battle in which we are to be engaged.

2 TIMOTHY 2:4

4 *No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

The devil loves it when we are entangled in arguments and drama with other Christians. For when we are sidetracked with strife, we are oblivious to our calling as soldiers of the gospel.

B. Maintain Lowliness of Mind

PHILIPPIANS 2:3

3 *...or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind...*

While *strife* is self-promotion, *vainglory* is “an erroneous opinion of self.” And it takes place because we are proud—we think more highly of ourselves than is accurate.

GALATIANS 6:3

3 *For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.*

D.L. Moody once said, “God sends no one away empty except those who are full of themselves.”

God tells us to replace both *strife* and *vainglory* with *lowliness of mind*—to have a humble opinion of ourselves.

Anything good in us is the work—not of ourselves—but of God’s grace. Even the areas in which we excel are gifts from the Lord, and we should deflect praise to God, giving Him the glory.

ROMANS 12:3

3 *For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*

We aren’t to deny the gifts God has given us, but rather, to turn the focus from the gifts to the Giver.

The best place to regain a humble opinion of ourselves is at the foot of Calvary. When we begin thinking too highly of ourselves or find contention growing in our lives, Calvary is the best place to put

everything back into a perspective of humility. It is a good place to show us who we are and who Christ is. We are merely sinners saved by grace.

At Calvary, we see the foolishness of strife and contention and holding grudges.

EPHESIANS 4:31–32

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Illustration

Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker were pastors in London in the nineteenth century. On one occasion, Parker commented from his pulpit on the poor condition of children admitted to Spurgeon's orphanage. The truth was twisted, and it was reported to Spurgeon that Parker had criticized the orphanage itself.

Spurgeon's fiery temper got the best of him, and on the following Sunday, he blasted Parker from his pulpit. The cruel words were printed in the newspapers and became the talk of the town. People flocked to Parker's church the next Sunday to hear his rebuttal.

Parker slowly got up and went to the pulpit, quietly cleared his throat and said, "Brother Spurgeon is sick today and cannot preach. This is the day when he takes up an offering for his orphans. May I suggest that we take up that offering for him in our church,

for he's doing a great work, and I know all of us would like to have a part in it.”

The crowd was delighted. Parker's compassion stirred such a response that the deacons had to empty the offering plates three times. They bagged the money and took it over to Spurgeon after the service, commenting, “This is a gift from Joseph Parker. He really promoted your program in church today.”

Spurgeon was transfixed by Parker's generosity. On Tuesday morning there was a knock at Parker's study. It was Spurgeon. Throwing his arms around his “rival,” he said, “You have more of the spirit of Jesus Christ than any man I know. You know, Parker, you have practiced grace on me. You have given me not what I deserved, you have given me what I needed.” (Source: <https://regenerationandrepentance.wordpress.com/2015/08/24/speaking-with-grace-parker-versus-spurgeon-and-the-outrageous-orphanage-incident/>)

This is the mind of Christ—lowliness of mind. Maintaining lowliness of mind will keep us separated from contention. It is a characteristic of humility.

C. Esteem Others Better

PHILIPPIANS 2:3

3 *...let each esteem other better than themselves.*

This word *esteem* means “to set a value on.” In lowliness of mind, we ought to value others better than ourselves. This is the mind of Christ. This is putting others before self.

There is something more important than our glory—the glory of God. People who have humility

below the baseline show respect toward others. This can only be done when we have a humble attitude.

Illustration

Two men of our Christian heritage who were influential for the cause of Christ were George Whitefield and John Wesley. Though George Whitefield disagreed with John Wesley on some doctrinal matters, he kept a humble spirit, despite their differences. In an effort to conjure up some strife, a reporter asked Whitefield, “Do you think you will see Wesley in Heaven?” Whitefield replied, “I fear not, for he will be so near the eternal throne and we at such a distance, we shall hardly get sight of him.”

1 PETER 5:5

5 ... Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

When you sense there is an issue that is pride-based, the best way to respond is through prayer. It is impossible to help another person see their pride. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. When we try, we usually exalt ourselves in the process. It is better to instead clothe ourselves in humility and respond by esteeming the other person’s needs higher than our own.

A person who is building humility below the baseline will seek a walk of humility and separate from contention. But they will go a step further as well.

III. **Serve Others in Need**

PHILIPPIANS 2:4

4 *Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*

Hours before Christ was betrayed and ultimately crucified, as He shared the last supper with His disciples, they were bickering about, of all things, which of them would be the greatest in Heaven.

Christ responded by telling them that true greatness is having the humility to serve.

LUKE 22:27

27 *For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.*

The posture of greatness is the position of a servant.

In our minds, the greatest person is the person with the highest title, the nicest stuff, the most prestigious honor, or a political office. But that is not how God sees greatness. He told us that greatness is found in being a servant.

The greatness of the Christian life is not in being very good at looking out for yourself; it is found in being very good at looking out for others.

A. **It is an Unselfish Look**

PHILIPPIANS 2:4

4 *Look not every man on his own things...*

Look means “to contemplate, to fix one’s eyes upon, direct one’s attention to.”

All of us have enough problems to consume our attention, but one who walks in humility has learned how to not allow their own burdens and problems to consume them or hold them back from being able to rightly focus on the needs of others.

This is not to say that we do not deal with the matters in our own personal lives. But the Bible says, *look... every man **also** on the things of others.* That means it is a two-fold action. We keep tabs on our business, but we also remain cognizant of others around us, looking for opportunities to meet their needs.

B. It is an Outward Look

PHILIPPIANS 2:4

4 *...but every man also on the things of others.*

A characteristic of someone who is walking in humility is that their focus is on serving others. They have learned to look beyond themselves and *look also on the things of others.*

There are so many things in life that are outside of our control such as the faults of others. But what you *can* control is yourself. You *can* extend kindness to someone else.

JAMES 1:27

27 *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

In fact, God calls us to serve one another.

GALATIANS 5:13

13 *For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.*

Someone who is developing humility below the baseline sets aside their own preferences and even limits their liberty to be able to serve others.

Conclusion

Our greatest example of humility is Christ Himself. That's why Philippians 2:5 points us to the mind of Christ.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5

5 *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*

When a crack of pride that shows up in our foundation is not dealt with, it will one day begin to spew out the problems of strife and vainglory. Instead of helping others, we'll be busy fixing stuff that we shouldn't have had to fix in the first place.

If instead, we allow the mind of Christ to be in us, we'll build humility below the baseline as we work for unity, avoid contention, and begin to notice the needs of others in order that we might serve them.

Study Questions

1. Why would a Christian want unity?
Seeking unity should be first and foremost based on our fellowship in Christ. It should be a reflection of the working of God in our lives.
2. Who is our greatest example of humility?
Jesus Christ, see Philippians 2:5
3. How is unity achieved?
Having the same love, being of one accord, and being of one mind.
4. What are the three characteristics of a person seeking to walk in humility?
Seek to walk in unity, separate from contention, and serve others in need.
5. According to Philippians 2:3, how do we separate from contention?
Refuse strife, maintain lowliness of mind, and esteem others above oneself.
6. Is there anyone with whom you struggle to get along? How can you practically apply Philippians 2:1–2 in your relationship with that person this week?
Answers will vary.
7. What was Jesus' response to the disciples as they bickered over who would be the greatest in Heaven?
He told them that the greatest position is to be a servant. See Luke 22:27.

8. Considering James 1:27, what are ways that you can have an outward look? Who can you serve who needs to be served, and how?

Answers will vary.

Memory Verses

PHILIPPIANS 2:1–2

1 *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,*

2 *Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

A Good Conscience

Text

ACTS 24:1–16

- 1 *And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.*
- 2 *And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence,*
- 3 *We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.*
- 4 *Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.*
- 5 *For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:*
- 6 *Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.*
- 7 *But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands,*
- 8 *Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.*
- 9 *And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.*
- 10 *Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been*

of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself:

11 Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.

12 And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city:

13 Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.

14 But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets:

15 And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void to offence toward God, and toward men.

Overview

Building below the baseline requires living with a good conscience. Our conscience is so important! The Apostle Paul speaks of the state of our conscience in several passages. We are going to study God's Word to understand the role of our conscience and how to have a good conscience that is void of offense toward God and toward men.

Lesson Goals

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should:

1. Understand the four conditions of one's conscience and identify the characteristics of each.
2. Know how to develop a good conscience.
3. Recognize the importance of displaying a good conscience.

Teaching Outline

- I. The Conscience Defined
 - A. The Good Conscience
 - B. The Defiled Conscience
 - C. The Evil Conscience
 - D. The Seared Conscience

- II. A Good Conscience Developed
 - A. Exercise Requires a Goal
 - B. Exercise Requires Discipline

- III. A Good Conscience Displayed
 - A. Toward God
 - B. Toward Men

LESSON FIVE

A Good Conscience

Text

ACTS 24:1–16

Introduction

The scene that unfolds in Acts 24 is a formal accusation against the Apostle Paul by the Jews to the governor, Felix. The Jewish High Priest Ananias has employed Tertullus, an orator (or lawyer), to accuse Paul of being a “pestilent fellow”—a troublemaker.

Although this took place in the first century, it’s not too hard to imagine taking place in our day as well. We live in a society that increasingly sees Christians who believe and preach the Bible as *pestilent*. Lawsuits are brought against Christians who stand for their beliefs in business. Scorn,

ridicule, and disdain are leveled against Christians who hold biblical values and teach that Christ is the only way to Heaven.

As you read Acts 24, you can sense the animosity seething out of the High Priest and those who did not like the Apostle Paul or his message of Jesus Christ being the Messiah.

And yet, as Paul eventually has opportunity to make his defense, he makes a statement that truly states the heart condition of this godly man.

ACTS 24:16

16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

The best defense that the Apostle Paul had was his clear conscience. He knew his accusers could craft lies about him, but he could peacefully face the false charges because he also knew he had no secret sin in his life or ulterior motives in his ministry.

A good conscience is still the best defense for God's people today. It has never been popular to stand for righteousness, and Christians all around the world are being persecuted for their faith. Even in America, those who live godly lives are suffering the seething accusations of the unsaved world.

Having a testimony that is "void of offense" doesn't just happen overnight. It is a below-the-baseline matter. It is developed privately and consistently.

Paul lived in such a way that no one could honestly accuse him of ill doing. Is this the testimony of your life as well?

Of course, having a good conscience doesn't mean that we never sin, or none of us would have one. But it does mean that our hearts are right with God and there is nothing others can say we have done to them without making things right.

Let's look closer at what God says about the conscience and how we can develop a good conscience at the very foundation of our lives.

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I. **The Conscience Defined**

What exactly is the conscience? Someone has defined it as “a window that lets the light in.” The light that comes through a window reveals what is already there. Even so, the conscience is one way the Holy Spirit reveals to us the true condition of our hearts. One of the great tools He uses to do this is His Word.

HEBREWS 4:12

12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

As we let the light of God’s Word come into our hearts, the Holy Spirit uses it to prick our conscience when we are not following the Lord in the way we should.

The Bible speaks of the conscience in several passages, and it describes four different types of consciences:

A. The Good Conscience

The first is the kind of conscience we should all desire—a good conscience.

ACTS 23:1

1 And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

Paul was not perfect, but he did not allow sin to linger in his life. If you have a good conscience, when you do sin, you are troubled by its presence

and immediately confess it to the Lord and ask for His forgiveness.

Paul also practiced a good conscience toward others and instructed Timothy to do the same—that his life would not come to ruin.

1 TIMOTHY 1:18–19

*18 This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare;
19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:*

We likewise see that Paul could honestly say that his serving God had been with a pure conscience. He did not have ulterior motives in his ministry.

2 TIMOTHY 1:3

3 I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day;

Someone once said, “There is no softer pillow than a good conscience.” With all of the burdens of life, we don’t have room for the heavy weight of sin and guilt. A clear conscience brings not just spiritual health, but lifts many of the emotional weights that hinder mental and relational health as well. Unconfessed, disregarded sin brings a toll of heaviness in your spirit and brokenness in your relationships—burdens God never intended you to carry.

Benjamin Franklin said, “Let no pleasure tempt thee, no profit allure thee, no ambition corrupt thee, no example sway thee, no persuasion move

thee to do anything which thou knowest to be evil; so thou shalt live jollily, for a good conscience is a continual Christmas.”

It is through the grace of God that we are able to resist sin and live with a good conscience.

TITUS 2:11–12

11 *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,*

12 *Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;*

Many Christians underestimate the power of God’s grace. Some think that by having a list of dos and don’ts, they are insured of keeping a good conscience. But these Christians fail to recognize the deceitfulness of heart-level sins, such as pride or covetousness. Other Christians think grace gives them license to avoid lists of dos and don’ts. These Christians fail to recognize the importance of a godly testimony through a godly lifestyle.

Grace is not a license to sin, nor is it merely having a standard to protect you from sin. Grace is the power of God to resist sin so we can live with a good conscience toward God.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul also pointed out that by the grace of God we can conduct our lifestyle (referred to as our *conversation* in this verse) in a way that protects our conscience and our testimony.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:12

12 *For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have*

had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

When the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts in conviction, it is a gift of God's grace. When we are responsive to His conviction, we can maintain a good conscience.

B. The Defiled Conscience

The Bible also speaks of a defiled conscience.

TITUS 1:15–16

15 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

16 They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

The word *defiled* means “made dirty.” Back to the analogy of our conscience as a window through which the Holy Spirit shines light, the defiled conscience is a window that has been allowed to become dirty. This is a conscience that was once pure and clean, but it no longer receives the light of truth as it once did. The mind has become polluted so that even innocent words or actions to this person's conscience are turned into something impure or unholy. Purity has lost its value.

A defiled conscience is not a safe guide. Whereas a person with a good conscience will often find that his conscience will hold him in check from making foolish decisions, a person with a defiled conscience has a mind that has become polluted. The decisions he makes—and insists are perfectly fine—are often

foolish and hurtful to others. On matters as serious as his marriage or as simple as how to spend free time, a person with a defiled conscience has lost the filter of holiness and purity through which to make wise decisions.

If you find yourself tolerating sins that years ago you shunned, this is not a mark of spiritual maturity; it is a mark of a conscience that is becoming less sensitive to the light of truth. And it's time to ask the Lord for help in cleansing you from sin and restoring your conscience.

C. The Evil Conscience

A third type of conscience is an evil conscience.

HEBREWS 10:22–23

22 *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*

23 *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)*

While a *defiled* conscience is the result of an occasional allowance of sin—perhaps enjoying a bad joke here or there, watching a show you know is not pleasing to the Lord, checking out the social media profile of an old flame, an *evil* conscience is the result of a *habitual* allowance of sin.

One of the most tragic examples of an evil conscience in Scripture is that of Lot. The Bible tells us that Lot was a believer, for he was a “righteous man.” But Lot made some disastrous choices which damaged his conscience.

2 PETER 2:7–8

7 *And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked:*

8 *(For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)*

Perhaps you know the story of how Lot initially had a curiosity of the things of the world. His compromises began small. First, he simply pitched his tent toward the wicked city of Sodom (Genesis 13:12). But his life spiraled downward from there. When we encounter him next in the pages of Scripture (Genesis 19) we find he is living *in* Sodom and has become a leader in the community. No one in the city even knows that he used to serve Jehovah God. As this chapter comes to a close, the last recorded event we have of Lot's life is a drunken act of incest with his two daughters.

What a grievous testimony to leave! And it is all the more tragic because Lot began with a good conscience. He allowed it to become defiled, however, and his final demise was the result of an evil conscience.

D. The Seared Conscience

The downward progression continues with the fourth type—the seared conscience.

1 TIMOTHY 4:1–2

1 *Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;*

2 *Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;*

The word *seared* means “burnt on the surface; cauterized; hardened.” A seared conscience has no feeling of conviction between what is right and what is wrong.

Illustration

Have you ever burnt your hand? Our skin is filled with sensitive nerve endings that transmit messages to the brain. But when that skin has been burned with extreme heat, it kills those nerve endings. Therefore, that burned patch of skin, though it heals and scars, it has no feeling or sensitivity. This is how God describes a seared conscience.

Looking back at the biblical description of a seared conscience, we see that this person’s conscience is so limited in its ability to sense the conviction of God that the person accepts and propagates false doctrine.

Illustration

To a Christian who is walking with God, there is nothing pleasant about being under the influence of wickedness and living in darkness. But the seared conscience has found this to be a comfort zone. It would be like a prisoner of war enjoying his captivity, and choosing to stay in confinement and darkness versus being liberated. To a free person looking in on the one held captive, we would say they are crazy. But that is the position of a seared conscience. This person has lost even the logical reasoning to recognize the bondage of their sin.

Remember that the person who ends up with a seared conscience once had a good conscience.

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Somewhere along life's way, the evil conscience we meet in 1 Timothy 4 resisted the conviction of the Holy Spirit and allowed his conscience to become defiled. Eventually, his choices became habitual, and he developed an evil conscience. But he continued to resist what little conscience he had left so that his conscience became seared—past feeling.

In contrast, think back to Paul's statement as he stood before Governor Felix, "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16). What a joy for him, as he was falsely accused as being a ringleader of trouble to be able to say, "My conscience is clear."

Every Christian with a heart for God desires a good conscience. So how is that conscience developed?

II. **A Good Conscience Developed**

Paul pointed out that maintaining a good conscience required something that not many of us like—exercise.

ACTS 24:16

16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void to offence toward God, and toward men.

Exercise here speaks of the effort invested in developing a good conscience.

Illustration

Exercise takes time and, if done correctly, is hard, sweaty work. It doesn't always show immediate results,

and, if we don't continue with it, our past exercise is powerless to maintain health in the future. It requires faithfulness. In the same ways, exercising ourselves to maintain a good conscience takes time and effort and is an ongoing process.

Let's look at two factors of exercise that will help us nurture a good conscience.

A. Exercise Requires a Goal

Zig Ziglar said, "If you aim for nothing, you will hit it every time." We achieve something by aiming for it, setting goals.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:25

25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

Those who compete in athletic events want to win. They spend many hours training for a few moments of an athletic event.

Those who strive to be the masters of their trades, likewise, put incredible amounts of effort into their areas of expertise so they might advance in their fields or receive honors for their skills.

If people will go to such lengths for physical, academic, or trade achievements, how much more should we invest ourselves in ways that have eternal significance?

For the Christian, the goal of spiritual pursuits—including exercising a good conscience—is to please Jesus.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1

1 Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

2 TIMOTHY 2:4

4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

Does your life please God? I think that some people view salvation like the “get out of jail” card in the board game Monopoly. God did not save us from sin so we could continue to live in it. Salvation gives you the power to now live a life that is pleasing to Him.

B. Exercise Requires Discipline

Perhaps the reason exercise is not naturally enjoyable for us is because it requires something our human nature detests—discipline. Paul explained that he practiced spiritual discipline to live a life that was pleasing to the Lord.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:27

27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Though God does not give us specific details of Paul’s self discipline carried out, I would surmise that this meant he kept under his control the places he would go, the friends he would choose, his daily habits, and so on. In order to keep his good

conscience, he established boundaries for himself and he stuck to them.

This personal discipline is what liberated Paul to minister to others. It is what enabled him to maintain a good conscience.

Paul instructed Timothy, “Take heed unto *thyself*...” Sometimes we focus more on what we *teach* than what we *live*. The result is usually a damaged testimony.

1 TIMOTHY 4:16

16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

Our Christian heritage is sprinkled with the sad stories of powerful preachers who brought great shame to the cause of Christ when secret sin was exposed. One may ask, “How does that happen?” First Timothy 4:16 answers that for us—they didn’t continually take heed unto themselves.

This personal discipline is not a matter of strong will power to do right. It is your response to God’s work in you. God works in us, and we are commanded to work out what He has worked in.

PHILIPPIANS 2:12–13

12 Wherefore, my beloved, ...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Some people ask, “Is Christian growth God’s work or my work?” The answer is “yes.” It’s both! It’s a divine-human synergy. God’s grace works in

us through salvation to give us the power to choose to live disciplined lives.

The disciplines of the Christian life can be summed up into two components:

We are to die to self and be filled with the Spirit. We'll look at both of these commands in more detail in lessons 6 and 7, but for now, here is a brief explanation.

Die to self. To exercise a good conscience, we have to die to self—sacrificing anything that may hinder our work for Christ.

Paul referred to this in 1 Corinthians 9:27 when he said, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection....”

Hebrews 12:1 speaks of the weights and sins that hinder our progress for the Lord.

HEBREWS 12:1

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

Victorious living in Christ demands that we recognize our old sin nature has been crucified with Christ and we can say “no” to our fleshly impulses and desires.

But there is a second part to the equation that is just as important.

Be filled with the Spirit. Not only are we to put off the sins of the flesh, but we are to allow the Holy Spirit to control our lives.

EPHESIANS 5:18

18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

Just as a person who is drunk is under the control of alcohol, so you and I are to be completely under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes that means there are things a leader will lay aside in order to be effective for Christ.

Illustration

Most of us, if we're not in the habit of regular physical exercise, don't initially like it. Our pep talks to get active usually include the motivational cliché "no pain, no gain." That popular phrase actually originated from Benjamin Franklin, nearly three hundred years ago. He was a proponent of physical exercise. This coined phrase came from one of his writings, "There are no gains without pains." (Source: www.thebenjaminfranklindiet.com)

Just as physical exercise requires discipline, so spiritual exercise requires a willingness to say "no" to anything that hinders and "yes" to that which aids.

A good conscience is developed—not just through *wanting* it—but through spiritual discipline to exercise it.

III. A Good Conscience Displayed

Although no one can see "below the baseline" of our lives, they will eventually see the *results* of what we are building below the baseline.

The Apostle Paul's good conscience was *toward God and toward men*. He was aware that God saw it, and he was aware also that others could see it as well.

ACTS 24:16

16 *And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence **toward God, and toward men.***

A. Toward God

A conscience that is “void of offence” toward God is held by someone who knows there is no unconfessed sin in his life—there is nothing between himself and God relationally.

MATTHEW 5:8

8 *Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.*

When we have a good conscience, we have a pure heart and can clearly see God at work in our lives.

God isn’t impressed with our outward achievements or our appearance of godliness. He sees what others cannot see—our hearts. He sees our true intentions.

1 SAMUEL 16:7

7 *But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*

When we don’t have pure hearts, we have simply to come to the Lord, confess our sins, and ask Him to cleanse our hearts.

JAMES 4:8

8 *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.*

God knows that if matters are right between ourselves and God, then it will manifest itself outwardly by being right between ourselves and others.

B. Toward Men

There are some who boast their individuality by saying, “I don’t care what people think about me.” But we should care! We are the vessels God has chosen to shine His light to this dark world.

MATTHEW 5:14–16

14 *Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.*

15 *Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.*

16 *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

Our light in this dark world is manifested in two ways:

First, it is in our testimonies. You cannot have a right testimony toward men if there is no difference between you and the world. Second Corinthians 4:2 speaks of this sanctification process as *by manifestation of the truth*. As we grow in Christ, it is manifested, or seen, by others.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:2

2 *But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth*

commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Paul lived in such a way that to honest observers of his life, their hearts bore witness with them that this person was genuine. This person was living for God.

God specifically calls us to separate ourselves from ungodliness.

2 CORINTHIANS 6:17

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

I believe the world has a higher standard for us Christians than the majority of us hold for ourselves. They know that if someone claims to be a Christian, there ought to be things they don't say or do. There ought to be a difference. If the people you intermingle with regularly would be surprised to discover you claim to be a Christian, you do not have a good conscience toward men.

All of us will stumble from time to time, yet, as leaders, we should desire that our lives would point others to Christ.

Leaders with a good conscience toward others are willing to limit their liberty in view of their responsibility to others.

1 CORINTHIANS 8:9–13

*9 But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.
10 For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience*

of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols;

11 And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

12 But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.

13 Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

The topic at hand in First Corinthians 8:9–13 is eating meat that had been offered to idols. Paul is expressing that, if it would be a stumbling block to a weaker Christian, he would not partake of it. This is personal discipline being exercised to maintain a good conscience toward man.

The second area we keep a good conscience toward men is through our witness. We who have the truth of the gospel are responsible to share it with a lost and dying world.

1 TIMOTHY 1:11

11 According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

Christ specifically commanded us to share the gospel with others.

MATTHEW 28:19–20

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

If it is our purpose to be the light in this dark world, yet we never introduce them to Jesus, the Light of the World, would it not be considered that we have failed our purpose? How can we have a conscience void of offense if we never tell the lost about Jesus Christ?

Conclusion

At the beginning of Acts 24, we find Paul being evil spoken of. But because he had a good conscience, and it had been developed and it had been displayed, he was ready to give an answer to every man.

If we will be effective servants of the Lord in our culture, we likewise must develop and display a good conscience.

1 PETER 3:15–16

15 *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:*

16 *Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.*

If we are making a difference for Christ, people will falsely accuse us. Our best defense is to have already been building a good conscience below the baseline.

Study Questions

1. What are the four types of consciences we looked at in this lesson?
A good conscience, defiled conscience, evil conscience, and seared conscience
2. Having a good conscience isn't about being sinless. What is it?
It is about confessing and forsaking sin—not having anything between us and the Lord.
3. What is a defiled conscience?
A defiled conscience is held by someone who has allowed the filter of their mind to be polluted.
4. What is an evil conscience?
The evil conscience has become comfortable with the habitual allowance of sin.
5. What is a seared conscience?
A seared conscience has no feeling of conviction between what is right and what is wrong.
6. What is the goal of maintaining a good conscience?
Our goal is to please Jesus.
7. What are the two disciplines of exercising a good conscience?
Death to self and being filled with the Spirit

8. How can we maintain a good conscience toward men?
Through our testimony and our witness

Memory Verses

1 PETER 3:15–16

15 *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:*

16 *Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.*

Dying to Self

Text

ROMANS 6:1–13

1 *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?*

2 *God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*

3 *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?*

4 *Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

5 *For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:*

6 *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*

7 *For he that is dead is freed from sin.*

8 *Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:*

9 *Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.*

10 *For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.*

11 *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

12 *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.*

13 *Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.*

GALATIANS 2:20

20 *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

Overview

God desires for each one of us to enjoy victorious Christian living. It is a vital element of building below the baseline. Yet, many struggle through their Christian life.

The equation for victorious Christian living is found in Romans 6 and Galatians 2:20. It is as we understand that our old nature is crucified with Christ and as we yield to the Holy Spirit that we are able to access this victory.

Lesson Goals

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should:

1. Be able to discern between the old nature and new nature.
2. Understand grace's saving power and purifying power.
3. Identify with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.
4. Know how to reckon and yield.

Teaching Outline

- I. A Presumption to Avoid
 - A. A Problem of Interpretation
 - B. A Problem of Intention

II. A Position to Acknowledge

- A. Crucified with Christ
- B. Buried with Christ
- C. Raised with Christ

III. A Process to Activate

- A. Reckon
- B. Yield

LESSON SIX

Dying to Self

Text

ROMANS 6:1–13; GALATIANS 2:20

Introduction

Romans 6 is filled with basic and necessary instructions for believers. It is like a driver's manual for the Christian life.

The Apostle Paul wrote the book of Romans, expounding upon the gift of salvation and all that it entails. This book teaches the great doctrines of justification, sanctification, and glorification. It begins with explaining our need for a Saviour. Then in the latter part of chapter 3 through chapter 5, it teaches the result of salvation by faith—that we are justified in the sight of God.

As we come to chapters 6 through 8, we are introduced to the next result of our salvation—sanctification, or being made like Christ.

Notice how Romans 5 teaches on justification and Romans 6 on sanctification—and how they are both connected.

Romans 5—Justification	Romans 6—Sanctification
1. Christ died for us	1. We died with Christ
2. Substitution	2. Identification
3. Christ died for sins	3. Christ died unto sin
4. He paid sin’s penalty	4. He broke sin’s power
5. Righteousness imputed	5. Righteousness imparted

Justification releases us from the penalty of sin through Christ’s substitution.

Sanctification releases us from the control of sin so we may live freely in righteousness.

As Paul described the incredible forgiveness available through salvation in Romans 5, he anticipated some readers questioning if freedom from the penalty of sin didn’t free them *to* sin without consequences. Thus, Romans 6 is Paul’s compelling argument, teaching us why and how amazing grace does not lead us *to* sin but instead leads us *away* from sin.

This brings us to an area in our Christian life that no one else can see. Are we allowing God’s grace to motivate us to die to self and to live for Christ? Or are we quietly and privately engaging in sin, claiming the grace of God? If we desire to build below the baseline, we must learn to die to self.

I. **A Presumption to Avoid**

ROMANS 6:1–2

1 *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?*

2 *God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*

Romans 5 closes with a glorious pronouncement: “...where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Romans 5:20). What a liberating truth! No matter how ugly our sin, God’s grace is greater.

Romans 6 then tells us that as beneficiaries of the amazing grace of God, our response should not be to sin *more*, but to sin *less*. In other words, though grace is always greater than our sin, this does not give us permission to live in sin.

Our world ridicules holy living. And some Christians have been so influenced by worldly philosophies that they ridicule holiness and growth in grace. In truth, although they purport to be emphasizing the grace of God, to use God’s grace for anything less than wanting to be changed to be more like Christ, is to abuse the grace of God.

Paul pointed out two problems with abusing God’s grace in this manner:

A. A Problem of Interpretation

Using grace as a license to sin is misinterpreting the Bible.

Some choose to think that if grace abounds when sin abounds, then the more we sin, the more we will receive grace. In other words, grace minus the law equals a license to live how I want.

In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. A growing Christian ought to study God’s Word—*all* of it—and rightly gather and implement the truths of God’s Word.

2 TIMOTHY 2:15

*15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.***

2 TIMOTHY 3:16–17

*16 **All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:***

*17 **That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.***

It is wrong to wrestle out of context Bible verses in order to accommodate our theology to our lifestyle. Developing a theological system that makes us feel good about the way we are living is no way to treat the Scriptures.

Beware of manipulating the truths of the Bible to cater to what you want it to mean. We ought to compare Scripture with Scripture, study our Bible, and seek counsel from spiritual leadership. This is rightly dividing the Word of God.

B. A Problem of Intention

Many, who wrongly presume they can freely live in sin, do so because of a heart problem. They live with sin in their lives not because they are naively misinterpreting the Bible. They misinterpret the Bible because the intentions of their hearts are wrong.

God's Word is the tool that God uses to show us the truth about our intentions. We must rely on God's Word to expose the hidden motives of our hearts, not misinterpret it to excuse them!

HEBREWS 4:12

12 *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, **and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.***

A Christian who insists on living apart from the holiness commanded in God’s Word will stand on the basic truth of God’s unlimited grace, but they will use it to quiet their conscience and silence the Holy Spirit. This abuse of God’s grace reveals the true intention of one’s heart. It does not please the Lord, and brings great shame to His name.

This is why Paul made very clear how God’s grace is *not* intended to be used:

ROMANS 6:1–2

1 *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?*

2 *God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*

That phrase, “God forbid” is an idiom in Greek. It’s like saying, “No way!” In fact, it’s the strongest idiom in Greek for denial of something.

The correct way to enjoy God’s grace is to not only recognize its liberation, but also to recognize its purification. God’s grace liberates us from sin and gives us the power to say “no” to temptation and fleshly living.

TITUS 2:11–14

11 *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,*

12 *Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;*

13 *Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;*

14 *Who gave himself for us, that he might **redeem** us from all iniquity, and **purify** unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

God's grace is not just a liberator from the penalty of sin but also a teacher unto righteousness. Notice especially in verse 14 how God's grace redeems us *and* purifies us.

We must avoid the presumption that, since we are saved, we can do whatever we want to do.

GALATIANS 5:13

13 *For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.*

God has given us liberty—not the liberty to sin, but the liberty to *serve*.

Illustration

“Amazing Grace” is perhaps one of the most popular hymns. The author of the song is John Newton (1725–1807). Newton was a slave trader and alcoholic. He got saved, became a preacher, and led the abolitionist movement to end slavery.

John Newton had experienced the redeeming grace through salvation and applied the

purification of grace. The words he penned testify of this experience.

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

*T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear.
And Grace, my fears relieved.
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed.*

John Newton had rightly applied God's grace to his life. He understood that the grace that covers sin is the same grace that is present when we are convicted by God *not* to commit sin.

The wonderful grace of Jesus not only justifies our soul; it sanctifies it. Grace is an amazing work of the Holy Spirit that conforms us to the image of Jesus Christ.

God forbid that we would abuse grace. May we never take the attitude, "I am forgiven. I can do whatever I want. I am under grace." This is the presumption we must avoid.

II. A Position to Acknowledge

The incredible truth about salvation is that we are "in Christ."

ROMANS 6:3–5

3 *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?*

4 *Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

5 *For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:*

Water baptism by immersion pictures that when we were saved we were completely immersed “in Christ.” Throughout this chapter, we’ll see that our position in Christ means that just as He died on the cross, we died to sin and do not have to serve it any longer. Furthermore, just as He rose from the grave, we are alive in Him, free to “walk in newness of life.”

R.A. Torrey explained it this way:

When Jesus died, He died as my representative, and I died in Him. When He arose, He rose as my representative, and I arose in Him. When He ascended up on high and took His place at the right hand of the Father in the glory, He ascended as my representative and I ascended in Him. And today I am seated in Christ with God in the heavenlies. I look at the cross of Christ, and I know that atonement has been made for my sins. I look at the open sepulcher and the risen and ascended Lord, and I know the atonement has been accepted. There no longer remains a single sin on me, no matter how many or how great my sins may have been.

What a liberating truth! Let’s break it down.

A. Crucified with Christ

One of the most concise declarations of what it means to be “in Christ” is found in Galatians 2:20.

GALATIANS 2:20

20 *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

Our old man (our sin nature) was crucified *with* Christ.

ROMANS 6:6

6 *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*

When Jesus Christ willingly gave His life on Calvary, much more took place than the death of one Man. He was the final sacrifice for the atonement of sin. God's perfect Lamb, the spotless Lamb, was offered once and for all.

Those who by faith have received Christ Jesus as the payment for their sins, have had their old man nailed to the cross. Their evil propensities and all of the wickedness of the old man has been conquered. It has been set aside by the presence of the New Man, Jesus Christ in us.

The cross destroyed the body of sin. It rendered sin inoperable. This is what Galatians 2:20 means when it says, "I am crucified with Christ..."

GALATIANS 2:20

20 *I am crucified with Christ...*

Living in the old nature is not normal Christian living. God never intended for us to live in continuing bondage to sin after our salvation. We still have the ability to choose to sin, but we do

not have the nature of sin like we did before we were “crucified with Christ.”

Illustration

Lester Roloff (1914–1982) was a preacher and evangelist. He once had a man apologize to him for having stated things that attacked his character and motives. Lester Roloff’s response was, “You can’t hurt a dead man.” He understood that he was dead to sin and didn’t have to hold a grudge.

For every Christian, the position to acknowledge is that our old man is crucified with Christ.

B. Buried with Christ

ROMANS 6:3–4

3 *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?*

4 *Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death...*

Our old man was buried *with* Christ. And this is where it is supposed to remain.

Just as Jesus’ lifeless body was placed in a tomb, expected to never breathe life again, our old man was buried with Him.

Think of your own tendencies to sin. What are the old sin patterns with which you wrestle? Perhaps it is a sharp tongue, bitterness, an angry spirit, or a proud heart. This sin nature has been rendered useless at the cross. It has been buried, expected to never breathe life again.

Every Christian should acknowledge that their old man is buried with Christ.

C. Raised with Christ

ROMANS 6:4–9

4 ...like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

7 For he that is dead is freed from sin.

8 Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:

9 Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.

Not only did our old man die with Christ, but we are alive in Christ. We have been given a *new nature*. Verse 4 tells us, ...*even so we also should walk in newness of life*. This is the normal Christian life. It is a new life. It isn't *your* life, but rather, *Christ's* life living through you.

GALATIANS 2:20

20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me...

We are to be dead to the things of this world, for that is the occupancy of the flesh. And we are to be alive unto the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in us.

The position to acknowledge is simply this: we are dead to self and alive unto Jesus Christ. That is the position of the victorious Christian life.

This does not mean that we are sinless. But we are no longer in a relationship with sin—we are no longer held in bondage to *have* to sin.

As we stand in our redeemed and victorious position (risen with Christ), sin no longer reigns over us. Because we are in Christ, we are victorious in Him.

2 TIMOTHY 2:11

11 It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him:

EPHESIANS 4:22–24

22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

In John 10:10, Jesus tells His disciples that He came to earth to give life, abundant life! This is the new life that God intends for us to live.

JOHN 10:10

10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

Our position in Christ gives us victory over our old nature. God never intended for man to live experiencing failure after failure. That old nature is dead. When we got saved, we did not add the new nature to the old. We exchanged natures.

COLOSSIANS 3:3

3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

17 *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

Baptism is a physical picture and reminder to us about living the exchanged life. Every time we see someone get baptized we are reminded that it is a picture of our position in Christ—dead to sin, alive to God.

III. A Process to Activate

We have looked at biblical facts about the Christian life—that “in Christ” we are dead to sin and alive to God. But we have a responsibility to live according to those facts.

Illustration

I heard about an elderly woman who died in an old shack, having lived in severe poverty. After her death, however, distant relatives were surprised to learn that she had hundreds of thousands of dollars in the bank. Although the fact was that she had the resources to live in luxury, she didn’t live according to that fact—either through ignorance or frugality.

What a tragic thing when a Christian who has Christ’s power within to live a victorious Christian life doesn’t live according to that fact, but instead lives according to the old nature.

GALATIANS 2:20

20 *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: **and the life which I now live***

in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

EPHESIANS 5:8

8 *For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:*

We are not partly light and partly dark. We are not partly dead and partly alive. We have a responsibility to activate the light. We must put feet to what we know and *walk as children of light*.

GALATIANS 5:24–25

24 *And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.*

25 *If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*

Rather than walking in the flesh, walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

Let's talk about the process to activate victorious Christian living and our identification in Christ each and every day.

A. Reckon

ROMANS 6:11

11 *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The process to activate begins first of all by reckoning yourselves to be dead unto sin.

The word *reckon* means “to take into account; to calculate.”

To say that the old man is crucified is one thing, but to reckon its reality is another. It is not enough merely to *know* our new position in Christ. We must, by faith, reckon it to be true in our own individual lives. We must begin each and every day reckoning our position in Christ.

Illustration

Consider your bank account. One does not merely spend money without keeping tabs on the status of his account. We will check our bank account ledger to see how much money we have and what has already been spent. We are “taking into account” or *reckoning* our financial position.

TEACHING TIP

Bring a checkbook register or ledger paper to class. Point out that when you settle an account, you are reckoning the reality of what is in it.

We must daily reckon our position in Christ. Our old account of sin was settled long ago. But we must reckon our new life in Christ for *today*.

Reckoning is simply that step of faith that says, “What God says about me in the Bible is now true in my life.” Reckoning acknowledges that we don’t live with sin, because that is the old man’s nature. We must reckon ourselves dead unto that and alive in Christ.

If we do not activate this process, we will quickly revert to old habits of the old man, even though we have been freed from living in them.

Reckoning is a daily process. The Apostle Paul said, *I die daily*.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:31

31 ...*I die daily*.

The Apostle Paul wanted to daily activate the victory of Calvary. So he daily had to reckon himself dead to sin.

You cannot go day after day without reckoning. Eventually, you will fail and experience the demise of trying to live the Christian life in the old nature. Far too many Christians have tried and failed. Their failure has brought great shame to the cause of Christ.

The only way to have sustained longevity in the Christian life is to realize that it is not *me* living this Christian life, it is *Christ* living it through me. It is reckoning myself dead to my tendencies, to my weaknesses, to my old way of doing things.

Illustration

George Müller was greatly used of God in the nineteenth century to care for over ten thousand orphans in England as well as in being used of God in the preaching ministry. One day someone asked him how he seemed to have so much spiritual power. He responded simply, “One day George Müller died.”

Positionally, we are victorious. But *practically*, we must reckon that to be the case. If we do not apply the truth of Calvary, sin will dominate our mind, emotions, and will.

Illustration

Perhaps you have heard of the two boys who caught a turtle and, while messing around with it, accidentally cut off its head. The turtle's legs continued to move, and the one boy said to the other, "He's dead; he just doesn't know it yet!"

Every born again child of God is dead to sin. But some Christians don't seem to know it yet.

B. Yield

ROMANS 6:13

13 ...but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

The activation process is two-fold—reckoning ourselves dead and yielding ourselves to God.

The word *yield* means “to place myself at the disposal of.” When we yield ourselves unto God, we want Him to be glorified through us—we draw near to Him and offer ourselves completely to Him.

ROMANS 6:12

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

The Christian does not have to let sin reign in—or be in control of—his life. In Christ, the enthronement of self ends.

ROMANS 12:1–2

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living

sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2 *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

We often think that some people are just naturally super great Christians, while others of us struggle. The reality is that we *all* struggle, but victorious Christians have learned how to yield to God and trust in His power in them. The missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, said, “Many Christians estimate difficulties in the light of their own resources, and thus attempt little and often fail in the little they attempt. All God’s giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on His power and presence with them.”

God gives us two instructions in these verses about yielding—a negative warning and a positive admonition.

ROMANS 6:12–13

12 *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.*

13 *Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.*

The negative admonition is to not let the sin nature have free reign in our body by having it readily at our disposal. It is easy to yield to sin when we make our lives available as instruments of unrighteousness.

Sin, Satan, and our flesh will always be around. But by the crucifixion of the old self, sin's power over us is broken. We commit sin when we act independently of God's presence in our lives.

We must recognize we cannot live independently of God and have victory in our lives.

The positive admonition is to make your members available to be righteous instruments in the hands of God. We can serve righteousness because we are alive in Christ.

Yield is a word that speaks of the heart. It's not just the outward motions—it's an inner decision to give in to God. Often what we call a lack of discipline is actually a lack of devotion. It's not that we *can't* say "no" to sin and "yes" to God, but that we don't love God enough to yield to Him.

Someone who habitually struggles to live victoriously may say, "I don't know why the old man takes over. I don't know why the old flesh wins." The answer lies in our choices—to whom we yield ourselves. And to whom we yield ourselves will be the one we love.

We can have complete confidence in the power of this yielded position. In Christ, we are dead to sin and alive to God. With Christ in us, we have the power to live a victorious life.

Conclusion

So many Christians live a miserable life because sin has dominion over them. Some even worry that they are not saved. It is possible to be a defeated Christian—truly born again, but oblivious to the facts of what it means to be in Christ.

Other Christians give up on gaining victory over sin. They know the truth, but because they fail to apply it, they become discouraged.

Every Christian needs to know that victory is available! In fact, it is vital if we are going to continue building below the baseline in our Christian walk.

ROMANS 8:12–14

12 *Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.*

13 *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.*

14 *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

To live in spiritual victory, is to reckon yourself dead to sin and to yield to the Spirit of God. This is the way to experience the true power of grace.

Study Questions

1. What is the presumption that needs to be avoided?
The false presumption is that God's grace gives us liberty to continue in sin.
2. What is the correct way you can enjoy God's grace?
The correct way to enjoy God's grace is to not only recognize its liberation, but to recognize it is equally for our purification.
3. What are the three positions we are to acknowledge?
We are crucified with Christ, buried with Him, and raised with Him.
4. What is the process to activate dying to self?
Reckon ourselves dead unto sin, and yield ourselves unto God.
5. According to Galatians 5:24–25, how do we not fulfill the lusts of the flesh?
Walk in the Spirit.
6. What is the only way to have sustained longevity in the Christian life?
It is to realize that it is not me living this Christian life, it is Christ living through me.
7. What is an area of sinful living that you have already seen God's grace give you the power to overcome?
Answers will vary.

8. What is an area that is a current source of temptation in which you need to reckon yourself dead to sin and yield to God for victory?

Answers will vary.

Memory Verse

GALATIANS 2:20

20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Filled with the Spirit

Text

EPHESIANS 5:15–21

15 *See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,*

16 *Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

17 *Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.*

18 *And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;*

19 *Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;*

20 *Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;*

21 *Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*

Overview

Although every Christian possesses the Holy Spirit, not every Christian is *possessed* of the Holy Spirit. There is a huge difference between the two positions. God commands us multiple times in Scripture to be filled with His Spirit. But this is not something God forces upon us; rather, it is our choice to yield to the process. In this lesson, we will look at God's instructions for living a Spirit-filled life.

Lesson Goals

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should:

1. Understand that it is only through God's Spirit that we are able to access living the Spirit-filled life.
2. Desire to live a Spirit-filled life.
3. Clearly know God's will as stated in Ephesians 5:17 and 1 Thessalonians 4:3.
4. Identify if they are in obedience or disobedience to God's command to be filled with the Spirit of God.

Teaching Outline

- I. The Spirit-Filled Path
 - A. A Path of Caution
 - B. A Path of Consecration
- II. The Spirit-Filled Purpose
 - A. A Determined Purpose
 - B. A Yielded Purpose
- III. The Spirit-Filled Product
 - A. It Is a Product of Joy
 - B. It Is a Product of Gratitude
 - C. It Is a Product of Cooperation

Filled with the Spirit

Text

EPHESIANS 5:15–21

Introduction

Illustration

Warren and Pam Adams live in Gilchrist, Texas. In 2005, when Hurricane Rita swept through Southeast Texas, it destroyed their home. So when they rebuilt, they reinforced the foundation heavily. Fourteen-foot support beams were installed to lift the house twenty-two feet above normal sea level in the event of another storm surge.

Less than three years later, Hurricane Ike hit in 2008. Everything within miles of the Adams was flattened—except the Adams' home. There it stood, intact amidst the destruction, a witness to the importance of what has been built below the baseline.

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The Adams family prepared in ways that others did not. They chose to build their foundation deeper than the families around them. No doubt, there were expenses involved that those around them did not incur. But when the storm came, it made all the difference. (Source: http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/09/18/ike.last.house.standing/index.html?eref=time_us)

TEACHING TIP

Show your class a picture of the Adams' home. You can access one through the news article cited in the illustration above.

In this lesson, we learn about another aspect of the Christian life that others don't see but that makes a tremendous difference—being filled with, or controlled by, the Holy Spirit.

It goes against our nature to have someone or something controlling our lives. We have an innate desire to control our own lives and our own destinies.

And yet, we don't always have control over our circumstances. Often storms and troubles will come our way that we wish we could stop. It is at these points that it will be revealed whether or not we have been building lives yielded to the Holy Spirit below the baseline.

At the moment of salvation, we receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

EPHESIANS 1:13–14

13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

14 *Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

But although we are given the Holy Spirit at salvation and He will never leave us, we must make the decision to surrender to Him on an ongoing basis. This is what it means to live the Spirit-filled life.

Our text of Ephesians 5:15–21 teaches us how this looks in daily living.

I. **The Spirit-Filled Path**

The Spirit-filled life isn't accomplished in a moment of decision. Rather, it is a path which we choose and continue to follow. It is comprised of choices made throughout our days.

GALATIANS 5:16

16 *This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*

The word *walk* refers to the way one conducts his daily living. It is referring to one's lifestyle. God wants us to *walk* in His Spirit as opposed to walking after our flesh.

Our key text gives us two descriptions of this path.

A. A Path of Caution

EPHESIANS 5:15–16

15 *See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,*

16 *Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

The Spirit-filled path is living our lives *circumspectly*. This word, although not one we use in daily conversation, is related to a word we do use—*circumference*. It refers to the entire perimeter, or being alert and cautious in every direction. A person who is walking circumspectly is less likely to stumble.

This is why Colossians 4:5 instructs us to “walk in wisdom.”

COLOSSIANS 4:5

5 *Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.*

We ought to live with the awareness that a spiritual hurricane could come at any moment. God wants us to be prepared for these storms by walking circumspectly, by walking with caution.

After all, we have a very real enemy lurking nearby, always seeking opportunity to devour us.

1 PETER 5:8

8 *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:*

To be *vigilant* is similar to being circumspect. It means “watchful; attentive to discover and avoid danger, or to provide for safety.”

Illustration

Lions are beautiful creatures to look at whether in National Geographic or in a caged arena at the zoo. But if we knew we would encounter a lion sometime during our daily routine, we would walk cautiously.

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A lion's favorite meal is an antelope. Two things help a lion as it hunts for its next meal. They are incredibly good at hiding and phenomenally patient.

But there is another advantage to the lion when hunting antelope. Antelopes, while physically fast, are not mentally sharp and do not learn from their past mistakes. Though an antelope may have been killed out of a herd just hours before, that same group of antelope will return to the same watering hole. (Source: <http://www.naturalhighsafaris.com/blog/how-lions-hunt>)

The devil is just like this. He is extremely good at hiding and phenomenally patient. He is not going to advertise that he is hiding among the bushes. We tend to be just like these antelopes. Though we have seen the demise of others who disregarded God's Word, we keep doing the same thing, expecting a different result.

The Spirit-filled path is a path of caution. We ought to be always on the lookout for the disguise of the enemy, for the trap that lurks behind a seemingly innocent matter.

B. A Path of Consecration

EPHESIANS 5:17

17 *Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.*

The Spirit-filled path is living a life of consecration. *Consecration* means “separating from a common to a sacred use.” It is the “will of the Lord” (Ephesians 5:17) that we live such consecrated, sanctified lives.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:3–4

3 *For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:*

4 *That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;*

It is God's will that we possess purity from sin. This is our sanctification (or the consecration) of the Spirit-filled path.

We live in a world that promotes living as close to the edge of sin as possible. But God tells us to get far away from the danger. God tells us to *know* how to keep our vessels under control. Boundaries need to be set. Decisions need to be made and enforced.

If we are going to be *for* sanctification and honor, we have to be *against* anything that hinders our testimony or pulls us from consecrated living.

How do we understand the will of the Lord as it relates to consecration? By the Word of the Lord!

COLOSSIANS 3:16

16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom...*

As J. Oswald Sanders said, "A walk in the Spirit will of necessity be a walk in accordance with the Word the Spirit has inspired. No one can be filled with the Spirit of God if he is neglecting the Word of God."

The Spirit-filled path is completely different than the carnal path. It is a path of walking circumspectly, staying away from danger. It is a path of consecration, set apart from common to sacred use.

II. **The Spirit-Filled Purpose**

This path of caution and consecration has a purpose. It's not simply that we be kept from danger and free from sin. It is that we can be filled with—under the control of—the Spirit of God.

EPHESIANS 5:18

18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

A. **A Determined Purpose**

If we are to be under the control of the Spirit of God, we will have to disallow anything else that would bring us into its control.

EPHESIANS 5:18

18 And be not drunk with wine...

This command could not have been given to us more clearly—do not become intoxicated.

It's a curious thing to me when people excuse or, worse, promote alcoholic drinks. Vance Havner once commented, "I'm tired of hearing sin called sickness and alcoholism a disease. It's the only disease I know of that we are spending hundreds of millions of dollars a year to spread."

Proverbs 23 gives us a lengthy explanation of the dangers of drunkenness and the tragic hold an alcoholic addition has on a person.

PROVERBS 23:29–35

29 Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?

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- 30 *They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.*
- 31 *Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.*
- 32 *At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.*
- 33 *Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.*
- 34 *Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast.*
- 35 *They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.*

The command here against drunkenness is direct and to be taken at face value. But it is also used as a comparison. Just as a drunken person is under the control of alcohol, so a Christian is to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. Even as alcohol takes control of the mind and body, affecting the drunk person's behavior and conversation, so the same happens to a person under the control of the Holy Spirit.

B. A Yielded Purpose

EPHESIANS 5:18

18 *...but be filled with the Spirit;*

To *be filled* means “to make full; to fill to the full; to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally.” Just as the contrast is made of choosing to be under the influence of alcohol, it is also a *choice* to be filled with the Spirit of God. It is a position to which one must yield.

When a Christian is fully under the control of the Holy Spirit, then he will be fully furnished and supplied

with all that is needed to live out the work of God in his life.

The key is obeying the commandment to be filled. To be filled is to yield to the Spirit so He may have total access to our wills and lives.

ROMANS 6:13

13 Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

God wants our lives to be completely yielded to Him. Every Christian *possesses* the Holy Spirit. But not every Christian is *possessed* of the Holy Spirit. There is a world of difference between the two positions.

Far too many Christians have the Holy Spirit living within them, but they are so carnally minded that the Spirit has no control in their lives. This Christian will never experience the power of God being demonstrated in them because they have not chosen to yield to the filling of the Spirit.

Andrew Murray said, “Men ought to seek with their whole hearts to be filled with the Spirit of God. Without being filled with the Spirit, it is utterly impossible that an individual Christian or a church can ever live or work as God desires.”

Being filled with the Spirit of God is not a suggestion God gave us. It isn’t even an appeal. It is a command from God. Anything less than being filled with the Spirit is disobedience to the Word of God.

When we find ourselves in a position of holding on to a sin, or unable to forgive someone, or not experiencing the fruit of the Holy Spirit, we must step

back and recognize that we are living in contrast to being filled with the Spirit. We are being filled with self.

Being filled with the Spirit is not something we do, but something that is done for us. We don't pour the power of the Spirit into our lives; we simply surrender our lives, and in that yielding, His power flows in.

In other words, we can repent of sin. We can be emptied of self. We can yield to the Holy Spirit. But it is *God* who fills us.

And when we are filled, we are blessed with spiritual liberty. When we give God's Spirit free reign in our lives, His power works in and through us mightily.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:17

17 ...and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

In sin and the flesh, there is bondage. But where the Spirit of God is in control, there is liberty.

The Spirit-filled path is one of being on guard against Satan and being consecrated to God. The Spirit-filled purpose is to allow the Holy Spirit freedom to work in our lives. But what is the result of being Spirit-filled?

III. The Spirit-Filled Product

The last three verses of our text define the way the Holy Spirit affects the life of one who is under His control.

EPHESIANS 5:19–21

19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

20 *Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;*

21 *Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*

When we are filled with the Spirit, there is going to be a different product that is produced in us. Galatians 5 further describes how the fruit of being Spirit-filled looks.

GALATIANS 5:22–25

22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,*

23 *Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

24 *And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.*

25 *If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*

These qualities are ones every growing Christian desires. But they don't come just because we try really, really hard to "be peaceful" or to "have faith." They come as we yield our desires to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to produce His fruit in us.

A. It is a Product of Joy

EPHESIANS 5:19

19 *Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;*

A Spirit-filled person is a person who experiences the joy of the Lord. This is the kind of person who people like to be around because their joy permeates through their countenance, actions, and words.

It is our nature to express our admiration of whatever or whomever through song. The song in one's heart is a clear indication of what or whom he admires.

To have a song in our hearts during happy times is human; but to have a song—making melody in our hearts to the Lord—in our hearts during difficult times is supernatural. The spirit of joy does not rest in our circumstances. It comes from the confidence we have in God. It is a settled inner peace because we trust in God.

The Bible tells us of Paul and Silas being beaten and imprisoned. Yet in their darkest hour, they had joy and sang songs of praise to God.

ACTS 16:25

25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

The cry for emotional relief is prevailing in our culture. Joy, however, is not found by being able to control our circumstances; it is the fruit of the Spirit of God.

The saddest Christians are the ones who are filled with their own agendas. But the happiest Christians are the ones who are fully yielded to the Holy Spirit. And as we have seen, this joy will express itself in song to the Lord.

COLOSSIANS 3:16

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Grace is a disposition created by the Holy Spirit. It is grace that allows us to love. It is grace that carries us through our difficult times. One of the manifestations of that grace is that we will sing and make melodies to the Lord.

A good thermometer of the spirit in a church is displayed during the music service. If people are distracted and disinterested, you know the Spirit of the Lord is not prevailing throughout the congregation. But when the people are using music to pour out their praise to the Lord, you know God's Spirit is at work in hearts.

One of the greatest distinctions of Christianity should be in its music, because the music God gives is not the music the world gives.

PSALM 40:1–3

1 *I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.*

2 *He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.*

3 ***And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.***

When you got saved, God put a new song in your mouth. According to Psalm 40:3, your music preferences are seen by many, and they ought to reflect Christ and His praise.

One of the results of being filled with the Spirit is joy and the desire to express it in Christ-honoring music.

Illustration

Fanny Crosby was only six weeks old when she developed a minor eye inflammation. It was a simple thing to treat even in 1820, the year she was born. All the doctor had to do was apply some poultices to her eyes with a little medication. Unfortunately, however,

the doctor who treated Fanny was careless, and he put too much medication in her eye. As a result, Fanny went totally and permanently blind.

Later in life, Fanny Crosby said of the doctor, “If I could meet him now, I would say ‘thank you’ over and over again for making me blind, because the first face to gladden my sight will be my Saviour’s.”

Fanny Crosby’s perspective of her blindness was because she saw it as a gift from God. It’s what helped her see Jesus in ways others seldom saw Him. Her blindness had given her spiritual insight few ever had.

Is it any wonder that Fanny Crosby penned some of the most powerful hymns we enjoy today?

TEACHING TIP

Prior to class, print the words to a few of Fanny Crosby’s songs. (This link will give you a list of her most popular hymns: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_works_by_Fanny_Crosby#Selected_hymns)

Encourage the class to talk about the powerful messages portrayed in these lyrics that were penned by a blind and joyful woman.

Consider together how we might respond to such circumstances. Fanny Crosby’s joy was surely the fruit of God’s Spirit in her life.

B. It is a Product of Gratitude

EPHESIANS 5:20

20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

Another manifestation of someone who is filled with the Spirit is the gratitude that comes forth from their life. The Spirit-filled Christian will give thanks *always for all things*. No exceptions!

1 THESSALONIANS 5:18

18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

Gratitude is one of the evidences of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. This gratitude is to always be directed to the Father.

Charles Spurgeon said, “When we bless God for mercies, we usually prolong them. When we bless God for miseries, we usually end them. Praise is the honey of life which a devout heart extracts from every bloom of providence and grace.”

Looking into your own life, are there things that you grumble about to the Lord? What if instead of complaining, you thank God for His faithfulness in the midst of it and yield to the Holy Spirit your insistence that He change it? The Holy Spirit will fill your life with gratitude, replacing the complaining.

C. It is a Product of Cooperation

EPHESIANS 5:21

21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Everyone likes to be around cooperative people. Everyone likes a team player. But not everyone likes to *be* the cooperative team player!

When we are daily dying to self, a willingness to serve and cooperate with others will permeate our

activities. We'll be willing to relinquish our rights as the supreme objective. We won't insist on the spotlight, and we won't be determined that ours are the only right opinions.

The Spirit-filled Christian is willing to take the position of a servant.

MARK 10:45

45 For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Do you have a spirit of cooperation in your relationships? The Spirit-filled Christian is a humble Christian. As Ephesians 5:21 tells us, this humble position of serving others is because we have an even greater respect and adherence to God. The Spirit-filled Christian's fear of God is displayed by cooperatively working alongside others.

All of us would love these products of the Spirit-filled life to fill our lives—joy, gratitude, and cooperation. And they can! We simply must yield our own way to the Holy Spirit and give Him full control.

Conclusion

A Christian who will survive life's storms must have a continual filling of the Holy Spirit below the baseline. This is not just a once-for-all decision. It is a continual surrender and yielding. And it is the only way to really experience all God intends for us in the Christian life.

Study Questions

1. What is the difference in our lives related to the Holy Spirit between what happens at salvation and what we've discussed in this lesson?

At salvation, the Holy Spirit indwells us. Being Spirit-filled is when we yield to allow the Holy Spirit to control us.

2. What is the Spirit-filled path?

It is a path of caution and a path of consecration. It is walking circumspectly and sanctified.

3. What does it mean to “walk circumspectly,” and why is it so important?

It means to be alert to danger and to walk with caution. It is important because the devil is always looking for an opportunity to devour.

4. What is the contrast Ephesians 5:18 gives to being filled with the Spirit? What does that tell us about what it means to be filled with the Spirit?

The contrast is a person who is drunk. Just as a drunk person is controlled by alcohol, so we are to be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

5. What ought to be the desire of every Christian?

To be Spirit-filled every moment of our day.

6. We see in our text that the product of a Spirit-filled life is joy, gratitude, and cooperation. Do you see these in your life? Would others who know you well say they see them?

Answers will vary.

7. In what areas do you *not* see the product of the Spirit's filling in your life? What does that tell you about where and how you need to yield to the Holy Spirit?

Answers will vary.

8. What Christian do you know who seems to always radiate the joy, gratitude, and cooperation with others of the Spirit-filled life? How can you learn through their example?

Answers will vary.

Memory Verse

GALATIANS 5:16

16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

Spiritual Discipline

Text

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24–27

24 *Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*

25 *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*

26 *I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:*

27 *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*

Overview

It may sound counterintuitive, but spiritual disciplines are not for the purpose of making us more spiritual. Nor are they to be a heavy imposition of religious rules or traditions. A Christian who is passionate to live a life pleasing to his Creator willingly places himself under complete submission to the Holy Spirit of God just as an athlete places himself under the training of a coach. In fact, this is the parallel God uses in Scripture to teach us the importance of building discipline below the baseline.

Lesson Goals

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should:

1. Understand that spiritual disciplines are developed out of a relationship with God.
2. See areas in which we ought to exercise temperance.
3. Desire to finish their race with a faithful testimony.
4. Understand the judgment seat of Christ.

Teaching Outline

- I. The Purpose of Discipline
 - A. To Run the Race
 - B. To Obtain the Goal
- II. The Practice of Discipline
 - A. Temperate in All Things
 - B. Purposeful in All Things
 - C. Controlled in All Things
- III. The Prize of Discipline
 - A. The Destination
 - B. The Declaration

LESSON EIGHT

Spiritual Discipline

Text

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24–27

Introduction

Our culture has dramatically changed over the past several decades. Whereas people once believed in temperance, orderliness, and personal discipline, there is now rebellion toward boundaries, independence from God, and chaos. America today is a place of disorderliness, undisciplined living, and no self-control or temperance.

Illustration

As a 2014 construction crew prepared a church building in Berkeley, California, for demolition, they discovered a time capsule from 1948 hidden inside the wall behind the church

cornerstone. Inside the sealed metal box was a carefully wrapped Bible, newspaper articles about the church's groundbreaking in 1948, and several pro-temperance (anti-liquor) fliers written by the founding pastor. (Source: <http://www.berkeleyside.com/2014/01/22/berkeley-time-capsule-contents-unveiled-historic-bible-anti-liquor-pamphlets-more/>)

The sad thing is that the building was being demolished because the church had already dwindled and disbanded. This church that had once stood for disciplines in the Christian life now, over fifty years later, no longer exists. Sometime during their ministry, this church succumbed to the pressure to turn away from disciplines. They lost their discipline of holiness and lost their way.

It is not a granted guarantee that a solid church and its members will always remain solid. What keeps us focused on right and grounded in truth is adhering to disciplines in our lives.

Paul wrote 1 and 2 Corinthians to a carnal church in the city of Corinth. He used an athletic racing analogy to teach the Corinthians the disciplines of a Christian's life. This comparison was relevant to the Corinthians because they were the center piece for the Greek Olympic Games. They understood well the disciplines of an athlete.

To each of us Christians, a race has been set before us. When we got saved, we were automatically entered into this race. To Christians who want to finish this race well, we must develop discipline below the baseline of our lives.

First Corinthians 9:24–27 gives us three important truths regarding discipline that we must learn in order to be victorious in our race.

I. **The Purpose of Discipline**

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24

24 *Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*

A purpose is an intention. Our purpose is what drives us to make the choices we make. Our lives are shaped by purpose. For example, if a man intends (or purposes) to gain wealth, he will work hard and research the most lucrative investments. If a woman intends (or purposes) to become a professional musician, she will invest hours of practice and sacrifice other pursuits to develop that skill.

There is a God-given purpose for spiritual discipline as well. Contrary to popular belief, spiritual discipline doesn't make us more acceptable in God's eyes. Christianity is not a works-based relationship. There is, however, a purpose for implementing disciplines into our lives.

A. **To Run the Race**

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24

24 *Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?...*

We need disciplines in our lives because we are running a race. Each of us is enrolled in this race, and we'll only run honorably if we are wise in our discipline.

A runner does not just eat whatever he or she desires right before a race. They don't let their minds wander to frivolous matters that distract from their

race. They focus on the finish line and concentrate all of their efforts on running that race.

Hebrews 12:1 uses the analogy of running a race for our Christian life.

HEBREWS 12:1

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

In this verse, God gives us a glimpse into an activity that is happening in Heaven. The “cloud of witnesses” spoken of in Hebrews 12 refers to the saints of Hebrews 11. These are they who have finished their race and are now in the stadium, cheering on those of us still running.

The Apostle Paul understood that he was in a race. He gives his testimony in Philippians 3, and you can sense the intense focus he directed in his race.

PHILIPPIANS 3:7–8

7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

Paul recognized that to press forward in his race meant he would have to implement discipline in his life. The things that used to be meaningful to him, he had to count them as a loss so he could successfully run his race for Christ.

If we desire to remain in the race, we must live disciplined lives. We need to be willing to lay aside weights and to run with patience (Hebrews 12:1). This is the disciplined life.

Of course, in the Christian race, we are not competing against each other, but rather against the obstacles of life. A successful athlete doesn't quit when he runs into an obstacle in his path. He, in the language of 1 Corinthians 9:24, "runs all." The intent is to run the whole race.

Today's Olympic runners train for months and even years. The same was true for the Greek Olympians in the first century. No one invests that much discipline and training into an event which they do not hope to win.

Spiritual discipline isn't an end in itself; it is a way of focusing our efforts on the race set before us. These disciplines would include regular Bible reading and study, daily prayer, consistent church attendance, and faithfully sharing the gospel. These don't happen without effort, but the effort involved is well invested. They allow us to participate in and to finish our spiritual race.

B. To Obtain the Goal

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24

24 ...*So run, that ye may obtain.*

The second purpose for discipline is because we need it in order to obtain the goal of the race—to win.

This is what Paul referred to when he said, "So run, that ye may obtain." He is saying *how* to run. In other words, "Run in such a way so as to be able to win."

There is always a prize to be won at the end of a race. In the Corinthian era, it was a wreath, made of olive branches, to be worn on the victor's head. Today, athletes will go after the goal to obtain a medallion or trophy. But to obtain it, the athlete must remain disciplined.

Our goal is Christ.

In the Apostle Paul's testimony, we see the goal for our race. The goal for the Christian is the Lord Jesus Christ. Though each of us has a different course to run, we have the same goal, "...*that I may win Christ*" (Philippians 3:8). Our goal that we want to obtain is Christlikeness and the conformity to Christ and the knowledge of Christ.

PHILIPPIANS 3:8–10, 13–14

8 *Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, **that I may win Christ,***

9 ***And be found in him,** not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:*

10 ***That I may know him,** and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;*

13 *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,*

14 *I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

When we see a victor receiving his awards, you can be sure that his discipline did not start the morning of his competition. This is something that begins long before

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the athlete performs. His discipline takes place behind the scenes, what for an actor would be the “backstage” of life.

Every one of us has a “front stage” life and a “backstage” life. The front stage life is where others see us. For a runner, that would be the moment of the public race. For us as Christians, it’s public ministry or service. The backstage life is where we prepare. For a runner, that would be the months of training before the race. For Christians, it is the personal and private disciplines that go into preparing for the front stage. It’s the time in private prayer or nurturing family relationships. It is the backstage—the discipline invested when no one else sees—that determines how the front stage goes. If we don’t have discipline on the backstage, we won’t have victory on the front stage. There must be private discipline as we live then a public life before the Lord and before the world.

The Apostle Paul had one thing he focused on. He reached forward toward the prize set before him. He pressed toward the finish line. And the goal he was focused on was Christlikeness, being conformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

This is the goal God has in mind for all of us. He saved us to be conformed to the image of Christ.

ROMANS 8:29

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Are you running your race to obtain that goal? Are you exercising spiritual discipline with the goal of letting God conform you to the image of Christ?

There is a purpose for spiritual discipline, and it is that we might continue in the race to obtain the goal. But seeing that purpose often boils down to a matter of attitude. Is your attitude one of wanting to win the prize? Are you looking toward the finish line?

A disciplined runner doesn't bemoan the foods or activities he must set aside to win the race. He sees them as a small sacrifice for a greater outcome. The same is true in our Christian life. Our attitude will determine our actions, and our outlook will determine our outcomes.

Remember that the purpose of discipline is to win the race, and it will help you have a proper perspective on the practice of discipline.

II. **The Practice of Discipline**

1 CORINTHIANS 9:25–27

25 *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*

26 *I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:*

27 *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*

The phrase *striveth for the mastery* means “to enter a contest; to contend with adversaries.” It is a choice to participate in this race. Although every Christian is in the race, not all Christians continue. Many Christians quit, because they don't want to participate in contending with the adversaries.

The temptation is to transition from being a runner in the race to merely observing the others running. To stay in the race, we will have to practice steadfast discipline.

1 PETER 5:8–9

8 *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:*

9 *Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.*

Our key verses give us three ways a Christian can implement the practice of discipline.

A. Temperate in All Things

1 CORINTHIANS 9:25

25 *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*

This word *temperate* means “to be self-controlled.” As in the case of an athlete, it means to set aside things that would harm the athlete in preparation for their athletic events.

TEACHING TIP

Discuss with the class different activities they have been involved in and what self-control was adhered to. Was it sports in school? A particular diet they followed? Learning a musical instrument? Any developed skill has required some form of temperance.

There ought to come a time in a Christian's life when he decides, *I want nothing more than the power of God on my life. I want nothing more than the knowledge of Christ. And I'm willing to exercise temperance to gain these.*

There are many who get up early to lift weights, to train for a marathon, or even to pursue advanced education. Cannot we exercise similar temperance to seek God's face in prayer and Bible study?

We live in what many refer to as the Laodicean church age (from Revelation 3:14–22) where many are lukewarm spiritually. It's not that they are *against* spiritual discipline, but they don't have the desire to develop it personally. The average Christian knows more about sporting events than the message he heard preached last Sunday.

We desperately need a generation of Christians who will love the Word of God, love the prayer closet, and love the things of God. But to feed that love, it demands being *temperate in all things*. This is a cost that many are not willing to pay.

Consider once again an athlete. His training regimen is not determined by what he perceives as his rights or feelings. He's willing to have a coach or trainer get in his face and tell him to dig deeper, to train harder. And he does it all because he has a goal in mind.

As Christians, when we hold tightly to our rights or personal liberties, we relinquish something more valuable—temperance. Our habits and actions should be temperate—disciplined—so we can run hard and so others will not stumble as they follow us. In some cases, this even means setting aside

things that may not be sinful but could be hurtful to others' success.

ROMANS 14:21

21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

Temperate in all things means abstaining from the distractions that would keep us from doing the work of God.

B. Purposeful in All Things

1 CORINTHIANS 9:26

26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

The Apostle Paul was not running his race aimlessly, *not as uncertainly*. He had a purpose. There was meaning behind everything he did, every choice he made.

In the prior verses to our key text, the Apostle Paul gives us his purpose for exercising discipline.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:19–22

19 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;

21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

22 *To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*

You see, the purpose for Paul's personal discipline was not only so *he* could know Christ. But he chose to live a life of discipline so *others* might know Christ.

Paul wanted to live his life in such a way that anyone with whom he would come into contact would be able to clearly see Christ in him. This was the purpose behind practicing discipline.

C. Controlled in All Things

1 CORINTHIANS 9:27

27 *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*

This phrase *I keep under my body* is a boxing term. It literally means to buffet one's body, as a boxer is beaten black and blue. What God is teaching us here is that a disciplined life demands that our flesh is brought into subjection. It is controlled in all things.

Painful choices will need to be made in a disciplined life. The Apostle Paul was testifying in 1 Corinthians 9:27 that he was willing to go through pain and reject particular comforts for the sake of having an effective life.

It is a tragedy beyond words when someone who has preached to others becomes a castaway. The damage done to the cause of Christ is immeasurable. This does not just apply to those who stand behind a pulpit and preach on Sundays. If you are a Christian

and people around you know it, you are “preaching to others.” If you are a Christian parent, you are “preaching to others.”

Paul didn’t want to be a castaway. He didn’t want there to be anything in his life that could potentially be a hindrance to someone knowing Christ. He was therefore willing to be controlled in all things.

Illustration

Our Christian heritage has been carried through history by men with discipline.

John Hus (1369–1415) refused to recant of his position of salvation through Christ alone. Executioners undressed him, tied his hands behind his back, and chained his neck to a stake. Wood and straw were piled up so that it covered him to his neck. Before the fire was lit, he was given one more chance to recant, which he declined with the words, “*God is my witness that I have never taught that of which I have been accused by false witnesses. In the truth of the Gospel which I have written, taught, and preached I will die to-day with gladness.*” (source: <http://www.greatsite.com/timeline-english-bible-history/john-hus.html>)

Martin Luther (1483–1546), when asked what his plans were, replied: “Work, work, from early until late. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.”

John Bunyon (1628–1688), author of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, was imprisoned for twelve years because he refused to stop preaching.

Each of these men, and so many more, were men of spiritual discipline. They had doctrinal devotion in their lives and determined that they would stand up for Jesus

Christ. Is it any wonder that God used them to lead many to Christ in their generation?

The phrase “keep under my body” is not only a boxing term; it also refers to bringing one’s body into subjection—making our body a slave. A serious athlete *leads* his body; he doesn’t *follow* his body.

Likewise, a committed Christian must not allow the flesh to control his life. This lesson ties in with lesson 7 on being filled with the Spirit. One who has spiritual discipline has learned how to deny fleshly desires and allow the Holy Spirit to control.

EPHESIANS 5:18

18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

We either live a fleshly controlled life or a Spirit controlled life. When we live a Spirit controlled life, we will not follow every impulse of our flesh but will follow God’s leading.

And we must commit to doing it for the duration of the race. While we can never lose our salvation, if we “break our training program,” we could become a castaway and lose our spiritual reward.

The **purpose** of discipline is so we can finish the race. The **practice** of discipline is keeping our body under submission to the Holy Spirit.

III. The **Prize** of Discipline

The prize of discipline is *not* Heaven. Salvation gives us that security. Disciplined or undisciplined, if we have trusted Christ as our Saviour, we have the promise of eternal life.

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That is not, however, to say that how we live on earth doesn't matter. In fact, the way we live on earth will have great eternal ramifications.

At the end of our race, there is an award ceremony at which we will each be present. This is the judgment seat of Christ. It is at this judgment seat where we will be given the prize of our life's disciplines, or the lack thereof.

A. **The Destination**

ROMANS 14:10–12

10 ...for we shall all stand before **the judgment seat of Christ**.

11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Every Christian will stand at the judgment seat of Christ. This is not a time of accounting for our sins, for that was settled long ago at Calvary. Works do not save us; only faith in Jesus' shed blood for the atonement of our sins will give us eternal life.

But our works here on earth do have a bearing on the rewards we will receive at the judgment seat of Christ. This is the only place in which our works have any bearing on our eternity.

Illustration

The Greek word used here for *judgment seat* is the word *bema*. The people of Corinth would have immediately thought of the actual bema seat in

Corinth where a judge would give out laurel wreaths to the athletes who had participated according to the rules. At the bema seat, some people would receive rewards while others would not. But no one was punished. Even so, at the judgement seat of Christ, the Lord will reward those who have faithfully run their race, but those who have not will stand there empty handed—yet still a child of God.

In 1 Corinthians 3, God gives us a deeper look into the events of the day we will stand before our bema seat.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:12–15

12 *Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;*

13 ***Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.***

14 *If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, **he shall receive a reward.***

15 *If any man's work shall be burned, **he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.***

Everything in our lives—spiritual and non spiritual—will be revealed by fire. Will the accumulation of our life's works be represented by gold, silver, and precious stones? Or will our works be more of the wood, hay, and stubble elements? At the bema seat, it will all be made known.

This truth ought to be very sobering to each of us. *Every man's work shall be made manifest.*

This will surely bring shame to many as we see our life's work go up in flames before the Lord.

ECCLESIASTES 12:14

14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

LUKE 8:17

17 For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad.

For the Christian who has implemented the necessary disciplines for their race, this upcoming event brings excitement and anticipation.

B. The Declaration

2 CORINTHIANS 5:10

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

The wreath that the ancient Greek runners received only lasted until it wilted. But our eternal rewards will last forever.

Our great desire is to hear our Lord tell us, “Well done.”

MATTHEW 25:23

23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

It is for this reason that we hold fast to the Word of God, develop spiritual disciplines in our lives, and press toward the finish line.

Esther Kerr Rusthoi penned the words to the hymn “When We See Christ.” These words remind us that any temporary pain is only temporary and is better seen in the light of eternity.

When We See Christ

*Oft times the day seems long, our trials hard
to bear,
We're tempted to complain, to murmur
and despair;
But Christ will soon appear to catch His
Bride away,
All tears forever over in God's eternal day.*

*Life's day will soon be o'er, all storms
forever past,
We'll cross the great divide, to glory, safe at last;
We'll share the joys of heav'n—a harp, a home,
a crown,
The tempter will be banished, we'll lay our
burden down.*

Chorus

*It will be worth it all when we see Jesus,
Life's trials will seem so small when we
see Christ;
One glimpse of His dear face all sorrow
will erase,
So bravely run the race till we see Christ.*

If you would **purpose** to run your race well, and **practice** spiritual disciplines, you will not regret for one moment that you did those things when you stand before Jesus and receive the **prize**.

Conclusion

1 CORINTHIANS 9:25

25 *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*

At the bema seat in Corinth, many athletes received their rewards for which they had labored. Their prize was a simple wreath. Eventually, it wilted. It was a corruptible crown.

But the Christian who is building below the baseline is striving for an eternal reward. That incorruptible crown is what we will be able to lay at Jesus' feet in worship and praise.

The Apostle Paul ended his race with anticipation for meeting the Righteous Judge. He did not have regrets for the things he “missed out” on in his life because of his determination to be *temperate in all things*. He could depart from his earthly life, knowing that he has crowns awaiting him at the judgment seat of Christ.

2 TIMOTHY 4:6–8

6 *For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.*

7 *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:*

8 *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

Someone once said, “The Christian life is not a hundred-yard dash, but a marathon.” Have you grown weary? Are you exercising spiritual discipline that will keep you in the race?

I challenge you today to determine, “I will fight a good fight. I will finish my course. I will keep the faith.”

Study Questions

1. Why do we need discipline in the Christian life?
To run the race and to obtain the prize
2. What is the goal of the Christian life?
Christlikeness; to be conformed into the image of Christ; to win Christ
3. What does it mean to “strive for the mastery”?
To enter a contest; to contend with adversaries
4. What are some adversaries you face that challenge you in your race?
Answers will vary.
5. What does “temperate in all things” mean? What is one area in which you want to exercise more temperance?
It means to be self controlled. Answers will vary.
6. What is the prize of discipline?
Receiving our rewards at the judgment seat of Christ and being able to lay them at Jesus’ feet
7. Are you living in daily awareness that you will one day stand before Christ?
Answers will vary.
8. When you consider the judgment seat of Christ, what disciplines do you want to develop in your life today?
Answers will vary.

Memory Verse

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24

24 *Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*

Forgiveness

Text

EPHESIANS 4:26–32

26 *Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:*

27 *Neither give place to the devil.*

28 *Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.*

29 *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.*

30 *And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*

31 *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:*

32 *And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*

Overview

God has bestowed His forgiveness upon us, even though it is completely undeserved. Yet within our relationships, we often struggle to forgive others. Unforgiveness cripples us, making us ineffective in our service for the Lord.

In this lesson, we will look at how God wants us to handle hurts, and we'll see the grace He offers us to forgive others.

Lesson Goals

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should:

1. Clearly see the devil's trap of anger.
2. Know how to respond to hurts and wrong emotions.
3. Understand the correlation of Calvary and our enablement to extend forgiveness to others.

Teaching Outline

- I. Reject Satan's Temptation
 - A. To Sin in Anger
 - B. To Stay in Anger
- II. Reflect Biblical Grace
 - A. In Your Actions
 - B. In Your Words
- III. Refuse to Grieve the Holy Spirit
 - A. Bitterness Grieves God
 - B. Sinful Speech Grieves God
- IV. Reflect the Saviour's Forgiveness
 - A. We Serve a Kind Saviour
 - B. We Serve a Forgiving Saviour

Forgiveness

Text

EPHESIANS 4:26–32

Introduction

We have been learning through this series that the most important quality of a structure is the foundation. Likewise, our lives are designed to need a solid foundation. Deep inside all of us where no one else sees except you and God are those areas that matter most.

In this lesson, we will be discussing an area essential to a strong Christian life as well as to strong relationships—forgiveness. All of us will have times when we are hurt by others. What we do with that hurt will determine if we are strengthening our foundation or weakening it.

Bitterness is one of the greatest hidden sins that will hinder your relationship with God, family members, other Christians, and unsaved people. On the other hand,

forgiveness is one of the greatest restorers of relationships and brings freedom to the Christian who builds it below the baseline in his life.

Illustration

Jim and Elisabeth Elliot were missionaries to a primitive tribal people known as the Auca Indians.

After a seemingly friendly first contact with several of the Indians, Jim and four other missionaries were speared to death. To many people's surprise, Elisabeth and her ten-month-old daughter returned to live with the tribe and eventually won many Auca people to Christ.

People often asked Elisabeth how she could forgive those who murdered her husband. Speaking of her response, Elisabeth said, "To the world at large this was a sad waste of five young lives. But God has His plan and purpose in all things...The prayers of the widows themselves are for the Aucas. We look forward to the day when these savages will join us in Christian praise."

This kind of response was only possible because Elisabeth Elliot had built forgiveness below the baseline in her life.

Relationships in Christian homes and churches are often destroyed because of someone who nurtured an unforgiving spirit. Although we often deny there is anything amiss, we can see the unforgiveness building in our lives when we avoid someone, gossip against someone, or remove ourselves from fellowship with another person.

Whether or not you are currently struggling with bitterness, all of us will have times when others hurt us. It is at these times that we must build forgiveness below the baseline. In Ephesians 4:26–32, God gives us a pattern to help us deal with the hurts of life with a forgiving spirit. In

this lesson, we'll see four specific ways that we can respond with forgiveness.

I. **Reject Satan's Temptation**

What do we do when someone has hurt us? The first thing we do is determine what we *won't* do—yield to Satan's temptation.

The devil has many darts and arrows that he will shoot at us. And one of his favorites is the arrow of a hurt spirit. In our most vulnerable moments of pain, he tempts us to respond in a most unhelpful way.

A. **To Sin in Anger**

EPHESIANS 4:26

26 Be ye angry, and sin not:...

When that moment of hurt comes, our natural reaction is to respond in anger. This response, however, only adds damage.

JAMES 1:20

20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

It is true that there are some instances in which anger is righteous. Even Jesus demonstrated anger at times.

MARK 3:5

5 And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine

hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

Jesus' anger, however, was always perfectly directed at sin, and it caused Him to uphold righteousness. He was not angry because someone had violated His personal rights—in fact, He freely yielded His rights.

ISAIAH 53:7

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

Bible commentator Matthew Henry said, “If we would be angry and not sin, we must be angry at nothing but sin; and we should be more jealous for the glory of God than for any interest or reputation of our own.” This is the kind of anger which Jesus displayed.

Our problem with anger is that it usually leads us toward sin. When wrongfully angered, a man or woman will often do things they never thought possible. The reason for this is that our anger is usually self-centered. We are angry because our feelings were hurt, our rights were violated, or our efforts were unrecognized.

Benjamin Franklin made an astute observation about anger when he said, “Whatever is begun in anger ends in shame.”

Be aware that the devil will tempt you to sin in anger.

B. To Stay in Anger

Satan not only wants us to *get* angry with someone, but he wants us to *stay* angry. This is why God commands us to not allow anger to linger in our hearts.

EPHESIANS 4:26

26 *...let not the sun go down upon your wrath:*

Wrath is defined as “intense anger.” It often has the idea of vengeance behind it. It is when we are angry and want to make someone pay for how they have hurt us.

Satan recognizes that as long as we are angry at someone, we are immobilized spiritually. Thus God commands us to not let the sun go down upon our wrath.

Illustration

A husband and wife were celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary. A young acquaintance of theirs was engaged himself and asked them for the most helpful thing they had done over their fifty years of marriage. The husband replied, “We never go to sleep angry with each other.” The young man was impressed until the wife chimed in, “And the longest we’ve ever had to stay awake was a week!”

Never be too proud to do whatever is necessary to not end a day with discord in your home or in your relationships.

When we make it our habit to go to bed angry, there is no limit to the insane things we may do. When we allow anger to seethe within us, it will boil over in so many other ways. God wants us to address

problems graciously instead of harboring hurts and becoming bitter.

HEBREWS 12:15

15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

Let's take Hebrews 12:15 to heart. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if there is any root of bitterness springing up in you.

Ephesians 4:27 tells us to *neither give place to the devil*. This word *place* is the Greek word *topos* from which we get our word *topography*. It means "any portion or space marked off." It is like saying to God, "This place right here, you can't have this. I have marked off this portion for the devil."

None of us would consciously give a portion of our lives to the devil. But when we allow anger to linger in our hearts, we are inviting the devil to come in and influence our lives.

Romans 13:14 warns us to not make provision—to not allow opportunities—to satisfy our flesh.

ROMANS 13:14

14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

Lingering anger that turns into bitterness provides plenty of opportunity for us to respond in relationships wrongly.

The Apostle Paul recognized that the devil uses unforgiveness to gain an advantage in one's life. He decided, according to 2 Corinthians 2:10–11, to

always forgive another because he did not want to give Satan an advantage over him.

2 CORINTHIANS 2:10–11

10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ;

11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

It doesn't matter how long one has been a Christian. We can all fall prey to this simple tool of the devil. He knows how to bring us down through hurts that are not dealt with properly.

Someone once said, "When you forgive, you set two people free, and one of them is yourself." For *your* sake, for your family's sake, do not let the sun go down upon your wrath.

Marriages and homes and friendships that fall apart don't do so overnight. In many cases, these kinds of tragedies happen after many nights of harboring bitterness. It happens when we let the sun go down upon our wrath.

We must reject Satan's temptation to sin in anger and to stay in anger. God has a better way for us. He offers us His grace.

II. Reflect Biblical Grace

When someone wrongs us, this is our opportunity to receive the grace of God and to respond to them with that grace. Ephesians 4 notes two ways in which we can respond in grace.

A. In Our Actions

EPHESIANS 4:28

28 *Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.*

At first glance, it may seem that Ephesians 4:28 is unrelated to the rest of the passage. And yet, the verses before and after deal with relationships and responding to others when wronged. This verse is not unrelated at all. Let's look at it more closely.

Notice the multiple actions that are mentioned in Ephesians 4:28: no more stealing, labor, work, give.

Responding correctly to the difficulties or offenses that are a part of life will be seen through our actions. God is telling us to reject allowing anger to have a hold in our hearts (verse 26). Properly and biblically deal with that anger (verse 27). And that will change the way we live (verse 28).

In this verse, stealing is being used as a parallel word picture of who we are when we do *not* reflect God's grace and we remain in our anger.

Stealing and unforgiveness both disregard the command of God as we reject God's grace. Additionally, stealing is a form of pride—believing I should have something which I do not have.

Anger is also a form of pride—believing that I should be treated a way differently than I have been treated.

Our pride demands that we get what we think we deserve. On a material level, that insistence leads to theft, and on an emotional level, it leads to anger.

God tells us instead to use our actions to give grace to others—to labor so that we have the wherewithal to give to others in need.

B. In Our Words

Perhaps the area in which we most struggle to respond with grace to those who have hurt us is our words.

EPHESIANS 4:29

29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

The word *corrupt* means “rotten, putrefied, unfit for use.”

When we hold unforgiveness in our hearts, it always comes out of our mouths. It may take a little bit of time before it does. But eventually, our bitterness will spill out in the words we say.

JAMES 3:10–11

10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

Just like a little bit of poison will contaminate an entire water source, a little bitterness corrupts everything inside of us.

What ought to proceed out of our mouths is good communication for the use of edifying.

The word *edifying* means “to cause to grow.” Our words should be good for others. Bitter and unforgiving words do not benefit anyone, but kind words do.

We live in a culture that is really good at tearing things down. Christians ought to be busy restoring life where the devil is trying to bring death.

Illustration

Mary had a tough day at school and started complaining about it as soon as she got home.

She moaned, “Nobody loves me...the whole school hates me...the whole *world* hates me!”

Her brother hardly looked up as he replied: “That’s not true, Mary. Some people don’t even know you.”

Edification is something every person needs.

We need to be in the business of edifying because each of us are ordained by God to be a minister of grace. Our words are to bring grace to those who hear us.

A mature Christian can take a potentially big problem and make it smaller. A carnal Christian will take a little issue and make it bigger.

God wants us to bestow the gift of good will and lovingkindness to others. Pouring grace on a situation brings a peaceful result.

Of course, our nature tends to be better at finding the negative than the positive. Sometimes it is easier to see what is wrong than what is right. Thus, we must invest intentional effort in giving grace to others through our words.

The best example of ministering grace in our speech was the Lord Jesus Christ.

LUKE 4:22

22 And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph’s son?

JOHN 7:46

46 *The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.*

We should speak in kind, wise, truthful, and encouraging words that will minister to those who hear our words.

When we are at odds with someone, we often use the cliché, “I’m going to give them a piece of my mind!” Instead of giving others a piece of our minds, let’s give them grace instead.

Proud people cannot minister grace. This is why in that initial moment of hurt, we must reject the temptation to respond in proud anger, or we will not be able to respond in humble grace.

Illustration

Consider these hypothetical situations and the effect that gracious words could have. Perhaps you can relate to one of these scenarios. What are your scenarios that could benefit from gracious words?

What would happen if...

You went to your unfair boss after a rough day and said, “Thanks for all you do around here.”

Suppose you did not make the sports team but went to the coach and said, “Could I help keep stats?”

What would happen if you wrote a congratulatory letter to the one who got the promotion or the parent of the child who did a little better than yours?

What would happen if you sent a sincere thank you note to the teacher who had to give bad news about your child’s grades?

This is how Christians ought to respond. This is ministering grace. When we respond with grace, God rewards us. But contrariwise, when we allow corruption or disappointment to fill our hearts, we easily become filled with bitterness.

We must learn to respond to the difficulties that we face in biblical grace. This will be evidenced in our actions and in our words.

III. Refuse to Grieve the Holy Spirit

EPHESIANS 4:30

30 *And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*

To be honest, we probably do not take into consideration the Holy Spirit's presence with us as much as we ought. And yet, He will never leave us. He has "sealed" us "unto the day of redemption." Because He is always with us, we should be careful that none of our actions cause Him sorrow or offense.

Ephesians 4:30 tells us we bring grief—sorrow or heaviness—to the Holy Spirit when we refuse to forgive. Verse 31 further describes what specifically grieves Him.

A. Bitterness Grieves God

EPHESIANS 4:31

31 *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger... be put away from you...*

Let's define these words:

Bitterness means “extreme enmity; grudge; hatred.”

Wrath means “fierce rage.”

Anger means “blowing up with violent emotion.”

These three often go together in our lives. They are sins that tend to feed each other. Usually, when we are allowing them in our lives, we feel justified in doing so. Yet God commands us to put them away.

B. Sinful Speech Grieves God

EPHESIANS 4:31

31 *Let all...clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:*

While the first three sins relate primarily to how we *feel*, these last three relate primarily to what we *say*.

Clamour means “a great outcry; to utter loud noises repeatedly.”

Evil speaking means “slander; speech injurious to another’s good name.”

Malice means “all that is sinful.”

Do you notice the process that is being exposed in Ephesians 4:31? The issue begins in the heart as bitterness. It fans the flames of our emotions. Thus wrath and anger begin to spill out of us.

As bitterness continues to boil inside, it is exposed through our speech. This is clamor and evil speaking.

The absolute best and only way to remedy this is to root out the bitterness through forgiveness. God wants the bitterness to be put away from us.

An unknown author wisely stated, “Unforgiveness is the poison we drink, hoping others will die.” Bitterness changes people. This poisonous hatred leads

to fierce rage (wrath) and blowing up with violent emotion (anger).

Sam Ewing said, “It’s wise to remember that anger is just one letter short of danger.”

It is so important to not grieve the Holy Spirit! We need His ministry to us. But if we are to not grieve Him, we must be a forgiving people. We must refuse to hold on to any hurts.

IV. Reflect the Saviour’s Forgiveness

God doesn’t just tell us what *not* to do. He gives us the perfect remedy for bitterness—choosing to forgive.

We usually think the perfect remedy is choosing to get even. Thus, God reminds us of the forgiveness He extended to us. Our having a forgiving spirit is to be a reflection of God’s forgiveness toward us. We forgive *even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven* [us].

A. We Serve a Kind Saviour

Sometimes we forget the kindness of God. Yet, He shows it to us every day—even when we fail to notice it or thank Him for it.

TEACHING TIP

Take the time to discuss with the class particular ways God has been kind to each of us.

God calls us to extend His kindness to others.

EPHESIANS 4:32

32 *And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted...*

Kind means “having tenderness or goodness of nature; benevolent.”

Tenderhearted means “having strong inward compassion; sympathetic.”

A lot of times, the people who hurt us have deep hurts in their own lives. We must learn to put ourselves in their shoes and to look at them as we would want them to look at us.

An old saying is, “Be kind to everyone for everyone you meet is fighting a battle.” How true this is! We do not know the burdens people are carrying. Your extending kindness and just letting go of what feels to you like an offense from them could make a difference in their lives. But even if it doesn’t make a difference that you can see, it is still right to pass to them the kindness you have been given of the Lord.

B. We Serve a Forgiving Saviour

EPHESIANS 4:32

32 ...*forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.*

Forgiving means “to give grace, to pardon.” It is me giving up my right to hurt you for hurting me.

When we have been deeply hurt, we think, “I just can’t forgive them. I will never be able to forgive them. They just don’t deserve it.”

But Ephesians 4:32 draws us back to Calvary. When Jesus forgave us of our sins and paid our penalty, did we deserve it? Not even a little bit. It was an act of grace.

It is interesting that as Jesus Christ hung on the cross, some of the last words He spoke were words of forgiveness.

LUKE 23:34

34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

And Ephesians 4:32 tells us we are to forgive “even as God.” In other words, the same way that God forgave us for Jesus Christ’s sake, we ought to forgive others. When we look at it that way, there is not one person we cannot forgive.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, “Whenever I see myself before God and realize something of what my blessed Lord has done for me at Calvary, I am ready to forgive anybody anything. I cannot withhold it. I do not even want to withhold it.”

When others wrong us, God calls us to forgive and to show them kindness.

ROMANS 12:21

21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Conclusion

Our culture tells us that forgiveness is an option—and that it is usually a bad option. Satan tempts us to respond to hurts in anger and to hold onto grudges. But the result of this type of living is bitterness and unrest in our hearts.

God tells us that forgiveness is not an option—it is a command. He tells us that He gives us the grace to release

our anger and even reflect His grace to the people who have wronged us.

If we are merely cultural Christians, we'll not choose forgiveness. But if we are spiritual Christians, we'll purposefully build forgiveness below the baseline in our lives. And others will then see Jesus through us.

Study Questions

1. What are some examples of how we see unforgiveness permeated throughout our culture?
Answers will vary, but may include the following: divorce rate, news and media drama, fights, etc.
2. How has God prepared a way for us to be free from the damage of unforgiveness and bitterness?
Reject Satan's temptation, respond in biblical grace, refuse to grieve the Holy Spirit, and reflect the Saviour's forgiveness.
3. What are some of the tell-tale signs of an unforgiving spirit?
Avoid a particular person, gossiping about a particular person, removing ourselves from fellowship with that person
4. When wrongfully angered, we often will do things we never thought possible. Why is this?
Our anger is self centered.
5. In what two ways can we respond in biblical grace?
In our actions and in our words
6. How do we cause sorrow and heaviness to the Holy Spirit?
By failing to forgive and harboring bitterness in our hearts
7. Is there someone who often tends to make you feel angry? How can you show grace to them this week?
Answers will vary.

8. Is there someone whom you need to forgive? How does forgiving someone else set us free?

Answers will vary.

Memory Verse

EPHESIANS 4:32

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Contentment

Text

HEBREWS 13:5–6

5 *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

6 *So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

Overview

Learning to be content does not come naturally to anyone, nor is contentment promoted in our world. But a solid foundation below the baseline demands the structure of contentment.

Contentment is only found when we look to God for our sufficiency. It is then that we recognize that He is all we need. In this lesson, we will learn why we can be content and how we can develop contentment in our lives.

Lesson Goals

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should:

1. Be able to say as the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:11, *“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”*
2. Identify areas of discontentment in their own lives and know how to make changes.

3. Recognize the sufficiency of Christ and His power to help in every need.

Teaching Outline

- I. Build Contentment by Rejecting Covetousness
 - A. In Our Lifestyles
 - B. In Our Hearts

- II. Build Contentment by Remaining Content
 - A. Because God Has Provided in the Past
 - B. Because God Will Provide for Our Future

- III. Build Contentment by Renewing Confidence
 - A. By Remembering His Presence
 - B. By Remembering His Provision

Contentment

Text

HEBREWS 13:5–6

Introduction

Throughout this series, we have been reminded that what is more important than the beautiful exteriors and furnishings of a building is the quality of its foundation. We've seen many hidden cracks that can ruin a life. And we've seen many qualities we need to build into our lives.

If we do not take care of matters below the baseline, we may look great on the outside, but when the storms of life hit, our lives will crumble.

Jesus gave a parable in Matthew 7 that illustrates the importance of building below the baseline. Two men who chose different foundations had radically different turnouts once the storms came.

MATTHEW 7:24–27

24 *Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto **a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:***

25 *And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.*

26 *And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto **a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:***

27 *And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.*

We are either building like the wise man, or we are building like the foolish man...and it all takes place below the baseline.

In this last lesson, we will look at one of the worst destroyers of what may otherwise be a good foundation—discontentment.

There are very few content people in the world today. People complain about the temperature of the water in the drinking fountain. People complain about their spouse, the heat, politics...there is no end to what we can find to complain about when we have a problem with contentment.

We all are searching for contentment in our lives, but the process of developing it demands a discipline many are not willing to develop. This is why contentment has been referred to as “a rare jewel.”

Discontentment plagues our society today. It is a “me first” mindset. “More for me is better for me,” the culture says. But it is this “me first” mindset that is sending our society to an internal collapse. Perversion, violence, political scandal,

and family breakups are all symptoms of our modern day obsession with self.

Entire industries, such as advertising and glamour modeling, are sprouted in the fertile soil of such unblushing self-centeredness.

Many marriages are ruined because a husband became discontent and angry, or because a wife was discontent with her husband. Some people constantly move—changing jobs, relocating, always unsettled and discontent in their spirit. Many people live with constant jealousy and unhappiness because they have not found their contentment in the Lord.

For the Christian, discontentment is destructive to one's spiritual walk. Many times it is an attitude that is not seen on the surface but is growing below the baseline.

How can we build contentment into our lives? Hebrews 13:5–6 gives us three ways.

I. Build Contentment by Rejecting Covetousness

Covetousness comes so easily—often, without our even realizing it. Even when we do notice it, we have a tendency to excuse it. Yet God calls us to reject it.

A. In Our Lifestyles

HEBREWS 13:5

5 *Let your conversation be without covetousness...*

The last of the Ten Commandments gives this same principle: *Thou shalt not covet.*

EXODUS 20:17

17 *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his*

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manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

The marketing mentality constantly tells us that we are not successful unless we have the earthly goods to prove it. If we are not careful, this media blitz that bombards us every day will create a discontentment within us. It will program us into thinking that there is no happiness without more things.

A covetous lifestyle is never satisfied, but always seeking more. Benjamin Franklin observed, “Discontentment makes rich men poor, while contentment makes poor men rich.”

Illustration

A survey conducted by *US News & World Report* asked people this question: “How much more money would you need to fulfill the American dream?” Most people indicated they would need about twice of what they already have. (Source: <http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/data-mine/2016/02/03/even-americans-cant-afford-the-american-dream>)

Illustration

A pilot always looked down intently on a certain valley in the Appalachians when the plane passed overhead. One day his co-pilot asked, “What’s so interesting about that spot?” The pilot replied, “See that stream? Well, when I was a kid I used to sit down there on a log and fish. Every time an airplane flew over, I would look up and wish I were flying. Now I look down and wish I were fishing.”

We are an easily discontented people. Whether it is our appearance, career, circle of friends, opportunities...the examples could go on. If we were to be honest with ourselves, there is often something that nags at us that we look at with discontentment. The devil has somehow convinced us that, if we had another person's family, wealth, looks, or possessions, we would then be satisfied.

But that is simply not true. God wants us to be content with Him alone. When Jesus is our all in all, we can be content.

Martha Washington said, "The greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions, and not upon our circumstances."

Everything we have—possessions, opportunities, relationships—is fleeting and can be taken from us at any moment.

1 TIMOTHY 6:17

*17 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, **nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God**, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;*

PROVERBS 23:4–5

4 Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom.

5 Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.

This is why we must learn to find our satisfaction in God alone. After all, contentment begins in the heart.

B. In Our Hearts

Contentment isn't a matter of possessions; it is a matter of the heart. A contented Christian can rest knowing that God is sovereign and that He is in control.

Sadly, there are many Christians who so strongly desire more in this world that they literally step outside of the will of God to chase that which they covet. The end result is that they fall away from the faith, *and pierce themselves through with many sorrows.*

1 TIMOTHY 6:9–10

9 *But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.*

10 *For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

Sometimes this plays out in a career choice. A man or woman takes a job that pays a little more than their current job, although they know it will pull them from church. Sometimes this plays out in a determination to be rich—at whatever cost. Unfortunately, the cost for someone who is willing to step outside of the will of God for riches is tragically high.

Jesus reminded His disciples that our lives are not the sum total of what we possess. Therefore, we shouldn't chase possessions to the neglect of what really matters most.

LUKE 12:15

15 *And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

Illustration

Wall Street Journal published an article in 2010, highlighting a pair of True Religion's Super T jeans. They were identifiable by their oversized white stitching. These jeans cost around \$50 a pair to make, were sold wholesale at \$152, and retailed for \$335 or more.

A brand consulting expert noted, "The cost of creating those things has nothing to do with the price. It is all about who else is wearing them, who designed them, and who is selling them."

When our lives revolve around possessions, it is indicative of covetousness in our hearts. This is why God commands us to reject covetousness.

II. Build Contentment By Remaining Content

HEBREWS 13:5

5 *...and be content with such things as ye have...*

This may sound too simple—"And be content." But the truth is, it is simple—it is a choice.

Be content means "to be possessed of unfailing strength, to be satisfied."

God wants us to find our spot of gratitude in Him and what He has given us and done for us. He desires

that we would be overwhelmed by His gift of salvation and thankfulness for what He has done. He wants us to find that position in our hearts and be satisfied in that place.

The Apostle Paul suffered many deprivations as he preached the gospel. Yet, he learned what it meant to be content with whatever God had provided at the moment.

PHILIPPIANS 4:11

11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

Our discontent often shows itself in credit card debt as people charge their way into what they believe will bring them happiness. In the long term, however, it only brings them bondage.

God challenges us to be content with what He has already given us. We miss out on such great opportunities in our lives because we are discontent.

There are two very good reasons why a Christian can always be content:

A. Because God Has Provided in the Past

Sometimes we worry about tomorrow's problems. But when we look back, we are reminded that God has *always* provided for us in the past.

PSALM 37:25

25 I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.

Illustration

If you make over \$35,000, you are in the richest 1% of the world. The global median salary is just over \$1,200. (Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2082385/We-1--You-need-34k-income-global-elite--half-worlds-richest-live-U-S.html>)

We are a most blessed people! God *does* take care of us. He *does* provide.

In lesson 2 we saw how God provided even for a widow who had nothing. She was on her last meal and expected that she and her son would starve to death. But God provided for her, and He will provide for you as well.

1 KINGS 17:16

16 And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

Do not let worry rob you of contentment. God has always provided for our needs. But that's not all; He promises to provide for our futures as well.

B. Because God Will Provide for Our Futures

HEBREWS 13:5

5 ...for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

The greatest provision God could give to us is His presence. And that is exactly what He gives. In fact, He promises that He will *never* leave us. If we will learn to be content with Jesus alone, we will experience the peace and joy that this promise extends to us.

America is a nation of worriers. As the stock market flows, so does our society's security and peace. This is not to say that we shouldn't pay any attention to our finances or to making wise investments. But it is to say that our peace of mind should not fluctuate with our finances. We ought to always keep at the forefront of our thoughts that we have a God in Heaven who is completely in control and has promised to provide for us as we seek Him first.

MATTHEW 6:30–33

30 *Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*

31 *Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?*

32 *(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.*

33 *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

Our number one concern tomorrow does not need to be a bank account or our financial investments. Our main concern should be to *seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*. Our minds ought to be consumed with the thought, "Lord, what do You want me to do for You today?"

We can live with contentment because God promises to provide for our future, and God always keeps His promises.

1 KINGS 8:56

56 *Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath*

not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant.

III. Build Contentment By Renewing Confidence

God wants us to experience the confidence of being content in Him. He wants us to be able to *boldly* claim His help.

Satan is a liar and the father of it (John 8:44). He generates doubt and stimulates guilt. He is the accuser of the brethren. Satan does not want us to experience the peace of forgiveness or the confidence of God's presence. He wants us to live our lives with a defeated attitude.

But *God* wants us to know that we belong to Him. God wants us to know and experience that, *greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*

1 JOHN 4:4

4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

We need to learn to build with confidence, and our confidence is in the sufficiency of Christ.

Illustration

In any kind of a building project, we would want to have confidence in the tradesmen who were carrying out the construction.

Imagine if the carpenters arrived and pulled out Elmer's glue to lay the flooring. Or how would you feel if the welders arrived, and they boasted to you

that they were pretty sure they knew what they were doing because they had watched several Internet videos on welding? Your confidence would be shaken to say the least.

When we do not have confidence in the competence of someone we depend on, we worry. When it comes to God, however, we can always have complete confidence in His ability. And this confidence gives us contentment.

Conversely, our fears and worries reveal that our confidence is not in God, but that we have placed it in that which is insecure.

Hebrews 13:5–6 gives us two characters of God that ought to give us confidence in His sufficiency.

A. By Remembering His Presence

HEBREWS 13:5–6

5 *...for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

6 *So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper...*

We build contentment with renewed confidence by remembering God's continual presence.

God's promises (such as this one) are not like our promises. Sometimes, even when we intend to fulfill our promises, circumstances outside of our control limit us. But God never fails to keep His promises. His promises are as good as His character. God *cannot* lie. His promises are sure.

TITUS 1:2

2 *In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;*

God wants us to boldly rest in the contentment of knowing that He is *always* with us.

The word *boldly* means “to be confident, cheerful, and courageous.” And yet, many Christians are fearful, gloomy, and fretful. Why is this? Because we forget that God is with us and He is our helper.

This word *helper* in Hebrews 13:6 is translated from a Greek word which is a compound of “to cry out” and “to run.” God hears and helps us when we call.

Think of the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace. Daniel 3 tells us their story.

King Nebuchadnezzar had given them the ultimatum of bowing to his idol or being cast into the furnace. They refused to bow, and the king made good on his promise.

But there in the furnace, these three men—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—discovered the presence of God.

DANIEL 3:25

25 *[King Nebuchadnezzar] answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.*

If Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could have confidence facing a fiery furnace, we can have confidence in whatever we will face tomorrow.

We will face big problems in this life. But we can *boldly* say, “The Lord is my helper.” He is with us.

God reminded Joshua of His presence as well and told him that he could be courageous because he knew God was with him.

JOSHUA 1:9

9 *Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.*

Perhaps you've heard the song that includes the words, "When you come to the place where I'm all you have, you'll find I'm all you need." When we remember God's presence, we can have great confidence and contentment.

B. By Remembering His Provision

HEBREWS 13:6

6 *...and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

We have no need to fear, for God has not only promised His presence, but He has promised to exercise His power on our behalf.

He tells us that wherever we are and in whatever need we find ourselves, we can simply cry out to Him for help.

PSALM 61:2–3

2 *From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.*

3 *For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.*

He hears us when we pray and even helps us to pray.

ROMANS 8:26

26 *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

Every good gift in our lives is from Him.

JAMES 1:17

17 *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

ROMANS 8:31–32

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

32 *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, **how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?***

He invites us to trust in His power and promises to take care of our needs.

PSALM 37:1–3

1 *Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.*

2 *For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.*

3 *Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.*

Yes, we can have confidence in God!

Conclusion

The Apostle Paul indicated that contentment is a learned trait: *“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content”* (Philippians 4:11). Are you building contentment in your life?

Even in the middle of a materialistic society and even when experiencing a time of need, you and I can live in contentment if we will remember the truths of Hebrews 13:5–6: reject covetousness, choose contentment, and renew confidence in God.

Study Questions

1. Discontentment is often seen in what we complain about. Think back over the past twenty-four hours of your life. What have you complained about? What have you praised God for?
Answers will vary.
2. What are the three ways God gives us in Hebrews 13:5–6 to build contentment in our lives?
Reject covetousness, remain content, renew confidence
3. The word *conversation* means “your manner of life.” How can contentment or discontentment be seen in our manner of life?
Answers will vary but may include our goals and priorities, how we spend our time and money, the habits we form, what is important to us, etc.
4. Discuss examples of modern day marketing that promote discontentment. What are things you deal with daily that promote the message of discontentment?
Answers will vary but may include television commercials, sales events, promotional sales, Christmas events.
5. Where does contentment begin?
It begins in our hearts.
6. What are the two characteristics of God that ought to give us confidence in His sufficiency?
His presence and His power

7. What promises of God do you need to remember this week?

Answers will vary.

8. Looking back over this *Build Below the Baseline* series, which lessons have made the greatest difference in your life? What are three things you desire to purposefully implement as you move forward building below the baseline in your life?

Answers will vary.

Memory Verses

HEBREWS 13:5–6

5 *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

6 *So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*



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