

# GROWING UP

FOUR PHASES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

T O G E T H E R



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*This curriculum is dedicated to Pastor Jeff Williams,  
whose steadfast leadership and example have inspired us  
to stay in God's Word and rest in His peace.*

*You are a blessing to our church, our community, and to your staff.  
May God use your vision for spiritual growth to reach many and  
may this study bear fruit for God, His Kingdom, and His glory!*



## How to use this workbook

The format of this book is designed to make it easy for the leader to facilitate a discussion and for others to follow along. You'll notice some color coded cues below that will help you to identify the action step at hand.

-  There are some words **in bold** on each page. These words highlight the main ideas for each section for you to get a quick glance of what the page content will include. This may be helpful as you review information or summarize what you've discussed.
-  As you go through each lesson, you will come across some blanks to fill in, underscored in red. If you miss an answer, you will find a list of answers in the back of the workbook.
-  Occasional words are highlighted in blue. These special words were selected to be included in a glossary of terms with definitions in the back of the book. If you come across a word that you do not understand, check out the glossary for a brief definition.
-  Green indicates areas of focus for your small group discussion. There are several questions in green as you progress through each lesson. You can plan to work through the questions on your own before you meet, or as a group. There are also instructions about a project at the end of each lesson in green. Talk about the project together and encourage one another to follow through with each project.
-  The yellow areas indicate special interest information and quotes that are relevant to the topic of discussion. Memory verses are also in yellow so that they are easy to find when you want to spend a minute to brush up on your memory skills!

Please note that videos of each lesson are available online at:

***[www.FaithCommunityChurch.net/pwgh](http://www.FaithCommunityChurch.net/pwgh)***





# Four Phases of Spiritual Growth



## **PLANT** – *Growing GOD'S WORD in us*

Application: Write down your life purpose statement

1. **Our Foundation**
2. **The Plan and the Problem**
3. **The Good News**
4. **The Messiah**
5. **The Holy Spirit**
6. **Habits for Spiritual Growth**



## **WATER** – *Living in COMMUNITY with God and mankind*

Application: Identify an accountability partner

1. **The Church**
2. **Unified in Spirit**
3. **Community Offers Fellowship**
4. **Created for Worship**
5. **Community Fosters Spiritual Growth**
6. **Accountability**



## **GROW** – *SERVING God and people*

Application: Get connected to serving in a ministry that excites you

1. **Spiritual Gifts**
2. **Discerning the Will of God**
3. **Stepping Out in Faith**
4. **Sharpening the Ax**
5. **Arrows In, Arrows Out**
6. **With All Your Heart**



## **HARVEST** – *SHARING the message*

Application: Pray for and share your testimony with someone who needs Jesus

1. **Worldview**
2. **Writing Your Testimony**
3. **Breaking the Ice**
4. **Sharing Your Faith**
5. **Growing Your Influence**
6. **Until Jesus Returns**

# Introduction to *Growing Up Together*:

**WELCOME!** We are SO glad that you are committing to **this study which will give you a vision of the potential you have for an exciting adventure as a follower of Jesus Christ.** Many people struggle to get through life and might even question their purpose for being here on this earth. God has a purpose for you, and we have every reason to be excited about it! Thank you for joining us in this study. We believe that it will be a transformational experience, a period of your life that marks the beginning of some spiritual growth that brings you closer to the will of God than you've ever been before.

## Why, What, and How?

As a church that wants to make a difference in this world, we need to understand what we are about. In order to do that, we ask three questions: Why, What, and How?

- Our **purpose** as a church is to glorify God. The WHY question. Why we do what we do.
- Our **vision** - that's the WHAT question. What are hoping to do in the end? We are seeking to fulfill the Great Commission to take the love of God to the world.
- Then we have our **mission** or the HOW question that's answered by this study.
- How do we become mature in our faith, and how can we help others to grow mature in their faith as well?
- It is a lifelong process for every one of us.
- We never stop growing because none of us knows it all and none of us is perfect.
- Romans 12:2 says that we need to be transformed and renewed in our minds.
- Unless we realize that we have a lot to learn, then we may not be open to learning anything at all!

**UNLEARNING:** Sometimes what is even harder than learning something new is un-learning something that we've been taught that may not be true.

- You may not realize it, but we all have a pair of tinted lenses that we look at the world through; it's called our worldview.
  - Our **worldview** is the filter that we use to understand why everything is the way it is; it's based upon our experiences and what we've been taught over the years.
- The culture we live in has been corrupted by sin and immorality; **our worldview may be distorted** or just plain wrong in some areas.
  - For example, "You can be anything you want to be if you put your mind to it." It's just not a true statement.
  - You may wish to break the world record for the mile, but if you are ninety years old with bad ankles and high blood pressure, then it's not likely to happen!



- We want your worldview to match how God sees your life because only then will you find fulfillment in knowing that you are following the will of God.
- You can't be something that God has not created you to be. He has a plan for you!
- Let's open our minds to the possibility that our worldview may need some adjustment, and we'll start with building upon a solid foundation – \_\_\_\_\_.
- In John 17:17, Jesus prayed for us to His Father. *"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."*
- Jesus is the Word (*Jn. 1:1*), so we're going to take a look at what Jesus has to say about God's will for our lives.

**Now, let's get started!**

# Phase 1: PLANT



**PLANT** – Growing GOD’S WORD in us

Class Assignment: Write down your life purpose statement



## PLANT – Lesson 1: Our Foundation

### Come Follow Me

**As a rabbi, or teacher, Jesus invited His disciples to follow Him.**

- He says, “Come, follow me” (Mt. 4:19, 19:21; Mk. 1:17, 10:21; Lk. 18:22).
- Following Him would mean leaving their current lives to sit under His tutelage and learn from not just what He knew, but from how He lived. It was quite common at that time for rabbis to have disciples who watched how they lived and interacted with others.
- Following your teacher would mean living out their worldview in your own life.

**Jesus had a worldview that was radically different from the rest of the world** and sometimes it was difficult for His disciples to understand His message.

- They had to let go of their preconceived ideas of how the physical and spiritual world worked. We also need to do the same.
- We don’t need to think outside the box, we need to \_\_\_\_\_ altogether! Jesus offers you an invitation.
- How do we follow Jesus? By living our lives the way that He would want us to.

**What will you do with Jesus? How will you respond?**

- The disciples gave up their plans to follow their teacher.
- If Jesus had asked you to leave your current life to follow Him, do you think that you would give up your plans to learn from Him, or would you write Him off as a radical?
  - Perhaps giving up our plans would be inconvenient for us, or maybe uncomfortable.
  - The truth is Jesus does ask us to give up our plans to follow Him if we want to be His disciple. You can read about it in Luke 14:25-35.

**Q: Look at Luke 14:25-35. Do you think that Jesus really wants us to give up everything to follow Him? Why does He make such an extreme request of His disciples?**

**Q: Are you willing to give up everything to follow Jesus?**



**Q: If not, what is holding you back?**

**SACRIFICE:**

Following Jesus is a very serious matter and may require significant sacrifices or changes from the way that you currently live your life.

- It doesn't mean that God is going to make you become a monk or a pastor or a missionary – but He might!
- We might feel that Jesus' invitation is impractical, so we may be tempted to try and reinterpret what He must have meant and work His plans in to our plans.

**Jesus doesn't want us to work Him into our plans; He wants us to get rid of our plans** and put all of our eggs in one basket with no strings attached.

- That's a pretty tall order! If there is anything holding you back from fully following after Jesus, bring it before God in prayer and ask Him to help you with your fears and concerns.
- You may not be ready to make this commitment, and that's okay, but please pray about it and understand that accepting Jesus is the only way that God has provided to restore our relationship with Him that we might have eternal life. We'll talk more about this in our next lesson.

**Q: How might some people need to change their lifestyle when they commit to following Jesus? Consider Colossians 3:23.**

**Q: How have you or might you need to change your life to fully follow Jesus?**

**THIS IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT!**

- This last statement in the paragraph above is why we are so passionate about reaching out to help lead people to Jesus! As a church it is our goal to bring people to faith and maturity in Christ.
- **Becoming more like Jesus** doesn't happen in an instant; **it is a lifelong process**. To help people along this path of growth, we have looked at scripture and found a pattern that Jesus described for growing spiritually: Plant, Water, Grow, and Harvest.
  - As we grow in our faith, we move from one aspect of spiritual growth to the next, until the whole process is eventually reproduced in another person when we share our faith with them.
  - God \_\_\_\_\_ seeds of truth into our hearts, and then He \_\_\_\_\_ these seeds through fellowship with other believers.

- Our faith will \_\_\_\_\_ in big ways as we apply our faith through serving others, and then there is a time of when we share our faith with people around us.
- We actually join God in the work of planting more seeds in the hearts of other people!

*“...other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop...”*  
Mark 4:8

## PLANTING SEEDS:

Read Matthew 13:1-9:

*That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. <sup>2</sup> Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup> Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. <sup>9</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear.”*

That last verse means that what Jesus is saying is important, so pay attention and consider the words He is saying!

- In the upcoming weeks we will start with this idea that because He loves you so much, **God planted a seed of truth** \_\_\_\_\_. Depending on the condition of your heart, the plant that grows can thrive or die.
- Who here wants the seeds that God has planted in our hearts to thrive!? Let’s cultivate the soil of our hearts!

Have you ever planted a garden? It’s really fun to watch flowers bloom with brilliant colors in the spring, but they don’t start out that impressive.

- Most **plants start from a tiny seed**. If you were to plant a garden you might go to the store to buy an envelope of seeds. If you take a look at the seeds, you’ll notice that they are small – some of them you can barely see with your eye.
  - If you plant them in good soil and give them water and some time to grow, they will get bigger and bigger and eventually will produce a vegetable, a fruit, a flower, or maybe a tree or shrub. But first **the seed needs to be planted**.
  - As long as they stay in the little envelope, your seeds won’t grow! God has taken seeds of truth and planted them **in the soil of your heart**.
    - We can tell that He has done this, because if He hadn’t you would not be taking the time to engage in this lesson today. He is at work in your heart right now!



- Hopefully, you have allowed your heart to be good soil for accepting God's truth and applying it to your life.

**Q: Look back at Matthew 13:1-9. What do you think makes a person's heart "good soil" for planting seeds of truth?**

## Seeds of Truth – Planted in our Hearts

These seeds of truth come from God. We can learn a lot about God **through His creation**, but if we want to know who God is, then we need to find the truth about Him **in the Bible** and that's what we want to look at today.

- The best way for us to have a solid faith is to plant God's Word in our heart.
- **The Bible is God's revelation of Himself to us; without it we would be completely lost.**
  - Just how important is it? Well, it contains words that bring eternal life or death! It is the most important book that anyone could ever read.
  - If God wrote it and He is trustworthy, then we can believe every word written in it. Because it is *inspired* by God, **we can trust absolutely everything we read in the Bible.** 😊 It is unlike any other book ever written!
    - Now, when we say that the Bible is inspired, we aren't just saying that it was His idea; we are saying that He essentially wrote the words for us to hear.
    - The Bible itself claims to be the "inspired" Word of God; literally it says that God "breathed" it out (2 Tim 3:16). That is something that no other book can claim. It is *inerrant* which means that it is never ever wrong, though it is possible for us to misunderstand, misinterpret, or misapply it.

*Over the centuries, the Bible has been scrutinized for errors, contradictions, and false information. Despite these tests by critics, the Word of God stands as strong as ever.*

Over the centuries, the **Bible has been scrutinized for errors, contradictions, and false information.** Despite these tests by critics, the Word of God stands as strong as ever.

- The Word of God is a library of \_\_\_\_\_ written over a period of 1500 years by at least 40 different authors.
- Together, these books portray the story of God's interaction with mankind from the creation of the world up through the first century A.D.
- Critics have argued that we cannot depend upon the accuracy of the Bible because we don't have any of the original copies, but even when copies span more than a thousand

years, the accuracy among tens of thousands of manuscripts is just incredible, and none of the variations change the overall message of the text.

- Some of the earliest copies of biblical writings have actually been dated to within about 30 years of the original text.
- **We can say with confidence that the Bible** we know, though it has been translated from its original languages, **is accurate to the original text**; therefore we can trust that it represents what God intended for it to say.
- Being able to trust the Bible as accurate is so peace-giving!

## The Origin of the Bible

You might wonder how God gave us this book we call the Bible. How was it formed? Well, it was written down as God directed people to share what we needed to hear. 2 Peter 1:21 says, *"For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*

- The fancy phrase for this is "verbal plenary inspiration." That means that **God guided people**, from cover to cover, from Genesis to Revelation, **to say what He wanted them to say to mankind** throughout history; past, present, and future.
- By the time we get to the end, God has given us the complete message of His plan for mankind, from creation through the end of time when Jesus returns to make all things new. This is incredible!
- The **God who created the universe revealed Himself to us** and gave us everything we need to know in His Word – the Bible.

**Q: Do you think that the Bible is accurate? What problems do people have with believing that the Bible is truly the Word of God? Refer to 2 Timothy 3:16-17.**

As we mentioned, the Bible was written by several authors over a long period of time. After Jesus completed His ministry here on earth and returned to heaven, the early Church leaders saw the importance of collecting the teachings of Jesus into a common resource.

- A rigorous process rejected many other books that had been written that were either deemed not authentic, unnecessary, or heretical in their teaching.
  - Only books that people agreed upon by were permitted acceptance into the " of Scripture.
  - The last book of the Bible that was written is the book of Revelation and nothing has been added to the Word of God since. The Bible is closed to any additions or changes.





- So the Bible we read today, though it has been translated into English, is the same Bible that people read from less than about one hundred years after Jesus walked the earth, and **it hasn't changed in almost 2,000 years!**
- The first semi-complete Bible is called the Muratorian Canon and dates to 170 A.D. This canon included 22 of the 27 books that we call the New Testament; the other books were affirmed at later council meetings.

## The Structure of the Bible

The Bible is God's Word to us about His \_\_\_\_\_ to us despite our sin. Believe it or not, He loves us unconditionally and wants us to come to Him for a relationship that is a mutual blessing! He wants to bless us, and we can in turn bring joy to His heart. We make God happy when we receive His blessings! The way that God relates to mankind has changed through Christ's death on the cross, so there is a split in the middle of the Bible.

**The Bible is structured into two main parts** which you may know as the **Old Testament and the New Testament**.

- Another word for testament is covenant. God revealed Himself in the old covenant to the people of Israel, and then God poured out His grace to all people through the new covenant, established through Jesus Christ.
- There are \_\_\_\_\_ in the Old Testament and \_\_\_\_\_ that make up the New Testament.

The **Old Testament** pertains to **the time of creation up until** just after the Jews were allowed to return to Israel after being exiled to Babylon. The chronology of the Old Testament ends **around the year 400 B.C.**

- The 39 books of the Old Testament are comprised of historical narrative, poetry, wisdom literature, and prophecy.
- **The first five books of the OT are called the "Law" or the "Torah" for the Jews, or perhaps the "Pentateuch".** They record the account of creation, the fall of mankind into sin, the formation of the Jewish nation as God's chosen people, and their repeated failure to obey His will.
- The next twelve books are **historical books** that record the narrative of the nation of Israel (the Jews) as God blessed or punished them according to their obedience.
- After that we have five books of **wisdom and poetry**, five books of **"Major Prophets"**, and twelve **"Minor Prophets"**.

All of these books include information that God wanted us to learn so that we might live a life that pleases Him. We learn from the Old Testament that our hearts have a tendency to walk away from God's will. We'll talk more about this at another time.

There is a 400 year period of silence in scripture called the “Intertestamental Period”. Though a lot happened in world history during this time, no prophecy or events were recorded in the pages of scripture.

The **New Testament** picks up just before the birth of Christ and records the life of Christ, His death and resurrection, and the beginnings of the Early Church.

- It is a collection of personal accounts from people who walked with Jesus or interviewed the disciples who witnessed His ministry.
- The first four books of the NT are called \_\_\_\_\_ and they are the only books in scripture that talk about the life of Jesus while He walked on the earth.
  - Four different authors record the events and miracles of Jesus’ ministry in their own words.
  - Each book is as unique as its author, but each accurately communicates the mission of Jesus.
- After the Gospels we have **the book of Acts** which is a historical book about the Early Church and the spread of the message of Jesus.
- Then we have a collection of several letters, called “\_\_\_\_\_” from church leaders to individuals and churches that had been established to bring unity to the message that was being communicated in the Church spreading throughout the world at that time.
- Finally, the NT **ends with a book about end times**. It is very different from the other books and should be read differently as it belongs to the “apocalyptic” genre which uses a lot of symbolism to describe spiritual realities.
- It talks about the ongoing battle between good and evil, and in the end – spoiler alert – God wins!

## The Message of the Bible

**Q: How would you describe the Bible to someone who has never seen one before?**

**If you have never read the Bible, then you’re missing out** on an incredible message that God wants you to know!

- Some people describe the message of the Bible as “His Story”, or the history of God’s interaction with mankind.
- It has also been described as His love letter to us because it reveals how far God has gone to show His love for mankind and what He has done to redeem us from our sin.
- We’ll go into greater detail about this in the next lesson, but for now we understand that the message of the Bible is that God loves people very much and He pursues our heart so that we can have a relationship with Him that will continue for eternity.



- The God of the universe loves us and knows us by name! Isn't that awesome!?

I don't know if you've ever read the Bible, or maybe you haven't read the whole thing cover to cover.

- First, we recommend that you do that. Read or listen to the entire Bible to see what God has to say to you about Himself and His plan for creation.
- If you read a little more than three chapters a day, you can read the Bible in about a year. A chapter a day will take you a bit more than three years to get to the end.
- Maybe you can get an audio version and listen to it as well. Whatever works best for you – if you've never read the entire Bible, put it at the top of your bucket list!

**Class Assignment:** Write down your life purpose statement.

Over the next 6 weeks, be thinking about why God has specifically put you on this earth. What abilities has He given to you and how does He want you to use them to bless people? We are asking you to write a one-page description of God's plan for your life.

**Memory Verse** (to memorize over 6 weeks):

**Matthew 13:31-32** - *"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."*

PRAYER REQUESTS:

## PLANT – Lesson 2: The Plan and the Problem

Welcome back! Hopefully over the last week you've had some time to think about how precious God's Word is and what a blessing it is to have it as a source of peace and guidance. Many people have died to bring us this Book to us in our language, and many people have died to preserve our freedom to read and learn about the Truth.

**In lesson 1 we laid the Bible as the foundation** for our understanding about God and how to relate to Him. It is so important to trust the Bible as truth so we can build our worldview upon **God's revealed plan** for creation. The Bible lays out the plan as God intended, and the problem of sin that has gotten in the way. Let's take a closer look at the Word of God (the Bible) to better **understand what went wrong**.

- Have you ever really wanted someone to like you?
  - Perhaps you can recall the first time you fell in love.
  - Maybe you wanted so badly to have them notice you or maybe you wanted to spend every waking hour with them, but they didn't even know you existed.
- And here's the problem: even if they know you exist, you can't force someone to love you.
  - Love has to be given freely or it's not really love at all.
  - God loves you more than any crush you've ever had and **He loves you more deeply than you are able to imagine!**
- There is nothing He would want more from you than for you to give your heart to Him in return. His heart cries out for our love, **but He can't force us to love Him.**

All of God's creation is intended to worship Him, but mankind is unique within creation.

- A part of God's character is that **He is a \_\_\_\_\_ being**. That's why He created mankind in His image – to have a relationship with us (*Gen. 1:27*). Isn't that awesome?
  - The God who created the universe not only knows us by name, but He wants us to have a relationship with Him! He wants to pour out His blessing upon us as a loving Father and to have us respond to His love.
  - It was God's plan for us to live with Him in this state of blessing forever, but sin and death came into mankind.

God created man to take care of the earth and to enjoy fellowship or relationship with Him. (*Gen. 2:15*)

**Q: If someone were to ask you, what would you say is the purpose or meaning of life?**

- Not only was there purpose behind God's creation of mankind for a relationship, but **He also created the rest of the universe** with structure and reason.

- When we observe creation, we can see the fingerprints of God which helps us to understand His plan. He created plants to need water so He provides rain. They also need light so He created the sun.
- If we look more closely at a plant we can see how God designed a plant to use photosynthesis to make food for itself – it's really pretty cool!
- Many of us have been taught that this is the product of millions of years of evolution. We've read about it in text books and heard it from our teachers whom we are told to trust as sources of truth, but the Bible teaches that God created Adam just thousands, not millions of years ago.
- **It takes a lot more faith to believe that all that we see in creation is the result of \_\_\_\_\_** because we can clearly see that it was put together with design and purpose.

**Q: Read Psalm 19: 1-6. What examples do you see in creation that affirm God as the designer of all things?**

From the vast expanse of the heavens to the details of subatomic particles, **God's fingerprints are all over His creation!** If we take time to look for them, we'll see them everywhere.

*"The heavens  
declare the glory of  
God and the skies  
proclaim the work  
of his majesty..."*

*Ps. 19:1*

- We also see God's design in what scientists would call the animal kingdom. Male and female animals will mate and procreate and populate the earth.
  - God commanded mankind to do this in Genesis 1:28. He said, *"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*
  - In this passage, we see two aspects of God's plan. God advocates that people should have children and He also gives them authority to rule over the earth.
  - God created men and women and gave them the ability them to produce offspring. God, who is loving and who knows what is best for us, purposefully designed that every child that has ever been born would have a mother and a father and would be born into a family.
  - In a family, a person is loved and nurtured and taught about the God who created them. This was God's plan for us as relational beings. We would express His love to one another in a family and in community with others just as He expresses His love to us. It is a recipe for blessing and joy in life!
  - **God is wise and He makes good plans for us.** Unfortunately, we have distorted most every aspect of His plan and created dysfunction for the family and instability for the society in which we live.

**Q: In what ways do you think that our culture has distorted God's plans for the family?**

It doesn't take much effort to realize how we have changed God's plan for our own convenience. The sad part is that we don't realize that God is trying to protect us from the negative effects of sin.

- Anyone who has experienced a divorce realizes that it not only hurts a couple, but it devastates a family.
  - It can have long-lasting effects on the emotional stability and security of a child or an adult.
  - Relationships where children are born outside of marriage place children into a family that is not stabilized by the bonds of marriage. There can be fear and insecurity and isolation.
  - Life gets more complicated and stressful as a single parent. Finances are stretched, workload can become overwhelming, and relationships are greatly hindered.
  - What might have seemed thrilling or convenient at the time eventually becomes exasperating – and it's nothing like what God had in mind for us. He loves us and wants us to live under His blessing, which means that we would be wise to live by His rules.
  - Divorce is just an example. We could mention many other aspects of life where we might think that our plans are better or more convenient (substance abuse, cohabitation, gambling, sex outside of marriage, materialism, etc.), but God knows best! His plan is the best plan for our lives. He wants to spare us the heartache that comes from living our life according to our own plans.

All of this goes back to the beginning of the Bible in the book of Genesis. **God created man to be in fellowship with Him, but mankind chose to disobey** (you can read about Adam and Even in Genesis 3).

- **As a result, mankind has been \_\_\_\_\_ from God.** This is really bad news – we really don't want to be on God's bad side!
- So what was once good became corrupt – not just for mankind but for all of creation. The only way to restore a relationship with God is to deal with our sin.

**Q: Do you feel that God loves you or hates you? Why do you feel this way? Take time to read 1 John 4:9-10.**

## Sin and Righteousness

- Starting in the book of Genesis, we see that God created all things and it was considered "\_\_\_\_\_."
- Then, God created man unique among His creation, creating us "in His image," meaning that we have some of the characteristics of God that none of the rest of creation was given – and He said that it was "\_\_\_\_\_ " (Gen. 1:31).



- God created us to be relational beings. He loves us unconditionally with all of His heart and He wants nothing more than for us to give our hearts to Him. He wants to be our greatest source of love, joy, and peace. He wants us to have a relationship with Him and His hope is that we would return our love to Him.

**Q: Look at 1 John 3:4-6. What is sin? How would you describe it?**

Because love cannot be demanded, **God gave us the freewill to choose to receive or reject His love.** Unfortunately, we naturally will choose to please ourselves every time.

- Take a look at the way young children play. When they find a toy they want to play with and another child comes along to take it away, their natural tendency is to cry out, "Mine!"
- Even as people grow older, they still carry that same selfishness and we look out for ourselves. When we want to do things that are selfish or wrong in God's eyes, this is what the Bible calls sin.
- **Sin** is anything that we think or do that is not in line with God's will. It can often seem more appealing than doing the right thing, but it is never the right choice because **sin separates us from God** – and that's a big problem!

Isaiah 59:1-2 says, *"Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. <sup>2</sup> But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."*

- Apart from God, we will suffer spiritual death.

According to the Bible, **we have a sinful nature** not because we choose to sin, but simply because we are a part of the human race. **We are born with it.**

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

*~ Rom. 3:23*

- Some people think that they can "earn" their way into heaven by their good behavior. This simply is not true.
  - It doesn't matter how good we are – we could even live a perfect life – we are still sinners!
  - So, pleasing God isn't about how good we are or how many little old ladies we help to cross the street, this sin issue that we have is here with us from the day we were born, and we'll be sinners until the day we die.
  - **Unfortunately, God cannot allow sin to remain in His presence.**

God is holy. The word "holy" means separate or different; He is separate from His creation and separate from anything that is sinful.

- God is completely perfect and there is absolutely nothing bad in Him at all.

- He is also just, which means He always does the right thing. This also means that He cannot allow sin to go unpunished.
  - This is really bad news because we just said that we are ALL sinners – we therefore all deserve to be punished by God!
  - **Sin has separated us from God and there is absolutely nothing that we can do on our own to change this.**
  - One day, God will destroy all that opposes Him and make it pure again, as He intended for it to be.

**Q: Do you consider yourself to be a sinner? Why or why not? Consider Romans 3:23.**

The opposite of sin is **righteousness**. The book of Romans says that there is no one righteous in God's eyes (*Rom. 3:10*).

- If God had not reached into creation, we surely would be destroyed along with all that is evil and corrupt.
- **Initially, God made a covenant with Abraham and introduced a \_\_\_\_\_ system** so that people could substitute the death of animals (symbolized in their blood) to appease God's wrath for their offenses against Him.
  - Yet, **this failed to draw their hearts back to Him**, so mankind continued to remain under the curse of sin (*Heb. 10:4*).
  - The Israelites turned away from God time and again, demonstrating that our hearts are prone to sin.
  - The prophets of the Old Testament foretold of a Messiah who would come and break this curse and our bondage to it.
  - We learn in the New Testament that **God sent His own Son, Jesus Christ**, as His anointed messenger, **to bring reconciliation to our broken relationship** with Him. Because Jesus was without sin, He was righteous before His Father.
  - We'll go into this more next week.

In Matthew 25 Jesus talks about a separation of sheep and goats.

- In this parable, sheep are considered to be those who faithfully follow their Shepherd, Jesus. They are considered to be righteous because of the way that they live.
- The goats are separated out from the flock because they do not live a righteous life.
- At the end of the chapter, Jesus makes the declaration about the goats and sheep, saying, *"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*

## End Times

We are created to live for eternity with God and **this is not our eternal home**. God loves us so much that He wants \_\_\_\_\_!





- One day our lives on this earth will end, but our spirit will live on and we will stand before God. **We will give an account of how we lived our lives for Him** (Rom. 14:12).

**Q: Read 2 Corinthians 4:18. When we stand before God, what kinds of things that we do in this life do you think will really matter?**

- How much we made won't matter as much as what we did with our resources to honor God.
- How much power we had won't matter as much as how we used our influence to draw people into the kingdom of God.
- How many people we know in this life won't matter as much as how many people we bring with us into the presence of God in the life to come.

Jesus frequently talked about the "parable of the talents", referring to how we respond to the gifts and abilities He has given to us.

- Like when you play a game of cards, not everyone is dealt the same hand. We all deal with different stuff, and we all have something different to offer. Therefore, we can't judge anyone else because it just wouldn't be a fair comparison.
  - **Some will choose to receive the gift of salvation** in Christ and will be offered an eternal home in the presence of God.
  - **The other option that the Bible offers is "eternal destruction."**
    - Jesus referred to a place called hell where there will be torment, isolation, sorrow, and regret. (Mt. 10:28; Mk. 9:45; Lk. 12:5)
    - It is a place of eternal destruction (Mk. 9:48)
    - The Apostle Paul says that those who don't know God will *"be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might."* (2 Th. 1:9)
    - The Apostle John describes eternal destruction as the "second death" and says that the smoke of the torment and destruction of these souls "rises forever and ever." (Rev. 14:11)

(Note: The Bible focuses a whole lot more on the joy, privilege, and invitation to enter God's eternal kingdom than invoking fear of eternal punishment. Yet, this is a reality that can be difficult for us to deal with – especially as we think about loved ones living in opposition to the will of God.)

**Q: How does the idea of eternal condemnation affect you? Do you believe that God will punish people who don't receive the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ?**

**Q: How can a good and loving God condemn people to eternal destruction? Isn't that unloving?**

- One day all of creation will come to an end and **God will** \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Many people think of heaven as a place where you get a harp and a cloud and sing "Kum ba ya" forever, but it's a whole lot better than that!
  - He will get rid of all pain and sorrow, and He will eliminate sin and death.
  - We will be given a new body that is perfect and holy. No more aches, pains, cancer, depression, addictions, grieving, loss, temptation...
  - We will dwell in His presence forever on a new earth.
  - It will literally be perfect, a heavenly paradise!
- If we could only imagine how awesome it will be, how much more excited we would be to go there!
- The Apostle Paul says in Philippians 1:23-24, *"I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body."*

We are created to be eternal beings. God wants us to live under His blessing, **but it is up to us to choose** Him or to be eternally separated from His presence.

That is a deep thought to end on, but worth thinking about. Next week we'll go deeper into what the "Good News" really means for us.

**Progress update on the Class Assignment:** Write down your life purpose statement.

**Review Memory Verse:** **Matthew 13:31-32** - *"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."*

PRAYER REQUESTS:

## PLANT – Lesson 3: The Good News

It's good to see you again! I hope that you are excited to talk about the good news today – Words really cannot do justice to how awesome God has been to us, but we're going to give it our best shot...

In the last lesson, we defined sin and righteousness. In this lesson we will look at why the gospel message is good news.

**Q: Can you remember the time in your life when you were the most excited? So excited that you couldn't hold in your emotions?**

- The word "**gospel**" comes from the Greek word for good news (*euangelion*), and it's really an understatement. The gospel isn't just good news, **it's GREAT news!**
- It's better than winning the lottery and even better than pepperoni pizza on a Friday night!
- The good news will affect our eternal destiny, so it is important for us to be able to \_\_\_\_\_ it for our own benefit and then be able to \_\_\_\_\_ this to someone else so that we can share with them just how amazing God's love is.

### The Bad News

Before we can say too much about the good news, **we need to start with the bad news** to demonstrate just how good the good news really is.

Last week we talked about how, because of our sin, **we are subject to punishment** by God who is holy. We deserve it, and there is absolutely **nothing we can do about it**.

- As we stand before a righteous and perfect God, our sin is repulsive and we have offended Him. Even though He is just and must punish our sin, He still loves us.
- God knows every mean action and every wicked thought we make. None of us is without guilt.
- And even if we could possibly live a life without sinning, the Bible says that we are born with guilt because all of mankind has inherited guilt from the sin of our great ancestors, Adam and Eve. There is no avoiding our sinful nature.
- I don't know about you guys, but I get this sinking feeling in my gut when I think about what I've done and what I deserve. It freaks me out to think that I deserve to be eternally banished from God's presence, His love, and His blessing!
- Our default status before God is separation from His presence – forever.
- Thanks be to God that this is not the end of the story! Now for the good news...

**Q: Can you imagine, just for a moment, what it would be like to be eternally separated from the loving presence of God? What thoughts go through your mind? Consider the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10.**

We don't have a lot of description of the eternal destruction that awaits those who die apart from Christ, and most of what we know comes from church traditions more than it does the Bible. We do know that it will be a place of great sorrow and regret and loneliness and isolation – and that it will last for eternity. Our sin is a big problem!

Fortunately, God, who loves us unconditionally, looks beyond our sin and pursues our hearts. **Since the fall of mankind, God has been seeking to restore a relationship with us.**

## The Old “Covenant” *(Gen. 15, 17)*

A covenant is a commitment between two parties with severe consequences for those who fail to uphold their end of the deal.

- In the Bible we find two important covenants were made by God which actually now form what we call the Old Testament (or Old Covenant) and the New Testament.
- The first covenant was conditional upon our response. With the second covenant, God made a commitment to us out of love, without demanding anything in return.
- In the \_\_\_\_\_, **God set apart a group of people, the Jews** (a.k.a. the Israelites, Israel, Judah, God's chosen people, etc.), who were supposed to set an example to the world about how to God wants to relate with mankind.
  - This covenant allowed man to relate to God on the condition that we would be faithful to consistently live an upright life.
  - He revealed His power to them through great miracles (parting the Red Sea, feeding them in the wilderness, making the sun stand still, etc.).
  - He sent messages to His people time and again through prophets, calling them to repent and turn away from their sin.
  - He established a sacrificial system where the blood of animals might be substituted for our own blood, representing the death we deserve (this is called atonement).
  - Unfortunately, this picture lesson didn't really affect the hearts of people like God desired and they continued to live in rebellion to God (*Heb. 10:4*).
  - Despite His gracious efforts to reach their hearts, **God's chosen people continued to stray and walk away** from God. Unfortunately, the same is still true for us.

**Q: Why do you think that God made a covenant with the Jews? What was His goal?**

God chose one faithful man, Abraham, and made a covenant to demonstrate the futility of any effort we might make to attempt to live a righteous life on our own. Our hearts are prone to walk away from God and our selfish desires drive us to go our own way.

## The New “Covenant” *(Lk. 22:20)*

Under the \_\_\_\_\_, **God sent Jesus to fix our sin problem once and for all.** This covenant is “unilateral”, meaning that God committed Himself fully to us and

makes no demand of our response. It is a beautiful, undeserved gift that He offers to us at great cost to Himself – He allowed His Son to die in our place.

- While Jesus carried out His ministry, He showed us an example of His Father's love, mercy, grace, and power so that we might know how to live our lives in a way that pleases Him.
  - He performed many miracles as a sign to demonstrate that He was sent by God.
  - Ultimately, however, **the reason that God sent His Son was to die on a cross in our place, suffering the wrath of God to pay for our sin.**
  - Hebrews 12:2 gives us the real reason why Jesus chose to die for us. It says, *"For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame."*
  - Jesus chose to die in our place because it would allow us a way into the presence of God – and our presence brings joy to His heart. He loves us!
  - God reaches out to us in love with hopes that His love will drive us to **repentance**. This means that we must confess and turn away from living a life of sin. Repentance opens the door for our hearts to receive the Holy Spirit into our lives.
  - For those who receive the gift of Jesus' death in our place, God no longer views us as sinners but as perfect like Christ (*Col. 1:22*). Our righteousness doesn't mean that we aren't still sinners, but that our sin is not being held against us any longer. **We are forgiven of our sin.**
  - Can you imagine being the focus of God's anger and punishment for eternity!? **That's what makes Jesus' gift of salvation such good news!**

**Q: Why would God send Jesus to die in our place? Why doesn't He just give us what we deserve? Discuss and then look at Hebrews 12:2.**

- The depth of God's love is impossible to put into words. All sin must be destroyed completely, but He allowed for His Son's life to be exchanged for ours because He loves us so much.
- I hope that you are amazed by God's love! The only appropriate response for us is to be appalled by our sin and want to rid our lives from anything that displeases God. Why would we ever want to choose to spit in God's face and continue to live in sin!?

## The Gospel Message

Let's take a look at some scriptures that help us to outline the good news and use it to review what we've already learned. You may have heard of the "  ". It's a set of passages that walk through the important details of our sin condition and its remedy.

- **Romans 3:23** says, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* No one is perfect – other than Jesus Himself. We all are sinners.

- **Romans 6:23** reads, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord."* Wages are something that we earn or deserve.

- When you work for your employer, you earn the wages in your paycheck. Because of our sin, we have earned death.
- Not just physical death, but eternal death or separation from God.
- That's right! Because of your sin, you deserve to be eternally banished from the presence of God and His everlasting love and blessing. Forever. And ever. And ever!... That's the bad news.
- Can you imagine being cast out from the presence of God, knowing that it will be forever!?

*For all have  
sinned and fall  
short of the  
glory of God.*

*~ Rom. 3:23*

**Q: We have offended God with our sin and need to make it right. How can we pay Him back?**

This is really a trick question. There is nothing that we could ever do to make our sin condition right before God. We are completely incapable of fixing our sin problem on our own.

- **Romans 5:8** says, *"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*
  - Even in the ugliness of our sin – even after we have stabbed Him in the back again and again by choosing to sin, God looked past our sin and saw the creation He made and loves, and He decided to forgive us.
  - If you've ever had a child tell you that they hate you, you might be able to comprehend this idea. Even though you might have a child swear at you, yell at you, hurt you, or maybe worse – maybe they disown you, a good parent loves their child despite their behavior.
  - In a perfect world, a parent forgives their child and yearns for a restored relationship. God did this when Jesus died in our place on the cross.
  - Only Jesus could be a substitute for us because He lived a sinless life and was righteous before God.
  - The good news is that **Jesus willfully went to the cross on our behalf**, so we wouldn't have to suffer the eternal wrath of God. It frees us from the penalty of sin, gives us freedom and peace, offers us a mission, and restores our relationship with God. We no longer need to live in fear of sin and death!
- **Romans 8:1-2** reads, *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."*
  - When someone chooses to receive the forgiveness of sin found in Jesus Christ, they **no longer carry the penalty of their sin**. They are free from the consequences because Jesus Himself experienced our suffering and settled our sin account with God.

- Our sin is a debt that we owe that we could never repay – like having a credit card bill with a trillion dollars on it – we are completely hopeless without Jesus!

How do we receive Jesus into our lives? Well, I am so glad you asked!

- **Romans 10:9-10** says that, *"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*
  - If you believe something in your heart, **it will change the** \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Receiving Jesus into your life is not complicated, but it isn't a decision that you make every day, like what color of socks to wear.
  - Following Jesus means giving up all of your plans so that you can follow His. It means giving up old habits that are harmful to us and to others.
  - It may mean making some changes in your life so that the love of God might shine more clearly through you.
  - Being a "Christian," or Christ-follower, is more than just a sticky label that we wear to church. God wants it to be our new identity.
  - A person who has received the gift of salvation will be so grateful that they will not want to remain in their old life.

**Q: Have you given up everything to follow Jesus? What does this look like lived out?**

It says in Genesis 1:27 that God created us in His image so that we could have a relationship with Him; isn't that amazing!?

- God wants to have a relationship with YOU! He wants you to reach out to Him for peace, joy, healing, strength, and hope.
- We are created to know Him and to worship Him, but how can we possibly relate to a God that is so much greater than we can even comprehend?

**Q: What do you think it means to have a relationship with God?**

God offers to have a relationship with us, **but how do we relate to a God that we can't touch** or have a conversation with?

- Obviously, we cannot give God a hug or see His face, but there are many ways that we can relate to Him.
- We can talk to Him, listen to Him, He speaks to us, and He wants to bless us, He loves us, and He desires for us to love Him in return. When we're angry, we can tell Him. When we hurt, He cares more than anyone. When we are lonely, He is always with us and will never leave us. When we are in need, He has the ability to provide for us in ways we never dreamed possible.
- He knows us by name – the Bible says that He even knows the number of hairs on our head! (see Mt. 10:30; Lk. 12:7)

- God is not a distant God who only comes when we need Him or call upon Him, but He is intimately aware of what is going on in our lives and cares even about the little, insignificant details.

**Q: Have you ever done this? Have you asked Jesus to come into your heart?**

God offers you an incredible gift; it would be a shame to not receive it. And even though the gift is offered to everyone, not everyone chooses to ask Jesus to come into their lives.

- Like any gift, it is up to you whether or not you want to\_\_\_\_\_it. I hope you will – you won't regret it!
- If you would like to receive Jesus into your heart, I want to encourage you to tell God about your desire right now.
  - If you don't have a regular habit of prayer, it doesn't have to be fancy – just tell God what is on your heart as you would talk to a well-respected and faithful friend.
  - For your convenience, here is a prayer that you might wish to use:

*Heavenly Father, I know that I am a sinner. I know that because of my sin I deserve to be separated from you forever. Thank You for reaching out to me and for showing me the truth and for sending Jesus to die on the cross for my sin. I confess my sins to You and ask that You would forgive me of my sin. Fill my heart with Your Holy Spirit, and show me what You want me to do next. Thank you for loving me, Amen.*

Did you pray that prayer!? If you did, then the Bible says that you are a new creation.

- Your old, sinful nature is gone, and your eternal destiny has taken a huge change for the better! This is awesome news, and we are so excited for what God is doing in your life.
- Please be sure to tell your pastor or someone about your decision to receive Jesus' forgiveness for your sin.
  - Your faith should not be something you hide or are ashamed of (*Rom. 1:16*), it is something to celebrate that others need to hear about!
  - The Bible tells us not to hide this joy or "light" within us, but to let it shine for the entire world to see (*Mt. 5:15*).

Ever since the day sin entered into mankind, God has been seeking and saving the lost. He desires to have a relationship with us, so He has made a way for us to restore the broken relationship through the death of Jesus. He died for us so we could live for God.

**Let's summarize this one more time:**

- Though He loves us unconditionally, because of sin we have been separated from God and no longer have fellowship with Him.
- This relationship can only be restored through personally receiving the gift of forgiveness found through the death of Jesus Christ.



- Through faith we exchange the death we deserve because of our sin for the eternal life that God offers through Jesus.
- Without Christ, we remain under God's wrath and one day would face an eternal punishment. Receiving this gift of salvation is the most important choice you will ever have to make in your life!

Looking at the Bible from cover to cover, the message is clear that God loves you and wants to have a relationship with you. So, **how do we put this into words** to explain it to someone else? We can break it down into five main points to remember.

1. God loves you with all His heart.
2. We have all sinned against God.
3. Our sin separates us from God forever.
4. Jesus died in our place and offers us a second chance at life.
5. We must choose to receive the gift of salvation in order to be forgiven of our sin.

**Q: Read Acts 5:42. Who do you know that needs to hear the good news? Do you think that God wants you to talk to them?**

## The Great Commission

Knowing that there is bad news, Jesus brought us the good news so that we could live in freedom from our sin and have the hope of spending eternity with Him.

- Before He ascended back into heaven, **He left his disciples with a mission** –  
\_\_\_\_\_.
- **Matthew 28:18-20:** *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*
- He has asked us to go into the world, show people the love of God, and tell them about the way to heaven; tell them the good news of the gospel.
  - That is our purpose in life and our highest goal.
  - **There is nothing better that we could do with our time!**

**Progress update on the Class Assignment:** Write down your life purpose statement.

### Review Memory Verse:

**Matthew 13:31-32** - *"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."*

PRAYER REQUESTS:

## PLANT – Lesson 4: The Messiah

Many people throughout the world have heard the name of Jesus mentioned, but **there is a lot of confusion about who He really was** and is.

- Was He just a man? Was He an angel? Was He God? Some people think of Jesus as just a man who was a good teacher. Some will call Him a miracle worker. Other people call Him a prophet.
- In reality, it doesn't matter what we *think* is true, what we want is to know the truth! The Bible says that Jesus came to confirm to us what the truth is (*Jn. 18:37*).
  - When we want to know the truth, it's important not to lean upon any person's opinion, but instead to read about God's opinion from the Bible.
  - Remember how we said it is the Word of God and we can depend on it? We are planting seeds of truth in our hearts – God's Word is truth (*Jn. 17:17*).
  - It's important to know Jesus and His teachings because He has made some claims about Himself that no man had ever made before – or ever has since.
  - When we understand the claims He made, then we are faced with the question asked by the theologian C. S. Lewis; was He a liar, was He a lunatic, or was He Lord!?

**Q: If someone were to ask you who Jesus is, how would you describe Him?**

**Jesus goes by many names** in scripture including Lord, Messiah, Christ, Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David, the Righteous Branch, the suffering servant, and Lion of Judah.

- He is all of those things and more. The Bible teaches that Jesus was present even before the beginning of time; in fact, **He was involved with the creation of the world** (*Col 1:16-17*)!
- **Jesus Himself claimed to be present before \_\_\_\_\_ was alive**, and he had died some 2000 years before Jesus showed up for His earthly ministry (*Jn. 8:58*).
  - Anyone can claim to be an eternal being, but in order for others to believe it to be true, you would expect some evidence to back up their claim.
  - People often came to Jesus asking for a sign of His heavenly authority, but He typically just let His teaching and lifestyle speak for themselves.
  - Fortunately, His teaching and His lifestyle set Jesus apart from everyone else as more than just a good teacher. His résumé included:
    - He never sinned
    - He turned water into wine
    - He raised the dead
    - Healed the sick and lame
    - Caused the deaf to hear
    - Caused the blind to see
    - He walked on water
    - He forgave people of their sins
    - He showed love to everyone
    - He died and rose from the grave

## Jesus in the Old Testament – Messiah

Jesus is not just a man who was born in a lowly stable 2000 years ago; He is much more than any ordinary man.

- He has existed before the beginning of time and was sent to earth at a specific time for a specific purpose, yet we often think of Jesus from what we read in the New Testament of the Bible.

**Q: A “theophany” refers to the presence of the pre-incarnate Christ in history. What examples can we find in the Old Testament where Jesus was likely present?**

- If we consider that Jesus has existed eternally as God’s Son, we can see evidence of His work throughout the Bible, starting in the book of Genesis.
- We mentioned that He was involved with creation. In **Genesis** 3:15 there is a prophecy that one day that a man would crush Satan with a fatal blow which Jesus did on the cross.
  - In Abraham’s family this Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah. He would be betrayed; He would ride on a donkey; He would bring peace; He would suffer, die, and rise again
  - **It’s all recorded in the pages of scripture long before Jesus ever shows up...** There is no way anyone could ever fulfill all of these promises unless it was all planned by an all-powerful God!
- The prophet \_\_\_\_\_ also mentions a future king who would come to the earth to reign, but would be “cut off” from this life and in the process would put an end to sacrifice and offering (*Dan. 9:25-27*).
  - Daniel 7:13-14 refers to someone “*like a son of man*” who receives the universal and eternal kingdom from God and is worshiped. Jesus specifically references this passage when speaking of Himself (*Mt. 24:27-31; 26:64*).
  - Daniel writes about the arrival of this Messiah who would die on our behalf more than 500 years before He would be born, and the dates in scripture line up precisely with the timeline of history. Crazy, right!?
- **Micah** 5:2 gives us a clue that this hero would come from Bethlehem Ephrathah (where Jesus was born).
- **Zechariah** 12:10 mentions that He would be pierced (Jesus was pierced with a spear while He hung on the cross). He would come from the lineage of Shem and more specifically from a man named Abraham.
- **Isaiah** 7:14 says that He would be born of a virgin (His earthly mother is Mary). Isaiah 9 speaks of One who would “honor” Galilee (the area where Jesus grew up), and would bring everlasting hope through a kingdom that would never end.
  - In Isaiah the **Messiah** is described as a “suffering servant” who would be innocent of sin but would heal us because of His pain (*Is. 53:5*). He would be from ancient times and would have great authority.

- The prophet Isaiah predicted the coming of Jesus more than 700 years before He showed up for His earthly ministry.
- He pointed out the way that this Anointed One would suffer and die for us. Jesus would be a servant of the Lord who would suffer for us.
- Specifically, we learn in Isaiah chapters 42, 52, and 53 that this suffering servant would be:
  - filled with the Spirit of God
  - gentle in character
  - a new covenant for the people
  - a light for the Gentiles
  - lifted up and exalted
  - marred physically
  - not attractive in appearance or stature
  - despised and rejected by men
  - pierced for our transgressions
  - punished on our behalf
  - led like a lamb to slaughter
  - silent in the presence of His accusers
  - cut off from the land of the living
  - innocent of violence and deceit
  - raised from the dead
  - honored by God

Sound like anyone you know? It seems pretty clear to us that there is a parallel between these descriptions and Jesus Christ, but this was not the kind of Messiah that the Jews were hoping for.

**Q: With such a detailed description like the one above, why didn't the Jews believe that Jesus was the Christ? Look at Matthew 13:13-17 for some ideas.**

It's easy for us to see the connection because we read about the fulfillment of all of the prophecies after they happened and we can see how they line up with what the prophets stated.

- The **Jews, however, were looking for a different kind of Messiah.** They were watching for a warrior-king who would free them from the oppression of Rome.
- The Hebrew word for Messiah means " \_\_\_\_\_," which is an idea that stems from the appointing of a priest or king who would be anointed with oil by a prophet (*1 Sam. 10:1, 16:1; 1 Ki. 1:39; 2 Ki. 9:3*).
- The Jews were familiar with God raising up a king to rescue them from their oppressors and that's what they were watching for at that time.
  - The Jews were hoping and **praying for restoration of their earthly prominence** and their status among the nations.
  - However, God was not concerned about their reputation, but about their hearts – which were far from Him.
  - Jesus was anointed by God to be the spiritual leader of His people, and He came to assume His role as King in the Kingdom of God (*Jn. 18:36*). This is made clear through Jesus' life, His teaching, and His death.

## Jesus in the New Testament – Christ

Jesus was sent here by His heavenly Father with a mission.

- He was born to the virgin Mary and conceived by the Holy Spirit.
- His earthly father was a lowly carpenter and his family was not of great prominence.
  - We don't have a lot of information is provided in scripture about Jesus as a child. We do know that where He was born and where He grew up line up with the prophecies.
  - Beyond that, we only have a small glimpse of His childhood from the end of Luke chapter 2 which tells us that at age of twelve, He was already amazing the religious leaders.
  - As an adult, His ministry began with His baptism by John the Baptist – a ministry that seems to last for a short 3 ½ years.

In Matthew 16, Jesus questions His disciples about who they think He is.

- Simon Peter declares to Him, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,"* and Jesus commends him for being correct.
  - There is no doubt that **Jesus accepted the title of *Christ***, which is the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament Hebrew title for the Messiah.
  - Christ is not Jesus' last name; it is a title that depicts His role and authority.
  - **Jesus also called Himself the "\_\_\_\_\_"**. Though we are considered to be God's children, Jesus is God's only Son (*Jn. 3:16; Lk. 1:35; Ps. 2:7, 12; 2 Sam. 7:14*).
  - Because Jesus is the Son, He has been assigned the role of Judge for all mankind.

**Q: Why do you think the people had a hard time believing that Jesus was the promised Messiah? Do you think that you would have believed in Him had you been a Jew at that time? Why or why not?**

## Deity of Christ

If we are honest, if we look at scripture, we will not find a specific passage where He claims outright to be God. However, if we look at some of the passages about the Messiah, we do see lots of divine characteristics.

- Isaiah 9:6 says, *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,*

### Jesus claimed to be:

- **eternal** (*Jn. 8:58*)
- **judge of the world** (*Mt. 25:31-46*)
- **Son of Man**
- **God's Son** (*Jn. 10:36*)
- **Lord of the Sabbath** (*Mk. 2:27-28*)
- **one with the Father**
- **a perfect picture of God** (*Jn. 10:30, 14:7-9*)
- **from heaven** (*Jn. 13:13*)
- **superior to Scripture** (*Mt. 5:21-22, 27-28*)
- **Worthy of worship** (*Jn. 9:39; 20:28; Mt. 2:11; 14:23; 28:9,17, Lk. 24:52; also see Dan. 7:14*)
- **able to forgive sins** (*Mt. 9:6; Mk. 2:10*)
- **King of the Jews** (*Mt. 27:11; Lk. 22:3*)

*Prince of Peace.*" It goes on to say that He will reign forever.

- When Jesus claimed to be the Christ, **He accepted all of the prophecies to be true about Him.**
- Looking to the New Testament, **Matthew 1:23**, ascribes the name Immanuel to Jesus (*from Is. 7:14*), which means "God with us."
- **John 1:1** says, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning... The Word became flesh.*"
- **Hebrews 1:3** says that "*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.*"
- Paul says in **Colossians 1:15-20** that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, everything was created through Him, and He holds everything together – He is the fullness of God in bodily form.
- In **Philippians 2:6** Paul says that Jesus is of the same substance/form as the Father.

If that weren't enough to support the deity of Christ, what He did in His ministry also makes it clear.

- He **performed many miracles** that no one else could to.
- Jesus \_\_\_\_\_, which isn't appropriate for anyone other than God (*Jn. 9:39; 20:28; Mt. 2:11; 14:23; 28:9,17, Lk. 24:52*).
- He also was accused of blasphemy (making statements to others about being God). This was punishable by death according to Leviticus 24:16 (*Mk. 2:1-12, 14:64; Mt. 26:64-5; Lk. 5:21*). His accusers wanted to stone him, and Jesus **did not try to defend Himself** or change accusers' mind (*Jn. 5:2-18, 8:59, 10:31-39*). He either wanted to die, or believed that the accusations were true – Jesus, a "mere man," claimed to be God (*Jn. 10:33*).
- In addition to all of this, **almost all of the Disciples all died to uphold His teachings** – evidently because they personally believed that He was who He said He was!

**Q: Do you find it difficult to believe that Jesus was more than just a man? Why is it challenging for many to believe that Jesus was God?**

Theologian Millard Erickson says it well. "*It is true that Jesus did not make an explicit and overt claim to deity. He did not say in so many words, 'I am God.'* What we do find, however, are claims that would be inappropriate if made by someone who is less than God." (Erickson 701)

## Humanity of Christ

Oddly enough, the debates over the years about who Jesus is do not center on whether or not Jesus was God. In reality, **the discussion focused upon the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ.**

- Could God enter into a sinful, human body? Why would He? To what degree was He limited? Did God's Spirit come upon a child at birth or at the baptism? Was He fully God and fully man? So many questions followed by centuries of discussion (*see pg. 147-149*).

- As we mentioned, it was foretold that Jesus would be born of a virgin (*Lk. 1, Gal. 4:4*).
- The Bible teaches that He is God but elected to give up his deity to come to earth in the flesh (*Jn. 1; Ph. 2:5-11*).
- We also know that **He suffered pain** and anguish (*Lk. 24:26, 46; 1 Pet. 2:21; Lk. 22:44*), **experienced rejection** (*Jn. 15:18-19*), and **professed limited knowledge** about the future (*Mt. 24:36*).
- Hebrews 2 tells us that He became fully human so that He could be our high priest and atone for our sin, and also to **endure temptation** so He could better associate with us (*also Heb. 4:15*).

**Q: Is it harder for you to accept that Jesus was fully man or fully God? How do we reconcile that He was both?**

## The Mission of the Christ

The prophecies say that the Messiah (Christ) would come from the line of David to reign forever. He would be a light for the Gentiles and a salvation for all people. Then He would suffer and die. Jesus said that His role as Christ was to:

1. To **do the will of the Father** (*Jn. 6:38*), by fulfilling the Law of Moses (*Mt. 5:17*)  
Jesus gave us an example to live by, but He also came to fulfill the role of salvation.
2. To **preach the good news** (*Mk. 1:38*)  
God has a desire to have a relationship with all people; not just the Jews. God is knocking at the door of your heart and He has a message for you: "I love you, and I want you to live your life for the kingdom of God."
3. To **testify to the truth** (*Jn. 18:37*)  
This world is constantly trying to redefine truth; Jesus came to clarify what God originally intended for us to know and how He wanted us to live.
4. To **give us a wonderful life** (*Jn. 10:10*)  
God offers us His peace and joy if we choose to rest in Him. Life may not be easy, but it holds the promise of God's love and hope for eternal life.
5. To **save the world** from judgment (*Jn. 3:17*)  
Jesus' death on the cross satisfies the debt we owe to God for our sin. It's a gift that is offered to all, but not all choose to receive it. The alternative is to suffer God's wrath.
6. To **seek and save the lost** (*Lk. 19:9-10*)  
Jesus actually pursues us, even when we are still living in our sin. He is drawing us to Himself through the Holy Spirit.
7. To **judge the world** (*Jn. 9:39*) with a sword (*Mt. 10:34*) and with fire (*Lk. 12:49*)  
When Jesus rose victorious from the dead, God gave Him all power and authority and He is Judge of the living and the dead.

We have stirred God's anger because of our sin. In the days before Christ, the Jews were instructed to sacrifice animals in their place for the forgiveness of their sins. The Christ was sent as the final, **perfect** \_\_\_\_\_ **to take our place.** Our sin was placed upon Him and God punished Jesus instead of us.

**Q: Are you still in awe of all that He's done for you?**

With our limited brains, it's really hard to fully appreciate or wrap our minds around all that Jesus has done for us.

- The Bible says that right now we don't see clearly, but one day we will see the full picture of the awesome blessing that we have in Christ (*see 1 Cor. 13:12*). He is the best thing that has ever happened to you!

## Where is Jesus now?

- After His resurrection, Jesus spent some time with His disciples, preparing them for the ministry ahead of them after He was gone.
- Then **Jesus ascended back into heaven where He now sits as Judge** at the right hand of God.
- **All of creation now waits for the return of Christ** when He will finally make all things new, doing away with all sin and evil, and creating a new heaven and a new earth that is just the way that God originally intended for everything to be (*see Rom. 8:19-23*).

**Progress update on the Class Assignment:** Write down your life purpose statement.

## Review Memory Verse:

**Matthew 13:31-32** - *"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."*

PRAYER REQUESTS:



## PLANT – Lesson 5: The Holy Spirit

It's much easier for us to grasp an idea that we can experience with our senses. If we can see, taste, touch, smell, or hear something, then our minds accept it as real.

- **There are lots of things that we aren't able to detect with our senses that are very real.**
- Did you know that an odor is added to **natural gas** so that you can smell it? Otherwise it could fill your house and you'd never even know – that could be disastrous!
- **Love can be felt** in our hearts, but you can't see, taste, touch, smell, or hear it – just the effects of a warm embrace or a tender kiss.
- **Consider the wind.** You can't taste or smell it, but you can feel a breeze on your cheek or see the trees sway or hear the leaves brushing together as the wind passes by. You know the wind is present because of the effects that you observe all around you.
- **The Holy Spirit is like that.** In fact, the original word for Spirit means "breath" or "wind." It's not something that you can see, taste, touch, smell, or hear, but you can see the Spirit of God as He works in and around you.

**Q: How would you describe the Holy Spirit? An energy or force? How would you try to convince someone that the Holy Spirit is real and at work in your life?**

### The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

The Spirit of God is present throughout the Bible.

- Even in the book of Genesis, the Spirit is involved with creation as He was "hovering over the waters" (*Gen. 1:2*).
- Though God does not change, how He has interacted with mankind has changed if we look at the Bible from cover to cover.
- **In the Old Testament**, for example, God did not say that His Spirit would dwell in the hearts of people; instead, **the Holy Spirit would come upon people** that God wanted to use for His purposes.
  - When we look at scripture, we see people being "filled with the Spirit" to lead and to build the tabernacle (*Dt. 34:9, Ex. 31:3, 35:31*).
  - The Spirit also came upon \_\_\_\_\_ to give them strength and insight to help the people of Israel (*1 Sam. 10:10, 11:6, 19; also 2 Chr. 15:1, 24:20; Nu. 24:2*).
  - We see the Spirit at work in the OT when the "glory of the Lord" filled the tabernacle or temple (*Ex. 40:34-5; 1 Chr. 7; 1 Kings 8; Ez. 10:4; Is. 6:4*).
  - This presence of **the Spirit in the most holy place is a foreshadowing** of His presence indwelling the hearts of men and women under the new covenant after Jesus comes.

- Both prophets Ezekiel and Joel announce that this would be God's plan (*Ez. 36:26-27; Joel 2:28*).
- 1 Corinthians 6:19 affirms that, under the new covenant, our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

**Q: Read Acts 4:31. The Holy Spirit wasn't as accessible to people under the Old Covenant as He is today. Who is the Holy Spirit available to and under what conditions?**

## The Holy Spirit in the New Testament

**Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit** throughout His ministry.

- By the power of the Holy Spirit He drove out demons and performed many miracles.
- The Spirit is present at Jesus' baptism, appearing in the form of a dove.
- He instructed His disciples to trust the Holy Spirit to guide them in what to say as they sought to build the kingdom of God (*Lk. 12:12*).
- He warned people not to blaspheme or reject the Holy Spirit – the "unpardonable sin" (*Mt. 12:28-31*).
- He commissioned His followers to make disciples in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (*Mt. 28:19*).
- Later, the disciples who followed after Jesus would also have access to the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit wasn't sent to dwell into our hearts until after Jesus ascended back into heaven.

- In the New Testament, as in the OT, the Spirit came upon Zechariah who prophesied about his son, John the Baptist, and also upon Simeon who held baby Jesus (*Lk. 1:67, 2:25*).
- **After Jesus returned to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit** as a "\_\_\_\_\_ " and a "\_\_\_\_\_ " to His disciples.
  - On the Jewish Day of **Pentecost**, the Spirit came upon them in the form of **tongues of fire**, enabling them to prophecy and filling their hearts with joy.
  - The Spirit gave the disciples **power to perform miracles, to speak in tongues, and serves as a guide** for us to go forth and preach the good news.

**Q: Read John 14:15-18. In what ways has the Holy Spirit been a guide for you? What does this look like in our daily lives?**

## The Spirit is a Person!?

You may have heard of the term "**Trinity**" in reference to God. **He is one God in three Persons**; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

- They are all the same essence, but they have different roles.



- The Holy Spirit is the active power of God that carries out His will. The Spirit is considered a person in the sense that He is described as having qualities that would be associated with an intelligent, relational being; He is more than an impersonal force.
  - The **Bible describes the Spirit as a “He”** instead of an “it” (*Jn. 16:13-14*).
  - He is **described as a “who”** and not a “what” (*Eph. 1:14*).
  - Jesus compares the Spirit to Himself as One who **gives counsel** (*Jn. 14:16*).
  - Ephesians 4:30 says that **we can grieve or discourage the Holy Spirit** when we disobey God (*Eph. 4:30*).
  - There is a story in Act 5:3-4 where **the Holy Spirit is lied to**. By the way – that’s not a good idea!
  - We interact with the Holy Spirit in similar ways that we do with our friends, He is every bit as present as a person even though you cannot see Him.

**Q: Consider the passage in 1 Corinthians 2:12-13. Being completely honest, can you feel the presence of the Holy Spirit? Do you hear Him speak to you? How do you know when it’s the Holy Spirit or just our own minds at work?**

**The Holy Spirit doesn’t speak to us with words usually** (although some have had this experience).

- When the Holy Spirit speaks to us, it is typically seen as an answer to prayer, a peace in our hearts, or a compelling to do something that would honor God in some way.
- Often times, we see the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we look back upon the events of our lives and see God’s hand at work.
- **Listening for the still, small voice of God’s Spirit is a discipline that we can learn** and improve as we draw closer to God.

## **The Role of the Holy Spirit**

In order for God to have a relationship with us, **we need to have a spiritual transformation** – an overhaul performed on our sinful lives.

- That is something that only the Spirit can do as we allow Him to carry out God’s will in our lives.
  - Through the Spirit, we are given a \_\_\_\_\_ **in Christ**; the Bible says that we are “born again.”
  - This new life is intended to be **lived in freedom** from the penalty of our sin, with the purpose of having a relationship with God.
  - He desires for us to **live our new life in a way that honors Him** and draws others into the kingdom of God. As we mentioned before, we are to plant seeds in the lives of the people around us.

To the right is a list of the many different ways that the Holy Spirit helps us to become the people that God wants us to be.

- **Without the Spirit, our best efforts to please God will amount to nothing.**
- But, when we are filled with the Spirit of God, then we will become spiritually mature, characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22).
- The more we grasp these characteristics, the more we will become like Jesus!
- **The Holy Spirit is like a mentor to us;** He shows us what to do and what not to do. He tells us where to go and how to pray. He helps us to grow up in our faith and to mature in our character. He gives us special gifts to carry out God's will.

### The Holy Spirit:

- **Convicts us** (Jn. 16:8)  
Both believers but sinners.
- **Transforms us** (2 Cor. 3:17-18)  
Into the likeness of Christ – ongoing process.
- **Guides us to truth** (Jn. 16:13)  
Helps us to discern truth from lies.
- **Dwells in us** (Ez. 36:26-27)  
That invisible quality of us that's hard to see!
- **Gives us a gift/gifts** (Heb. 2:4, 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4)  
For the use of building the Church
- **Teaches/Illuminates** (Lk. 12:12; Jn. 14:26)  
When we read the Word or learn new Truth.
- **Comforts us** (2 Cor. 1:3-6)  
Though life is difficult, we have hope for life.
- **Compels us** (Acts 20:22; 1 Cor. 9:16)  
Through passion for God and life experiences.
- **Sends us** (Acts 1:8, 16:7; Rom. 15:17-20; 2 Cor. 3:3)  
Fulfilling the purpose of our calling.
- **Helps us pray** (Rom. 8:26-27)  
Intercedes for us, knowing God's will

## Spiritual Gifts

When you accept Jesus' gift of salvation, the Bible says that the Spirit of God comes to dwell in your heart.

- The Spirit also gives us abilities, or gifts, as a blessing to the Church – which is the kingdom of God on earth.
  - The Bible talks about many **different kinds of gifts**, such as the gift of leadership, preaching, teaching, shepherding, apostleship, exhortation, evangelism, craftsmanship, mercy, prophesying, speaking in tongues, interpretation of dreams and so on (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4).
  - The **purpose of these gifts is to** \_\_\_\_\_ in their journey as a follower of Jesus Christ.

**Q: Read 1 Corinthians 12:7-14. Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? If so, how are you using them?**

There are some **spiritual gifts** tests that you can find today to help you to understand how God has gifted you, or you could also ask a mature Christian friend if they see any clear gifts that God has given to you.

- It helps to know how God has gifted you because He uses these gifts to direct you into a life that will **bring you a sense of fulfillment as you serve Him.**



- If you try to serve in areas where you are not gifted, you will find yourself discouraged and wanting to give up.

## Speaking in Tongues

Some people are given the gift of *speaking in tongues*, which is controversial in some Christian circles.

- Tongues are **a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit**, but we must be careful not to make this a requirement for salvation or membership within the Church, as some have done. What does the Bible say?
  - Speaking in tongues refers to **speaking in a different language** with help from the Holy Spirit.
  - In Acts 2:4, they spoke foreign, understandable languages for the purpose of proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus Christ to the foreigners who had gathered for Pentecost.
  - Sometime after this point, tongues seemed to also include languages and sounds only understood through the interpretation of the Spirit.

**Q: Do you know anyone who has experienced speaking in tongues? How do you feel about the idea of the Spirit of God giving someone this ability? What do we learn about this topic from 1 Corinthians 14:1-12?**

How speaking in tongues is related to salvation is not clearly laid out.

- For example, does the gift come before or after baptism?
  - Well, in Acts 10:46, while Peter was teaching, they spoke in tongues and then were baptized.
  - However, in Acts 19:6, when Paul was teaching, they were baptized and then spoke in tongues.
- If baptism correlates with the event of salvation, then **speaking in tongues must be a** \_\_\_\_\_ to salvation, not mandatory for it.
  - If that weren't enough, Paul asks the question in 1 Cor. 12:30, "*Do all speak in tongues?*" and the indicated response is "No."
  - Again in 14:5 Paul seems to suggest that not everyone speaks in tongues.

Paul says more about tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 as well.

- Some gifts, such as prophecy have more value than tongues.
  - A tongue is understood by God, but would require a sent interpreter in order to be beneficial to the hearers.
  - If there is no interpretation, than the utterance has no value for corporate worship, though it has value for personal edification.
  - He is not against speaking in tongues, but understands that the gift has a second required element in order to bless others.

- It can also be a distraction to outsiders who might view this as senseless behavior, unless an interpretation is offered.
- **We must be careful not to elevate the gift of tongues** to a place where it causes self-righteousness or division within the Church.

Paul sums up the importance of our words in verse 19: *"I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue."*

- So, our desire is not to eliminate the gift for the Church, but we use it only as much as the Church is benefitted by it; otherwise, it's best to use this gift for personal edification.

## Living in the Spirit

**Q: If all Christians have the same Spirit, why do you think that some people "feel" His presence more than others?**

Some Christians may be more in tune with the Spirit than others.

- It might be that **at times God is silent for a purpose**, other times **it may be that you are failing to listen**.
- If you find that your "experience" doesn't match what you envisioned it to be, you may become discouraged that you don't "feel" God at work in your life – be careful not to trust in your emotions!
  - A true Christian is promised the presence (baptism) of the Holy Spirit, and when you allow the Spirit to work in you, you will see evidence of growth in your life which testifies to His presence.
  - The evidence of God's Spirit in you is known as the "fruit of the Spirit" (*Gal. 5:22*).
- On the other hand, 1 Thessalonians 5:19 says that **we can "\_\_\_\_\_"** **the Spirit** or put out the Spirit's fire when we practice unrighteous behavior or attitudes.
- If you want more of God's Spirit in your life, pray that God would bless you with it, and also act out your faith in love. You *will* see the Spirit at work through you!

We may hear about living or **abiding in the Spirit, but what does that actually mean?** Well, it means that we make our daily decisions using the direction we receive through listening to God's still, small voice speaking to us in our spirit.

- We ask God to show us what we should do
- We **live according to His Word**
- We live out His will through our character and actions
- We resist the temptation to live according to our selfish nature.

- It's much easier said than done.
- We must **deny our own desires every day**, even moment by moment, so that we consistently live a life that pleases God.

## How to “Get” the Holy Spirit

Even though it was poured out upon the believers at Pentecost, it would seem that the gift of the Holy Spirit **must be willfully accessed** or received in conjunction with the salvation of Christ.

- Some people believed, but did not receive the Holy Spirit until later.
- In Acts 8:14-17, Peter and John were sent to Samaria to minister to the new believers there. Then they prayed for the believers to receive the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit had not yet come upon them. Peter and John laid hands on them and they spoke in tongues.
- Also, in Acts 19:1-7, Paul came to the believers in Ephesus who had received the baptism of John.
  - Apollos, Priscilla, and Aquila had all ministered to these people, but they had not yet received the Holy Spirit.
  - When Paul heard this, he baptized them into the name of Christ Jesus, and then **laid hands upon them**, and the Holy Spirit then came upon them, allowing them to speak in tongues.

**Progress update on the Class Assignment:** Write down your life purpose statement.

### Review Memory Verse:

**Matthew 13:31-32** - *“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”*

PRAYER REQUESTS:

## PLANT – Lesson 6: Habits for Spiritual Growth

Growing in your faith doesn't just happen because you've been a Christian a long time or because you go to church. Spiritual growth happens through intentional effort.

The truth is that **God wants to spend time with you.** Doesn't that blow your mind!? He doesn't just tolerate us; He enjoys us.

- The One who created it all knows you by name and wants to have a mutual relationship with you.
- He not only allows us into His presence, but He wants us to invite Him into our lives as well. (Rev. 3:20)

If you love someone, you probably enjoy spending time with them. God wants to spend time with us so that we can fellowship with Him and so that He can teach us about His will. There are **many ways to connect with God**; here are just a few.

**Q: God wants to connect with you. What is the best way for you to enjoy God's presence? Read Psalm 42:1-2. Do you relate to what the psalmist is saying?**

### Bible Study

God has given us a message about His love and His plan.

- It would be a shame to receive **a love letter from the God of the universe** just to let it collect dust on a shelf!
- The Bible reveals the character of God to us as He brings the words to life for us through His Holy Spirit.
- This process is called "\_\_\_\_\_." It's like a light bulb goes off in your mind so you understand what God is trying to say!

There are so **many reasons for us to read God's Word.**

- for guidance
- to avoid trouble
- to know about God
- to be saved from our sins
- to learn about holiness
- to have God's approval

You may feel like reading the Bible is an overwhelming task.

- **Try not to look at it as one big book, but instead view it as library of 66 relatively small books** and read them one at a time.
  - When you approach the Bible like this, it's not so overwhelming, and you can choose to read a book or passage that is relevant to what is going on in your life.



- You should **make it a goal**, however, **to read the entire Bible** from cover to cover at some point, because it's all important.

**Q: How much of the Bible would you say that you have read? Why do you think it might be important to read the entire Bible?**

The first time you read the Bible on your own, it might feel like you're reading a foreign language.

- Take time to **pray** and ask God to help you understand what you are reading.
  - Resist the urge to read more unless you are just trying to get an overview. When you read the Bible, sometimes less is more.
  - Read a little bit and just **spend some time** \_\_\_\_\_.

If you just read the Bible, that's good. But there's so much more value if we take the time to process and apply it to our lives. A helpful tool to break down what you are reading is the **OICA method**. These four letters remind us of four words that will help us to retain what we read.

**Observe** – *What does it say?* Read the words of the Bible at face value. Who wrote it? Before we try to apply it to our life, we should understand the original meaning of the text.

**Interpret** – *What does it mean?* Why was the passage written? What did the author want to communicate to his audience? What is the background context for the occasion? (Was there a war or persecution going on? Was there a problem to address? What would have been the cultural perspective on the situation?)

**Correlate (or Connect)** – *What does the rest of the Bible say about this?* How does the passage you read relate to other passages in the Bible? Reading one passage is like having one piece of the puzzle – it's an important piece, but it doesn't give us the full picture so we compare them to other puzzle pieces in the Bible.

**Apply** – *What does it mean for me?* What can you learn from the passage that applies to your life? Is there a promise to believe, an action to take, or some truth to learn? The Bible isn't just relevant to audience that was addressed; God wants to use His Word to teach us about Himself.

## **Meditation**

After you have spent some time reading the Bible, it's a good idea to let the ideas sink in.

**Q: Read Psalm 145:3-7. When you hear the word meditation, what images come to mind?**

- You might picture a person sitting with legs crossed, hands resting on the knees with fingers pointed to heaven.
- Maybe you think about chanting a mantra over and over.

- **Meditation** has often been used to describe how eastern religions practice emptying their minds in an attempt to achieve peace, but the practice of meditation for a follower of Jesus means to fill your mind with truth about God.
- **We all meditate on something** – we are intentionally deciding what to meditate on.

Meditating doesn't have to be any more complicated than thinking about the will of God.

- The important part about meditating is being intentional.
  - It's easy to read a passage in the Bible or to hear a sermon and then go about our day and nothing really changes.
  - Yet, if we slow down to think about what we hear and read, then we will see it all in greater detail.
  - **It's kind of like using a microscope.** Have you ever used a microscope to study a drop of water? If you look closely, there's so much more in water than you might realize if you never stopped to take a closer look.
- When you meditate, you can review what you have learned, and it might be helpful to **ask yourself some questions.**
  - How does this apply to me?
  - How has today's culture distorted this message?
  - Who needs to hear this message right now?
  - What is God trying to say to me through this?
  - Do I really believe what I just read?

Meditation is an important key that helps us to understand and embrace God's view of the world we live in.

## Prayer

Prayer is how we communicate with God. We can talk to Him any time and He will listen to us. It is a friendship that we enjoy, but with a foundation of reverence and honor.

The Bible says in **1 Thessalonians 5:17** that we should “\_\_\_\_\_.”

- That doesn't mean that it's all we do, but we should have an attitude of praying everyday and throughout the day when we have questions, when we need help, when we want to thank God, or for any reason at all.
- If God wants us to pray all the time, then it must be pretty important!

**Q: How can we have a habit of praying without ceasing? Do you know of anyone who models this well? What do they do to keep prayer a high priority throughout the day?**

Some people are intimidated by prayer.

- It feels awkward and uncomfortable. We don't want to say the wrong thing or to sound stupid, so we'd rather not pray with other people around.
  - Well, praying with others can be a very uplifting experience for you and the people around you!
  - **It might feel uncomfortable at first**, but you'll get used to it and you're going to **see the great benefits** that go along with prayer.

As we look to prayer, it is easy to fall into the trap of keeping ourselves at the center of our focus.

- When we pray, **we are praying for God's will to be done in our lives**, not our own. It is contrary to how we might normally want to pray.
  - Babies are completely focused on themselves when they are born, but as they grow up they are given increased amounts of responsibility.
  - As adults, we are not only responsible to take care of ourselves, but also those around us.
  - The same is true of your spiritual maturity. As you grow, you are expected to focus on the needs of others.

A simple, but helpful model for structuring your prayer is **the A.C.T.S. model**. This is an acronym for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication (requests). All of these elements are important to maintain a proper attitude in prayer:

**Adoration** – Praise God for who He is, keeping an attitude of humility.

**Confession** – Acknowledge sin, choose to correct it, and receive forgiveness.

**Thanksgiving** – We respond to the endless grace that we receive from God.

**Supplication** – We make requests. "Supplication" is a fancy word for the needs that we offer up with the expectation that God will hear and answer us.

The Bible teaches that we should be persistent in prayer, bold in our requests, and ask with motives that are pure (*Lk. 18:1-8*).

**Q: What is the purpose of prayer? What is the goal of prayer?**

## Silence and Solitude

Anyone feeling too busy?

- **We live in a very face-paced world** and we can keep busy from the moment we get up until the moment we put our head back on the pillow if we are not careful.
- God established seven days in a week and declared that one day should be set apart for rest (*Ex. 20:8*).
- The Bible also says that Jesus often went off to lonely places to pray (*Lk. 5:16*).
- **Slowing down to spend time in fellowship with God is more important than ever.**

There are many purposes for getting alone with God. When you discipline yourself to seek God through silence and solitude, your time will help you:

- **To hear the voice of God better** – By eliminating the distractions around us.
- **To bring physical and spiritual restoration** – In Mk. 6:31 Jesus encourages the disciples to find some privacy to get some much needed rest.
- **To express our faith in Him** – When we affirm the value of meeting with God.
- **To worship Him** – When our hearts are right, we can't help but praise Him!
- **To regain spiritual perspective** – This means redirecting our focus off of ourselves and onto God's purpose and plan for our lives.
- **To seek the will of God** – Jesus went to a mountainside and prayed all night before selecting the Twelve in Lk. 6:12-13.

Below is a chart for you to look at as you think about spending time in silence and solitude.

**Divert Daily** – *Commit your plans for the day to God, to study His Word, to pray.*

**Withdraw Weekly** – *Uphold the Sabbath to rest from work and focus on God.*

**Abandon Annually** – *Take a vacation to get away from the routine of life.*

## Stewardship

**Stewardship** is a fancy word that means we should take care of what God has given to us – which is basically everything we have! **Everything we have** \_\_\_\_\_.

- Most people think of this as it relates to **money, but it really is so much more than that.** It includes all of our time, talents and resources.
- The idea here is that when someone lends us something, we are expected to take good care of it until it is returned. Let's break this down a bit:

**Time** – God has only given us a certain number of days to dwell upon this earth, and each of us only has 24 hours a day and seven days a week. We are invited to give God as much – or as little – of our lives to Him as we choose. We can give God our time when we spend time reading His word and in prayer, but also as we serve other people and love them as Jesus would.

**Talents** – Our talents, or abilities, can be used for helping other people to experience the love of God. Each of us has different abilities to sew, to build, to create, to cook, to clean, to show hospitality, to teach, to lead, and so on. We are each unique and when we offer the gift of our lives to everyone else, we fulfill a need that others cannot. God has created us as an essential part of the Church, with something special that only we can offer!

**Treasure** – We have resources that God gives us to share with others. Our money can be given to the church, to the poor, to people in need, or to missionaries who minister on the other side of the world. Our treasure is not just our money, however; we may have a home to share, a trailer to lend out, extra food to pass along, or some other tangible gift to offer to someone as a blessing to be given in the name of Jesus.

### Key Biblical Stewardship Principles:

- Everything belongs to God (*1 Chr. 29:11; Job 41:11; Psalm 24:1*).
- God owns me (*Ezekiel 18:4; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; Romans 14:8*).
- God gave me everything I have (*1 Cor. 4:7; 1 Chr. 29:14*).
- As steward of my life and possessions, I must be faithful to the Owner (*1 Cor. 4:2*).
- I will answer to God for what I've done with my life (*Rom. 14:12*).
- I will receive eternal rewards in proportion to my faithfulness (*Mt. 25:14-30*).

**Q: How can we thank God for giving us everything we have? What do you think He wants us to do in return for these blessings?**

### Serving

One of the greatest ways to grow in your faith is through serving others. It's so important that we are going to spend six weeks looking at the different aspects of using our gifts, talents and passions to bring glory to God. For now we will just mention that serving:

- Gets our focus off of ourselves
- Affirms that you are part of a family
- Blesses people who are in need
- It inspires others to serve
- Leads us to bearing fruit for God's kingdom
- Helps us to fulfill our God-given purpose
- Strengthens your faith
- Brings joy to our heart

### Journaling

**Journaling is another exercise that can \_\_\_\_\_** and understand God's Word or even what God is doing in your life at any given time.

- When you write thoughts down, you are forced to put thoughts into words.
- As you put thoughts to words, the ideas become clearer.
- It's really a great opportunity that may be helpful for you.
  - Perhaps you use a journal to take notes on what you are learning **as you read the Bible**.
  - Perhaps you write down **prayer requests** and answers to prayer to keep record of what God has done.
  - Maybe you just want to record **how you see God moving in your life** as He guides and directs you along the way.

**The key to journaling** isn't how much you write, but **how consistent you are**.

- Perhaps you just write a couple of sentences every day.
- If you do it regularly, you'll have a record of some special memories of God's awesome grace in your life!
- Consider getting a notebook or a journal, and **try to do it daily for three weeks**.

- If you find it's not helpful, let it go.
- On the other hand, it may be just what you need to keep your spiritual fervor vibrant and alive.
- It is important to note that journaling is not a command in scripture, but we do see an example in the Old Testament which is rich with poetry.
- Writing became an outflow for writers to process their thoughts and emotions.

**Q: Have you ever kept a journal? If so, what are some of the benefits that you've found to be helpful with keeping a record of your thoughts and prayers?**

## Fasting

### You want me to what!?

For times when you really want to **dig into a deeper relationship** with God, you might consider doing a **fast**. It's not something that many people talk about or perhaps even practice often, other than for medical purposes. A spiritual fast is intended to get your heart aligned with what God wants to do in your life. It's not an easy discipline, but it can be very rewarding and faith-building.

Although the Bible is clear about the benefits of fasting, **how to do a fast and for how long is not specified**. Some people might fast overnight, and others like Moses and Jesus fasted for 40 days! (Note: it's a good idea to consult your doctor and perhaps your pastor before doing a long fast.) During a fast, people in the Bible might go without food or water, but some Christians more recently have taken to a "partial fast" where they stick to a liquid diet and no solid foods.

### Some general benefits of fasting may include:

- a deeper sense of humility
- revelation by the Holy Spirit
- spiritual rejuvenation
- better understanding of God's Word
- internal peace
- strengthens our resolve to live for Christ
- A greater appreciation for food and drink!

**Q: Why do you think that Christians have gotten out of the habit of fasting?**

**Wrap-up on the Class Assignment:** Share your life purpose statement if you haven't already.

### Memory Verse Final Review:

**Matthew 13:31-32** - *"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."*

PRAYER REQUESTS:



# Phase 2: WATER



**WATER** – Living in *COMMUNITY* with God and mankind

Class Assignment: Identify an accountability partner.



**Every plant must have the right environment to develop** healthy and strong.

Just like a plant, Christians need the right environment to grow into the kind of person that God wants us to be.

- If you surround yourself with toxic people, then you will eventually become an unhealthy person.
- We want you to surround yourself with people who will build you up and bring life to your spirit, like a refreshing rainfall upon a dry land.
- In 1 Corinthians 3:6-9 the Apostle Paul teaches that he planted a seed, and then another believer (Apollos) came along to WATER the seed, causing it to grow.
  - One of the key components of a healthy spiritual environment is COMMUNITY.
  - When we surround ourselves with a network of relationships with other Christians, God will water the seeds of truth in our hearts, causing them to grow which will help you to become spiritually strong. (*Jn. 4:10-14; 1 Jn. 1:7*)

The world we live in places a high value on independence and being self-sufficient, but throughout the Bible we see God giving us a message that we need one another.

- **We are not created to be alone**, we are relational beings, and **we are** \_\_\_\_\_ upon one another.
- Since the day we were born, God has desired for us to live within the safety of a loving family.
  - And **God has also given us a church family** where we can feel safe and where we can learn and grow into the kind of person He wants us to be.
  - Today we are going to talk about God's plan for the Church and how it is to be a family for us.

**Q: Look at Act 2:42-45. The Bible conveys the message that we need each other. What do we need each other for? Why is this important? Can't we have a healthy relationship with God without having to be connected to a church?**

## WATER – Lesson 1: The Church

### Role, purpose, design

When you **think about the word "church"**, you probably envision pictures of stained glass, maybe some pews and an organ, and a tall steeple perhaps with a bell tower.

- The **Church** is more than a building.
  - From the very start, the Church was made up of the people in it.
  - The Greek word for church means “called out ones” and it can refer to a local body of believers, or collectively as a whole, timeless, global group.
  - Even before they ever started meeting in a formal church, followers of Christ first met in homes or gathered in social areas for fellowship and teaching.
  - The people were the Church – and it’s still true today; **the Church is not a place we go to; it is made up of those people** who have committed themselves to living out the will of God in their lives.

**In the Bible** we see examples of what the early church did, **but no clear definition of what the church “should” look like.**

- So we have been given a message to share, but beyond that we have the freedom to follow as the Holy Spirit leads us.
  - Therefore God’s Church can meet in a grand **cathedral or in a dark room** with blinds closed.
  - Church might do ministry in a **third world country** on the other side of the world, or in the **local county jail**.
  - The Church includes all of us **gathered together** for a weekend service, or it can be a **one-on-one** meeting at the coffee shop down the street.
  - Some churches take up large sports arenas, others meeting in homes.
  - The Church is the outflow of a recognized need for community, fellowship, worship, and it provides a structured environment so that believers might learn about the faith they profess and then be sent out to accomplish His will.

**Q: If the Church is made up of the people, then why do we even need a building?**

## **The Church: Past and Present**

Initially, the early Church did not meet in a fancy or formal building, but gathered in homes and social spaces.

- Acts 2 talks about a group of believers whose lives were interwoven in community that watched out for one another and reached out with the good news.
  - They gathered for teaching, for worship, to eat meals together, to pray, and to just hang out and enjoy spending time together (*Acts 2:42*).
  - Initially, there wasn’t a well established formation or network within the Church, but as time went on the need for structure became more evident.
  - Individuals (called elders, bishops, or **overseers** – like a pastor) were appointed to keep an eye on the spiritual wellbeing of a body of believers.
  - **Deacons** were appointed to take care of the physical needs within the church. Doctrine was taught verbally and shared in the form of letters (epistles) which were later compiled into the New Testament.



**Q: In what ways has the Church today preserved the practices of the Early Church? In what ways has the Church today changed how “church” is done?**

For over one thousand years after the ministry of Christ, there was just one Church.

- Unfortunately, since **the Church is made up of people it is far from perfect** which means problems are bound to rise.
- Today, there are **many different** \_\_\_\_\_.
  - It started with a split between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church in 1054 A.D.
  - Later there formed several protestant groups – Lutherans
  - Now we have the Anglicans, Episcopalians, the Reformed, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Anabaptists, the Brethren, Methodists, Pietists, Pentecostals, Charismatics...
  - and each group with their own sub-groups!
- On top of that, **everyone has a stereotype** against some churches and preferences about what makes them comfortable.
  - Some churches might seem too **traditional** or too **liberal**; too **old-fashioned**, or too **contemporary**.
  - Some are **dogmatic**, and some have lost touch with the doctrines of the Bible. If we're not careful, we may be guilty of legalism, much like the Pharisees in the Bible.
  - Instead of getting caught up with the color of the church carpeting, we need to **make sure that we stick with holding to the major doctrines** while allowing grace in other areas.
  - We are commanded to preserve the unity within Church (*Eph. 4:3*).

**The Purpose of the Church:**

1. **Worship** – to glorify God in song and action
2. **Discipleship** – to teach and learn how to live like Christ
3. **Fellowship** – to enjoy a community who cares about our well-being
4. **Evangelism** – to take the good news to the ends of the world
5. **Ministry** – to show love to our neighbors. pointing them to

**Q: How did you go about finding a church to attend? What should we look for in a good, healthy church? What are some of the bad reasons people might pick a church?**

## **Kingdom of God**

Jesus usually described the Church as the “**kingdom of God**”.

- When you hear the word “kingdom,” you might think about a big castle with a moat, but in the day of Christ a kingdom simply was a community of people or group of cities lead by a king.

- In the Church, **Jesus is our king** and leader, and we are subject to His rule and serve His will.
  - In Mark chapter 4, **Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a seed that grows in the hearts of people** until it matures and bears fruit and multiplies in the lives of others.
  - This is where we get the theme for the vision of Plant, Water, Grow, Harvest – it is a depiction of how the \_\_\_\_\_ grows in our hearts.

### **The Church is the kingdom of God here on the earth.**

- Jesus reigns over all of heaven and earth, and we are a part of His spiritual reign in the physical realm.
  - In other words, He reigns from heaven, but we are here on earth as His ambassadors, representatives to the world of His goodness.
  - Right now, Satan still has some authority over the physical realm that we live in, but spiritually the outcome of the battle between good and evil has been settled through Jesus' victory on the cross. It's a done deal!

**Q: If the Church is the kingdom of God upon the earth, what does that indicate about the authority of believers? How should this affect the way that we interact with the world?**

## **Authority**

### **What does that mean for you?**

- God the Father gave Jesus all authority in heaven and on earth, and **Jesus has delegated His authority to us** and also gives us power through the Holy Spirit to advance His kingdom as we demonstrate the love of God to others.
  - When we **show God's love** in tangible ways we **make Him attractive** and we plant seeds that grow and **spread the kingdom**.
  - Jesus compares His kingdom to a tiny mustard seed that grows and spreads until it becomes a huge plant; but it all starts with the seed of God's love planted in the heart of an individual. And Jesus has asked us to plant seeds so that His kingdom will grow.

### **What does it look like to plant a seed for the kingdom of God?**

- It's simply **showing love to others with the intent of pointing them to God**.
  - Let's say you know that your neighbor is out of a job and running low on food.
  - Being the nice person that you are, you decide to **buy groceries** and give them to your neighbor.
  - Now, **if your motive is to feel good about yourself**, then the Bible says "you have received your reward in full." You get the glory, end of story.
  - But if you give groceries to your neighbor and say, "I'm sorry that you're going through a hard time and we are praying for you. These are to remind you that God

loves you and that He knows about your struggles. Let me know if there is anything else we can do to help. Have a great day!"

- Then, no longer is it you who is getting the **glory**, but God.
- This is what it means when the Bible tells us to store up treasure in heaven.

## The Church is a Family

**I don't know what your family was like** growing up, maybe your experience was good and maybe it wasn't, but God established the Church to be a place where we can act as a family was intended to be.

**Q: How would you describe your family growing up? Was it a good environment? How has this affected the way that you view how your church family should interact?**

- **The Church is often called the "\_\_\_\_\_."**
  - God is described as **our Father**, and we often call one another **brothers** and **sisters** in Christ. He calls us His children.
  - It is no accident that God uses this picture for the Church, which He also calls His **bride**.

When we were born, God gave every one of us a mom and a dad and **placed us each into a family** where we could be loved and nurtured.

- **When you were first born, you couldn't take care of yourself** and you needed the love and care of those around you until you were old enough to do some things on your own.
  - We live in a time where **the family structure is really messed up** and we can see the effects that it has brought to our society when a father is absent or divorce shatters people's lives.
  - And the **Church should not be here to judge anyone's past, but to show them a better future**.
- God is good and **His plan is best**, and His plan is that the family would have a husband and wife who are united for life, spiritually and physically, through the bond of unconditional love for one another and then that love would overflow to their children and their children's children.
- A family should foster an environment where people will be picked up when they fall, and challenged to become all that God wants them to be, and celebrated when victory comes our way!
- The family structure is a beautiful description of what the Church is intended to be.

**Q: Consider Hebrews 2:10-11. In what ways have you observed our church acting like a family to one another?**

So we have a family connection here at Faith, and I don't know what your family is like at home, but usually you have a strong bond to your family – even if you don't always get along.

- With blood relatives, there is **a commitment that runs deep** and an unspoken obligation to watch out for one another.
- In a similar way, Jesus blood flows through our veins and we have a special bond with our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- The Church is designed to be a place where you can feel safe, where you can be honest and transparent and not judged for the struggles that you face.
- Instead, it is a place where we can fail, get back up, move forward, and find victory as seek to follow the will of God.

The Bible says that **we are to live in unity** with one another.

- Now, **no church is perfect** because it is made up of imperfect people (people will offend you and hurt your feelings), but a healthy church will have people who go out of their way to love one another sacrificially, just as Christ demonstrated for us.
  - That means when you are struggling, you should be able to **reach out and find help**.
  - And when you are doing well, God wants us to watch for opportunities **to show love to others**. That's what God wants our church to look like!

**SUMMARY:** The purpose of God's Church is for believers to gather together and encourage one another to remain faithful to our commission to go and teach the world about Jesus.

We want our church to act like a healthy family to one another, caring about one another's lives and taking care of one another's needs.

**Class Assignment:** Start thinking about how you can connect to an individual or a couple of people who will encourage you to grow in your faith. Pray that God would lead you to a person or people who will be willing to tell you what you need to hear.

### Memory Verse:

**1 Corinthians 12:25-27** - *"there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."*

PRAYER REQUESTS:

# WATER – Lesson 2: Unified in Spirit

**God has given us a message to share** with the world, and the only way that the world will believe us is if we are unified with one another in spirit.

- The want to know that love works.
- They want to know that the Spirit of God transforms lives.
- The want the peace that this world cannot offer, but **if there is no peace** among us, **why would they listen?**

1 Corinthians 1:10 urges us to be one. *"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought."* – 1 Cor. 1:10

- Satan's desire is to rob God's glory for himself, and one of his most successful strategies has been to bring division to the Church.
- It is so important for us to keep the peace among us so that we do not allow God's love and reputation to be hindered.
- We can't let our squabbles get in the way of God's plan.

**Q: Do you remember your first experience in the church? What kind of impression did it leave for you?**

## God loves us all

God loves people and He created them to be \_\_\_\_\_.

- Not just the smart ones or the pretty ones or the strong ones – He loves us all!
- He created each of us just the way that He wanted us to be, and He loves us as we are.
- He thinks people are awesome and He wants us to feel the same way!
- It's important for us to **see people the way that God sees people.**
  - 1 Samuel 16:7 says, *"man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."*
  - He is able to look beyond our faults and sees the good in each of us. Aren't you glad that He doesn't just look at our flaws!?
  - When God looks at us, He sees as He sees His Son – without any fault! (Col. 1:22)

**Q: How do we see people the way that God sees people? How do we cultivate this kind of heart for others?**

**Philippians 2:3-4** says, *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."*

- Consider the needs of others above our own!?
- This doesn't even register in most people's minds!
- The verses just after this passage talk about Christ's attitude, or mindset, towards us.
  - He, who is in very nature God, humbled Himself to the point of death, and served our needs when we were helpless and hopeless, drowning in our sin.
  - Jesus humbly loved us more than His own comfort, knowing that His sacrifice would bring about the opportunity to be with us forever.
- Hebrews 12:2 says, *"For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame."*
- Jesus served us in His earthly ministry and now He asks us to do the same for others.
- **Jesus suffered and died because He loves us. That's reason to be excited!**

## Help!?

So, God has set His children apart to be **separate and different from the rest of the world**. When the world is fighting and greedy and looking out for themselves, God wants us to be living in peace and **looking out for one another**. The truth is that we need each other.

*"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity." (Pr. 17:17)*

This picture of **placing other people's needs above our own** seems quite idealistic and even unrealistic to a certain point, but this is what God asks us to do.

Have you ever found yourself in a place where **you needed help** and didn't know where to turn?

**Q: Galatians 6:2 instructs us to carry one another's burdens. Do you recall a time where you needed someone else's help? What was it like to have someone come along to help or rescue you?**

- Perhaps you've been stranded on the side of the road or maybe were struggling to make ends meet – there was too much month at the end of the money?
- Sometimes things happen that are beyond our control, but God is always in control. He knows your need, and **He uses people to answer our prayers!**
- Why does He allow His children to go through trials? Well, we cannot possibly understand all of His reasons, but we do get a sense that our trials provide an opportunity for His children to demonstrate His love to one another in a tangible form.
  - **God wants us to be** \_\_\_\_\_ to those around us.
  - That's just one of the reasons His plan for the Church is so amazing.
  - He gives us the privilege to join Him in the amazing work that He is doing!

Looking at our lives, there are \_\_\_\_\_ and there are \_\_\_\_\_.

- If our needs are met, then we have freedom to use our energy for other things.



- By default we tend to use our extra energy to embrace all that this world has to offer us (our “wants”), but **God desires that you use your life to serve** the needs of the people He has placed in your sphere of influence.
- God doesn’t ask us to give all of our money to the poor, but He may give you more than you need with the hope that you might use your excess to show His love to people He cares so deeply about.
  - You may have extra time, extra clothing, extra food, extra money, an extra cup of coffee to share, an extra bedroom in your house.
  - These can all be ways to hoard and be selfish or to show love and to be generous.

The beautiful part of this whole picture comes into focus when **we find ourselves to be the one in need.**

- Life can feel overwhelming at times and you might feel like you are drowning.
  - If the Church is operating the way that God intended for it to, then you have a wealth of resources to help you, and people around you who genuinely care.
  - The only way that this can work is if we live interdependently upon one another.  
**Everyone has to be looking out for those around them!**
  - This isn’t easy, though. People in this world are really messed up – just like we are!

**Q: Read Hebrews 13:16. How can we find out about the needs around us? What are some practical ways to become more aware of who is hurting or in need?**

## Sheep are Messy

We mentioned before that **God’s Church** is designed to be a family to one another. We also noted that it **is made up of imperfect people.**

- The Bible often compares people to sheep (*Mt. 15:24, 25:33, 26:31*). Sheep need to be led and fed and cared for, and sheep tend to be messy, smelly, and not so... bright.
  - **Like sheep,**\_\_\_\_\_. We all have baggage that we carry throughout our lives; much of it that we had no choice over and some of it might be the result of our own poor decisions.
- We have memories that haunt us, behaviors that trap us, and challenges that hinder us. You and I are messed up. We all are!
  - In order to get along with our church “family”, we’re going to **need to accept people for who they are and offer lots of grace** for times when they mess up... and we’ll need them to do the same for us!

**This doesn’t mean that we accept sinful behavior** or allow sin to continue, but we recognize that Jesus has forgiven those who come to Him with a broken and repentant heart.

- We don’t bring up the past unless it is hindering them from growing into the person that God wants them to become.

- The reality is that people are the product of their life experiences.
  - Their beliefs are founded upon how their worldview developed from their childhood through the present.
  - They may have experienced a lot of hurt, abuse, prejudice, tragedy which have led to fear, anxiety, and anger. They may not trust people. They may have zero social skills. They may not be aware of how they dress or act or speak.
  - They may not be aware of the sin in their life. They see it as normal.
  - God loves them just the same! And He loves us with our imperfections, too.

We all come to Christ as we are, stinky mess and all, but then God places us into a family where **we can help one another to learn, grow, and mature.**

- God loves us unconditionally and Jesus was sent to show us what that looks like lived out. As Jesus sets the example, we follow the will of God the best that we are able. God wants us to love people unconditionally.
- Our goal is that we would all become more like the example Christ has shown to us.

**Q: Discuss Luke 6:37-38. Do you struggle with judging people? It comes pretty naturally! How do we change our perspective so that we are more helpful to people?**

## The Right Attitude

Again, this all seems idealistic, but when you have experienced God's love in your time of need, you've seen that **God's plan works!**

- Until that point, **you might be tempted to look down upon people** who don't seem to have it together like you do.

**Q: Have you ever witnessed or experienced a poor example of what the Church was intended to be? Why does this happen even among God's people? How can this be prevented or improved?**

- If we're honest, we often compare ourselves to the people around us and we try to make ourselves feel better when we see others struggle or don't measure up to the perception that we have of ourselves.
  - **We have an issue with pride** and it's ugly.
  - It's tricky to get a handle on our pride because the solution isn't to try and be more humble; it just doesn't work.
  - **The solution is to** \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Not to think less of ourselves, but to think of ourselves less.
  - When we consider the challenges that people face, we are more likely to understand the way that they think and what they need.
  - Let go of the thought that you are better than anyone, it's just not true.



## For the love of God! (The Right Motive)

We are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves. It's the 2<sup>nd</sup> greatest commandment.

- It's easy to love ourselves; it comes naturally to us. Loving others? Not so much.
- We love people not just because we are commanded to, but because that is how God has treated us.
- He loved us while we were still living in our sin with our backs turned away from Him.
- It's really mind boggling if we think about it, but that's why Paul says that "Christ's love compels us" to live our lives for God (2 Cor. 5:14-15).
- **We have the choice to live our lives any way that we want**, but it's important to remember that our choices always lead somewhere.
- **Bad choices lead to \_\_\_\_\_ . Good choices lead to \_\_\_\_\_ .**

Consider the consequences of selfish living with these words from God in **Amos 5:21-27**:

*"I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.*

- It is tempting for each of us to do the things which make us feel good and to follow the path of least resistance and greatest pleasure.
- Sometimes, though, God might want us to choose to do something that might be hard or even unpleasant.
  - We may be faced with two choices, one that is easy and fun, but another that is difficult but rewarding.
  - For example, following the path of missions work is very difficult, but it can also be very rewarding.
- How do we know what the best choice is? How do we know what God's will is? **What should be our motive** for making decisions?
- Our motive is **to bring glory to God**. (Mt. 5:16)
- That means we draw people's attention to Him in such a way that they praise and thank God for the work He is doing in their lives.
- We bring glory to God by showing love to other people.

**Q: What motivates you to live for God? What distracts us from being fully committed to Him? What can we do to avoid being distracted? Discuss 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.**

## People are Watching You

We mentioned that the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself.

- **The greatest command** in the Bible is, "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind and with all of your strength." (Mk. 12:30)

- He is so worthy of our very best efforts to live a life that points people to God.
- And people are so desperately in need of His love, forgiveness, and peace.

**When God's people show love** to one another and genuinely care for one another, it makes the Church \_\_\_\_\_ **to the world.**

- People want to check it out. People see a glimpse of what is missing in their own life.
  - Every week people who are needy, hungry, overwhelmed, hurting, and lost **come through the doors of your church.**
  - They may be new, first-time visitors, or they may have been attending every week for the last twenty years.
    - When a person who feels invisible is noticed on a Sunday morning, it can mean the world to them. Just a simple brief conversation to let them know that you care.
    - Maybe you ask someone how they are doing. Perhaps you ask how you can pray for them. Maybe they open up just a bit about life's trials.

**What you do** with that information **may affect their view of God and His Church!**

- Is the Church a place where people really care?
- Or just a place where they want your money and put guilt and shame on you because of your sin?
  - Our actions, when people open up to us, will answer that question for them!
  - It's really important for us to be prepared to show love to others.

**If you are looking for needs, they are all around you.**

- When you recognize needs, it is a privilege to be a tool in God's hands to show someone His love.
- It doesn't have to be elaborate. A simple hello is a good place to start. Hold the door; introduce them to some people at church.
  - Maybe you might be able to invite them to your small group, a Bible Study, or the men's breakfast. These simple gestures matter a great deal.
  - Remember – you are a part of God's plan for their eternal destiny! No pressure.
- Engaging with people might happen at church, but it could be at work, in your family, or in a casual conversation with a stranger.
  - 1 Peter 3:15 encourages us to always be ready to give and answer for our faith.
  - **If people know you are a Christian, they are \_\_\_\_\_** and that's a good thing!
  - It means that you have an open door to show them what God's love should look like, because it's possible that they've seen some pretty poor examples in the past.

**Q: Read Matthew 5:14-16. Who do you think might be watching you? Do people know that you are a Christian? What kind of example are you setting for them and how can it be improved?**

- People hunger for fellowship and family and peace.
- When they come to your church or your small group, or your Bible Study, or your home, will they feel God's love and presence?
  - We are representatives of God's love 24-7-365!

## **SUMMARY:**

We need to be united because God loves everyone and wants us to make the church a place that is attractive to others.

- He wants us to be different from the world by looking out for one another and by overflowing with His love and peace.
  - This takes grace and patience because people are messy and we all come to Christ just as we are, rough around the edges.
  - We humbly value others and honor them despite their flaws because they are made in God's image and that is what God has done for us.
- The opportunities to show God's love are endless.
  - The Bible words it like this: the fields are ripe for harvest.
  - The better we can love one another, the more attractive people will find God and His Church.
- We want to be a church where people feel safe enough to open up about their mess so that they can find healing and enjoy God's peace.
  - We cannot judge them if we want them to be transparent or vulnerable.

**Class Assignment:** Have you given any more thought to whom God might want you to connect with to help you grow in your faith?

## **Memory Verse:**

**1 Corinthians 12:25-27** - *"there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."*

## **PRAYER REQUESTS:**

# WATER – Lesson 3: Community Offers Fellowship

**There is an old saying, “Birds of a feather flock together.”**

- We hang out with people who are like us.
- It is also true that we become like the people with hang around.
- A similar proverb words it this way; *“Whoever walks with the wise become wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.”*
- That’s why it’s **important to surround yourself with people who will build you up**, encourage you, and tell you the truth when you need to hear it!

In our last session we talked about the importance of being unified in spirit so that we can show the world a picture of God’s love in action.

- This session we will **move from theory to practice** and look at how to **create that unity** within our church family.

One of the amazing aspects of the church is that it includes people at every level of spiritual growth.

- There are seekers and **new believers**, and there are also **seasoned believers** who have gained wisdom throughout many years of following after Jesus.
- It can be challenging for young Christians to engage in a Bible study when they haven’t even opened a Bible, but it’s a good exercise for new believer and an opportunity for other Christians to exercise their knowledge through sharing what they’ve learned about God through their own study, or experiences as God has walked along side of them throughout life.
- It is healthy for us to have **people to build into, and people who will build into us.**

## Community Takes Time

It’s hard to connect with people when we don’t spend time with them.

- It’s important to **live our lives \_\_\_\_\_ to our church family** – literally and figuratively.
  - **Literally** – it’s good to live somewhat near your church or at least some families from your church. If you have a long commute, then you are less likely to connect with people, serve in ministry, or be involved in a small group.
  - **Figuratively** – The more time you spend with people from church, the closer your proximity and more influence you have over one another’s lives.
  - If you isolate yourself from people at church, you are likely to feel neglected, forgotten, and bitter. This opens the door for bad things to happen.

In a perfect world, we’d have lots of time to spend together.



- In reality, **our lives are insanely busy!** Too busy to live out God's plan for the church.
  - **The early church came together daily** for a meal, for prayer, and for teaching – they couldn't get enough fellowship!
  - It may not be realistic to get together with our church family every day, but it probably isn't as farfetched an idea as we might think!
  - It is important to consider our priorities and **look at how we use our time.**
    - Perhaps we should spend less time at work so we can make a greater impact in people's lives.
    - Maybe we spend a lot of time on hobbies or vegging out in front of the TV or a computer screen.
    - We have as much time as we make for one another.
    - This might require some mental adjustment – people need to be a priority to us because nothing else in this world is eternal.

**Q: How willing are you to schedule your time so that you can spend time with people from church? How much time are you willing to sacrifice?**

Since there are people at every level of spiritual maturity, **the church needs to**

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- We need to get people into the church, to get them healthy, to make them strong and mature, and then we need to send people out to reach the people that God has placed in their lives.
- Once people come to church, they may want to grow in their faith, but won't know how to go about it.
- Our church offers all kinds of resources to meet the needs of people who want to grow.

## Support/Healing Groups

Many people who come to church are hurting and looking for hope. The church is a place where you are invited to come as you are, trusting that God will transform your life.

- People also may enter into an unexpected season through a death in the family, a scary diagnosis, some form of abuse, or perhaps an addiction has a hold on their life.
- **The church can be considered a hospital** for people's spiritual needs; sometimes God needs to do surgery on our hearts!
- Thankfully, our church offers many resources to help people in need.

**Proverbs 17:17** says that *"a friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity."*

**Q: Read James 1:21. Do you have any unhealthy behaviors, thoughts, or addictions that are keeping you from moving forward in your faith? What group might be best for you to consider?**

## Community Groups

Where many groups are intended to help people with their spiritual, emotional, and behavioral health, **small groups offer a place for growth and fellowship.**

- Some churches call them life groups, some call them support groups, **our church calls them \_\_\_\_\_** because they are designed to build the kind of community we need to build a strong church family.
- They tend to **meet on a regular basis** (usually weekly) and provide a place where people can talk about what is going on in life as well as dig into God's Word a bit.
- Groups are often formed through a common interest or age, or perhaps a group of friends just wants to spend more time together.
- Community Groups are a great place for people to **encourage one another to grow in faith** and to live lives that make an eternal impact.

**Q: Have you ever been in a Community Group? If so, what are the greatest parts of being in a group that keep you coming back? Read and discuss Hebrews 10:24-25.**

## Action Groups

At some point, we need to get outside of our four walls at the church to go and reach out to the people in our community.

- An action group might organize an event to help someone in the church or in the neighborhood.
  - **Working shoulder to shoulder** with like-minded individuals can create a deep and lasting bond that develops the kind of community that we are looking for.
  - An action group might respond to an emergency, go out to share the gospel, or might plan to help someone move.
  - In the past, we've put on roofs, raked people's yards, moved several people across town, and installed bathrooms.
- Usually, an action group doesn't meet regularly, but instead **on an as-needed basis**, and often works in conjunction with an ongoing ministry.
  - Maybe you have an idea for a project that the church could work on? Today would be a great day to start the planning process!

**Q: What is it about doing something with other people that bonds you together? Can you think of an example of an experience you had with a group of people you now consider to be your friends?**

## Fellowship groups

Some groups focus on healing, some on Bible Study, others on getting things done, but there are actually **some groups that exist purely for having a good time.**



- We have a group that gathers for food and conversation each month.
- Church families sometimes gather for a bonfire in the summer, head to the baseball stadium for a game, have a potluck at the church, or go on an adventure in the woods or on a lake.
- It's great to build relationship through making memories together.

All different types of groups are important and are necessary for different stages of our lives.

- We wish that everyone in the church was in a small group because small groups really are the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - When we are in community with the rest of our church family, then we have people watching out for our well-being and our best interest.
  - In a small group you realize that you are loved, that you are noticed, and that your life matters!

**Q: Describe the perfect fellowship group for your interests. Do you think that it would be possible to form an actual group like this? Does one exist?**

**Q: How do fellowship groups help people to grow in their faith?**

## True Friendship

**Do you have good friends?**

- Do you have people that you could call at 2 in the morning and you know that they would pick up the phone if they knew it would be you?
- Do you have friends that would come along side of you in your time of need?
- **Not everyone does.** That's one reason we feel the need to focus on fellowship is so important.

**Q: Read Proverbs 11:24. What makes a good friend? How does one go about finding good friends?**

**The goal of community is to develop true friendships** that will strengthen you as you continue along your spiritual journey.

- Having true friends is a precious gift that we often take for granted.
- Perhaps you feel that true friendships are lacking in your life.
- You need someone to pick you up, to tell you the truth, to inspire you to press on, and to rejoice in moments of celebration!
- **Small groups are a great place to make friendships that will last a lifetime!**
- Would you please consider connecting to a small group of some form?
- If you don't know of a group that fits your needs, perhaps you could form a group based upon your needs?

There are **many dangers** that will inevitably cross our paths throughout life and when they do, we had better be connected to some people who can point us in the right direction.

- **When we isolate ourselves**, we open up the opportunity for \_\_\_\_\_ to overcome us.
  - A lioness looking for prey doesn't attack an entire herd – just one weaker animal that is separated from the group.
  - **We are weaker** when we try to do life on our own.

**Q: If God is our strength, why do we need other people? Is it okay to not have friends?**

**"It is not good for man to be alone."** – Gen. 2:18

## Be a Friend

What a blessing it is to have people around us who like us, who care about us, and who fill our tank when it is empty.

- **Wouldn't it be great if everyone had a few friends** who truly cared about them and would even tell them the truth when they need to hear it? (*Pr. 27:5-6*)
- We want to **build that kind of community in our church** because friendship is a tangible expression of love that comes from God.

### Tips on how to be a good friend:

- Find someone who you connect with well
- Be the first to initiate
- Ask good questions
- Give them a gift
- Make time for a get together
- Invite them over
- Be more interested in them than you are in you
- Listen more than you talk

**The best way to make friends is to be one.**

- This comes naturally to some people, but for other people making friends **can be a big challenge**.

In a world where relationships often form through Facebook, Twitter, and texting, there is a hunger for true friendship.

- **Social media provides** \_\_\_\_\_ for really getting to know the people on the other end of our digital communications.
- These kinds of relationships can often be superficial because we are trying to put on the best presentation of who we want to be instead of being transparent about who we really are.
  - We are represented by a perfect, airbrushed image, instead of the raw, flawed people that we really are.
  - Social media is often a façade or **an illusion that isn't based in reality**.
  - Basically, it's a lie with expectations we could never achieve.
  - That's why so many people can seem to have it all together online, but in reality their lives are falling apart.



- They are **plagued with depression and loneliness** even though they may have more than 1,000 friends on Facebook, or more than a hundred followers on Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok.

**Q: What are the benefits and hindrances of social media and relationships over the internet?**

It is awesome to have **people who know us inside and out and still love us** for who we are!

- Face to Face relationships are better than anything the digital world has to offer.
  - You can meet people anywhere you go, but if you are looking for people you can look up to, people you can trust, people who care, find a good small group at church.
  - Where do you find good, healthy friends who care about you and build you up?
  - In a small group at church! I'll bet you saw that coming.

**SUMMARY:**

We become like the people we hang around.

- If our goal is to become like Jesus, then it makes sense that we would surround ourselves with other people who feel the same way.
  - The best place to connect with people who love Jesus is in a small group at church.
  - Small groups take on many forms, so there is likely to be one that fits your needs or season in life.
- We all need good friends, and to make friends we need to be one.
- The best friendships are experienced face to face and have reciprocal trust and interest.
- Please find a small group where you can build into others and find encouragement for yourself.

**Class Assignment:** Have you given any more thought to whom God might want you to connect with to help you grow in your faith?

**Memory Verse:**

**1 Corinthians 12:25-27** - *"there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."*

PRAYER REQUESTS:

# WATER – Lesson 4: Created for Worship

Did you ever wonder **why God put you on this earth?**

- The Westminster Catechism, written in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, states that the chief end of man is to **“glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”**
  - In other words, He created us to **worship** Him in a relationship that never ends.
- Now, God is not self-conceited in the sense that He needs us to scratch His ego.
  - It is actually quite the opposite.
  - He created us that He might pour out His love to us so that we might respond to Him **with grateful hearts.**
  - He has created us to be the objects of His love, the recipients of His blessings!

**Q: Read Genesis 1:26-27. Why do you think that God created mankind? How are we different from the rest of God’s creation?**

In the **Old Testament**, God set up several \_\_\_\_\_ and commanded the entire nation to participate.

- They celebrated these holidays with big parties that lasted for several days.
- The purpose was that they would regularly assemble and **remember what God had done for them.**
- He had set them apart as His chosen people, rescued them from slavery, brought them through the wilderness, led them to the Promised Land, and blessed them with fruitful harvest times.
- They recounted the stories and praised God for His abundant blessings.

**Q: Why is it important for us to go to church? Is it absolutely necessary? Why or why not? Look at Acts 2:46-47 and the surrounding verses for further discussion.**

As humans, **we are so quick to forget** what God has done for us.

- That’s why it is so **good for us to come together regularly** at the church to worship God, to receive instruction, inspiration, exhortation, and to refocus our hearts and lives so that we are fully devoted to Him.
- Like the festivals of the Old Testament, when we gather it **should be a celebration** – we have good reason to be excited. The God of the universe is in our midst!
- Have you ever been in a church service, hopefully at another church, where you couldn’t stay awake or kept watching the clock to see how soon the service would be over?
  - That church would be doing you a disservice!
  - When we gather, it shouldn’t be a show or mere entertainment, but it should be an exciting time where **you expect God to do great things.**

Can't we worship God when we are alone? Isn't He everywhere?

- Of course! But when we come together there is **a synergy that happens** that magnifies our spirits and unifies our hearts in a way that is not possible when we are all alone.
- If you've ever been in a stadium full of people at a sports arena, a concert, or Christian revival, you know that there is a special energy that comes when people gather together with one purpose in mind.
- **You are created to** \_\_\_\_\_; at home, throughout the day, and in community with the rest of your church family.
- This **community** of worship "**waters**" **our souls** with nourishing energy that helps us to grow in our faith. Like a seedling, we need to be watered regularly if we want to grow up in a healthy manner.

**Q: Consider the words of Psalm 100:4-5. How do we cultivate an expectant heart as we enter into worship? What are we expecting God to do?**

## Engaging in Worship

**When you come to church, what do you come for?**

- To be spiritually fed? To be around other Christians?
- Hopefully you come for more than the coffee!
  - Many people come to church **to receive**, and there's nothing wrong with that.
  - Even so, if you really want to engage in true worship, you need to come to church **to give your heart to God**.
  - Jesus is quoted in saying, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Ac. 20:35).
  - If you want to leave the church overflowing with joy, don't come with the goal to be filled; come with the intention of giving God your whole heart.
  - As you align your heart with His, **you will find the happiness you seek** through the worship you bring!

**Q: What are your favorite parts about the church service? What gets you charged up?**

So, if you're one of those people who **sneak in** after service has started **and leaves** before the closing prayer, then **you're missing out on the best that God has to offer**.

**Q: For what reasons might a person or family have a habit of coming in late or leaving early from a church service? How should we respond to these people?**

- If you don't sing with the worship or only enter into worship half-heartedly; you're forgetting the reason why we sing!

- We sing because God is worthy; because He has reached into our lives and saved us from our sin.
- We celebrate because He is good.
- **We worship because we are created to glorify God** and enjoy Him forever!

Sometimes I come to church and I feel kind of worn out.

- Life can be busy, stressful, discouraging, and downright depressing.
- Have you ever felt that way?
  - When we come together at the church, we are **reminded that** \_\_\_\_\_. We're all in the same boat together!
  - We need an **ongoing renewal** of the presence of God; a rejuvenation of the Spirit of God in our hearts.
  - At church we are reminded that there is more to life than what this world has to offer; we **refocus our hearts on heaven**.

**Q: Is it okay to stay home from church if you are feeling tired and worn down? What can happen if we allow our emotions to dictate our decisions?**

So, the next time you come to church or perhaps to your small group, come with a heart of worship; a desire to give your heart to God, **holding nothing back** from Him.

- Don't worry about what the people around you are thinking, sing your heart out!
- And if you feel like raising your hands, go ahead!
- If you need to sit down, have a seat!
- And if you feel like dancing!? Well, just be careful.

As we talk about worship, most people usually think of the singing portion of a service, a worship band or maybe some good ole traditional hymns.

- In reality, **singing is just a sliver of the worship** that we can offer to God. At church, we worship God when we love one another, and take care of one another's needs.
- We can worship God as we allow the **Word of God** to penetrate our hearts.
- We worship Him when we give our very best in **tithes and offerings**, allowing Him to multiply the blessings He has given to us.
- And our worship doesn't even stop at the end of the service!
  - I love the passage in **Romans 12:1** where the Apostle Paul says, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."*
  - \_\_\_\_\_ **is an opportunity to worship** God in some way.

To worship means to ascribe worth to or honor.

- **As a community**, God has called us to **bring glory to Him in today's culture**.
  - We worship God **at home** when we talk to our family about what He has done.
  - We honor God **in the workplace** when we overflow with His joy.
  - We ascribe worth to His name when we overflow with love to complete **strangers** and they wonder what hit them!
- When people ask you about your joy or the love you show or they ask what church you go to, we as a community of believers worship God \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q: Read the words of Paul in Romans 1:16. Do people know what you believe and what you stand for?**

**Q: In Titus 2:10 believers are encouraged to do what they can to make "God our Savior attractive in every way". When people hear about Faith Community Church, what do they think? How does a community's opinion about our church bring glory to God?**

## **Worship through Serving**

**Serving is another form of worship.**

- You might **greet** people at the door,
- help them to find the children's sign-in area,
- **introduce** visitors to our welcome center team,
- serve **communion**,
- help the **tech** team,
- **teach** in the youth room,
- **participate** in the choir or on a worship team,
- or commit to serve on the safety team at one of our services – that is also a form of worship!

We'll be talking more about serving at a later time, so for now just consider that there is a place for everyone to worship in some way through serving at a weekend service.

- The same can be true for a **small group**, too.
- We honor God when we honor one another by
  - **hosting**,
  - **leading** a discussion,
  - **bringing a snack** to share,
  - or managing a list of **prayer requests**
  - if it's done with the right attitude, it's all an act of worship!

**Galatians 5:13** – *"Serve one another humbly in love."*

**Q: In what way is serving people a form of worship? Doesn't it put the focus on a person rather than God?**

## SUMMARY:

God waters our spirits in community as we worship together.

- When we assemble together for worship, it's more than just singing some songs to God.
- We worship with our hearts in song, as we receive God's Word, when we give to His work, and through serving as we use the gifts God has given to us.
- God is holy and good and worthy of our very best worship!

**Class Assignment:** Have you given any more thought to whom God might want you to connect with to help you grow in your faith?

## Memory Verse:

**1 Corinthians 12:25-27** - *"there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."*

PRAYER REQUESTS:

# WATER – Lesson 5: Community Fosters Spiritual Growth

## Part of the Puzzle

When I was young my family had a habit of putting together **jigsaw puzzles** – not like the kid kind with 24 pieces, but I mean like one thousand pieces or sometimes even more!

- And in our family, we weren't allowed to peek at the picture on the box until the puzzle was done.
- Inevitably, someone would hide the last piece somewhere so that they could complete the puzzle and be the first to **see the full picture**.

A puzzle is a good illustration of God's plan for creation.

- The timeline for mankind started thousands of years ago, and each person is a piece in this puzzle of time.
- Slowly, His plan becomes clearer and someday we'll see the full picture.
- But what I like most about this illustration is that **every single piece matters**.
  - The picture isn't complete until the last piece is put in place.
  - And **some puzzle pieces were more exciting** than others – some completed a border or maybe it was just the piece you were looking for to complete a section.
  - You are a part of God's plan for creation and your piece of the puzzle is an essential part of the timeline.
  - It is unique from all other pieces and it cannot be replaced by any other!
  - If you equip yourself with a good understanding of God's plan, then He can use your puzzle piece to **help others to better understand the picture** of what He is doing.

**Q: Romans 12:5 mentions that the body of Christ is made up of many parts; you are a part of something greater. How do you think that your puzzle piece fits in to God's master plan? Do you know what His purpose is for you yet?**

As we have mentioned in this study, God has a plan. His plan is to restore a relationship with all mankind by offering them salvation through His Son, Jesus, who died on the cross for us.

- **1 Timothy 2:4** says that God *"wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth."*
- **2 Peter 3:9** tells us that He doesn't want anyone to perish, but instead He desires *"everyone to come to repentance."*

It is true that God brings about the growth in a person's life through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, but **He intentionally uses \_\_\_\_\_ to carry out His plan.**

- We get to be a part of God's eternal design, a piece in the puzzle that is a part of the whole picture!
- There's a part of that last statement that **leaves me in awe** – God sees us as worthy and capable of making a difference in the lives of people for eternity...
- And then there's a **part of me that feels woefully underqualified** to carry out the will of God. Maybe you feel that way, too.
- **We come up with excuses**
  - I'm not smart enough
  - I don't have enough faith
  - I'm just a baby Christian
  - I can't share the gospel – I'm too scared
  - I can't preach I can't teach; what good am I?

**Q: Why do people who have been in the church their entire lives sometimes feel unqualified to teach or lead a Bible study or small group?**

- If you feel unqualified to be used by God, that's a great place to start – but not a good place to stay!
  - It's a good place to start because **it takes humility** to recognize that we don't know it all.
  - **But we don't want to be a \_\_\_\_\_** for God – we want to make a difference, leave a legacy, bear fruit for His kingdom.
  - We want our lives to matter – to count for something.
  - We want to be able to hear "well done good and faithful servant" and to know in our heart that we've done our very best to glorify God with the time He has given us on this earth.

## Take the Next Step

**You may feel like you can't** lead someone to Christ, you can't lead a Bible Study, you aren't able to serve in the Children's Ministry, or maybe you're uncomfortable even praying out loud.

- That's fine if you are new to the faith, but if you still feel that way after decades in the church, then something's not right!
- There are some people in the church who have attend groups and studies so long that they really should be leading, but they haven't taken the next step.

Regardless of where you feel you are at right now, **I want to encourage you to consider taking another step forward in your faith.**

**Q: 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, "For we live by faith, not by sight". What is the next step of faith God would want you to take? How will this prepare you for the plans He has for you down the road?**





- Never stop learning, **never stop growing**, and never stop asking God to use you in greater ways.
- Spiritual growth is something that never ends – the path to maturity leads us to the realization that we always have more to learn.

You might want to grow in your faith but **don't know where to start**. Well, let me give you some ideas.

1. **Stay grounded in the Bible** – It's the most important book you can read and the only one that you can fully trust. Read it. Study it. Live it!
2. **Don't try to do it alone** – we'll talk more about this next week, but having someone along side of you will help you to grow more than learning on your own.
3. **You get out of it what you put into it** – If you don't want to do the work, don't expect to grow very much. Growth takes intentional effort and a lot of introspective work!
4. **Ask God to do amazing things** – Pray that He would do something through your life that you could never do on your own. Trust God to stretch you and use you to display the wonder of His love and power. He is more than able!
  - I love 2 Chronicles 16:9 which says, *"For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him."*
  - He will help you to do what you are not able to do on your own.
5. **Use the resources available at church** – It's there for you to use!

**Q: What would be something that you would want God to do but you could never accomplish on your own? Be encouraged by Psalm 37:3-4.**

## Feed Yourself

Have you ever seen an adult acting like a child? It's embarrassing!

- Unfortunately, many people grow older but they never grow up.
  - Perhaps some names are coming to your mind right now.
  - The same is true of our spiritual growth.
  - Some people have been in the church for years, but they still act like babies in the faith; they have failed to grow up.

Many people come to church on a regular basis and lean on the teaching from the pastor for their spiritual growth.

- There's nothing wrong with that.
- But it's really like being spoon fed instead of feeding yourself.
- We don't want to be "spiritual infants" any longer than we need to be.
- The author of Hebrews talks about this in chapter 5, verses 12-14:

*"...by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."*

### Q: Why is it not enough to go to church to be spiritually fed?

So, to grow up spiritually we need to feed ourselves solid food on a regular basis.

- **Nobody here eats once a week**; we shouldn't treat our spiritual nourishment that way, either.
- Even if it's just for a short few minutes, **invest time into your** \_\_\_\_\_ each day.
- I encourage you to add some simple structure to your spiritual growth.
- Follow a devotional, read through the Bible in a year, find an inspirational study – and then commit to doing a little bit each day.

Some of you might be thinking, "But pastor, you don't understand my schedule – I really have **no extra time** in my life."

- If that's true, then you are choosing to be too busy!
  - We have time for the things that are most important to us because we make time for them.
  - **If God is your top priority, then I guarantee that you will find time for Him** in your schedule.
  - If you don't have time, it's your priorities that reveal what you value most.
  - Might I take this moment to remind you that **God is more than worthy** of your time – He gave it to you as a gift!

### Q: Do you have any tips for others about how to continue growing in faith? Consider 1 Timothy 4:15-16 and the importance of maturing as a believer.

## Resources for Growing in Your Faith

You can, of course, **use your Bible for personal study**, but there are so many other resources available today that can help you grow deep in faith and mature in your character.

We have never had **so much information available at our fingertips** as we do today.

- Through the **internet**, information has become available to the world.
- Now, some of that information is good and helpful, and some of it is not.
- If you are using the internet to expand your horizons, I commend to you the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:21 which exhort us to test everything and hold on to the good.
- The internet has many free Bible Study resources, apps, podcasts, videos, music, blogs, and websites where you can purchase books and products that will help you to grow.

Resources may also be **available through your church** for you to use if you wish.

- Perhaps your church has a **library** with books, devotionals, and Bible study helps categorized by topic.



- Maybe your church has a collection of family-friendly movies, music, or even some Christian board games.

**Q: What resources do you usually go to when you want to grow in your faith? Do you know of good online resources or any must-have books that you recommend?**

Resources for spiritual growth don't just come in book form, however.

- People are a great resource to help us grow.
  - Hopefully you are in a **small group** where you are engaged in conversations about how to apply your faith to everyday life.
  - Maybe you feel more comfortable in a one-on-one environment.
  - You might consider connecting with a **mentor** to go through a curriculum such as *Real Zeal* (info available on the last page of this book).
- Consider joining or starting a **Bible Study** to learn more about the Word of God.
- Your church may offer **classes** on topics that are relevant to living out your faith in today's culture.

## **SUMMARY:**

So, to bring this all together, growing in our faith is a lifelong process that takes intentional effort. When you engage in community, God will water your spirit through the people around you as we grow together. There are many resources available to you to minister to your needs right where you are at, and if there's anything else you need – just reach out and ask questions. Chances are if you have a need, God will provide for it through a person. As we serve one another, our piece of the puzzle makes the image of God more clear to the world!

**Class Assignment:** Have you given any more thought to whom God might want you to connect with to help you grow in your faith?

## **Memory Verse:**

**1 Corinthians 12:25-27** - *"there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."*

## **PRAYER REQUESTS:**

# WATER – Lesson 6: Accountability

## Growth Takes Work

### Are you one of those people who make New Year's resolutions?

- Usually near the eve of January 1<sup>st</sup>, many people make a commitment to some form of self-improvement.
  - Common resolutions might be to eat healthier, to exercise more, to get out of debt, or to lose a few pounds.
  - According to one recent study, only **8% of people who make a new year's resolution will carry it out and 80% of resolutions are abandoned by February.**  
*(Ipsos Survey of 2011 people making resolutions for 2020)*

When I was in high school I ran cross country. It wasn't easy, it was challenging, but I found that I could run for miles and still have energy left over. Recently, I decided to hop back on a treadmill after not doing much in the way for exercise. I thought that it would be like riding a bike and I would be back up and running – literally – in no time at all. What I found was quite the opposite. I started off at a good pace and quickly burned out – not just physically, but inside my spirit I questioned why I was even putting myself through all of this.

It wasn't fun like it used to be, and I didn't really care to be up to the challenge. So I trudged through it for a while, but I'll be honest – our treadmill sits in the basement collecting dust!

- Maybe you've had a similar experience with exercise or dieting. You feel like you are giving it your best shot, but moving forward and making progress seems like it is just too hard.
- I think that a lot of people have thrown in the towel with their spiritual growth as well.
  - It's just too hard to stick to a schedule. You don't know what to do, what to read, what to study.
  - And maybe you get off to a good start on January 1<sup>st</sup>, but by the time February rolls around you've long forgotten any habits that you've started for spiritual enrichment and all progress comes to a halt.

**Q: Have you ever made New Year's resolutions? Did you make your goal? Why do you think so many people fail to follow through with their resolutions?**

## Hire a Personal Trainer

### There is a reason that personal trainers exist.

- Personal trainers will help you to have **a plan** and to keep it and they'll monitor your **progress** along the way. They might even **push you** a little bit and stretch you until it becomes a bit uncomfortable.



- We need people in our lives to push us in order that we make progress in our spiritual growth. Mentors, pastors, friends, and family all help influence who you are becoming. What a blessing it is to have people who will care enough to push us through life's challenges and won't let us give up until we find victory!

This whole idea of community, where God waters our lives and breathes life into us through other people points out that God never intended for us to go through life alone.

- **We are** \_\_\_\_\_ upon one another. We are created to be in relationship.
  - Even when we look at the idea of the **Trinity**, we see God in relationship through three Persons – The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – in a perfect, balanced relationship.
  - In **Genesis 2:18** God says that it is not good for man to be alone. We often apply this to marriage because that is when God created Eve, but the principle applies to all of mankind – it is not good for us to be alone, we are better together.

Life has a way of bringing us trials. We have either just been through one, are in the middle of one, or might be about to enter into a difficult season in life.

- Jesus said that in this world we would have troubles, but He also said that we would never be alone.
  - God has given us His Spirit for strength, but He also places us into community so that we can thrive.
  - We talked about the importance of being a true friend to others and about how community fosters spiritual growth.

**What makes spiritual growth happen** in a community environment is **accountability**.

**Q: Read Ephesians 4:14-15. How have you seen your involvement at church help you to grow in your faith on a personal level?**

**Q: Looking back on your life, what has helped you to grow in your faith the most?**

- When we commit ourselves to the wellbeing of the community of believers around us, there is an expectation that we will watch out for one another.
- If each of us had just one person who cared about how we are becoming like the image of Christ, then the church would be transformed in a huge way overnight!
  - We can come to **church** and learn about God and His Word at a weekend service.
  - We can be inspired to grow through a **small group** discussion
  - **But in a relationship where we have accountability, that is where**

\_\_\_\_\_.

- With accountability we get beneath the surface, get rid of the masks, unpack our garbage, we are honest with ourselves, and unwilling to stay where we are at.
- Our goal is to become like Christ and we have a long way to go!
- There is a lot of work to do.
- Having one or two or three people in our lives will help us to get there much faster than on our own.

**Q: Look at Proverbs 27:17. Is it possible to grow in faith without being accountable to other Christians? Why is accountability so important?**

- A mentor or an accountability partner is like having **your own personal trainer**.
- They are committed to your success, and your success as an individual means that they have been successful as a mentor or friend.

There are **lots of benefits** to having someone along side of you:

- You're more likely to **achieve your goals** for growth.
- It will keep your progress **moving forward**.
- You will have someone to **share your burdens** with and to celebrate your **victories**.
- You'll **have more fun** along the way when you can share life with a friend.

## Finding an Accountability Partner

When Jesus started out His ministry He chose twelve disciples who would follow Him everywhere, live with Him, eat with Him, and learn from Him.

- Now, you probably don't want your friends following you everywhere you go, but it is good to have a few people who know your life inside and out.
  - Even **from among the Twelve, Jesus chose Peter, James, and John** to be His closest confidants, sharing some things with them that He did not with anyone else. The Transfiguration, some miracles, and revelations about the end times.
  - The point is this, you can have **many surface level friends**, but you only need one or two or three people to know you and love you \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q: During His earthly ministry, Jesus allowed some people to be closer to Him than others. Aren't we called to love everyone? What do we learn from His example?**

**Proverbs 18:24** – *"One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."*

- That's the kind of people we need in our lives.



Wouldn't it be great if someone you like just walked up to you and asked if you would be interested in helping one another to grow in your faith and character?

- Unfortunately, it's not likely to just happen, but you can be that person for someone else!
- Sometimes this happens naturally, but if you don't already have one or two friends who truly care about you, why not **make it happen**?
- Or perhaps you have some good, close friends, but maybe you need to bring some **structure to your relationship** by challenging them with some regular accountability.
- It might be someone who is already in your small group, or maybe someone you recently met and you just hit it off right away.

If you are looking for an accountability partner or a group of two or three others, here are some thoughts to consider:

1. **Start with prayer** – ask God to lead you to someone who will tell you what you need to hear.
2. **Avoid opposite gender relationships** – this can lead to temptation and emotions can skew trust and the transparency you desire to have.
3. **Ask** – Not through a text or social media.
  - Talk to them in person if possible, or through a phone call if needed.
  - Help them to understand what you are hoping to gain through meeting together regularly for encouragement and accountability.
4. **Give them the freedom to say no.**
  - They may not have time in their schedule to give you what you need.
  - Don't take it personally, and don't guilt them into changing their mind.
  - You don't want to be stuck in a relationship that is full of stress.
5. **Be patient, but don't give up!**
  - Expect that a few people may not be able to or interested.
  - It may take a while, but it is worth the effort.
  - Continue in prayer and perhaps seek some counsel from a pastor or friend.

**Q: Read James 5:16. Have you ever been in a friendship where you were held accountable for your actions? If so, please share about some of the benefits of your experience.**

**Q: Do you have any creative ideas for others on how to find a good mentor or friend for accountability?**

## **Bring Structure to Your Group**

Friends get together all of the time to talk about the weather, sports, politics, or other surface level conversations. Accountability helps you to go deeper.

- If you want your relationship to grow deep in trust and to go beyond shallow discussion, it would be good to consider being intentional about having some type of structure for your time together.
  - You might \_\_\_\_\_ to follow each time you get together, or perhaps you can work on it personally and then talk about it when you meet.
  - If you are looking for a good book to study, check out our **Real Zeal** curriculum and the **Building on the Rock** books mentioned at the back of this book.
  - There are many other study options as well. Make sure that you find a curriculum with a good reputation for being solid in what it teaches.
  - Another option would simply be to **read a book or a book of the Bible** together.
  - Having some structure will ensure that you are filling your hearts and minds with good, spiritual food.
- We don't just want to fill our minds with information; however, we want to apply it to our lives.
- **Asking one another questions** is a good way to learn about the real you.
- Most people have a version of themselves that they present to the world which is often different from the real version of who they are.
  - How are you doing – really?
  - What has God been teaching you recently?
  - What is your greatest challenge right now? How can I be praying for you?
  - What is your next step in following God's will for your life?
  - Are you keeping your heart and mind pure in all areas?
  - Is there anything else I should know about?
- Asking questions encourages vulnerability which requires trust.
- If you are in an accountability relationship, be the first to model vulnerability, but avoid dumping your garbage out in a discussion all at once or too soon!
- This can be overwhelming.
- Trust takes time to grow, and it can all be lost in a moment, so be very aware of how you treat the information that is shared in your conversations.

**Q: Consider Ephesians 5:15-16. Why do you think that it's important to have structure for your conversations? Is it really that necessary?**

**Q: If you've been in an accountability or discipleship relationship, what kind of structure did you use? See another example of discipleship in Titus 2: 1-8.**

## Going Deep

As kids on the football field, you may have played a game where the quarterback told you to "go deep." Time was of the essence and your team needed a big play to make progress towards the win.





## If you want to make progress toward becoming like Jesus, you'll need to "go deep."

- Going deep beneath the surface of our lives is **an effort to clean up the muck** and mess that comes through living life in a fallen world.
  - It might be dealing with issues related to our family of origin, bitterness that eats us up, habits we hang on to, or pent up anger toward a guy who cut you off in traffic earlier today.
  - It can be \_\_\_\_\_, discouraging, and unpleasant, but these are the parts of our lives that **hold back God's best for us**; His joy, peace, and freedom.
  - Being transparent and vulnerable is especially difficult for men because our culture has portrayed this as a sign of weakness.
  - Those who have experienced this kind of friendship will tell you that they wouldn't trade it for the world!

After you've built some trust, there will be a time when you need to speak the truth in love.

- We don't need to beat one another over the head with Bible scriptures, but sometimes we need to hear the truth.
- **It is not loving to withhold the truth** when it needs to be said.
  - Jesus was not afraid to tell Peter he was wrong,
  - He didn't ignore the sin of the adulteress (but still offered her grace),
  - He let the Pharisees know that they failed to understand the heart of God.
  - He told them the truth

*Better is open rebuke  
than hidden love.*

*~ Proverbs 27:5*

Can you imagine how good it would be to have someone who cares, who listens, who helps, who doesn't judge you but tells you what you might not want to hear?

**Q: Is there someone in your life that you could see yourself opening up to? Is this someone God might want you to meet with for encouragement or exhortation?**

**Q: Who will you ask?**

It seems to be **a rare thing** today, but that is what God has called the Church to be; interconnected with one another in authentic relationship.

- So, find someone, commit to meeting together regularly, make it a priority, and be sure to ask one another good questions so that your conversation is deep and meaningful.
  - If done right, an accountability relationship **can** \_\_\_\_\_ – even if you move to opposite ends of the world.

- Fortunately, with today's technology has made the world much smaller and it's possible to easily connect with people anywhere there is an internet connection.
- Even so, in a world where Facebook friendships come and go, **nothing beats a face-to-face conversation** with a true friend that is seasoned with love, grace, and truth.
- I hope that you are able to be that kind of friend to someone else.

### SUMMARY:

Over the last several weeks we have been looking at how God uses COMMUNITY to water our spirit so that we grow.

- We are made for COMMUNITY which we experience through the local **church**.
- In COMMUNITY, we are to be **unified** in spirit through a bond of love and peace.
- We have **fellowship** with one another and are called to honor one another as brothers and sisters in a caring Family.
- Out of gratitude we lift up our **worship** together as a COMMUNITY to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
- Our goal is to make God's name great in this world through the life He has given to us.
- We are the hands and feet of Jesus to the world as we demonstrate God's love in action with one voice – as a COMMUNITY.
- In order to do this well, we seek to **grow in our faith** and challenge one another **through accountability** to remain steadfast in reaching out to a lost world that needs to hear the message that we've been given.
- The message is that God invites you to be a part of His family. We are a family and a COMMUNITY of believers. We are the Kingdom of God upon the earth. We are the Church.

I'm so glad that you've joined us for the discussion as we talk about this process of Plant, Water, Grow, and Harvest.

- We completed the first half of our study and I hope you'll return as we dig into what God wants to do with your life as we grow and He produces a harvest through us.
- Thank you for being here with us! God bless

**Class Assignment:** If you haven't already, ask someone about starting to meet on a regular basis to get to know them and see where God leads!

### Memory Verse Final Review:

**1 Corinthians 12:25-27** - *"there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."*

### PRAYER REQUESTS:



# Phase 3: GROW



**GROW** – *SERVING God and people*

Application: Get connected to serving in a ministry that excites you



We have been looking at the process of how a follower of Jesus Christ grows from the time God starts to plant seeds of truth in their heart and works in us to produce a harvest for the glory of His name.

- In our discussions we've talked about how God takes the seeds He has planted and He then waters them as we immerse ourselves in a community of fellowship with others – the family of God.
- Next, we will look at how we really grow in our faith as we start to apply what we've learned in action; we serve other people with His love.
- Then we'll wrap everything up with a focus on how to bring a harvest by sharing our faith with those around us.

We see this pattern laid out in scripture, but so many Christians fail to live it out in their lives. Let's challenge one another to faithfully carry out God's will as we seek to produce a harvest together.

## GROW – Lesson 1: Spiritual Gifts

**Q: How would you describe spiritual gifts? Do you already have an idea of what your spiritual gifts are?**

### What is a Spiritual Gift and what is it not?

Having an accurate understanding of what a spiritual gift is can be a bit confusing, so let's break this down a bit. If we don't understand why He gives us a gift, then we may not use it in the way that God originally intended.

What a spiritual gift is NOT:

- This gift is **not just what you are good at**. It is more than being able to draw well, to cook up a mean batch of spare ribs, or knowing how to run a successful event.
- A spiritual gift is not intended for selfish gain. It should not be used to promote personal fame or status or to bolster a person's ego. If that were the case, we would be building our own kingdom, but it is God's kingdom that we want to grow.

What a Spiritual gift IS:

- **Spiritual gifts** are special abilities that God gives us through the power of the Holy Spirit after we have personally received the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.
- A spiritual gift is \_\_\_\_\_ **with a purpose**. The purpose of a spiritual gift is to serve others and to build them up.

- **1 Corinthians 12:7** says, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” It’s not for our own benefit, but **for us to use** \_\_\_\_\_.
- Remember that God uses people to carry out His will and that means that He wants to use you to help fulfill a part of His master plan!
- Your gift might be connected to something that you are already good at, but before you followed Christ it did not have purpose. God can use your talents to be a gift that He can use to build His kingdom, but this isn’t always the case.
- It may also be that your spiritual gift(s) was something completely new to you when the Holy Spirit came into your life!

## What the Bible Says About Spiritual Gifts

If you’ll recall, earlier in this study we discussed how we are:

### 1. Created for community

- Jesus said that we should, “love one another” and commands us to “serve one another in love.” (*Gal. 5:13*) *There are many passages that talk about caring for one another.*
- When you believe in Jesus Christ, you become part of a family—through Christ. God the Father adopts us into His family. (*1 Th. 4:10; 1 Pet. 2:17*)

### 2. Created with a purpose

- From the beginning, God had it in mind that we would be a part of His master plan.
- In **Ephesians 2:10** we read, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”
- The works we do are intended to bring glory to God. As it says in **1 Peter 4:11**, “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”

For further study of the spiritual gifts, you may want to check out these other passages in the Bible: **Romans 12**, **Ephesians 4**, and **1 Corinthians 12**.

To summarize these passages,

1. We are all different and have been given different gifts as the Spirit chooses
2. Our gifts were intended to be used
3. Gifts are to benefit the common good of others
4. Every person is important
5. Our goal together is to become spiritually mature, like Jesus

### Q: What happens when someone in the church chooses not to use their spiritual gifts?

We shouldn’t neglect our gift (*1 Timothy 4:14*), but should use it to bless others. If we fail at this, then the body of Christ is not \_\_\_\_\_.

## Examples of Spiritual Gifts from Scripture

Our spiritual gifts come from the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit was not sent to us prior to the ministry of Christ, therefore the list of spiritual gifts, or the "*charismata*", comes from the New Testament.

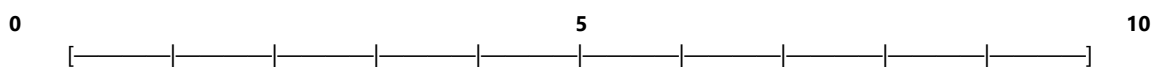
There is no single list of spiritual gifts provided in scripture, but we can put together quite a few if we look at passages such as those mentioned above.

- Lists of spiritual gifts may vary a bit, but I'd like to share a pretty standard list to consider, along with a simple survey for you to take to get an idea of how God may have gifted you.
- Ideally, you would have others take this survey on your behalf since our opinion of ourselves may sometimes be skewed. If there is someone who comes to mind who knows you well, you might consider asking them to take this survey and rate how each gift describes you.
- No **spiritual gifts test** is perfect; **it's just a tool** to help you understand where you are at right now. Your spiritual gifts may grow and develop as your faith matures, but most likely you'll see God using you in some areas more than others. **Read the descriptions below and then rate on a scale of 0-10** how much each gift describes what others would say about you.

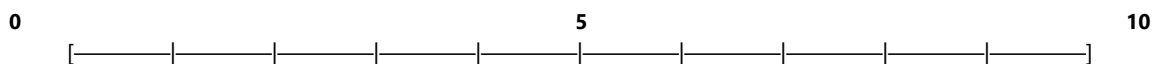
### Spiritual Gifts

- Administration
- Apostleship
- Discernment
- Evangelism
- Exhortation
- Faith
- Giving
- Healing
- Helps
- Hospitality
- Knowledge
- Leadership
- Mercy
- Miracles
- Prophecy
- Shepherding
- Speaking in Tongues
- Interpret Tongues
- Teaching/Preaching

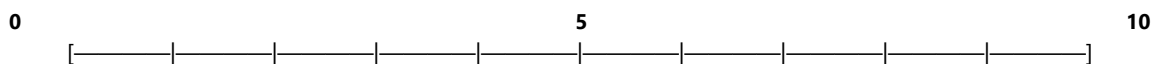
## Spiritual Gift Survey



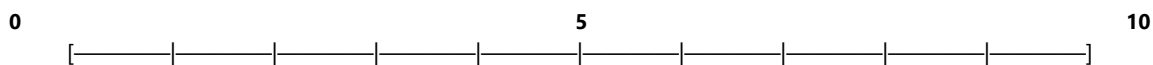
**Administration** - Someone with this gift will have the ability to plan ahead, organize information, and to manage people in a way that efficiently carries out the will of God. They thrive in structured environments and are helpful everything in the church to run smoothly.



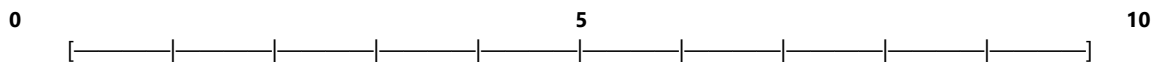
**Apostle** - An *apostle* has the passion and ability to take the message of Christ to places where God is doing something new. Planting a church, starting a mission, or building a ministry from scratch might be on their to do list. They will not let fear get in the way of what they feel God is directing them to accomplish for His glory.



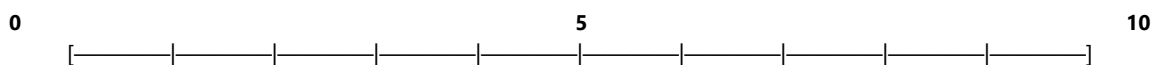
**Discernment** - Being able to distinguish good from evil and truth from a lie. They have the ability to sense when something isn't quite right even if they cannot put it into words. It is the ability to know whether a behavior, a teaching, or a statement comes from God, from man, or from the spiritual forces of evil.



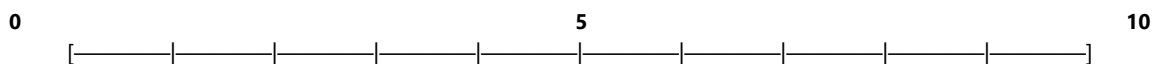
**Evangelism** - People with this gift have a strong passion to let others know about the salvation that is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They actively look for opportunities to share their faith and testimony with others so that they will have the opportunity to respond to the gospel message.



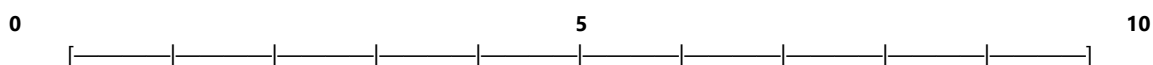
**Exhortation** - This gift pertains to telling people what they need to hear, whether they want to hear it or not. It may be a word of encouragement, correction, rebuke, or an affirmation of God's power at work in someone's life. People with this gift help others by sharing the truth without being disrespectful, even if it is hard to hear.



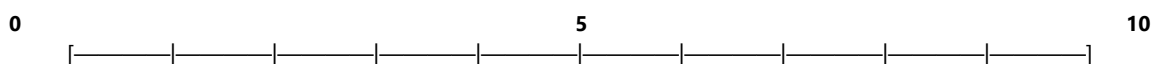
**Faith** - The ability to trust in God regardless of the circumstances. It means having a steadfast peace in one's spirit that God is in control, and that He loves us and has a plan. He will be faithful to carry out His will as it is laid out in scripture. These people never give up hope because they are rooted in the Truth of God's Word.



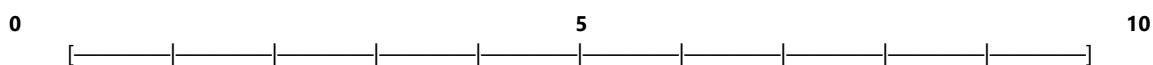
**Giving** - It is more blessed to give than to receive, so let's be generous until it hurts if it will bless someone in some way! Giving means blessing others with your time, money, and resources in the name of Christ with the hope that people will receive it as a tangible expression of God's love for them.



**Healing** - The supernatural ability to invite God to miraculously restore the physical wellbeing of a person's physical body. This gift goes beyond medicine and holistic treatments; it is God using a faithful servant to bring an undeniable demonstration of His power to reveal Himself to someone with a physical need and to those around them.

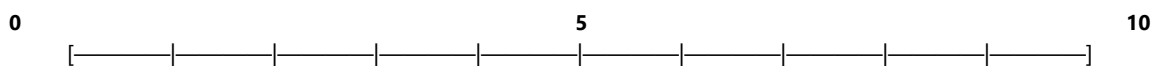


**Helps** - When someone needs a hand of support, this person will come along side and join in the work that another person is seeking to accomplish. In this way they are being the hands and feet of Jesus to show others the love of God. This person is willing to make sacrifices in their agenda to meet the needs of others.

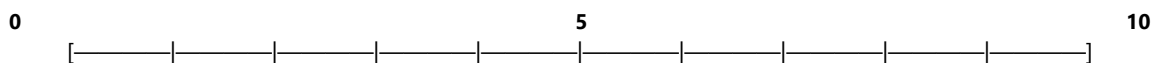


**Hospitality** - Anyone with this gift is able to make others feel welcome and at ease. They are the first to open their doors to host a party or small group, and thrive off of the opportunity to help

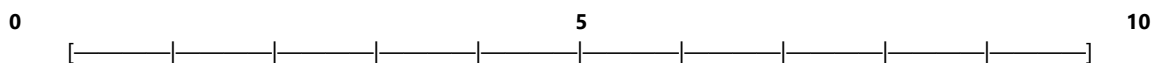
people to have a good time. They show God's love by offering a place where others can feel valued as someone made in the image of God.



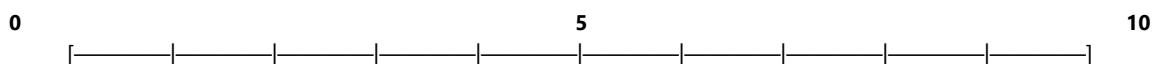
**Knowledge** - God gives some people the ability to excel at retaining information to share at the appropriate time. It may be in a specialized area or a general understanding of the world we live in. People with this gift are often the first person we think of who might be able to answer a tough question that comes to mind.



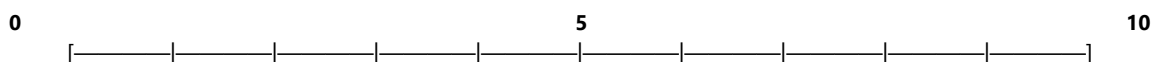
**Leadership** - Someone who is a strong leader is able to communicate a vision in a way that mobilizes people to action. They are able to bring order out of chaos and establish the culture or "feel" of a group. The leader is not necessarily the one in authority; it may just be the person that people turn to for direction, or the first person to step forward when no one else is sure what to do. A leader is someone that people trust.



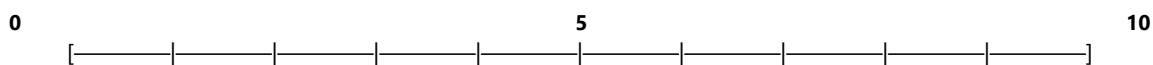
**Mercy** - When someone is hurting, burdened, or oppressed, the gift of mercy will show up to help. This person recognizes the needs of those around them and has compassion for those in need. They will be able to look beyond a person's behavior or appearance to see the inherent value that God places upon those He loves.



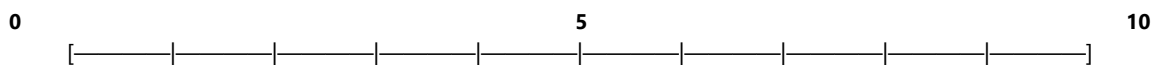
**Miracles** - Those with the gift of miraculous powers are given the ability to demonstrate the power of God in supernatural ways. Miracles cannot be explained apart from the hand of God at work and should never be used for personal gain, fame, or fortune. Miracles are a reminder to us of God's power and sovereignty.



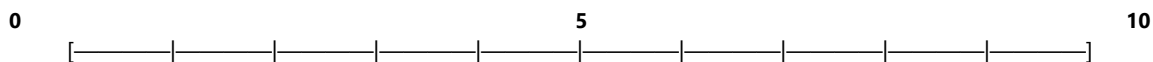
**Pastor/Shepherding** - Like a shepherd, a pastor cares for a flock of believers, making sure that they are fed, protected, and growing healthy. Shepherds have a genuine care for people and their daily needs. They are gentle but willing to fight in order to protect from false teaching or sinful behavior. They encourage people to follow the example of Christ (the Good Shepherd) in their lives.



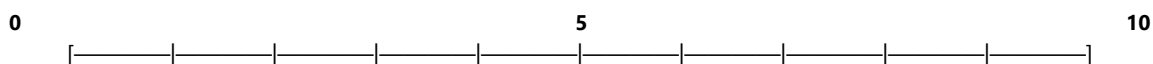
**Prophecy** - There are two aspects of prophecy; FOREtelling (revealing the future) and FORTHtelling (speaking forth the truth). The prophet receives a message of God and then delivers it to whom God instructs. It may be an individual or a group and God may send them to believers or unbelievers. They will never speak anything that is contrary to the Word of God.



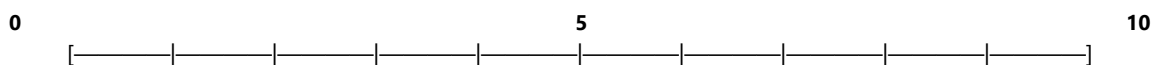
**Service** - Similar to the gift of helps, a person with the gift of service will use their hands and feet to accomplish tasks as a demonstration of love. It is different in that they don't need to wait for an opportunity to help or support someone in need; it is always on their heart to look for a way to bless others. Seldom do they sit and watch others do the work but jump in to do what needs to be done - even if no one has asked them to.



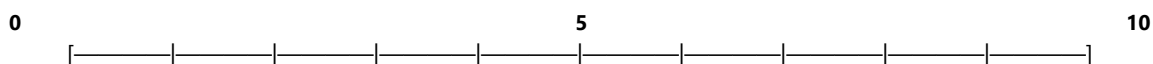
**Speaking/Preaching** - This is one of the greatest fears for many, but not for those with a gift to speak because the desire comes to them from the Spirit of God. Some people talk a lot, but people with this gift draw in others to hear what they have to say. They use this gift to communicate the will of God and the Word of God and seek to inspire and equip others to be more fully devoted to Him.



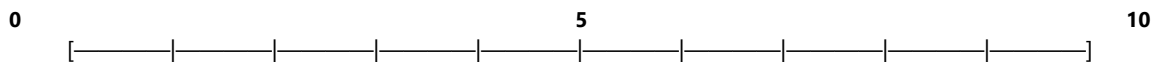
**Teaching** - A teacher understands how people learn, considers their ability to comprehend, and communicates an idea in a way that people understand. They have a passion to help others grasp new information or to correct misinformation. They love to see the light bulb come on for people learning something for the first time.



**Tongues** - The Spirit of God enables some people to speak in another language to bring a message to a body of believers. At times in scripture, the Spirit has manifested the presence of God in **tongues** as known foreign languages, and other times as a language unknown to mankind. The gift of tongues bears witness to the work and presence of the Holy Spirit.



**Interpretation of Tongues** - Tongues without an interpretation is useless and without benefit to its hearers. When God gives a message through the gift of tongues, He will also enable someone to translate the message so that it can edify those gathered to hear it. It is a supernatural ability to understand what can only be explained by the Spirit of God.



**Wisdom** - Wisdom is knowledge rightly applied. You can have all of the knowledge in the world, but if you don't know how to use it, then it's just information. Someone who is wise is able to make sound decisions based in knowledge while led by the Spirit. They are able to take God's revealed plan and apply it correctly to a specific situation that may seem complicated to others.



Now look back and circle the three gifts that have the highest scores. Do you think that these accurately represent how God has been using you to help other people? Again, it might be a good idea to **ask some friends and family that know you well what they think** your strongest areas might be.

## How to Apply Your Spiritual Gifts

We've already pointed out that the purpose of these God-given gifts is to benefit the church, but how do we apply them?

- Not only does God give us gifts to use to build up the Church, but **He also instills** in each of us certain \_\_\_\_\_. When we line these desires up with the Word of God, we begin to narrow down what that might look like.
- Do you have a passion to teach children? Perhaps you like to build or landscape. Maybe your heart cries out for the rights of the unborn or has compassion for the elderly.
- It's also possible that you've had an **experience** that has changed the way that you view life; you've lost a child, you spent some time in the hospital, you had a struggle with an addiction, you've spent time in jail... God can use these experiences, along with your spiritual gift(s), to build His Church!

**It's like a GPS (Global Positioning System) narrowing down where you are at in the big map of God's creation.**

- We take our **G**ifts, our **P**assions, and look at how we can **S**erve God in His church. We look at the blessings that God has given to us and it helps us to hone in on what His will is for our lives. We'll be talking more about that in our next lesson!
- Taking a step back, let's review this process of spiritual growth:
  - God PLANTS seeds of truth in our heart through His *Word* – the Bible
  - Then He WATERS those seeds through *Community* with other believers
  - And we GROW as we use our spiritual gifts to *Serve* others
  - So that we can produce a HARVEST as we share our faith through showing God's love to people whose hearts He is working in

**Q: Do you have a good idea what your gifts are?**

**Q: What are your greatest passions and desires? What makes your heart rate jump?**

*The Holy Spirit gives each spiritual gifts and passions to build up*

**Some people are very visionary** and have concrete ideas about how God can use them to bless others.

- If this describes you, God may want you to start something new – plant a church, establish a new ministry at your church, start a **parachurch ministry**.
- These people often have gifts for leadership or apostleship or administration.
- But this only describes a fraction of everyone out there – for most people it isn't that easy to see how God has created them to serve Him.

**You may be still struggling to understand** how your passions and your gifts work together. Maybe you don't know how you can use them to minister to others.

- Your next step may be to join in a ministry that God is already working through.
- God can use our different gifts to achieve a common goal as we work together.
- Let's look at an example together:
  - Your church wants to **start a meals ministry** to feed people who live in underprivileged areas in your community.
  - You'll need people with a gift of **leadership** to provide a vision of what the need is.
  - You'll need people with a gift of **giving** to provide the needed resources to give away.
  - You'll need people with a gift of **administration** to fill in the details, find volunteers, organize people, and plan events.
  - You'll need people with the gift of **mercy** or **hospitality** to minister to the families that you reach out to.
  - You'll need people with a **passion** to serve and help out to box/bag food items, load it into vehicles, or place it on shelves for people to come pick up.
  - And you'll need people with a passion to pray for the family's spiritual, physical, and emotional needs.
- We could go on, but you get the idea. We should all have a love for people, and God can use whatever gifts we have to offer to serve the Church and build His kingdom.

**Q: Are you already serving in a ministry at the church? Do you find it fulfilling? Why or why not?**

**Q: If you could describe the perfect ministry for your gifts and passions, what would it look like?**

It is so important to understand the concept that **God has created you for some things and not for others.**

- If you fail to grasp this, you will not likely find ministry to be exciting or fulfilling.
- Serving areas that we aren't gifted at is one of the reasons people burn out.



- Have you ever been in a church where the pastor desperately pleads for someone to step up and serve in the children's ministry because they are struggling to find volunteers?
  - If Joe in the back row doesn't really like kids but he really wants to support the pastor and the church, he may raise his hand to help.
  - But if he isn't gifted or passionate about it, it will show in his attitude and he will more than likely have an unpleasant experience – along with those that he is trying to minister to.
  - In God's Church, **we want the right \_\_\_\_\_ in the right \_\_\_\_\_ for the right \_\_\_\_\_!**
- If you jump into a ministry, don't let yourself feel trapped where you are at; consider exploring other ideas.
- Ask God for direction and be willing to follow where He leads you. You may find yourself enjoying a ministry that you never even thought you'd consider!

Keep in mind that your spiritual gifts will generally remain the same, but your **passions may change with different seasons of life.**

**Q: How have your passions changed over time? Do you recognize why or how this changed?**

- You may find yourself really connecting with children for a season, especially if you have young children or grandchildren.
- Later in life God may call you to minister to aging parents or other elderly people.
- You might have a life experience that turns your world upside down and compels you to do something in response to a need.
  - You'll probably know when it's time to move on from a ministry, but I encourage you to consider when that time comes not to leave a gaping hole behind you in the ministry.
  - Find someone who can carry on the work that God has been doing so that the needs of people you've been ministering to are not hindered.
  - Prepare and train someone and show them how rewarding ministry can be.
  - Then follow the Spirit's leading to do what He has prepared you to do!

## **SUMMARY:**

God created the church to be a place where people's needs are met and He uses people to meet those needs. The Holy Spirit enables people to do this by giving each person a spiritual gift or gifts that will benefit the Church in some way. It is important to recognize what our gifts and passions are so that we can serve in a ministry that brings fulfillment to our spirit.

**Class Assignment:** For the next six weeks, consider the spiritual gifts and passions that God has given to you and how He has uniquely prepared you to do His will. If you don't already have a ministry that you serve on a regular basis, pray about getting connected to a place where you can

both bless others and be blessed in return! Talk to your pastor or a ministry leader about your next steps. Plan to get your feet wet in ministry at church and perhaps explore some other ideas as well.

For this next week, pray about how God might want to use your spiritual gifts (from the survey above) in some way to bless your church.

**Memory Verse:**

**1 Peter 4:10-11** - *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."*

PRAYER REQUESTS:



## GROW – Lesson 2: Discerning the Will of God

**How do we come to understand what God wants from us,** specifically when we face big decisions and hard questions that confront us throughout life? We are called to make disciples of all nations, but who does God want me to reach out to? I know that I want to serve God, but how and where does He want me to go? What degree should I pursue? What spouse should I marry? Should we buy a house? Do we need a new car? How do we discern His will as He gently guides us through the Holy Spirit?

*"Your call will become clear as your mind is transformed by the reading of Scripture and the internal work of God's Spirit. The Lord never hides His will from us. In time, as you obey the call first to follow, your destiny will unfold before you. The difficulty will lie in keeping other concerns from*

### Your Relationship with God

Have you ever felt like you just **don't know what God wants from you**? If so, you're not alone. Let's look at some biblical principles that help us to know God's will.

In the Church we often talk about having **a relationship with God**, but it's **not the same kind of relationship** that we have with our friends and family.

- Jesus is our friend, but He is not a tangible being. (Jn. 15:14-14)
- He is always with us, but we can't hug Him or hold His hand. (Mt. 28:20)
- We don't see the expression on His face when we praise Him or serve Him.
- We can talk to Him, but we shouldn't expect to hear Him respond with an audible voice.

Jesus is our friend but He is not our equal – He is our Lord and King! He speaks to us through His Word and we respond to Him in prayer. He may also speak to our spirit with a gentle nudge, but we must be careful to always align our hearts and will with His.

God reveals His will to us through three levels of revelation.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ **(or indirect) Revelation** – We see the character of God revealed through His creation and observe structure, order, purpose, beauty, and creativity.
  - He places us into a family to be loved and cared for as a reflection of His love.
  - He provides rain and food for us.
  - We understand that we live in a fallen world and this life is temporary.
  - We learn about Him through the work that He has done.

**Q: What parts of God's creation speak to you most about who He is?**

2. \_\_\_\_\_ **(or direct) Revelation** – God has revealed Himself to us through His Word. All we need to know about God and His plan can be found in the Bible.

- God may not tell you who you should marry, but He will tell you what kind of person to look for.
- He won't tell you what to do for a career, but He teaches us that whatever we do here on this earth, we are storing up treasure in heaven.
- He may not tell you where you should go out for dinner, but He does tell us to take care of our bodies and to be good stewards of our money.
- The Bible may not tell us what to do, but it tells us how God wants us to live.
- We can always depend on the Bible to give us an accurate picture of God's will. If you don't know what God wants you to do, it is always the best place to start.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ **Revelation** – This is His revelation to us individually as we abide in the Holy Spirit. (Some might describe this as a branch of special/direct revelation.)

- If *general* revelation is God showing Himself in creation and *special* revelation is God showing Himself to mankind, *particular* revelation is God showing Himself to us.
  - We see examples of this in scripture when people have experienced a direct revelation of God through angels.
  - He got Moses' attention through a burning bush.
  - He touched some people's lives through miracles and healings.
  - For Elijah it was a gentle whisper.
  - For Belshazzar it was a hand writing on the wall.
  - For Gideon it was a fleece...
- God doesn't reveal Himself to everyone in these ways, but ministers to each of us as He sees fit.
  - He may speak to some through answered prayers.
  - God may speak to you through an event or circumstance in your life that helps you to understand better what He has already stated in His Word.
  - He will never speak something to you that contradicts what He says in the Bible.
- When placed alongside the Word of God, *particular* revelation is where we learn what God's will is for our lives.

*God wants to be found by us; He reveals Himself through creation, His Word, and our*

**Q: How have you heard God speaking to you directly? Do you have a hard time hearing from God directly? Why do some people have a difficult time knowing what God wants to say to them?**

**Q: Of the three types of revelation mentioned above, in what ways do you feel God speaking to you most clearly?**

## Prepare your heart to know God's will

Understanding God's will can be tricky because we all have a selfish nature. That means that we can be guilty of interpreting the world around us by what we want to see rather than what really is.

- We let our emotions drive our decisions, our desires, our hopes and wishes, but just because something makes us happy doesn't mean that it is the will of God.
- If you want to know God's will it is possible, but you might not want to do what God has planned for you!

### 1. To know God's will, you need to be \_\_\_\_\_.

- Being in touch with God's heart goes beyond knowing what the Bible teaches.
- The Pharisees knew the Torah inside and out yet Jesus deemed their righteousness unworthy of the kingdom of heaven.
- **Matthew 5:20** says, *"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."*
- This was hard for the people to grasp because the Pharisees were viewed as the most righteous men of all. But God looks at our hearts (*1 Sam. 16:7*).
- If you want to know God's heart, then you'll need to know His Word. There are no shortcuts to this! Study the Bible and you'll learn about the heart of God.

### Q: What is the key to connecting to the heart of God?

### 2. To know God's will, you need to be willing to \_\_\_\_\_.

- No one ever said that sin wasn't appealing.
- Just because it brings us pleasure doesn't make it right or healthy or pleasing to God. If God declares it wrong, then He must have said it for a reason.
- He loves us and He wants what is best for us and He knows what is best.
- It is easier to give into sin than to resist it, but God commands us to obey.
- We cannot pretend to be following God when we are living in sin.
- Remember **2 Chronicles 16:9**? *"For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him."*
- Being fully committed means obeying God in every area of our life.

### Q: Is there anything in your life that you find difficult to resist or that you are unwilling to give up?

### 3. To know God's will, you need to be willing to \_\_\_\_\_.

- When you want what God wants more than what you want, then you know you're on the right track!
- When we know what we're supposed to do and we're scared, He calls us to "trust and obey" (*Pr. 3:5-7*). He commands us to *"be strong and courageous"* (*Jos. 1:6-9*).

- We recognize that God may lead us to uncomfortable places, dangerous places, even treacherous places.
  - Many Christians have faced trials, persecution, and death. Stephen, Peter, Paul, Martin Luther, Tyndale, Thomas Cranmer, and others whose names are not forgotten by the One for whom they gave the ultimate sacrifice.
  - When we face rejection or even if we fail in the eyes of men, if we are truly living for the glory of God, then we have succeeded in being faithful to His will.
  - Who will go? May we answer as the prophet Isaiah, *"Here am I. Send me!"* (Is. 6:8)

**Q: How far would you go to follow God? Where would you draw a line in the sand?**

**If you are acquainted with God's Word, willing to deny your selfish nature, and can follow wherever He leads, then you will be able to perceive and do the will of God.**

- This is probably a good time to remind you that followers of Christ have been called to die to ourselves:
- **Galatians 2:20** – *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

**Q: How have your passions changed over time? Do you recognize why or how this changed?**

Does this sound impossible? Too idealistic? Perhaps we might consider the words of Jesus, *"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"* (Mt. 19:26; Mk. 10:27; Lk. 18:27)

If you want to know the will of God it will require you to be diligent, it will require sacrifice, and **it will cause you to be uncomfortable.**

We are creatures of comfort, but for those who wish to give up their temporary comforts in this life, God has promised a great reward. Consider these verses:

- **1 Corinthians 15:58** – *"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."*
- **James 1:12** – *"Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him."*
- **Philippians 3:14** – *"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*



## God's Plan For Me

In review, God has revealed His general will for mankind in His Word and He has revealed some aspects of His character through His creation. But that still doesn't answer the **questions that are unique to our life situation**.

- How do we know the right person to marry?
- How should we choose what career path to take?
- Should we buy a house?
- What church should we attend?
- Does God want us to move?
- Do these khaki socks match my shirt?

Okay, maybe not all questions carry the same weight, but there isn't anything that is off limits in our conversations with God!

- He doesn't want us to wander through this life without direction.
- Sometimes He gives us a very clear answer – a closed door or an unexpected opportunity that would be hard to pass up.
- Other times it may be hard to know what God wants us to do.

Years ago, I was told that "God has a wonderful plan for your life."

- The message was intended to get me excited about a vision for my future.
- Unfortunately, it has caused me a lot of undue stress.
- I had this idea in my mind that God had a specific plan and either I was abiding in His will or I was failing to complete my God-given mission.
- Though God does know the beginning from the end, He doesn't want us to stress out about what we do for Him.
- **He loves us \_\_\_\_\_, despite our failures, and aside from our accomplishments!**

God has given us life as a gift to use to glorify Him. Our lives are an offering. Romans 12:1 says, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."*

- Our lives are an open book and we have some freedom to write about what we want our lives to look like.
- Of course, it is ultimately God who is in control (see *Pr. 16:9*), but He gives us the freewill to give as much or as little of our hearts to Him that we are willing to give.
- In 1 Corinthians 6:12, the Apostle Paul indicates that though we have the freedom to do anything we want, some choices are better than others.
- The best choice that we can make is to do what God wants us to do, so what we really need to do is to align our hearts with God's heart.
- Psalm 37:4 says, *"Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."*
- If we want what He wants, then we will have what our hearts truly yearn for!

*God's love for  
us is NOT  
based upon  
what we do for  
Him.  
His love is*

**What is God's plan** for you? To **love Him with all your heart**, soul, mind, and strength.

- That's it! If we could boil the Bible down to one phrase, that would be it.
- Jesus Himself called this \_\_\_\_\_! (Mt. 22:36-38; Mk. 12:28-30)
- Sometimes we can make life so complicated worrying about plans and decisions and goals and really only one thing is important – Love God with all you've got!
- If we can get this down, then everything else falls into place!

## Making the Best Choice

So, discerning the will of God **isn't about discovering some mysterious plan** that He desires for you to achieve before you die.

- It is **making the best choices** that bring honor and glory to His name.
- Should you marry this person? Answer: Is their life heading in a direction that will help you to honor God more?
- What career should you choose? Answer: How can you best honor God and point others to Him using your gifts and passions in the days ahead?
- Should you buy a house or a new car? Answer: What is my motive for making this purchase? Do I want to impress people or is it something that God can use to expand His glory through my life?
- What church should I/we attend? Answer: Where can you be spiritually fed and also contribute to the mission of a church or ministry?

## Words of Wisdom

In order to not over-simplify God's will for us, let's look at some tried and true helpful hints for discerning the will of God for your life.

### 1. Seek His Word

We've already laid a foundation upon the inspired Word of God - the Bible.

- You can trust what it says and it offers the solution to any question you may have, at least to a certain degree.
- If you have searched His Word and still need more information, proceed to step two!

### 2. Pray Persistently

Prayer isn't something that we should do after we've run out of other options.

- We should come to God with all of our concerns, questions, and requests.
- In prayer we pour out our hearts to God and ask Him to answer our petitions according to His will.

### 3. Ask for wise counsel

Sometimes our mind can become clouded by worry, fear, anxiety or even pride, joy, and excitement.

- In order to keep a level head it is good for us to bounce ideas off of other mature Christians who also love God and want to see His will lived out in our life.



- Don't skip this step before making a big decision. You may learn some things about yourself that can help you to avoid making a mistake!

#### 4. **Consider the big picture**

Look at the other aspects of your life that might contribute to your decisions.

- Your life goals (life purpose statement), your past experiences that have shaped your passion, and perhaps some doors that keep closing for reasons beyond your control.
- God can use His Word, prayer, the wise counsel of others, and your life experiences to guide you in the right direction.
- Be careful, however, not to let discouraging news prevent you from moving forward with what God has shown you to be His will.
- We need to be cautious to discern what is an obstacle in our way and what is a closed door that God might be using to direct us in a different direction.

#### **SUMMARY:**

Let's bring this all together. God wants nothing more from you than to give Him all of your heart. If you can put God into the center of your life, then everything else will fall into place. The challenge is to deny our selfish interests to focus on the will of God. As we wrap up, take a moment to reflect on what it is that might be keeping you from hearing what God wants to say to you.

- Are you spending regular time with Him in prayer and in reading His Word?
- Is there ANY sin at all that might be hindering your prayers?
- Are you willing to do whatever God might ask you to do?

**Class Assignment:** Has God shown you how your spiritual gifts might benefit the church you attend? Is there a ministry that already exists that you could serve in, or do you think that God might want you to start something new?

If you could custom design the perfect ministry for you, what would it be? What would it look like? What would be your role in it? Write a one-paragraph description of the idea ministry for you and be prepared to share it with your group next week.

#### **Memory Verse:**

**1 Peter 4:10-11** - *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."*

PRAYER REQUESTS:

## GROW – Lesson 3: Stepping Out in Faith

I don't tend to be an extroverted person. Many extroverts might translate that to mean that I don't like people, but that really isn't true. I love people, but it may take me a bit more energy to interact with them. Introverts are recharged by being alone and extroverts tend to be energized by being around other people. Neither is right or wrong or even better than the other, it's just a part of who God has created us to be. Being an introvert doesn't change the fact that God has given us a mission to reach the world with His love, and extroverts could learn a thing or two from introverts about how to connect with people who are different from them. And **for both introverts and extroverts, stepping out in faith can be a scary thing** to do.

### The Great Commission

Then Jesus came to them and said, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Mt. 28:18-20)

In our last session we discussed knowing God's will for our lives and we mentioned God's special revelation in His Word to us.

- One of the most significant messages of the New Testament is found in Matthew 28.
- This is known as "The **Great Commission**." If you remember back to our first lesson together, this answers the "What" question. This is what God wants us to do.
- There are a million different ways we can do that, and we've already discussed some of the gifts and passions that God has given you to serve in the kingdom of God.
- Your gifts and passions lead you to answer "how" you do the "what" as you seek to find your niche in God's eternal plan to save people from their sin.

**Q: Do you remember your life purpose statement? Could you put into words how God wants to use you to build the kingdom of God?**

**The Great Commission is a \_\_\_\_\_** from Jesus to all disciples, past, present, and future. This is our goal and the desire of God – that none should perish (2 Pet. 3:9).

- The effects of our ministry during our lifetime will be felt in the generations ahead and forever in the scope of eternity. That's hard for us to wrap our minds around!
- The Great Commission is **more important than any other goal** that we have in this life because what we do here on Earth will last for eternity.
- So, if God is at the center of our lives as He should be, it will naturally be important to keep the idea of disciple making in the forefront of our minds.

Discipleship is simply helping people along the path to becoming like Jesus.

- It includes not only our salvation, but also the days before and the days that follow.
- **Discipleship doesn't ever stop**; it is something that we work on throughout our lives.

## Get in the Game

It is said that when there is work to be done in the church, 20% of the people do 80% of the work (this is known as the Pareto principle).

- Ideally, everyone would recognize that they play a part in the bigger picture of what God is doing. We are a priesthood of believers, and we all carry out God's will.
- Everyone is a team player, but sometimes we settle to be spectators instead of participants.
- **When we all serve together, it makes each of us stronger.** It spreads out the load of work to be done, and makes the journey more fun!
- It's not the pastor's job or the ministry team leader's job, we are all on the same team and we need YOU in the game! We want you on our team.
- God chooses to use people to carry out His will and His plan.

**Q: Do you have a habit of serving in the church? What typical excuses do people come up with to justify why they don't serve? What is wrong with these excuses?**

**Q: What problems might be solved if everyone in the church was committed to doing something to serve in the church or in a parachurch ministry?**

*The Church is stronger when each person serves in the way that God has gifted*

If you aren't serving in the church, you are missing out on an important part of the adventure that God desires for your life! It doesn't just affect your life now – consider what it says in **Matthew 6:19-20**:

*"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."*

What you do now in this life will have a direct impact on your life to come!

- We can't say exactly what that will look like, but the Bible is clear that **He will** \_\_\_\_\_ those who are faithful to carry out His will. (Mt. 10:41, 16:27; Mk. 9:41; Lk. 6:35; 1 Cor. 3:8; Eph. 6:8; 2 Jn. 1:8)

## Fear

We are creatures of comfort. We generally follow the path of least resistance.

- It's not rocket science; we want whatever feels comfortable, pleasurable, and exciting and we avoid anything that causes pain, discomfort, anxiety and fear.

- We have a general view that it is good to listen to our fears because it protects us from undesirable experiences.
- Think about the good things that have happened when people didn't give into fear.
  - Martin Luther King Jr. brought attention to racial injustice.
  - Police officers and fire fighters run into danger to keep us safe.
  - Soldiers go off to war to protect our freedom.
  - Jesus willfully died on the cross.
  - The apostles took the gospel message into an opposing worldview.
  - Missionaries take the message into dark places.
- **Just because something is scary doesn't mean that it isn't good**, honorable, and pleasing to God.
- We need to come to grips with **these emotions** which **can paralyze us** from carrying out the will of God in our lives.
- Has He called you to go? Yes! Is God worthy? Absolutely! Let's not live a life of regret.
- Overcoming our fears **doesn't mean that bad things won't happen**, but when they do it is a chance to remember **why we do what we do**: \_\_\_\_\_.
- God doesn't ask us to be successful, He just asks us to be faithful. We do what we are called to do and leave the results up to Him.
- We'll never know just how big an impact we are making, despite how unproductive our efforts may seem to be.
  - Consider the missionary Jim Elliot – He gave his life to minister to the Auca people of Ecuador (Yes, he literally gave his life!).
  - The Auca people didn't understand the depth of God's love and forgiveness because their hearts were hardened with anger. So they killed him.
  - Later, however, Jim's widow came and finished the story of grace by forgiving them. Now many Aucas have given their lives to Christ because they experienced God's unconditional love.
  - **1 John 4:18** says that *"perfect love casts out fear."*
  - Jim was faithful with the message and Elizabeth, his wife, did not let fear hinder the message that God wanted to share.
- Hopefully God won't call you to give your life for the Great Commission, but what an award that must await those who have given it all as martyrs for Christ! (see Rev. 6:9-11)

**Q: What are your greatest fears about serving God in the church?**

## What's Next?

Once God is in the center of your life and you recognize that He has a will and a plan to use your life and spiritual gifts to carry out His plan for redemption, it's time to take the next step into the "full and abundant life" that God desires for you.

- Yes, carrying out His plan can be scary, but you are not alone!
- If you are connected to other Christians in fellowship, then it is helpful to know that we are all in the same boat headed in the same direction.

- **Your next steps will not be \_\_\_\_\_.** The answer to that question, "What's next?" depends on where you are at spiritually in life.
- You may be eager to jump in with both feet, but you might not be ready yet.
- You may be dragging your feet and you've been attending the church for decades!
- At this point it would be helpful to have a good understanding of your level of spiritual maturity.
- As people look ahead to serving in God's Church, it is important to grasp where you fall on these steps:
  1. **Get saved** - Give your life to Christ
  2. **Get connected** – Build relationships within a church family and/or small group
  3. **Get healthy** – Deal with any emotional pain or habits that hinder you
  4. **Get equipped** – Prepare yourself mentally and spiritually for God's work
  5. **Get going** – Focus your energy in the way that God has created you to operate

Let's take a quick, **personal inventory of our spiritual growth**. Read the questions below and circle all that apply on the line chart:

1. Worshipping other gods 2. Rebellion against God 3. Angry at God 4. Skeptical/Agnostic 5. Apathy/Ignorance 6. Recognition of sin 7. Guilt 8. Brokenness	9. Point of Salvation 10. Gratitude 11. Turn away from sin 12. Learning and 13. Serving God's will 14. Feeding myself 15. Leading the Church 16. Christ-like Character
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O — O — O — O — O — O — O — O — O — O — O — O — O — O — O — O — O — O — O

1. Do you currently practice any occult, consult mediums, use a Ouija board, play with Tarot cards, or the like? 2. Are you currently practicing a lifestyle that is openly opposed to the will of God? 3. Do you feel like God has given you any unfair challenges in life? 4. Do you question the existence of God or our ability to have a relationship with our Creator? 5. Are you indifferent to church, religion, and God's will for your life? 6. Do you believe that you are a sinner that deserves eternal separation from God? 7. Are you ashamed of the way that you have lived your life? Do you feel that God is	disappointed in the way that you are living your life? 8. Do you regret the way you've lived your past to a degree that you desire to live your future in a better way? 9. Have you ever prayed to receive the forgiveness of Jesus Christ and to make Him the Lord of your life? 10. Are you awestruck and thankful for the incredible gift of forgiveness and salvation that comes through Jesus Christ? 11. Have you removed old habits of sin that are unpleasing to God, or do you continue your actions because He has forgiven you?
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12. Do you attend classes and church services where you can learn about how to grow in your faith?

13. Are you using the gifts and abilities that God has given you to serve others?

14. Is it a regular practice for you to open your Bible, to pray, and to think about God's will for your life?

15. Are you building up other Christians in their faith or bringing others to faith in Christ?

16. Would you say that the Spirit of God is leading you in every decision you make and every word you say?

**Q: In what areas have you grown the most on the chart above over the last year?**

Hopefully you are able to see some growth in your life over the past year or two, but perhaps this survey also brought up a couple of issues that you might need to work on. That's okay! In fact, it's great that you recognize your need to grow – we all have room for growth.

Your next step is to take ownership of any areas on the spiritual growth inventory where you scored below a nine.

- If you have any issues from your past that keep you from abiding in the will of God, get rid of it! (*Consider Jesus' warning in Matthew 5:29-30. "If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. ..."*)
- If you need help, get help to do this. The sooner you deal with your hang-ups, the sooner you will be ready to honor God with your life.
- In fact, just working on our issues is a way that we can please and honor Him.

If you have no issues below a nine on the spiritual growth chart, your next step is to work on whatever area was lowest for you.

- We are building upon a foundation, one step at a time.
- The steps may vary a little bit, but each is an important part of our spiritual growth.

**The next step of spiritual growth that I need to work on is:** \_\_\_\_\_

As a reminder, we are all at a different stage in our spiritual growth and it's important to recognize where we are at so we don't try to get ahead of what God is doing in our life.

- If you try to live out your faith and you aren't connected to other believers, you may burn out or get discouraged when life gets difficult.
- If you try to serve before you are spiritually prepared, you may cause others to stumble.
- If you aren't equipped properly to serve, you may feel unqualified, your theology may be off, or perhaps you might just be unproductive.

1. **Get saved**
2. **Get connected**
3. **Get healthy**
4. **Get equipped**
5. **Get going**



- **When you are connected, prepared, and equipped, then you are ready to get going.**
- God certainly can use us to do His will wherever we are at. Looking forward to serving the Church over a lifetime, following the steps in this process is best for \_\_\_\_\_ (Jn. 15:16).

## Get Going!

Remember that **accountability partner** that we encouraged you to partner up with? Well, this is one of those times when it would be good to have someone challenge you and pray for you!

- Pray about what God would want you to do to take your next step to follow His will for your life.
- Ask your **accountability partner** to check in on your progress from time to time.
- Perhaps you could work together on some of your goals.
- Commit to making your next step. If you need more help on how to do this or what it might look like, ask for help but don't settle to not act on what you feel God is telling you to do.
- If you are starting a new ministry effort that will involve other people, it is very important to make sure that you are planning ahead.
- There is a saying, "\_\_\_\_\_." There is wisdom in that. Take time to think through the questions and don't move forward before the time is right.
- As you move forward, it's a good time to ask some questions.
  - Do you need to develop a team?
  - Do you have a plan?
  - Is now the right time for this step to take place?
- With that being said, make sure that you don't make any excuses and give up on what God wants you to do. Push forward!
- Talk to a ministry team leader or a pastor and get connected to serving!
  - Don't worry about what might happen or what people will think – it is God that you are serving!

## Benefits of Serving

Once you begin to use your gifts, talents, and passions in service to bless God and others, you will find it exciting and rewarding.

- Serving will surround you with other people who are passionate about the will of God.
- You will build new relationships which improve our overall emotional and spiritual health.
- You will grow in character.
- You will bear fruit through your productivity and the effects it has on others.
- It will increase and strengthen your faith to work shoulder to shoulder with others.
- Your soul will be revitalized as you serve.
- You will personally witness the power of God at work through your life!

## SUMMARY:

God has given us the Great Commission and He has asked us to carry out His will as an act of gratitude and to glorify His name.

- We shouldn't let fear get in the way of doing what He has called us to do. Sometimes surrounding ourselves with people who will push us can be helpful.
- Once we've identified that we are spiritually healthy and we have equipped ourselves with knowledge and passion, we have the privilege of serving God and the work that He is doing.
- Might we never allow apathy or fear to keep us from living the full and abundant life that God desires for us!

**Class Assignment:** As time permits, have your group members each share the paragraph that they wrote describing a ministry that would be ideal for them. How can you as a group help them or support them in that ministry idea? Perhaps a couple of people's ideas work well together and they might pair up to start something new!

Identify a ministry in the church that you would enjoy and that might benefit from your strengths. Identify the ministry leader and contact them about the needs of that ministry.

## Memory Verse:

**1 Peter 4:10-11** - *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."*

## PRAYER REQUESTS:



## GROW – Lesson 4: Sharpening the Ax

Have you ever seen a **shooting star**? It is a beautiful moment to capture something so brief and yet its memory can leave a lasting impression on anyone who witnesses it. In reality, a shooting star, or meteor, is a tiny piece of rock screaming through the Earth's atmosphere at a high rate of speed (around 50,000 mph). If the piece of cosmic debris is large enough to make it through the atmosphere, it becomes a meteorite and crashes into the ground at high impact, leaving the remains of a molten, **smoldering heap** at the bottom of a crater.

What does this have to do with serving in the church?

- If we aren't careful, this illustration could be a picture of our life in ministry!
- What we do in the church is a "fragrant offering" to God – it's a beautiful thing!
- But ministry is work and sometimes that tension brings some heat that challenges our spirit.
- If the heat is great enough or long enough, it's possible that **our hearts could crash and burn in a heap** and we wonder, "What on earth has happened to me?"
- It actually happens more than we'd care to realize, and the effects can really be damaging to the health of a person's faith.
- Can this be avoided?

As we discuss this topic of serving in the church as we grow in our faith, it seems to be an appropriate time to take a pause to mention that there may be a time for you to step away from ministry for a while.

- **Who you are is more important than what you \_\_\_\_\_.**
- If you need to take a step back from ministry to take care of yourself, don't pretend that everything is okay! It's appropriate for you to watch out for your needs.
- Let's look at some ways for us to monitor our spirit while we serve.

### Stay Spiritually Healthy

- Just as it is important to enter into serving in ministry for the right reasons, it is also important to maintain your spiritual health along the way.
- Luke 5:16 says, "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."
- His life was busy and many people were demanding for His time and attention. Jesus needed to keep in regular contact with the Father.
- If the Son of God needed to step away from ministry to get His spirit in check with the Father, we should also evaluate our spiritual health.

*You need to  
be spiritually  
prepared in  
order to  
minister to  
others.*

We've mentioned the importance of the **spiritual disciplines** in the past (Bible study, prayer, meditation, etc.). They really do make a difference!

- If you feel burdened by what is happening in your spirit, that's your cue to check in with God! Ask Him where your stress is coming from.

**Q: If you are currently serving in the church, do you find it burdensome? How should we feel about the work of ministry?**

- We do this in prayer throughout the day, or perhaps just before we go to bed when we reflect on what transpired throughout our day.
- Sometimes we think that we are able to get through this life on our own, but our power is limited. **We need to** \_\_\_\_\_ to carry us through.
- When you start to sense that you are feeling burdened by church or ministry, it is time to ask some questions:
  - Am I trying to do this in my own power?
  - Have I kept my spirit connected to the heart of God?
  - What can I learn from this?
  - Do I need to make any changes?

Asking yourself questions like these will help to prevent unnecessary stress and even burnout.

- Give your spirit the attention it needs and pay attention to the warning signs that something may not be right.
- Keep your heart abiding in Him and He will give you both joy and strength to carry out His will.

**Q: What are you currently doing on a regular basis to keep your spirit healthy?**

## Seasons of life

There are many potential reasons that our spirits can become weary or unhealthy, but that's not the only reason that you might need to step down from ministry.

- Sometimes it can be as simple as the season of life that you find yourself in that can change the trajectory of your life, even if it is just a temporary adjustment.
- Getting an education, having a child, raising kids, becoming an empty nester, retirement, taking care of your elderly parents and other milestones in life can all affect the amount of time and energy that you have to give towards ministry.
- Naturally, there will be some **times in each of our lives when we have more time** than others. This isn't right or wrong – it just is what it is.
- These seasons of life can also be a time that God uses to prepare us for the next stages of our journey in ministry, and each stage of life offers ministry opportunities as well.
- Your entire life is an act of worship, not just when you come to church or serve in a ministry (Rom. 12:1).

- When you change diapers, do laundry, or drive someone to a medical appointment, if it is done for the glory of God, it will be an acceptable sacrifice for Him (*Ph. 4:18; 1 Pet. 2:5*).

**Q: Have you encountered a season of life where you needed to step down from ministry? How were you treated?**

## **Trials and Suffering**

In addition to milestones that happen in our lives, sometimes we can be **blindsided by** \_\_\_\_\_ that just take precedence over our ministry responsibilities.

- You lose your job. Someone is diagnosed with cancer. A car accident. A death in the family. Marital tensions. You're pregnant again – surprise!...
- Life happens, and when it does it doesn't often give us a warning.
- We all go through trials and most of us know suffering to some degree.

**Why do bad things happen to good people?**

- There really isn't an adequate answer to this question that can address life's challenges.
- We know that God is in control and He can prevent bad things from happening if He chooses, but sometimes He doesn't.
- We know that He is always good, but sometimes He allows bad things to happen to us.
- Sometimes we might think that we deserve God's blessings simply because we are His children, but He never promises an easy life for us.
- In fact, Jesus says, "**In this world you WILL have trouble**," but God also promises to give us strength to stand up under the pressure (*Jn. 16:33; 1 Cor. 10:13; Eph. 3:16*).
- In reality, Jesus says no one is good but God alone (*Mk. 10:18; Lk. 18:19*).

**Q: What is one of the biggest trials that you've had to face? Why do you think God allowed you to go through that trial?**

Another way to look at this topic is to start by recognizing that we live in a fallen world.

- Our challenges in this life come from **three sources, the flesh, the world, and the spiritual forces of evil**.

### **The Flesh**

The flesh refers to our innate, sinful nature that we are born with and naturally desire to give into.

- Lust, selfishness, hate, covetousness, greed, malicious thoughts, anger, and other willful sins that enter our mind are a result of what happened in the Garden of Eden.
- The Apostle Paul talks about the struggle with the flesh in **Romans 7:15-20**.
- The fight against our sinful nature is a constant battle that occurs within our spirit and prevents us from being the righteous people that we desire to be.

- This sinful nature leads us to make poor choices based upon desires that are ungodly.
  - Lust can lead to a pornography addiction or divorce.
  - Selfishness can cause us to think ourselves to be more important than others.
  - Hate can lead to broken relationships.
  - Covetousness can leave us discontented.
  - Greed moves us to take advantage of others.
  - Anger causes us to hurt others.

## The World

The world is the culture that we live in that is influenced by sin due to the fall.

- The culture is corrupted by sin through and through and it will continue to be that way until God \_\_\_\_\_.
- The world helps us to justify what we want by telling us it's normal, it's okay, and we deserve to have it.
- The world tells us lies such as:
  - There are many ways to God.
  - To love people you have to accept the way they live.
  - If you want it, you deserve it.
  - The goal of life is to make it to the top.
  - If you want to be acceptable, you have to be pretty.
- Perhaps you've believed a few of these lies yourself?
- The world can bring trials upon us if we allow ourselves to be persuaded by the lies.

## The Spiritual Forces of Evil (Eph. 6:12)

Ephesians 6:12 points out that there is a spiritual battle going on between good and evil, and though we cannot see it, it is as real as the book you are holding.

- Satan desires to rob God of His due glory and he therefore seeks to lead people away from the heart of God.
- It's hard to recognize it because it is not something that we are very acquainted with, but we can see its effects. Just look at Facebook. People are hating people because of:
  - Their political stance.
  - The color of their skin.
  - For not liking their post.
  - For serving our country.
  - For protecting our community.

Trials and suffering can drain our energy and get us off track of what God has called us to do.

- We must **recognize the source of our trials** and \_\_\_\_\_ to handle.
- Suffering isn't pleasant; trials aren't fun. By God's grace we help one another through them so that we can move on and get back on track with the Great Commission.

*Sin comes from  
three sources:  
the World  
the flesh  
and the devil*

## Q: In what ways have you seen evidence of the kingdom of darkness at work around you?

These burdens are just another example of why a small group or an accountability partner can be a critical part of your spiritual journey!

## Burnout

Hopefully you never reach the stage of burnout. **Burnout is losing any desire** that you have to do anything for the kingdom of God.

- Sometimes people are serving in the wrong place.
- Sometimes they are being asked to do too much.
- Maybe they are serving in a ministry without any support.
- Perhaps they haven't been properly trained to succeed.

Again, if you feel any burden to the privilege of ministering in the church or a parachurch ministry, that is a red flag that should be given attention as soon as possible.

## Sharpen the Ax

When you need to step back from ministry to take care of your spiritual needs, it's like "sharpening the ax."

- If you are chopping wood with an ax, the blade will eventually become dull with use.
- That means that it requires more force and effort to do the same amount of work.
- Wisdom will lead us to stop periodically to sharpen the blade which will make our work easier.
- Spiritually, we need to **step back from serving to refresh our spirit** and renew our strength so that we can serve more effectively.

### Ways to Sharpen the Ax

- Take a break from ministry
- Do a spiritual fast
- Educate yourself for serving
- Learn something new
- Do a topical study of the Bible
- Spend time in worship and prayer
- Evaluate your motives
- Purify and refocus your life

When we experience the red flags of burnout, it is tempting to withdraw because we are embarrassed and we don't like to let anyone down.

- If you ever feel burned out – don't isolate yourself! Reach out to your church family.
  - Lean upon your support system and seek wise counsel
  - It's okay to feel overwhelmed and it's okay to feel stressed, but it's not okay to be alone.
  - You don't want to stay in the valley any longer than you need to. It's not a good place to be.
- **It's okay to** \_\_\_\_\_ **from ministry** – better to take a break than to burnout!

- Find someone to fill in your ministry position for a period of time and step away if you need to!
- Celebrate what God has done through you – whose lives have been touched?
- Enjoy some rest and thank God for the opportunity to be used by Him.

**Q: What are some of the signs of burnout? How do you know when you should press through and when you should take a step back?**

## Why We Serve

God doesn't love you less if you are not serving Him. He loves you unconditionally with all of His heart. He couldn't love you more and He won't love you less!

- **We tend to think that God is pleased with us based upon our performance** in doing good or being good.
- He doesn't love us for what we do. He loves us because of what Christ has done.
- His love for you is never ever going to change!

So **why do we serve** the kingdom of God?

- Because it is a \_\_\_\_\_ **to live our lives out of** \_\_\_\_\_ for a God who is worthy of our very best.
- Romans 12:1 says, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."*
  - Because Jesus died on the cross for us, we are exhorted to live out the remaining days of our lives in a way that is pleasing to Him.
  - Living for Him will be a personal sacrifice to our own selfish desires, but very much to our better advantage.
- Serving God is a blessing and an opportunity, but not a life sentence.
- You can give as much or as little of your life to God as you want and He will love you regardless of the choices you make.
- As we close, a question to ask is that after all that He has done for you, isn't He worthy of your very best?
- And **He promises to reward** those who give even a cup of cold water in His name – Can you imagine how He will treat the one who gives their life for His plans?
  - We will all one day stand before God. (*Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10*)
  - The works we do here on earth don't earn our way to heaven, but they do matter.
  - The Bible describes them as a fragrant offering or a gift to God. What we do here on earth to glorify God is our gift to Him. We can't take anything else with us.
  - It doesn't matter how much money or success or fame or stuff we have in this life – it's just temporary.
  - 2 Corinthians 4:18 puts it this way. *"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."*



- This isn't how we usually think. If we can see, taste, touch, hear, or smell it, then it must be real. God's Word tells us that there are some things that are unseen that are even more real and they will last forever.
- What is that? The spiritual realm of the kingdom of God. It exists in the hearts of people as they live out God's will and His love.
- Who wants to stand before God one day with nothing to offer?

### **SUMMARY:**

Talking about serving today isn't the church's ploy to plug people into holes in ministry so we can keep all of the plates spinning. We want you to recognize that you have an opportunity to store up treasure in heaven by the way you live your life from now until the day God calls you home. There are seasons of life that you may be available to serve, and there will be times when you need to take a break. We just want you to consider what you have to offer to God and then we want you to know that we are behind you 100%. We want to help you get started; to help you plug in; to help you get equipped to carry out your God-given purpose.

John the Baptist said that he wanted Jesus to become more and that he had to become less. That's how it works in the kingdom of God. We want you to become more because we know that you have the capacity to bring more glory to God! And we celebrate with anyone who strives to make His name known. To God be all the glory forever and ever!

**Class Assignment:** At this point you should have identified a ministry that you could connect with and have hopefully been able to contact the ministry leader. If you have found a place that God might be leading you to serve in, what are the next steps to get started? Do you need to take a membership class? Have the church do a background check? Shadow some other ministry volunteers? Take your next step to get involved in serving.

If you don't see a good fit for your spiritual gifts and passions, do you think that God might want you to start a new ministry? Is this something that you could do on your own or would you need to form a team? If you feel God is leading you to start a new ministry, start working on a strategic plan that includes core values, scriptures for support, and a description of the goals and methods of the ministry.

If you need to step back from ministry, talk with your ministry leader and give them a heads up before stepping back. Try to work with the ministry leader over the next few weeks to find a replacement so that ministry isn't hindered by your absence.

### **Memory Verse:**

**1 Peter 4:10-11** - *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."*

### **PRAYER REQUESTS:**

## GROW – Lesson 5: Arrows in, Arrows Out

Think of someone that you have met that seemed so into themselves that they didn't have time for anyone else. You got the sense that they **loved themselves** and **looked down upon others**. They constantly were checking themselves out in the mirror or posting a pic on Facebook to let everyone know how good they look today. Maybe they thought they were more beautiful, more intelligent, more wealthy... more important than everyone else. Does anyone come to mind?

These people may appear to have it all together and it may seem that they have lots of friends, but if you were to look at their lives, you'd find out that their relationships are shallow and their friends don't stick around. Why? Because they are only interested in themselves.

Unfortunately, **churches can be like that, too**. Maybe you have attended a dying church where their youngest member was over 70 or you could see the weekly attendance dropping regularly. Maybe the people were friendly, but there just wasn't any excitement about what God was doing in the church. There may be other factors that contribute to a dying church, but a number of churches that I have seen struggle have had a tendency to have their arrows pointed in and not enough arrows pointed out.

### What's With the Arrows?

Here's an exercise for you to consider.

- **Make a list of all of the ministries** that your church has to offer.
- Then, next to each ministry, make a mark. If the ministry helps people "in" the church, draw two arrows pointed inward toward each other. If a ministry focuses on people outside the church, then draw two arrows that point away from each other.
- Taking a step back, do you see more arrows pointing in than arrows pointing out? Is there a great imbalance between the two?
- Churches that have ministries that all point inward will eventually \_\_\_\_\_.

### Why does this happen?

You might think that a church ministering to its members would be a church where everyone is happy and comfortable.

- And that is exactly right – people like what they are seeing, but no work is getting done.
- When no work is getting done, we lose focus of our purpose and we become stagnant.
- When you have stagnant, lukewarm water, that is the perfect environment for bacteria to grow, leading to disease and posing a great risk to your health.
- It's also not really pleasant to drink!
- Churches that are lukewarm will not last long.

Consider **Revelation 3:14-19**.

*"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, **because you are lukewarm**—neither hot nor cold—I **am about to spit you out** of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent."*

This message was written and sent to an actual church with a stern warning against letting their hearts become complacent toward the work of God.

- Don't get too comfortable so much that you no longer depend upon God.
- Let's not be ignorant about what we have been called to do.
- And **God might just take away the** \_\_\_\_\_ from our church!

## The Narcissistic Church

Remember the person who can't get enough of themselves?

- They have a very small world and little room or time to love others.
- Therefore, people can't relate to them.
- This is why they don't have many true friends.
- They say that the smallest gift is a person all wrapped up in themselves.

**It's hard for new people to fit into a church that is all about taking care of its own.**

- Churches with this mentality can be guilty of unintentionally ostracizing visitors.
  - A visitor doesn't feel that they belong if no one takes time to recognize them.
  - They may feel that their presence somehow changes the atmosphere in the room, making them uncomfortable.
  - A church like this will likely get uncomfortable when someone new, or different, might come walking through the doors.

**Q: Have you ever walked into a church and gotten the feeling that your presence was either unrecognized or unwanted?**

This "Arrows In" idea is more than how we treat visitors, however.

- It represents focusing solely on building up its own members.
- Yes, it is important to be spiritually healthy, but **if we just keep feeding ourselves** without exercising our faith, **we may become spiritually** \_\_\_\_\_!
  - Bible Studies, small groups, classes, fellowship times, and weekend services all have a place in our spiritual wellbeing, but these are only the means to an end.
  - We come to church to get equipped to be an "Arrows Out" kind of church.

- We build each other up so that we are empowered and sent to carry out the will of God as His ambassadors in this world.
- Let's plan to not be a church that is narrow-minded and focused on feeling good spiritually and comfortable in our cushy chairs.
- Every week people come to the church because they are hungry for God and for relationship; let's give to them what they need!

How can we avoid this trap? By developing an "Arrows Out" culture.

## Developing an "Arrows Out" Culture

Jesus talked about showing love to those who were outcasts, the poor, the sick, and strangers who were in need.

- An **"Arrows Out" culture** is a mindset that **we are here to serve** "the least of these."
- People in these categories may make us feel uncomfortable because they are different from us.
- We may even feel that we are superior to them in some way because we appear to have it all together – or at least more together than those around us.
- Jesus warns us sternly not to forget to keep our hearts focused outwardly to those who are in need of a tangible expression of God's love.
- The key to loving "the least of these" is to guard our hearts from pride and to live out humility.

### Examples of "Arrows Out"

- Buying groceries for someone in need
- Donating goods to an event at church
- Giving someone a job
- Helping someone to write a résumé
- Listening to someone share their story
- Visiting with a shut in
- Caring for the elderly
- Serving in the community
- Christmas Caroling
- Meals on Wheels
- Local Missions, International Missions
- Mission Trips
- Holding seminars in the community (marriage, parenting, addictions, etc.)

**Q: Look at Matthew 25:31-46. Who are the least of these in our society? Where do we find these people in our community?**

Loving the least of these is something that happens as we \_\_\_\_\_ live out God's love, but also as we \_\_\_\_\_ seek to fulfill the Great Commission as a church.

### Living Arrows Out – Individually

There are some ideas in the yellow box above about how we can follow Jesus' example of loving others.

- **We start with those closest to us** – our family members who need to be touched by God's love.
- Then we might look to our neighbors, co-workers, and friends who are in need.

- God might also call you to minister to a complete stranger as He makes a need known to you.
- These are all opportunities to love, to store up treasure in heaven, and to glorify the name of God as you bear witness to His love.

You are an ambassador for God, but also a representative of your church.

- **If people heard what church you attend**, what would they think of that church?
  - **Would they want to come check it out**, or would they want to avoid it?
  - People are watching your lifestyle and they want to know if your walk matches your talk.
  - It has been asked, "If you were put on trial for your faith, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

I like what the Apostle Paul says in **Titus 2:10** when he says that we should make the teaching about God our Savior attractive in every way.

**Q: Where do you typically encounter people outside of the church? How can we find more opportunities like this?**

- If you are walking out to your mailbox, a friendly wave or a hello shows kindness to someone passing by.
- Mowing the lawn may give you the opportunity to bump into your neighbor. Take time to stop and acknowledge them. Compliment them. Appreciate them.
- Treat coworkers with the highest level of respect – especially if they don't deserve it.
- Going above and beyond to make coffee, be on time, ask people how they're doing.
- Hanging out with coworkers and brushing shoulders with them to learn about their families and hobbies.
- Address people by name, when possible.

**Always be looking for an \_\_\_\_\_** to show someone that you care.

- Acknowledging the needs of others doesn't have to cost you money, just a few seconds of time.
- Each encounter is like giving them a step in the right direction (or the wrong direction)
- When you've built up enough trust, these steps may lead them to church or to Christ!

**Ephesians 5: 15-16** says, "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity..."

- Connecting with people can be scary, thrilling, and at times rewarding.
- It's harder for some than for others, but ultimately it comes down to love. Our love for God which leads us to love others.
- We'll talk more about this in our next section, so just keep in mind that when we serve, it is a way for us to grow and to open doors to share God's love.

## Living Arrows Out – Corporately

- This kind of culture isn't just for when we leave the four walls of the church, however.
- It is just as important for us to have the same welcoming, open-armed attitude for **every person who walks through the doors of your church.**
- Each one of us can play a part in developing this kind of culture.
- **It's not just up to the pastor** or the worship leader to get people to shake hands with those around them.
- It's more than the greeter team – it's all of us loving to one another as a family!

*It's everyone's job to create a culture that welcomes new people to the church!*

Being welcoming is the same idea when at home or at work – the principles still apply.

- Notice people, recognize people, compliment their outfit or their voice. No need to lie, but if there is cause for it then make it known!
- Make people feel that you are glad that they came and that your day has somehow improved by their presence!
- How do we do this? It's not just by the words we say, but also
  - How we smile (Is it authentic?)
  - How we shake their hand (Is it enthusiastic?)
  - What we say (Is it surface level or genuine?)
  - Your excitement for worship (Are you engaged?)
- Imagine a service where every person has been greeted by a handful of people who genuinely expressed concern for one another.
  - People follow up prayer requests from the prior week.
  - People invite one another out for lunch or for coffee.
  - People pray for one another before or after service.
  - They recognize when someone was missing the week before.
  - They talk about the message, the worship, and the opportunity to fellowship.
  - And **they leave feeling valued** – \_\_\_\_\_!

**Q: Do you have any creative ideas about how our church can do a better job of ministering to visitors, especially people who don't normally come to church?**

As a church, corporately, we develop ministries not just for the spiritual, emotional, and physical health of our church family, but also for those outside the church.

- As we serve in the church, we can join in the effort to develop an "Arrows Out" culture.
- **What abilities do we have as a church** that can show love to others? Let's get creative!
  - This might be a community outreach ministry to the underprivileged.
  - A special event, movie, or concert to get people thinking about God.

- Hospital visits, nursing home visits, caroling.
- We can fix cars, fix toilets, shingle roofs, move boxes, pay rent, buy food...
- The sky is the limit when it comes down to what can be done, but one thing is for sure:
  - We have to go to where the people are.
  - And **we have to meet them where they are at.**

We can have the best of intentions, but without a plan our desires will amount to nothing. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Hopefully your church already has several opportunities in place, but if not, maybe God wants to use you to start something new!
  - Consider your resources (abilities within the church, financial support, pastor's blessing, etc.)
  - Focus on an identified need within your community.
  - Cast a vision to the pastor and some friends.
  - Start small and pray for God to bless your efforts.
  - Make sure to give God glory for each opportunity to serve and let people know that it is an expression of God's love for them.

### **SUMMARY:**

People and churches that focus on themselves won't attract others. Churches like this will eventually die. It's good to minister to one another, but the purpose of building up the church is so that our hearts might mature to become like Christ's. Jesus was a servant of all. If we want our hearts and our church to grow, we will need to focus on serving people not just inside the church but outside our four walls as well. As we exercise our faith and serve others, our heart grows more like God's heart. Everywhere we go, our actions reflect upon our faith and our church.

**Class Assignment:** Have you gotten connected to a ministry in the church (or parachurch ministry)? If not, don't give up! Keep moving forward. If you've gotten connected, be sure to communicate your intentions about ministering with the ministry leader. Are you checking out the ministry, are you all in, and if so, do you understand your role and expectations?

If you are starting a new ministry, this week make an appointment to share your strategic plan with your pastor!

### **Memory Verse:**

**1 Peter 4:10-11** - *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."*

### **PRAYER REQUESTS:**

## GROW – Lesson 6: With All Your Heart

The **Ironman Triathlon** is considered to be one of the most elite of sporting challenges in the world. Athletes compete in a three-part course including a 2.4 mile swim, a 112 mile bicycle course, and ending with a 26.2 mile marathon... all in the same day! Believe it or not, people come in droves to the event that is hosted in Hawaii; some to compete and some to watch. What is interesting about this race is that it isn't as much a fight to be the first to cross the finish line. Your greatest competitor is your own self and your goal is simply to finish within the allowed time frame.

To run a race that is challenging requires lots of preparation and training because during a race you will **push your body** to the limits. You will experience fatigue, discouragement, fear, doubt, and a vast array of emotions and physiological effect from extreme exertion. Why in the world would anyone put themselves through such agony? For the eternal glory of being heralded as an "Ironman."

### Whatever You Do

**Have you ever done something with all your heart?** Have poured your life into something that left you completely exhausted by the time you were done? Maybe you aren't an Ironman, but we all have goals and desires that we would like accomplish.

- Some people find satisfaction from completing a race.
- For some it might be to buy a car or a house or a boat.
- For others, their goals may be to give their kids a better childhood.
- Some people value education, some financial security, others family.
- How do we decide which of these values is most important?

*"Whatever you do,  
work at it with all  
your heart, as  
working for the  
Lord, not for men,  
since you know  
that you will  
receive an  
inheritance from  
the Lord as a  
reward. It is the*

you  
to

**Q: What are your greatest goals in life right now? What are your highest priorities?**

**Q: How do we decide which goals are worth our time, which ones are most important?**

There are all kinds of goals that we can aspire to, but how do we decide which ones are best?  
**Which goals we should pour our lives into?**



## Dot Versus Line Thinking

Perhaps you have heard of the concept of “dot versus line” thinking.

- If you were to step back and look at a chart of your lifespan on a timeline, you would see the beginning from the end and an unlimited number of points between the day of your birth and the day of your death.
- Take a moment and **put an “X” on the line** where you think that you might be at this point in your life.

Birth Death  
[-----]

Some people don’t tend to think of the big picture when planning their goals.

- They are driven by emotions and desires that will gratify them in the moment.
- They aren’t concerned about the consequences of their actions and sometimes end up living with regret.
- This is **dot thinking**. Making decisions that **seem best at that** \_\_\_\_\_.
- It may feel best at the time, but in the long term it may not be the best decision.

**Q: Can you think of a time when you waited on making a decision with the hopes that it would benefit you farther down the road? How did you feel about delaying your gratification?**

**Line thinking** takes your entire life into consideration. **Looking at the** \_\_\_\_\_.

- How will your decisions affect your marriage, family, and your children?
- Will this produce stability or security for your family over the years?
- Sometimes delaying gratification can bring more satisfaction in life down the road.

This seems to be the responsible way to think and how most of the world would encourage you to plan out your life. But there is still a better way to plan!

Looking at the timeline above, if you could remove the bracket beneath the proposed point of your death and make it an arrow pointing to the right, it would help you to realize that God’s plans for you really don’t end there!

Birth Death Eternity  
[-----]----->

**At this point, your entire life becomes a dot, and the line really is unending.**

- Even so, the dot of your life is a critical part of God’s master plan and can play a huge part in the line that points to the right.
- Your life here and now matters in the scope of eternity!

- We ought to be spending more time on things that will affect our future eternity than what we might enjoy temporarily in the here and now.
- The big picture includes not only our children, but our grandchildren, and their grandchildren...
- Your life and legacy affects many more people than you probably realize.
- Because this is true, **God teaches us to focus on things that are eternal** (i.e. Col. 3:1)
- Do you remember what Jesus said in **Matthew 6:19-20**?

*"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."*

Paul makes a point in **1 Corinthians 10:23-24** that *"I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything'—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.*"

It would be so good to be able to read all that was on Paul's mind as he wrote his letters.

- We get a bit of a glimpse of his heart in **Colossians 3:23**, he says "whatever you do..." but it seems like there may be more that he would want to say.
- Perhaps it was something like this: "You can do anything you want to, but keep in mind..."
  - Whatever you do, don't waste your time here on earth
  - Whatever you do, don't forget you are created for eternity
  - Whatever you do, don't forget your time here is short.
  - Whatever you do, make sure it matters for eternity.
  - Whatever you do, make sure that it is worthwhile
  - Whatever you do, be sure that God is in it.

As we have mentioned before, **only** \_\_\_\_\_ **are eternal** in the scope of God's creation.

- Nothing else will be carried into eternity with us, just the lives that we've impacted.
- Whatever you do, Paul says, keep in mind what is most important, and do that well.

*In the scope  
of God's  
creation, only  
people are*

**Q: What is the hardest thing that you've ever accomplished? How did you feel about it after you achieved your goal?**

## Work at It

*"Whatever you do, **work at it** with all your heart..."*

**Anything that brings us satisfaction is going to take** \_\_\_\_\_.

- Training for a marathon takes a lot of work.
- Raising kids takes a lot of work.
- Building a bridge takes a lot of work.

There's a reason that you expect a paycheck at the end of the week! Most of what we do we wouldn't want to do for free because it takes a lot of effort.

- It's the hard work that makes **a challenge so rewarding!**
- When everything pays off, when you reach your goal, when you can look back and see the change you've made, there is a sense of satisfaction that cannot come from just coasting through life.

Work is hard, it consumes our energy. Mental energy, physical energy, emotional energy, spiritual energy.

- Because it can be so exhausting it had better be worthwhile.
- Many of us are busy working for someone else's vision and someone else's goals.
- Though there is nothing morally wrong with this, could it be that God has bigger plans for your life?
- What if you didn't need to worry about bills and rent and groceries? What would you want to do with your time?
- If the fear of risk didn't inhibit you, **what would you want to trust God to do** with your life?

**Q: If you could choose to do anything you wanted with your life, what would you do?**

It may be the most difficult thing that you do, but God is able to help you do what might even seem impossible, as long as you are seeking to do His will!

- Earlier in this study we looked at God's purpose for your life.
  - **Start with God's will.** What does He want? How can you serve Him?
  - Can you do this where you are currently at, or would you need to make some changes?
  - Make some plans, pray, and **seek wise counsel.**
  - How are you doing at living for God with all your heart?

## **With All Your Heart**

Life is complex. Life pulls us in many different directions.

- Our lives are busier than they've ever been and we might feel stuck on this crazy wheel with no option to get off.

- We have more control over what we do with our lives than we realize, but it may require us to make sacrifices if we want to change.
- You don't need any elaborate plan to live for God with all of your heart.
- You just need a heart that is \_\_\_\_\_!

The challenge with this idea is that our hearts are prone to wander.

- If we look at the Israelites in the Old Testament, we can see a great example of the problem that we all have – we have a selfish, sinful nature.
- The Israelites would follow God for a time, but eventually their hearts would turn away to worship idols.
- God would allow bad things to happen to the Israelites to get their attention (the sword, famine, plagues, etc.)
- The Israelites would cry out to God for rescue and He would raise up a redeemer/king that would restore the Jews to their former glory.
- It would only be a matter of time until the Israelites wandered away once again.

The Jews had the **sacrificial system** to cover their sin, but it failed to keep their hearts close to the heart of God.

- **The people of Israel had become desensitized to their sin and they let their hearts drift.**
- Christians today do this very same thing and we ought to learn from the Israelite's mistakes.
- When we come to Christ, we feel a strong sense of God's presence and can see the work that He is doing in our lives.
- Then **we get comfortable** \_\_\_\_\_ and our hearts start to drift.
- We look at the cross and our hearts are no longer grieved because of our sin.
- If we are not careful, our hearts will fall away and we may turn our backs on God.

**Q: In what ways have we allowed our hearts to become desensitized to our sin?**

Keeping our hearts near to God's is not something that just happens, it takes consistent effort.

- If you think that you are just coasting in your faith, you are wrong!
- You are either pushing forward or you are falling back because it is an uphill challenge.
- No one really is ever on a plateau spiritually.
- In order to keep your heart in tune with God's, there are no short cuts. We are required to **regularly focus our heart through spiritual disciplines** (prayer, Bible study, meditation, etc.)

## Working for the Lord, Not for Men

Okay, let's be honest. With medical bills, insurance premiums, rent and mortgage, food and necessities, car payments, phone contracts, internet and cable, we have to somehow support all of this stuff that we get to enjoy, right?

- It may be possible to cut back in some areas, but ultimately it costs money to get by in the world we live in. **Work is therefore a necessary evil, right?**
- Well, we could make an argument that work is a result of the fall of mankind, or we could see it as a \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Every good thing that we have comes from God. Not just our homes and cars, but also our health, our family, our time, and even our employment.
  - They say that "if you enjoy what you do, then you'll never have to work a day in your life." In a similar sense, we should view our job as a blessing and not a curse.
  - We don't have to leave our employment in order to work for God. **If everyone sought to be a pastor or a missionary** or a monk or a nun then the world might fall apart!
  - On the contrary, the work we do for a paycheck can also be an opportunity for us to carry out God's will upon the earth.
- God can use you anywhere, including where you currently work – in an office, in a factory, in your home. Serving God is a 24/7 kind of job.
  - **It's not about where you work, but Who you are working for.**
  - Are you able to say that you are working for God? Can you see how the work that you do brings glory to His name?
  - In most cases, you should be able to see that God can use your life to be a blessing to your coworkers or to produce goods and services that bless others.
  - It might be possible, however, that you currently are not in a job that glorifies God or edifies others. If that is the case, the Holy Spirit may speak to your heart about this.

When you are working for God, you see your **primary goal as loving** the **people** you are working with and working for.

- Your employer, your coworkers, your customers – they are all eternal beings on a spiritual journey with the rest of us, and they may need some guidance.
- Do your job, and do it well, but keep your heart in tune with what God wants to do through your life in that environment. You are working for God.
- The people that God has given to you to work with are even more important than what you produce.
- **Your job description is to make disciples** of the people around you.
- We are serving God with our lives as an act of obedience and as a form of worship.
- Serving God may not bring you a paycheck, but the benefits are out of this world (Sorry, I had to say it...).

## SUMMARY:

When you work at something with all of your heart, you follow a plan. You can see the effects upon the people you serve, it brings a very satisfying feeling. God gives us a mission and equips us to serve Him according to His plan. We are challenged by Scripture to live our lives as an act of worship as we live for God with all of our hearts. He is the One we serve as we focus on keeping an eternal perspective on our lives.

**Class Assignment:** Hopefully at this point you have a clear plan or path for ministry and maybe you have even gotten plugged in. If now isn't the right time to get connected, look for ways to serve the people that you work with and live with. How can your gifts be a blessing to them? If you are starting a new ministry, keep praying and keep moving forward. Go slow and let God lead!

## Memory Verse:

**1 Peter 4:10-11** - *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."*

PRAYER REQUESTS:



# Phase 4: HARVEST



## HARVEST – *SHARING the message*

Application: Pray for and share your testimony with someone who needs Jesus



God **PLANTS** the seed of truth in our hearts through His Word. Then He **WATERS** the seed through the community of people around us. We begin to **GROW** as we live out our faith in action, serving the Church. When a seed reaches maturity, there will be a time of **HARVEST** as the seed multiplies into hundreds of new seeds. In this section of our study, we will focus on **what it means to be a worker in God's harvest fields**. God wants to send each of us into the world to draw people to Him.

## HARVEST – Lesson 1: Worldview

At the beginning of this study we defined a worldview as the lens through which we see the world. Today, let's take a look at this again and consider the implications of having – or not having – a biblical worldview.

In Daniel chapter 3, the people of the land were commanded to bow down to King Nebuchadnezzar and his gods. Anyone who defied this command would be put to death. Would you worship the President or foreign gods to avoid death for yourself? Would you do it for your family?

**Three brave Israelites refused to bow** to these orders (literally) and were faced with a death sentence. Even in the face of death, these men **did not waver but held fast to their faith** and their worldview, affirming that God was able to save them from death. They also recognized that He might not save them, but even so they were unwilling to worship anyone or anything apart from God. Fortunately for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, God chose to spare their lives even though they were thrown into the fiery furnace. For the rest of the story, check out Daniel chapter 3!

### The World's View

Everyone in the world has a **worldview**.

- A worldview is formed starting the day we are born as we interact with our family, our friends, and with life.
- As we grow up we learn about love, about pain, about regret, about God, and about our purpose for being here.
- We figure out by observing others what "normal" is and we generally conform with a desire to fit in.
- The problem with this is thinking is that **though we may view something normal**, \_\_\_\_\_. Everybody may be doing it, but it might not be God's plan for us.

- King Nebuchadnezzar believed that people should bow down to him.
- The soldiers believed that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would be burned to a crisp as a message to the world not to mess with the King.
- Many people probably thought that it would be okay to bow to the king in order to spare their own lives or the lives of their family.
- But for three Israelites, it didn't matter what other people thought; they only cared about God's opinion.

Paul said in **Galatians 1:10**, *"Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ."*

- **God is our Judge;** His opinion matters infinitely more than anyone else's and yet we still care about what other people think.

**Q: If God is so much greater, why do we worry about what other people think of us?**

Throughout the years, the **American culture has been groomed to believe** that:

- People are valued based upon the color of their skin.
- We value people based upon their nationality or ethnicity.
- It's okay to live an alternative lifestyle.
- If I am not hurting anyone else, then it must be okay.
- If everyone is doing it, then it must be okay.
- If he/she says yes, then it must be okay.
- I deserve it because I work hard.
- The government should pay for things I cannot afford.
- Women are beautiful based upon their size and shape.
- Men never show emotion and are measured by their physical strength.
- Intolerance is bigotry.
- Money is the key to happiness.
- If you aren't really busy, then you won't be very productive.

**Q: What is it that makes controversial topics controversial? Why is it uncomfortable to talk about these topics?**

These opinions are the result of people establishing their **values upon their** \_\_\_\_\_; the desire to feel good, to be happy, and to please others.

- Unfortunately, when we try to please ourselves and others, someone gets hurt. Someone has to pay for it, someone will be offended, or it just leads to an end goal that is empty of meaning and fulfillment.
- Consider the life of King Solomon.
  - He has been considered to be the wisest man who has ever lived and (presumably) authored the book of Ecclesiastes.



- Solomon had everything a person could ever want from this world. He had wealth, success, power, women (700 wives and 300 concubines), all of the toys that money could buy...
- You'd think that he would be the happiest guy on the planet, but do you know what he said about all of this earthly pleasure?
- Solomon said that it's all meaningless and vain – like chasing after the wind!
- You'll never have enough money, get enough love, gain enough power.
  - John D. Rockefeller, another person among the wealthiest of all time, was once asked how much money is enough. His answer? "Just a little bit more."
  - That is the nature of our flesh because of sin.
- Keep in mind that **we all have a** \_\_\_\_\_ on the world we live in.
- It's important to keep an attitude of humility so that we recognize that our worldview may need some adjustment.
- It is possible that we may be confronted with multiple opposing views at one time.
- If you were to ask 10 different people who God is, you might get 10 different answers.
- What we need is a standard view to live by!

## God's Worldview

**The world's worldview is rooted in self** and it is an abyss that will always lead to disappointment. There is hope for fulfillment but it cannot be found in the perspective adopted by cultures throughout the world over the course of human history.

**Only God can bring the fulfillment that we desire.**

- Where do we go to get God's perspective? Into His Word.
- **Psalm 19:9-11** says, *"The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward."*
  - When I am obedient to the will of God, I find that I have peace in life, no matter how difficult it might seem.
  - When I try to live by my own pleasures, that's when I find that I mess everything up and I am riddled with guilt, shame, and stress.
  - God's plan is best; hopefully you haven't needed to learn that the hard way!

If God's Plan is found in His Word, then we need to be \_\_\_\_\_.

- Read it. Study it. Memorize it. Live it!
- We cannot emphasize this enough. If you want to know the Word of God, there are no shortcuts!
  - Read a little bit each day and never stop. It doesn't have to be much!
  - Find a reading plan that works for you and a time that is convenient.
  - It might also be helpful to do this with a friend who can encourage you.

- The Bible is full of wisdom that leads to a healthy spirit and a life of joy!
- Hearing a sermon with a few verses on the weekend isn't enough to keep us strong.

**Q: Do you have a Bible reading plan that has worked well for you? What about it do you like? Do you know of other helpful Bible study resources?**

**A biblical worldview** in a nutshell is that **God is the Creator** of all things and **all glory belongs to Him**.

- He created mankind unique and special within His creation to have a relationship with us.
- We are loved dearly by Him and He gave us the freewill to choose to love Him in return.
- In this freewill we have chosen to love ourselves more than God and have sinned against Him.
- God's creation has been subjected to sin and currently is fallen and corrupt.
- One day, God will make everything new and all evil will be destroyed.
- God desires to redeem His children from their sinful nature through the blood of Jesus who died in our place, taking the penalty of our sin upon Himself.
- Those who receive this gift of salvation have the hope of eternal life in His presence.
- All others will suffer God's wrath and eternal condemnation.
- Our purpose on this earth is to spread the message of the Good News for the glory of God and the benefit of those who will respond.

With this freewill that we've been given, we can choose to love God as much or as little as we choose.

- He couldn't love us more, and He wouldn't love us less, and our performance doesn't change the status of our salvation before Him. He loves us unconditionally.
- Yet, when we think about what we deserve because of our sin and what He has saved us from, the only appropriate response is a fully devoted heart motivated by a profound sense of gratitude.
- Perhaps it seems a bit idealistic to be fully devoted to God, but this is clearly His desire for us in passages like Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, and Luke 10:27 which all remind us of God's command:

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."* (Mk. 12:30)

In case we're wondering how much of our hearts God wants, He repeats it four times – **He wants ALL of your heart!**

## Fully Devoted

- Even though the Bible is pretty clear that God desires us to be committed to Him in obedience and faith, **most of us find it a challenge to keep our hearts close to His.**
- We have this sinful nature that pulls our hearts away from God. We are selfish and we want to make our own decisions.
- It might be that we look around us and we don't really see any good examples to follow. If everyone else is living for themselves, why shouldn't we?
- Another reason for our lack of commitment is that it is hard to remain steadfast for a lifetime when we are constantly facing trials, temptations, and other obstacles that get in our way and distract us from the will of God.
  - We lose a loved one and question if God cares.
  - We lose our job and blame God for it.
  - We get comfortable with our lifestyle and don't make time for God.
  - Maybe we faithfully attend church for a while but we find it's easier to sleep in on weekends.
- When **life gets us tired**, drained, and weak, we will want to justify patterns that lead toward the path of least resistance – whatever is easiest for us. It's really pretty normal.
- The Bible talks about denying your "self" in order to to keep on track.

*"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it."*  
(Lk. 9:23-24)

**Q: Do you know someone who is fully devoted to the will of God? How can you tell?**

We might be tempted to compare ourselves to the people around us. Perhaps we might feel like we are doing better than others in keeping God's will, but God does not grade on a curve – it's \_\_\_\_\_!

- Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
- Of course, we aren't perfect and that is why we need Jesus.
- Instead of comparing our holiness to others, we need to remind ourselves that before God we are unholy apart from Christ.

Once we recognize our need for Jesus, then we have a message to share with the world.

- **God is looking for people who are fully devoted** to use for His purposes. (2 Chr. 16:9)
- Are you willing to be one of those people?
- **It may require us to make personal sacrifices** and it will require you to trust in Him, but He promises to reward those who are faithful to carry out His will.

## Meeting People Where They are At

As children of God seeking to have a biblical worldview, we must acknowledge that **the world has a different worldview.**

- That means we should not expect people who don't know God's love to understand the way that He thinks.
- It should not surprise us that people outside of the Church live in disobedience to God. It may be willful disobedience, but it also may simply be ignorance. Those without faith in God don't know what He desires.
- We should not shame unbelievers for not knowing better, for they are a product of the world we live in.
- **New believers need someone to show them the truth** and to meet them with unconditional love on their level.

*"Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)*

In another passage, Paul stands before a Greek audience that believes in the Roman Pantheon of gods. (see Acts chapter 17)

- Those in Athens were so concerned about not including any overlooked gods that they have a shrine labeled "To an unknown god."
- Paul meets the Greek culture right at their level and proclaims to the Athenians about the God who was formerly unknown to them, telling them about what He has done for them in Christ.

That's what we need to do with our friends, our neighbors, our family, and our coworkers.

- **Instead of judging others** for living in disobedience to God, we need to **meet them on the level of their worldview** so that we can understand why they think what they think.
- Are they angry at God? Do they know about Jesus? Did they grow up in a home that looked down upon religion? Do they believe in any higher power?
- What is at the heart of their worldview?

**Q: Have you been praying for someone who wants nothing to do with God? What do you think has caused them to feel this way? What can you do to address it?**

You may also meet some people who call themselves Christians who clearly see the world differently than you.

- Though it is important to uphold the major doctrines of the faith, **we need to \_\_\_\_\_ in our differences.**
- We focus on what is truly important and seek to maintain unity within the church on minor issues as much as possible.

## **SUMMARY:**

We all have a worldview and it is likely that everyone's worldview is off just a little bit so we should be gracious to those who are different from us. It is important for us to hold fast to the teachings of the Bible as a common standard for how we view this world that we live in. It is God's revelation of Himself that shows us how to live an obedient life. We need to understand that a person's worldview is made up of their experiences and it isn't that they are living in opposition to God – it may merely be ignorance. God calls us to go into the world and to share the truth with them. We can do this one person at a time.

**Class Assignment:** During the next six weeks we will be writing out a simple testimony of what God has done in our lives. Our goal is application! There are many ways to share God's love, but we want to challenge you to communicate it through words and offer an invitation for people to come and learn more about God at church.

Let's set a goal of sharing your faith with three people over the next 6 weeks – that's one person every two weeks. For now, pray about who that would be and write down a list of names along with some specific prayer requests. For example, maybe God wants you to speak with Janice and you know that Janice is struggling with depression. Start to pray for your list of people and ask God to show them their need for Him.

## **Memory Verse:**

**Luke 10:2** - *"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

## **PRAYER REQUESTS:**

## HARVEST – Lesson 2: Writing Your Testimony

When our kids were young, my wife and I had a habit of sitting them down on our lap to **read a book**. Sometimes we'd pick a book or perhaps the kids would choose one of their favorites and we would dive into a different world. We'd read the classic Bible stories or whimsical poems by Dr. Seuss, or perhaps a book that takes us back into history. Even before they could read, our kids would look at the pictures as they listened and allowed their imagination to **bring the story to life**.

Everyone has a story. A story paints a picture of your life experience and gives people a better understanding of who you are. **A testimony is the story of what God has done** in your life to draw you into His presence. Today we are discussing that story with the goal that you might write it down with the hope that you would share it with someone you care about.

### It's Not About You

Before we jump into writing out your testimony, it is important to understand that your testimony is \_\_\_\_\_.

- You heard that right! **Your testimony is NOT about you.**
- Your testimony is about what God has done for you and how He orchestrated your life in such a way that you came to understand the immensity of His love for you.
- It will include some details about your life, but ultimately it is a story about God.
- He is the hero of your life and He should be the hero in your story!

When you first heard that there was a God – He was at work in your spirit.

- When someone invited you to church – God's hand was in it.
- On days when you had doubts, God was still there.
- When you realized that you were a sinner, the Spirit of God was revealing to you that you needed a Savior.
- Even when you turned your back on God, spit in His face, swore at Him, and ran the other direction – He never left you, gave up on you, or cast you aside.
- **God pursued you** and believed in you when you didn't believe in yourself.
- When you first gave your heart to Him, He was there rejoicing with you.
- Even now He is at work in you, working out your faith, guiding you to live out the image of Christ in your life.
- **God loves you** so much and He has made it possible for you to escape the fate of your sinful nature, rescuing you through the cross!

*Your  
testimony is  
not about  
you.*

**Q: Have you ever shared your testimony before? How would you describe that experience?**

John the Baptist was approached by some disciples who were concerned about the success of his ministry because people were starting to follow Jesus. John replied, *"He must become greater; I must become less."* (John 3:30)

- With the same idea in mind, our testimony should get people to focus on God and our message should fade into the background. Our lives should reflect the glory of God.

## In a Moment...

It can take years to build trust and to show people what God's love looks like lived out.

- Unfortunately, that **trust can be lost** \_\_\_\_\_.
- It is a sobering thought that our testimony can be permanently tainted by a poor decision, a lack of self control, ignorance, or perhaps momentary disobedience.
- **Proverbs 27:19** says, *"As water reflects the face, so one's life reflects the heart."*
  - People will know your heart by the way that you live. It's important that your life matches the message you wish to share with others.
  - If and when you make a mistake (as we all do), be quick to acknowledge it, own it, apologize for it, and then move on.
  - People don't expect you to be perfect, but they won't trust someone who is being a hypocrite.
- Please keep this thought in mind when you face temptation. Sin can rob you of the ministry opportunities that God has planned for you both now and in the future.
- **Don't give into temptation** and allow Satan to neutralize the momentum that you've created by living an upright life as an example to those around you.

## A Story Worth Hearing

When my kids listened to a story that we read, they connected with the story through their imagination.

- When you tell people about God, you need to **help them to connect with God** in a way that their mind can comprehend.
- Jesus did this through parables. **He used everyday stories** to help us connect with theological ideas.
  - The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.
  - The teachings of the Pharisees are compared to yeast in dough.
  - The parable of the talents teaches us about serving God.
  - The lost sheep is someone who needs to be brought back to repentance.
  - Weeds are like false teachings.
- Some of the ideas may seem a bit outdated and foreign to us, but for the original hearers it was an obvious and easy parallel.

When we share our testimony, we need to communicate with words that are easy for others to understand.

- You have a story that is incredible and that people need to hear!

- It is not incredible because it is about you; it is incredible because it is about God.
- Even so, if your testimony is filled with “\_\_\_\_\_” and theological terms that people who don’t attend church have never heard before in their life, it will not make much sense to them.
  - What does it mean to be “washed in the blood” of Jesus?
  - What is the “Word” of God?
  - Why do I need to be “saved”?
  - What is sin?
- Some ideas that may be obvious to us may be new to the people you are talking to, so it is important to communicate clearly using the appropriate terms.
  - **Use words that they can understand.**
  - And share a story that they will be able to connect with.

**Q: What are some terms that we use in church that might be unfamiliar to people who haven’t spent much time at church? Was there a time that you felt Christians spoke a different language? Why does this happen?**

## I Have Become All Things

It would be easy to write down your testimony one time and be done, but unfortunately it’s not that simple.

- Everyone is at a different place in their faith journey and every one will come to understand God’s love from a different perspective.
- Remember last week when we looked at what Paul had said, *“I have become all things to all people... that I might save some”*?
- We need to meet people wherever they are at and speak in a language that they can understand.

When considering your testimony, it would be helpful to **be prepared with a message that anyone can relate to.**

- There are many different topics in our culture where we can find common ground.
- Some people find interest in sports, Nascar, movies, music, and entertainment
- Others see politics and social events as topics worth discussing.
- Family and relationships are both topics that everyone understands.
- Find a topic that interests you or that you have some knowledge about and build off of that theme as you prepare your testimony.
  - Make sure it is a topic that most anyone would find interesting or that they have experienced it in a personal way themselves.

If you know of a person that God is leading you to speak to, take into consideration their passions and interests.

- **What gets them excited?** What will get them talking to you?



- You might even want to study a subject to familiarize yourself with it.
- What experiences have they had that may have affected their view of God?
- It's almost like learning to speak a new language.
- The more you can speak in their language, the easier it will be for them to understand.

Think of a topic or a theme that most people might connect with.

- We talked about this when you wrote your life purpose statement.
- Family, Sports, Art, Music, Social Media... How does it relate to the Good News of Jesus Christ?
- How is God like – or unlike – your theme?
  - For example – Everyone has a family. Perhaps yours was unloving. In God's family we experience perfect love.
  - For those who like sports, God wants you on His team
  - For photographers, God brings life into focus.
  - For Facebook users, God wants a deep and personal relationship with you.
- You get the point. **Pick a common topic** that most people are familiar with **and**

## Make it personal

Think about the story of your life; the pages God has written in the past, your current page, and the blank pages that He has planned for you in the days ahead.

- It may help to write a chronology of certain events and dates where you saw God at work in a significant way.
- Make this a time of praise to God for His faithfulness to you!

**My Major Life Events:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

After you have a list of key events, think about why you are so thankful for God.

**Q: What is the one thing about you that people find the most interesting? How does this relate to your faith journey? Could it be a part of your testimony?**

- How do you see Him at work in your past? What did He do for you?
- What people did He use to reach into your life? What experiences?
- How did you respond to what He was trying to do? How long did the process take?

- **Don't candy-coat** the bad stuff, either. People need to know that you are being real and transparent. God can use the details of your sin to help you connect to someone who may feel that they cannot relate to God.
- (Remember to avoid using religious terms!)

**How I see God at work in my past:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**What brought you to understand God's love and grace?** \_\_\_\_\_

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## How long should it be?

There is no correct length regarding your testimony.

- **It really just depends** upon who you are directing your testimony to.
  - It could be very short, or it could literally be a book!
  - If people are curious about your faith or just have a question on your views of God, then you probably don't need to give them your full, doctoral thesis!
- If you engage with someone who is willing to talk to you and listen to your story, having a longer testimony in your back pocket can be a great way to more fully answer someone's questions.
- For the most part, **people are generally interested in the 3-minute version** of your story. Any longer than that, then people often tend to stop listening!
- Making your story interesting can help with this a lot.
- As you prepare a testimony, consider doing a shorter version and a longer version.
- It will help you to become comfortable with sharing your faith if you can start by talking to friends and family members who are willing to take the time to listen.
- This can also be a good way for them to think about their own story.

It's good to make your testimony personal, and even better to make it specific to the person you are talking to.

- What do you know about the person you feel led to minister to?

- What is important to them?
- What significant life experiences have they recently had?
- What is their view of God?
- How can you connect that idea to a spiritual truth?

## The Bones of Your Testimony

As a reminder, **your testimony is not about you**; it testifies to the work that God has done in your life. As you prepare your testimony, there are a few important ideas that you will want to convey to someone seeking God.

### God loves me

First, it's important to let them know that they are loved by God. Many people believe that they are unlovable because of what they have done in their past. Perhaps they were told that message by the church. The Bible repeatedly mentions God's love and grace and forgiveness (*i.e. Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 4:8,16*). He created us to be in relationship with Him and despite our sin He pursues our hearts. He looks past our faults and sees the person He created and loves us unconditionally!

### I am a sinner

Even though God loves us unconditionally, He is just and our sin is a real problem. He cannot allow sin to remain in His presence, unpunished. We deserve to suffer the wrath of God because we are sinners and there is no way that we could ever \_\_\_\_\_ on our own. It would be like owing a trillion dollars to the IRS. We are in way over our heads and we need someone to rescue us. That's where Jesus comes in!

### Jesus is my only hope

The Bible is clear that **there is only one way to heaven**. You can check it out in John 14:6, Acts 4:12, or 1 Timothy 2:5. Jesus is God's singular exception to our deserved, eternal condemnation. This is a hard concept for some people to accept, but God in His wisdom, has established the plan and made the way for us to be able to restore our broken relationship. As Creator, He has the right to determine how we can access His presence.

### I have received His gift

Years ago, my in-laws had an unexpected gift show up at their house. It was the most hideous plaid patterned sofa that you could imagine; the kind that wouldn't match anything if you tried. As you can imagine, though they were grateful for the thought, the sofa never made it past the front door and they sent it back to the store. In Romans 3:23 salvation is described like a gift. **As with any gift, it must be received.** No one is forcing us to love God or to repent. It is an act of freewill. Fortunately, God's gift of salvation is much more attractive than a plaid sofa.

One final thought of what you might want to include in your testimony is an \_\_\_\_\_. There is a purpose to your testimony. In fact, it serves at least three purposes. First, it is a reminder to yourself that God has done a great work in your heart. Second, it brings glory to God when we tell others about what He has done. And third, it is an exhortation to others to consider their eternal status before God with a selfless desire that they would receive the priceless gift of forgiveness found in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### SUMMARY:

Testimonies come in all different shapes and sizes and it's not a one-size-fits-all conversation. Whatever it looks like, the goal of a testimony is to place a spotlight on God and what He has done for each of us. A good testimony will be easy to relate to and relevant to the one who hears it. When we have the opportunity to share what God has done, a good next step might be to have them come to church or perhaps just ask them to share their story as well. As we are faithful to share the Good News, may God bless us and grant us favor by increasing our influence in the lives of others!

**Class Assignment:** Write out a three-minute testimony about what God has done in your life. Continue to pray for the list of people that God has placed upon your heart. Be thinking about how each person would feel most comfortable with you connecting with them. Would it be a letter? A phone call? An email invitation for coffee? A face-to-face encounter?

Work on your testimony and share it with a friend. Ask for feedback about what was good and what needs work. It would also be good to share it with your group to encourage one another.

### Memory Verse:

**Luke 10:2** - *"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

### PRAYER REQUESTS:



## HARVEST – Lesson 3: Breaking the Ice

I will never forget the day Brad almost died. Brad was a short, scrawny, college-aged student with the heart of a lion and the social skills of a slug. I had just recently met him along with a few hundred other students who had gathered down in Panama City, Florida for the annual Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ) Spring Break Conference. At the outreach conference, we were challenged to go and share our faith with people on the beach and Brad was eager to go.

We went out in groups and split up to go start some conversation. Being confident in his message, all seventy pounds of Brad walked up to a bunch of college-aged football players who were there to enjoy the sunshine and all that spring break had to offer. Brad introduced himself briefly and then informed them that they were all going to hell unless they repented from their immoral behavior. Needless to say, it wasn't received well, but I pictured in my mind that the imminent outcome would be a good way for him to learn an important lesson: **People don't care what you know until they know that you care.**

Fortunately, some others stepped in and pulled Brad aside and rescued him from being beaten to a bloody pulp, but I cringe at the message that Brad and many others have delivered in the name of Christ without having the heart of Christ.

### The Conversation Before the Conversation

It is not generally a good practice to walk up to someone and strike up a conversation about God without first recognizing them as a human being.

- Why would we say this? Because talking about God is a very \_\_\_\_\_.
- Faith is something that everyone must grapple with and for many it is an extremely frustrating struggle that stirs up some deep-seated emotions.
- It would be insensitive to pull off the scab on someone else's wound.
- For some people this comes naturally; for others it does not.
- Fortunately, having an engaging conversation is something that can be learned.

Our job as ambassadors of Christ is not to merely deliver a message; it is to deliver the love of God in tangible form.

- Being faithful with the message doesn't mean that we speak the truth, but that we speak the truth in love.
- Unfortunately, **the world is already preconditioned to be skeptical** of Christians, of the Church, and of God.
- Before others will be ready to listen, we need to let them know that the conversation we want to have with them is not like the one they have already formed in their mind.

In a sense, there is a conversation that we need to have before we have a conversation with others about God.

- The conversation should have in mind the goal to **calm their fears** and **acknowledge their frustration**.
  - It may include an apology on behalf of the Church for the hypocrisy and dissention that we have demonstrated to the world.

- It must acknowledge that the Church is filled with sinful people who have delivered a message that was very different from the one we were sent out to proclaim.

Of course, not everyone will need to spend a lot of time with this initial conversation, but it is better to start with an open conversation about their experience with God and His Church instead of hitting them over the head with scripture verses about sin and condemnation.

- Before talking to someone about God, it is good to **know about their view of God**.
- This can help you to address their concerns, correct bad information, and to determine what their greatest needs are at the time of your conversation.

**Q: Do you think that people really are generally interested in talking about God? Why or why not?**

Depending on where people are at in life, they may or may not be open to talking about God, but people are usually interested in hearing your story. Sharing our story can open the door to

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## Don't Delay

The above conversation might happen in just a couple of minutes, but perhaps more ideally it could take place over days, months, or even years.

- With that being said, we should make the most of every opportunity because we never know how much time any person has.
- When God leads you to minister to a person spiritually, you should nudge them as much as they are willing to move.
  - Push them too fast, and they'll shut you out.
  - Move too slow, however, they may not trust your message as being of great importance.
  - Usually if we move too slow it is because of fear. We avoid the conversation because it can be awkward and uncomfortable.
  - God wants us to be strong and courageous and to follow His will with all our heart!

## Where to Start

So, you have a testimony to share but you know you can't just jump into a spiritual conversation. Where do you start?

- **Start with prayer.**
  - This is not a cliché; you really should start on your knees before you open your mouth.
  - Ask God to prepare your heart to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

- Pray that He would bring you a person who is hungry for the truth.
  - Seek wisdom on how to build a rapport with this person so that they will trust what God gives you to say.
  - Ask God to help you to love someone who may be a complete stranger to you.
- When you encounter someone that God brings across your path, be sure to show them that you care about them.
  - God loves all people and He wants us to love them, too.
  - This might mean simply acknowledging their presence with a smile or a nod. If it's not returned, that may be a sign that they aren't ready to engage in a conversation with you.
  - You might consider offering a heartfelt compliment to our about them in some way. (Their shoes, their parenting, their humor, etc.)
  - Remember – People don't care what you know until they know that you care.

**Q: What are some ways that we can show people that we care in a conversation? Do you think it has to do with the words we say or is it something else?**

- **Start with a question.**
  - Your question might pertain to the compliment that you just made (i.e. How do you get your children to behave so well!? Where did you find those awesome shoes?)
  - Get them talking about \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Continue to ask questions and show genuine interest. Have a desire to learn about people and what interests them.
  - Let them lead the conversation as much as they are willing to.
  - If you can **get someone to start talking** about themselves, you have opened the door to a meaningful encounter.

## **Making the Transition**

Every aspect of our lives somehow ties back to God.

- Our job, our kids, our marriage, our homes, the food on our table, the shoes on our feet; it all is tied into our spiritual lives in some way.
- Your goal is to **find out what is important to them** and **make the connection to their spiritual life.**

Good topics that most people like to talk about would include their family, vacations, their job, or perhaps their hobbies.

- Sometimes their interests are easy to identify.
  - Perhaps you met them at a car rally or see them interacting with their family at the beach.
  - Maybe you work with them or meet them in the hotel lobby while you are on vacation.

- Perhaps their interests aren't immediately obvious, but a friendly question can help you to see what they are excited about.
  - What keeps you busy? What pays your bills?
  - You have a knack for that. Is it something you do a lot?
  - Your accent tells me that you might be from Texas. Are you here visiting?
  - Your baby is adorable! How old are they? (Notice we didn't say he/she – that can be an awkward conversation closer.)
  - A friendly note of advice: Never ask a woman if she is pregnant unless the baby's head is crowning! Stick with the above questions.

## Unconditional Love

At this time the idea may sound really nice, but when you dig into someone's personal life you will quickly realize that they are different from you.

- They may have different habits, different language, different values, different morals.
- Perhaps they smoke, drink, have tattoos, swear, dress different, smell or act strange.
- Remember the discussion we had on worldview?
  - These differences don't make them \_\_\_\_\_ and they don't make you a \_\_\_\_\_.
  - It just means that **they have had a different experience** growing up and this can be a clue for you about where they are at spiritually.
- God extended His unconditional love to you and overlooked your flaws; He wants you to do the same for those around you.
  - This doesn't mean that you condone or approve of what they do.
  - It just means that you let God be the judge of their sin and you continue to pursue them with His love.
  - We do our best to look at them and **see them through God's eyes**; they are made in His image and they are precious to Him.

**Q: Is it possible to love someone that lives a lifestyle or acts in a way that we do not approve of? How do we get past our perspective of seeing people as a hopeless cause?**

## When Necessary, Use Words

St. Francis of Assisi is often attributed the words, "Preach the gospel always; if necessary, use words."

- If you have the privilege of developing a relationship over time, say with a coworker, these initial conversations may happen three minutes at a time as you brush shoulders in the office or stop to converse around the water cooler.
- Don't feel like you need to jump into sharing the gospel with someone right away unless it seems necessary. (i.e. you encounter them on a 3-hour flight to Miami)
- Instead, **show them the gospel by the way that you** \_\_\_\_\_ – and be sure that you live in a way that makes the gospel attractive!

They say that for kids, behavior is more caught than taught.

- The same idea holds true for sharing your faith.
- When you live in close proximity to others, they will see the way you live.



Breaking the ice suggests that things may start out a bit “cold”, but don’t lose heart.

- Breaking through ice can require some effort. You chip away at one spot for a period of time, and the walls that people have will start to weaken.
- When you show them that they can trust you, the walls will crumble and fall.
- Not until the walls have fallen will you be able to move forward into a discussion on the deeper topics that require people to be more vulnerable.

**Q: Have you ever looked at someone and thought, “I’d bet that they are a Christian”? What makes some people exude this kind of presence that causes people to be attracted to them?**

## Let’s Do This!

No, really. We are going to practice breaking the ice.

- Find a person that you want to get to know. If it feels more comfortable, maybe you start with someone that you already know a bit and ask them some questions.
- **Think about your non-verbals.**
  - What is the expression on your face communicating?
  - What are you doing with your arms and your eyes?
  - How close should you be to them?
  - Are you nervous? (If you seem nervous, that might make them nervous, too.)
  - Are you happy for the opportunity?
  - Will the way that you are dressed affect how they view you?
- Anything you can do to reduce the barriers will be helpful for your conversation.

For some, this exercise will seem like an everyday encounter. For others it will be as uncomfortable as your first day in high school!

- Keep in mind the reason why we are choosing to grow in our ability to communicate with other people; for the glory of God and His kingdom!

### EXERCISE:

In groups of two or three, spend about three minutes taking turns to strike up a conversation. For the sake of the exercise, assume that you have just met in a long line at the grocery store. Pick someone to lead the first conversation and then switch so that everyone has an opportunity to lead. Offer feedback to one another and try to come up with some additional conversation starters for future conversations.

After you have followed through with the exercise, come back together as a group to wrap up your discussion.

- What questions come naturally for you? What topics are good conversation starters? How did you decide what to say?
- Was it awkward? If so, why? What would make it feel less awkward to you or the person you were talking to? Encourage one another by recognizing what went well.

## SUMMARY:

You may have grown up in the church or have been involved in one for a long time. If that's the case, keep in mind that most of the world does not think like you! You need to enter into their world and meet them where they are at. A good way to break the ice is to ask questions and show a genuine interest in their lives. If you have the opportunity, make sure that you are living a life that is a worthy example of Christ. You may not be perfect, but you do reflect the image of God through your actions. If you allow God to fill your heart with love and compassion, they will see Christ in you. Let's give the world a clear picture of Jesus through our lives!

**Class Assignment:** Continue to pray for your list of people that God has laid upon your heart and then make some plans for your next steps. If you plan to get together, where will you meet? If you make a call, how will you start the conversation? What is your goal in talking with them? To invite them to coffee for further discussion? To invite them to church? To let them know that you are praying for them?

If you haven't already, make an attempt to get together with someone to talk about life and about God, or start up a written conversation through an email or letter. Try to think about what God would want you to say and let Him lead the discussion.

## Memory Verse:

**Luke 10:2** - *"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

## PRAYER REQUESTS:



## HARVEST – Lesson 4: Sharing Your Faith

On occasion we hear stories about treasures found in homes after people have passed and homes are sold. An old coffee can with gold coins buried in the backyard in California; a cashbox beneath the floorboards in the attic of a Massachusetts home; banknotes found during a remodeling project; precious gems in a lockbox behind the family picture. Sometimes these discoveries are worth thousands or even millions of dollars. It's the stuff that movies are made of and it really does happen!

What is unfortunate is that the owners of these fortunes never got to enjoy the riches of their wealth. They hoarded it, hid it, and held onto it instead of using it, sharing it, or investing it. Ultimately, you can't take it with you and all that we gain in this world is left for those we leave behind. But we have a treasure that is far more precious than anything that this world has to offer, and **if we give it away we can bring the wealth of that treasure with us**. This priceless treasure is the message of the gospel.

### The Greatest Treasure of All

- In **2 Corinthians 4:7** the light of the gospel is a treasure in \_\_\_\_\_.
- In **Luke 15:8-10** it's the lost coin which is worth dropping anything else that we are doing to give it our full attention.
- In **Matthew 13:44-46** the gospel is the key to the kingdom of heaven described as a treasure hidden in a field or a valuable pearl.
- It is to our benefit to invest all that we have into this one promise that God has made; He opened a way to pardon us from our debt of sin.
- This treasure that God gives to us in Christ will more than pay for our debt and He gives it to us as an inheritance because we are His children (*Rom. 8:23, 9:4*).

It is so easy to take for granted the indescribable value of this gift that we've been given. If we truly grasped the significance of the blessing we have, we would want to shout it from the rooftops and share it on every corner!

**Q: Generally speaking, why aren't Christians more excited about the Good News of the gospel?**

**There is no greater purpose**, no greater use of your time, nothing more worth your energy, than to share the message of the gospel with those around you.

- The eternal souls of the people around you are the only part of this life that you will be able to take with you into eternity.
  - Perhaps the lives we change in this world will be the reward that we receive in the next?
  - Wouldn't it be wise for us to pour our hearts into sharing this treasure with others with the time we've been given?

Being given the gift of salvation is a gift in itself, but when we invest our lives into other people, our blessings and reward will accrue with compound interest as we store up our treasure in heaven!

## Following Through

So, you have a testimony and a message.

- You know that God has asked you to go into the world to be a worker in His harvest field.
- He has called you to be courageous and strike up conversations and engage with people in order to demonstrate His love to them.
- We get the idea, we know **it's a command, but most Christians fail to carry it out.**

The last command that Jesus left for His disciples is found at the end of the Gospel of Matthew in chapter 28:18-20. Jesus said, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

- If we want to live a life that is pleasing to our Lord and Master, He says, "This is how you do it. Go and tell people how to live a life that is upright and honorable."
  - **A disciple is someone who follows in the footsteps of another**, living as they would live and acting as they would act.
  - First, we need to be \_\_\_\_\_ to show others an example of upright living.
  - Colossians says that we should *"rid [ourselves] of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."* (Col. 3:8)
- Once we are spiritually healthy (not once we are perfect), we should be looking for opportunities to be used by God to show His love to those around us.
- If we are looking, God says that the "fields are ripe for harvest!" (Jn. 4:35)
- All that is left for us to do is to embrace the opportunity and put our faith into action!

**Q: Is sharing our faith something that God calls us all to do? Aren't some people more gifted at this? Is there a specific calling for some people to share their faith?**

## Ripe Fruit

**Colossians 1:6** says, *"the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace."*



As God's children, we want to bear fruit for Him. How do you know when someone is ready to hear the good news? How do we know that the timing is right?

- There may not be a perfect answer to this, but a good place to start is to pray and listen for the Holy Spirit's leading.
- You may also get a sense of whether or not a person is open to continuing a conversation; be sensitive to their non-verbal and verbal clues.
- **Psalm 42:1-2** describes someone who is hungering for the presence of God in their lives. It says, *"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"*
- Unfortunately, we aren't able to read people's minds, but God knows their hearts!
  - If you feel that the timing may be right, **be intentional** about striking up a conversation with the goal and prayer to learn more about the condition of their spirit.
- Don't push too much, but be intentional about finding out if they are willing to have a discussion about spiritual things.

Ideally you will form a relationship over a period of time before jumping into a spiritual conversation. It is important to build trust if you want people to hear what you are saying.

- Talking about God doesn't have to be uncomfortable. \_\_\_\_\_ and share from your heart.
- You may find the conversation to be uncomfortable and maybe even awkward at first.
- If you are leading your conversation out of love, they may thank you later for getting them out of their comfort zone. They might want to talk but just need someone to start the discussion.

**Not everyone is searching for God.** Not everyone thirsts for His presence. Not everyone is aware of their desperate need for Him. They may not be ready to talk about it.

- **John 6:44** teaches us that God is at work in our hearts to draw us to Him.
- Our job as ambassadors of heaven is to join God in the work that He is doing and to be a tangible expression of His love.

**Q: What should we do when people aren't interested in talking about spiritual things? Should we push them a bit or can this do more harm than good? Do we leave them alone?**

Do you remember when you came to Christ? Do you remember why? What was it that finally led you to give your life to God?

- It is important to **think like someone who doesn't know God.**
- Some of us have been in the church so long that we've forgotten what it feels like to be on the "outside".

- Others may not be aware of the concept of sin. They may not believe that we can know God. They probably have never felt the love of God poured out through one of His children.

## The Right Attitude

Make sure that you are approaching your conversations from **an attitude of humility**.

- Too many people have experienced the hypocrisy of self-righteous Christians.
- They think that by being faithful to the message they are doing the will of God.
- God doesn't want us to merely share a message with them; He wants us to show them the message in action.
- Some people have tried to \_\_\_\_\_ people into heaven instead of \_\_\_\_\_ with His love.
- We have got to change this and make a name for Christ that is attractive!
- The Church should be a place that people are drawn to; a place they want to come to and explore how their spiritual life can be more fulfilling.
- We cannot ignore the clear warnings about hell in scripture. If you take time to really evaluate Jesus' ministry, He consistently presented a gracious invitation to embrace the love of God and the gift of eternal life.
  - He did not shame people or guilt people into repentance.
  - **He did not use fear as a motive** for loving God.
  - He showed people their sin, and He forgave them and told them to go and sin no more.

If people can see that you don't have an agenda and that you are just seeking to look out for their best interest, they may not agree with you but they will be open to listening to what you have to say.

- God loves people who are lost every bit as much as those who have repented, and He wants us to love them, too.
- Especially those who are different from us. Those who look different, talk different, act different, smell different.
- Sometimes the people who are running away from God the fastest are the ones who really want Him the most. They just need someone to come alongside of them to show them who He is.
- Sharing your faith is a form of love and to not share your faith with others means that we are choosing not to love others.
- **No person is insignificant.** There is no one that God overlooks. The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. (*Mt. 9:37*)

## Remember Why You Are Doing This

Sharing your faith can be uncomfortable because it is risky.

- You may be rejected by a person, but consider the joy that your faithfulness brings to God.
- It may make you nervous, but God is worthy of our devotion.
- It may make them nervous, but if by your efforts they come to God, you will have won a friend for eternity!
- Jesus Himself says in **Matthew 10:32**, *"Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven."*

**Q: What would you tell the introvert or the person who just cannot bring themselves to tell others about God?**

## Lifestyle Evangelism

We can plan to be prepared with a scripted testimony. We can plan to anticipate certain questions they will have for us. We can know all of the "right" answers. Ultimately, however, it comes down to your lifestyle.

- You can do everything right according to the script, but if you don't **live out your faith** then your testimony will have no substance.
- Really, it's much more natural to live a life that people take note of, then they are compelled to ask you about it.
  - The way that you treat people when they mess up.
  - The smile on your face when you show up for work.
  - How you talk about people when they aren't present.
  - Your excitement about your faith.
- When they ask you about your life, then you know that they are interested in something valuable that you have to offer.
- And **you don't have to share the entire gospel** \_\_\_\_\_ – just make sure that you are making the most of every opportunity to point people to God.

**Lifestyle evangelism** doesn't mean that you just live out your faith and wait for people to ask about it. Some people will never ask.

- Wear your faith on your sleeve. Don't hide it.
  - Give praise to God when a project turns out well.
  - Offer to pray for people when you recognize a need.
  - Be generous to others without expecting anything in return.
  - Be happy for those who succeed.
  - Recognize and encourage those who are struggling.
  - Look for opportunities to bless people.
  - Invite them into your life.
  - **Take time to enter into their lives** as well.

## SUMMARY:

We have been given a precious message to share with the world. God says that the harvest is plentiful and has asked us to share this gift of salvation with others. Not everyone will be ready to talk about God, but most will listen to our story as we share about our own experience with Him.

Sharing your faith doesn't have to be awkward and uncomfortable. If we live a life that is notable and different from the world, people will ask us why. We all hunger for the love and joy and peace that comes from God.

Sharing your faith can be a very faith-building exercise!

- Not only will sharing your testimony help you to overcome your fears, but it actually will strengthen your faith.
- If you are feeling down or spiritually weak, tell someone about what God has done in your life and you will be reminded of just how blessed you are!

**Class Assignment:** Did you get the chance to share your faith yet? Take time to review your previous engagement(s) in sharing your faith. What seems easy for you? What areas do you need to grow in? How can you make the experience more natural?

Share your experience with your group – good or bad! Encourage one another to press on with love and compassion for the people in your life who need to hear about what God has done for them. Pray for each other that God would open doors for relationships to grow.

Reach out to a second person and invite them to get together to talk. Pray that God would help you to guide the conversation into a spiritual discussion.

## Memory Verse:

**Luke 10:2** - *"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

## PRAYER REQUESTS:



## HARVEST – Lesson 5: Growing Your Influence

Jesus is hands down the most influential figure to have ever walked the face of the earth. Yet, even the Bible says that He was born into a lowly family with no significant social status. How did He go from nothing to everything? The Apostle Paul, originally from a place called Tarsus, took the message and spread it throughout the Roman Empire in just a few decades. Why did people listen to what He had to say?

It is amazing what God can do with one person's life. He is looking for people who are committed to living out His will and are available to be used by Him. You could be a person that God uses to do something amazing! I love what it says in 2 Chronicles 16:9, *"For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him."* What might happen if we all had the attitude that we wanted to be used by God more than anything else?

### Words Seasoned With Salt

As we consider growing our influence, it is important to clarify that we are not seeking to bring attention to ourselves. We are looking for increased **opportunities to tell people about God**.

- In **Colossians 4:2-6** Paul asks his fellow Christians to pray for an open door to share the message of Christ. Then he encourages them to *"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."*
  - Letting your conversation be seasoned with salt is not a common phrase that we would use today.
  - Salt is a preservative, it makes food taste more flavorful, and it also makes you thirsty.
  - We preserve the message, make it appealing, and let people thirst for more.
  - **Matthew 5:6** says, *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."*
- We should give people a reason to thirst for God and make Him attractive with our words.
- We let them know that He is the only One who can quench their spiritual longing.
  - That means that **when we tell people about Jesus we should be** \_\_\_\_\_.
  - We want them to enjoy the same blessings that we've experienced.
  - We want them to have the peace that we have.

**Q: Are you excited about your faith? Would people know it by hearing you talk? Be honest! What would you say to someone who isn't as excited about their faith as they should be? What should we do about the times we aren't overflowing with joy?**

People who have never experienced God's love do not understand what they are missing.

- The unconditional love of God is not like the performance-based love that we've all experienced.
  - God's love is not judgmental; it does not shame; it does not hold guilt over our head.
  - He does not bring up the past and He is able to look beyond our faults.
  - He loves us not for what we have done but because of who we are; His children!
  - He could not love us more and there is nothing that we could do to make Him love us less. He really, really loves us with all of His heart!
- The world needs to hear about this incredible love.
- **Let's tell the world with passion in our spirit** and gratitude in our hearts that God loves them more than they will ever know!

Our purpose in this life is to bring glory to God by drawing others into the kingdom of God.

- All who follow Christ are called to make disciples. (Mt. 28:18-20)
  - Every harvest worker is incredibly important because there is much work to do and so few workers. (Mt. 9:37; Lk. 10:12)
  - Your active participation in the kingdom building effort is infinitely valuable and will be greatly rewarded.
  - It makes sense that we would want to do this well.
  - Remember that you are an important piece of the puzzle in God's master design and every piece is an essential part of His plan.
  - So, how do we do this well? By growing our influence!

**Q: What's your greatest hindrance to telling others (or showing them) about God's love?**

## Enlarge my territory

- Jabez prayed in **1 Chronicles 4:10**, *"Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain."*
  - Jabez prayed for material blessings; how much more should we pray for God to increase our spiritual influence. God answered his prayer.
- John the Baptist proclaimed of Jesus in **John 3:30**, *"He must become greater; I must become less."*
  - **Our job is to** \_\_\_\_\_. The more we place a focus on Him, the less we will focus on our own interests.
  - Not that we are obligated to forsake all earthly interests but we use our blessings to expand the message of Christ.
  - On the other hand, John the Baptist willfully gave up the pleasures of this world so he could pave the way for people to come to the Messiah.

The Bible says that if we pray according to His will, He will answer our prayers. (1 Jn. 5:14-15)

- If we want to be well-equipped to minister to people in the harvest fields, then we should pray for God to bless us with what we need to be effective.
- Take time to pray daily that God would open doors for you to tell others about Him.
- Then watch to see how He answers that prayer!

**Q: What are some of the most effective ways to get a message out to the world?**

There are so many ways to reach people in the harvest fields and the opportunities continue to grow with the **advancement of technology**.

- Just think about how life has changed in the last 100 years- from telegraph to radio to television to the internet to cell phones... The world is evermore available at our fingertips.
  - You can share your faith through **social media, blogs, podcasts, and websites**.
  - You can use apps and share videos and memes and verses to inspire people.
  - People in the most remote regions of the world are gaining access to the world wide web which means they have access to the message of the good news.
  - We are truly living in unprecedented times!
  - Our commission is to take the good news to the ends of the earth and it is plausible to think that in our lifetime this will happen for the first time in history!

Even with so many options available, **the most effective ministry will always happen when one individual personally reaches out to another in love.**

That's why it is important to grow in your ability to relate to others.

- We have mentioned the importance of being a good friend already.
- Growing your influence means that you are actively pursuing new relationships with the people that God brings across your path.
- Paul said in Colossians 4 that we should *"make the most of every opportunity."*
- What does that look like?
  - It might be saying hello to someone walking down the sidewalk.
  - Striking up a conversation with someone in a grocery line.
  - Thanking someone who has done a good job.
  - Noticing and complimenting someone's outfit.
  - Being friendly to new people at work or at church.
  - Making an appropriate comment to a Facebook post.
  - Perhaps opening up your home for foster care or a foreign exchange student.
  - Inviting your neighbors over for a meal or hosting a block party.
  - Starting a small group in your home.
  - Engaging in a discipleship relationship with another individual.

- Keep in mind that God may want you to **use your spiritual gifts to grow your influence.**
  - Has He given you a gift for hospitality? Invite people over to your home.
  - Do you have a gift for exhortation? Perhaps discipleship would be a good approach.
  - People with a gift of encouragement could listen to someone's story over a cup of coffee.
- As you pray for God to enlarge your territory through networking, make sure that your motives are lined up with bringing attention to God.
- Keep your heart in check to be sure that you are being humble and vulnerable.

## Grow Your Abilities

Another way to increase your influence is to have more to offer.

Unfortunately, many people want to serve God but they don't feel qualified. Well, if that's the case then we need to get qualified!

Everyone has \_\_\_\_\_. And whatever that something is, we can grow to offer something even better.

**Q: If you could do really well at one thing that would help other people, what would that one thing be? How could you grow in that area to become more proficient?**

- If you have a passion for encouragement, perhaps you find a course in counseling. Maybe you might even consider getting licensed?
- If you have a gift of mercy, research what the needs are in your community.
- If you want to speak, maybe you could take some classes on communication.
- If you like to cook, learn more about cooking.
- If you like to serve, maybe you learn some new trades (painting, drywall, plumbing) or purchase a newer truck and trailer.
- If you like to teach, talk to your pastor about starting a class.
- If you like to preach, maybe God wants you to be a pastor someday.
- If you have a passion for people, missions could be in your future.
- Opportunities for growth are all around you. Mentors, online classes, in person classes, personal research on the internet.
- Read books, subscribe to blogs and podcasts, ask questions, find helpful articles.
- Take some courses on leadership, learn about managing people.

**Build into your character** so that you can better "season your conversations" with salt.

Be sure that you are constantly seeking to grow and looking for opportunities to apply what you know. Make yourself a more useful tool in God's hands!

## Growing Your Influence in a Person's Life

As much as it is important to work on our overall ability to network, connect, and relate to people and to build bridges to others, we also need to be able to grow our influence in an individual's life.

- **Be a good friend.** Practice good listening skills. Ask good questions. Show them you care. All of these are important to make a good first impression.
- You may have a short initial conversation, but God might not want you to stop there. **Pray for them** and look for opportunities to continue the conversation.
- Listen for clues about where they are at in their faith. Do they want to talk about God or do they change the conversation?
- If they change the conversation, is it because they are angry, hurting, or confused?

**Q: In what ways have you seen God growing your influence? Who has God brought into our life to minister to?**

**Wait for the right time.** Timing is everything. *"A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver."* (Pr. 25:11)

- If you push too hard, a person can shut down. If you don't push at all, people will assume that you just don't care.
- Pray specifically for their needs and for wisdom, so you can show them the love of God.
- Stretch yourself and challenge yourself to get out of your \_\_\_\_\_!

## How Are You Doing?

Okay, my friends, let's be completely honest. We all know and agree that the Great Commission was given to all believers and Jesus has asked us to take the Good News to the world. **How are you doing with this?**

- It's easier said than done! I can't tell you how many times I have stood in a checkout line and I was too busy or too distracted or too uncomfortable to acknowledge the person in front of or behind me.
- Canadian hockey player and coach Wayne Gretzky once said, "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take." We need to get off of the bench and into the game!
- If we're looking at the fruit that has come from our testimony up to this point, would we have something that we would be proud to lay down as an offering before God as we stand before Him?
  - There is no guilt and no shame here.
  - We are all human. We all get distracted. We all have fears.
  - We know that God loves us not because of what we do for Him but simply because we are His children.

- On the other hand, now is our opportunity to live a life with no regrets, to make a difference in eternity, and to bring meaning to the words, *"Well done, good and faithful servant!"*
- Again, **no one is pointing fingers** right now because we are all in this together.
  - This is a reminder that God has given us a job to do and we will give a report when the job is done.
  - The report **doesn't change our status before God**, but it is our opportunity to say THANK YOU for the gift that none of us deserves.
  - Sharing His love with others is our offering to Him; it is our opportunity to bring Him praise.
  - Can you imagine how much more wonderful life with God will be when we see the impact our lives have made as we celebrate with those who are with us? Some of them because we reached into their lives with God's love.

### Q: If sharing our faith doesn't change God's love for us, why is it important?

As a general thought, keep in mind that the harvest fields include not only people who need to know Jesus, but also people in the church need to be built up and ministered to as well.

- God has planted seeds of truth and we are all growing in our faith.
  - The harvest fields that are mentioned in the Gospels are not just outside the four walls of the church. Many seekers visit every week to see if what they've heard is true.
  - What a privilege it is to be used by God as we join Him in the work that He is doing in people all over the world.
  - People He cares about. People He loves. People in all different shapes and sizes and colors. **They all matter to Him.** Every. Last. One.
- Our job is to \_\_\_\_\_ until Jesus returns.
  - We don't know when that day will be so we stand firm together, encouraging one another daily, faithfully carrying out His will.
  - We intentionally look for ways to love or create new opportunities for relationships to form.
  - We serve, we listen, we look beyond sin and love all people unconditionally – just like God loves us.

## Set Goals

With a message and a mission so important, it would be wise for us to set some goals.

- Bearing a harvest for the kingdom of God isn't about numbers, but it is about souls.
  - **Proverbs 16:3** says *"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans."*
  - Pray about who God wants you to reach out to and for the strength to follow through.

- It would be a good idea to find an accountability partner who can join you in prayer.
- **Set some goals** – be realistic, but make sure that they are “measurable.”
  - Could you share your faith with one person a day? A week?
  - Then, go out and love people with all your heart, soul, mind and strength!
  - Together we are increasing our ability to glorify God.

## **SUMMARY:**

If we want to bear fruit for God, we will need to grow our sphere of influence to reach more people. When our actions and attitude are in line with the character of Jesus, we will draw people to ourselves and point them to God. We do this one person at a time, allowing God to work through us as we demonstrate God’s love to others. We must be intentional to equip ourselves and to reach out to people in need; setting goals and having some accountability will increase our effectiveness in touching people’s lives.

**Class Assignment:** Hopefully you have had the opportunity to strike up some spiritual conversations. If you haven’t been able to start this habit, you might consider asking someone to help you out. Perhaps you have been enjoying the relationships and discussions – is there someone in your group that you might be able to help grow in this area? Partner up with someone and get together to love on another person or two. Before you reach out, pray together and talk about what their physical, spiritual, and emotional needs are. How can you bless them? Then, set a date and make it happen!

## **Memory Verse:**

**Luke 10:2** - *“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

## **PRAYER REQUESTS:**

## HARVEST – Lesson 6: Until Jesus Returns

Jesus first came into Rachel's life when she was just 3 years old. Unfortunately, the environment around her brought about circumstances beyond her control that led her down a path of destruction. This bright, young girl came to live in fear of abuse, had no support from her family, and felt invisible to the world.

Rachel tried to fill the void any way she could, seeking attention to find the love she yearned for. She turned to drugs, alcohol, and sex which led to many relationships and 5 beautiful children. Because of the instability in her life she came to hate who she was. Looking back Rachel can see that God was protecting her every step of the way. She first realized it the day she got into an accident while driving 90 miles an hour, intoxicated, and walked away without a scratch. Through physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, Rachel still struggled to see any value in her life. She continued to live a double life, attending church on the weekends, but using drugs to escape her pain.

Eventually, her mistakes landed her 35 years in prison and her children were placed into foster care.

### Looking Back

Life is messy. I wish I could say that this was just a random story, but Rachel is a real person like many others that has had a difficult life that led to some poor decisions. Why did this happen? Where did Rachel go wrong? Is it even her fault? Did the church fail? Could this have been avoided? If so, how?

**Q: What do you think? Who is responsible for Rachel's outcome? Are we all responsible for making our own choices? Is this a fair assessment? How could the church do a better job of ministering to people like Rachel?**

Let's do a review and answer these questions.

- Looking back we've spent 24 weeks painting a picture of God's will for how His children spend their time upon the earth.
- **Our time here is \_\_\_\_\_** but we are created to live for \_\_\_\_\_.
- Since the fall of mankind, God has been seeking to restore a relationship with us and offers us forgiveness when we receive the gift of salvation through Jesus' death on the cross.
- When we receive that gift, we choose to die to ourselves and live a new life, committed to obeying the will of God.
- **His will is that we show the world the same kind of love that He has shown to us.**

How do we do this!?



Just as **God has PLANTED seeds of truth in our hearts**, so we are called to sow seeds of love and truth into the lives of others.

- We sow seeds of truth and love by acknowledging people, stepping into their lives, assessing their needs, and by doing what we can to demonstrate God's love to them in a tangible form.
  - Truth bears witness to the heart of God.
  - It corrects mistruths and uncovers lies that have been spread.
  - It brings stability where there is confusion and peace where there is chaos.
- When we plant seeds we are giving people opportunities to experience God's love and to recognize their need for a Savior.

**Matthew 13:31-32** - *"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."*

- We wrote down a **one-page description of God's unique purpose** for our lives. This gives us some direction to where God wants us to plant seeds in the lives around us.

## Planted Seeds

Not all of the seeds that are planted in our hearts come from God. While God plants good seeds, the Bible is clear that there is an enemy who plants weeds that choke out the truth.

- **In Rachel's life, God had planted seeds** of love in her heart as a toddler, **but Satan was quick to snatch away** any growth that might have happened (*see Mt. 13*).
- The family structure is a critical part of God's plan so that we can grow up in an environment where these seeds of truth can thrive and flourish.
- Because Rachel's family environment didn't allow for it, the seeds never took root.
- Instead, the world brought in a flood of untruth, a deluge of lies, distortions, and perversions of what God intended.

**Q: Looking back, can you see times in your life where you were tempted or gave into believing the world's lies? How did you come to recognize the truth?**

- If we take time, we may see some similar patterns in our own lives.
- How important it is for us to feed truth into our own lives, and to protect those around us from the lies of the evil one. We protect them by telling them the truth.
- That's what family does, and \_\_\_\_\_!
- If Rachel had a family around her that loved her and planted seeds of truth in her life, it would have no doubt changed her outcome.
  - You have great value because you are created by God.
  - You are loved by God.
  - You are forgiven for your mistakes.

- God can make something beautiful with your life.
- God is not done with you yet.

## Watered Seeds

Then **God WATERS these seeds of truth as we surround ourselves in a community** of like-minded believers who want to see us thrive in our faith.

- We fellowship with other Christians during weekend services at church, and as much as we are able. It is good for us to engage in other opportunities as well.
- Small groups, classes, one-on-one discipleship, special events, and ministry outreach are all examples of how we can live in community in a way that builds our faith.
- Without community we can be more vulnerable to spiritual attack, moral failure, and an unproductive life.

**1 Corinthians 12:25-27** - *"there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."*

- **We identified someone to come along side of us** to encourage us and to hold us accountable to do the will of God. Are you meeting regularly with an accountability partner yet?

The community around Rachel was not looking out for her spiritual wellbeing.

- They were looking out for their own interests. This is the way of the world.
- **How might this have looked if Rachel were connected to a small group** at church or a mentor who worked with her on a weekly basis?
- Perhaps she got connected to a support group that refused to let her isolate herself and checked in on her regularly to see how she was doing?
- Ah, but she did go to church on the weekends!
  - Perhaps what she needed was someone to notice her with a warm welcome or a personal invitation.
  - It's hard to know what went wrong.
  - Maybe the church did love her and she wasn't ready to open up.
  - She also could have reached out for help, but that doesn't often happen.
  - We need to be looking for people to love every week we come to church.
  - We can't wait for them to ask for help – Jesus went to the sick and hurting.
- Sometimes you don't even need to know someone's story. Maybe you know about a person's "community" – the environment that they live in.
  - God may give us discernment and intuition to see into a person's life or to make some reasonable judgments that not all is well.
  - As you pray, as you talk to people, as you hear about needs, look for ways to love people that God brings into your life.
  - "Rachel" could be sitting in the pew in front of you this Sunday morning.

**Q: Describe the ideal “community group.” How many people are in it? What do you talk about? How often does it meet?**

## **Growing Seeds**

As we apply our faith in serving one another, with God’s help **we will continue to GROW.**

- We take our understanding of God and His will and put it into action.
- He has given us each a spiritual gift for the purpose of making the church stronger.
- We all have a gift to offer and our piece of the puzzle is an important part of God’s master design.
- **As we serve one another**, we make God \_\_\_\_\_!

**1 Peter 4:10-11** - *“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”*

- **We took an assessment** to identify how God has created us to serve in His Church using our spiritual gifts and prayed for direction to apply them in service. You were encouraged to start serving in an area that you are gifted in.

People like Rachel need someone to serve them. To come along side and point them in the right direction.

- Rachel needs someone to greet her at the door of the church with a warm welcome.
- Someone to follow up with her first visit.
- A friend to mentor her in discipleship.
- A small group leader to provide a place for her to experience God’s love and to learn about the truth from His Word.
- She needs a person to lead a recovery group that provides the tools for her to become spiritually healthy.
- She needs people to love her unconditionally when she relapses.
- She needs people to love her children when she is unavailable.
- Rachel might need a job, she might need groceries, or someone to unclog a toilet.
- We need to be available for Rachel.

**Q: Are you serving in a ministry somewhere? How does your service contribute to building the kingdom of God? Put it into words.**

We know. Being available for others is asking a lot.

- We’re busy with work. Busy with home. We want to relax. It’s not convenient.
- That’s what it means to die to ourselves and to live for Jesus. (Gal. 2:20)

- Our church is about sacrificing the way that Jesus did by looking out for the interests of others. (Ph. 2:4)
- We need you to \_\_\_\_\_ as an example to those around you!

## Harvesting Fruit

After God has equipped us with the truth, He sends us out into the world to plant new seeds that will **bear a HARVEST for His kingdom.**

- We are called to plant seeds, but the growth of the harvest really comes from the work of the Holy Spirit.
- It's the same unchanging message that has been preached for 2,000 years and that has transformed billions of lives throughout history.
- Sharing our faith isn't complicated but it will likely force us to get out of our comfort zone and God is more than worthy of our very best effort.

When you **tell other people about what God has done in your life**, you are carrying out the vision of our church to its proper end.

- God is constantly working, and we have the privilege to join Him in what He is doing.
- Sometimes we feel like giving up on people. We think that they will never change.
- He never gives up, never tires, never slumbers, God is pursuing people 24-7-365!

So, **what about Rachel? God never gave up on her**, either!

- While in prison, the church reached out to her by loving on her family.
- By God's grace Rachel was baptized in prison on January 2, 2020.
- By God's amazing grace she was released from prison after just two years on April 13, 2020.
- By God's unmerited favor, all five of her beautiful children were given back to her!
- Because of God's incessant pursuit of Rachel's heart, she went back to school for Human Services with an emphasis in Domestic Violence.
- And God's not done yet! He was at work in her life the day she was born and He has never stopped working on her – drawing her heart to His.
- God is at work in every person's life. Sometimes they just need someone to come alongside of them to point it out.

Are there still struggles for Rachel? Yes. Is life easy now? No, but she has strength that comes from above to carry on and move forward. She says, "I know Jesus now and there is no turning back." Rachel is a life that has changed!

- This is why we do what we do.
  - All praise and glory be to God for what He has done in Rachel's life and continues to do!
  - There are more stories still being written and God gives us the chance to help Him write the end of the story.

- Happy endings. Hope-filled wrap-ups with a glorious reunion ahead.

**Q: Have you seen any Christians fall away from faith? Why do some people lean into God in their difficult times, and others walk away?**

## What's Next?

Hopefully this study and discussion has helped you to get a picture in your mind of what God's Church is all about.

We have this pattern of growth given to us in scripture, and He has empowered us with His Holy Spirit, *"to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."* (Eph. 4:12-13)

- We need to **keep our hearts on fire** through prayer, fellowship, and by serving others using the gifts that God has given to us until we reach the ends of the earth.
- Reaching the world with the message of Jesus Christ is our mission.
- Seeds are planted one at a time through personal encounters with the people God has placed in our lives – Just like Jesus did.
- **One life at a time** we are turning the tide of the culture and changing people's eternal destiny.
- We serve others with all our heart until the day God calls us home.
- The seed grows again and bears fruit, completing the cycle.
- This is our vision – outreach, discipleship, teaching – through relationships.
- The Apostle Peter reminds us of the words of the prophet Isaiah in **1 Peter 1:24-25**. He says, *"All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever."*
- God works in us and through us to accomplish His will. We will only be fully effective if we are **all in and faithful to working together for the** \_\_\_\_\_.
- Our church is God's Church

Where do we go from here?

**Q: Do you feel like God has given you any direction on your next steps as you grow in your faith? How has this study helped you in living out the truth?**

## SUMMARY:

We live in a fallen world and sometimes people get caught up in patterns of sin because of life circumstances. We cannot look down upon others but must have compassion in our hearts as Jesus would. God has commissioned the church to interrupt the work of Satan and to redeem what has been lost due to sin. It is a mission that will not end until Jesus returns. We are called to be faithful and diligent until that time. We protect the Church from evil, and we go into the

world to rescue those who have been led astray by the lies that come from the spiritual forces of evil. Every person matters to God. Every. Last. One!

**Class Assignment:** We set a goal of ministering to the needs (with the hope of sharing your faith) to at least three people over the last several weeks. Ultimately, our lifestyle will set us up to be constantly watching for opportunities and for making opportunities happen. Where can you plant seeds of truth? How can you connect people to a group where they can grow? We are building God's Church and making His glory known. Stay connected to fellowship and look for ways to help others from one step to the next: Plant > Water > Grow > Harvest – Repeat!

**Memory Verse:**

**Luke 10:2** - *"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

PRAYER REQUESTS:

## Glossary of terms:

**Accountability** – Giving someone else authority to speak into our lives about the choices that we make, good or bad. Accountability involves trust, vulnerability, and humility to listen to the truth when it is spoken in love.

**Accountability Partner** – Someone who will help you to be faithful to living out what you believe and achieving the goals that you set. Having a person hold you to your word can be helpful for times when you aren't thinking clearly or might be blind to what others can see in your life.

**Apostle** – An apostle is the first successful person to establish a ministry in a particular sphere or region. In scripture, the Apostles specifically refer to the Twelve disciples that Jesus chose to sit under His teaching in order to establish the Early Church.

**Arrows In / Arrows Out** – Churches need both kinds of ministries; ministries that serve the church and ministries that reach out into the community. Churches that focus solely on inward development fail to carry out the will of God and will eventually stagnate. The Church has been commissioned by God to go into the darkness with the light of Christ.

**Charismata** – Another name for spiritual gifts, specifically the supernatural gifts. (*See Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4*)

**Christ** – Christ is the Greek version of the Hebrew word for Messiah; it is a title and not a part of Jesus' name. The word for "Christ" is rooted in the idea of anointing, which was applied in times when a king would be chosen by God through the prophets of the Old Testament. Jesus was considered to be king through the line of David, a great patriarch of Jewish history.

**Church** – If not capitalized, "church" usually refers to a local body of believers or the building in which they congregate. When Church is capitalized, it refers to the timeless, universal Church that spans the entire globe throughout history. The Church is the kingdom of God upon the earth. It is more than a building; it is the God-fearing people united under the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ.

**Deacon** – The role of a deacon was committed to serving the physical needs of the church. The position was usually delegated by church leadership. It is first noted in scripture in Acts 6:1-4.

**Fast** – To go without food or water for a period of time in order to draw near to the heart of God. There is no specific directive in scripture about the proper way to fast. Usually in scripture fasting included refraining from both food and water. If you should consider a fast, please consult your doctor.

**General Revelation** – God reveals Himself to all of creation as He leaves evidence that bears witness to His creative work. It is the observable part of His revelation in the universe. The stars, the moon, the planets, the earth and everything in it point towards a Creator.

**Glory** – The manifested magnificence of God that emanates from His being. It is His power, love, and beauty that commands honor and reverence.

**Gospel** – When starting with a capital “G,” Gospel would refer to one of the first four books of the New Testament. These are the accounts of Jesus’ ministry while upon the earth. When not capitalized, the “gospel”, which means “good news”, is the story of how Jesus Christ has saved us from the penalty for our sin against God.

**Holy Spirit** – Considered to be a “Person” rather than an impersonal force. The Spirit of God executes the will of God throughout creation. In the Old Testament, the Spirit dwelled in the Holy of Holies (the temple) and only came upon people when God would call them for His purposes. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit resides in the hearts of those who have received salvation through Jesus Christ.

**Inerrant** – Meaning without error. The Bible is inspired by God and therefore is perfect in its original form. Though it may be misinterpreted by people, the original message conveys exactly what God wanted us to know about Himself and His plan for creation.

**Inspired** – The Bible was written by men as they were led by God. Inspired means that the authors of scripture accurately communicated God’s message as the Holy Spirit guided them. (*See 2 Peter 1:20-21 and 2 Tim. 3:16-17*)

**Kingdom of God** – The realm of God’s domain; spiritual and physical. The Church is the manifestation of the kingdom of God on the earth. The spiritual realm is also under His authority.

**Lifestyle evangelism** – Living out your faith in a way that causes people to ask why you are different. It’s about reaching into the lives of the people around us that we see on a daily basis and demonstrating to them what the love of God looks and feels like.

**Meditation** – Whereas eastern meditation practices the emptying of one’s mind, in Christian meditation we fill our hearts and minds with thoughts about God, His Word, and His plans. In the busyness of today’s culture, it is important to step away and find time to refocus our lives on the will of God. Spending time in reflection and prayer can be helpful for living a life that makes a difference.

**Messiah** – The Hebrew name for “Christ”, meaning “anointed one”. Jesus has been anointed to be King over all, by His right as the Son of God and descendant of King David. Symbolically, Jesus was “anointed” with an expensive perfume by a woman named Mary. (*Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:36-50; John 12:1-8*)

**New Testament** – The second part of the Holy Bible containing 27 books that record the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and the Early Church. Much of the New Testament is comprised of letters that were written and circulated within the Church at the time. It ends with the book of Revelation in which the Apostle John depicts heavenly visions about end times.

**Old Testament** – The Old Testament records the history of the Jewish nation from the beginning of time through about 400 B.C. The first five books are referred to the Torah, Pentateuch, or Law





(all describing the same books), and the rest of the 39 books include history, poetry, and prophecy written by various authors over a span of about 1000 years.

**Overseer** – Sometimes called an elder, bishop, or presbyter (often depending upon denominational affiliation), an overseer was/is responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of a local church body. They were to lead by example and teach the people about God. An overseer would be the equivalent of a pastor today.

**Parachurch Ministry** – A faith-based organization that ministers to people in the name of Christ but is not the direct outflow of a church. Instead, it comes alongside the church and helps to achieve a common vision. A shelter for people in transition, a food pantry, or a soup kitchen might be examples of a parachurch ministry.

**Particular Revelation** – God speaks to us personally through our own relationship with Him. As we read the Bible and it comes to life, as we witness a miracle or an answer to prayer, as He guides us through life circumstances through the Holy Spirit, we hear God speak to our heart. God is not distant from us. He knows us and He is intimately involved with the details of our life.

**Repentance** – The Hebrew word for repent means “to change direction”; the Greek word means “to change one’s mind.” When we come before God, we must acknowledge our sin and turn away from it so that we don’t continue a lifestyle that offends God. Our goal is to realign our spirit with the heart of God.

**Righteousness** – Living a life that is pleasing to God. It is the opposite of sin. The only way that we can truly be seen as righteous before God is if our sin has been washed away through Christ’s death on the cross.

**Sacrificial System** – When God called the nation of Israel out of Egypt, He established a system of substitutionary atonement where the blood of animals would satisfy the wrath of God towards the sins of His children. When Jesus came as the perfect Lamb and died as a sacrifice in our place, our need for forgiveness was fulfilled once and for all! The temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. which put an end to sacrifices for all of Judaism. The temple was the only permissible location for “legal” animal sacrifice.

**Sin** – Any action or thought that opposes the will of God, whether willfully or out of ignorance. The price of sinning against a holy God is eternal death, or separation from His presence.

**Speaking in Tongues** – The fancy word is glossalalia, and it refers to the Spirit-given ability to pray or talk in a language that would otherwise be unknown to an individual. When in a corporate setting, it is anticipated that a message delivered in a tongue would be followed by a translator or translation offered so that it benefits the hearers and does not lead to a self-righteous attitude.

**Special Revelation** – God revealing who He is to mankind through supernatural means. A worldwide flood; a burning bush; a pillar of fire; stone tablets; plagues. Throughout history God

has shown Himself to man in various forms and His plan for us is recorded in the Word of God – the Bible. In this sense, we can see the Word of God, His special revelation of Himself to us.

**Spiritual Gifts** – Abilities given by the Spirit of God for the purpose of helping others to see the hand of God at work in their lives. There are many different gifts and all are needed to help the Church to be effective in carrying out the mission to make disciples of all nations.

**Spiritual Disciplines** – Activities that foster spiritual health. Reading the Bible, spending time in prayer, memorizing scripture, meditating on the Word of God, writing down thoughts in a journal... Discipline takes effort, but with that investment comes a valuable return of growth.

**Spiritual Gifts** – Special gifts given by the Holy Spirit to the believer for the purpose of building up the Church.

**Stewardship** – Everything that we have comes from God and belongs to God. We are given the responsibility to take care of and use our resources in a way that we bring glory to Him and to His kingdom. We use these resources for our daily needs and we also return a portion to Him to remind us of His many blessings and to advance the mission of the Church.

**Testimony** – The story about what God has done in your life. The purpose of a testimony is to put a spotlight on God through His activity in our lives. It is an opportunity to tell others about God's goodness and mercy for the purpose of drawing them into His presence.

**Tongues** – The Spirit of God enables some people to speak in another language to bring a message to a body of believers. At times in scripture, the Spirit has manifested the presence of God in tongues as known foreign languages, and other times as a language unknown to mankind. The gift of tongues bears witness to the work and presence of the Holy Spirit.

**Trinity** – A word that describes the relationship behind the three Persons of the Godhead; God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. All three are mentioned together on equal terms (*Mt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Cor. 12:4-6*). All three were present and active in creation (*Gen. 1:1-3; Ps. 33:6; Jn. 1:1-3*). All three are present at Jesus' baptism (*Mt. 3:16-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-22; Jn. 1:31-34*). All three are active in man's salvation (*Gal. 4:6; Rom. 15:16; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 1 Pet. 1:1-2*).

**Worldview** – The lens through which we see and evaluate the world we live in. It is formed through our experiences and knowledge that we gain which then become our beliefs.

**Worship** – The act of giving God what He deserves. This can be done through song, with words, or by how we live our daily lives. We ascribe worth to Him, proclaiming Him to be above all else.

# Fill in the blank answers:

## PLANT

### Lesson 1:

Truth  
get rid of the box  
PLANTED/ WATERED/  
GROW/ HARVEST  
in your heart  
66 books  
canon  
love and faithfulness  
39 books/ 27 books  
the Gospels  
Epistles

### Lesson 2:

relational  
chance and evolution  
eternally separated  
good/very good  
sacrificial  
to be with us forever  
make everything new

### Lesson 3:

understand/communicate  
Old Testament  
New Covenant  
Romans Road  
way you live  
accept  
the Great Commission

### Lesson 4:

Abraham  
Daniel  
Anointed One  
Son of God  
received worship  
humanity  
sacrificial Lamb

### Lesson 5:

kings and prophets  
Comforter/Counselor  
new birth  
encourage other people  
secondary issue  
quench

### Lesson 6:

illumination  
letting it sink in  
Pray without ceasing  
comes from God  
help you to process

## WATER

### Lesson 1:

interdependent  
denominations  
kingdom of God  
family of God

### Lesson 2:

with Him forever  
His hands and feet  
needs/wants  
people are messy  
focus our attention on others  
condemnation/ blessing  
attractive  
watching you

### Lesson 3:

in close proximity  
meet people at every level  
Community Groups  
heart of the church  
temptation  
a shallow platform

### Lesson 4:

days of celebration  
worship God  
we are not alone  
Every breath we take  
with our lives

### Lesson 5:

people like you and me  
useless vessel  
connection with God

### Lesson 6:

interdependent  
true growth takes place  
unconditionally  
choose a good curriculum  
uncomfortable  
last a lifetime

## GROW

### Lesson 1:

a God-given ability  
to bless others  
reaching its full potential  
passions and desires  
people/places/reasons

### Lesson 2:

General  
Special  
Particular  
in touch with His heart  
deny your selfish desires  
follow where He leads  
regardless of our  
performance  
the greatest commandment

### Lesson 3:

universal directive  
reward  
for the glory of God  
the same as anyone else's  
bearing fruit that will last  
Go slow, go far

### Lesson 4:

do for the church  
abide in God's power  
unexpected life events  
makes everything new  
give it to God  
take a break  
privilege/gratitude

### Lesson 5:

start to die  
privilege of ministry  
fat and lazy  
individually/corporately  
open door  
because they are

### Lesson 6:

"point" in time  
big picture  
people  
a lot of work  
full of God's love  
with our sin  
blessing from God

## HARVEST

### Lesson 1:

it may not be right  
personal desires  
skewed perspective  
familiar with it  
pass/fail  
allow for some grace

### Lesson 2:

not about you  
in a moment  
"Christianese"  
compare it to God  
satisfy our debt  
invitation

### Lesson 3:

personal topic  
spiritual conversations  
themselves  
bad people/better person  
live

### Lesson 4:

jars of clay  
living like Jesus  
Just be yourself  
scare/drawing them in  
all at once

### Lesson 5:

excited  
make Jesus known  
something to offer  
comfort zone  
keep up the good work

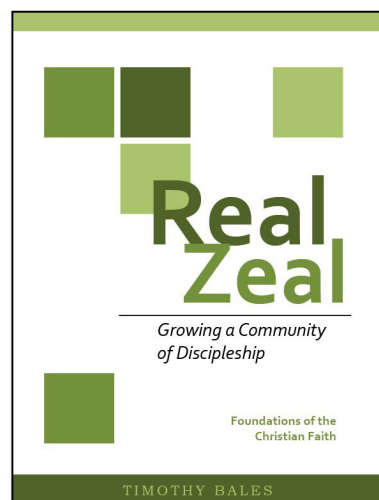
### Lesson 6:

limited/eternity  
we are family  
attractive to the world  
set the bar high  
glory of His name

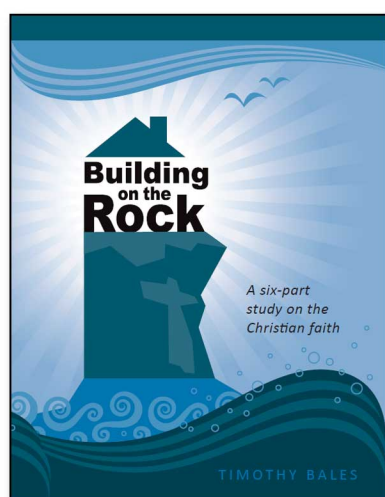
## Looking for your next study?

**Real Zeal** is a one-on-one discipleship curriculum that serves to encourage you to bear fruit for the kingdom of God. Using this book as a guide, you can lead a seeker or young Christian through a study about what God says regarding topics relevant to Christian living. This is a great way to develop meaningful relationships with another Christian brother or sister! Areas of study include:

1. **Following** – Choosing to Commit to Christ
2. **Learning** – Equipping myself to live a purposeful life
3. **Living** – Acting like Christ in a sinful world
4. **Ministering** – Offering the message to others
5. **Leading** – Equipping others to go and make disciples that multiply



Life brings challenges to all of us, but Jesus Christ is our foundation and our cornerstone! Jesus said that if you build upon a firm foundation, then you will be able to withstand the storms of life. Our strength comes from God as He reveals His will to us through scripture. 1 Corinthians 3:11 teaches that *“no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”* Jesus is not only our foundation, but He is also our cornerstone which supports us (Lk. 20:17). We find our hope and our strength in Him which leads us to victory!



**Building on the Rock** is a six-part study to ground Christians in their faith. This curriculum can be used for personal study, in one-on-one discipleship, or in a small group or class setting. Each ten-lesson study focuses on a specific area essential to building a strong Christian faith:

1. **Understanding the Blueprints** – *Basic Beliefs*
2. **Pouring a Foundation** – *Christian Disciplines*
3. **Setting the Framework 1** – *Old Testament*
4. **Setting the Framework 2** – *New Testament*
5. **Establishing your Flooring** – *Theology*
6. **Interior Decoration** – *Christian Living*

Let's look at the Word of God to see what He says about His plan for creation, the purpose of the Church, and your role in it!

