



FOUR LEVELS OF THE SCHOOL OF DISCIPLESHIP

LEVEL 2



GROW

THREE MONTHS

DISCIPLESHIP MANUAL

STRATEGY OF JESUS SIMPLIFIED

strategy



**APOSTOLIC ASSEMBLY
OF THE FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS**

**STRATEGY OF JESUS
SCHOOL OF DISCIPLESHIP
LEVEL 2 - GROW**

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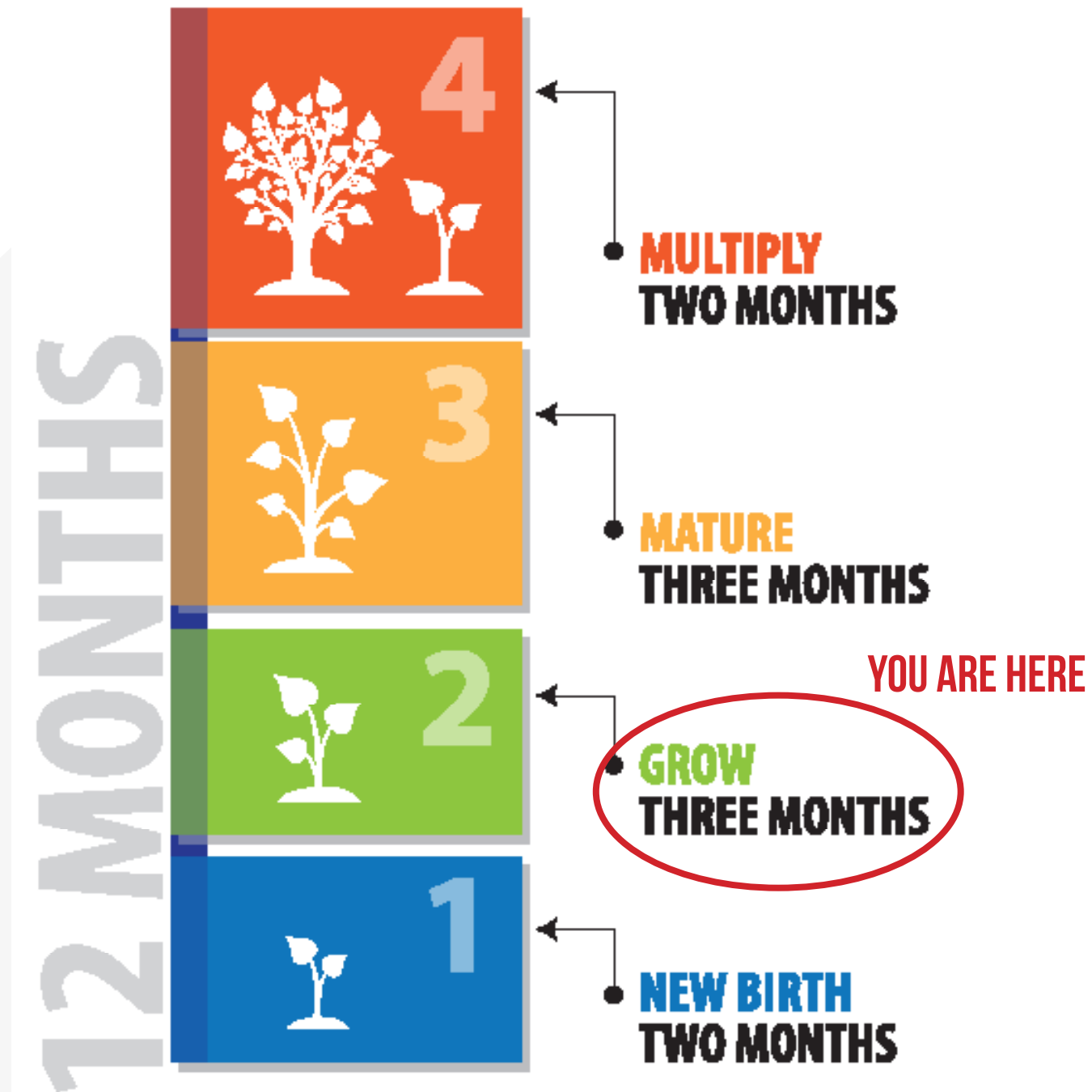
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DISCIPLESHIP MANUAL

FOUR LEVELS OF THE SCHOOL OF DISCIPLESHIP



LESSON 1

THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLESHIP

What is discipleship? Why is it important? What purposes does it serve?

Memory verse: *“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”* Ephesians 4:13-15

1. INTRODUCTION

We are educated from an early age with the goal of reaching our full potential in the various facets in our lives. From general observations we understand the importance of educating ourselves because we know that an education will make the difference between a decent life and a destitute life. The same is true of the spiritual life. Now let us examine the spiritual.

2. WHAT IS CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP?

When we speak of Christian discipleship, basically we are referring to being taught how to live the kind of life Jesus lived. When we received Christ as our Savior, we become responsible for displaying a new life; we were made new creatures. It is from that moment on that discipleship should effect important changes in the believer.

Discipleship is frequently associated with nothing more than a series of themes taught in a classroom, by an experienced teacher, using a well-organized workbook. That is true in part, however, discipleship cannot be limited to the classroom. Discipleship can take place anywhere or in any circumstance. Discipleship is accomplished with the guidance of a mature believer through the working of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Every believer, throughout their life, has the opportunity to learn to imitate the Lord Jesus in every area of their life.

There are different ideas regarding Discipleship that are not complete in themselves. For example, the idea that discipleship means to transmit a body of knowledge from the mind of the teacher to the mind of the student. The other idea of “training,” which implies that discipleship only involved training the student to follow certain rites, rules or habits; or to develop certain character traits. Discipleship is also thought of as a process to prepare a student for the future.

All these contain certain elements of truth; however, Christian discipleship is more than transformation and development. A good definition would be the following: Christian discipleship is the effective communication of the salvation experience, which is in Jesus Christ, in such a way, that through a personal relationship with God, the disciple is transformed, matures and is perfected. This definition includes the ideas of effectively communicating to the believer godly character traits and customs, as well as a readiness to serve Him. Total transformation is the key principal. That is what makes everything else possible.



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3. THE CHARGE OF CHRIST

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” Matthew 28:19-20.

The charge of Jesus is direct and simple; it refers to teaching, it includes making disciples and revolves around the commandments. The educational goal is that the apprentice will learn to ***“to observe all things”*** Christ commanded. It conveys the idea of obedience and putting into practice what has been learned. It is more than simply listening. It requires more than merely learning certain truths. The Christian teacher must teach while looking for fruit in the lives of his disciples. Christ clearly did more than just transmit knowledge. His teaching transformed the lives of those who followed Him.

According to Matthew 28:19-20, Discipleship has four foundations. They are:

(1) Expansion: ***“Go ye therefore...”*** The teacher must seek the student, convey the message of salvation and teach them biblical truths. Before reaching them, it is necessary to go search for them.

(2) Evangelization: ***“and teach all nations, baptizing them ...”*** The teacher must seek the student, convey the message of salvation and teach them biblical truths. Before reaching them, it is necessary to go search for them.

(3) Teaching: ***“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...”*** Winning new disciples is only the first step unto an abundant and fruitful life in Christ. The student must now learn the commandments of Christ; they must become established in the faith and the Christian life, and affirm themselves on doctrinal biblical truths and conduct.

(4) Edification: ***“and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world...”*** The emergent, well-established disciple, will develop a testimony of faithfulness to God in every area of his life as he reflects Christ.

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLESHIP

Growing in the Faith is fundamental and vital. Learning how to live the Christian life will help us avoid many problems that could impoverish our life. An impoverished Christian life would require counsel from our leaders and more mature brethren in the Lord to correct. Anything that distances us from the plan God has for our having and abundant life must be avoided.

Jesus said: ***“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”*** John 10:10 He has promised to help us know the truth and that the truth would make us free. Free from what? Free from the bondage of sin; free from condemnation; free from ignorance; free to live in victory everyday.

To grow in Christ is to open ourselves up more and more to wonderful experiences. Our joys will then completely cover our temporary afflictions, persecutions and difficulties that occur in during a lifetime of walking with Christ. The Apostle Paul puts it this way :



“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

Clearly, the Christian is not promised a life free from problems and difficulties; but he is promised a permanent peace that no affliction in this world can take away. Jesus said: *“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”* John 16:33.

For us, there is nothing greater than the gift of salvation and the joy of fellowship with Jesus that we enjoy during our life here on Earth. Jesus has not left us orphans. He has come to us through the Holy Spirit. He abides in us, and He guides us through the Holy Spirit and His Word every day. Therefore, the more familiar we become with His Word, the better chance we have of living a victorious Christian life that is pleasing to Him. A life that resembles the life of Jesus is the greatest testimony of the new birth that any Christian can have.

In the Level 2 Grow course, we will explore questions like: What does the Word of God teach us concerning our walk with Christ and of our personal development as His disciples? How does He want us to walk? And within these questions; What does His Word say concerning our obligations to our family, our church and other areas of our lives. All of these points are vital because as humans we do not live for ourselves, but rather our influence on those around us is a fundamental part of our Christian testimony

5. THE PURPOSE OF DISCIPLESHIP

Basically, the purpose of Discipleship is to guide us in the practical application of Christian life principles, which have been clearly established in the Word of God. We see in the following a relatively complete list of such principles:

- (1) **Biblical Knowledge:** Teach the Word of God, helping every disciple understand it, believe it and obey it.
- (2) **Salvation:** guide the believer until they receive Christ. Such is our objective in Lesson 1 Birth.
- (3) **New life:** help the born again person to be filled with the Spirit and continue walking in the Spirit every day, cultivating Christian habits.
- (4) **Christian life:** help every disciple apply Christian principles in every relationship and event of their life.
- (5) **Personal commitment:** lead the believer to a complete surrender to the will of God, in obedience, consecration and holiness.
- (6) **Spiritual Development:** assist the believer in growth until reaching maturity, this objective is pursued in Lesson 3 Maturity.

LESSON 2

GROWING IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

How does a child of God grow? What are the steps towards spiritual growth? How do we obtain “The Mind of Christ” or His way of thinking?

Text to memorize: *“...beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”* 2nd Peter 3:17-18. NKJV

1. INTRODUCTION

Since we have become new creatures in Christ, we embarked on the greatest and most wonderful adventure that a human being can experience. We have been supernaturally born in the kingdom of God by means of water and spirit. In water baptism, in the name of Jesus Christ, we have received the name of the Father. By receiving the baptism of his Holy Spirit, we have also taken on his divine nature. Because of Him, we are now...

2. CHILDREN OF GOD

Let's look at some scriptures that tell us about this new reality:

John 3:3-7: *“Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”* NKJV

Acts 2:38-39: *“Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”* NKJV

John 1:12-13: *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”* NKJV

1 John 3:1-2: *“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”* NKJV

Romans 8:14-16: *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,”* NKJV



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Ephesians 2:19-22: ***“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”*** NKJV

According to the biblical texts, we are made children of God through Faith. Now we belong to the family of God. According to 1 Peter 2:5, we are also “living stones” a dwelling place in which God Himself dwells. We have become “God’s building” 1 Corinthians 3:9 and ***“The Church of the Living God”*** which is ***“Column and bulwark of truth”*** 1st Timothy 3:15.

What a privilege we have to belong to the Lord and to be able to dwell in His house! (Psalm 84:4.) In it we can feel as if we were in our own home. In fact, that’s true! In this new home, we have found and currently enjoy invaluable and precious privileges such as fellowship, encouragement, support, sense of belonging, food, teaching, preaching, strength, wisdom and spiritual power to live the Christian life victoriously.

No matter what our natural age when we came to Christ, we all need these things to grow in the Spirit and gain a deeper understanding of the things of God. Such growth will not be determined by the number of years in the church, but rather by our search for the knowledge of God and his will for us. That search will always be rewarded by Him with abundant grace, understanding, faith, trust, and security; which are absolutely essential elements in every good home.

3. A NEW HOME, A NEW WAY OF THINKING

The Word of God tells us that we were ***“adopted as sons by Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will,”*** Ephesians 1:5. This spiritual adoption can be likened to the adoption of a child because, in both cases, there are changes in environment, development of new habits, ideas, and new experiences that must be managed. The insecurities of an adopted child can be compared to those that each of us brought with us when we first came to the family of God.

This is true because, as children of God, we will have many adjustments and changes we will have to make in this new and unfamiliar lifestyle. We have brought to with us a collection of memories, sinful experiences, bad habits, and wrong ideas. The carnal mind, accustomed to the debauchery of sinful pleasures, is opposed to and fights hard against the new standards and disciplines that our new spiritual nature demands.

Paul sent the Corinthian brethren a strong claim: ***“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal...”*** 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. He stated in Romans 8:7 that ***“The carnal mind [the way of thinking we brought with us into our new home] is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”*** NKJV

We see then that our way of thinking is naturally hostile to God. Our mind is “always ready” to give into carnal passions. It feels no desire for this new relationship with God because it means dying to the old life of self-gratification. The debauchery of the carnal mind is incredibly harmful to our spiritual understanding and advance. It moves in the opposite direction of the spiritual mind that feeds on a deep love of God and on a complete confidence in God.



The things of God are revealed to us by His Spirit and not by the natural machinations of a corrupt mind. This is why we must take and use the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God daily (Ephesians 6:17b). This will assure that we end with the lies and suggestions of the natural man. ***“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”*** Hebrews 4:12. NKJV

The Word of God will silence any human idea, our own or those of others, as well as any diabolical impression about our Lord Jesus Christ and his care for us. That is why it is vital that each one of us grow and develop through ***“the unadulterated spiritual milk that is the Word of God”*** 1st Peter 2:2. This pure and unique milk contains all the nutrients that we need to grow spiritually healthy.

4. ROWING STEP BY STEP

It is very important that we also understand that to grow, we don’t need to eat a lot of food all at once. This could lead to a state of “spiritual malnutrition” which could lead us to anxiety, frustration, depression, and even pride. Spiritual nourishment is given to us by God to be enjoyed. It is given to us in such a way that we can accept it and make full use of it. If we learn to nourish ourselves correctly, we will grow ***“in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”*** 2nd Peter 3:18.

Growth is a slow process. There has never been a newborn child that has the ability to stand on his fragile feet and walk immediately after birth. An infant will first learn to crawl and then learn to stand. It is not until after stumbling and failing that the child would manage to walk.

A child’s experience is very similar in the spiritual walk of a believer. If you become too confident and try to walk faster than “your legs” will permit, you are sure to fall. On the other hand, fear or the lack of trust in God could unnecessarily paralyze you. Don’t expect your spiritual legs to develop overnight nor be discouraged by the mistakes that you will make.

No parent loses hope that their child will walk if he doesn’t walk by the third or fourth month from birth. You must be patient with yourself and allow Jesus to guide you step by step. “One day at a time” as the old hymn goes. It is very important, as a new believer, that you understand, that your maturity in Christ will take time; many years. Although the process takes time still it is one filled with exciting experiences and filled with wonderful blessings.

5. CONCLUSION

God’s will is that ***“Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*** Ephesians 3:17-19.

LESSON 3

A TRANSFORMED LIFE

Can we experience a real transformation in every area of our lives? How can we get our minds, words, and actions to reflect Jesus Christ?

Text to memorize: *“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”* 2nd Corinthians 3:18. NKJV

1. INTRODUCTION

The memory text expresses perfectly the kind of person in which we can become by the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. When we are born again, by the water and Spirit, everything that we think, say, and do reflects our Lord Jesus Christ. We become a living image of Him and an eloquent testimony of his grace and love for others. Let’s look at the most important aspects of this transformation starting with the area of our mind.

2. OUR THOUGHT LIFE

Luke 6:45: *“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil...”* Like the fruit of a tree helps us to identify the type of tree that it is, our words and actions are a clear manifestation of our thoughts. We can try to hide what we think from people, but King David said that God knows and examines our thoughts: *“O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off.”* Psalm 139:1-2.

It is true that we cannot entirely control the environment in which we live most of the time, but we should avoid those things which can contaminate our thought life. Some things we are exposed to are a choice. Of the other things we cannot control, God always offers us a way to escape: *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”* 1st Corinthians 10:13.

Our hearts will become pure if we consciously exercise control over our thoughts. Philippians 4:8: *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”*

To achieve this, we need to pray each day the way King David prayed: *“Let the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”* Psalm 19:14. Anyone who manages to control something as important as their mind will certainly be able to control the other areas of their life.



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3. OUR TALK

What we talk about is closely linked to what is going on in our minds and hearts. As we speak, we express what we feel or think. In Matthew 12:34, Jesus put it this way **“of the abundance of the heart speak the mouth”** and Matthew 15:11 states that **“what comes out of the mouth contaminates man.”**

In chapter 3 of the book of James (study it at home) we are told that good and evil come from the tongue. The scripture says that we offend many times with the tongue. In James the tongue is compared to a rudder. As the rudder directs a ship so our tongue directs our life. The tongue is the member that pollutes our whole body and **“inflames the wheel of creation”** while it **“is inflamed by hell”** (V.6). We are also told that the tongue is **“an evil that cannot be restrained”** (V. 8). Finally, believers cannot use the tongue both to bless God and at the same time to curse others (v. 9-11).

The following is a shortlist of sins of the tongue. Those who desire to live a transformed life must avoid the following:

(1) Indecent Words: **“But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.”** Colossians 3:8.

(2) Curses and Blasphemies: **“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.”** Ephesians 4:31. **“but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions.”** 1st Timothy 6:4.

(3) Gossip: **“A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends.”** Proverbs 16:28. **“The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, And they go down into the inmost body.”** Proverbs 18:8. **“...idle [...] and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not”** 1st Timothy 5:13.

(4) Murmuring, Complaints: **“nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.”** 1st Corinthians 10:10. **“Do all things without complaining and disputing”** Philippians 2:14.

(5) Lies: **“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”** Exodus 20:16. **“Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, But those who deal truthfully are His delight.”** Proverbs 12:22. **“Therefore, putting away lying, “Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,”** Ephesians 4:25. **“all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone”** Revelation 21:8. **“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”** John 14:6.

4. OUR ACTIONS

Now, Let's focus on our actions. How should we behave with others? In principle, God asks us to **“Seek the good before all men.”** Romans 12:17b. Of course we understand that no one goes to heaven because they are “good,” but by the grace and favor of God. However, if we truly consider ourselves Children of the Most High, we are commanded to be gentle with everyone including those that are evil. **“But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.”** Luke 6:35.



We must be humble and obedient *“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”* 1 Peter 5:5-6. *“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”* John 14:15. By obeying God we demonstrate our love and we testify of our faith to the world. The most powerful means of evangelism is our testimony.

Honesty is a crucial part of our Christian testimony. Believers must always be honest in their public and private lives. They must be true in their familial relationships, in their dealings with friends, in business, and in all other matters. Honesty is not negotiable. *“You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.”* Leviticus 19:11. Honesty is an expression of kindness which is a characteristic of the *“Fruit of the Spirit”* Galatians 5:21-22. Dishonesty is evil. The Holy Spirit will never dwell in the heart of those who are dishonest. Just as great actions are the result of smaller actions, small acts of dishonesty will inevitably grow. Let us practice purity in our actions with others. Whatever we sow, we shall reap. We can only be honored and blessed by God if we do the same with our neighbors. Study Leviticus 19:35-36, Proverbs 11:1, and Galatians 6:7.

God also commands us to bring anger under our control. His Holy Word says that *“A quick-tempered man acts foolishly,”* Proverbs 14:17. Anger is a weapon of the flesh and a precursor to many painful things. Anger leads to bad decisions, hatred, bitterness, murder, and war. The devil will use anger whenever he can to destroy marriages, homes, churches, and nations. Anger against sin is the only type of anger that is constructive, but in that case, we must measure our actions.

The best example is the one given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ, who is meek and of a humble heart. He is slow to anger and great in mercy (Psalm 103:8-9). Punishment is not delight for the Lord when he has to administer it. Study Mark 3:1-6, John 2:13-16, and Ephesians 4:26. How can we get our “bad temper under control? The most powerful factor is self-control and it comes from God. When God baptized you with His Holy Spirit, He endowed you with power, love and self-control (2 Timothy 1:7).

Let us now study another key part of Christian Life...

5. DISCIPLINE AND TRANSFORMATION

A transformed life demands discipline. Without discipline, we cannot develop the God-like character that we need to face adversity. The individuals that are undisciplined are inconsistent and double minded (James 1:8) and are easy prey to the deceiver. Discipline is the key to power and the mark of every true son of God. The words Discipline and Disciple share an etymological root, that is, they are inseparable concepts. *“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”* Matthew 16:24. Can someone who does not possess the discipline to deny themselves, follow Christ and carry his cross? Clearly, the answer is no.

The believer who is disciplined: (1) develops the ability to control their conduct; (2) does things, not by impulse, desire, pressure or custom, but rather guided by principles and good judgement; (3) develops the ability to subordinate their appetites, emotions, moods and words; (4) Defeats temptation and lives subject to his authorities. Read 1 Corinthians 9:25; Hebrews 12:11; 13:17; James 1:26; 3:2. We need discipline in order to

LESSON 4

DEVELOPING A PRAYER LIFE

***What does the Bible teach about prayer? How do you pray for at least one hour?
What are the key principles for prayer?***

Text to memorize: ***“Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*** Matthew 26:40-41

1. INTRODUCTION

Prayer is for the Christian Life as blood is for the human body; without it there is no spiritual life. Prayer is a direct line to speak to God, a free passageway to climb to the throne of God. The reality is that many believers are cold in their search for God. They pray very little, which is why they have little passion. Prayer is secondary to them. Because the times are more dangerous than ever before, Christians should place great importance on prayer as did the ancient Christians.

2. PRAYER IN THE BIBLE

According to the Word of God, Prayer is vital. We live and die by prayer. The Bible teaches us to pray: (a) ***“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance”*** Ephesians 6:18. (b) ***“incessantly.”*** 1st Thessalonians 5:17. (c) ***“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*** Mark 14:38. (d) And faithfully: ***“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*** James 5:16.

The Bible also contains a long list of experiences where prayers were answered. Abraham prayed and God granted his request. Moses prayed and the sea opened. Joshua prayed and the sun stopped. David prayed and God destroyed his enemies. Elisha prayed and God ordered fire from heaven. Paul prayed and the prison walls shuddered. Lets examine what happened when Daniel Prayed.

Darius, the king of the Persian empire, signed an edict forbidding prayer, throughout his kingdom, for thirty days (Daniel 6,7,9). This prohibition attempted to take from God the tribute he is to receive from men and steal from men the comfort they receive from God.. What king of the earth, however powerful, has the right to do something like that? This reckless decree attempted to deprive the prophet Daniel from ninety opportunities to pray.

“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.” Daniel 6:10-11.



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How wonderful it is to have predetermined hours to pray! Daniel could not live a single day without communion with God. How could he abide by the royal decree and go thirty days without prayer? Today, no such decree against prayer exist, yet many Christians desert prayer for almost any reason. Christians who do not pray don't humble their hearts in the presence of God and hold back the expressions of gratitude he deserves.

Even though Daniel was a man with many occupations, he always prayed. He never used his many responsibilities as an excuse to keep him from exercising his daily devotions. When Daniel prayed he bent his knees and expressed his thanksgivings to God. Prayer kept Daniel ready to confront any affliction God could allow in his life. When affliction they did come, God honored him by closing the mouth of the lions. Let's read Daniel (6:22-23).

Business is never an excuse for finding time alone in the presence of the faithful Creator! Those who live without prayer disregard their souls and in the end will be found wanting. When the lions come into their lives, nothing will be done to close the mouths of their lions. Let's read Daniel 6:24.

3. COULD YOU NOT PRAY FOR ONE HOUR?

The Lord expects us to spend time with Him. His reprimand to the disciples (Matthew 26:40) is also for us. The following are THE TWELVE STEPS OF PRAYER. These twelve steps will help us raise the quality of our prayers as well as the amount of time we spend in prayer. These twelve steps are:

(1) Praise: This is a sacrifice. It is a vocal celebration of the nature and virtues of God. Let's read Psalm 63:3, 141:2 and Hebrews 13:5.

(2) Forgiveness: We must forgive our debtors. *"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."* Mark 11:25.

(3) Confess: Never try to pray without confessing. A person who does not confess his sins to God will never experience the joy of prayer (Psalm 139:23-24)

(4) Ask: Jesus want us to ask (Matthew 7:8). His heart responds to our need. James says: *"You do not have because you do not ask."*

(5) Intercede: All around us are many people that are in desperate needs. Interceding for the brethren and for the lost is very intense dimension of prayer *"with all perseverance and supplication."* (Ephesians 6:18b).

(6) Read the Word: New possibilities are revealed when we read the Bible. Although our time to pray should not become a time to study. A brief moment of biblical reading is excellent and enriching the prayer.

(7) Meditate: Our minds becomes very active when they meditate on God. When we meditate in Him, we focus our minds to spiritual matters and particularly His Word (Psalm 119:97).



(8) Pray the Word: First we spent a brief period of time reading the Bible. Now, we “pray the Bible,” that is, we pray the scriptures applying the scriptures directly into our lives.

(9) Give Thanks: Although thanksgiving should be sprinkled throughout the entire prayer time, we must assign a special time to thank God aloud for all the things He has done in our lives.

(10) Sing: An important aspect of prayer is to sing “new songs” to the Lord. Singing renews and comforts the soul. New songs are exciting and uplifting in the Holy Spirit during prayer (Psalm 96, 149).

(11) Listen: We must establish good habits of listening during our prayers. When we listen, we receive direct orders from the Holy Spirit. May our prayers always include listening to God’s voice.

(12) Praise: We enter and exit prayer through the doors of praise by exalting with joy the nature of God “...yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for all ages. Amen.” Matthew 6:13.

Do not feel restricted by the proposed method of prayer. Use the twelve steps of prayer as no more than a sketch. Don’t rush and don’t think that you have to strictly spend five minutes at every step. You can spend more time for some things and less for others. For example, interceding can rarely be done in just five minutes. All the Holy Spirit to lead. Let us now study the five key elements of prayer: faith, humility, delivery, the Word, and desire.

4. FAITH

Before you begin your prayer time, before you present your petitions, express your faith in God. ***“For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.”*** Mark 11:23-24.

God longs for your trust. Without faith, it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6a). Disbelief is the foundation to all impoverished prayers. Your faith, on the other hand, proclaims your certainty about the existence of God and declares the truth that He is ***“a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”*** Hebrews 11:6b. He rewards your faith! The Bible tells us that we can pray in faith, be saved by faith, be protected by faith, walk in faith, live by faith, inherit God’s promises by faith, be rich in faith, overcome the world by faith, and praise God by faith. For the one who pray, faith opens the door to the throne of God. Faith is the ingredient that every disciple needs!

5. HUMILITY

Humility is an indispensable prerequisite for obtaining true power. Neither the fool nor the vain person can pray effectively. Humility springs from a proper esteem of ourselves and of the things we feel we deserve. Humility is a recognition of our total incapacity and powerlessness outside of the presence of God in our lives.



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There is not self-praise in humility. Christ said: ***“Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”*** Matthew 18:4. ***“For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”*** Isaiah 57:15.

It’s not the intellectualism that the Church needs. Neither are men of wealth or of social influence what our time requires. What this lost generation desperately needs, are men and women with vigorous prayer lives like those simple Christians of the first century who ***“attained good testimony by faith”*** Hebrews 11:39. That was a period of time filled with glorious achievements for the Church. If we only imitate our brothers and sisters of that time!

6. DELIVERY

Proverbs 23:26: ***“My son, give me your heart, And let your eyes observe my ways.”*** Prayer changes the heart, character, and the conduct of the believer. Believers who fully give themselves to God become a vessels He uses to reach the world with the gospel. John 1:6-7: ***“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.”*** A simple man that was consecrated to God, John the Baptist, became the divine instrument to mark the end of one dispensation and that had been prepared centuries before.

The Lord declares: ***“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.”*** 2nd Chronicles 16:9. God wants us to glorify His name on the earth and to manifest His power through men and women who are willing to give themselves to Him. The glory and efficacy of the Gospel is placed upon men and women who pray. God does nothing if it is not in answer to the prayers of his children.

This is why the Apostles gave themselves to prayer (Acts 6:4). His priority and that of the Church was prayer (Romans 15:30). There was the key to the tremendous success they enjoyed. In the days of his ministry, Jesus Christ did the same thing. He prayed for long hours and as a result He was moved with infinite compassion for the ripe fields of the earth that perished, and continue to do so, because of the lack of workers. Pausing in his own prayer, Jesus tried to awaken the marred sensitivities of his disciples and He commissioned them: ***“Then He said to them, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”*** Luke 10:2.

7. THE WORD

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” John 15:7. Many that call themselves disciples of Jesus have an attitude of: “I don’t need to learn from the Bible.” But how can they remain in Jesus and the words of Christ not remain in them? It’s impossible. All the saints must feed daily on the Word of God, not only the pastors or the leaders of the church. ***“Not only of bread will man live...”***

In Psalm 119, King David beautifully recounts how the Word of God brought prosperity into his life. The Word of God raised him to magnificent height in the presence of the Lord. ***“I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, As much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.”*** (V. 14-16).





LESSON 5 – REMOVING OBSTACLES IN PRAYER

Are there things that can hinder our life of prayer? What are they and how can we overcome them?

Text to Memorize: *"Give ear to my words, O Lord, Consider my meditation. Give heed to the voice of my cry, My King and my God, For to You I will pray. My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; In the morning I will direct it to You, And I will look up."* Psalm 5:1-3

1. INTRODUCTION

The Word of God offers us principles and counsel concerning prayer **"...that your prayers be not hindered."** 1 Peter 3:7. If we truly want to have a fruitful prayer life, we need to identify the obstacles that hinder it and learn how to overcome them. Only then can we avoid losing out on the many blessings God has prepared for us. Let us consider then some of the most frequent hindrances of prayer.

2. DOUBTING THE VALUE OF PRAYER

You will never be able to fully understand how prayers works, but do not let that stop you from praying. Prayer is not a human concept, but a divine one. It is not based on a set of earthly laws, but divine principles. So, it is not essential that you fully understand prayer. It is enough that you know and believe that prayer is effective and that it makes a difference in life.

As children of God, He has invited us to pray and we have been promised answers. Never let Satan deceive you into making you believe that you have no right to pray. Never doubt the validity of prayer. Often, when a spiritual leader says, "Let's pray about this matter," the needy person will think, "This is just one of my options." If you think that human solutions are as important or more important than praying, you are mistaken. We need to see prayer as the most valuable solution and often the only real solution

3. NOT ASKING

The problem with most people simply is they do not pray. Hindrances to prayer are overcome...praying! **"Ask, and it shall be given you;"** the Lord tells us (Mathew 7:7). Therefore pray. Pray positively. Pray asking. Pray specifically. Pray to overcome. Pray for the salvation of souls. Never say: "Lord, maybe you can hear me" or "Lord, maybe you want to bless me." These statements will do you no good. God has invited you to pray, and if He has done so then He hears you and wants to bless you. So therefore, never pray in a doubtful or timid manner. Pray with confidence in God and ask with clarity

4. LAZINESS

Most people would do better in life if they worked harder. We dont like to hear this, but it's the truth. Basically, the majority of us are lazy. Being lazy hinders us from praying. You can be sure that laziness, more than anything else, will prevent you from praying. Resist the temptation to set prayer aside because you are tired or discouraged. **"My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up."** Psalms 5:3. Often, after just a couple of minutes of prayer you will feel rested and refreshed.

5. SUPERFICIALITY IN PRAYER

There are people whose that are “Nobody cares about me” or “nobody loves me”. It seems that no one caresbut remember that God is not like us human beings. **“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.**” Isaiah 55:8. God really cares about us. So, when you pray, pray in good faith, earnestly believing. If you pray superficially, as if prayer does not matter, you will not obtain any benefit, no matter how much time you spend praying. Pray deeply, from the bottom of your heart, because God always hears serious and sincere prayers.

6. TRUSTING YOUR FEELINGS

You must pray even when you don’t feel it. One of the problems that many people face is that they wait until they “feel the desire” to pray. Sometimes, a person can go a long time without “feeling” the desire to pray. That is why you must be consistent in prayer and never base your prayer plan on your feeling or circumstances. Prayer is a lifestyle based exclusively on faith in God.

7. ONLY SILENT PRAYERS

We pray aloud because in the Bible we read: **“I cried out to God with my voice—To God with my voice; And He gave ear to me.”** Psalm 77:1. **“So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,”** Acts 4:24. You may be someone that is timid and shy, but you should not be afraid or ashamed to raise your voice in prayer. God looks forward to hearing you. Praying aloud is one of the most important ways of praying. Expressing yourself clearly, speaking with your voice raised, is perhaps an important way of communicating with God what you are feeling in your heart **“So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”** Exodus 33:11.

8. NOT ACTING ON OUR PRAYERS

Another problem in prayer is failing to act on our prayers. When you fail to act on the direction given by the Holy Spirit, your relationship with God gets complicated. The Lord said to Moses, **“Why are you crying to me? Tell the children of Israel to march”** Exodus 14:15. If you do not respond to an answer that God gives you in prayer, why should you expect for him to continue speaking? In prayer, if you fail to act, you’ve failed.. **“...the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.”** Daniel 11:32.

9. THE FEAR OF TRUTH

At some point or another in our lives, we all fear confronting reality. To be sure, many people neglect to pray simply because they fear the response they may receive from God. God’s response, however, is always the best. It may be contrary to what you feel, or it may seem negative, but when God answers, He always does it as a father responds to his son. He answers looking for our benefit. Never be afraid to seek God’s guidance and help in your life.

10. WRONG MOTIVES

James 4:3: **“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”** Asking for the wrong reasons or for negative things is a sure way to fail in prayer. We must pray within the sphere of God’s will. Remember that God never answers prayers outside of His divine will or outside the truth of His Word. When you pray, your motives must be pure. **“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”** 1st John 5:14-15..



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11. SIN IN OUR HEART

Psalm 66:18: ***“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.”*** Sin separates man from God and hinders prayer. One should be careful to search their heart every time they kneel to pray. Make sure that all sin has been confessed and placed under the forgiving grace of Jesus Christ, or the sin in your heart will impede your prayer

12. IDOLS IN OUR LIVES

Ezekiel 14:3: ***“Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?”*** There is only one God. And He must be the only God in your life. Whatever you put before God, be it people, possessions, projects, activities, etc, these, in a sense, become a god to you. Idols are a formidable obstacle to prayer. Put God first in your life, and keep him there.

13. UNFORGIVENESS

Mark 11:25–26: ***“And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.”*** One of the most important requirements of prayer is forgiveness. We must forgive others before God can forgive us. An unforgiving spirit is a great impediment to prayer. Never entertain the slightest bitterness.

14. LACK OF GENEROSITY

Proverbs 21:13: ***“Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be heard.”*** A person who gives generously exhibits in every aspect of their life a willingness to accept the inconveniences of helping others and the work of the Lord. This attitude is what God loves. He honors the prayer of generous people with abundant blessings. However, when that generosity is lacking, the prayer life is obstructed.

15. MISTREATMENT OF THE FAMILY

1 Peter 3:7: The guilt associated with family abuse is overwhelming. If you mistreat your family, you will never be able to pray effectively because of the guilt that comes upon you. Kindness and love must first be expressed in your own family, because God watches over how you treat them. His blessing depends, to a great degree, on your attitude towards your family. Perhaps nothing hinders prayer more than trying to pray immediately after having a serious quarrel with your wife, husband, or children. You probably realize that doing so is impossible. Work constantly to improve the relationships with your family. Treat your own with justice and love, and God will honor you.

16. NOT BEING ABLE TO BELIEVE

Mark 9:23: ***“Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.”*** When one calls the name of the Lord it is because he believes. Praying to a God you don't believe in is simply a waste of time. Believing is one of the most important things in life. If you don't believe, then you won't receive anything. Not believing brings death; not believing obfuscates things and hinders progress. When you believe, everything is possible. So, when you pray, believe and God will answer every prayer you pray.





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LESSON 6 – HOW TO KNOW THE WILL OF GOD

Is there a way to know if we are living in the will of God? How can we find the right course for our lives?

Text to memorize: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”* Romans 12:1-2

1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since we surrendered to Christ, we began to see every aspect of our lives from a new perspective. We now have a desire to order our way according to God’s will and to discover His plans for our lives. It is not difficult to harmonize our life with the Spirit of God. The purpose of the coming of Christ was to show man that the knowledge of God’s will is not a mystery. If we are truly interested in learning, He will guide us and we will never stray.

2. KNOW GOD

To understand God’s will, we must first know His nature, understand his purposes; and always keep in mind that God’s thoughts are distinct from ours. Never try to gauge God from your mere human perspective: *“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?”* Romans 11.33-34. We need to accommodate *“the spiritual to the spiritual”* (1 Corinthians 2.13). We need to think as he thinks. Several biblical verses enlighten us as to the nature of the Creator, but it is through *“the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Corinthians 4.6) that we can receive the greatest light. In the Gospel we find Jesus bowing to children, speaking softly to the poor, crying with his friends in tragedies, responding judiciously to the critic, and trying to reach a city with a tender heart. Don’t you want to be like Him? Study Matthew or Luke and allow your heart to be renewed, because Jesus is:

(1) Fair: He does not “lose his mind” in a difficult situation. It stays firm under pressure. He never makes judgments lightly or with a vengeful spirit. There is not a single flash of human rationalization or partiality in Him.

(2) Merciful: There are no “blind spots” in His vision. When He examines us, He considers every aspect of our life; and his loving gaze is full of compassion and forgiveness.

(3) True: Jesus does not hide struggles for identity, fame or personal growth. He never uses scapegoats, or blames others.

(4) Powerful: Jesus can always do something about the situation that comes to your attention. There is nothing that He cannot fix. Just by saying the word, the blessing comes.

(5) Realistic: Jesus never prescribes an impossible course of action. There will be things that seem impossible to us, but for Him nothing is. He always gives the ability to do what he asks of us.

(6) Accessible: The Lord our God is not of bronze or plaster. He sympathizes with our weaknesses; and always has time to attend to us.



(7) **Constant:** We can always depend on Him, because He is always the same.

3. THE GREATEST PURPOSE OF GOD

God's loving purpose is to bless us, to pour Himself out upon the people of this world. He wants everyone to be saved (2 Peter 3:9). To achieve this, He seeks people like you and me who dare to believe in Him and rejoice in doing His will. God's plan is simple: **"to seek and to save that which was lost."** Luke 19:10; and it is by His grace that you and I were included as collaborators in this plan.

Luke 4:18–19: ***"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord."*** After leaving the temptation of the desert, Jesus dedicated himself to preaching the Kingdom message. Then the Apostles and finally the Church went into action:

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" Romans 10:13–15. The primary purpose of that preaching was — and continues to be — to save people from sin (Matthew 1:21); to free them from the enslaving power of the evil one as seen in chapters 9 and 10 of Matthew; and heal the sick (1 Peter 2:24).

4. THE WILL OF GOD

God's will is for you and I to be His **"ministry of reconciliation"** on Earth (2 Corinthians 5:17–6.1). Too often we have cast aside this crucial mission, to care for a career, home, friends, entertainment, etc. How easily we turn our backs on our vocation, limiting ourselves to seeking the divine will in the professional, the sentimental, the financial realms. We are satisfied when God directs us and allows us to progress in the different natural areas of life; But do we ever stop to think about what will happen when the end comes? Because there is an end that is coming, and a place where we will go after this fleeting life. And maybe there we will find out that God never agreed with what we were or did here. Let's read John 17.9–26.

Going back to the beginning, Romans 12:1–2 teaches us that God's will for our life is good, pleasant, and perfect, for everything He does or plans is perfect. Clearly, if we dedicate our lives to obeying Him, we will discover His perfect plan — a plan that is available to every Spirit-filled believer. Of course, God will not always respond as soon as we want, but He will not "play hide and seek" with us until we know if we really wanted to know His answer.

God is our loving Father and truly cares about us, as seen in Matthew 7:7–11: ***"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"***



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So what is the key to knowing God's will? The key is in the word disposition; and it works like this: we make ourselves available to God through the **"living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God,"** mentioned in Romans 12:1. This is a choice of our own, a personal sacrifice that we must make, but that we often do not make, perhaps by assuming - very wrongly - that we are incapable of doing what God will ask of us. Let's think! Are we people afraid of obeying God?

"Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit. But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing." 1 Thessalonians 4.1–12.

In the previous text, the apostle Paul affirms that our sanctification is the will of God; that His total purpose is that we live prepared to meet Him, and also that we help others until they can be **"presented before Him perfect"** according to Colossians 1:27–28. Our salvation is the most important thing to God!

5. THE SPECIFIC DIMENSION OF THE DIVINE WILL

Our natural inclination is generally to reject the "from the Lord" responses when they are contrary to our wishes. In order for this not to happen to us, Jesus must become both our Savior and our Lord. This is why it is so important that we have a proper relationship with Him. Discovering the will of God individually is the privilege of every believer. God really wants to pour out his gifts of wisdom, intelligence, and insight into us. Understanding what God wants is to bring a sense of guidance or direction imbued or grafted onto the heart. It is not something we strive for, but a Presence that we live with! Only then can we know His specific will.

Here is an excellent three-step guide to learn the correct course for our life. We call it the "Proof of Sense". We can be sure of God's guidance or direction if these three questions can be answered affirmatively:

- Does it make Biblical sense?
- Does it make spiritual sense?
- Does it make circumstantial sense?

If these three areas align, we can rest on the fact that it is God who is guiding us. He shows us the way because He loves us. He knows how much we need His help and direction. He is our Shepherd leading us in the paths of righteousness for his Name's sake... He listens to our requests like a father; but let's always keep in mind that even if your answer is a "no" or a "wait!", it is still His response.





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LESSON 7- GRATITUDE AS A WAY OF LIFE

Is it of any use to complain or worry about the difficulties of life?
Why does God expect us to give Him thanks in everything?

Text to Memorize: ***“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*** 1st Thessalonians 5:16-18.

1. INTRODUCTION

An interpretation of the word praise in the Bible is “a confession of gratitude”. We see then that praise and give thanks is very closely related. Hebrews 13:15 add this perspective,

“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” We are exhorted by the Word of God to continually offer praise. Let’s then see how we can turn gratitude into a lifestyle.

2. GRATITUDE IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

According to the above, our whole life must be an expression of gratitude to God who saved us. It is our knowledge of Him and what He has done for us that enables us to be continuously thanking Him in our hearts and with our lips. The priests of the Old Testament had to continuously sacrifice animals. We, the true priests of this age, must continually offer spiritual sacrifices to God who has brought us out of the darkness and into His wonderful light.

We are also encouraged by the Word to show gratitude in prayer. ***“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;”*** Philippians 4:6. ***“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;”*** Colossians 4:2.

Our lives must express a continuous stream of praise and appreciation regardless of the circumstances. At times situations arise and something unpleasant happens that may tempt us to doubt God’s providence. We must continually remember His and trust that He knows what is best for us. His Word affirms that ***“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”*** Romans 8:28.

Look at that scripture again. It does not say that all things are good, but that all things help us or collaborate for our good. It is easy to be grateful when all “goes well” according to our perception of “well,” but when difficulties come can we still obey these commandments? ***“in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*** 1 Thessalonians 5:18. ***“Be filled with the Spirit. giving thanks always for all things...”*** Ephesians 5:18,20)..

3. PRAISE IN THE BATTLE

How can that be possible that we are grateful in every thing....? Humanly speaking it is not; but, with God everything is possible.. We must be careful not to question God’s will especially when tragedy occurs. Our minds can become troubled when we try to know why God allows certain things to happen in our lives. Then complicated things can get even more complicated when we try to understand how such circumstances will result in our good.



There are difficult situations when it takes a lot of confidence in God to accept His plan. However, when we sincerely thank Him in the midst of a difficult situation, believing that He knows what is best, and that He is capable of resolving things for our benefit, we can worship him regardless of the evil that has happened to us. Believing and thanking God releases supernatural power in our lives. That divine force that brings changes that are nothing but miracles.

Jehoshaphat's story gives us an extraordinary clear example of how God works when we praise Him. Study chapter 20 of II Chronicles. The scriptures say that King Jehoshaphat woke up to find Judah had been surrounded by powerful enemies. Desperate, he cried out to God: ***"O our God, wilt thou not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee."*** V. 12. Notice that Jehoshaphat took his eyes off the problem and put them on God; this does not mean that he was attempting to escaped from reality, rather it means that he recognized his helplessness and turned to God for help.

Never be preoccupied with evil threats or with the adversity in your life. God is aware of every situation and will speak to you as he did with Jehoshaphat: ***"And he said, Harken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you."*** V. 15,17.

Jehoshaphat and his people were then given orders, ***"And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth for ever."*** V.21 ***"And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten."*** V.22.

4. THE LANGUAGE OF FAITH

Worrying doesn't help and complaining even less. Complaints are the language of disbelief. At the bottom of all grumbling and tantrums is disbelief. This is why God is angry when his children murmur: ***"Now when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp."*** Numbers 11:1. For this very reason God destroyed the children of Israel whom He had rescued from the slavery of Egypt. They complained and questioned how they were being directed: ***"nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."*** 1st Corinthians 10:10-11.

The words that caused the Hebrews to not enter the promised land were seemingly insignificant. They could have received many blessings in a land that flowed milk and honey if they had only stopped their murmuring! But, instead of expressing gratitude they complained. When a person complains, what they are really doing is accusing God of mishandling their lives. When believers complain they become vessels of clay questioning the works of the potter!



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"The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the Lord. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!" Jeremiah 18:1-6.

"But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Romans 9:20. When we murmur, we demonstrate our lack of trust in God and a reluctance to accept difficulty as an instrument God uses for our growth. Complaining will always be the easiest and quickest "relief" but also the opposite of thanksgiving. Never forget that the way the way out of any dilemma is through faith and its language which is praise. From now on, think before you grumble when things don't go your way. Exercise rather your faith, praising and thanking God in the midst of difficulty.

5. A NEW AND BETTER LIFESTYLE

Hebrews 3:12 & 4:1-3: *"Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;" "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest..."*

The Apostle Paul, who we believe was the writer of this book, practiced the counsel he wrote to the Christian Hebrews. He would have been right to complain about his circumstance when he was beaten and placed in jail in Philippi for preaching Christ. In like manner, what did Paul and Silas do as they waited for their execution on the cold and humid floor of the cell? Did they complain to God? They *"...were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."* Acts 16:25.

Paul and Silas trusted that their praise would release the power of God in their favor. The Bible described what happened: *"Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed."* Verse 26. God can shake the roots of our problems, open doors, and loosen the chains of our tension and nervousness if we only learn to praise him.

6. CONCLUSION

Let us live giving glory to God, always rejoicing and giving thanks to the Lord in all things (1st Thessalonians 5:16-18). Let's cultivate gratitude as a way of life!

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." Colossians 3:15-17.





LESSON 8 – THE PERSEVERANCE OF A CHRISTIAN

What is perseverance? What does the Bible say about it? What are the benefits of perseverance? How do we become persevering Christians?

Text to Memorize: *"...[The Lord said to Moses] lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east; behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan. But command Joshua, and encourage him and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you will see."* Deuteronomy 3:27-28.

1. INTRODUCTION

Moses and his brother Aaron walked with Israel through the wilderness of the Sinai heading for a land that God, for forty years, had prepared for them. Though they came very close to entering, Moses and Aaron were not able to enter: *"Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."* Numbers 20:12. They were buried in the desert. It was Joshua, the successor of Moses, who managed to enter Canaan along with Caleb. Of the many thousands of people that left Egypt only two entered. *"There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men"* (Ecclesiastes 6:1). Inconsistency is a universal, human, ancient and modern evil. In our culture, the disease of leaving things done half done is an epidemic. People leave school, work, salvation halfway. Where has perseverance gone?

2. PERSEVERANCE

Perseverance is an attitude, virtue, and a character quality. It is an inner strength that allows someone to stand firm until they reach the goal. The Italian writer Arturo Graf defined perseverance as "the virtue by which all other virtues bear their fruit." Napoleon Bonaparte, the emperor of France, said that "Victory belongs to the most persevering." The English writer Samuel Johnson said that "Great works are done not with strength, but with perseverance." An ancient Chinese proverb teaches that if you fall seven times, you must get up eight.

Spiritually speaking, perseverance is key for a stable life in Christ and a basic condition of salvation. *"And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved."* Mark 13:13. Perseverance means persisting, insisting, continuing, following even when you are experiencing difficulties. Courage is often required to start something, but perseverance is the ability to continue the task until it is finished, regardless of the obstacles. To persevere is not give up and to continue fighting. It is to continue to do the right thing even though the world does the opposite. It is to continue to do good regardless of the circumstances just because we love God and His Word. Individuals that persevere are highly motivated and have a deep sense of commitment that prevents them from abandoning the task they began. It motivates them to work until it is finished.

Before we continue talking about perseverance, let's share some ideas about its opposite which is inconsistency. What does the Bible say about someone that is inconsistent? It says that they are impatient: *"traitors, headstrong (impatient), haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God"* 2 Timothy 3:4. Indecisive: *"They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, And are at their wits' end."* Psalm 107:27. Ignorant: *"as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of*



the Scriptures." 2 Peter 3:16. Mediocre: *"So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth."* Revelation 3:16..

3. PERSEVERANCE IN THE BIBLE

According to the Word of God, the persevering individual is:

Patient: *"I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps."* Psalm 40:1-2.

Disciplined: *"Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."* Hebrews 12:11.

Responsible: *"But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."* 2 Timothy 4:5.

Brave: *"Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."* Joshua 1:9.

Some additional Scriptures on Perseverance

James 1:2-4: *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."*

Romans 5:3-5: *"we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*

Galatians 6:9: *"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."*

Philippians 3:13-14: *"Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*

James 5:7-8: *"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."*

1 Corinthians 10:12-13: *"let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."*



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2nd Thessalonians 2:16-17: ***“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.”***

Hebrews 12:1-2: ***“let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”***

2 Corinthians 4:16-17: ***“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”***

Hebrews 10:35-39: ***“Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: “For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”***

4. HEART DECISION

Returning to Joshua’s story, strength and good courage were what allowed him to persevere until entering the promised land. You also can persevere. Perseverance is only achieved when it is established on a sincere decision: ***“If you will not hear, And if you will not take it to heart, To give glory to My name,” Says the Lord of hosts, “I will send a curse upon you, And I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, Because you do not take it to heart.”*** Malachi 2:2. Not everyone wants to the good. It all depends on the heart. For example, there are those who want to reach heaven, but choose not make any commitments to the Lord or his church. There are others who don’t spend time with God, rather they chose to spend their time in other things like travel or social media. Many want the benefits of being members of the Church without assuming the obligations to live in holiness and obedience to the Word of God.

There are believers who want to do good but fail to stand firm when adverse situations arise. Persecution, affliction, scarcity, pain, disappointment, indifference, and temptation cause many to abandon the race before reaching the finish line. Many, like Moses, have failed with a momentary outburst. This is a really sad possibility that God does not desire for his children. For this reason we need to be persevere in prayer: ***“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints”*** Ephesians 6:18. In the Word of God: ***“Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.”*** 2 Thessalonians 2:15. In good works: ***“[Jesus] will render to each one according to his deeds”: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality.”*** Romans 2:6-7.

5. THE VICTORY OF THOSE WHO REMAIN FIRM

In the early church, our first brothers were victorious despite the harsh persecution they suffered: ***“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.”*** Acts 2:46. Paul, an exhausted elder writes: ***“For I am already***





LESSON 9 – FACING STRUGGLES AND TRIALS

What do struggles and trials consist of? What should we do when we face them? How can we confront them and obtain the victory?

Text to memorize: *“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.”* 1 Peter 5:6-9.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Christian life is truly wonderful, but it is not without its difficulties and problems. In walking with God, believers will often face situations that will test their patience and faith. We have to prepare for these situations. In this lesson we will learn how to effectively face struggles and trials so that we can overcome them in the glorious name of Jesus.

2. THE STRUGGLE

Every Christian who wishes to serve God will have struggles and will suffer opposition of some kind. There are struggles against the flesh and its desires, the devil, family and friends who do not want us to serve God.

(1) The Devil: *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”* Ephesians 6:12. The devil and his demons are our main adversaries. They try to destroy us by targeting our weaknesses.

(2) The World: *The World: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”* 1 John 2:15-17. The world, under the dominion of the evil one, offers many temporary attractive alternatives to faith in Christ. His intention is to cause us to deviate from God’s purpose; so that we will live slavishly after the delights of this world

(3) Our Flesh: *“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”* Galatians 5:19-21. The flesh is one of the strongest enemies we have to overcome. Our flesh, our sinful nature, pleasures, and other things that act against the Word of God call for our attention. Often the believer wants to attend church and serve God, but his flesh does not. The fight against the flesh is difficult.



(4) Relatives, friends, and others: *“And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.”* Matthew 10:22. *“and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.”* Matthew 10:36. In this text we see that because of Christ and His Gospel, we will be loathed by some people even those of our own homes and families.

3. A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE AND SOME ADVICE

The life of the Apostle Paul gives us an example of spiritual success. Drawing from the struggles Paul faced in his walk with God, we can get insight that will help us be victorious in the difficulties we will face in our Christian life. Let’s look at our four features of Paul’s life.

(1) He lived for Christ: Paul said: *“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* Philippians 1:21. He was determined to give his life for Christ if necessary and he indeed did so. He died precisely because of the One who called him: *“Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”* Acts 21:12-13.

(2) He faced great difficulties: Paul was a great Apostle. Part of his greatness was his willingness to suffer greatly for the work of the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-29, we find a list of things that happened to him for serving the Lord which included whippings, imprisonments, dangers, stoning, shipwrecks, false brothers, works, thirst, hunger, fatigue, cold, nudity, and other similar things. However, Paul put these trials in their proper perspective and placed the interest of the Gospel above his own: *“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel”* Philippians 1:12.

(3) He lived a humble life: Paul saw great miracles including going to the third heaven where he saw angels and the Lord! He said: *“I myself do not intend to have reached everything...”* Verse 13. These words of Christ were present in his mind in all his sufferings: *“So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.”* Luke 17:10. On the other hand, Paul was a man who also knew how to receive good things from God and give Him glory to in all that he possessed and at times lost. He learned to be content in any situation: *“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.”* Philippians 4:11-12.

(4) He didn’t stop the race: A motto not written in Paul’s life, but evident in every step of his seems to tell us is ‘Don’t stop and keep going.’ In Philippians 3:14, he wrote: *“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* When he was about to leave with the Lord, he wrote to his disciple Timothy: *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”*

Like the Apostle Paul, you and I must never focus on obstacles given that our salvation is so close (Romans 13:11). As a Christian, you will face a great deal of struggles in life, but use the example of the Apostle Paul so that you will always be firm in the Lord. Let’s look at the four tips that will help you to win everyday struggles.



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(1) **Never Quit:** The Christian life is a race. In a race you don't stop because if you do, another will get the prize. **"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it."** 1 Corinthians 9:24. The wonderful thing about the Christian race is that everyone who runs, without quitting along the way, will win their prize at the end.

(2) **Fight Clean:** Paul said, **"And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown."** 1 Corinthians 9:25. The Christian overcomes will get eternal rewards.

(3) **Get rid of everything:** The book of Hebrews advises us: **"...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,"** Hebrews 12:1. Whatever hinders us or is an unnecessary weight must be set aside so we can run the Christian race well.

(4) **Forget the past:** **"Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."** Philippians 3:13-14. Your past in and under the blood of Jesus. As Christians we do not let the past (sins or victories) hinder our walk with God. Victorious Christians always reach forward, doing all we can to know Him better while working hard to do as much as we can for the King.

4. TRIALS

The second element that every believer must face is trials. Trials usually come from God. Sometimes the Lord does things in our lives for the sole purpose of teaching us life lessons for our faith to grow. This was the case with Abraham. God tested Abraham by asking him for his only son. Isaac was the son given to him in his old age, the one through whom God had promised to raise a great multitude. God asked Abraham to offer him as a sacrifice to Him (Genesis 22:1-2). That was a tremendous test. God also tried Israel (the entire nation) when He took them out of Egypt and through the wilderness for forty years, He could have led them on a much shorter path that would have taken two weeks or less. The Bible says that God did this to prove them: **"There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them."** Exodus 15:25. Here we see then that God tests his children.

Trials are tests. They are processes through which God submits us to prove our faith, faithfulness, perseverance, love, etc. Sooner or later, God will test us to make us grow spiritually. Trials are part of the Christian life. In Matthew 14:22-33, we have an example of how Jesus tested his disciples. Jesus allowed the disciples to face a strong opposing wind in the Sea of Galilee.

The disciples had come from seeing a great miracle which was the multiplication of loaves and fishes resulting in the feeding of five thousand people (Matthew 14:13-21). When they crossed the sea their boat was assaulted with waves that covered the boat. While the storm raged, the Bible says that Jesus was sleeping quietly in the stern of the boat (Matthew 8:23-27). Once awoken, Jesus rebuked the winds and the sea and then admonished the disciples: **"Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?"**

In the next story, the disciples were traveling alone. Let's look at some key phases of the test they went through.



Phase 1: The trial was initiated by Jesus. After a long day's work, Jesus sent his disciples, in a boat, to the other side of the Sea of Galilee as he dismissed himself from the multitudes. He then went to the mountain to pray.

Phase 2: The disciples face the trial. While the Lord is praying, the boat begins to be thrashed by great waves by the strong opposing wind. About the same time Jesus went to the mountain to pray, the disciples began to battle the wind.

Phase 3: The trial is extended. In this experience, let's notice several things. First, the disciples struggled to advance. At its widest point the lake measures 12 km (7.5 miles). Since they'd left in the afternoon, the Disciples only managed to get about halfway through it. Second, Jesus was observing them. Mark 6:48 says that Jesus saw them from the mountain as they exhaustingly paddled because of the strong opposite wind. Third, Jesus came to help them at the start of the fourth vigil. At that time, the Jewish night was then divided in four vigils. The first vigil was from 6pm to 9pm; the second from 9pm to 12am; the third from 12am to 3am, and the fourth from 3am to 6am. It wasn't until the last vigil that Jesus came to help them. That is to say that the Apostles were struggling for eight or more hours starting from the time Jesus began to pray. Jesus knew they were struggling from the beginning of their struggle, but He didn't go to help them until 3am or later.

Phase 4: The Resolution. In the final stage of trial, we see the resolution or the results which, for the disciples, were very beneficial.

5. THE RESULTS OF TRIALS

The most extraordinary thing about being tested by God are the good results that occur in our lives when we overcome. Let's look at the positive outcome of the test:

(1) **Jesus walked on the sea:** *"Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea."* Matthew 14:25, When the disciples couldn't do anything more, Jesus came to them walking on the sea.

(2) **The disciples were afraid, but Jesus encouraged them:** *"And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."* (Matthew 14:26-27). This tells us that there are times when fear attacks us, but the Lord is there to reassure us: "Be encouraged, do not be afraid.

(3) **Peter walked on the water:** *"And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water. "So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased."* Matthew 14:28-31. This is one of the greatest miracles a mortal man has ever experienced. Walking on water is simply not possible. However, when Jesus gives the order, men can walk on water. Though the Apostle Peter's faith began to wane and he began to sink, Christ ultimately came to his rescue.

(4) **The faith and admiration of the disciples for the Master grew that day.** *"...And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled."* Mark 6:51.

LESSON 10—HOW TO ENDURE AND OVERCOME TEMPTATION

What is temptation? How does it operate? How can we bear and overcome it with the strength of God?

Text to Memorize: *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”* 1 Corinthians 10:13.

1. INTRODUCTION

Temptation is an enemy, which every child of God will often have to face in his Christian life. It is a silent enemy that visits those who want to serve God. This enemy can be so subtle that many times the believer enters into temptation without realizing it, which is why Jesus warned his disciples, *“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* Matthew 26:41. Temptation can ruin the life of any careless Christian that falls in its trap. In the Bible, we find several examples of great men of God, who in a moment of weakness, succumbed to this mighty enemy. Let’s look at a known case.

2. THE CASE OF DAVID

2 Samuel 11:1-4: *“It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king’s house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, “Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house.”* You may know the rest of the story. The woman, Bathsheba, became pregnant and David had her husband, Uriah, murdered to hide his sin. Do you think David consciously thought, “I know what’s going to happen today.” “I will spend the night with Uriah’s wife, and in exchange for a brief moment of pleasure I will ruin my life.” “That is exactly what I want to do today.”? Of course not, no one makes plans to destroy their own life, however, that is what happened to David.

Let us think clearly: If a King, a man of God, could fall so easily into temptation, then what about us? As we learned in a previous lesson, the God who sees everything called David to account and consequently David had to suffer the terrible consequences of his sin, which included the death of the baby who he had conceived with that woman. As we can see in this sad story, temptation is one of the most powerful weapons the enemy has to make us fall, destroy our relationship with God and our testimony. That is why we have to pay careful attention to this subject matter. Occasionally, respectable and honorable people —like David— or people with great ministries, fall into sin and spiritually failure, and we ask ourselves “What happened?” The answer is simple: they could not deal with temptation.

3. SOURCES OF TEMPTATION

In his great book on temptation, Alfred Kuen says that, “Temptation is an attraction to the forbidden. An



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inner movement that incites man to evil.” He also points out that temptation “is an occasion that is presented to us to perform something that is evil, but that promises us pleasure,” and affirms that, “any legitimate pleasure can become an occasion of temptation when presented outside the framework devised by God.”

Where does temptation come from? There are those who believe that it is God who sends it. They even think that temptation becomes stronger as the believer draws closer to God. However, temptation does not come from God, nor does it have any relation with our search for Him: **“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.”** James 1:13. It is then clear that God is not the source of temptation. Temptation comes from our own flesh (Verse 14), from the world with its pleasures and delights, and from our adversary, the devil. Let us look at these three sources of temptation.

(1) The devil: One of the external sources of temptation is Satan. He will always want us to fall and fail, and will make use of all possible means to achieve it. An example of this is in the well-known case of the temptation of Jesus: **“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’** Matthew 4:1-3. Another example is when David, of whom we have already talked about, conducted a census contradicting the will of God. There, the Bible says, that, **“Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.”** 1 Chronicles 21:1.

(2) The world: The world is a continuous source of temptation for the Christian because it offers things that the flesh and eyes want and long for. The Bible states that **“For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.”** 1 John 2:16. The Apostle mentions elements that are well known to us. The definition he gives is more relevant now than ever before: technology dominates, electronic and social media promote terrible things, and sin and evil are the order of the day. Today, it is easier than ever to enter the hiding place and satisfy the lowest of passions through the Internet, which has made pornography and other elements available to everyone. This is an avenue for human beings to sin and precisely feed the flesh, eyes and the pride of life.

(3) Our own flesh: However, the most powerful source of temptation is not the devil, nor the world he rules, but our own flesh. That is right. The human being is led by a mind that plots everyday, a heart where dark feelings and passions are stored, and as Solomon says, “eyes that are never satisfied” (Proverbs 27:20). That is why the Bible states, **“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.”** James 1:14. Our own flesh is that powerful to seduce and induce us to fall into temptation.

4. THE PROCESS OF TEMPTATION

What leads a person to fall into temptation? As we will see through the Word, people are tempted by their own evil desires —unmeasured and uncontrolled— so that anyone who fails to govern his passions ends up being governed by them. The believer is also tempted by what surrounds him —environment or ambient— which as the coming of the Lord approaches, becomes more and more toxic and dangerous for him. Erwin Lutzer, says: “Nowadays temptations come looking for us and chases us.” This statement refers to television with its programs and commercials. It also refers to the global networks of information designed to attract and please the most perverse passions and many other spiritually harmful elements. Kuen says that, “Temptation always attacks us at our most vulnerable point.” This is a reality. Let us read James 1:12-16:



“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.”

Here, the Apostle brings forward the process that leads a person to spiritual death. It consists of four stages: (1) Weakness: When a Christian draws away from the Lord he starts to weaken spiritually, the desires of his flesh begin to take control of his actions. Then he is attracted by uncontrollable desires. This happens because of a lack of participation in spiritual activities, such as prayer, fasting, attending services, and reading the Word of God. (2) Seduction: This is the most powerful weapon of the enemy to make a Christian fall. When a person is seduced, he falls into the trap without even realizing it. This is how Samson was seduced, deceived and trapped by Delilah. He lost his eyes and later his life (Judges 16:15-20). (3) The fall: This is when the desires of the flesh that are out of control lead a person to sin. After a person has been seduced and drawn into the trap, evil desire does its job and sin is conceived. Conceiving means giving birth. In other words, it is no longer a thought, but now an action in progress which will make the person fulfill the desires of the flesh and do exactly what he had in his heart. (4) Death: The result of sin is death. No matter how insignificant the committed sin may be considered, as time goes by, this will cause spiritual death. Adam and Eve were told that the day they ate fruit from the forbidden tree they would die (Genesis 2:17). When they ate the fruit they did not die instantly but were cast out of the presence of God, which meant spiritual death to them and, with the passage of time, physical death as well.

5. HOW TO OVERCOME TEMPTATION

Temptation is like a visitor disguised in a way that most attracts you, one that will always come without invitation. No one is exempt from him nor can avoid him. At times, God will allow us to go through situations of temptation as He did with Peter: ***“And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.”*** Luke 22:31. As we said at the beginning, with temptation, God will make the way of escape: ***“But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”*** Luke 22:32. This means victory is ours. You and I can overcome temptation and here we will explain how to do it.

(1) We must submit to God: ***“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”*** James 4:7. We must submit to the will of God, we must resist the devil and he will flee from us. A Christian submitted to God, —submissive, humble, obedient— will not be an easy prey for the enemy of our souls. However, a weak Christian will fall into his trap.

(2) Use the Word of God: When tempted by the devil, Jesus responded with the Word of God, and so He overcame him. First, when the tempter incited Him to turn the stones into bread, Jesus said, ***“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”*** Matthew 4:4. Then, he tempted Him to jump from the pinnacle of the temple. Jesus responded, ***“You shall not tempt the Lord your God.”*** Matthew 4:7. Finally, when Satan tempted Jesus again, offering Him the kingdoms of the world in exchange for His worship, Jesus used the Word again, ***“Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”*** Matthew 4:10. In like manner, as Jesus resisted the temptation of the devil, we must do the same, using the Word of God since this is power of God to defeat Satan.



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(3) Pray to God: The Christian must pray in order not to enter into temptation. This was the counsel of Jesus given to His disciples in the model prayer: **“And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”** Matthew 6:13. Jesus counseled them while he was with them on the mount: **“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”** Matthew 26:41.

In summary, you should not be afraid of temptation. It will always come, but mighty is God to help you and provide a way out: **“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”** 1 Corinthians 10:13.

6. CONCLUSION

Temptation is an unwanted but necessary element in our process of spiritual growth. There is no victory if there is no battle. We need to fight against temptation and overcome it. Let us conclude this lesson with some powerful scriptures on the subject: 2 Peter 2:9-10: **“then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries.”** Romans 13:13-14: **“Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in lewdness and lust, But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”** James 1:12, “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

Our prayer is that you can overcome all temptation in the victorious name of Jesus Christ. Amen.



LESSON 11 – LET’S PERFECT HOLINESS

Why is holiness necessary? How can we be holy inside and out?

Text to memorize: ***“Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” “I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty.”*** 2 Corinthians 6:17 -18. ***“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”*** 2 Corinthians 7:1.

1. INTRODUCTION

God is holy, but can we be? In this lesson, we will answer this crucial question and learn how to live a holy life before God. First, let’s define holiness. The word holy comes from the Greek word **“agios”** which means separated and dedicated to the service of God. In Hebrew, the root of the word holy is **“qadosh”** which has a strict religious meaning and applies to people, objects, places, and days (Exodus 19:6, Number 5:17, Psalms 50:5, Daniel 7:22, Acts 9:13). Study these scriptures at a later time.

The concept of holiness has a long relationship with God and speaks to us of His nature. God is holy, morally (Leviticus 11:44), and in power (1st Samuel 6:20). He is called **“The Holy One of Israel”** many times in Isaiah, including Isaiah 1:4. Believers are also called **“Holy”** in numerous scriptures including Romans 8:27, 1st Corinthians 1:1 & 14:33, and Ephesians 1:1.

2.WHY IS SANCTITY NECESSARY?

There are at least three reasons why we must be holy.

(1) Holiness is necessary to preserve salvation: ***“God is holy, and he wants anyone who has the hope of seeing him face to face, to be purified.”*** 1st John 3:2–3. ***“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.”*** Hebrews 12:14.

(2) We must be holy in order to serve God: God asks a holy life of all those who desire to serve Him. To the priests of Israel He said ***“Otherwise he shall not defile himself, being a chief man among his people, to profane himself. They shall not make any bald place on their heads, nor shall they shave the edges of their beards nor make any cuttings in their flesh. They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for they offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy.”*** Leviticus 21:4-6. These priests were consecrated and needed to protect themselves from many things in holiness, but the people also needed to be holy. God ordered Moses: ***“Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.”*** Exodus 19:10-11. The church must also behave as **“a royal priesthood and a holy nation”** (1 Peter 2:9) and **“without blame before Him”** Ephesians 1:4, if they desire to serve God

(3) Holiness is a necessary as a way of life. True holiness is a lifestyle. It should be evident in our behavior always and at all times. Holiness is a reality inside and out. Holiness is life in harmony with God’s will in every area and part of our being: ***“as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be***



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holy, for I am holy." 1st Peter 1:14-16. In a sinful world, God wants us to show that we are different. If we do not practice holiness, we are living a religious life that lacks substance. Let's consider how we can perfect holiness in our whole being.

3. TRUE HOLINESS

True holiness begins within the believer and is then reflected in the exterior. It begins in the area of thoughts, then moves to the level of attitudes and words, and finally manifests itself externally. This is the process of sanctification that God wishes to work in us, if we allow it.

Jesus rebuked the religious leaders of His time because although externally they seemed to please God yet, internally, they displeased God: **"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also."** Matthew 23:25-26. First, let's talk about sanctifying the inside which includes the heart and the mind. The mind is the force behind everything we think, say, and do. Holiness is to displace all the unclean and negative thoughts with pure and good ones. Any soiled, negative, or perverse expressions, must be replaced with edifying words and love (2nd Corinthians 10:5, Philippians 4:8).

The Heart is the seat of our emotions and desires. The heart is also called the soul in the Word. From the heart come sentiments that may be pure or unwholesome as the Lord said. Matthew 15:19: **"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."** An unsanctified heart that is not subject to God. It engenders hatred, grudges, bitterness, deceit, pride, envy, negative and indecent words, etc. Our words express what we feel, what we think, and who we are. We more fully developed this topic in lesson 3 of this course. Reread chapter 3 of James to remember the importance of holiness in our speech.

Galatians 5:19-21: **"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."** Paul presents us with a list of passions called the "works of the flesh". These are bad desires that begin in the heart and materialize in our members. Paul says that those who practice all of this "will not inherit the kingdom of God." Holiness, on the other hand, is to practice what is mentioned in Galatians 5:22-25: **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."** If we want have a victorious Christian life, it is vital that we take care of our inner being by maintaining it pure, holy, and clean for God and that it be free from all falsehood and hypocrisy.

4. OUTER HOLINESS

A person's external appearance is a reflection of his or her inner condition; it speaks about the condition of their heart. Our outward appearance is a reflection of our inner being before God and others. If our relationship with God is sincere, clean, and the condition of our heart is pure, then that condition will produce a holy, external appearance. An ungodly appearance, on the other hand, will promote desires of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the vanity of life as we have already studied.



The Christian must be moderate in all things; this includes the outward appearance. Our clothes or hairstyles should not be ostentatious or too ornate. Our adornment must be meek and humble which is of great value in the sight of God. The basic principles are: (1) chastity; (2) modesty; (3) rejection of ornamentation; (4) moderation of cost; (5) clear gender distinctions and (6) separation from worldly connections.

Christians should refrain from wearing immodest clothing, ornate jewelry, ostentatious clothing, very expensive, extravagant clothing, or eye-catching dresses, dressing in the clothing of the opposite gender, long hair on men, short hair on women, and styles that can be associated with carnality, superficially, ostentation, and vanity. Let's look at these issues.

(1) Clothing: No indication is given to us about color and style, but the Bible has a lot to say about the type of clothing that should or shouldn't be worn. (a) There must be a distinction between men's and women's clothing. According to Deuteronomy 22:5: ***"A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the Lord your God."*** A man must be masculine in appearance, and a woman must be feminine in their appearance. Christians should abstain from wearing clothing belonging to the other sex. Effeminate men are an abomination to God: ***"...Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites will inherit the kingdom of God."*** 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. (b) Our dress should be moderate: A good practice to follow is to ask, "Would I feel comfortable in this garment if I were in the presence of Jesus Christ? Do I reflect God with my appearance to those around me? (c) Our clothing should not be expensive or attention-seeking. God wants us to dress modestly. There are styles of clothing that conform to God's law in that they cover the body, but their style, price, or pricey appearance can communicate pride or a life that has not been fully surrendered to God's will. 1 Timothy 2:9: ***"in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing,"*** 1 Peter 3:3: ***"Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel."*** These principles also apply to men.

(2) Chastity and nudity: Chastity means "having reserved feelings towards what is related to sexuality." In practice, modesty motivates men and women to dress decently. Modesty evades showing parts of our body particularly those that cause sexual attraction. Many cultures in the twenty-first century are strongly influenced by a proclivity towards nudity, but God continues to be rigorous about this issue. God hates disordered nudity. He doesn't want his children to show their nakedness, except in the bond of marriage. Cam's sin was setting his eyes on the nakedness of his father (Genesis 9:22-27). In Leviticus 18, God forbade his people from revealing the nakedness of their father, mother, brothers, etc. The Bible says that our bodies are holy. Our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. ***"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?"*** 1 Corinthians 6:19. Therefore, we must be careful in the type of clothing we wear by ensuring that it is not too short, too revealing and that it does not exhibit nudity.

(3) Hair: There are certain instructions in the Bible regarding our hair. Much of it has to do with male and female distinctions. Hair can also be used in scriptures to communicate spiritual disorder, listen to Jeremiah, ***"Cut off your hair and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on the desolate heights; for the Lord has rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath."*** Jeremiah 7:29, In 1st Corinthians 11:3-16 we are told that a woman who cuts her hair dishonors her head. Verses 14-15 provides the explanation by stating that long hair on a man is a shame, but in a woman it becomes her glory.



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(4) The passage speaks of the head covering which many call a “veil”: ***“Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.”*** This chapter, highlights the order established by God. This chain of authority is important to understand and respect.

The order is that God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of the woman. The head provides direction and those who are under authority submit to it. The question of order in no way means that a man is superior to a woman. Both sexes are created in God’s image. Respect, however, for this order is important and must be minded. That is why the passage says that the woman must have ***“a symbol of authority on her head”*** Verse 10. A “Sign” is something that is visible and that can be appreciated. When a man is standing before the Lord, while praying or prophesying, he should not have his head covered. If a man does cover his head, it affronts or dishonors his head which is Christ. That’s why men remove their hats when they enter a home or a church. If they are Christians, they also remove their hats when they pray, preach, or teach the Bible. This is how men manifest that the headship of Christ. A Woman, on the other hand acknowledges that man is her head by covering her head. She also covers her head when she is before the Lord praying or prophesying. If a woman comes before God to pray or prophesy with her head uncovered, she affronts or dishonors her head that is man. The covering can be a veil, a cloak, or even a hat..

(5) **Wearing jewelry:** According to the Bible, Jewelry is nothing but vanity. We believe that jewelry is unnecessary: ***“when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—”*** 1 Peter 3:2-3. ***“in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.”*** 1 Timothy 2:9-10. Again, this principle applies to man as well. What about the wedding ring. We believe that a wedding ring is not necessary to show commitment. Commitment is demonstrated through honest and respectful behavior. The wedding ring is not a remedy to marital unfaithfulness. What about a watch? We do not consider a watch to be an ornament because it has practical functions.

5. CONCLUSION

Hardly anyone would dare dispute the important of inner holiness. However, many people question the importance of outward holiness by arguing that God “only cares about the heart.” In fact, many Christians are abandoning the practice of outward holiness. However, as we have already seen, Jesus does care about our external appearance, ***“...that the outside of them may be clean also.”*** Matthew 23:26. It is true that the temple may look great from the outside, but corrupted on the inside. True holiness, which comes from within, will always be reflected on the outside by its conformity to the Word of God: ***“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** 1 Thessalonians 5:23.



LESSON 12 – YOU SHALL KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUITS

How do you know if someone is truly a disciple of Christ? What are the marks or signs that distinguish an authentic Christian?

Text to memorize: *“You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”* Matthew 7:16-20.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Lord’s words in Matthew 7:16-20 are impacting. They reveal that there is a way of determining the type of person an individual is, that is, by observing their “fruit.” In other words, we can know a person by asking certain questions. How does this person think? How does he talk? How does she act? How do they relate with others? Do they serve others or just live for themselves? Questions like this will help us determine whether a person is really Christian or not. More importantly, they can help us discover whether we are or are not living the Christian life.

2. DIFFERENT TREES, DIFFERENT FRUITS

Let’s examine ourselves. Just as a tree can be known by its fruits, others can know our relationship with God simply by looking at our life. The total sum of who we are is actually reflected in what we say and do. Our words and deeds reveal our character. What kind of fruit are you producing today?

The works of the flesh and of the spirit spoken of by Paul in Galatians 5:19-23 are represented as fruit being produced by two different kinds of trees. One tree produces good fruit while the other produces bad. The fruit of each tree is according to its nature. Later in this study we will examine some characteristics of the “old man” (our carnal nature) and then consider what the Spirit of God will produce in us as born-again Christians.

3. THE TREES THAT GIVE BAD FRUIT

We will see three passages where Paul asks the Galatian, Ephesian, the Colossian brethren to put off or undo the works of their old nature or worldly behavior.

Galatians 5:19-21: *“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*

Ephesians 4:22: *“that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,”*

Colossians 3:1-9: *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming*



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upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,"

Our old nature, without Christ, was incapable of producing a good character, just as a bad tree is incapable of producing good fruit. Then, we could only produce the kinds of things mentioned above which include pride, selfish ambition, jealousy, resentment, rivalry, controversies, discord, rage, complaints, lack of forgiveness, bitterness, lies, greed, deceit, fraud, laziness, slackness, sexual immorality, unclean desires, lust, perversion, drunkenness, orgies, worship of false gods, spells and enchantments, as well as other evil passions that God's law condemns.

According to the Word of the Lord, these and other works of the flesh must be discontinued if we are to please God (Romans 6:1,2). We must rid ourselves of all of them seeing that they belong to our old carnal nature and not to the new spiritual nature. They do not correspond, in any way, to the fruit of the Spirit, as we will soon see. If we really want to have a new life, If we really want to embrace the grace available to us in Jesus Christ, and, most of all, if we have a home in Heaven with Jesus, then we must get rid of everything of our carnal nature . As we have already read, ***"those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."***

Romans 1:28-32 shows us the terrible result of doing evil persistently despite our knowing how to do good: ***"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them."***

4. THE TREE THAT GIVES GOOD FRUIT

A study of Galatians 5, Ephesians 4, and Colossians 3, will reveal the fruit of a life that's been transformed by Christ. The fruit of this transformed life is associated with very positive character traits such as honesty, control, trust, hard work, generosity, love, clean speech, positive attitudes, edifying words, kindness, forgiveness, sexual purity, etc. Let's look at some of these verses.

Galatians 5:22-25: ***"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."***

Ephesians 4:23-24: ***"and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."***

Colossians 3:10-15: ***"and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one***



another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful."

In 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 we find another exhortation to produce good fruit: **"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself...comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work."** How can our words and works be established by Christ?

(1) **Good words:** Speaking frankly about our words, James instructs believers by saying, **"it is not possible [...] that the fig tree give olives, or that the vine give figs."** James 3:12. In this text, James explains that our tongues cannot speak both good and evil. The Apostle, later in this chapter, explains that divine wisdom is filled with good fruits and that sowing seeds of peace with our lips can reap the fruit of virtue. Colossians 4:6 says **"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."** So we should always be careful to avoid speaking ill of others, which includes gossip, talking to others inappropriately, and being verbally abusive.

(2) **Good works:** Although we cannot be saved by good works, Paul tells a preacher to constantly teach **"those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men."** Titus 3:8. He also tells the brethren of Galatia **"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."** Galatians 6:9-10. Paul prayed constantly for the saints of Colossae so that they might **"walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."** Colossians 1:10.

5. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

In reality, there really is no good reason for our lives not to be filled with the virtues of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God tells us that there is no law, in Heaven or on earth, that forbids them: **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."** Galatians 5:22-23. We are also told that "for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth" and that "if we live by the Spirit" we must "walk by the Spirit." Galatians 5:25.

If we profess to have a relationship with God, we must demonstrate it daily by walking in the Spirit, and acting in righteousness, and truth, as true children of God. We must never forget or neglect the virtues we have just studied, because the Lord expects them from each of us. We must also never forget the powerful reason behind such an injunction: **"that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."** Philippians 1:10-11.

6. CONCLUSION

Disciples of Jesus must produce the **"fruit of the Spirit."** This is not a secondary or optional matter, but one of the highest important. In the next lesson, we will study the divine qualities of the fruit of the Spirit. We will also analyze Galatians 5:22-23 from its literal Greek connotation. Finally, we will also learn how these qualities can be reflected in our lives, attitudes, words, and actions.