

VERSION 2.0



ESSENTIALS

A GUIDE TO THE FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS
AND PRACTICES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Essentials, a ten-lesson study of the foundational beliefs and practices of the Christian faith. The goal of this study is to see Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-10 fulfilled in your life...

...WE HAVE NOT CEASED TO PRAY FOR YOU AND TO ASK THAT YOU MAY BE FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WILL IN ALL SPIRITUAL WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING, SO THAT YOU WILL WALK IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE LORD, TO PLEASE HIM IN ALL RESPECTS, BEARING FRUIT IN EVERY GOOD WORK AND INCREASING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD;

Understanding and application; faith and practice; knowledge and good fruit... to have one we must have the other. The Christian life is grounded by knowledge of biblical truth, but it becomes sterile and lifeless if that truth is not lived out in daily practice. So each of these ten lessons will introduce truths and related practices that are foundational to our Christian faith. Each section will be connected to real life through compelling case studies describing representative people from our community. In the back of this packet you will find scripture memory cards to cut out and keep with you so that you will be ready to share what you've learned with others. Finally, to prepare you to lead others through this study, a summary sheet is provided at the back for you to write out the key truths and practices you learn each week.

One last word - realize that this study is just the beginning. No seventy page packet could ever come close to covering all the vital truths of Christianity. Many important truths, practices, and biblical passages had to be left out for the sake of brevity. So please do not forget that this packet is simply your introduction, your starting place for a lifetime of continued study into the foundational truths of Christianity.

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1.0 WHO IS GOD?

THE TRINITY OF GOD AND THE PERSON OF THE FATHER

IMPRINT MEMORIZE

And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment.”

Matthew 22:37-38

EXAMPLE CASE STUDY

Ahmed is the nicest guy on your street. Sincere, helpful, considerate, he seems the exact opposite of the radical Islam you hear about in the news. Yet in solidarity with all Muslims, Ahmed worships Allah, whom he believes is the almighty and un-touchable sovereign of the universe who

must be feared and obeyed. He considers Jesus a great teacher and prophet, but is offended by those who would worship him as a god. This whole notion of the trinity, **THAT GOD IS “THREE PERSONS IN ONE GOD,” IS SIMPLY FOOLISHNESS AND IDOLATRY IN AHMED’S EYES!**

1. *If Ahmed asked you to describe your God in one sentence, what would you say?*
2. *How does your Christian view of God differ from Ahmed’s Islamic view?*
3. *Do these differences matter, or are we all in the end using different language to worship the same God?*

“WHAT *higher,*
MORE *exalted,*
AND MORE *compelling*
GOAL CAN THERE BE THAN TO KNOW GOD?”
--J.I. PACKER

 *In your life, what goals compete with the goal of knowing God better?*

1 GOD IS TRINITY

In contrast to all other major religions, Christianity proclaims a Triune God, that “God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God¹.” While Scripture never uses the word “Trinity,” it clearly teaches the concept as the following passages demonstrate:

UNITY GOD IS ONE

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!”

Deuteronomy 6:4

“Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him...”

1 Corinthians 8:6a

DIVERSITY THE FATHER, SON AND SPIRIT ARE GOD

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your fellows.

Psalms 45:6-7

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

Matthew 28:19

Thomas answered and said to [Jesus], “My Lord and my God!”

John 20:28

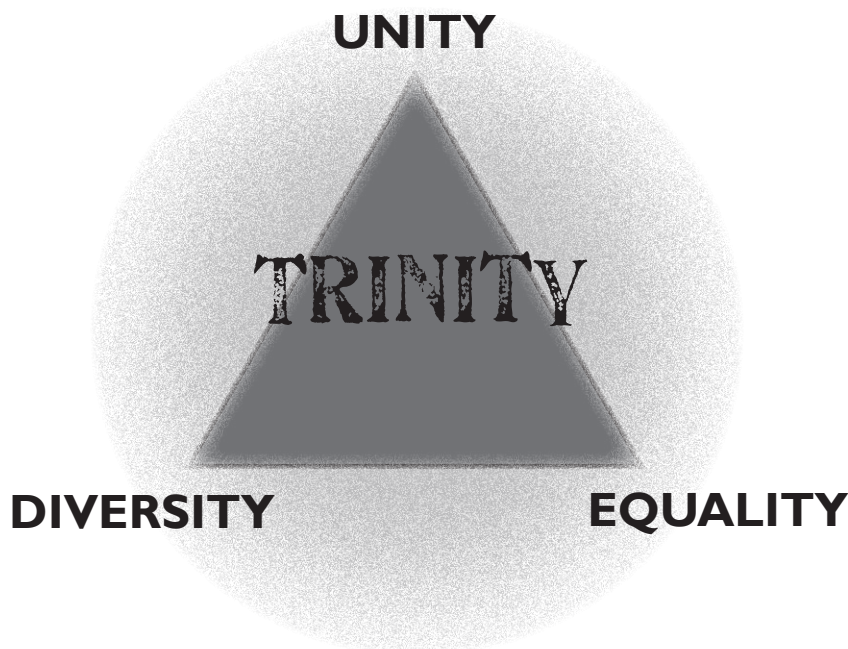
But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?... Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”

Acts 5:3-4

The one who claims to understand the Trinity has LOST HIS MIND;
the one who denies the Trinity has LOST HIS SOUL



Like everyone else in your group, you may at this point be wondering, “HOW CAN ONE BE THREE AND THREE BE ONE?” What was easy to state and scripturally defend is still incredibly difficult to grasp! There is probably no concept in all of Christianity as challenging to comprehend as the Trinity. Human reason cannot fathom it, logic cannot explain it, and no analogy can ever do it justice. In the end, however, we should actually expect our infinite God to be incomprehensible in many respects to finite creatures like ourselves. As Augustine (354-430 AD), one of the most famous church theologians of all time said, “WE ARE SPEAKING OF GOD, WHAT MARVEL IF THOU DO NOT COMPREHEND? FOR IF THOU COMPREHENDED, HE IS NOT GOD.”



THE TRINITY IS *sufficiently understandable*
BUT *ultimately incomprehensible*

1. As mentioned, no other major religion proclaims a Triune God, nor do any of the pseudo-Christian cults like Jehovah's Witnesses. So why hold to this unpopular belief? Does it have a bearing on any of the other core beliefs of Christianity? If so, what?
2. Does the doctrine of the Trinity have any practical bearing on our lives? If so, what?

2 GOD IS GREAT

Each of the following six attributes describes how infinitely great our God is. For each attribute, read the definition², look up the bold passage in your Bible, and then fill in the box entitled, “How it affects me.” To fill in this last box, spend a moment considering the following questions: Are there times in my life where this attribute has affected my attitude or actions? What would my life be like as a Christian if God DID NOT have this attribute?

a. FREE

God is not limited by anything outside Himself nor is He dependent on anything.

Isaiah 40:12-28;
I Chron 29:11-13;
Acts 17:24-25;
I Tim 6:15-16

How it affects me...

b. ETERNAL

Not created, without beginning or end, God exists outside the dimension of time and is not constrained by it, yet can choose to interact in time with His creation.

Rev 1:8;
Exod 3:14;
Ps 90:4;
I Tim 1:17

c. IMMUTABLE

God's nature and His sovereign plan do not change.

Mal 3:6;
Heb 13:8;
Jam 1:17

d. OMNIPOTENT

God is the all powerful supreme Ruler of the universe, able to do anything He chooses, yet never chooses to do anything contrary to His plan or character.

Ps 135:5-6;
Job 42:2;
Mt 19:26;
Phil 3:20-21

e. OMNISCIENT

God fully knows and understands all things past, present, and future.

Ps 139:1-6,16;
Ps 147:5;
Isa 46:10;
Heb 4:13

f. OMNIPRESENT

God is everywhere, always, completely present in His creation, yet is always distinct from it.

Jer 23:24;
I Ki 8:27;
Ps 139:7-12;
Prov 15:3

3 GOD IS GOOD

Each of the following five attributes describes how infinitely good our God is. For each attribute, read the definition³, look up the bold passage in your Bible, and then fill in the box entitled, "How it affects me." *To fill in this last box, spend a moment considering the following questions: Are there times in my life where this attribute has affected my attitude or actions? What would my life be like as a Christian if God DID NOT have this attribute?*

a. HOLY & RIGHTEOUS

God is absolutely separate from sin and evil and absolutely good and pure in all He does.

Rev 15:3-4;
Deut 32:4;
Isa 6:3

How it affects me...

b. JUST IN WRATH

God exercises perfect justice in punishing sin.

2 Thess 1:5-10;
Rom 1:18; 2:5

c. FAITHFUL & TRUE

God is the standard of all truth. He is absolutely faithful to Himself, to His Word, and to His people.

Dt 7:9;
Ps 33:4;
Jn 17:17;
Titus 1:2

d. LOVING

God is unconditionally self-giving to others. This love is most perfectly expressed within the Trinity, yet is also directed graciously towards creation.

1 John 4:16;
John 3:16; 14:31;
Rom 8:37-39

e. GRACIOUS & MERCIFUL

God shows compassionate love freely to those who do not merit it, particularly those in need or those deserving His punishment.

Ex 34:6;
Mt 9:27;
Eph 2:8

4 GOD AS FATHER



EXAMPLE CASE STUDY

Jenny has never had an intimate relationship with God. Though a believer for many years, she lacks the desire to know or spend time with a God the Bible calls “Father.” **WHY WOULD SHE WANT TO BE CLOSE WITH ANYONE WHO WOULD SHARE THAT TITLE WITH THE ALCOHOLIC MAN WHO BERATED AND ABUSED HER THROUGHOUT CHILDHOOD?** Sure, she’ll serve and obey such a God because that’s what’s expected of her as a Christian. But get to know such a God, even love such a God, no thanks!

▶ *How would you counsel Jenny? What would you say to help her see the differences between her earthly father and our Heavenly Father?*

Like Jenny, many believers suffer from an impaired relationship with God because they have an inaccurate perception of who God the Father is. To many, He is a heavenly policeman whose primary concern is to punish any wrong-doing. To others, God the Father is an old but kind heavenly grandfather who loves to bless them regardless of what they do. To those like Jenny, the Father is nothing more than a detached, uncaring dictator. The Bible, however, presents a very different portrait of God the Father.

Look up the following passages and write down the characteristics of God the Father that you observe in each:

Psalms 103:13-14

Matthew 6:26, 31-33

Luke 15:11-24

Hebrews 12:5-11

Galatians 4:4-7

Perhaps like Jenny you grew up with an abusive father or no father at all. If so, painful memories of betrayal can make it seem impossible to think of God as a Father. If you’ve never talked to someone about abuse or abandonment in your childhood, please consider talking to a trusted friend, pastor, or Christian counselor with the goal of coming to terms with this past betrayal and its present-day effects. With time, God can bring peace, healing and a willingness to forgive your earthly father. In reality, none of us had perfect earthly fathers, but through being adopted into God’s family, we can all enjoy our perfect heavenly Father.

PRAXIS



practice worship

There's no more fitting way to end this lesson than by responding in worship to the awe-inspiring truths we've learned. Few practices are as central to Christianity as worship. **WORSHIP, SIMPLY STATED, IS OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORTHINESS.** It should take place every day and should permeate our entire lives, involving our thoughts, words, and actions (it's so much more than just singing on Sunday!). Proper worship involves consistently submitting to God as one's sovereign Lord, humbly serving God in everything one does, and thankfully remembering all that God is and has done.

Spend the next few minutes looking back over your chart of God's attributes on the previous pages and prayerfully thanking God for who He is.

Once you've responded in thankfulness, take some time to reflect on your own life. Are you consistently submitting your whole life to God as your righteous, sovereign Lord? Do you entrust all you have (relationships, time, money, possessions, job, etc) to Him, to His goodness, power, and wisdom? What are you holding back and why? *Take this opportunity to rededicate yourself completely to God for He alone is worthy.*

WHEN WE TAME GOD, IN WORDS AND CONCEPTS, AND FILE HIM AWAY
UNDER ALPHABETIZED CHARACTERISTICS,
WE CAN EASILY LOSE THE FORCE OF THE

passionate relationship

GOD SEEKS ABOVE ALL ELSE.

2.0 WHO IS GOD THE SON?

THE DEITY OF CHRIST

IMPRINT MEMORIZE

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1: 1

EXAMPLE CASE STUDY

Your older brother Stephen has always been keenly interested in religious things. Though he would call himself a Christian, he takes pride in his openness to new ideas and loves to share the latest controversial religious topics over dinner. At the table tonight, he tells the family about an exciting book that he's just finished, Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. As Stephen talks, it becomes obvious that he agrees with some of the book's shocking claims about Jesus. "It really makes sense," says Stephen, "that the ancient church exaggerated all the miraculous stuff about Jesus to draw more people to their religion. But with the help of historical research like Brown uses, it's easy for us to see that Jesus was really just a great teacher and example. I don't know if I agree that Jesus got married and moved to France, but it certainly seems more reasonable than that he rose from the dead!"

1. *What does popular culture in America say about Jesus as expressed in best-selling books, TV shows, and movies?*

2. *Do you think it matters what people personally believe about Jesus? Why or why not?*



Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." HE SAID TO THEM, "BUT WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?" MATTHEW 16:13-15

Almost every major world religion highly esteems Jesus Christ, but it is hard to reach agreement on who He really was. Was He just a man, a great teacher or a revolutionary politician? Did He just appear to be a man? Was He God in a human body? Was He one among many gods? Did He even exist, or was He just an idea, a representation of the best in each of us?

How would you answer Jesus' question in Matthew 16:13-15? Who is He, and on what do you base your belief?

① THE DIRECT CLAIMS OF JESUS

1. *Who did Jesus Christ claim to be?*

John 14:8-10

John 8:56-59 (with Exodus 3:14)

John 10:30-33

Matthew 26:63-66

Matthew 28:19

2. *What did Jesus' enemies think that He was claiming in these passages?*

The direct claims of Jesus truly are radical, as noted by the eminent Christian author C.S. Lewis who drew the following implication...

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God⁴.”



② THE DIVINE ACTIONS OF JESUS

WORSHIP — *Read John 20:25-28*

1. *If Jesus Christ was just a man, then how should He have responded to Thomas (Matthew 4:8-10; Isaiah 42:8)?*

FORGIVENESS — *Read Mark 2:5-11*

2. *Who has the right to forgive sins (Isaiah 43:25)? How did Jesus Christ validate His authority to forgive sins?*

ETERNAL LIFE — *Read John 10:27-28*

3. *What is “eternal life” (John 3:16; 17:3)? If Jesus Christ has the authority to give eternal life, how does this demonstrate that He is God (John 5:26)?*

③ THE CLAIMS OF CHRIST-FOLLOWERS

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....
And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the
only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:1,14 (The apostle John)

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form....

Colossians 2:9 (The apostle Paul)

▶ *What do you learn about the beliefs of Jesus' followers from the following verses?*

John 1:1-18; 20:31

Titus 2:13

Col 1:15-17

Hebrews 1:1-3

4 O.T. PROPHECIES ABOUT JESUS

Many Old Testament prophetic passages speak about a coming Messiah – God’s anointed deliverer who would save His people. Each of these prophecies was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ. *Look up the following three examples. What do each of these prophecies tell us about the expected Messiah?*

Micah 5:2

Isaiah 9:6-7

Isaiah 53

5 ANCIENT SECULAR WRITINGS

While both of the following two men are regarded as accurate ancient historians, neither were Christians (Tacitus was a pagan Roman and Josephus a Jew). Yet in the desire to record historical truth, both referred to a man named “Jesus” or “Christ” in their writings.

“But not all the relief that could come from man, not all the bounties that the prince could bestow, nor all the atonements which could be presented to the gods, availed to relieve Nero from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration, the fire of Rome. Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Roman also.”

Annals XV. 44, Cornelius Tacitus, (born AD 52-54),
the preeminent Roman historian of the first century

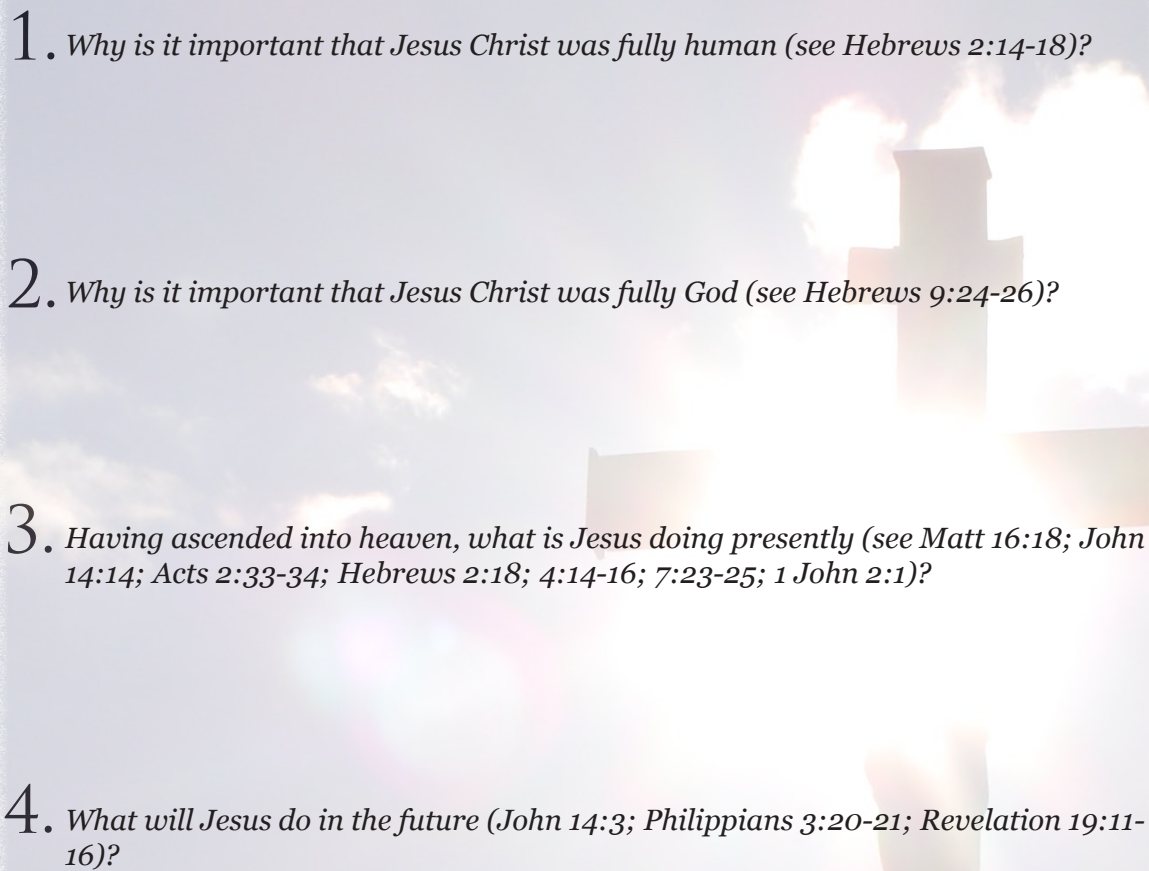
“About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man... For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and Greeks... When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him... And the tribe of Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.”

Antiquities. Xviii.33., Flavius Josephus (born AD 37)

In conclusion,

From the biblical evidence, we can say the following about Jesus Christ:

WE BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, THE UNCREATED AND ETERNAL SON, who is equal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. He is forever fully God and fully man, having been conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life and then died on the cross as the sacrifice for our sins. Further, **HE AROSE BODILY FROM THE DEAD AND ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN** where He is now exalted at the right hand of God the Father.

- 
1. *Why is it important that Jesus Christ was fully human (see Hebrews 2:14-18)?*
 2. *Why is it important that Jesus Christ was fully God (see Hebrews 9:24-26)?*
 3. *Having ascended into heaven, what is Jesus doing presently (see Matt 16:18; John 14:14; Acts 2:33-34; Hebrews 2:18; 4:14-16; 7:23-25; 1 John 2:1)?*
 4. *What will Jesus do in the future (John 14:3; Philippians 3:20-21; Revelation 19:11-16)?*

Bonus: *What did God the Son give up in order to become a man (Phil. 2:6,7)?*



*A*lmost 2000 years ago Jesus Christ asked His followers, “Who do you say that I am?” This remains the most important question for any man or woman. It is the central issue of the Christian faith – Who is Jesus Christ? If we miss the mark on this issue, we have missed Christianity altogether. As we continue to share our faith and build others up in their faith, we are guaranteed to confront this issue. *Therefore, equip yourself to defend the identity of Jesus Christ accurately from the Scriptures by memorizing the following passages.*

JESUS CHRIST...

... IS FULLY GOD – JOHN 11

... IS FULLY MAN – COLOSSIANS 2:9

... DIED FOR SIN – 1 PETER 2:24

... ROSE FROM THE DEAD – ACTS 2:23,24

i know men: and i tell you that jesus christ is not a man. superficial minds see a resemblance between christ and the founders of empires, and the gods of other religions. that resemblance does not exist. -- NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

3.0 HOW CAN I BE SAVED?

FINDING RECONCILIATION THROUGH THE GOSPEL

IMPRINT


MEMORIZE

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9


EXAMPLE


CASE STUDY



Your plan to sleep in this lazy Saturday morning is suddenly interrupted by a frantic knock at the door. You pull on a bathrobe and look out to see your co-worker Mary. Her outfit is shabby and mismatched, her cheeks stream with mascara-laced tears. She looks the exact opposite of the confident and well-dressed woman you saw at the office yesterday. It's hard to believe your eyes. Mary always seems to have it so together. She works hard, is kind to others, avoids the politics and gossip so common where you work, and usually spends her Saturday mornings volunteering with a children's shelter. Though she doesn't share your beliefs about Jesus, she's one of the most sincere friends you've ever known.

As you open the door, Mary's words rush out between sobs. "PLEASE, I REALLY NEED SOMEONE TO TALK TO. I fell asleep at the wheel last night driving home from a movie and swerved into oncoming traffic. I woke just in time to avoid hitting a semi, but it scared me to death. I haven't been able to sleep at all. What would have happened if I would have been hit? How do I know I would have gone to heaven? HAVE I BEEN GOOD ENOUGH? You seem to be so confident in your beliefs. Please help me..."

 *What would you say to Mary?*



*H*aving spent the previous two lessons discovering who our awesome God is, we want to take this lesson to ask the vital question, **HOW CAN WE HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH SUCH A GOD?** Like Mary, we want to know for sure that we will spend eternity with God in heaven. However, the Bible reveals that **ALL OF US ARE BORN WITH A SERIOUS PROBLEM THAT SEPARATES US FROM GOD.** This deep problem is described in the following two points...

THE BAD NEWS OF SEPARATION

① YOU ARE A SINNER

1. *What do each of the following verses tell us about sin?*

Psalm 51:4

Romans 5:12

Matt 5:27-28

Ephesians 2:1-3

Romans 3:23

2. *From these passages, how would you define the word “sin?” What does it include?*

The primary words for “sin” in both the Old and New Testaments were originally used in the practice of marksmanship and meant “to miss the mark or target.” What is the mark that God has set? It is His own perfect example (Matt 5:48). In other words, if we want to earn God’s approval, then we must be as holy as He is holy, as righteous as He is righteous. But it doesn’t matter how religiously we live, how good we are, or how hard we work; none of us can meet that standard (Isaiah 64:6). Here’s an illustration. Suppose you and I were standing on a beach on the Atlantic coast and I say to you, “Let’s see which of us can swim across this ocean to the other side.” So we begin to swim. But while you might get farther than I, or I might get farther than you, neither of us will come anywhere close to making it. Both of us will fall short.

AMAZING GRACE, HOW SWEET THE SOUND, THAT SAVED A WRETCH LIKE ME.

② THE PENALTY FOR SIN IS DEATH

1. *Romans 6:23a tells us that, “the wages of sin is death.” But what does the Bible mean by “death?” What exactly is the result that our sin earns us? Answer this question by looking up these passages: Rom 1:18; 5:12-14; 2 Thess 1:8-9; Revelation 21:8.*

2. *Why does our sin naturally result in our separation from God (Isa 6:1-5; Hab 1:13a)? This question ties back to what you learned in Lesson One about God’s attributes.*

3. *Let’s return to the previous case study about Mary. As you talk to her this Saturday morning, it becomes obvious to you that Mary has been relying on her morality at work and her service to the poor to earn her admission to heaven. She can genuinely say that she lives a “better” life than 90% of the people she knows, and she has always felt that this must outweigh the faults she still struggles with. What would you say to Mary to help her better understand the biblical view of sin?*

*I*t takes a good hour to communicate these ideas to Mary, but finally she agrees that her morality and her best deeds can't erase the fact that she falls far short of God's perfect standard. Yet this simply leaves her more anxious! If she can't earn her way to God, then what hope does she have? Fortunately, the Bible reveals that what we cannot do, God has already done. The Bible calls this great news the "gospel," a word that simply means "good news." This good news is described in the following two points...

THE GOOD NEWS OF *Reconciliation* RECONCILIATION

③ CHRIST DIED FOR YOU AND THEN ROSE FROM THE DEAD

Read the following passages carefully and write down what each says about the "good news" of what Christ has done for us.

Romans 5:8

I Peter 3:18

I Corinthians 15:3-4

The essence of the "good news" is Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. God the Son lived a perfect, sinless life and then died on the cross in our place for our sins (1 Peter 2:22-24). It's as if I stood as a convicted criminal before a perfect judge. Being perfect, the judge must condemn me for my crime; he must send me to prison because this is what the law demands. But this judge genuinely loves me and cares for me. So having passed a just sentence of life in prison, he steps down from his bench, places his hands behind his back, and orders the bailiff to escort him to prison in my place. By taking my punishment upon himself he frees me from the condemnation I justly deserve.

This is exactly what God did for us! Jesus took all of our sins upon Himself and died as our substitute. But praise God, death could not hold Him down, for three days later God the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

▶ *Why is it important that Jesus Christ rose from the dead (1 Peter 1:3)? What if He had just died for our sins and stayed in the grave (1 Corinthians 15:13-19)?*

4 YOU CAN BE SAVED THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST

Read and observe Ephesians 2:8-10. Underline the key words in the passage. Then use this passage to answer the following questions.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. **Ephesians 2:8-10**

1. According to this passage, what is the basis for our salvation? In other words, what ultimately makes it possible?

2. What is required of us to receive this salvation? What does this word mean? See also Acts 16:29-31 and Romans 4:3-5.

3. According to this passage, how do our good works relate to our salvation? See also Titus 2:14 and 3:4-8.

I ONCE WAS LOST BUT NOW I'M FOUND, WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE



What are the results of being “saved” through faith in the gospel? Look up these verses and write down all of the results you see: John 1:12, 3:16, Romans 5:1, and Col 1:13-14. (We will talk about this much more in coming lessons!)

Dig Deeper...

...INTO THE SUBJECT OF SIN:

1. Read Genesis 1:26-31; 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Romans 5:12-19 and answer the questions below.

- For what purpose did God originally create humanity?

- How does sin affect this purpose?

- What is the origin of human sin?

- Why are we sinners? Is it simply because we do sinful things or is it a state we are born into?

...INTO THE SUBJECT OF SALVATION:

2. Read Acts 4:12 and 1 John 5:11-12. According to these passages, what is the apparent consequence for those who do not believe in Jesus? Is there any other way to be saved? Do you agree? Why or why not?

3. What things do people often add to the gospel message, mistakenly thinking that they are essential for salvation?

4. Is it necessary to pray a certain prayer or walk down the aisle of a church to be saved? Why or why not?

THE MOST EFFECTIVE EVANGELISTIC TOOL YOU HAVE AVAILABLE FOR SPEAKING THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL TO SOMEONE LIKE MARY IS YOUR OWN LIFE. People can argue apologetic issues with you all day long, but no one can argue with what God has done in your life. And besides that, our lives are a story... and everyone loves a story. Now keep in mind that not everyone is ready to sit through the epic version of your life. So be prepared with a short version (3-4 minutes) of your story that communicates the gospel clearly. Whoever hears it should know exactly how he or she can make a decision to become a Christian – that is the point of a personal testimony. Here are a few tips on how to communicate your story effectively:

Think back on the period of time leading up to your belief in Jesus Christ for eternal life. What were the primary influences that caused you to believe in Jesus? Were they intellectual, circumstantial, relational?

Move quickly to the main point, the gospel, and make it clear. Share a couple key Bible verses to clarify the main points of the gospel (such as John 3:16, Romans 3:23, 6:23, or Ephesians 2:8-9).

Avoid Christian jargon (e.g. “justified,” “atonement”) and negative statements about other Christian denominations or groups.

Tailor your testimony to the needs of each listener. Is he an atheist, a Hindu, a person who calls himself a “Christian” just because he goes to church on Sundays? Adjust what you say based on what they need to hear to grasp the gospel message clearly.

Now take a few minutes to write out a short version of your testimony (3-4 minutes). Then read back over it twice to familiarize yourself with it.

In general, you can use a three point chronological outline:

1. Life before knowing Christ; e.g. Acts 22:1-5
2. How you came to know Christ (be specific); e.g. Acts 22:6-11
3. Life after you received Christ (changes He has made, what He means to you now; obviously you will emphasize this point if you became a Christian at a young age); e.g. Acts 22:12-21

4.0 CAN I KNOW FOR SURE?

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE OF YOUR SALVATION

IMPRINT MEMORIZE

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. **John 10: 27-29**

EXAMPLE CASE STUDY

Derek grew up in a family that never went to church. His parents didn't really care what he did on the weekends, so he lived a pretty wild life. Once he left home, he continued down the same path, until he met you. You told him about Christ after work one day and Derek believed that Jesus Christ really did die for his own sins and then rose from the dead. The next day Derek was fired up. However, for about a week after that you didn't see Derek – he bolted when work was over and seemed to be avoiding you. Finally, you cornered him during an afternoon break and asked him what was going on. Derek looked at the floor in silence for a few moments and then quietly confessed that he had continued sleeping with his girlfriend and was feeling really guilty about it. He had begun to wonder if he was actually a Christian after all. How could God still love him, especially when he continued to do things he knew were wrong?

1. *What would you say to Derek?*

2. *Do you think it's possible for a person like Derek to know for sure that he or she has eternal life?*

3. *Do you think it's arrogant for a person to claim that he knows for sure that he has eternal life?*

4. *Have you ever felt unsure that you have eternal life? Why?*



ETERNAL SECURITY

*I*n the previous lesson we learned how a person can have an **ETERNAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD** (eternal life) through faith in the gospel. But what happens when that same person begins to doubt? Perhaps, as in Derek's case, doubt is brought on by a renewed struggle with sin. Or perhaps the doubt arises from a prolonged period of personal suffering or spiritual dryness, when God feels very distant. Could this sin, suffering, or depression mean that I've lost my salvation, or that I never had it to begin with?

This important question touches on two crucial issues. The first is the biblical teaching of eternal security. Eternal security is an objective fact; it's true whether we believe it or not and whether we feel it or not. Eternal security simply means **ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED**. Once a person accepts Jesus as his savior, he receives eternal life that can never be lost regardless of what he does or doesn't do in later life. This truth is revealed in the following passages which can be grouped into three sections, each section providing a distinct basis for eternal security. *Look up each passage and write down what it teaches us about our eternal security.*

I AM ETERNALLY SECURE BECAUSE OF....

①...THE NATURE OF MY SALVATION

Ephesians 1:3-5

Hebrews 10:10-14

Colossians 2:13-14

②...THE NATURE OF MY NEW IDENTITY

2 Corinthians 5:17

Ephesians 1:13-14

Galatians 3:26

1 Peter 1:3


③...THE NATURE OF MY SAVIOR

Hebrews 7:24-25

John 10:27-29

John 6:37-40

Romans 8:35-39



Using what you learned from the passages on the previous page, how would you answer someone who says the following?

Truth

“I am sure I have eternal life because....

...I go to church, pray daily, and genuinely try to do what is right.”

...I was baptized in the church.”

...I believe God exists and He loves me.”

...I believe Jesus Christ died for my sins and rose from the dead.”

1. *Is it possible for a genuine believer to live a consistently unrighteous life? In other words, even though he or she SHOULD obey God and SHOULD grow in spiritual maturity, is it POSSIBLE to disobey and remain spiritually immature? If this is possible, what is the ultimate outcome? See 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, 10-15 and 2 Tim 2:11-13.*

2. *Returning to the case study we started with, what if Derek's sin were far more severe? Are there any sins that Derek could commit that could cost him his salvation (immorality, murder, suicide)?*

3. *What if three years from now Derek decides that he no longer believes in the gospel? If Derek rejects his faith (often called apostasy) does that cost him his salvation? Does it prove that he was never a believer to begin with? Why or why not?*

4. *Go back to Derek's original case study. Having answered the previous theologically oriented questions, how would you practically counsel Derek as he struggles with sin?*

ASSURANCE OF MY SALVATION...

*A*s stated earlier, there are two important biblical issues to address in this lesson. The first issue, **ETERNAL SECURITY**, is objective – it is true whether or not I realize it. In contrast, the second issue, my own **ASSURANCE OF MY SALVATION**, is subjective, it is something that I may or may not feel at a given time. Whether or not I presently feel assured of my salvation does not change the objective reality that I am indeed eternally secure. However, it is not God's desire that any of us would struggle from a lack of assurance.

Notice what **1 John 5:11-13** says:

And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.

1. *What does this verse say about assurance of one's salvation?*

2. *Why would God want us to know without a doubt that we have eternal life? Why is this assurance of our salvation important in our daily lives?*

YOU ARE *saved*,
NOT BECAUSE OF WHAT YOU DO,
BUT BECAUSE OF *what Christ did.*
--MAX LUCADO

PRAXIS

practice evangelism

W

hat joy it is to know that through faith in the gospel we have eternal life that can never be lost! This truly is the greatest news in all of human history, and **THE MOST IMPORTANT MESSAGE YOU COULD EVER SHARE WITH OTHERS**. So take the next fifteen minutes to review the four points and key verses of the gospel outline we learned in the previous lesson so that you will be ready to share this great news with others. Try to get all four points and verses by memory.

1. **You are a sinner – Romans 3:23**
2. **The penalty for sin is death – Romans 6:23**
3. **Christ died for you and then rose from the dead– Romans 5:8**
4. **You can be saved through faith in Christ – Ephesians 2:8-9**

Who will you share this good news with this week? _____

When will you share it with them? _____



5.0 WHO IS THE SPIRIT?

THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

IMPRINT MEMORIZE

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation - having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who was given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. **Ephesians 1: 13,14**

EXAMPLE CASE STUDY

A few years ago your friend Sarah learned that many of her favorite celebrities were followers of an Eastern religion called Buddhism, and she can't seem to read enough on the subject since. Like millions of people on the planet, Sarah became fascinated by the teachings of this ancient offshoot of Hinduism. Though there are countless varieties of Buddhism and Hinduism practiced today, Sarah was particularly attracted to those that espouse a pantheistic view of god – that everyone and everything is “god.” Such a god is impersonal and indistinct from creation.

What really surprises you, however, is how often Sarah uses what sounds like “Christian” language. She often talks to you about the spirit of god within her that gives her strength and motivates her to do good to others. This divine spirit guides her to truth and “saves” her from forces of evil. Since Sarah sees many of the same words and ideas when she reads about the Holy Spirit in the Bible (which she frequently does along with other major religious works), she is convinced that Christianity is really just Eastern pantheism in disguise. In fact, when she can't attend services at the Buddhist monastery out of town, she happily attends a local church to learn more about “the spirit of god that filled Jesus just like it fills me!”

1. *Is Sarah's understanding of “the spirit of god” the same as the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit? How are they similar? How are they different?*

2. *What might you say to Sarah to help her see the differences clearly?*



The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is one of the most misunderstood and underutilized truths in the entire Christian faith. In order to take advantage of the Spirit's presence and power, which will be our topic of discussion in lesson eight, we first must know exactly who He is...and who He is not.

Most people outside of the Christian faith either 1) don't believe the Spirit exists because they can't see Him, or 2) like Sarah, believe He is not a He at all but an "it" – an inanimate, impersonal power source that is inside of everything, even the rocks and trees. Few cultural icons have so accurately summarized this second view as Master Yoda, the short, green Jedi instructor from Star Wars who tells his student, "My ally is the force and a powerful ally it is. Life creates it and makes it grow. Its energy surrounds us and binds us. Luminous beams are we, not this crude matter. You must feel the force around you. Here between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere..."

WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

① THE HOLY SPIRIT IS FULLY GOD

How do each of the following passages support this belief?

Matthew 28:18-19

Acts 5:3-4

② THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A PERSON, NOT A FORCE

1. *How do each of the following passages prove that the Holy Spirit is a person (a He) and not an impersonal force (an it)?*

Acts 13:2-4

I Corinthians 12:11

I Corinthians 2:10-13

Ephesians 4:30

2. Think back to the case study about Sarah. She would argue that the "spirit of god" is simply an impersonal force that is part of all things, whereas you believe that He is a real divine Person who is present everywhere yet always distinct from His creation (the meaning of "holy"). *Is this distinction important? Does it have any affect on your daily life?*

3. *What does the designation "spirit" imply (Luke 24:39)? How should this affect our worship of God (John 4:24)?*

THE ACTIVITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1 ROLES OF THE SPIRIT



What does the Holy Spirit do? What is His purpose and function? Let's start by observing the following passages from John and underlining key words or phrases.

John 14:16-17, 25-27

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you..."

"These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."

John 16:5-15

"But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you."

1. *What different titles or descriptions of the Holy Spirit does Jesus use in these passages?*
2. *According to these passages, what role does the Holy Spirit have in relation to believers?*
3. *What role does the Holy Spirit have in relation to the world in general?*

② THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SALVATION

1. *What specific activities of the Holy Spirit in the process of our salvation are mentioned in each of the following verses (the first one is completed for you as an example)?*

John 16:8-11 *Convicts those who are not yet saved of their sin and unbelief*

Revelation 22:17

John 3:1-8

I Corinthians 12:13

Ephesians 1:13,14

2. *How should a knowledge of the Spirit's activities in the process of salvation affect our interactions with those who do not believe in Jesus Christ?*

③ THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CHRISTIAN LIFE

IN THE PASSAGES WE JUST STUDIED FROM JOHN, spoken by Jesus shortly before His crucifixion, He revealed a radical new ministry of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit would temporarily empower a person to serve God, and then the Spirit would leave. However, after Christ's ascension, He sent the Holy Spirit to permanently live inside of every Christian (Romans 8:9-11). This is the "indwelling" ministry of the Spirit.

1. *What is the significance of each of the following pictures of the indwelling Spirit?*

I Corinthians 6:19-20

John 7:37-39

2. *While every Christian is "indwelt" by the Holy Spirit, not every Christian is "filled" with the Holy Spirit. Read and observe Ephesians 5:15-21. What does it mean to be "filled" with the Spirit? Can you think of a synonym?*

We will study this concept in much greater detail in coming weeks since it is absolutely essential to the Christian life.

Etcetera...

MORE GREAT STUFF THE HOLY SPIRIT DOES FOR BELIEVERS:

Romans 8:2ff.; Gal. 5:16,22 --The Spirit produces spiritual maturity

John 14:16,26; 16:7 --The Spirit comforts us

Romans 5:5 --The Spirit pours out God's love into our hearts

Romans 8:16,17 --The Spirit gives us hope to persevere and confidence in eternal life

1 Corinthians 2:10-14; John 14:26 --The Spirit enables us to understand God's word

Acts 2:1-4; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 --The Spirit enables us to serve God

2 Thessalonians 2:6,7 --The Spirit restrains sin in the world



H *practice prayer*

ere's one more vital thing the Spirit does for believers – He makes prayer possible. **THE HOLY SPIRIT IS OUR LINE OF DIRECT COMMUNICATION TO GOD THE FATHER**, as Romans 8:26-27 tells us,

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Few practices are as vital to the Christian life as prayer, and yet most of us struggle to take full advantage of this privileged access to the Father. How do we pray consistently and biblically? What practical steps can we take to enjoy a deep, passionate, and powerful prayer life?

Let's start by looking at the example of Jesus. The disciples were so impressed by Jesus Christ's intimacy with God through prayer that they begged Him to teach them how to pray. His response was the model prayer of Matthew 6:9-13. *Read this passage and answer the following questions:*

1. *What specific elements/ideas does Jesus include in this prayer?*
2. *"Hallowed" means "holy" or "set apart." Why does Jesus start His prayer with this idea?*
3. *How does Jesus' prayer compare to your typical prayers?*

Biblical prayer is neither formulaic nor mechanical; it's genuine communication with God. Yet the following acronym can be very helpful in developing a consistent, well-balanced prayer life. **WHEN YOU PRAY, THINK ACTS:**

Adoration: worshipping God for who He is.

Confession: acknowledging to God that we have sinned and asking His forgiveness.

Thanksgiving: thanking God for all the good gifts He has given to us – spiritual, material, relational, physical, etc.

Supplication: asking God to supply the needs and desires of our friends, our families, ourselves, our nation, our world.

6.0 HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

THE UPWARD CALL OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS

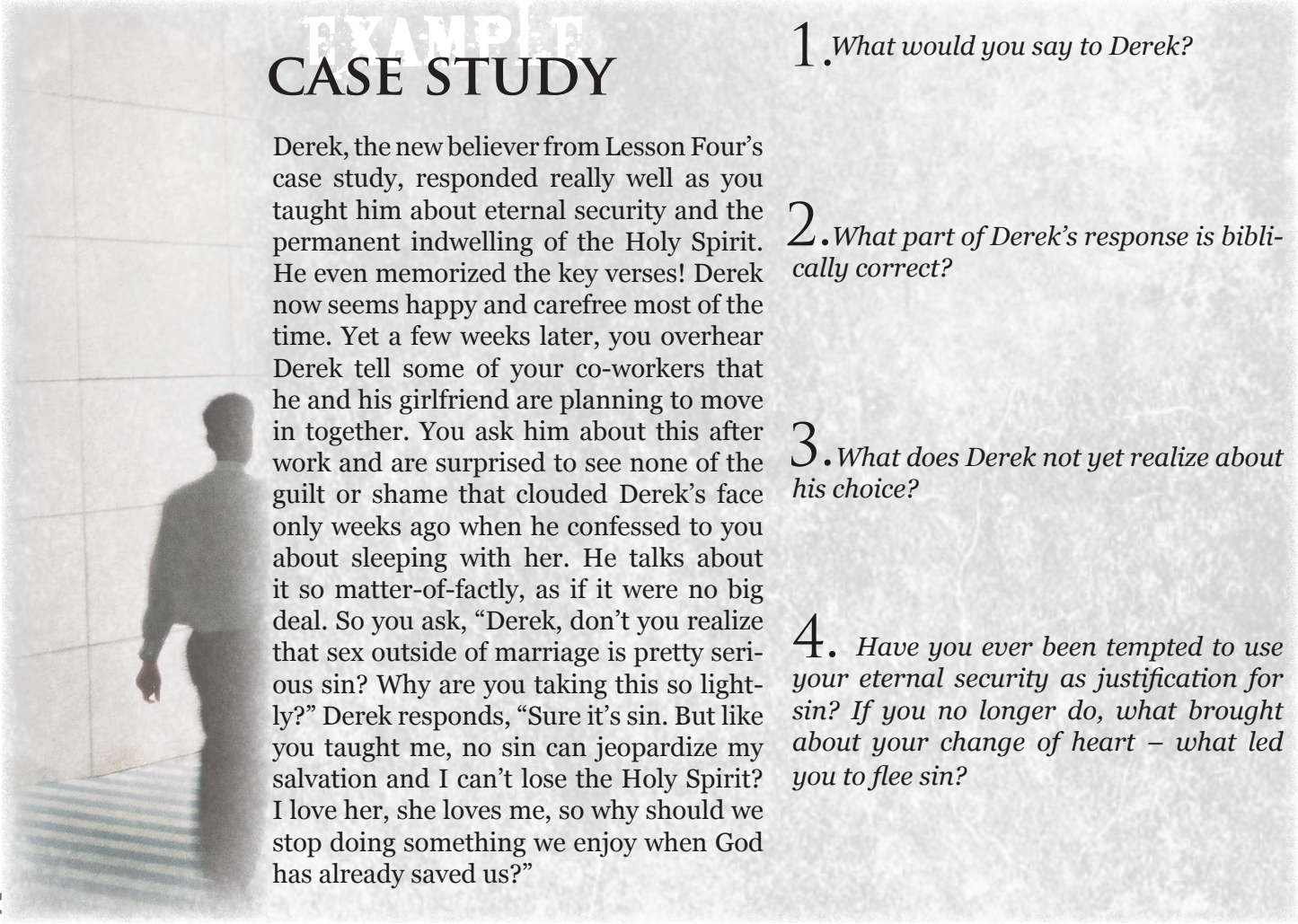
IMPRINT

MEMORIZE

More than that I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ. **Philippians 3: 8**


EXAMPLE

CASE STUDY



Derek, the new believer from Lesson Four's case study, responded really well as you taught him about eternal security and the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He even memorized the key verses! Derek now seems happy and carefree most of the time. Yet a few weeks later, you overhear Derek tell some of your co-workers that he and his girlfriend are planning to move in together. You ask him about this after work and are surprised to see none of the guilt or shame that clouded Derek's face only weeks ago when he confessed to you about sleeping with her. He talks about it so matter-of-factly, as if it were no big deal. So you ask, "Derek, don't you realize that sex outside of marriage is pretty serious sin? Why are you taking this so lightly?" Derek responds, "Sure it's sin. But like you taught me, no sin can jeopardize my salvation and I can't lose the Holy Spirit? I love her, she loves me, so why should we stop doing something we enjoy when God has already saved us?"

1. *What would you say to Derek?*
2. *What part of Derek's response is biblically correct?*
3. *What does Derek not yet realize about his choice?*
4. *Have you ever been tempted to use your eternal security as justification for sin? If you no longer do, what brought about your change of heart – what led you to flee sin?*

 Derek's question is very appropriate at this point in our study - **KNOWING ALL WE DO ABOUT ETERNAL SECURITY AND THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN US, WHY SHOULD WE BOTHER OBEYING GOD?** The apostle Paul asked exactly the same question in the book of Romans. If the grace of God really does exceed any possible sin that we could commit, then why not sin all the more so that God's grace in forgiveness can abound all the more (6:1)? If we are indeed saved simply by grace and not by obedience, then why try to obey at all (6:15)? Such questions naturally arise in Paul's mind when he beholds the extreme grace of God!

THE *ideal* CHRISTIAN LIFE

optimal
abundant
fulfilling
significant

How do we answer Derek's question? It's helpful to start by focusing on his motivation. Derek chooses to sin because he believes that a life of physical satisfaction is better than a life without it. The majority of the human race believes that

"the good life" can be found primarily in satisfying human desires through such things as pleasure, possessions, money, ease, fame, etc. And countless Christians like Derek agree.



YET THE BIBLE PRESENTS A DIFFERENT PICTURE OF THE "IDEAL CHRISTIAN LIFE."


Read and observe Philippians 3:8-14. Underline any key words or ideas.

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

1. *What do you learn about the "ideal Christian life" from this passage? List out everything Paul says about such a life.*

2. *From this passage, finish this statement as succinctly as possible, "The ideal Christian life is..."*

THE IDEAL CHRISTIAN LIFE AND SIN

erek and many other believers like him who choose to pursue the pleasures of sin need to realize that sin has consequences on their ability to experience the ideal Christian life. *Read the following passage and underline key words.*

1 John 1:5-7

“This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

1. *According to this passage, how does sin affect our fellowship with God?*
2. *How do we reconcile this passage with the lesson on eternal security? (Hint: read 1 John 1:8-2:1 and think about the difference between “fellowship” and “relationship”)*

The ideal Christian life is to know Jesus Christ ever more fully so that I experience His supernatural power transforming me more and more into His likeness. Yet 1 John 1 presents the negative effect of sin on a believer’s ability to experience this ideal life. The following passage from the gospel of John makes the same point from the positive perspective - we will only enjoy growing intimacy with Christ if we choose to live in obedience to Him. *Read this passage and underline key words.*

John 15:8-10

“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”

1. *What does John mean by each of these key words: “glorified,” “fruit,” “abide?”*
2. *Where should we look to find the “commandments” that Jesus desires us to obey?*

WHY PURSUE CHRIST RATHER THAN SIN?

The ideal Christian life is inseparable from obedience to God. Our growth in intimacy with Christ depends on our willingness to obey the Father. Therefore, believers like Derek must choose between a life that pursues sinful pleasure and a life that pursues Christ, for we can't have both – they are mutually exclusive. So why choose to pursue Christ? Is this option really better than the obvious pleasures that sin can provide? **WHY SHOULD WE DEDICATE OUR LIVES TO KNOWING AND FOLLOWING JESUS CHRIST RATHER THAN PURSUING SIN?**

1 BECAUSE WE ARE NO LONGER WHO WE USED TO BE

Who We Were – Look up Romans 5:12, 1 Corinthians 15:22, and Ephesians 2:1-3.

1. What does it mean to be “in Adam?”
2. What is the meaning of “death” in these verses?

Death. The fundamental meaning of “death” in the Bible is “separation from.” There are several types of death in the Bible. For example, physical death is separation of the spirit (the immaterial nature of man) from the body; spiritual death is separation of the spirit of man from the spirit of God.

Who We Now Are – Look up Romans 6:1-7.

3. What is the significance of being “baptized” into Christ? Note the definition below and use the context for clues. Is this “baptism” reversible?
4. What does it mean to be “dead to sin?” What are the practical implications (look at the following context, 6:11-14)?

Baptism. The Greek word “baptizo” literally meant “to submerge or dip.” It was used to describe a ship sinking or a piece of cloth being dipped in dye. Figuratively it took on the meaning of “identification with.” For example, the piece of cloth became identified with the dye as it was immersed in the dye and took on its color.

② BECAUSE NOTHING WILL BRING YOU GREATER INNER PEACE AND JOY IN THIS LIFE

Look up John 15:10-11.

1. How does our experience of joy relate to our obedience to Christ?

2. What does Jesus mean by “joy?” What does it look like to experience true joy in this life? (see also Hebrews 12:1-3)

Look up Philippians 4:6-9.

3. According to this passage, what are the steps to finding true peace?

③ BECAUSE PURSUING CHRIST RESULTS IN GREAT REWARD IN THE NEXT LIFE

What do the following passages tell us about the rewards we can receive in heaven?

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

2 Timothy 4:7-8

Revelation 2:26-27

④ BECAUSE PURSUING CHRIST AVOIDS THE PAINFUL CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

What painful consequences of sin do you observe in the following passages?

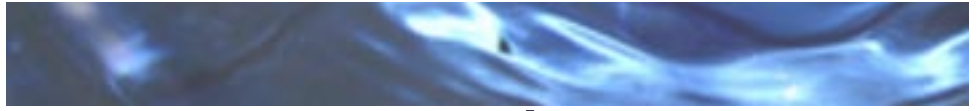
Romans 6:15-16

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

1 Corinthians 11:29-32



The above list of four reasons to follow Christ is by no means comprehensive. What other reasons can you think of for following Christ rather than pursuing sin? Can you think of scripture to go with each?



practice prayer

AT THE END OF THE PREVIOUS LESSON WE WERE INTRODUCED TO THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER, A VITAL PART OF THE IDEAL CHRISTIAN LIFE. We learned two helpful examples, Jesus' prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 and the acronym ACTS, to help us develop consistency and balance in our prayer life. However, as important as prayer is to our spiritual health, it is so easy for us to neglect. Martin Luther once said, "I HAVE SO MUCH TO DO TODAY, I MUST SPEND THE FIRST THREE HOURS IN PRAYER." Most of us would have a very hard time relating to that statement! When things are busy and stressful, prayer gets pushed to the bottom of our list of priorities until a crisis forces us back to our knees in frantic pleas for God's help. How can we keep prayer central in our lives? Here are some practical suggestions to try this week:

🌀 **Keep a prayer journal.** Record who and what you pray for. As God answers specific prayers, record this also in your journal. Few things are as motivating to look back at as specific and concrete examples of God's faithfulness!

🌀 **Create a weekly or monthly prayer list.** This list should include everything you want to pray for (family, friends, co-workers, your church, ministries, missionaries, unbelievers, government, etc) assigned to particular days. That will keep you consistent while making each day more manageable.

🌀 **Pray with others.** This will help hold you accountable to pray and you'll also learn more about how to pray from the examples of others.

🌀 **Set appointments with God.** Don't consign prayer to the left-over minutes of your schedule – it's far too important! Budget some of your best time of the day to prayer.

🌀 **Use Scripture to guide your prayers:**

Examples of prayer from Paul:

Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12;
Philemon 4-6; 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

Examples of prayer from the Psalms: 27:4; 63:1-3; 84:8-12

Examples of ACTS prayer:

Adoration: Psalm 19:1; 33:5; 90:1-2; 119:142; 139:1-4;
Isaiah 6:1-4; 40:12-14; 43:13; Jeremiah 23:23-24;
2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Daniel 4:34; 2 Peter 3:9

Confession: Psalm 32:1-6; 51:2-4; 86:5; 103:11-12; 139:23-24;
1 John 1:8-10; 2 Corinthians 7:9; Joel 2:12-13

Thanksgiving: Psalm 69:30; 95:1-6; 100:1-5;
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Colossians 4:2; Revelation 7:12

Supplication: 1 Timothy 2:1; 1 Samuel 12:23; Matthew 9:37-38



Look back over this list and choose one practical suggestion to implement in your prayer life this week. Write down exactly what you will do this week:

7.0 WHY IS IT SO TOUGH TO OBEY?

FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST IN A FALLEN WORLD

IMPRINT MEMORIZE

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted. beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

EXAMPLE CASE STUDY

Pete and Libby's marriage seems to be in pretty bad shape. Sadly, that's nothing new. The first two years were difficult enough to motivate this non-religious couple to attend a Christian family conference in the hopes that something practical would be said that could help turn things around. Yet in between practical advice, they heard the gospel clearly for the first time and both believed. That was exactly one year ago.

Since that time, Pete and Libby have attended your church and looked to you for advice. Lots of advice, especially in the last couple months. Both are discouraged because their marriage seems as rocky as before the conference. Pete still finds himself getting impatient and angry with Libby on a regular basis. And Libby still finds herself resisting Pete's leadership in their marriage and envious of her friends whose husbands earn more money than Pete.

They come to you desparate and disillusioned – this is not how they thought life as a Christian couple would be. Haven't they been spiritually reborn, freed from slavery to sin and filled with God's all-powerful Holy Spirit? Then why do they keep giving in to the selfishness and pride that are tearing their marriage apart? Why does Pete snap at Libby when he's had a long day at work? Why does Libby talk badly about Pete when she's around her wealthy family? These are the same sins they committed before their conversion. How can they still be struggling with them!?

1. *What would you say to Pete and Libby?*

2. *How would you encourage believers like Pete and Libby who become discouraged and disillusioned due to their continued struggle with sin?*

3. *Have you ever felt like Pete or Libby? When?*

ONE BIG PROBLEM: THREE POWERFUL ENEMIES

*I*n previous weeks we learned that we are no longer who we used to be. Through faith in the gospel we have been born again as new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17), freed from slavery to sin (Romans 6:2-6) and transferred into the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13) as His children (Romans 8:15-16). So then, **WHY DO WE STILL STRUGGLE WITH SIN?** I know that sin is destructive and desperately desire to avoid it. Yet I still find myself powerfully tempted by it, and worse, still give in to it. How can this be?

THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE; the instant I believed in the gospel I began to battle three powerful enemies: the world, the devil, and the flesh. Before my conversion I was unaware of their destructive influence in my life and unknowingly followed their every lead. Now that I belong to Christ, I am no longer enslaved to any of them; yet all three still exert great effort to lead me to sin. When a football team wants to defeat an opponent, the team studies films of that opponent's games and then adjusts its strategies accordingly. This lesson is a game film on our enemies – What are the world and the flesh? Who is Satan? How do they operate? Then in the following three lessons, we'll study how to defeat them.

① THE WORLD

Read the following passage and underline key words.

1 John 2:15-17

Do not love the world nor 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 and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

1. *What does John mean by "world" here? Does he mean simply the created earth (see Psalm 24:1) or something else?*
2. *How does the world influence us toward sin? In other words, what strategies or techniques are employed by this enemy to lead us away from God?*
3. *How does God want His people to relate to the world (see John 17:14-18 and Romans 12:2)? What should this look like in day-to-day life?*

2 THE DEVIL

THE BIBLE REVEALS THE EXISTENCE of a race of immortal creatures, angels, non-physical beings of incredible power and intelligence (2 Chron 32:21; Ps 148:2,5; Lk 20:36; Eph 6:12). Some of these creatures chose to rebel against God long ago. The Bible calls these fallen angels demons and reveals that their rebellion was led by the most powerful of all angelic beings, Satan (Ezekiel 28:12-17). Because their rebellion against God has proven unsuccessful (Luke 10:17-18), they are now bent on destroying His earthly people, you and me (1 Peter 5:8; Rev 12:7-17). Satan, whose very name means “adversary,” seeks to destroy us by leading us away from God and into sin.

1. *Paul warns us in 2 Corinthians 2:11 that Satan employs multiple “schemes” or strategies to lead us to sin. What strategies can you identify in each of the following passages:*

Genesis 3:1-6 (note: the serpent was possessed by Satan, Rev 12:9)

John 8:44

2 Corinthians 11:14-15

1 Peter 5:8-9

2. *How do our first two enemies (the world and Satan) relate to each other? (See 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; 1 John 5:19)*

3. *Having studied Satan’s tactics, can you think of some specific examples where he used any of these against you in the past? What factors caused you either to be victorious or to fail?*

SATAN DOES NOT CARE IF WE TURN OUT TO BE EXTREMELY WICKED PEOPLE OR FAIRLY “GOOD” PEOPLE, SO LONG AS WE ARE NOT INVOLVED IN LOVING GOD AND LABORING FOR HIS KINGDOM.
--BRIAN FISHER

3 THE FLESH

IN THE BIBLE, the word “flesh” is sometimes used to refer simply to our mortal, physical bodies (as in 1 Corinthians 15:39). However, at other times it is used to refer to our third new enemy: the inherent desire and disposition towards sin that is present in all human beings, including believers. In this sense, the flesh is that powerful motivation within all of us that is committed to living independently from God. In contrast to the external attacks of the world and Satan, the flesh is a believer’s “traitor within” – it can influence the way he thinks, feels, and acts. Paul describes this intense battle with the flesh in Romans 7 and Galatians 5.

Read Romans 7:14-25 and Galatians 5:13-21

1. *What do you learn about the “flesh” from these passages?*
2. *What does a lifestyle surrendered to the flesh look like?*
3. *What other force is within Paul that causes him to desire to obey God (see also Romans 8:2-6)?*
4. *Returning to the case study about Pete and Libby, how might you use these passages to counsel them?*
5. *Looking at Paul’s example, would you say that as a believer you are now a sinner, a saint, or both?*



READ 1 CORINTHIANS 2:14-3:3. After talking about a “natural man,” the unsaved person in his or her natural state unable to understand the things of God, Paul then distinguishes between the two ways that believers can relate to their flesh. *For each description, answer the following questions: How is this believer relating to the flesh (in battle or in surrender)? How would you describe the lifestyle of this believer?*

FLESHLY / CARNAL (see also Galatians 5:16-17)

SPIRITUAL (see also Romans 8:4-6,10)



In conclusion,

- ⚡ When I accepted Jesus as my Savior, I was born again (1 Peter 1:3), indwelt by His Spirit (Ephesians 1:13), and freed from slavery to sin (Romans 6:2-6).
- ⚡ Yet at that same moment I began to battle three powerful enemies: the world, the devil, and the flesh.
- ⚡ As a result, though I am truly a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), I am still a sinner, betrayed by my sinful flesh and constantly vulnerable to the coordinated attacks of the world and the devil.

SO WHAT HOPE DO WE HAVE AGAINST SUCH POWERFUL AND PERVASIVE ENEMIES?! FORTUNATELY, GREAT HOPE! As our memory verse this week declares, God promises to help us overcome any temptation these new enemies can throw at us. We'll take the next three lessons of our study to discover how **GOD MAKES THIS VICTORY POSSIBLE** through His Spirit, His Word, and His people.

1. *In order to incite our sinful flesh, Satan and this sinful world constantly bombard us with lies and temptations through unbelieving family members, friends, co-workers, and through television, movies, and magazines. What specific lies or temptations are you most vulnerable to?*

2. *What circumstances cause you to be most vulnerable to these lies or temptations?*

3. *While these circumstances are sometimes unavoidable, often we can wisely avoid the things that make us most susceptible to these attacks. For example, if watching a particular TV show causes you to struggle with discontentment or lust, it would be wise to stop watching. Spend some time prayerfully asking God for wisdom to help you better avoid the lies and temptations Satan and the world bombard you with. What specifically is the Lord leading you to change this week?*

8.0 VICTORY THROUGH THE SPIRIT

DIVINE EMPOWERMENT TO CONQUER SIN

IMPRINT MEMORIZE

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. **Galatians 5: 22-23**

EXAMPLE CASE STUDY

The word legalism perfectly fits your classmate Amy. She's not your typical college senior. Amy avoids parties and secular music and busies herself with hour-long quiet times every day as she prepares for the four separate Bible studies she signed up for this semester. Why does she do all this? Because of guilt – guilt instilled over years at the small church her family attends. She believed the gospel as a young child, but then spent years learning from the pulpit that God's continued approval is earned through avoiding a long list of questionable actions while fatiguing oneself with spiritual activity. Amy's extensive set of rules, from no-smoking to never missing a quiet time, is her way of keeping God happy with her. Yet as successful as she is in following her rules, you've noticed that Amy doesn't seem very happy lately. She knows that you are a believer and is amazed at the joy and peace you seem to have, especially since you don't participate in as many Bible studies and Christian clubs as her. She struggles so much to love others (it's item 3 on her list of 52 Do's and Don'ts!), yet you do it so naturally without a list. Why is she not experiencing the joy and victory that you are?

1. *What would you say to Amy?*

2. *How would you define the word "legalism?" How does a legalistic approach seek to overcome the world, the devil, and the flesh?*

3. *Do you ever find yourself trying to earn God's approval? If so, how?*

In the last lesson we learned about the three powerful enemies all believers face: the world, the devil, and the flesh. Yet as powerful as they are, we still have confident hope for victory through the Spirit of God, the Word of God, and the people of God. All three of these sources of victory are equally important, yet the first is the foundation of the others. Unless we appropriate the victory we can have through God's Spirit, neither His Word nor His people will do us any good. We've already learned a great deal about the person and activity of the Holy Spirit (see Lesson Five), but now we want to see exactly how the Holy Spirit makes victory over sin possible and how we can take advantage of His prevailing help.



THE MEANS TO VICTORY

HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT ACCOMPLISH VICTORY IN OUR LIVES? How does He help us overcome the evil impulses of our sinful flesh that are inflamed by our world and by Satan? Few passages of scripture are as essential to our daily Christian lives as the following. *Read these two passages, underline key words or ideas, and answer the questions that follow.*

Galatians 5:16-25

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

1. *According to this passage, how do believers overcome temptation and sin? Is this victory in any way contingent upon us (in other words, is there anything we must do in order to experience victory)?*

2. *What does victory look like in the Christian life according to this passage? Is it simply the absence of immorality?*

3. *What does “walk by the Spirit” mean? Look up Romans 8:4,5,6,13. What do you learn about “walking by the Spirit” in this passage?*

4. *Read John 15:5. How are “abiding in Christ” and “walking by the Spirit” related?*

“will not inherit the kingdom of God.” The key word of Galatians 5:21 is “inherit.” Paul is not speaking about entrance into heaven, he is speaking about inheriting authority in Christ’s coming kingdom. All believers will stand before Jesus Christ for judgment after this life, a judgment based upon our works (Rom 14:10-12; 2 Cor 5:9-10). Those who have proven faithful in this life will receive honor, reward, and the opportunity to rule with Jesus Christ, while those who have pursued sin will not (1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Tim 2:11-13; Rev 2:26-27).

Ephesians 5:15-21

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

1. *Using the context, what does Paul mean by “be filled with the Spirit?” Why does he compare it to getting “drunk?”*

2. *What would be the opposite of being filled with the Spirit?*

3. *What is the result of being filled with the Spirit?*



The greatest UNUSED POWER *in the*
world is the Holy Spirit of the living God.

A. J. Gordon



HOW TO WALK

LET'S GET PRACTICAL. How do we “walk by the Spirit?” How do we allow Him to continually fill us and guide us?

1 THROUGH DEPENDENT FAITH

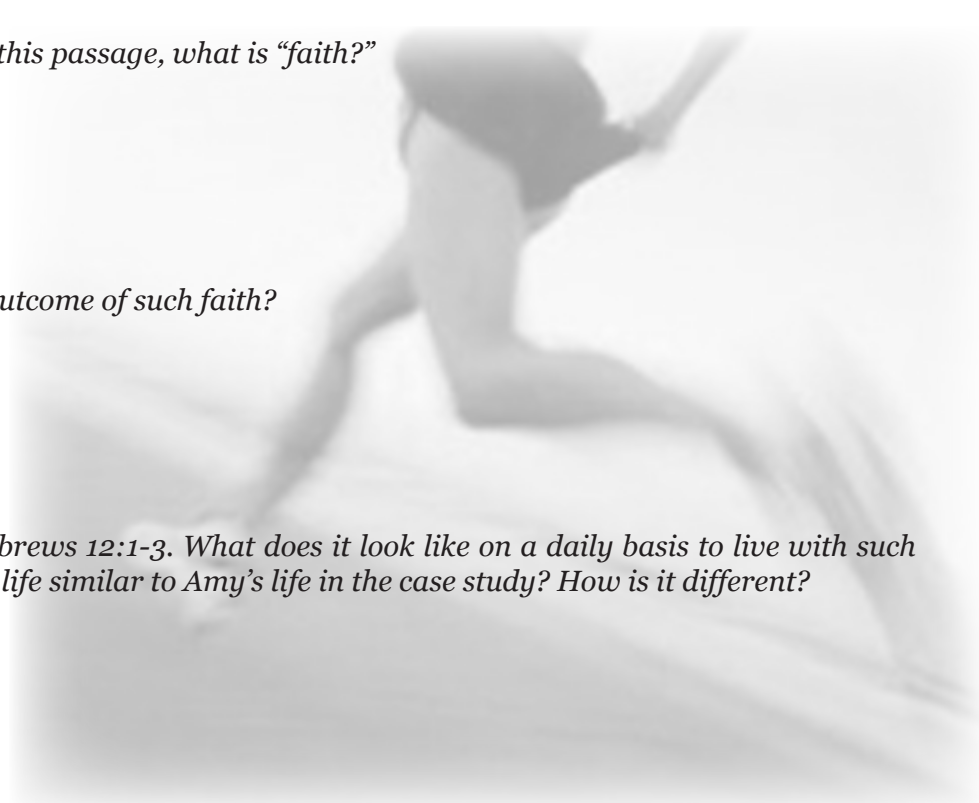
Read Galatians 3:1-3. Paul was very concerned that the believers of the church in Galatia were trying to win victory over sin through legalistic self-effort. This was Amy’s mode-of-operation in our case study. So in v.14, Paul pointed them to the only source of victory, the Holy Spirit, and the key ingredient for victory, faith. Just as faith is the key ingredient in our eternal salvation, so it is in our daily victory over the world, the devil, and the flesh. It is through faith that we “walk by the Spirit.” Yet what does this daily faith look like? *Read and observe the following from Hebrews 11.*

Legalism is any attempt to earn God’s approval through human effort. Notice that our sinful flesh leads us in one of two directions, either towards **LICENSE**, leading to the sinful deeds of Galatians 5:19-21, or towards **LEGALISM** which Paul finds just as condemnable if not more so, for it can lead to a mistaken confidence in one’s own self-righteousness (Phil 3:1-7).

Hebrews 11:1-3,6

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible... And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

1. *According to this passage, what is “faith?”*
2. *What is the outcome of such faith?*
3. *Look up Hebrews 12:1-3. What does it look like on a daily basis to live with such faith? How is this life similar to Amy’s life in the case study? How is it different?*



② THROUGH CONSISTENT OBEDIENCE

Philippians 2:12-13

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

1. *What is the significance of the phrase, “both to will and to work?” Why include both? How is this a cause for hope in the Christian life?*

2. *According to this passage, what is our part in God’s victory over our sin?*

3. *How much obedience is Paul looking for here? What’s my goal? (See Matt 5:43-48; 1 Peter 1:14-16)*

4. *Notice that both legalistic Christianity and biblical Christianity value obedience to God. How does obedience in one differ from obedience in the other?*

③ THROUGH PROMPT CONFESSION

1. *While our goal should be consistent obedience, all believers will struggle with sin throughout this life. Read Ephesians 4:29-32 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22. How does our disobedience affect the Holy Spirit’s work in us?*

2. *When we do fail to obey God, what should we do? Read 1 John 1:9-2:2. What does it mean to “confess our sin?” What happens as a result of confession?*

3. *In summary, look back at Amy’s case study. How would you now advise her?*

Spiritual Disciplines. In reality, these three practical steps are only the first of many “spiritual disciplines” given by God to help us experience the Spirit’s transformative work in our lives. We’ll learn two more in the next two lessons: intake of God’s Word and fellowship with God’s people. Other important disciplines include prayer (covered in previous lessons), fasting, giving, service, and simplicity.

PRAXIS



In Conclusion

practice obedience

THE HOLY SPIRIT ENABLES US TO HAVE VICTORY OVER SIN.

BUT WE MUST COOPERATE BY CHOOSING TO “WALK IN THE SPIRIT” RATHER THAN IN THE FLESH.

HOW DO WE “WALK IN THE SPIRIT?”



THROUGH DEPENDENT FAITH, CONSISTENT OBEDIENCE, AND PROMPT CONFESSION.

As we’ve seen in this lesson, few things are as important to the Christian life as faith-inspired obedience. This is not obedience motivated by guilt or fear. Biblical obedience is motivated by our love for the God who died for us and who now empowers us through His Spirit (see Lesson Six for more reasons to obey!) Furthermore, biblical obedience can not be distilled down to a list of Do’s and Don’ts. It’s absolute. It demands that our whole lives grow in conformity to the example of Jesus Christ. To truly obey God means that I am orienting my entire life around His desires – I am submitting all that I am and all that I have to His will. *So, take the next few minutes to consider how you are doing in each of the following five areas. Ask yourself, “In this area of my life...”*

...am I obeying God’s holy standards?”

...am I living for my selfish gain or for God’s glory and others’ good?”

...would I be joyful or ashamed if Jesus saw exactly what I was doing this last week?”

⚡ MY MONEY

⚡ MY FREE TIME (ENTERTAINMENT)

⚡ MY OCCUPATION

⚡ MY MARRIAGE (OR DATING LIFE)

⚡ MY TALENTS AND ABILITIES

9.0 VICTORY THROUGH THE WORD

THE WHAT, WHY, AND HOW OF SCRIPTURE

IMPRINT MEMORIZE

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

EXAMPLE CASE STUDY

For very different reasons neither Sheri nor Ben have read a Bible in years. As a child, Sheri loved reading the gospel accounts of Jesus' life. But a "Bible as Literature" class in college changed all that. Sheri was shocked as her professor listed numerous historical errors in her beloved gospel stories. Then he spent a full week detailing what he considered laughable scientific errors throughout the Old and New Testaments. Finally, he made his students memorize a chart of seemingly irrefutable contradictions found in the Bible. Having never heard evidence to the contrary, Sheri accepted her professor's views as fact and permanently retired her childhood Bible to a box in the closet.

1. *What advice would you give to Sheri? Do you know how to answer the claims of her professor?*



Ben never doubted the reliability of the Bible, he simply doubted the relevance. You see, Ben's a busy man. He runs his own company, has a family of five, and chairs the neighborhood home-owners' association. He attends church as any believer should, but doesn't have the time nor the inclination to read the Bible on his own. Why not leave that to the professionals, the pastors and seminary professors of the world? After all, the one time Ben did read from his own Bible, he got lost in some book called Leviticus that didn't seem to have any bearing on life in the real world.

2. *What advice would you give to Ben? Have you ever felt like he does? Do you still?*



*I*n this lesson we will learn how to help believers like Sheri and Ben develop a life-changing love for God's Word. This is absolutely essential to the growth of any believer, for God's Word is our second of three divine means to victory in the spiritual life. Without a regular diet of Scripture it is simply impossible to experience the joy, growth, or significance that God desires for each of us. Moreover, since scripture is THE revelation of Jesus Christ, it is the indispensable means by which we grow in our relationship with Him (our number one priority in life as stated in Philippians 3:7-11).

So let's begin by helping those like Sheri. How do we answer the shocking claims of her professor? First, we need to determine exactly what the Bible says about itself. What is this book Christians so revere? Second, we need to know how to defend the Bible's claims.

① WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

1. *Look up the following passages. What do you learn about the nature of scripture from each?*

Isaiah 40:8

2 Timothy 3:14-17

2 Peter 1:20-21

Matthew 5:17-18

Luke 1:1-4

Luke 24:44-47

Acts 3:18

Acts 4:24-26

2. *According to these passages, who is responsible for the content contained within the Bible?*

3. *What do these passages teach about the reliability of scripture? What do they teach about the endurance of Scripture?*

In contrast to the view of Sheri's professor, the Bible declares that God superintended the authors of scripture so that, using their own individual literary styles, they perfectly composed and recorded God's revelation to man in the words of the original manuscripts. Thus, when accurately interpreted, the Bible is without error or contradiction and is our final authority in all areas of life. In B.B. Warfield's succinct words, "The Bible is the Word of God in such a way that **WHEN THE BIBLE SPEAKS, GOD SPEAKS.**"

We believe that this view of scripture applies to all 66 books of the Bible, from the Law (the Torah or first 5 books) of the Old Testament to the prophetic book of Revelation at the end of the New Testament. Though written over a period of 1500 years by more than 40 authors, from the first page to the last the Bible tells the unified story of God's creation and redemption of mankind through Jesus Christ (see story line of the Bible in appendix).

2 IS THIS REASONABLE TO BELIEVE?

Having established what the Bible claims about itself, that it is the authoritative Word of God without error or contradiction, a skeptical reader may wonder, “Is it reasonable to believe these claims?” The short answer is, “Absolutely!” Unbiased literary analysis, historical research, and archeology all provide strong evidence in favor of the reliability of scripture. We don’t have room to list all the evidence, but here are three strong arguments in favor of the reliability of scripture:

INTERNAL EVIDENCE

For a book written over many centuries by many authors in many places, the Bible demonstrates remarkable unity in theme and theology. Notice how the enemy introduced in Genesis 3 becomes the enemy vanquished in Revelation 12:9. Also, it includes an astounding amount of historically fulfilled prophesy (Psalm 22:14-18 fulfilled in Matt 27:35; Isaiah 53 fulfilled perfectly in the life of Christ; Micah 5:2 fulfilled in Matt 2:1-6). Finally, contrary to almost all other ancient works of literature, the Bible is shocking in its faithfulness to record embarrassing truths and events without distortion, such as disorder in the churches (1 Corinthians 3:1-3) and sins of the apostles (Romans 7; Gal 2:11).

MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT

When we read the New Testament today, are we reading a book that has been heavily distorted over the last 2000 years or a reliable witness to the original text? Ancient manuscripts clearly demonstrate that the latter is true – our text today is over 99% accurate and the minor discrepancies affect no major doctrinal issues. Evidence for all other ancient literature pales in comparison to the overwhelming body of ancient manuscript evidence for the NT, as the following chart⁵ demonstrates:

WORK	DATE WRITTEN	EARLIEST COPY FRAGMENT	TIME SPAN	NUMBER OF COPIES	ACCURACY OF COPIES
Plato	427-347 BC	900 AD	1200 Years	7	-----
Aristotle	384-322 BC	1100 AD	1400 Years	49	-----
Sophocles	496-406 BC	1000 AD	1400 Years	193	-----
Homer (Iliad)	9th Cent. BC	400 BC	500 Years	643	95%
New Testament	40 - 100 AD	125 AD	25 Years*	over 24,000**	99+%

* to earliest manuscript fragment of book of John; ~ 100 years to large NT texts; 250 years to single, complete NT (Codex Sinaiticus)
 ** 5,300 Greek texts, 10,000 Latin Vulgate translations, 9,300 other early translations

HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

As a last line of evidence, we can compare the people, places, and events recorded in the Bible with historical and archeological evidence from the same periods. What do we find? As the prominent Australian archeologist Clifford Wilson wrote, “Those who know the facts now recognize that the New Testament must be accepted as a remarkably accurate source book.” Take Luke for example, the careful historian who wrote Luke and Acts (see Luke 1:1-4). In Luke 3:1, he refers to Lysanias as tetrarch of Abilene in 27 AD, which seemed to contradict historical evidence until the discovery of an inscription written between 14 and 37 AD that confirmed Luke’s statement. Acts 17:6 refers to “politarchs” in Thessalonica, thought for years to be a historical mistake until confirmed by numerous inscriptions found in the excavation of Thessalonica and dating from the first century. In fact, not a single archeological discovery contradicts Luke’s references to 32 countries, 54 cities, and 9 islands! Such data should not surprise us because the biblical authors were typically very near in time, place, and participation to the events they recorded. Even secular historians note that the nearer an author was to the events he recorded, the more reliable his account would be.

Now we need to move on to Ben's objections to reading scripture. If you remember, Ben avoided the Bible for two reasons. First, he saw little practical benefit to reading scripture on a daily basis. It just didn't seem to have any bearing on his real-world life. Second, when he did spend time in the Bible he got very little out of it. He had no clear method for studying and applying scripture in a way that would truly benefit him. So let's tackle both of these objections in order...

③ WHY SHOULD I SPEND THE TIME?

Why should we take time out of our hectic lives to delve into God's Word? Take a few minutes to look up the following passages and answer the corresponding questions:

1. *Read Isaiah 55:11 and Hebrews 4:12. What sort of power does the Word of God have? How should this reality affect our view of scripture?*

2. *Read Psalm 119:9-11, John 8:31-32, and Philippians 4:8-9. How does our knowledge of God's Word enable us to ward off the attacks of the world, the devil, and the flesh?*

3. *What other reasons for investing daily time in scripture do you learn from the following passages?*

Psalm 1:1-3

Matthew 7:24-27

Romans 15:4

1 Peter 2:2

2 Timothy 3:16-17

SO, WHY SHOULD WE SPEND OUR TIME STUDYING THE BIBLE? Because only as we personally spend time in God's Word will we grow in our faith, become mature followers of Christ, and reach out to others effectively in eternally significant ways.

4 HOW CAN I GET THE MOST OUT OF IT?

Many Christians believe that spending time in God's Word is essential, yet never do because they don't know how. There are three basic methods by which we delve into God's Word in a meaningful way, and we should each be practicing these on a regular basis:

READ SCRIPTURE

Though your previous attempts to read through the Bible on a daily basis may have proven frustrating, use these tips to get the most out of your reading:

1. Start and end with prayer since understanding God's Word requires His illumination (1 Corinthians 2:10-13).
2. Read when you are at your mental best. Choose a period of the day when you are fresh and alert and seek out a place where you can focus without distraction.
3. Alternate between reading and meditating. Meditating is prayerful reflection on what you're reading with a view to both understanding it and applying it to your life.
4. Alternate between different types of scripture. Perhaps spend one day in Psalms and another in John. When you finish one book, choose a different type of book to keep you fresh and engaged.

MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE

Committing portions of scripture to memory is immeasurably helpful in our battle against sin. Read Matthew 4:1-11 and note how Jesus used memorized scripture to defend Himself. You can memorize verses from any translation of scripture, but it's helpful to stick with one. Work on your memory verses regularly and review those you've completed. Finally, it's often helpful to have a partner check your progress and hold you accountable.

STUDY SCRIPTURE

In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul encourages Timothy to, "BE DILIGENT TO PRESENT YOURSELF APPROVED TO GOD AS A WORKMAN WHO DOES NOT NEED TO BE ASHAMED, ACCURATELY HANDLING THE WORD OF TRUTH." We are all called to follow Timothy's example by becoming competent students of God's Word, not just reading and memorizing it, but also delving deeply into it through our own regular study. To effectively study God's Word we need to apply the four steps on the following page to each book and passage we study.

*The Scriptures were not given to increase our knowledge
but to CHANGE OUR LIVES.*

Dwight L. Moody

SURVEY: WHAT'S THE BIG PICTURE?

Before getting into the details of individual verses, read the whole section (paragraph, chapter, or book) quickly through to get a sense of the big idea. What are the key themes of this section? What major words are repeated or emphasized? How would you summarize this section in a short title?

OBSERVATION: WHAT DO I SEE?

We can't hope to understand a passage or apply it to our lives until we carefully note what it says. So spend some time in each verse noting everything you see. Particularly look for:

- 1. key words** that are important theologically or thematically, including words that are repeated.
- 2. verbs** – these are crucial to understanding the authors main idea.
- 3. connecting words** such as “and, likewise, if, but, for, therefore, so that” – these are crucial to understanding the author’s flow of thought.
- 4. the 5 W’s and an H** – note who is doing the action, what they’re doing, whom it is benefiting or harming, and when, why, and how they did it.

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The goal of interpretation is to determine what the original author was saying to the original recipients of the book or letter. Start by peppering the passage with lots of What and Why questions such as:

WHAT is the...

- ...meaning of a word?
- ...significance of a word or phrase?
- ...implication of a statement?
- ...relationship between words, phrases, or passages?

WHY did the author...

- ...choose this word or phrase?
- ...not say _____?
- ...connect these ideas?
- ...put this idea before that idea?
- ...include this idea at all?

Once you've asked your questions, find answers by:

- 1. using the context** – follow the author’s flow of thought throughout the chapter and book.
- 2. defining key words** – use an English dictionary or Bible dictionary.
- 3. studying cross-references** – look up the references provided in your Bible’s margins or in a concordance.
- 4. wrestling with the text** – carefully think through the options and decide on the best interpretation; consult other people or commentaries to gain additional insights.

APPLICATION: HOW DOES IT WORK?

Now that you have an idea what the passage meant to the original audience, it's time to apply it's truths to your own life. This requires three steps:

- 1. Determine one or more timeless principles from the passage.** These are succinct statements of truth that still apply to you today. Choose one principle to apply this week.
- 2. Reflect on your own obedience to this principle.** When do you do well? When do you struggle to live this out?
- 3. Create a concrete plan of action.** Take one area of your life where you are struggling to live this principle out and commit to make changes towards greater obedience this week. Be specific – what exactly will you do differently this week than last? Who will you ask to hold you accountable?



NOW THAT YOU KNOW a basic method for studying scripture, let's try it on Matthew 28:18-20.

1. Survey: Read Matthew chapter 28. What is going on in this chapter? How does it fit into the overall story of Jesus' life?

2. Observe: Read Matthew 28:18-20 twice. Write down at least fifteen observations.

-e.g. Jesus uses the structural indicator "therefore" (v.19)

-e.g. the disciples are commanded to baptize in the name of all three members of the trinity

3. Interpret: Read Matthew 28:18-20 again. Write out five interpretive questions and then attempt to answer them. It is all right if you can't answer them all.

-e.g. Why does Jesus mention his authority in v.18?

-e.g. What is the connection of his authority to the command given in vv.19,20?

4. Apply: Write three principles from Matthew 28:18-20. Pray for wisdom and select one principle this week to attempt to implement with the Holy Spirit's power. What specifically will you do differently this week than last and who will hold you accountable?

Ignorance OF THE BIBLE MEANS
IGNORANCE OF *Christ.*

--JEROME

10.0 VICTORY THROUGH THE BODY

THE NECESSITY OF THE CHURCH IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

MEMORIZE

But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building of itself in love. **Ephesians 4:15-16**

CASE STUDY

Your friend Rob is a do-it-yourself kind of guy in every area of life. He chose a career as an independent sales representative because success would be based solely on his own efforts. He designed and oversaw construction of his new house without assistance because he didn't want, "somebody else to mess it up." And he applies the same paradigm to his spiritual life. Though a believer for many years, Rob has no interest in church. He reads his Bible and prays regularly, so what could other people possibly offer him that he can't accomplish better himself? No, Rob is quite content to practice his own brand of Lone Ranger Christianity.

1. *What would you say to Rob?*

2. *Even though Rob seems to have incredible skills and diligence, is he missing out on something by not participating in church?*

Carmen became a believer at an early age but hasn't been to church in over ten years. It's not for the same reasons as Rob, however. Carmen grew up in a poor, ethnically diverse area of town but attended a large, middle-class church with her grandmother until May 2, 1996, the Sunday she overheard two prominent men in the church sharing horrid jokes about the Hispanic race. These same men had just taught her Sunday School class to "love thy neighbor" as Jesus commanded. What hypocrites! Because of that incident, Carmen hasn't set foot in a church since. Why should she go to a place that seems just as racist as the world around her? Why fellowship with other Christians if they can hurt you just as much (or even more!) as anybody else?

3. *What would you say to Carmen?*

4. *All of us could point out glaring incidents of hypocrisy in this or other churches (moral failure, racism, deception, pride, etc). What would you say to those who would use such failures as a reason to abandon Christianity?*



uring this final lesson we have the privilege of learning about God’s third means to victory in our lives – His people, the church. Our goal is to define what the church is, what it should do, and how we should participate. By the end we should have answers to both Rob and Carmen, and we should each have a plan of action for how we can participate this year in what God is doing at our church.

1 WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The word “church” is commonly used to refer to one of two things. First, it can refer to the Universal Church, the sum total of all believers from the day of Pentecost following Christ’s resurrection (Acts 2) till the day of the Rapture when Christ returns to remove His church from the earth. This includes all genuine Christians of any denomination and any geographic location. Second, the word “church” can refer to a local church, a single congregation of professing Christians in a specific location, such as Grace Bible Church in College Station, TX.

1. *Despite the helpful definitions above, we must remember that the church is not just a collection or assembly of people. Read Ephesians 1:22-23. According to this passage, what is the church?*

2. *Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-13. Which definition of “church” best fits here? What characteristics do you learn from this important passage about the nature of the church?*

3. *The Bible presents a number of illustrations or analogies for the church. Look up the following examples. What do you learn about the identity and/or the purpose of the church in each analogy?*

John 10:11-16,27-30

John 15:1-11

Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-5

Ephesians 5:25-33; Revelation 19:7-8

“THE NEW TESTAMENT KNOWS NOTHING OF *solitary saints* WHO DEVOTED THEMSELVES EXCLUSIVELY TO THEIR OWN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT AND *ignored other believers* OR A LOST WORLD. NOR DOES IT ENDORSE THE POPULAR BRAND OF ‘COMMERCIAL CHRISTIANITY’ THAT PERMITS PEOPLE TO GO TO CHURCH AND *get what they want* BUT NEVER MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO THE NEEDS OF OTHERS.” --WARREN WIERSBE

② WHAT SHOULD THE CHURCH DO?

While much of the NT discusses the activities and functions of the church, the following four passages establish the overarching mission of the church – they tell us why the church exists and what it must do above all else. *Read the following passages and underline key words and ideas. Then answer the questions that follow:*

Ephesians 3:8-11

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,

1. *Why did God create the church? In other words, for what grand purpose does the church exist?*

2. *Practically speaking, what things should a local church like ours do in order to fulfill this grand purpose?*

3. *When did God determine to create the church? Was it a follow-up plan if the nation of Israel failed to accomplish God's purposes?*

Matthew 22:36-40 (The Great Commandment)

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And [Jesus] said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

4. *Why did Jesus add the threefold modifier, “with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind?” What’s His point?*

5. *Jesus was only asked about the greatest commandment of the law. So why do you think He went on in v.39 to discuss the second greatest commandment? What motivated Him to include this? (see also 1 John 2:9-11)*

6. *What does such love of others look like? Read Philippians 2:1-11 and 1 Corinthians 13 and list below the characteristics of Christ-like love mentioned in these passages.*

Ephesians 4:15-16

But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

7. *According to this passage, why does the church exist?*

8. *What is the ultimate goal of the “growth” this passage speaks about? In other words, what is our standard of complete maturity (see also Colossians 1:28-29)?*

9. *What does this passage say to Lone Ranger Christians like Rob and Carmen from our case study? Can they succeed in the Christian life alone? Why or why not?*

10. *Practically speaking, what things should a local church like ours do in order to fulfill this command?*

The Great Commission – Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

11. *What important activities or functions of the local church does this passage address?*

12. *What is a disciple? How do we “make” one (see Mark 16:15-16; Philippians 3:17; 2 Timothy 2:2)?*

3 HOW DO I FIT IN?

By this point we should be able to define what the church is and describe what it should do. Furthermore, from this knowledge we should be able to see why it is so vital for each of us to abandon individualistic Christianity and live in community with other believers. Living the victorious Christian life absolutely requires that we participate in a local church.

SO HOW DO WE EFFECTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN A LOCAL CHURCH?

First, we need to choose to love one another. Second, we need to choose to join the mission God has given to the church.

CHOOSE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Participating in a local church means more than just showing up on Sunday mornings. The previous key passages should have demonstrated the overwhelming priority of loving relationships in the proper functioning of a local church. It is these relationships and not simple attendance that defines healthy participation in church.

So, practically speaking, how can we each manifest Christ's love to one another within the church body? Write out the answer given by each of these "one-another" passages:

Romans 15:7

Ephesians 5:21

Romans 15:14

Hebrews 3:13

Galatians 5:13

James 5:9

Ephesians 4:32

James 5:16

CHOOSE TO JOIN THE MISSION

This will be our PRAXIS for this lesson, so turn the page to learn how you can participate in the mission of Grace Bible Church...



practice mission

The mission of every local church is the same. It is an unchanging absolute given by God in the four passages studied above and can be summarized as: Exalt God, Edify believers, and Evangelize the lost. Yet God directs each local church to participate in this mission in unique ways. Given the distinctive strengths and opportunities of Grace Bible Church, God has directed us to focus our efforts on **RAISING UP NEXT GENERATION LEADERS TO REACH OUR WORLD FOR CHRIST.**

In crafting our vision statement, we chose the word “**LEADER**” because we believe that all Christians are called to become spiritual leaders. That is, all are called to **MODEL** devotion to Christ; are all called to **SACRIFICIALLY LEAD** as Christ led (serving, not lording), and all are called to have an **INFLUENCE** on other believers and on the lost. That means that God has called you to lead. In order to lead well, you must know where you are going. The following exercise will help you articulate your unique, God-given mission.

1. *Spiritual leadership requires continual growth as a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Take the next few minutes to evaluate your growth in each of the following areas. Ask God to show you your strengths and the weaknesses you need to address.*

COMMUNION (relationship with God)

CONTENT (knowledge of theology and Bible; vision for life purpose)

COMMUNITY (relationship with believers)

CHARACTER (a life in conformity to the example of Jesus Christ)

COMMISSION (relationship with unbelievers)

COMPETENCE (effective ministry and life skills)

2. *Create a personal mission statement that reflects God’s purpose for your life by answering the following questions:*

WHAT ARE MY “ROLES” IN LIFE (e.g. husband, father, employee, student, roommate, etc.)?

WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES/OPPORTUNITIES IN EACH ROLE?

WHO DO I WANT TO BECOME IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS? TEN YEARS?

WHAT DO I FEEL CALLED TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS? TEN YEARS?

WHAT EXACTLY WILL I DO DIFFERENTLY THIS YEAR TO HELP ME ACCOMPLISH THIS MISSION?

WHO WILL HELP ME ACCOMPLISH THIS MISSION?

NOTES

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 226.

² Definitions adapted from J. Scott Horrell, “Class Notes for Systematic Theology 402, Trinitarianism,” (Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2002).

³ *ibid.*

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1960), 55-56.

⁵ Chart adapted from Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol 1* (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 1972), 42-43.

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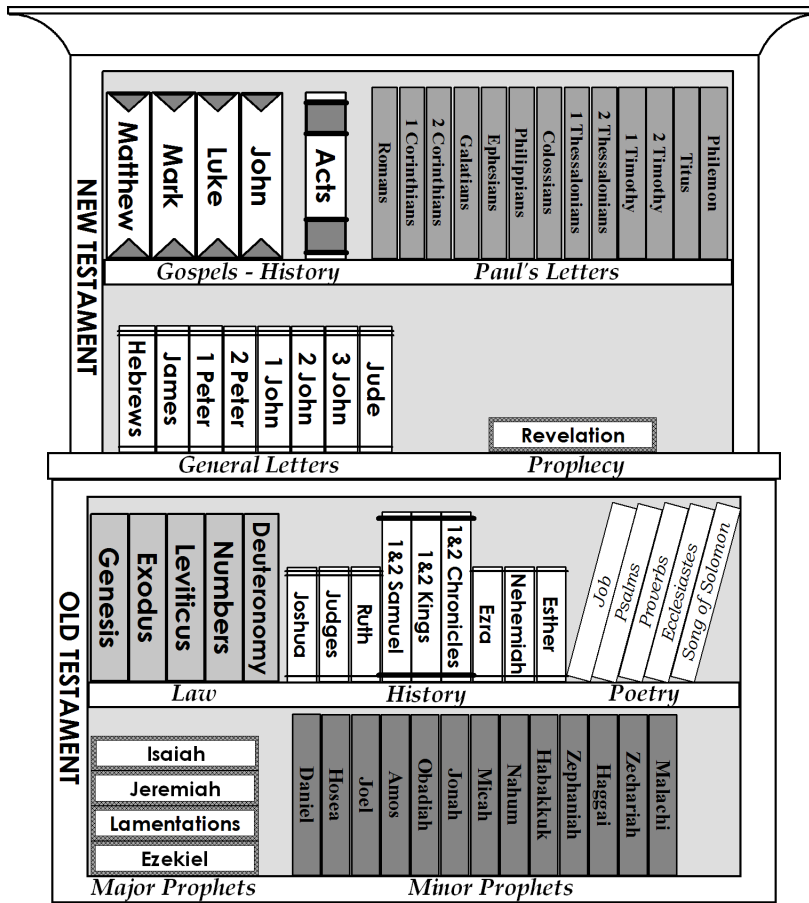
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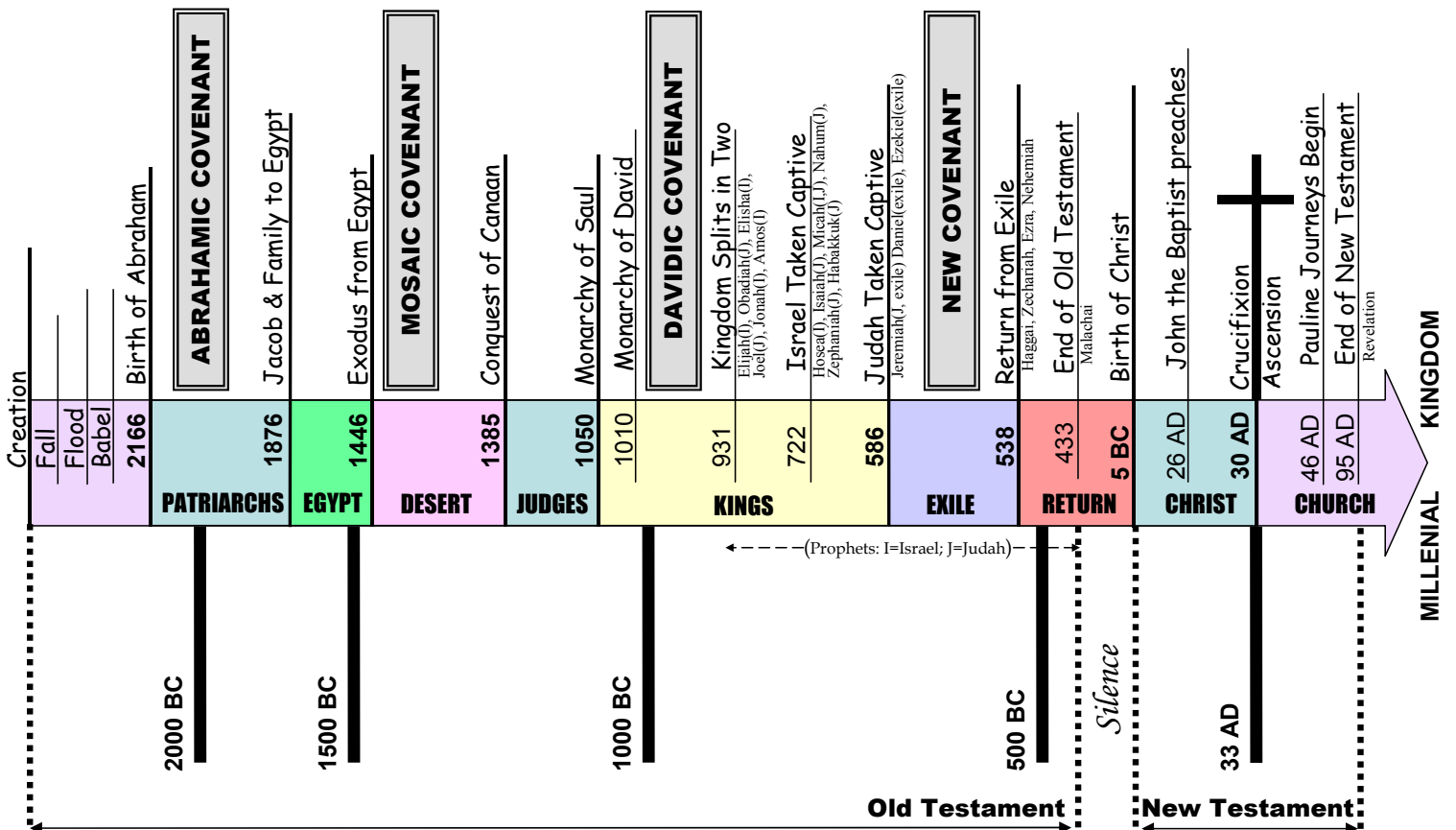
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

66 BOOKS OF THE BIBLE



BASIC STORYLINE OF THE BIBLE



ESSENTIALS SUMMARY

- 1.0 WHO IS GOD?** THE TRINITY OF GOD AND THE PERSON OF THE FATHER

- 2.0 WHO IS THE SON?** THE DEITY OF CHRIST

- 3.0 HOW CAN I BE SAVED?** FINDING RESTORATION THROUGH THE GOSPEL

- 4.0 CAN I KNOW FOR SURE?** LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE OF YOUR SALVATION

- 5.0 WHO IS THE SPIRIT?** THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- 6.0 HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?** THE UPWARD CALL OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS

- 7.0 WHY IS IT SO TOUGH TO OBEY?** FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST IN A FALLEN WORLD

- 8.0 VICTORY THROUGH THE SPIRIT** DIVINE EMPOWERMENT TO CONQUER SIN

- 9.0 VICTORY THROUGH THE WORD** THE WHAT, WHY, AND HOW OF SCRIPTURE

- 10.0 VICTORY THROUGH THE BODY** THE NECESSITY OF THE CHURCH IN SPIRITUAL LIFE

And He said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment.”

Matthew 22:37-38

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation - having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who was given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1: 13,14

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time if need.

Hebrews 4: 15-16

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1: 1

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

John 10: 27-29

More than that I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.

Philippians 3: 8

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5: 22-23

But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:15-16