



Apostolic Assembly



IN THE TEMPLE AND IN EVERY HOUSE



52 LESSONS
FOR FRIENDSHIP GROUPS

In the **Temple** and in every **House**

52 lessons for Friendship Groups / **Manual 2014**

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FOR FRIENDSHIP GROUPS

2014 MANUAL



Apostolic Assembly
of the Faith in Christ Jesus



PRESENTATION

2013 and 2014 have been years of great growth in the Apostolic Assembly. God allowed us to have in the United States of America:

- a)** Over 7,000 baptisms in the name of Jesus Christ in 2013.
- b)** Over 3,200 baptisms in the first half of 2014.
- c)** Establish 3,500 Friendship Groups, which meet each week.
- d)** A weekly attendance in cells groups of over 30,000 people.

The national and international commitment of the Apostolic Assembly with the Strategy of Jesus program is giving a great harvest of new believers.

To continue supporting this project, I present the new 2014 Manual of 52 lessons for Friendship Groups, *"In the temple and in every house."*

I want to thank Missionary Gabriel Pereira Das Neves for writing these beautiful lessons and Ismael Martin del Campo III, for editing them.

This manual will be available in Spanish, English, Italian, Portuguese and Swahili, God willing, to serve our churches worldwide.

God is blessing the apostolic movement with a new revival. One quality of this is a renewed passion to reach men and women of every race, nation and language the word of life. We give glory to God for how He is guiding his Church in the XXI century!

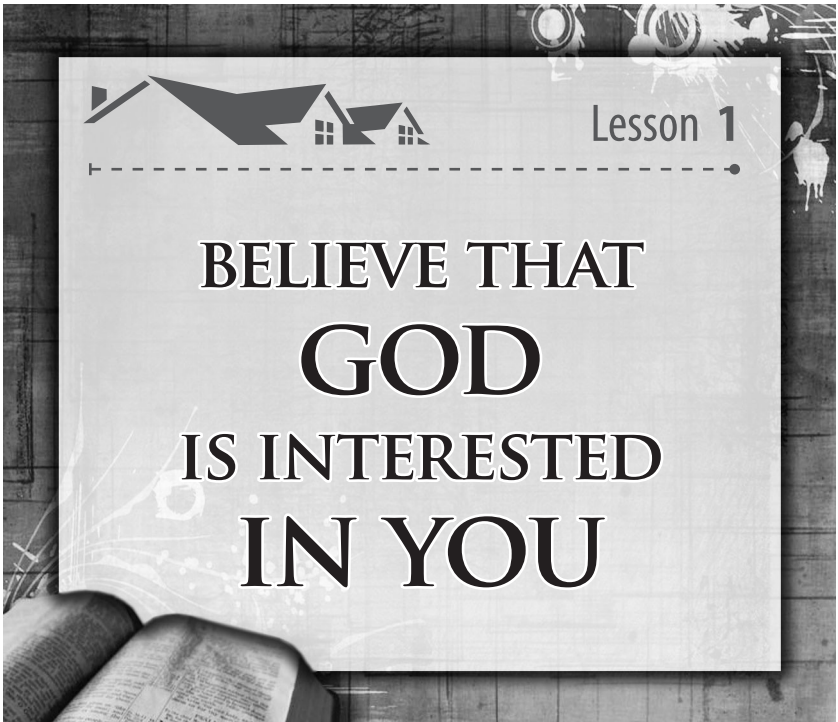
Bishop Ismael Martin del Campo,
Secretary of Christian Education

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Icebreaker: The practice of giving selflessly is fading. Is this true or false?

Psalms 139:14 1-4 *“You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

We begin this series, “Seven Keys to Enter Heaven,” with a simple but meaningful theme about the interest that God has for every one of us.

Unfortunately, all of us on one occasion have put this truth into question. ***Who has not questioned himself at one point:***

“Does God really think about me?” or “Does God listen to my prayers?” In certain circumstances of life many of us have said: “God has forgotten about me!” “God doesn’t love me!” “He is not interested in my situation!”

However, the Word of God teaches us that the opposite is true. God takes care of us. He is loving and merciful. God is not a distant force, as Pantheism and New Age conceptualize. God is not a great ray of energy cosmic, which lacks sensitivity and emotions. No! Our God is alive; He thinks and feels; He is loving and merciful; He knows all our needs; He always thinks about us; He listens to our prayers, He intervenes in our situations, just as He deems appropriate.

2. GOD IS MAINLY INTERESTED IN US.

A man came to the service in our church and he did not like to hear all the brethren praying together aloud; so he said: “You don’t pray right! How can God hear your prayers, if all of you pray at the same time?”

As finite people

Human beings can only follow one train of thought at the time. The president of a country can come out on TV saying he is concerned for the needs of all the people, but will never know the situation of each citizen in particular. The people from a nation will never say: “My president knows me well; he is worried about my problem and I am sure he will do something about it.”

God, however, can deal with all the issues or needs you desire, at the same time. He is Omnipresent, Omniscient, and Omnipotent; meaning, He is everywhere at the same time; He is all knowing and He can do everything. It is very important that everyone recognizes and trusts the attributes of God, even though we may find it difficult to understand how.

The patriarch Job, the apostle Paul and other servants of God declared themselves incompetent to understand God. King David said: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it. **Psalms 139:6**. Although he also said and with much assurance: “But I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinks upon me **Psalms 40:17**. We also need to completely trust in the mercy and power of God.

3. GOD CARES FOR US

We must look to God with the eyes of faith and be sure that His thoughts for us are always good: “*For I know the thoughts that I have toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil...*” **Jeremiah 29:11**. Moreover, although God often allows us to go through difficult and strange paths, “*we know that God causes all things for the good of those who love Him*”

Romans 8:28 NIV.

The wisdom of God’s thoughts is great. We all make mistakes many times, but God is never wrong. His ways are perfect and there is much evidence of this in His creation. For example, the planet earth rotates on its axis at about 1,700 miles per hour. If that speed would slow down to 1,500 km/h, the days and nights would lengthen, the sun would burn us in the summer and cold would freeze us in the winter, ending with life in a short time.

If we read **Luke 12:22-31** and think: If God takes care of nature, how much more will He care for you and me! How beautiful it is to meditate on this! God is in control of all things, and that includes every one of us. However, to live under this care there is an established condition: “Seek, rather, the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added.” **verse 30.**

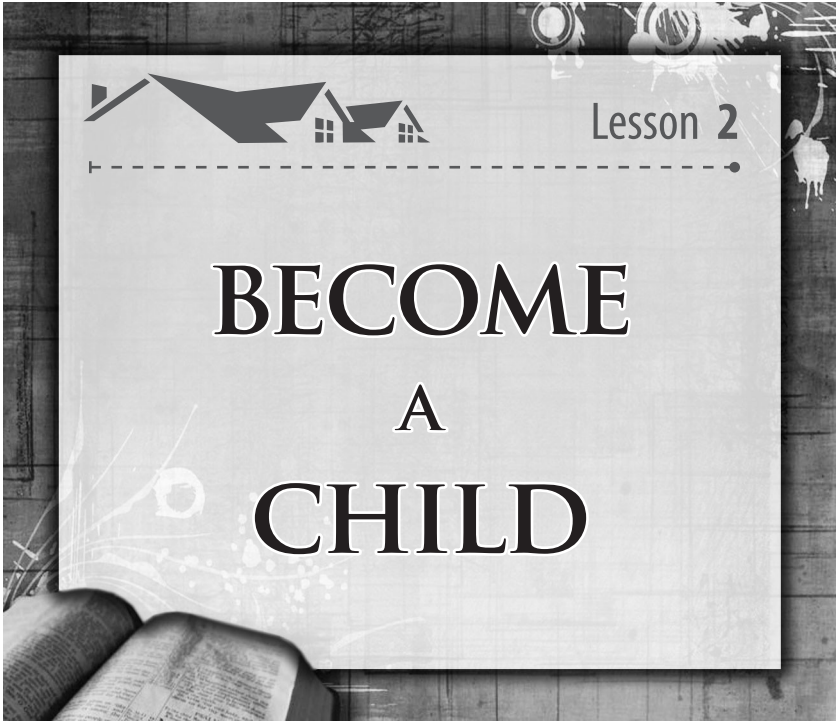
Verse 30 is very important because it shows that our primary need in life is to seek God. Many feel abandoned by God, but the reality is they do not seek Him as He asks, and as a result they live a life filled with anxiety and worry.

At this God says, “Seek me and live” **Amos 5:4.** Paul advises: “Be anxious for nothing, but your requests be known before God in everything by prayer ...” **Philippians 4:6.** Moreover, James assures us: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” **(4:8).**

4. CONCLUSION

Today you can change your negative and pessimistic thoughts for very different ones. You can begin to trust that God is with you, ready to help in every situation. He will never forsake His children. He genuinely cares about your life. No one cares about you more than Jesus!

- What steps will you take in the coming days to seek more of God?



Icebreaker:

Is there any experience from your childhood that you remember specifically? Please share it.

Mark 10:13-15:

“Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.””

I. INTRODUCTION

Let us meet another key to enter the kingdom of God. Scriptures for this lesson were taken from the KJV 1995 Bible.

Adults commonly believe that we are children's example, and that children learn and progress as they imitate us. However, in today's Biblical text, Jesus says the opposite: if someone wants to be saved, and enter the kingdom of God, you need to learn from children. *"Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it"* **verse 15.**

Can an adult receive Jesus as if he were a child? Consider the following four ways to achieve this.

2. BECOME A CHILD

Why did Jesus say that we should be as a child? Perhaps the best way to answer this question is by posing this question: How are children? Children have enthusiasm, passion for life and great sense of wonder and rejoice. Children are simple, teachable, humble and honest (sometimes too honest!). Children have absolute faith in their elders; they are innocent, and spontaneous. Children do not use hypocrisy; do not hold grudges, envy, malice, or prejudice, except when adults teach them. The challenge that Jesus makes today to everyone, is to recover the virtues we had in our childhood, those qualities that over the years have faded.

3. HUMBLE YOURSELF AS A CHILD

In Jesus' kingdom, the greatest is neither he who knows the most nor the oldest. An older brother told a younger brother: "I have been in this church for 30 years", to which the young man

replied, “What you have is a one year repeated 30 times.” Why would you have answered it?

Matthew 18.1-5: *“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked: - Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus called a little child and put him in the midst of them and said, Verily I say unto you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. So whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes in my name one of these children, welcomes me.”*

According to this portion of the Gospel, no one can enter heaven unless he first “becomes” like a child.” Becoming “implies total transformation. It is not enough to appear to change. Jesus says that the greatest in His kingdom is the one who humbles himself as a child. This means changing authentically.

Humbling and converting ourselves whole heartily to the Lord, we receive from him the ability to recognize our weaknesses and accept all His help. No one should be proud of their strength or capacity, or think he or she can be self-sufficient, let alone believe they are better than others See **Romans 12.3**.

4. PRAISE GOD LIKE A CHILD

Read **Isaiah 29.13**. From the beginning, God has demanded complete surrender and submission on our part. God has always sought a personal relationship with each of His children. However, “man’s precept” or religion, often have ruined that relationship.

The paradox is that “religion” means “to unite men once again with God.” Why is that while it is so noble in its purpose, religion becomes a barrier between God and us? Because often

times we trust it more than the One who died on the cross to save us. That's right: religion cannot save. Christ does!

Matthew 21.14-16:

“Then came to him the blind and the lame temple and he healed them. But the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things he did, and the children crying in the temple and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! Were outraged, and said, do you hear what these are saying? And Jesus said: Yes, have you never read, Out of the mouth of babes and suckling's thou hast perfected praise?”

While Jesus enjoyed the cheers of those children, the leaders disputed in the temple. Jesus' answer: *“God has perfected praise from the mouths of babes.”* Here we see another important principle: the best praise to God is the one that children offer. See **Psalms 8.2.**

The praise of our services and meetings can be accompanied by good musicians and singers, as well as the best and most modern equipment, but if it is not motivated by a sincere admiration for Jesus, it is not acceptable by Him. Praise is acceptable and perfect to God if it is born from a sincere and pure heart, like that of a child.

5. DESIRE SPIRITUAL THINGS AS A CHILD

1 Peter 2:1-3: *“Cast away, all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, and Desire, like newborn babies, the spiritual milk, that by it you may grow thereby, and have tasted the goodness of the Lord.”*

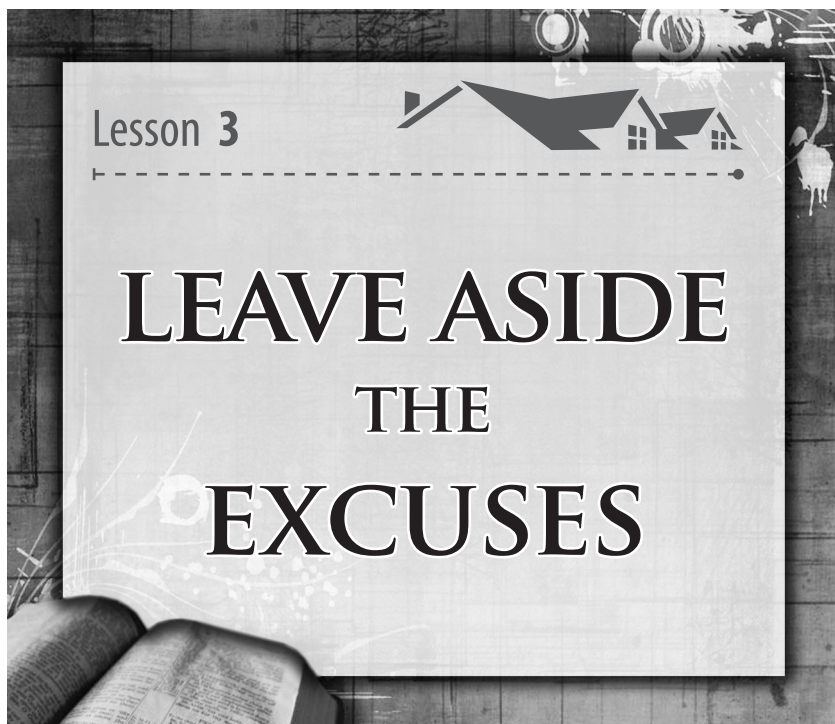
Peter reminds us that the most important goal of every newborn is to grow. A healthy baby, when not sleeping, is eating, and vice versa. In other words, in their first days of life the child spends most of their time resting and eating, because growth is a priority. In addition, as if we were newborn infants, we feel the fervent longing for the things of God, His Word, His presence and power. If we prioritize, these things properly we will grow in our spiritual life, as a child grows healthy if we eat well.

6. CONCLUSION

A final warning: To be like children does not imply immaturity or simplicity. God is balanced and He tells us how to balance our Christian character. **1 Corinthians 14:20**, *“Brethren, be not children in the way of thinking, but be children in regard to evil and mature in the way of thinking.”*

Our daily search of God’s Kingdom and how we live as if we were children certainly will cause rejection and criticism from those who do not know Jesus. But it also will serve as a warning to them and as comfort to us, these amazing words, *“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven”* **Matthew 18:10.**

- What significance do you find in this last Biblical text?
- What qualities have you lost over the years and now want to recover?
- What steps will you take to achieve this?



Icebreaker: What do you think about this phrase?
Excuse is the half sister of lie.

I. INTRODUCTION

When we cannot meet as promised, when we arrive late to a commitment, when we forget something, etc. the idea of presenting any excuse comes to mind. There is an excuse for everything, or almost everything. There is a phrase that says “nobody is guilty of anything since excuses were created”. However, if we want to advance in life, we should put all excuses aside, and assume our individual responsibility.

Continuing this series “Keys to Enter the Kingdom of God” let us consider seven Biblical stories that will help us understand the seriousness of the problem with excuses; and how to resolve it, with God’s help.

2. “THE WOMAN YOU GAVE ME”

Genesis 3:9-12: *“But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid. And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” The man said, “The woman you put here with me - she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”*

With a simple confession as an answer to God, Adam could have resolved the problem of guilt before him, but instead he chooses to foist blame on his wife, and even God Himself! Note the reproachful tone in his expression “the woman you gave me” as if to say “Lord if you had not given her to me, this had not happened”.

3. “BUT I DON’T KNOW HOW TO TALK”

Exodus 4:10-14: *“Moses said to the LORD, “Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.” The LORD said to him, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12 Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.” But Moses said, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.” Then the LORD’s anger burned against Moses...”*

Moses was pursued by the ghosts of his past. God becomes angry when we out of fear try to convince ourselves and even Him that we are incapable of achieving something He promises we can attain, if we trust in His power. Do you not think that Moses was lacking faith in God?

4. “IN MY COUNTRY I WOULD BE BETTER”

2nd Kings 5:9-14: *“So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha’s house. Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, ‘Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.’ But Naaman went away angry and said, ‘I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. I 2 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn’t I wash in them and be cleansed?’” So he turned and went off in a rage. Naaman’s servants went to him and said, ‘My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, ‘Wash and be cleansed!’” So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.’”*

Nationalism, pride and prejudice are behind many excuses. Naaman’s excuse is that in his country there were better rivers than the River Jordan. This almost cost him the opportunity to receive his healing. How many opportunities are we letting go because of our prejudice?

5. “I AM TOO YOUNG”

Jeremiah 1:4-9: *“The word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.’ Alas, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.” But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD. Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “I have put my words in your mouth.”*

Young Jeremiah had feelings of inadequacy and used his lack of self-esteem. This was an excuse to avoid the calling of God in his life. No one is too young or inexperienced, if the Lord wants to use him or her. Jeremiah was able to prove it conclusively in his prophetic ministry.

6. “I WAS AFRAID OF YOU”

Luke 19:20-23: *“Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. 21 I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’” His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?’”*

The real reason that this servant kept the money was not due to fear, but because of his disloyalty and negligence. We have to assume that these same problems are in us.

7. “NOBODY HELPS ME”

John 5:2-7: *“Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, ‘Do you want to get well?’ ‘Sir,’ the invalid replied, ‘I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.’”*

This is a typical case of self-pity, complaints. The paralytic only had to answer Jesus’ question with a loud “Yes of course!” It is good that the Lord in His great mercy healed him anyway. **(verse 8)**

8. “I AM TOO BUSY NOW”

Luke 14:15-20: *“When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, ‘Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.’ Jesus replied: ‘A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. 17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’” Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’” Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’”*

It is perhaps one of the most eloquent accounts of Jesus about salvation; a story that also represents the way that we answer to God’s invitations. It seems that at this time man’s main

problem that we are too busy to search for God. We need to check our list of priorities now, since the story above shows us that God will not insist indefinitely. **(See verses 21-24)**

9. CONCLUSION

There comes a point in life when excuses end. If we do not know how to face certain things, or simply do not want to face them, we have to admit it now and leave self-justification aside. Just as God worked in Naaman, Jeremiah, or the paralytic, he will perform for each one of us if we are sincere.

Jesus is now offering you the opportunity of a new beginning with Him; but for that to happen you have to leave all excuses aside.

- Can you mention an excuse that you remember saying or thinking of?
- What steps will you take next to overcome the ugly habit of giving excuses?



Icebreaker: Have you ever been in a natural disaster, heart quake, hurricane, etc...? Share your experience.

Matthew 7:24-27: *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

On August 2005 an unexpected and powerful hurricane category five, hit the South Atlantic. Since it was a climatic phenomenon completely unusual in those latitudes, the population and the government were not prepared to deal with it. The wind destroyed everything in its path in many cities of South Brazil and Uruguay. Many people died, most of them were crushed by trees or their own houses, which were not built to resist the force of hurricanes.

In the year 2010 there was an earthquake in Haiti measuring seven degrees on the Richter scale, which killed about 300,000 people in Port of Prince and its surroundings. Again, the main cause of death was the collapse of houses; the vast majority did not have anti-seismic structures therefore, they crumbled with the earthquake.

A few weeks after, in the Central Region of Chile there was another earthquake of 8 degrees recorded, which also caused a powerful tsunami in the Pacific Ocean. However, remarkably, the total number of people killed by the earthquake in Chile in 2010 was just a few hundred.

The aforementioned disasters had similar destructive power, why is there such big difference in the number of fatalities? The answer is simple: where homes were well grounded on solid foundation, the number of landslides was minor, but in places where the houses were built in a primitive or improvised manner, landslides were many.

2. THE WHOLE WORLD COLLAPSES

Now let us look at the world. Nature has been damaged on a large scale. Its resources are dwindling rapidly. Each day, programs and news portals report new diseases, wars, terrorism, mass protests, hunger, and more.

Violence and crime are taking over towns and cities. Prisons everywhere are being overwhelmed. The average age of offenders are getting lower. New and more complex forms of crime arise all the time.

The education, health and pension systems are collapsing everywhere. The rates of divorce, drug addiction, prostitution, trafficking, abortions, etc. increase steadily. Marriages, homes, government, entire nations; all the human institutions are failing.

The whole world is falling apart, crushing many nations under the weight of unprecedented crisis.

What does all this mean? You must know that this is just the prologue; the mere beginning of a time of terrible suffering that will come upon the inhabitants of the earth. Consider **Matthew Chapter 24** and Revelations chapter **6** thru **18**. In these and in other parts the Word of God talks about worldwide disasters of great proportions that will occur in the context of what Jesus called the Great Tribulation (**Matthew 24:21**).

The Great Tribulation will be unleashed as soon as Christ has collected His Church, and no one living on Earth at that time will escape its effects. This will last for seven long years. In vain, man will attempt to tackle these things.

3. JESUS CHRIST, THE ROCK

We wonder how did we get into this situation. Is God the cause of the disasters that are coming? Not at all. The man is the culprit. The man who built his house, that is to say his value system, culture, philosophy and religion on unstable sands of his own thought, is responsible for its own universal ruin.

Man has put his trust in himself, and has forgotten of the Creator. There are many people that do not pay attention to the way they are building their life nor do they stop to think that depending on the foundation on which they build their house now, it is how it's going to be tomorrow. But as the great fatal earthquake approaches (Revelations 6:12), the Word of God continues to remind us that Jesus Christ is the Rock, and the only sure foundation on which we should build our lives.

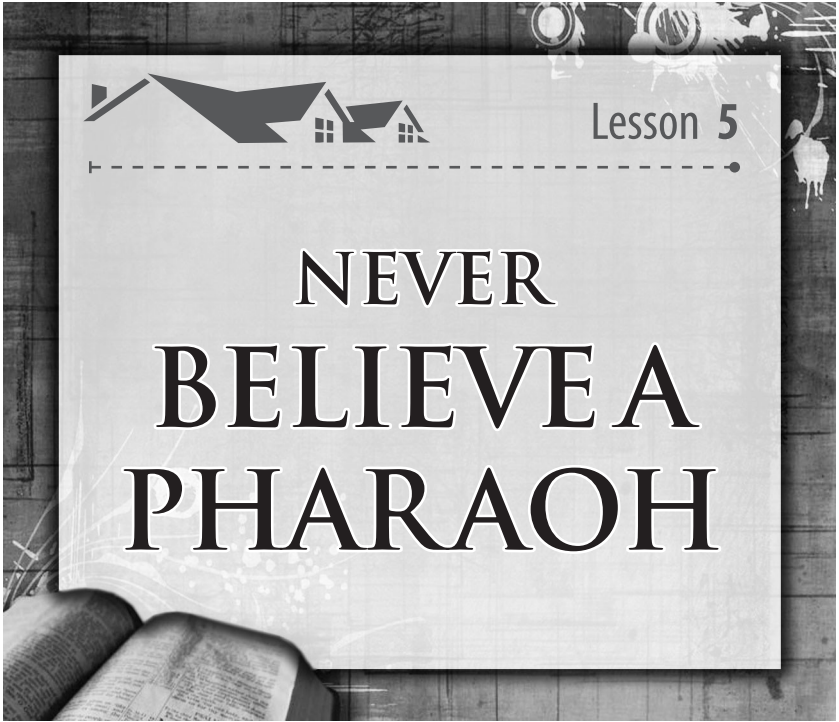
What does it mean to build our house upon the Rock? It means to put our faith in Jesus not a religious or superficial faith, but a total and obedient faith. To build the house upon the rock is to have a solid confidence in God, through which we can fully depend on Him and His promises. This true faith is what gives us the certainty that everything that God says in His Word is true and everything He tells us to do is good for us. Faith is knowing that if we give our lives to Christ and serve Him in obedience to His Word, we will be fine, no matter what kind of inclement reaches our life. Read **Psalm 15**.

4. CONCLUSION

Brother, friend, even though the evil dark waters and hurricane winds of trouble, are hitting you now, you still have

time to start building your house upon Christ, the Rock. Jesus guarantees you that if you make this wise decision; your house will never fall.

- Is there someone here who wants to start securing his or her future in Christ?
- Who wants to become that wise person who hears and obeys what God says?
- What steps will you take in the following days to affirm your house upon the Rock?



Icebreaker:

Have you ever been deceived by one of the infomercials that come on television?

Hebrews 7:17-19,

“For He testifies: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.”

I. INTRODUCTION

Continuing our series on “Keys to Enter into Heaven” we will study the interesting story of how Israel was set free from Egypt through Moses, while the Pharaoh did everything possible to prevent it. Pharaoh is a type and shadow of Satan; the nation of Egypt represents the world, and Israel the church.

2. PHARAOH’S CLEVERNESS

Many years after Joseph died, things changed unfavorably for the Hebrews that lived in Egypt. At that time, a new Pharaoh arose, who was a self-proclaimed god. He was a cruel and evil king, a tyrant who oppressed the people of Israel with tenacity for decades.

Pharaoh’s plan went much further than trying to reduce the Hebrews birth rate. His true goal was to destroy the people of God. Would he achieve this? No, rather, what he did obtain was the downfall of his own nation, until this day.

God moved by compassion for his people in slavery, raised Moses; through whom He brought various plagues upon Egypt all with the purpose of subduing their stubborn king. Study at home the book of **Exodus, chapter 7** and **11** to better understand this lesson.

There were 10 plagues in total. In every case (with the exception to the second to the last one), it appeared that he was going to give them their liberty. However, then he would “change his mind.” What this king was actually doing was playing a game of “cat and mouse” with Moses and his people. Conscious that in the end he would loose the very convenient servitude of Israel,

Pharaoh tried to snatch from Israel three precious riches that God had given them:

3. CONSECRATION

Exodus 8:25-27, *“Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, “Go, sacrifice to your God in the land.” And Moses said, “It is not right to do so, for we would be sacrificing the abomination of the Egyptians to the Lord our God. If we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, then will they not stone us? We will go three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as He will command us.”*

God requires complete separation from the world; our friendship with the world is enmity for Him (**James 4:4**). Since the Egyptians worshipped cows, they were scandalized to see Israel sacrifice livestock to Jehovah. This was one of the reasons why Israel needed to get out of Egypt. This also is why the believer should leave the world and be separate. “Therefore, “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you” (**2 Corinthians 6:17**). In other words, we cannot offer worship before we obtain consecration.

Exodus 8:28,

*“So Pharaoh said, “I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away. Intercede for me.” “Don’t be fanatics” says the world. “It is okay to be religious, but don’t take it so seriously.” It is here that we are tempted to live as “border believers” trying to live close to the world and God at the same time. However, the consecration that God is asking for is a complete one (**Revelation 3:15-16**).*

4. THE FAMILY

Exodus 10:7-11,

“Then Pharaoh’s servants said to him, “How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?” So Moses and Aaron were brought again to Pharaoh, and he said to them, “Go, serve the Lord your God. Who are the ones that are going?” And Moses said, “We will go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we will go, for we must hold a feast to the Lord.” Then he said to them, “The Lord had better be with you when I let you and your little ones go! Beware, for evil is ahead of you. Not so! Go now, you who are men, and serve the Lord, for that is what you desired.” And they were driven out from Pharaoh’s presence.”

To comply with Pharaoh request would mean to leave their wives and children in the world. Faith involves the entire family, not just the men. It is the husband and father’s privilege to guide his family into the blessings of the Lord.

5. GOD’S PROVISION

Exodus 10:24-26,

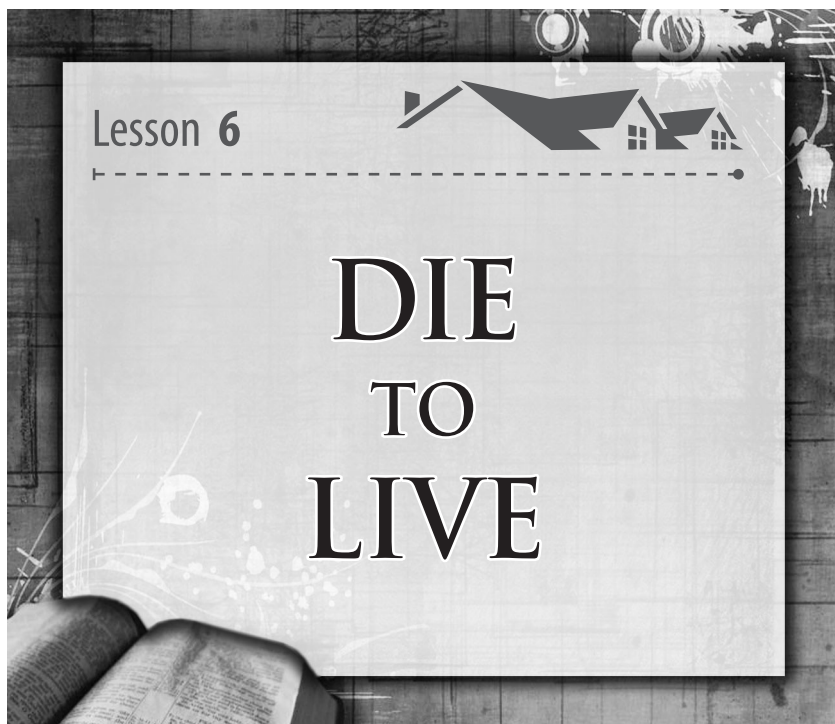
“Then Pharaoh called to Moses and said, “Go, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be kept back. Let your little ones also go with you.” But Moses said, “You must also give us sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. Our livestock also shall go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind. For we must take some of them to serve the Lord our God, and even we do not know with what we must serve the Lord until we arrive there.”

Through cleverness and tempting offers, Satan tries to take control of our material riches, preventing us to use them for God's service. All that we have belongs to Christ. What a tragedy it would be to hand over to Satan what the Lord has provided for us **(Malachi 3:8-10)**.

6. CONCLUSION

If Moses was to please God, he knew he had to be completely persuaded not to make any agreements with any type of Satan in this world. For this reason, he refused to give in to the proposition that Pharaoh presented. Be careful, while we think we are doing well by taking it easy on the world, or negotiating with it, God demands complete obedience; a complete separation. Therefore, Never believe a Pharaoh!

- Do you remember a time in which you trusted a Pharaoh? How did it end?
- What do you plan to do next time Pharaoh comes into your life with his propositions?



Icebreaker: Is death good or bad?

Matthew 28:6, *“He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Many people visit the Egyptian pyramids that contain the remains of great kings. The city of Paris is heavily visited as well for its catacombs full of corpses. In the city of Madrid, Spain, there exist the “Valley of the Fallen” where the body of general Francisco Franco was buried. Subsequently, in many countries there are mausoleums and large monuments frequently visited.

These famous places are visited because of what they contain; however, there is a small monument not too far from here in the city of Jerusalem that is famous for what it does NOT contain. We are speaking of the tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ, which has been empty for the last 2,000 years.

2. JESUS CHRIST LIVES AND REIGNS

When considering the topic of the resurrection of Christ, some associate it with a certain week of the year. There are masses of people that carry a plaster image to whom they render with sadness their devotion. Many see Christ in this manner, with a crown of thorns on his head, bloody, seriously injured, and humiliated. However, what does the Bible say on this subject?

The Bible teaches that Christ is no longer crucified, nor buried in a tomb; it says that He is alive and He reigns over all and everyone, *“And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death”*

Revelation 1:17-18

3. AN INCOMPARABLE RESURRECTION

Although the Biblical story of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus is not the only one, it is absolutely exceptional and incomparable. In the Old Testament we find the case of the son of the widow from Zarephath, who was resurrected by the prophet Elijah (**1 Kings 17:20-23**). There was also the body that was resurrected when it fell on the bones of the prophet Elisha (**2 Kings 13:20-21**).

In the Gospels, we find also the resurrection a twelve year old girl, the young man from Nain, and Jesus' friend Lazarus (At home, find the scriptures related to these wonderful stories). After Christ, there have been other resurrection cases, as was the case in those that appeared alive in Jerusalem after He had resurrected (**Matthew 27:52-53**). There was also Tabitha, who was resurrected by the apostle Peter (**Acts 9:40-41**).

Therefore, why do we say that the resurrection of Jesus is incomparable? First, the rest of those that were resurrected died again. Christ was raised from dead once and for all. **Hosea 13:14** refers to this when it says, "O Grave, I will be your destruction!"

Paul adds, "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (**1 Corinthians 15:20**). What this means is that Christ was the first—the first-fruits of all those that wait to be resurrected in a not so distant day. The believer's will resurrected to never die again, just like Christ.

In second place, Jesus resurrected from His own power. Before he was crucified He said, "I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." (**John 10:17-18**).

Let us consider that when Lazarus left the tomb, his hands and feet were bound, completely wrapped in linen. This is why Jesus asked him to be set free, but Jesus escaped his linen without the help and anyone.

When Lazarus resurrected, the apostle John says that the rock that sealed his tomb had to be removed by other people, so

that he could come out. However, the rock covering the tomb of Jesus did not need to be removed by anyone. On the morning of the third day, when the three women arrive the rock had already been removed. Who had done it? The Lord himself had removed it, and not so that He could exit the tomb, but so that the world could see that the tomb was empty.

4. A LESSON FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

In Israel, the high priest would enter into the Holy of Holies once a year, to intercede on behalf of the people. The people would congregate in the outer court awaiting his exit with anticipation. If the high priest returned quickly after the sacrifice, it was because the sins of the nation had been forgiven for another year.

The sound of the bells on the priestly robe could be heard from outside, as an indication that the priest was still alive inside. See **Exodus 28:34-35**. If the sound stopped and or the priest did not appear after a certain time, they concluded that he had died, surely because his sacrifice had not pleased God.

For this reason, and since no one else could enter into the Holy of Holies, the Israelites began to tie a long rope around the priest ankle, so that they could remove his body if he died. However, if the priest exited, the people would break out in praises to God, celebrating that their sins had been covered once again.

One day, Christ our great high priest entered into the Holy of Holies to offer the most excellent sacrifice for our sins. He offered His own life. He later returns victorious over death, and for this reason we know that through his name we have forgive-

ness for our sins. Now Jesus lives and He manifests himself when we congregate in His name (**Matthew 18:20**). Now we can praise, exalt, and adore Him with all our heart. See **Hebrews 9:24-25**

5. THE PARADOX OF THE SEED

Lets read **John 12:23-26**. Here we find Jesus speaking about a seed. The seed produces life only when it dies. In this, we find a paradox that means, “an idea opposed to the common opinion of other people.” The Christian life is also a paradox, or strange for the majority of people.

Unbelievers only think about entertaining themselves and getting the most out of life the few days they have, because they believe they need to celebrate and enjoy life before they die. However, Jesus teaches the opposite: that to life, you must first die. He said we must hate and lose our life, in order to gain eternal life (**verse 25**).

The best example of this He demonstrated to us by dying, being buried, just as a grain of wheat when it falls in the ground and dies (**verse 24**). Although the seed dies, in a way it never actually does because it is then transformed into a plant that produces fruit, along with other seeds that only can be formed in this manner.

That seed was buried in Jerusalem over twenty centuries, died, but at the same time caused many other seeds to be born. This is the lesson and purpose for the seed: It dies to live. Jesus’ church is the precious fruit of that one seed that fell in the ground and dies. Each one of us, as a believer, is the result of death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

6. CONCLUSION

In **verse 26** we read, *“If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also...”* Our Lord Jesus Christ has called us to serve Him, to follow Him where He went. In other words, Jesus is calling us to die so that we can live with Him.

- What do you think of this topic?
- What meaning does the following phrase have for you, “To die to live?”

Now read **Galatians 2:20** and identify parts in your life that should die so that Christ can live in you.



Icebreaker: What is the first thing you think of when you hear the word, “individualism?”

Psalms 118:8, *“It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

The scripture that we will be considering today is found exactly at the center of the Bible. This could be a coincidence, but highly unlikely, even for those who believe in coincidences. Actually, this makes us think that God placed it there by design for it is one

of the most important things for humanity to understand. With this lesson, we finalize the series, “Seven Keys to Enter Heaven.”

2. THE CHALLENGE OF TRUSTING IN GOD

God has always sought out people that trust in Him, that allow Him to save them. He then employ's them for His higher purposes. However, it seems that in every generation, He has difficulty finding those people, *“I beheld, and indeed there was no man” (Jeremiah 5:21).* *“So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one” (Ezekiel 22:30).* *“There is none who does good, no, not one” (Romans 3:12).*

It happens to be that humanity has serious problems in trusting God. Today we demonstrate not only the reality of this fact, but also in that one of the main causes of this is our self-confidence. We can affirm that if anyone has a difficult time trusting in God it is probably because he or she do not desire to stop or cannot stop trusting in him or herself.

3. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SAUL AND DAVID

First Saul, then David respectively on the throne of Israel, had more in common than most people think. They had the same privileges, the same opportunities, and the same blessing from God. Neither was seeking to become king, both were selected directly by God. Furthermore, the two were anointed by the same prophet.

Saul like David came from humble origins (**I Samuel 10:22, 27**) and had spiritual experiences with God (**I Samuel 10:5-10**). Both began in a similar manner. What then was the difference between the two? Answer: the way they finished. David was a man of God until the end of his days, while Saul was not. David died with honor, while Saul did not.

At the beginning, Saul and David had a good relationship, to the point that David became Saul's son-in-law. Nevertheless, while one started his ascent, the other began his descent. Then the day that their lives crossed paths arrived, and from that point forward David secured his ascent, and Saul his descent.

Let us consider that God may have saved someone and started to use them for His glory. Yet, this does not guarantee they will continue doing what God desires the rest of their life. There are people that can begin well and finish badly. Someone that was approved can later become unapproved by God.

What caused the fall of Saul and the ascent of David? The response each one had in the face of crisis and the difficult situations they faced. That is, how each one handled their problems. The problems of life serve to reveal our character. Those problems disclose what is in us.

In face of difficulties, David knew the “telephone number” to God. However, when Saul faced difficulty he fell deeper and deeper into trusting himself. When David sins, he repented. When Saul sinned, he did not even acknowledge his failure, instead he tried to justify his sins.

4. SAUL'S FIVE SINS

(I) And Samuel said, *“What have you done?” Saul said, “When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you*

did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, 'The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the Lord.' Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering." And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you."

Israel enters into a battle with the Philistines. Samuel leaves for seven days and tells Saul to wait for him to offer a sacrifice unto God. Saul did not wait and offered himself the sacrifice. Samuel returns and rebukes him, "What have you done?" Saul answers him, "When I saw that the people were scattered from me." Saul never recognizes his sin, but rather deposits his fault in others. His inability to wait revealed his impatience. Impatience is the lack of trust in God. In other words, impatience is the synonym of disbelief and self-confidence.

(2) Partial obedience I Samuel 15:3,9.13-15, *"Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed. Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord." But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of*

the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed."

Samuel tells Saul to destroy everything. However, Saul only destroys what he considered vile and undervalued. Partial obedience is actually disobedience. What sink many believers are not necessarily great sins, but "almost obedience's." Partial obedience is equal to rebellion. Saul was not to choose, evaluate or interpret his orders; he only was to obey them. However, he could not because of his rebellious heart.

(3) Oaths, vows, and curses, I Samuel 14:24: *"And the men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had placed the people under oath, saying, "Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies." So none of the people tasted food."* In speaking like this, Saul thought he was acting spiritual, and that is precisely all he did: act

(4) Egotism, I Samuel 15:12, *"So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself; and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal."* Saul raised a monument for...himself. In making this image, he defies God. **Exodus 20:4.**

(5) Jealously and envy. 2 Samuel 21:2-3, *"So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; the children of Israel had sworn protection to them, but Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah. Therefore David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And with what shall I make atonement, that you may bless the inheritance of the Lord?"* Saul's last days will filled with jealousy and envy which can lead us to killing someone.

5. CONCLUSION

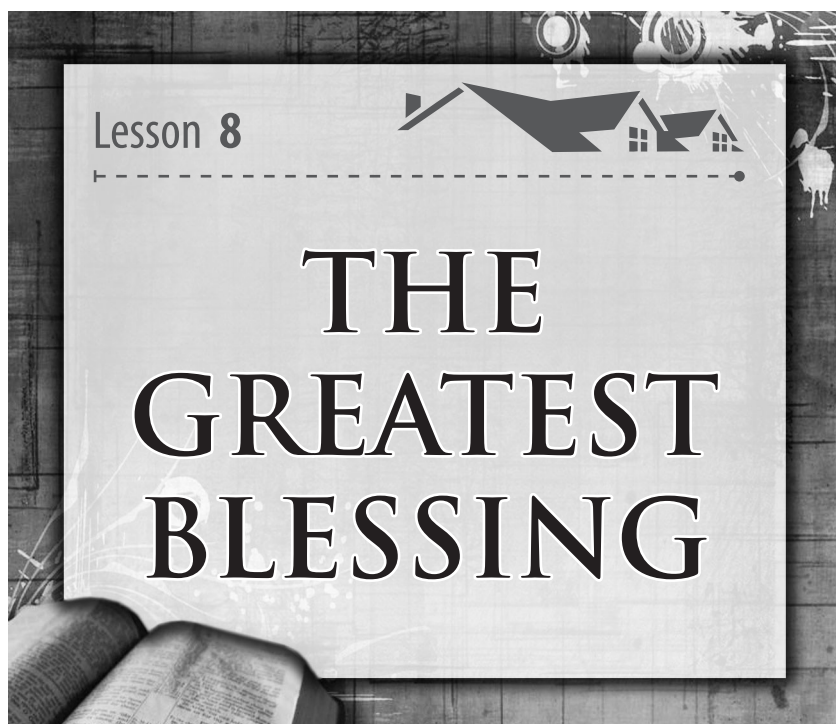
Saul never humbled himself, confessing his sin before God, and when he does, it was just an outward appearance. “So Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent.” Then he said, “I have sinned; yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord your God” **I Samuel 15:28-30.**

Saul was well aware of his sin, but his ego was too big to allow him to change paths and “look bad” before others. To him, appearances were more important than God’s approval. Therefore, in the midst of his defeats, failures, and sins, he chooses to trust in himself and convince himself that he could continue like this.

Surely, he had thoughts like: *“I will overcome these obstacles”, “I will work it out, to come out of these problems”, and “I can do this!”* Nevertheless, do you know what? This never happened. No one has made it very far trusting in himself. That is why the Lord invites us to trust in Him: *“It is better to trust in the Lord Than to put confidence in man”* **(Psalms 118:8).**

- Would you like to stop looking like Saul, and come to be like David? In what aspect of your life?
- What steps will you take in the next few days to achieve this?

Read at home, **Psalms 20** and **37**. Also, study **Proverbs chapters 3** and **4**.



Icebreaker: When you hear the word blessed, what is the first thing that comes to mind?

I. INTRODUCTION

Song of Solomon 6:10

asks a profound question, *“Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?”* With the help of God, we will answer this question through the series “12 Responses to Song of Solomon 6:10.”

Let us read **Matthew 16:13-20**. How is the church blessed by Jesus Christ? In this scripture, Jesus is announcing the formation of the church, the only institute that He establishes. This explains the role that the disciples would play in His edification. He promises the final victory over the evil forces. There are three major themes that merit our attention:

- (1) The foundation of the Church
- (2) The responsibility of the Church
- (3) The assurance of the Church.

2. WHAT THE PEOPLE THOUGHT OF JESUS (verses 13-14)

First, the Master asked His disciples about the popular idea regarding His person. The answer that He received teaches us that the people considered Jesus mainly as a resurrected prophet. Herod believed that Jesus was John the Baptist, who had returned from the dead. Some said He was Elijah and that he had appeared to prepare the way for the Messiah; others thought He was the prophet Jeremiah.

3. PETER'S BLESSING (verses 15-17)

After Jesus interrogates His apostles directly, Peter responds on behalf of the group, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." This was the first time that someone had called Jesus the Messiah (Christ). Peter's answer was so correct that Jesus calls him "blessed." Why? Because neither Peter nor his companions obtained the knowledge displayed in this declaration, through human teaching or earthly institutions; but as a direct revelation from God. See **Luke 10:22**

Such a magnificent blessing it is was to know Jesus, and still is a true blessing for it leads to the enjoyment of many other blessings. That is why, before we can expect more favors from God, human beings need to understand who Jesus is. This is the greatest blessing that we could have: Know Christ. Jesus' church is blessed like no other, for it knows who Jesus is. The word "blessed" Biblically is connected to blessings, grace, salvation, and glory.

4. JESUS ANNOUNCES THE CHURCH

(verse 18a)

Chronologically, this is the first time that the word Church is mentioned in the New Testament. The Greek word "Ekklesia" transliterates to the English as "Church". It describes a citizen's public assembly, as well as a congregation. These two ideas are combined in the word Church. This is to refer to a group of people called out with a purpose. We are called out by God, for a specific mission. **(John 15:16).**

Jesus' promise was to create an institution that would serve as an agency to extend the kingdom of God on earth. The term Church covers at least three things:

(1) The joining of believers from all nation, race, and culture in Christ, purified by the blood of Jesus and renewed by the baptism of His Holy Spirit.

(2) The local Church or a joining of disciples of Christ from one place, united by their faith in what Jesus taught, and committing to do what He commanded.

(3) The Biblical doctrine, Spiritual gifts, the institutional appearance, and the Church's hope in the promises of God.

A clarification of the expression, “you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church.” The rock that Christ built His church on was Peter’s declaration, not Peter himself. Peter could not be the foundation, for Christ is the only master builder and foundation of the church:

1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20.

When He said, “my” church, Jesus shows us that He is the owner, and the one that builds it.

5. THE TRUE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The church that Jesus established is largely not an organization, but rather a living organism in which abides the Spirit of God. That is why the government of the church should be theocratic, in the sense that Christ is the head and every member should submit their lives and decisions under the Lordship of Christ.

The church is a fellowship of believers in Christ, united with one commitment for Christ, and His mission in this world. Disciplines and activities like, congregating, singing, praying, studying the Bible, etc.... should only be means that we employ to reach our ultimate purpose, which is to lead others to the feet of Christ. We should never confuse the means with the end. If our church is not winning the lost, beyond all the programs that it may have, it is not fulfilling its mission.

Our mission can be summarized in equipping the saints so that they can exalt Christ, and evangelize the world. The apostles, in particular, Paul understood this mission, and they established a nucleolus of believers in the entire world calling them churches.

6. THE POWER TO BIND AND LOOSEN (Verse 19)

Matthew 18:18 and John 20:23 tell us that in addition to Peter, the other apostles also received the authority to “bind and loosen.” That is to say, teach which is the only and true way to salvation. They received power to declare a believer saved that produced fruits of repentance and of their faith in Christ Jesus.

The greatest privilege of “binding and loosening” is the connection to prohibit and allow things. To bind means to prohibit. To loosen means to allow. Just like the priest of the Old Testament and the first teachers of the primitive church exercised discipline and decided on the issues of the day in regards to the work of God. The Church of today also has authority to handle its business, allow or exclude members, sanction or censor a practice or doctrine; all of this in accordance with scriptural teaching, and discernment that Jesus has granted us through His Spirit.

The terms “bind”, “loosen”, and “keys” speak of the same topic. The keys work to close and open doors. “The Keys to the Kingdom” refers to the authority to open an entrance door to salvation to those who meet the conditions to enter: repentance and faith in Christ. It also refers to the authority to close doors to those who do not meet these terms.

Peter uses these keys with great authority on the day of Pentecost when he proclaims the first apostolic sermon and gives entrance to three thousand people into the Kingdom of God. The rest of the faithful believers in all the ages have continued using this authority, to introduce millions of people into the Kingdom of God.

7. THE TRIUMPH OF THE CHURCH

(verse 18b)

“And the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Hades refers to a place for the deceased, the world of the dead that is at times represented as a city with doors. Hades is presently the opposite of the Kingdom of God. The fact that its doors will “not prevail” means at least three things.

- (1) After giving His life on the cross, the Lord proceeded to open the doors of Hades to release those that were saved. See **Matthew 27:52**. In other words, Jesus conquers death, and therefore the church does not die. According to chapter **15** of **1 Corinthians**, Paul teaches that the believers that are asleep and are in the grave, one day, according to Christ’ promise will rise.
- (2) There is a ferocious battle between Hades and the Kingdom of God because of us. Since its beginning the church has been persecuted violently and it continues to do so. (get informed at www.persecution.com). Very often, we receive assaults and blows from the adversary, but God does not allow that the forces of our enemy defeat us, for the gates of Hades cannot prevail against the church.
- (3) It is true that death and hell are the unbeliever’s destination, but the church has the glorious mission and the power to set free mankind from that destination, introducing them to the Kingdom of God where there is eternal life. See **Colossians 1:12-13**.

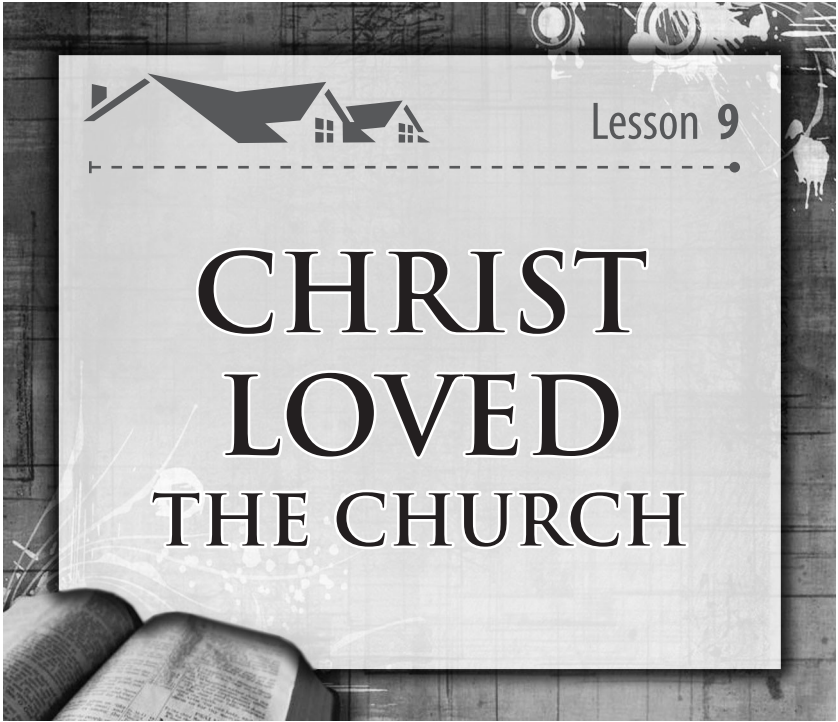
8. CONCLUSION

Read **Matthew 16:20**. It appears to be a contradiction when Jesus prohibits His disciples to preach at that moment that He was the Christ. However, Jesus had a reason for this. His disciples were not to divulge the truth until after His resurrection, because at that time they were not ready to neither endure the persecution that would be unleashed, or use the Keys of the Kingdom correctly. They would only be able to do after the infilling of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

The first time Jesus saw Peter he told him, “*You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas*” (which is translated, A Stone) **John 1:42**. That was a promise of what Peter would become through the grace of God. This is the process that Christ wants to complete in all of us. Although, at this present time we may not be all that God desires, what is really important is that we know Christ and focus in serving Him.

“...but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits” (**Daniel 11:32**). With time, He will transform us into the type of people that He purposed us to be. Nevertheless, by the fact that we know who Jesus is, we are already the most blessed people on this earth.

- Do you think that we need to appreciate more the blessing of knowing Christ?
- How do you plan to demonstrate your gratitude to Jesus for having granted you this privilege?



Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word “marriage?”

Ephesians 5:25-27, *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

This is a Biblical portion of scripture about the love of Christ for His church. The love of Christ towards the church is one that

is sincere, pure, and constant; in spite all of the church failures. The church and its believers will never cease to have blemishes and wrinkles until we arrive before the glory of God. Yet, even like this Christ gave His life to sanctify us in this world, to glorify us in the one to come. God gave Himself to award us liberty from the fault, contamination, and dominion of sin. However, only those that are sanctified here will be glorified by Him in the afterlife.

2. “CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH, AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR HER”

Christ offered Himself to God. **Hebrews 9:14**, but He also did so for the church, **Galatians 1:4; 2:20**. This was because He loved the church. Not in a sentimental, mediocre, or interested manner, but with a constant, profound, and everlasting love. (in Greek: agapê). The love of Christ is selfless, and without measure. It does not resemble in the least to humanities love. Neither to that bond that has deteriorated, we still dare call marriage. Christ’ love is without conditions.

3. “TO SANCTIFY IT, HAVING PURIFIED IT”

The holiness of marriage is thoroughly presented in the Bible. Marriage consists of a covenant. Any thing that damages this agreement is considered adultery. Christ’ death on the cross is a covenant that sanctifies and purifies the church to Himself. The purpose of Christ’ sacrifice was to obtain a bride exclusively for Himself.

Therefore, the church is the bride of the Lamb that was sacrificed on the cross to redeem her. The church belongs to Him,

and as members of His church, each one of us individually is God's property. The Lord has cleaned us from our old way of living, from sin, from evil, and has separated us for His service; a royal and special service. Paul alludes to three things here:

First, Paul refers to the priestly ceremonial cleansing of the Old Testament as a type and shadow of the spiritual cleansing that would come at this time. **Exodus 40:7, 11, 31.**

Second, Paul refers to the anointing and washing utilized in antiquity to prepare the bride for the wedding. Brides from the East prepare themselves for marriage with great anticipation and care. See **Esther 2:12.** This is the same for all of us. The great difference is that through baptism, Christ Himself washes the church. See **Ezekiel 16:8-9.**

Third, Paul refers to the teaching that we constantly give in church to be able to produce cleanliness in our minds, hearts, and conduct. The Lord told His disciples, *"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you"* **John 15:3.**

4. "THE WASHING OF WATER BY THE WORD"

That Word not only produces faith, leading the sinner to repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, It can maintain cleanliness after. For this reason we need to hear the Word of God constantly. From here comes the idea of the importance of congregating in order to hear Biblical preaching, and apostolic doctrine; as well as the reading of the Bible in our private devotion.

5. “THAT HE MIGHT PRESENT HER TO HIMSELF A GLORIOUS CHURCH”

The great love of Jesus for us causes Him to never cease working with each one of us so that He can present Himself a blameless church. Christ desires His church to become in His joy and satisfaction. **2 Corinthians 11:2, Colossians 1:21-22.** Paul insists in his epistle’s on the necessity of presenting to God: **(a)** the members of our body: **Romans 6:13. (b)** Our entire being: **Romans 12:1**

“Glorious” is used to describe to us a church filled with honor, splendor, and beauty. It captures the idea of “shinning”, a bride that has the entire admiration of her Husband. **Song of Solomon 4:7.** Christ is glorious and when the church becomes like Him, it will also be glorious. This will occur on the day of our washing, **1 John 3:2.** The city that we will dwell in will be like this, **Revelation 21:2.**

6. “NOT HAVING SPOT OR WRINKLE OR ANY SUCH THING”

Spots are those impurities that only the grace of our Lord Jesus can remove. The absence of wrinkles speaks to us of joviality of a young lady who is prepared for marriage. The invitation of Christ to his beloved is, *“Listen, O daughter, Consider and incline your ear; Forget your own people also, and your father’s house; So the King will greatly desire your beauty; Because He is your Lord, worship Him”* **Psalms 45:10-11.**

“Any such thing” is the distortion caused by sin, which twist and spoil us. See **1 Thessalonians 4:7; Ephesians 5:1-5; He-**

brews 10:28-30. It is of great importance that we strip off these things. See **Hebrews 13:12-14.** This scripture tells us that we should:

- (1) Go out, as Christ from this world's lifestyle.
- (2) Suffer reproach, as Christ.
- (3) Put our hope in the eternal city that God is preparing, and not in this temporal world. All that we are now, and have is temporary. Only our relationship and service to Him will remain.

Where are storing our riches? In glory or here?

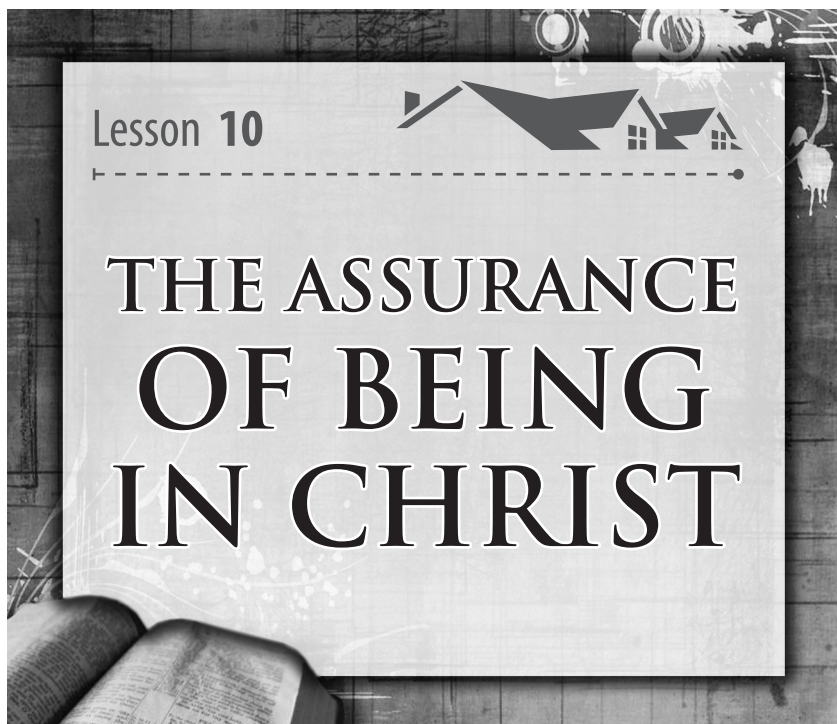
7. CONCLUSION

Christ loved the church even before it existed. However, when and where exactly was the church born? John was the only apostle that witnessed, *"But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out"* **John 19:34.**

We are born from Jesus side. The church has flowed from the very heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. The blood and water that came from Him, represent the two great benefits from which all of us participate: Justification and Sanctification; blood for atonement, and water for purification.

Our lives emerge from our Creator and Redeemers pierced side. We were the ones that pierced Jesus, with our sins, ignorant and inconsiderate with our pride and hardness of heart. From His side poured out water and blood to justify and sanctify us by His name.

In what area or aspect of your life would you like to reach purity and holiness? What steps should you take?



Icebreaker: Why do many people feel unsafe and terrified?

I. INTRODUCTION

We will continue to answer the question in **Song of Solomon 6:10**, “Whose is she...?” Let us read **Romans 8:28-39**. In this portion of scripture, we can study the greatness of God’s love, and his plan for His people; and Paul feels the desire to praise Him. He presents a hymn to express his experience of the assurance that every child of God has been privileged to also enjoy.

2. WE LACK NOTHING (verses 31-32)

First, salvation through faith in Christ Jesus places on God's side. He is in our favor and seeks at all times the very best for us. The implications of this truth are tremendous. If God is for us, who can be against us?

God almighty is sovereign over the universe. He is the creator who made all that exists. He controls space, time, nature and history. If this God is seeking for our good, who could cause us harm, that would not in the end be beneficial for us? He assures that all things work for our good. Therefore, what is there in the universe that could harm us or interfere with His plan?

The price God paid to obtain our salvation was so high it is difficult to understand. He became flesh in Jesus to die for us. If He were willing to pay such a high price for us, while we were still hostile and rebellious towards Him, How much more would He give now that we are His children?

We can be certain that He will supply our needs. God provides all that is necessary for our good. In Christ, we lack nothing. For this reason, to be truly in Him, through the faith of His finished work, we can be sure to reach the goal that God has designed for us.

3. THERE IS NO CONDEMNATION (verses 33-34)

The second reason why we should feel safe in God is the impossibility for anyone to condemn us. The only person that has the right to do so has already said He would not. God has

declared us just because of our faith in Him, He sees Christ in us. If God who is the judge, has declared us to be just, who has the right to accuse us?

Jesus Christ guarantees that no one can condemn us. He died for us to pay for the bill that we owed because of our sin. He resurrected as a demonstration that His death was not just another one caused by the wages of sin. The resurrection of Jesus demonstrates His victory over death, and confirms that His sacrifice for our sins was accepted.

The last proof that the death of Christ was sufficient to eliminate any condemnation is that He is now sitting at the right hand of God. In the ancient world at the right hand of the king was a place of honor. Jesus' being there signifies that He has received glory, power, and authority.

For this reason **Matthew 26:64** says, "*sitting at the right hand of the Power*" and **Hebrews 1:3** says, "*the right hand of the Majesty on high.*"

4. THERE IS NO SEPARATION (verses 35-39)

Another reason for us to feel secure is that there is nothing, which can separate us from the love of God. Paul presents a series of events that provoke separation or uprooting. They are natural tragedies that can actually take our life away and separate us from our loved ones. However, none of those things, not even death can separate us from God. Rather, it is through these losses that we can approach Him.

Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or sword can only occur when they are part of God's plan to bring

good. If they are part of God's plan, He will use these circumstances to draw us closer to Himself. With the goal of conforming us to the image of Christ so, that He can glorify himself in us. If the purpose of God includes these events, they will not be able to separate us from His love.

In addition to reminding us that these things form a part of the process, that God uses to take us to glorification. Paul presents another great truth: Death is not a tragedy. We have the tendency of seeing these life events from a human perspective. We are accustomed to investing all our effort to stay alive, yet, if death serves as a vehicle to the presence of God, why fight to avoid it?

When we are in His presence, we will be in a better state. Death cannot separate us from the love of God. If God is glorified through the death of His children, we have no reason to fear it, neither try to escape it. God works all things for our good, even in the hour of anguish and death.

When we face the tragedies of life, God trains us to triumph. Furthermore, He makes us more than conquerors through Christ, who loved us, and gave Himself for us. We are no longer victims of these events. According to God's good purpose, we have confirmed that problems only contribute to us becoming conquerors, even more than conquerors.

Founded on that truth Paul assures us, there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. Death cannot separate us from God, for when we die we go to Him. Life cannot separate us either, for He has promised to be with us until the end of the world. We cannot go so far as to separate from God. He is with us wherever we may be. He accompanies us with His love.

5. OPPONENTS TO THIS ASSURANCE

Another truth that the children of God should know is that according to **Ephesians 6:10-13**, there are spiritual beings that oppose God's plan. These creatures can afflict us, and cause us pain. Surely, they will increase their activity as the end of this time approaches. Even so, we should not place our sight on these things. The principalities and powers of evil are real, however, they cannot overrule God's sovereignty over creation.

God is on His throne and no one can stop His plan of taking us to perfection. Therefore, we can be certain that the enemy's activities will serve as everything else for our benefit. There is nothing natural or supernatural from above or below the earth, which can separate us from the love of God.

We can be certain if we are in Christ, that nothing or no one, not even our own works ("nor anything other created thing"), can separate us from the love of God. This is possible thankfully because we did not gain our position in Christ through our good works. Justification through faith depends exclusively on the work of redemption accomplished by Christ on Calvary. Therefore, being in Christ we can live confidently.

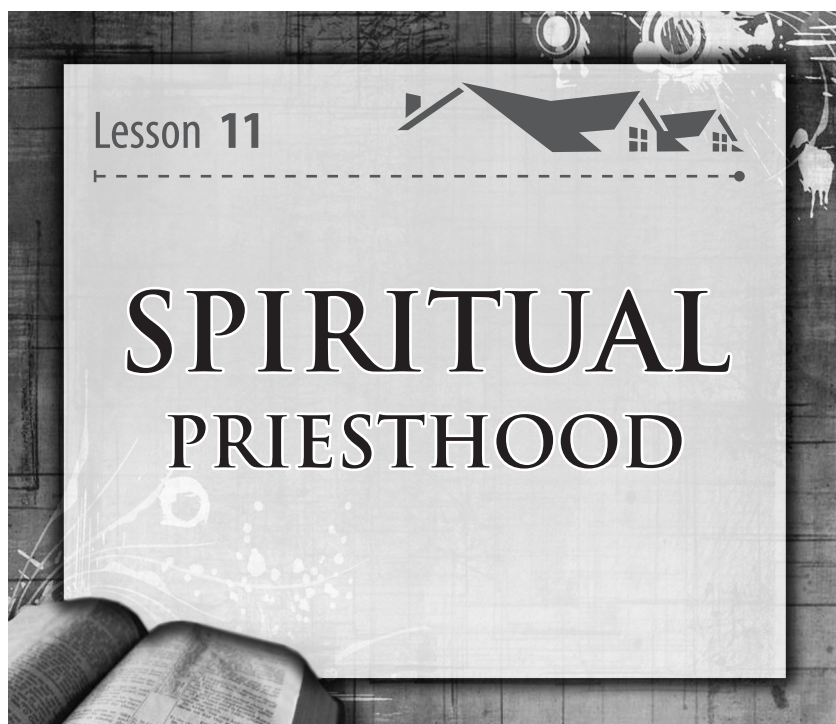
6. CONCLUSION

The Word of God gives us absolute assurance that we are God's children. We can feel confident to approach Him today, and enjoy in the assurance of being able to do it tomorrow. The good news of the Gospel has promised us absolute safety in being God's children, for we have trusted in Christ. In addition, we

have the promise of Christ in the sense that He intercedes on our behalf if anyone were to accuse us.

In Christ, we have complete safety. What great news! However, possessing this assurance should never serve as an excuse to sin. Having this salvation does not mean that we can live as we please.

- Therefore, how should we live?
- How do you want to live?



Icebreaker: What is the first word that comes to mind when you hear the word “priest?”

I Peter 2:5,9,

“You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

I. INTRODUCTION

What is a priest? It is a person who intercedes before God for others and one that speaks to others on behalf of God. A priest is a mediator between God and the people. Spiritual priesthood in the believers is a fundamental part of doctrine. We believe in the priesthood of all believers, that is to say, that every person who forms a part of the church is called to serve God.

2. ISRAEL'S CALLING

Exodus 19:6, *“And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”* This is the most important Bible verse on the topic of priesthood in the Old Testament. It is located in the Moses’ discourse as he is establishing the covenant between God and the children of Israel. God says here that everyone who is a part of Israel’s people should become a priest for Him.

This truth was so important that God taught Israel this even before He gave them the Ten Commandments. An altar for each Israelite family was God’s plan. A priest in every home was His desire. In this manner, every Israelite should be a priest for the Lord. See **Deuteronomy 7:6** as well.

3. THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD

Consider God’s desire to universalize the priesthood in the children of Israel. He had to choose one of the twelve tribes of Israel, the Levites to provide religious leadership for the nation. The tribe of Levi would produce the priest that would serve and minister in the tabernacle of Moses, then later in the temple. They would offer sacrifice to God every day, interceding before God for the people.

Moses, Aaron and Mary were descendants of Levi. Aaron was precisely the first high priest of Israel, and his children the first priest. The establishing of this class had its good and bad consequences. On the positive side, the people had leaders who would watch over their well being, guiding them to God. On the negative side, the people came to believe that only the religious leaders had the responsibility of serving God.

4. THE PROPHETS

Centuries later came the prophets. The prophets of Israel were not priest, but ministers of God that would challenge kings and priests to repentance. The main task of the prophets was to call the people to reclaim their priesthood. We now know that never happened: **Ezekiel 22:30**.

Israel's disobedience in this caused God to finally renounce the idea, and in the last chapter of Isaiah, proclaim that in the last days He will take priest and Levites from other nations to arrive in Jerusalem. **Isaiah 66:18,19,21**.

5. JESUS, THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Jesus arrives and inserts Himself in the prophetic. He opposes traditional leaders of His time, which represented God very badly. They exploited the people, in particular the defenseless. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were enriched at the cost of the people! Jesus sent them a clear message in calling simple people that worked as fishermen, agriculture, people with little education, and from lower social classes to apostolic ministry. For example, Simon the Zealot; look up the work "Zealot" in the dictionary.

Upon observation of the Gospel, we will find that Jesus was the minister by excellence, the best that has ever existed. He defined His mission on earth in a completely new way. See **Luke 22:27** and **Mark 10:45**.

Jesus is the high priest of whom **Hebrews 9:11-12** speaks about. Jesus is the main priest or servant in the Bible, and history. He is also the chief and owner of the apostolic ministry. He came to fulfill the law, affirming that God now is calling everyone into the priesthood, through baptism to form part of His church.

6. A SPIRITUAL PRIESTHOOD

In **Genesis 12:3**, God had called the patriarch Abram, saying, I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” The promise made to Abram was that his descendants would be a blessing to all humanity, yet as we have already seen, the children of Abraham did not fulfill these expectations.

The good news is that in **Romans 4**, the apostle Paul confirms that those who have come to the faith of Jesus Christ have been converted automatically in spiritual children of Abraham. That means that God has included the Christian people in the promise made to the patriarch. How is this possible? Through the sacrifice of Christ we are now coheres of the promises of God through the covenant of the cross.

However, alongside with the privileges, we have also inherited the responsibility that God deposited in Abraham. That means that God now blesses humanity through us. What a great honor and commitment for the church.

The Christian priesthood should include sacrifices, not of animals, but spiritual. David seems to have been the first to know of this. Since he was not of the tribe of Levi, he could not be a priest-although he desired this very much. That is why he did not stop from offering God the sacrifice of praise, which is definitely better. See **Psalms 116:16-19; Hebrews 13:15**

7. A UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD

The first Christian denominations began referring to their pastors with the term, “priest” and ended up developing a ministerial hierarchy, dividing the Christian people in two large groups: the clergy, that is the group lead by priests, bishops, etc. and the laity, which makes up the rest of the believers. “Laity” comes from the Latin “Laos”, which means “people.” In general, it has had a derogatory connotation.

Throughout history, the churches have fallen repeatedly in the error of affirming the authority of the clergy and stripping the Laity of their power. This error is shared by the old churches, and by modern denominations alike. Nevertheless, the word of God affirms that all Christians have received power and authority.

See **Matthew 18:18, Luke 10:19, and Acts 1:8.**

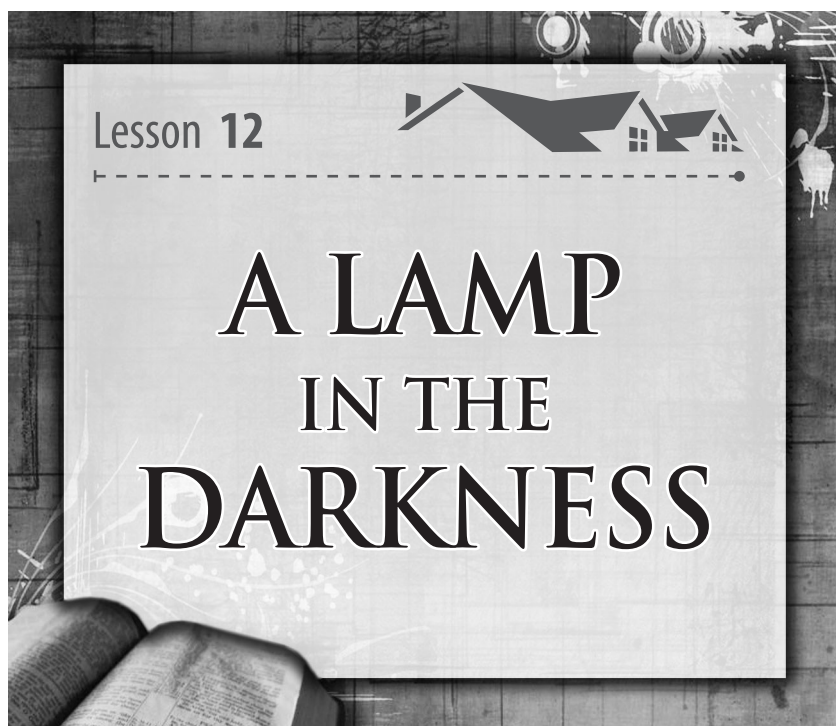
8. CONCLUSION

The Lord Jesus Christ calls every believer to share their faith and bless the lives of others; to be a priest for Him. Therefore, we have the privilege of carrying the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ, along with the responsibility of enduring his sufferings. See **Luke 14:27.**

Pitifully, Israel like the church has abandoned the Biblical vision. We need to return to this vision. The Biblical vision is clear: God has called every believer to see themselves as ministers of the gospel.

In the last days, God will make kings and priest of all those that believe in Him. **Revelations 1:5-6** cites an old Christian hymn alluding to this truth; that you and I were called to give testimony of our faith in Jesus Christ. You and I are called to be a blessing!

- Is it correct to affirm that the church has neglected its priesthood responsibility? Why?
- What can you do to honor justly your function as a priest of Jesus Christ?



Icebreaker:

Have you even been in a blackout at night, in total darkness? Share your experience.

I. INTRODUCTION

Read **2 Peter 1:16-21 (ESV)**. The apostle Peter mentions a lamp. There are even lamps that enable light to become portable (flashlight). In a practical sense, the lamp can help guide you. Some has used light in various forms like a torch, a lamp, or a fire as a symbol for illumination and knowledge.

2. ORIGIN AND INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY

Where do prophecies come from in the Bible? Why do we confirm that many have been fulfilled? Prophecies did not come out of the creativity of the prophets, their own imagination, neither from their personal circumstances (**verse 20-21**). Rather, from the infinite mind of God, who inspired the prophets to write them.

“Inspiration: is the work of the Spirit of God through Him who led the holy writers of the Bible. He guided them in the selection of words, and keeping them from errors or omission and showing them what to communicate. God had a message for all humanity, and He protected, and guaranteed its preservation, the precise words that He wanted us to receive.

Peter adds that the scriptures were not inspired by any man, but by the Holy Spirit. Its interpretation should not be private, or capricious but rather, depend on of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we need the illumination from the same Spirit that inspired the scriptures, to be able to understand them. Paul summarizes this truth in **2 Timothy 3:16**, where he uses the Greek term “theopneustos” “God-breathed”. God breathed the words that the apostles and prophets wrote.

3. THE MORE SURE AND PERMANENT PROPHECY

Verse 16. The Bible is not a collection of fables, neither a human concept about God. It actually is the Word of God, the will of God, God’s instructions, given through people for every-

one. We have received this gospel message directly from the witness of the first century; from those that were present and saw first hand the wonderful acts that occurred. These men are a reliable source. They witnessed these great things.

Verses 17-18. The truth is that we are even jealous in a way that they had that privilege. What would it have been like for us to be with the Lord Jesus Christ on the mount of transfiguration? Or when He taught and performed miracles? Or if we could have been with Him on the infamous night the Son of God was hung on the cross! What a privilege!

However, on a certain occasion Jesus Christ told Thomas, *“Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”* (**John 20:29**). Therefore, we have not seen Jesus like those men, but by their testimony, written with all the authority and influence of the Holy Spirit; we have the inspired story that presents us Christ. Thanks to this, we are even more blessed than they are.

Peter then brings out his authority as a face-to-face witness, but then places the authority of the scriptures inspired by God over his own. He refers to the Word of God *“as the more sure prophetic word.”* The Greek word used here implies: firm, stable, steadfast, sure, certain, established. It is more sure than the experience of any person, it is the Word of God revealed by Himself from ancient times.

Let's read **Luke 24:44-48**. Here Jesus says that His disciples will serve as witness of all that has happened. However, what he brings to light is that many of the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled during His first stay on earth. For this reason we say that the prophetic word is more sure. Thanks to this for Peter (and us) there is no doubt of the fulfillment of the rest of the prophecies that will come to fruition in the future.

The testimony of all scripture and fulfilled prophecy offer us great assurance of our destiny. The personal experience with God is very important for all humanity, but nothing is more important, firm, or permanent than the Word of God.

See **1 Peter 1:23-25**. There is no better foundation in the life of Christian than the Word of God.

4. THE LIGHT THAT DEFEATS THE DARKNESS

The church from its early existence in the first decades suffered from false teachers. Who were they? They were those that preached false doctrine, men that teach strange doctrine that does not harmonize with the teachings of Jesus or the apostles.

See **2 Peter 2:1**.

During this difficulty surges the second universal epistle of Peter, directed to help the believers of his time and all times defend themselves from false teachers, and furthermore, train us to counter attack and reproof the lies that these false teachers teach.

The false teachers are represented by darkness, while the truth of God's Word as a light that overcomes that darkness. See **Ephesians 5:13; Colossians 4:6; 2:8**.

All Christians, but in particular those that preach and teach about Jesus, need to review their lives and determine if they need to move from the tradition of man into His perfect will. The Word of God will never move towards us, for it does not change.

5. A LAMP IN THE DARKNESS

Verse 19. We have arrived at our main point. Peter tells us that readers of the Bible do well in scrutinizing prophecy, in looking attentively at the light in darkness. In other words, there is much value in the study of Eschatology (Prophetic future events), for the Old as the New Testaments shed much light in this area. They are as lamp illuminating in darkness what is to come.

Consider this! Regardless of how much civilization wants to present itself as advanced, progressive, “illuminated” religious, intellectual, socially speaking- it still is characterized as a “dark place.” Humanity lives, for the most part unaware (it would seem alienated) of the future events that will occur.

Where ever we go it is visible that standards are no longer respected; everything is now relative. Almost all is permissible; furthermore, it is encourages and exalts immorality and promiscuity. What is diabolical is promoted as something wholesome that is not offensive. However, all of this wants to present itself as a great illumination of the modern conscious, the Bible describes as a dark place, and as the darkness of this world. **Ephesians 6:12.** Only the Word of God, the most power light can illuminate even the darkest corners of this perverse system allowing us to walk without going astray. See **Psalms 119:105.**

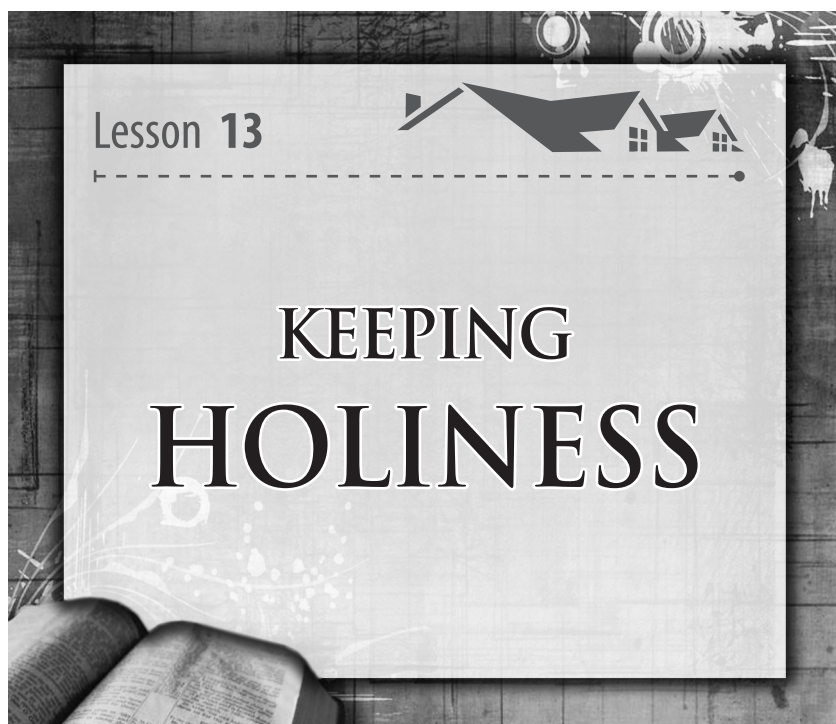
6. CONCLUSION

Peter tells us to look at the lamp until the day dawns, and the morning star rises in your hearts. Who is that morning star? It is Christ, our Lord! In addition, when He returns, he will shine in all of His glory. See **Revelations 22:16.** Until that glorious day comes, we have the word as a lamp, and the Holy Spirit as

combustible oil. Until that day arrives, we will not cease to need that lamp to life a safely.

While we await the coming of the Lord, we should not wander looking for “spiritual experiences”, rather we should walk looking attentively to the prophetic word, which is more secure. The apostle James said that we should look into “the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing” **(1:25)**.

- How is spiritual failure and poor or non-personal Bible study connected?
- What steps will you take to be more attentive of the prophetic word of God?



Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word “holiness?”

Leviticus 11:44, *For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

“Who is she...?” asked Solomon in **Song of Solomon 6:10**. The answer today is: a church that maintains in holiness.

In the Bible, the root word for “holy” is the Hebrew word “qadhash” that also serves as a root for the word Sanctification. Holiness is to practice purity, to live separate from the world and sin. Sanctification is the process that allows us to be holy in our daily lives. Sanctification is to allow the Holy Spirit to make us more like Jesus in our actions, thoughts, and desires.

Staying in holiness will bring God’s miracles to our lives. It will allow us to conquer those areas that even we have not been able to overcome. Let us consider Israel and the process by which God used in making them walk through the desert (sanctification), arrive at the river Jordan (Renewal), cross the river (Miracles), and enter into the promised land (conquest).

2. HOLY IN OUR WALK

We cannot walk with God without holiness. When God took Israel out of Egypt, He provided them food, clothing, footwear, and everything else they needed. God wanted to conquer the heart of that generation, but they left their hearts in Egypt, in idolatry and paganism. “God removed Israel from Egypt, but He could not take Egypt out of Israel.”

Although they walked through the desert they were not sanctified, and for this reason God had to destroy them completely over four long decades. After our liberation from the slavery of sin we too should walk, but not in just any way, but in constant sanctification. We cannot walk toward what God has for us, while keeping our sight on what we have left behind. See **Luke 17:31-33**.

3. HOLY WHEN WE ARRIVE

A new generation of Hebrews was born in the desert. They grew up hearing the stories of wonders that God had made in or-

der to set them free from slavery in Egypt: The plagues, miracles, plundering, opening of the Red Sea, the column of fire at night, and the cloud during the day, the Ten Commandments written on stone.

Every day and night the Israelites were feed with the Manna that God provided, wondering when they would arrive at the promised land. Time passed by, and Moses died. Joshua is placed in charge of the people, and now they hear him pronounce this order: “*Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you*” **Joshua 3:5**. The excitement overcame the entire camp, they were finally going to enter into the promised land—but, the Lord could only do wonders if they sanctified themselves.

Today, holiness is spoken of less and less in our churches. However, if we want to see God perform wonders in our midst. We must confront the sin in our lives, and be sanctified for Jesus. We should desire to enter into the will of God and live according to His plans, but the key for this is: Sanctification. We need to start where the Bible tells us to start.

See **I Thessalonians 4:3-8**.

Jesus prays for us in this sense (**John 17:16-19**). We also should pray and fast, which will allow us to recognize the difference between serving God according to the flesh and serving Him in the Spirit. See **Hebrews 9:13-14**. Fasting and prayer will help us stay in Christ. If we are in Christ, His blood cleanses us of dead works, enabling us to serve God in true holiness.

If we are going to be useful to God, there cannot be any room for pride in our heart. David cries out, “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me*” (**Psalms 51:10**).

This tells us that we need to sanctify our desires, sanctify in us a right Spirit, sanctify our attitudes, and sanctify our flesh.

Sanctification is the entire congregations responsibility. See **Hebrews 3:12-13**

4. HOLY WHEN WE CROSS OVER

Joshua gave specific orders for the children of Israel to be able to conquer the Promised Land. See **Joshua 3:3-4**. God said that the only thing they needed to do was to watch Him act. They were at the point of seeing wonders that they only had heard about. When the bottom of the priest feet touched the waters of the river Jordan, the waters separated just as the Red Sea had 40 years ago, allowing Israel to cross over on dry land (**Joshua 3:17**).

This is what sanctification produces: Miracles! God wants to take us out of our religious chair, and place us in the camp of His miracles. Too many brethren are on the sideline of what God is doing. Few are standing firmly in the center of God's will.

Would you like things to change in your home? Begin to act like a priest before God. Sanctify yourself, pray, fast, and stand firm in the will of God. Those in your family will see what God is doing in your life, and they will follow you, finding the direction from God for their lives.

Note something of importance: the children of Israel all crossed over in the same place. Today there are many people looking for their own path. It is not time for that, today more than ever before we need to walk together, adopt a common position, take a firm stance against sin, speaking one same thing. We need a spirit of trust, unity, and compassion for each other.

5. CONCLUSION

The “chosen generation” by God to cross the Jordan and conquer the land could only cross after the rebellious and stubborn died in the desert. However, after they crossed something interesting occurred: *“At that time the Lord said to Joshua, “Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time” (Joshua 5:2).* The young generation had not been circumcised. This tells us that they had not been sanctified, and to enter into the Promised Land it was necessary.

Circumcision speaks about the sanctification of the flesh, of cutting dead things, and of renouncing hidden sins. We can look well in public, lifting our hand, giving offerings, praying and fasting, while hiding deadly sin. You and I were sanctified for the first time in baptism, but we need to be sanctified again because as time passes we allow certain sin to hid in our hearts.

God has made us many promises. He did not bring you through the desert to die before you cross the Jordan. Your destiny is on the other side. Your destiny is to conquer. Staying Holy will take you to your destiny. Now is the time to remain Holy so that we can overcome!

- Can you identify an area in your life that needs sanctification?
- What steps will you take to maintain holiness until you conquer?



Icebreaker: What does the following Biblical expression mean to you: “contend earnestly”?

Jude 3, *“Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

We cannot deny that our apostolic faith is being attacked during these last days. Attacks against our doctrine come not

just from outside, but also from inside. Today more than ever, we should heed to the counsel of Jude and contend earnestly for the faith that the saints have received.

2. APOSTASY IN THE LAST DAYS

Our faith was not invented or composed by the thoughts or will of man. The apostle Jude clearly declares that our faith was given to us. Our doctrine is a gift from God to His church. This agrees with what the apostle Paul said, **(2 Peter 1:21)**, in the sense that our doctrine was given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Our doctrine is sound; it does not need changes, or repairs. Just as it was given, is how we should preach it. Our doctrine is as a lion. The lion does not need anyone to defend it. When Jude tells us to contend for the faith, he is exhorting us to preach sound doctrine, just as it was given to us.

The word of the Lord clearly indicates that before the rapture of the church, she (the church) will live through a time of apostasy. See **1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3**. Now we are seeing the fulfillment of the prophecies. The very foundation of our doctrine is being questioned.

- 1) One God.
- 2) Baptism in the Name of Jesus Christ.
- 3) The Baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues.
- 4) Our standards regarding holiness and a separation from sin.

A spirit of rebellion has risen against the spiritual authority established by God. Children are rebelling against their parents. Husbands and wives are breaking their marital vows, and opting to divorce. Church members are rebelling against their pastors, openly disobeying and on occasions even taking them to court. There is murmuring everywhere, criticism and defamation against spiritual authority and their respective families.

See **Jude 4 and 8**.

3. GOD'S JUDGMENT

The apostle Jude reminds us that God will judge these people, and he cites three examples of judgment.

The first judgment is mentioned in **verse 5**. God miraculously saved more than two million people from Egypt. They crossed the Red Sea, and witnessed the signs and wonders of the highest God. Nonetheless, man did not believe in the Lord, but they murmured and rebelled against Moses's spiritual leadership; they died for this reason. God judges those that rebelled against the spiritual authority He had established.

Lets read **verse 6**. Jude then reminds us of God's judgment against the fallen angels, who had been before the presence of God. They united with Satan in his rebellion against the highest God, and were cast out of heaven. The price for their rebellion was God's eternal punishment.

Moving on to **verse 7**. Finally, Jude presents the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which had fallen into homosexual sin. Jude reminds us that God severely punishes immoral sin.

God's judgment comes in three ways:

- (1) It can come suddenly as was in the case of Sodom and Gomorra.
- (2) It can be later as was the case in the fallen angels.
- (3) It can come slowly, as was in the case of the Children of Israel (40 years).

4. DISOBEYING SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

Lets read **Jude 8-13**. Here we find Jude describing how the sin of rebellion develops in the heart of man. Jude presents the rebellion of three Biblical characters: Cain, Balaam, and Korah.

a. Cain. He represents the egotistical man, whom only is concerned with his personal interests. Cain never loved his brother Abel. The first step toward rebellion is a egotistical spirit, that will transform anyone into a despicable person, capable of murdering his or her own brother. Many "Cains" that hate their brother, will rise up, to kill his testimony, the family's name, ministry, and much more.

b. Balaam. In the Old Testament, there are two stories about Balaam: **Numbers 22:21-35** and **31:15-16**. We will focus on the second story. Balaam taught the men of Israel how to sin with pagan women. These women taught the men of Israel to worship pagan gods. The sin of Balaam that the Apostle Jude mentions is to teach your brother how to sin. Teaching someone to sin is a grave sin before God. See **Luke 17:1-2**.

c. Korah. He caused the people of Israel to rebel and divide against Moses and Aaron. For this rebellion 14,600 men of Israel

died that same day. See **Numbers 16:1-3; 19-21; 25-33; 49-50**. Korah openly challenged the spiritual authority that God had established. When the Lord saw this, He ordered Moses and Aaron to distance themselves from the people. This tells us that God recognizes and rejects the divisions that take place among His people. Korah and all his people suffered God's judgment, for He judges against all rebellion against spiritual authority.

5. HOW CAN WE LIVE VICTORIOUS DURING THESE DANGEROUS TIMES?

Lets read **Jude 14-19**. The apostle gives us a warning relating to the things that will take place in the church in the latter days, before the coming of the Lord Jesus. Lets also read **verses 20 and 21**. Jude's counsel gives us the following steps to follow.

(1) Build yourself up on your most holy faith, growing in the knowledge of the Word of God. **(2)** Pray in the Spirit, this is in accordance to God's perfect will. **(3)** Keep yourself in the love of God, keeping us in Him. **(4)** Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is the coming of our Lord for His church that is our great hope.

What of the rest? Lets read **verses 22 and 23**. Here is what is recommended: **(1)** Convince those that doubt. **(2)** Make an effort to save those that are lost. **(3)** Have mercy of those that we cannot help. Finally, Jude gives us words of encouragement and security (**verse 24-25**). If we are faithful, God is powerful enough to keep us from stumbling. When He sees us, He does not see blemish on our clothing, thanks to the power of His blood, we continually sanctified.

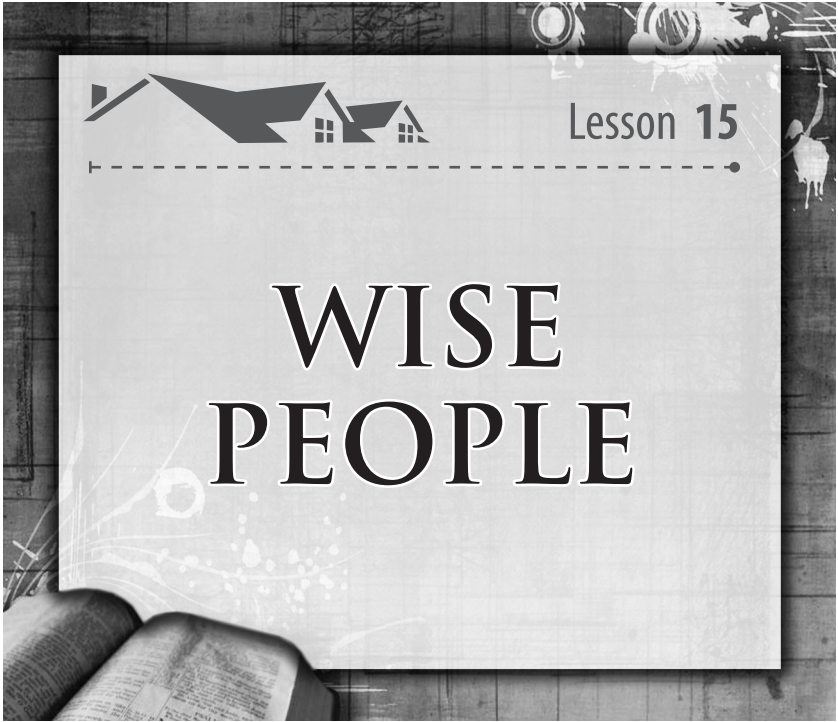
6. CONCLUSION

The time is near. The Lord Jesus Christ is at the doors to take His beloved church. Continue forward, fighting the good battle of faith. At the end of our journey, we will be able to say as the apostle Paul did in **2 Timothy 4:7-8**.

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

Until that moment arrives, continue exalting the power name of the one and only wise God, our savior Jesus Christ, who reigns now and forever. Amen!

- What will you do to take better care of the faith that you have been given?



Icebreaker: What comes to your mind when you hear the word “wisdom?”

Proverbs 4:7, *“Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

Why did Jesus change history? What is the reason for a before Christ, (B.C.) and an after Christ (A.D.) in our calendars and encyclopedias.

From a human perspective, Jesus was not a simple Galilean destitute of money and power. He never used weapons neither did he use technology. Jesus did not travel by plane, and never sent E-mails. Then, how could He in just three years and a half of living a public life change the course of humanity? The answer: Jesus was the possessor of a great deal of wisdom (and continues to do so!). See **Luke 2:40, 46-47**.

John tells us of a Samaritan woman, who after hearing Jesus speak said, “*Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet*” **(4:19)**. Mark comments that the Jews, “were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (1:22). Luke testifies that Jesus’ enemies “could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent” **(20:26)**.

See also **John 7:46**.

2. WHAT IS WISDOM?

Wisdom does not consist of knowing everything, in quick reasoning, or remembering the most. Some of the most successful people in history were not even that intelligent or educated.

Jesus lived a victorious life until the end. He left, but promised that He would be with us until the end of days. He also promised us the victory over this world. The apostle Paul tells us in his epistle to the Romans, that in Christ we are more than conquerors **(Romans 8:37)**.

Therefore, why are there so many difficulties in our lives? Why do we feel unhappy on many occasions? What is the cause of so many conflicts in our home? Do we need more luck? Should we seek out more resources? Or should we network with better peo-

ple? Is it the government's fault? None of this is the reason. What is most probable is that we are lacking wisdom to manage our life.

Solomon established that, *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"* **Proverbs 9:10**. What does it mean by the fear of the Lord? It means to seriously respect Him. It means to submit and live in obedience in His will. This is where wisdom begins. However, wisdom is much more than this.

3. WHEN WISDOM IS LACKING

In our everyday lives, wisdom is to see the world from God's perspective. This is something that is not learned from one day to the next. David prayed to Jehovah, *"So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom"* (**Psalms 90:12**). Therefore, wisdom comes through a slow process.

On one occasion, a young man arrived at a lumberyard to work as a lumberjack. During his first day of labor, he worked hard and as a result, he cut down many trees. On the second day of work, he worked just as hard as the first day-but his production was only half as good. On the third day, he was determined to improve his production, and although he chopped furiously with his axe, his output was even poorer. Seeing the poor production of the young man, the foreman asked him, "son, when was the last time you sharpened your axe?" The young man replied, "Actually I haven't had time to do it, since I have been so busy cutting down trees."

Ecclesiastes 10:10, *"If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; But wisdom brings success."* The New Living Translation (NLT) says, "Using a dull ax requires great strength, so sharpen the blade. That's the value of wisdom; it helps you succeed."

Our axe, our way of thinking, our actions, how we manage our problems becomes dull constantly because of our daily grind and adverse situations. When our axe has lost its sharpness, we need to take it to the Sharpener. Do not continue to beat it when it has been muddled. If we act in this condition, we will most likely hurt others, as well as ourselves. A lumberjack can tell us how difficult it is to control an axe that is not sharp-as it ricochets off the wood.

4. WISDOM FROM ABOVE

The problems of life are easily resolved with wisdom. Every time that we forge this principle and we add strength, what happens is we crush our relationships, pushing people away. When we trying to solve conflicts we should not resort to what Paul calls, “the flesh”, or our human ability. We should turn to wisdom from above.

See **2 Corinthians 10:3**.

Wisdom that comes from above is very different from the one that come from this earth. *“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (James 3:13-17).*

In every situation, Jesus would minister using the wisdom that the Father gave Him. See **John 12:44-50**. The principle that we must understand here is: Dependency in God. Wisdom

from above descends to us when we begin to live depending on God, and not ourselves.

5. ACQUIRING WISDOM

James recommends to ask God for wisdom, when we notice we are lacking it. See **James 1:2-5**. At the beginning of his reign, Solomon accepted his incompetence and asked God for wisdom. According to **2 Chronicles 1:10**. The Lord was pleased with him, and he was granted wisdom and many other blessings (**verse 11-12**). What do we ask for in our prayer?

Lets read **James 1:6-8**. The key in asking for wisdom is to do so with faith. Whomever doubts never gets what they request. Those that are easily discouraged never obtain what they seek, and go through life without purpose, without any lasting or positive results.

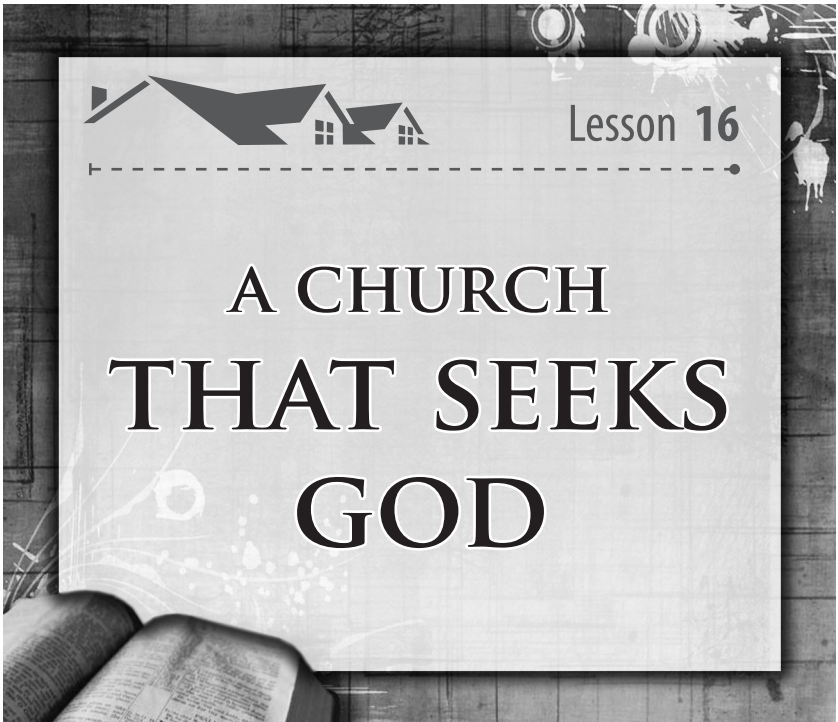
Acquiring wisdom allows us to be humble, sincere and friendly. For this reason, God never gives wisdom to anyone who wants it to boast in it, or to treat others bad. All of the gifts that come down from the Father are for our blessing, and the blessing of those around us.

6. CONCLUSION

Now more than ever, we need wisdom in our homes, work, church, etc. We live in confusing times, where danger abounds. Lets ask the Lord to help us be wise people, for whom He will return to take away very soon. Lets pray that when He does return, He will find us: living wisely, serving Him with intelligence, managing our resources with prudence, and handling our problems with maturity.

Every morning, before we begin any activity, let's ask God for wisdom. We should not take one step without requesting it. For with it we will be able to live triumphantly, just as Jesus lived. We will feel more affection from those near us like our families, friends, and brethren. We will be able to develop a new ability of positive influence in others, and reach new levels of understanding that we now do not know.

- How important is it to become a wise person?
- Who wants to pray for wisdom from above today?



Icebreaker: What do you associate with the Biblical idea of a “hardened heart?”

Hebrews 11:6, *“But 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 diligently seek Him.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

If you have been a Christian for some time your need for God has not decreased over time, but on the contrary, it has increased. In our desperate early days, we would cry out to

the Lord because we did not know entirely what we were doing. However, with time we acquired some level of confidence and safety.

We have learned many things; we have seen and have heard many things. We also accumulated a great deal of experience and wisdom. For this reason our need for God is greater now than ever before. Our vulnerability has increased over the years, and as we continue in our walk, we need to seek more of God. We will better understand the significance of this by reviewing the life of Asa, the king of Judah.

2. DEMOLITION AS THE FIRST STEP

Asa was Solomon's great grandson. Solomon had strayed from God in his last days. Jeroboam followed as king, then Abijah, Asa's father. These kings allowed idolatry to enter into a nation that was supposed to love and honor God. When Asa ascended to the throne, the spiritual condition of Israel was terrible, and the stability of the country was in grave danger.

The young king Asa was not prepared to be a spiritual leader. We do not know who influenced him to seek the Lord, but the Bible tells us that at the beginning of his reign, Asa did what was good and right before the eyes of God. See **2 Chronicles 14:2-4**.

The first years of his reign are characterized by a national general cleansing. In response, the blessing of God was poured over the king and his people. The first step in any spiritual awakening is demolition. In order to advance our search of God, it is necessary to first demolish the altars of rationalization and excuses in our life.

We wonder if a government employee told him, “pardon me king Asa, but your father built that altar. Are you sure you want to demolish it?” Asa would have responded, “God never will never bless us with this Canaanite idolatry in place. This is not for us, therefore, bring it down now!”

The methodology of many religious leaders today is to reclaim the blessings of God without regard how they live. Nevertheless, what does the Bible teach us? Simply that sin contrite the Holy Spirit, and it diminishes God’s power in our ministries.

Every time we become hungry to know the Lord, the Holy Spirit places in our hands the necessary tools to begin the cleansing process. Members of the congregation begin to understand the damage that gossip causes, husbands and wives begin to address old deeply rooted problems in their marriage, youth and adult begin to filter their preferences on the internet, television, music, etc...

3. GOD RECOMPENSES THOSE THAT SEEK HIM

Seeking the Lord with all our hearts does not make us exempt from the attacks of the enemy. After 10 years of peace, the territory of Judah was suddenly invaded by an enormous Ethiopian army.

The fact that we are serving God does not guarantee us an easy path the rest of our lives. However, in the moments of conflict, those that seek God have built a deposit of faith that is ready to confront new problems, and they know exactly what they should do. See **2 Chronicles 14:11**.

Asa's faith was not a cheap version of faith. He did not panic, because even before the attack, for a decade Judah had been calling out to God. Now they only asked Him to respond, which He did wiping out the Ethiopian army. The superior amount of soldiers did the Ethiopians no good. Verse 14 tells us "the fear of the Lord came upon them."

4. RENEWING THE COVENANT WITH GOD

The more we seek God; we will see our need for Him increase. Asa, encouraged by this experience, began to look around, and discovered things he had not noticed before. The altar of the temple of Jehovah was in need of repairs, and immediately he orders its repair. He called a solemn assembly to the entire nation, and he renewed a covenant with God.

Later he was surprised to discover that his mother Maachah, still had an image of Asherah **(15:16)**. Asa destroyed the image and removed his mother as queen mother. Many could have said, "Can you believe that king Asa has the edacity to treat his own mother like this?" Perhaps other would have said, "This king really has decided to please God."

It is because Asa was committed to whom deserved all his loyalty. It was not his nation, his culture, his tradition, not even his own family-it was God. What a wonderful example of consecration unto the Lord!

5. A MONUMENTAL ERROR

At some point as in the case of some pastors, leaders and congregations, for some unknown reason they stop feeling the

need to seek the Lord. After 25 years, Asa stopped seeking the Lord. Perhaps it was because of the many worries of life, or maybe he felt he had reached the peak of spirituality. Nevertheless, the Bible teaches that it is not possible to stay in the same spiritual position. Either we are moving closer to God or we are moving away from Him.

One day Asa received notice that a small army from one of his neighbors to the north was building a blockade around his territory (**chapter 16**). This opponent was not even a fourth of the size of the Ethiopian army. What would Asa do now? How will he respond? What happens next could be straight out of a movie. Read **2 Chronicles 16:2-3**.

Asa's plan worked. The enemy retreated and Asa must have been telling himself, "I am so smart!" The people also realized they had a very cunning leader. Many today think the same way: Anything that produces "result" is good. If there is a tactic that fills the room and multiplies the fund, then it must be "of the Lord." Those that think in this manner will suffer a harsh reality when they stand before the Lord.

The eyes of God are upon us, seeking for someone that is committed to pleasing Him. The days are passing by and God is looking...Is there anyone that is willing to call upon the name of the Lord more than anything else? Is there still someone who is interested in receiving His approval and blessing? See **John 7:37-38**.

6. HARDENED HEART

The court officials still were congratulating each other for the brilliant maneuver they just pulled off, when the prophet Hanani started to speak (**16:7-9**).

If only Asa would have dropped to his knees and pleaded with the Lord to forgive him for moving away. If only his heart would have melted in confession. However, the opposite occurred. Asa become angry against the prophet Hanani, and put him in jail. To make matters worse he oppressed some of the people (**verse 10**). Those that stop seeking God become hardened and arrogant. A prophetic reprimand only irritates them more.

Lets compare Asa with David his great-great-grandfather-who also erred after being an experienced king. The mistakes that David made were even worse: He went to bed with another man's woman, had her husband killed, than had a census which he knew God had prohibited. However, when David was rebuked by the prophet, we did not become angry, but humbly recognized his error. **Psalm 51** is a register of that confession.

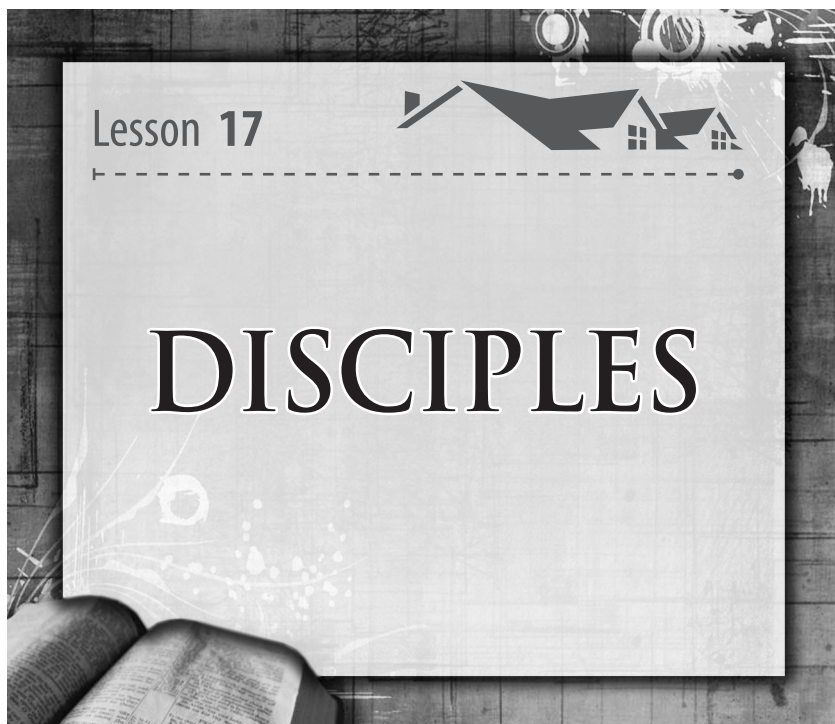
It is not that people whose heart is set on seeking God don't make mistakes, but the condition of their heart that determines how they respond to correction. This will affect how God treated them in the future. If Asa had become broken and contrite before the Lord as David, perhaps his end would be different. However, since he did not, the picture of his last days was an unfortunate one. Two years before he died, he suffered from a painful problem on his feet. See **2 Chronicles 16:12-13**.

7. CONCLUSION

Some believed that the sickness on his feet was gout. If this was the case, walking through the palace in those years must have been very painful. There are people that like Asa, suffer from a terrible disease; they do not walk upright before the Lord. They can remain with a hardened heart and say, "Don't tell me my spiritual life needs correction, I'm fine." Or they can recognize the truth.

We need to get closer to God with a broken and contrite spirit; humble, removing the debris of life and turn back to leaning on Him. Our future is determined by this: Our seeking of God. The blessings that we receive and then pass on to others are all contingent on this truth: God rewards those that seek Him.

- Who desires to seek more of God?
- What will you do in the next few weeks to get closer to Him?



Icebreaker: Is being a believer and disciple of Jesus the same thing?

I. INTRODUCTION

Lets read **I Samuel 1:21-28**. From here we will emphasize on the word “wean.” According to the New Oxford American Dictionary “wean” means: *accustom (an infant or other young mammal) to food other than its mother’s milk. It is the process of separating a child from the attention and comforts in their home in order that they might fend for themselves.*

Regrettably, there are brethren that form part of the congregation that do not understand the concept of discipleship and commitment in life. In the church, there is an abundance of frustrated spectators that lack depth in their Christian walk.

Speaking of discipleship, responsibility, and commitment is never popular. If we were to offer a course on prophecy, many would come. If we were to give a study on the life of prayer, or the importance of good relationships, or how to invest your resources in the work of the Lord, those interested would be few.

2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DISCIPLESHIP

To speak of discipleship is to speak of transferring life. In the Bible, we find in the life and words of Jesus a growing concern for commitment and dedication. Jesus speaks of a process, not an event, which involves a variety of spiritual subjects and disciplines. See **Matthew 16:24**

Experts in discipleship have given different definitions of the same: Lets observe two:

(1) Campus Crusade for Christ defines it as the educational-spiritual process that produces obedient men for Christ, as a first step. As a process, it is infinite. Its ultimate goal is for men to think and live like Christ.

(2) Keith Phillips in his book “The making of disciples” says that discipleship is the relationship between the teacher and student based on the model of Christ and His disciples. In this model, the teacher reproduces in the students the fullness of a life in Christ, in such a manner that the disciple is trained to empower and teach others.

An apostolic definition: Discipleship is a Christian's permanent personal commitment to obey Christ. It is the permanent Lordship of Jesus Christ in the believer. In other words, it is the complete submission of a Christian to the Word of God under the control and direction of the Holy Spirit.

In the following series of lessons, "Seven aspects of Christ Lordship" we will delve into this definition.

3. BELIEVER OR DISCIPLE?

Lets read **Ephesians 4:13**.

The disciple of Christ is a believer that reflects a constant spiritual growth. As a result, he or she has a prayer life, is effective in evangelism, and the formation of other disciples. This is achieved because they are under the direction, control, and power of the Holy Spirit. Some statements that have helped us understand more in depth the concept of being an authentic disciple of Christ are:

- a. A believer is won; a disciple is made. The people that respond favorably to an evangelistic invitation cannot be counted as disciples, but as people that are interested in know more about God. Billy Graham said, "It takes 10 percent effort to win a person for Christ, but 90 percent keeping them in the faith."
- b. Believers expect bread and fish; a disciple is a fisherman. There are believers whose primary task is to consume what the kingdom has to offer. They attend church, without making members, or seldom using all they have for God's service. They are spectators that need to be converted into authentic fishers of men and women.

- c. The believer struggles to believe, while the disciple in reproducing. The common believer does not think in others, but in themselves. They say, “What can I get out of this situation?” or “How will this benefit me?” They are centered on themselves, never considering others. The true disciple reproduces themselves, following the philosophy of circulation, which consist in sharing with others what they have received.
- d. The believer murmurs and complains; the disciple obeys and denies self. I am convinced that one of the sins that have caused the most damage in the church is murmuring, and gossip. Few brethren have come to understand the seriousness of this sinful practice. We should make a pact with God to not talk about anyone who is not present to defend him or herself. If we have a complaint against someone, we should follow the Biblical pattern to confront him or her and reconcile. One never puts ones Sunday best clothes on over their dirty work attire. The believer that is transformed into a disciple “unrobes himself or herself” of this sinful practice before putting on Christ.
- e. The believer can fall into a routine; the disciple is revolutionary. One of the greatest dangers of the believer in Christ Jesus is to stay stuck in the triumphs of yesterday. Life is characterized by the road, and in particular the life in Christ. Regrettably, there are believers, like entire churches, that fall into what is called “Christian Dementia” which is simply made up of doing the same things expecting different results. A committed, and authentic Christian seeks change, progress, and to conquer areas that they have not overcome. He or she cannot just live with yesterday’s victories.

- f.** The believer waits to be assigned tasks; the disciple is applied to taking on responsibilities. Many say, “Pastor, when you need me, just call me” and then they depart without the least intention to participate. They are at ease in “making themselves available” for God. The truth is that the disciple does three things: First they identify a need, Second, they use the gifts that God has given them to fill that need; Third, continue to train to give God the service He deserves. The disciple knows they do not need ecclesiastical “positions” to serve God, but rather seek to serve Him in love and excellence.
- g.** The believer likes comfort and safeness; the disciple offers a living sacrifice. If we were not so dedicated to our comfort, by now we would have reached many people for Christ. The apostle Paul’s demand was overwhelming: To present our bodies a living sacrifice. Paul had learned how to deny himself.
- h.** The believer seeks to be encouraged; the disciple seeks to encourage. A concept that should capture our attention from the life of a Christian is enthusiasm, which is nothing else but having God inside them. Unfortunately, churches that are filled with individuals that seek experiences to be encouraged, and or be filled etc... However, when the church does not fill those expectations, they begin to look for another church “to fill them.” Then when that new church no longer can fill their desires, they seek another, or turn to the world. However, God has formed an exceptional type of person: a disciple. This is a disciple that can encourage him or herself because; they experience abundant living when they received Christ Jesus. Everyday is a fountain of essential joy, and peace that does not depend on special circumstances.

- i. The believer gives part of his or her earnings; while the disciple gives his or her life. One of the most serious problems in church is dualism. On one side, God is telling us how to be spiritual, while on the other; they remain distant from becoming what He wants. This duality is seen when Christians speak of the day of the Lord, forgetting that every day is the Lords. They say that the tithe belongs to the Lord, when in reality 100% belongs to God. They say that the temple is the house of God, forgetting that every believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Yes, God desires for each one of us to surrender completely to Him.
- j. The believer depends in large part from the milk of his or her mother (the church, the pastor, the small group leader, etc....) while the disciple had been weaned to serve. Many immature believers wait for others to become responsible for their spiritual growth, and when they do not see clear evidence of their faith in Christ Jesus, immediately deflect responsibility to others for their poor performance. On the contrary, the disciple is committed, seeking their own nourishment, ready to serve others.

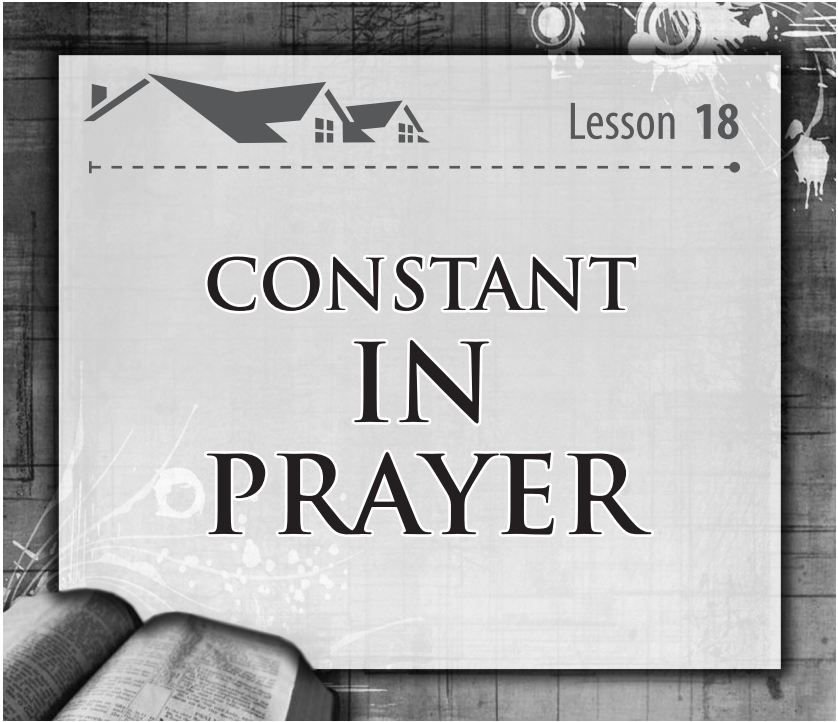
4. CONCLUSION

Lets go over **I Samuel 1:23-28**. Hannah gave her child to the priest and then worshipped God, whom had granted her what she had requested. As always, God was in charge of the events and He used Hannah's infertility for a great purpose. If Hannah had any prior children, she would not have left him in the temple in Shiloh. This child would not have been raised there to be a great man of God- the prophet Samuel.

Our need, problem, or difficulty all has a purpose in the mind of God. He wants to wean us as soon as possible; for us to spiritu-

ally grow and mature that we may serve in His house. God wants us to be much more than believers, **“His true disciples!”**

Make a list of all the different things you can do to become a real disciple of Jesus.



Icebreaker: Today's Christians dedicate more time to prayer than those from the early church? True or False?

Lets read the interesting story that is found in **Daniel chapter 6.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Prayer is to the Christian life what blood is to the human body: without it, there is no spiritual life. Prayer is the telephone number to speak directly with God; it is the free pass to ascend without the need of a ladder to the throne of God Himself.

However, the reality is that the church of today has neglected to seek the Lord. There is little prayer, and therefore, little passion. Today's Christian does not give prayer the importance that the early church gave it, and that it truly deserves.

2. PRAYER IN THE BIBLE

According to the Word of God, prayer is vital. We live if we pray, or die if we do not. The Bible teaches us much about prayer. It tells us that we should pray:

- a. At all times: *“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints”* **(Ephesians 6:18)**.
- b. Without ceasing **(1 Thessalonians 5:17)**.
- c. To not fall into temptation: *“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* **(Mark 14:38)**.
- d. Effectively: *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much”* **(James 5:16)**.

The Bible contains a long list of examples of answered prayers.

Abraham prayed and God granted his petitions. Moses prayed and the Red Sea was opened. Joshua prayed and the sun stood still. David prayed and God destroyed his enemies. Elijah prayed and God sent fire from heaven. Paul prayed and the walls of the prison shook. Daniel prayed and God closed the mouth of lions...

3. DANIEL, THE PRAYER PROPHET

Lets read once again, **Daniel 6:7,9**. Darius, king of the Medio-Persian Empire, had signed the written decree forbidding prayer for 30 days in his entire kingdom. This prohibition was meant to steal God of the tribute that He received from man, and steal from man the counsel he received from God. Regardless of how powerful they were, which earthly king had the right to do such a thing?

The rash decree intended to deprive the prophet Daniel from 90 opportunities of prayer. *“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days” (Daniel 6:10).*

How good it is to designate time to prayer!

Daniel could not live one day without God, how could he comply with the royal decree, and spend 30 days without prayer? It is troubling to think that today there is no decree prohibiting prayer, yet many Christians have abandoned it for the least of things. They have neglected to humble their hearts in the presence of God, and forsook to present their gratitude towards Him.

Although Daniel was filled with many demands, he always prayed. He did not consider those demands to make him exempt from practicing his daily devotions. Daniel prayed by bending his knees and presenting his thanksgiving to God everyday. That maintained him ready for whatever afflictions God would allow in his life. When that affliction finally did arrive, God honored him by closing the lion's mouths:

“My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.” Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God” (Daniel 6:22-23).

How unforgivable are those that having much or little to do in this world, never find the time to present their souls before the faithful Creator! Whoever lives without praying, truly casts aside his or her soul, and in the end will be found wanting. Furthermore, when the lions arrive in their lives, nothing can be done to close their mouths.

“And the king gave the command, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions—them, their children, and their wives; and the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den” (Daniel 6:24).

4. HOW TO PRAY IN ONE HOUR

In this following section, we will present twelve steps in prayer that will truly help elevate the quantity of our daily prayer, and the quality of our devotionals. The twelve steps are:

- (1) Praise.** *“Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Psalm 141:2).* Praise is a sacrifice; it is vocal celebration of God’s nature and virtues. **Hebrews 13:5.** Prayer is the beginning of praise! **Psalm 63:3**
- (2) Forgive.** We should be careful to forgive our debtors. Jesus says that if we want to be forgiven for our sins and faults,

we need to be willing to forgive others. *“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11:25).*

- (3) Confess.** Do not attempt to pray without confessing. A person that does not want to confess will never know the joy of prayer: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24).*
- (4) Ask.** *“Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:2-3).* Jesus desires that we ask.
- (5) Intercede.** There are any people surrounding us with distressing needs. To intercede for brethren and the lost is the most intense dimension of prayer: *“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18).*
- (6) Read the Word.** When we read the Bible, new possibilities present themselves. Although our time to prayer should not become a study time, a brief moment reading scripture in an excellent way to enrich prayer.
- (7) Meditate.** When one meditates on God, ones mind becomes active. During meditation, we consider the spiritual lessons from the Word and Holy Spirit.
- (8) Give thanks.** Although giving thanks should be spread throughout the entire time of prayer, we should separate a special time to thank God aloud for all the things He has done in our lives.

(9) Pray the Word. First there was a brief reading of the Word, now “Pray the Word”; in other words incorporate scripture directly into your prayer.

(10) Sing. An important aspect of prayer is to sing “new songs” to the Lord. Singing renews and comforts our soul. A new song in the Holy Spirit is a very exciting time during prayer.

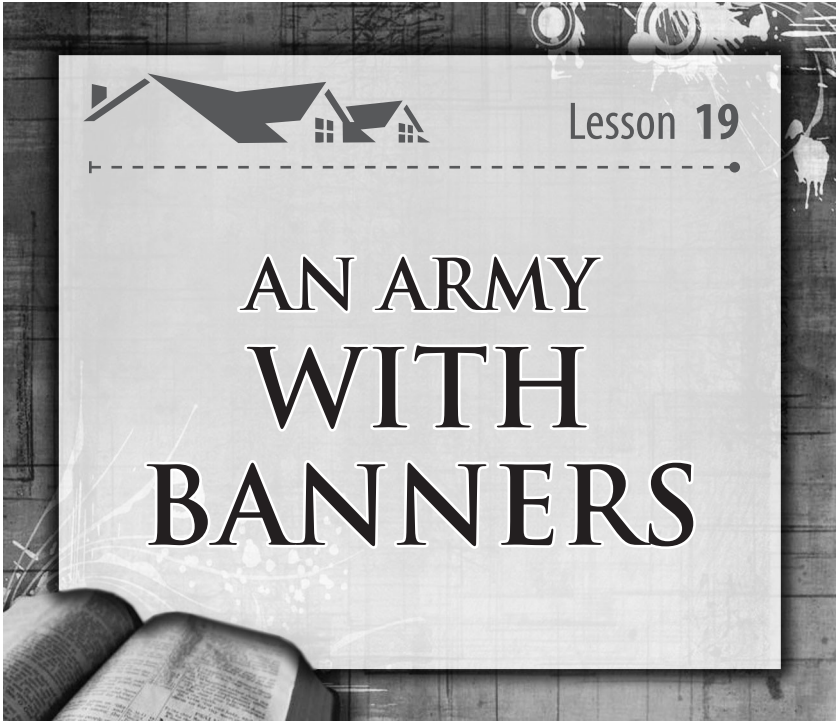
(11) Listen. We should establish good listening habits in our prayers. When we listen, we receive direct orders from the Spirit of God. May our prayer always include a time to listen.

(12) Praise. We then enter through the door of praise and conclude every session of prayer with the same- exalting the nature of God: “*For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen*” **(Matthew 6:13).**

5. CONCLUSION

Do not feel restricted with the method of prayer proposed in this lesson. Use these twelve steps in prayer as an outline only. Do not worry; don't think you have to dedicate five minutes to each step. You can use more time in some steps or less. For example, intercession rarely can be done in just five minutes. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead you at all times.

- How consistent do you believe your personal prayer life is?
- Do you believe your personal devotion can improve?
- What steps would you take to achieve this?



Icebreaker:

Have you ever heard of the term, “Spiritual Warfare?” Say in a few words what you know about the topic.

Song of Solomon 6:10: *“Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?”*

I. INTRODUCTION

As we arrive at the end of this series, we return to our key verse, which speaks to us about “An army with banners.”

When young people enlist in the army, their first stop is boot camp. This is the place where they receive intensive training directed to take them from a civilian life to a military one. Without boot camp, the soldiers would never win a battle much less a war.

The main purpose of this instruction is to shape the soldier's character that they might be able to face the difficult situations in combat. Part of this training is realized through exhausting physical disciplines, which develop the soldier's muscles and frayed nerves.

Another aspect of this training that perhaps is more important, which is the psychological preparation. This is necessary to ensure that each soldier buys into the army's mission; it also adds courage and self-discipline. Additionally, it makes certain each soldier is entirely prepared to submit to authority and obey direct orders without question.

2. SPIRITUAL BOOT CAMP

This concept of boot camp also applies to the Christians that engage in spiritual warfare. Many believers want to participate in the action without first submitting to the discipline that equips a soldier for combat. This is why they are exposed to serious spiritual attacks running the risk of discrediting the body of Christ.

Spiritual warfare is an action that is integrated by two simultaneous movements: One upward and the other outward. It deals first with God, the one we pray to, then with our adversary, against whom we pray. We don't pray to convince God, but to submit our strength to His, and against our enemy.

We do not have any power to overcome the devil. See **Zechariah 4:6**. It is very dangerous to try to advance outward, if we have not moved enough upward; that is without spiritual preparation.

Lets read **James 4:7-8**, Here we find three basic lessons for spiritual warfare. “*Submit to God*” – Upward. “*Resist the devil*”- outward. This last one can only be successful is: **(1)** We submit to God, **(2)** If we approach Him, and **(3)** We cleanse our hands and purify our hearts.

3. SUBMIT TO GOD

There are many brethren that were raised in dysfunctional homes that did not learn the significance of having a loving father to guide and provide for his family. Many have a difficult time identifying with the commandment, “Honor your father and your mother” and with the admonition in **Ephesians 6:1**, because in their home they did not have an example of it.

Those that never submitted voluntarily to a natural father, struggle with regularity to submit to their Father that is in heaven. They seek God so that He will love them, care for them, forgive, and heal them; however, they regress before His demands for obedience and commitment. For them, the normal attitude is rebellion and not loyalty. They never have accepted the idea that Jesus is their Lord.

Brethren that are not willing to totally obey God are like soldiers that want to fight a battle while failing to fulfill their superior’s orders. The reality is that there is no separation between loving God and submitting to Him. See **1 Juan 2:3; 5:3**. Submitting to God is the first lesson in Spiritual boot camp.

4. APPROACH GOD

The second lesson refers to our personal prayer life. Prayer is the most valuable thing in spiritual warfare. It is the barometer that measures the quality of our relationship with Jesus. Only in a close relationship with Him, can we hear His voice, know His will, and understand His heart. See **John 5:19**. Only with an intense prayer can we experience forgiveness, renewal, and power for a righteous life.

However, getting close to God requires time. We should set aside specific time to pray. Many people do not dedicate time to pray, because they do not enjoy it. However, for them there always is something more urgent to do before praying. There time to pray is scarce, because their priorities are other activities.

Some even think that prayer is a difficult labor. They forget that the essence of prayer is an intimate relationship with God. This would be like a husband saying: "Spending time with my wife is a difficult task." This would be an insult to her. How do you think God feels about the "It's difficult to pray" attitude?

5. FOUR HELPFUL HINTS TO ENJOY PRAYER

- a. The place.** Find a comfortable and tranquil place and create it into your regular place of prayer. Being in a pleasant and well-known environment, will help enter more quickly into communion with God.

- b. The Time.** A reasonable daily goal for prayer is one hour. However, if this seems too difficult, try starting with five minutes and then increase to 10 minutes, until you reach your goal. Do not worry too much that from time to time you will find yourself dreaming awake. Investing time will produce soon bring quality.
- c. Attitude.** Concentrate on your personal relationship with God. Prayer is a conversation, a union, two interwoven personalities. Waiting on the Lord is a spiritual practice in that after you speak to God, He will speak to you.
- d. The format.** Use the 12 steps of prayer that were presented in the previous lesson.

6. CLEANSE YOUR HANDS AND PURIFY YOUR HEARTS

Lets review **James 4:8**.

Here we find a calling to holiness. The cleansing of hands refers to what we do and the purification of the heart refers to what you think and feel. Holiness is fundamental for spiritual warfare. A soldier of Jesus lacking holiness is like a combat pilot flying blind!

The word “holiness” comes from the Greek term “hagiasmon” which means “set apart.” God wants us to live for Him; this is sanctification. Holiness is to love Jesus, and do all that He desires. Read the epistles, Ephesians, Colossians, and Galatians often, to find many of the holiness guidelines to follow.

Can any Christian can be holy? The answer is yes. Every Christian is holy. Can someone be holy enough? This time the answer is no. No Christian is holy enough. As a born-again Christian, you can say with tranquility “I am holy” however you can never say, “I am holy enough.”

According to John “*Whoever abides in Him does not sin*” (**1 John 3:6**). This means that we no longer practice sin as a life-style, and we now stand against sin. However, this does not mean that we are perfect. In fact, we sin and would do well to recognize this. **1 John 1:8**. This is why we should daily pray, “*Forgive us our debts.*”

Although, we can never be holy enough, we need to increase in holiness, for example: we should be more holy than last year; and should plan to five years from now to be even more holy. However, beware not to call in the temptation of the Galatians, who had identified certain external actions as visual proof of reaching holiness, or the fullness of the Spirit.

Reaching certain external levels does not use Biblical criteria to measure holiness. Internal holiness (holiness of the heart) is clearly expressed by Jesus to the Pharisees in **Matthew 6**. What good are external standards? To detect the absence of holiness. If we use the name of the Lord in vain, if we dress immorally, if we consume alcohol, or have sexual relations outside of marriage- to give a few examples, obviously we are not holy.

External standards also helps as evidence of maturity, which allow us establish when someone is ready for service in the work of the Lord. Study the letters from Paul to Titus, and Timothy to learn how our good actions and testimony are necessary in order for us to hold a place of leadership.

7. PRINCIPLES FOR SPIRITUAL WARFARE

- a. Have a good (not perfect) relationship with God. This means having a life of personal prayer and being full of the Holy Spirit. For your heart to desire more God more intimately pleasing Him in everything.
- b. Confess all your known sins. Do not try to bind a principality or evil power with sin in your life, for you will be surely embarrassed. Use as a guide the list of “works of the flesh” found in **Galatians 5:19-21**.

Look for other lists in the Bible.

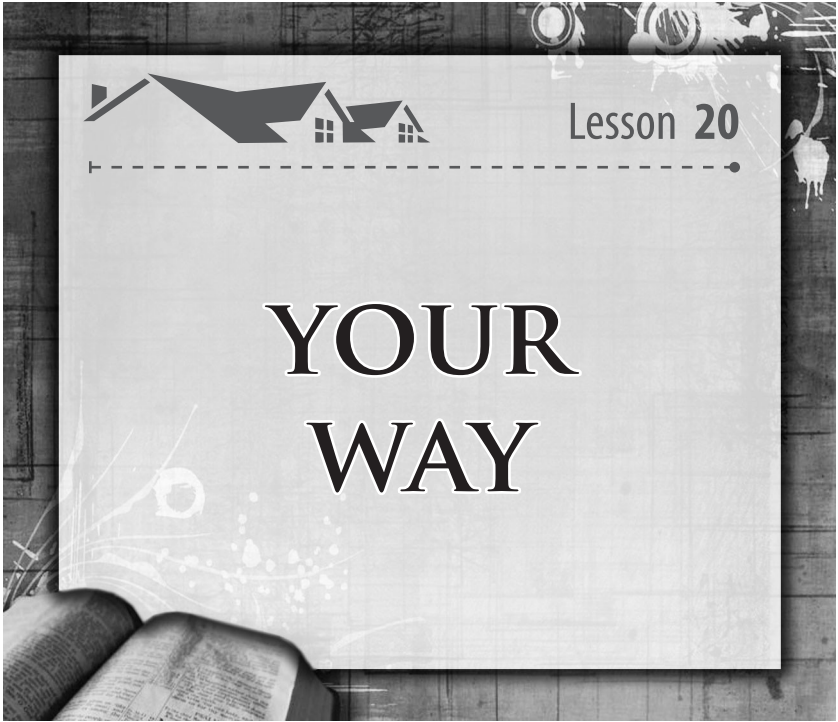
- c. Identify patterns of persistent sins. If there is a certain sin manifesting continuously in your life, we are spiritually sick and need healing. If you had a bladder infection or diabetes, you would be seeking medical help. Find spiritual help before you enter into any type of ministry, especially if you will be participating in spiritual warfare.
- d. Allow others to read your spiritual barometer. If you keep everything to yourself, you have no way of validating the accuracy of your auto evaluations. Connect with two or three brethren whose spirituality you respect, and whom you know well enough to be open up with.
- e. Be especially strict with yourself. The higher God calls you in leadership, the higher your level of holiness should be. Some levels of ministry require considerably above average spiritual requirements.

8. CONCLUSION

The church should not function just as a hospital for the wounded in battle, but also, as a barrack, that trains its soldiers, a place of spiritual conditioning. Let us be filled with the Holy Spirit. Lets be His witnesses until the ends of the earth. Let us be the church of **Song of Solomon 6:10**.

An army with banners!

- How do you plan to apply **James 4:7-8** in your life?



Ice Breaker:

Have you ever lost your way, as you looked for an address? Share your experience.

Proverbs 3:6, *“In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

Is this the will of God, or not? This is a question you will have to ask yourself on more than one occasion. The good news

we bring you today is that we can develop an ear to recognize the voice of God, and the discernment to understand His will. In this manner, we begin our next series, “Seven Aspects of Christ’s Lordship.” Focusing in first place in our way, that is, the manner in that we live, and the way we submit our decisions to our Lord Jesus’ will.

2. GOD CHANGES US

Let us read **chapter 22** from the book of **Numbers**.

This is the story of the prophet Balaam, who was bribed by Balak to curse the Israelites. Balaam consulted with God whether to do so or not. God told him not to, but Balak tempted Balaam again, offering him more money. Therefore, Balaam returned to pray and ask God for his permission to curse Israel.

The first advice is:

Be careful not to be driven by money! Regardless how much money is on the table, God does not change His way of thinking.

Instead of fulfilling God’s will, Balaam was trying to do was he pleased. Balaam reminds us of the type of people that make decisions without the consent of God, Christians who try to obtain God’s approval in their decisions after God has advised otherwise.

We too at times have heard the God tell us, “it is a bad idea to go there” or “that relationship is not in your best interest, I have something better for you” or “don’t buy that, you don’t need it.” However, we turn back to Him trying to change His mind, while we forget that He said, “For I am the Lord, I do not change...” **Malachi 3:6**.

3. Asking God

We frequently forget to ask God how He feels concerning our decisions. According to **Proverbs 3:6**, it is our role in this relationship to recognize God in all our ways, acknowledge Him in all your decisions. His role is to guide us, and God truly knows how to do so! For this reason we should always consult Him before we make any decisions. When He responds, we should submit to His will.

As a prophet, Balaam knew this, and yet he was persistent towards God for permission to go where he wanted. Finally God allows him to go, but it was as if He was saying, “Go Balaam, since you so greatly desire it, but you will go against my will, and it will not fair well for you.” Here we find a great truth: If we insist in something without God’s approval, perhaps we may have it our way, but we will walk down a painful road. *“Good understanding gains favor, But the way of the unfaithful is hard”* **Proverbs 13:15.**

4. IN DANGER OF DEATH

Balaam rode on his donkey to curse Israel. However, God placed an angel in his way to stop him. Balaam’s donkey saw the angel of the Lord in the middle of the road and he stopped. The prophet could not see him, so he insisted that the donkey move forward. This is what happens with the disobedient, they do not see what they should, and they become so stubborn that reasoning with them is impossible.

Balaam punished the donkey without mercy until God finally supernaturally opened the mouth of the beast so that it could rebuke Balaam for his abusive treatment. This had to be one of

the strangest conversations in history. Can you imagine two donkey's talking to each other? The most astonishing thing was that the four-legged donkey demonstrated more intelligence than the one with two legs.

While Balaam thought is donkey should die, it was trying to save his life, for the angel of the Lord had a drawn sword ready to kill Balaam if he proceeded. How many of us act against God's will, mistreating other's that with good intentions are trying to help us. Youth disrespect their parents. A spouse attacking his or her spouse. A church member rebels against his leader.... Watch Out!

Finally, Balaam was able to see why the donkey wanted to turn back instead of advancing. When we are going in contrary way to God's will, eventually we will discover that God's way is the only way. It is then we must turn back, swallow our pride, and thank those that spoke to us the truth. Read **James 5:19-20**.

5. DISCOVERING THE CORRECT WAY

God has always been faithful in placing in our path people that save us from falling in the abyss. Do we want to be like Balaam, foolish, stubborn, on our high horse, walking to our destruction? Of course not! May God stop us before we complicate our lives even more with a bad decision! We should listen to the divine warnings.

We should never force things to happen. This is like trying to force a puzzle piece in the place it does not belong. It may appear correct but it does not fit. When we try to force things, usually it is an indication that we are not following God's lead.

Before purchasing something, we are very concerned with its price. However, the more relevant question is if God agrees. For if, that item is within the will of God, He will pay for it, not us! Where ever God guides, He provides. Everything that God approves, he blesses. Read **Psalms 23**.

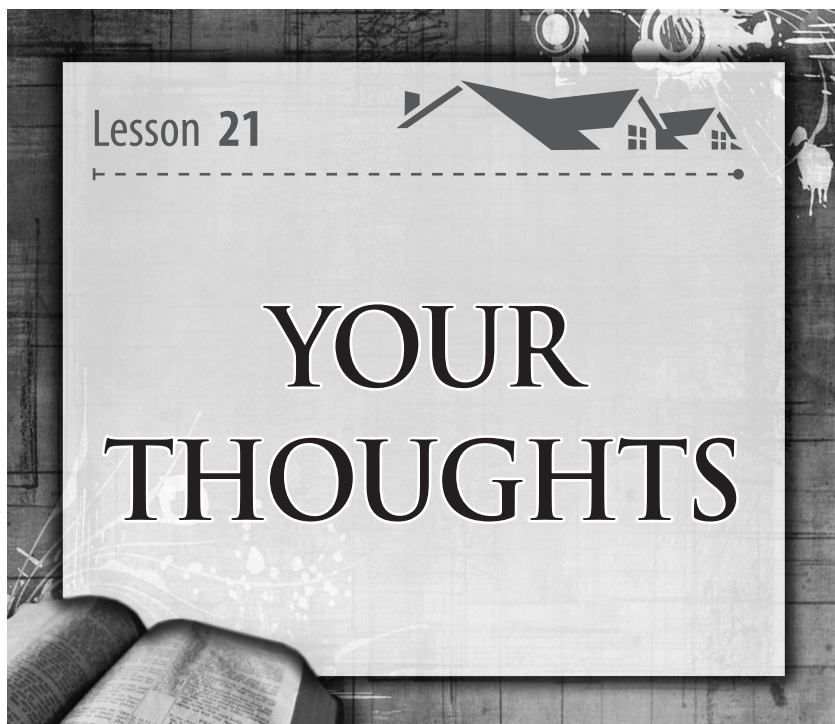
6. CONCLUSION

John 10:14, “*I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.*” **John 10:27**, “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*” How do the sheep know the voice of their shepherd? through their daily communication with him. The problem is that we do not spend enough time with our celestial Shepherd so that we can recognize His voice, when He speaks to us.

Jesus spent a great deal of time alone, seeking the will of the Father. We need to spend more time alone with God, so that He can show us how to walk. “*Be still, and know that I am God...*” **Psalms 46:10**. Let us make plans to be with Him reading His word for it is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Let us be filled with His spirit for this is what leads us to all truth.

“*In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths*” **Proverbs 3:6**.

- Think of an area or aspect in your life that needs to be put under Christ dominion.
- What will you do in the following days, to surrender it under God’s will?



Ice Breaker:

What is the first word that comes to mind when you hear the word, “pessimist”?

“Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” **2 Corinthians 10:5**

I. INTRODUCTION

Our thoughts govern our actions. Negative thoughts produce negative actions while positive thoughts produce positive actions. We are

where we are, and are who we are because of the thoughts that have dominated our minds.

In a world filled with bad news, the Gospel – which means “good news” challenges us to think positively. A research company asked a group of people, what was the best thing that had happened to them in the past five years. Twelve percent of the people that took the survey replied, “Nothing.”

Sadly, this type of people exists. When they see an optimistic person they say:

“They are like that because they lack experience, sooner or later they will see the harsh reality, they will learn.”

If you were to give them to choose from two evils, they will say, “Can I have both?” They are people whose thinking has not been brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

2. A FLAT WORLD

There is a common type of negativism that we will name “Flat World”. A “Flat World” person lives conditioned by their education and past experiences. They will accept something that is not true, as a fact and allow it to lead there thinking.

In 1490, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Aragón hired a royal committee to study Christopher Columbus proposal to find a new shorter route toward the legendary India. The committee was composed of an impressive panel of experts, led by distinguished geographers and scholars. They examined his plan and presented their conclusion to the king and queen: This journey could not take place, it was “totally impossible” they wrote.

Fortunately, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella and most importantly Christopher Columbus ignored the experts. Columbus was able to acquire the funding necessary for his journey, only to struggle and convince his crew to sail “around” the world. Why? Because people at that time believed that the world was flat. The entire world believed one thing, and it was not receptive to other possibilities. Finally, the Niña, la Pinta, and the Santa María set sail and in a few years, they discovered that the world was indeed round.

At the beginning of the 20th century, it was said that aviation experiments were a waste of time and money. Thomas Edison tried to convince Henry Ford to forget his idea of putting a motor in an automobile. The experts told Benjamin Franklin to forget his foolish testing of electricity. Marie Curie was obliged to forget her crazy idea of the radio.

Our assumptions trump our creativity and stop the realization of our true potential. When we are conditioned to unknown truths, and closed to new positive possibilities the following occurs:

- (1) We see what we want to see, and not what we could potentially see.
 - (2) We hear what expect to hear, not what we could hear.
 - (3) We think what we expect to think, not what we could think.
 - (4) What we expect to happen occurs, not what could happen.
- Read **Job 3:25**.

3. NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

One of the saddest stories in the Bible is the failure of Israel to enter the Promised Land. According to **Numbers 13** and **14**, twelve spies were sent to Canaan to bring Moses informa-

tion. They were in the same places, at the same time, but differed in opinion. For Joshua and Caleb the Promised Land was all that God said it was. They said, “We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit” **Numbers 13:27**. While the other ten spies, returned with a negative report (**verses 28-29**). The results of this allow us to understand how harmful negative thinking can be.

- a. Negative thoughts cloud your sight. The ten spies sight had been clouded. When our sight is clouded we are stressed instead of relaxed. A remark often heard between students is: “I hope I don’t get asked that question on the exam, for I know I will not be able to answer it.” They begin the exam, and just as expected they see the question followed by the results they expected. Is this an accident? No, prophecy fulfilled. You responded negatively to the question, and declared your fear responding accordingly. The next time you are studying for an exam say, “If there is ever a moment when I will remember the answer to this question, it will be while I take this exam.”
- b. Negative thoughts limit God (**verse 3**). Here we see an example of how a negative report can limit God. Without God it will always be difficult, if not to say impossible. Murphy’s Law states, “Nothing is as easy as it appears; everything takes longer than you imagined; if anything can go wrong-it will and at the worst moment.” Let’s change that to, “Nothing is as difficult as it seems, everything is more gratifying than I expected, If anything can go right-it will and at the best possible moment.” Jesus said, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (**Matthew 11:29-30**). Paul proclaimed, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” **Philippians 4:13**.

- c. Negative thoughts place everything out of proportion (**verses 32-33**). Here we see how the spies continued exaggerating. Some people treat a leaking roof, as if it were a hurricane. Everything is a difficult task. They cannot find a solution for every problem, only a problem for every solution. Do not continue to tell God has great your problem is, begin telling your problem how great your God is.
- d. Negative thoughts are contagious. In **Numbers 14:1-4** the negativism reaches its full potential in that it spreads to all the people. Israel even desires death in the desert. Let us think, what is it that we are propagating to others? Has our conversation changed someone else's attitude? How has it changed it? Are we are good or bad influence?
- e. Negative thoughts hinder others. In **Numbers 14:7-10**, Caleb and Joshua tear their clothes (a sign of desperation) and spoke to the congregation of Israel so that they would not be afraid- but the multitude considered stoning them. Those are "flat world" people. In church, in homes, in jobs, and in every other place there are people whose thinking has not been submitted under Christ lordship. How do we know this? Because they arrive with stones in their hands, ready to through them.

4. A CHANGE OF "POLES"

Can you pass from the "flat world" to the round one? How can we become positive people? Paul offers us an excellent recipe to achieve this: *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these*

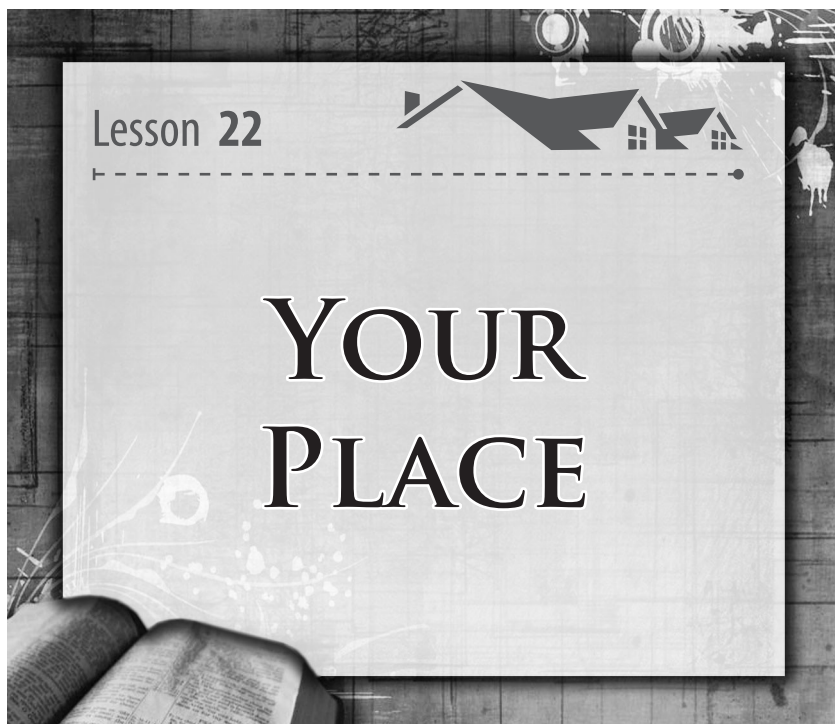
things” (**Philippians 4:8**). From this scripture, we obtain seven steps that can take us from a negative pole, to a positive pole.

- a. Identify and question thoughts in you that are from the “flat world.”
- b. Analyze, what is the source of those thoughts?
- c. Reject any negative affirmation from negative people.
- d. Find positive people that can help you.
- e. Read your Bible, in particular the book of Psalms.
- f. Be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit through prayer.
- g. Praise and give thanks to God at all times.

5. CONCLUSION

The people that are positive thinkers make the difference in every place and circumstance. Read **Numbers 14:30**. A “flat world” mind allows us to sleep for Him. A “round world” mind keeps revolving around Him. Let us come out of negativity, and allow Jesus to govern our thoughts.

- Lets ask ourselves: Are we governed with positive or negative thoughts?



Ice Breaker:

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the expression, “out of place?”

Genesis 3:9, *“Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?”*”

INTRODUCTION

Being in the right place at the right time is crucial in order to please God. Before creating Adam, God prepared a place: the

Garden of Eden. Before giving Adam a wife, He gave him work, a job. This means that before He blesses us, the Lord prepares an appropriate place for each of us, and then He positions us there. It is important that each one of us discover where that correct place is, and position ourselves there.

Positioning ourselves in the right place changes our lives in six ways: **(1)** Releases supernatural provision. **(2)** Provides protection. **(3)** Demands the death of pride. **(4)** It first causes us to pass through discomfort. **(5)** It distances us from sinful and tempting situations. **(6)** It avoids us future problems. **(7)** Causes the glory of God to be manifested in us.

I. SUPERNATURAL PROVISION

We read in **1st Kings 17:1-7**, that during a famine God instructs Elijah to move to a place where He would provide for his needs in a supernatural way. If Elijah had moved to another place, the crows would not have feed him, neither would he have found water to drink **(verses 3-4)**.

For all of us God has a “Place” of supernatural provision. Many times, we pray asking God to bless us where we are going. While we should have prayed for God to take us where He would bless us. We need to discern the place of blessing for our lives. All that we need is available in the right place.

2. TO BE UNDER PROTECTION

The wrong place is anywhere where we know that our Christian walk is in danger. While Adam and Eve walked in Eden with God, Satan did not approach them. The devil approaches Eve when she is absent from the presence of God.

Any place that Jesus would not go is wrong for us as well. Peter was not where he should have been, far away from Jesus when he denied Him three times. We need to walk with Jesus, for there is protection in His presence. If we distance ourselves from the body of Christ that is the church- we become an easy prey for the enemy.

3. THE DEATH OF PRIDE

Before we can occupy the right place, our pride must die. Pride blocks the passage; it prevents us from realizing we are in the wrong place and that we need to move. Elijah was a man of God, a powerful prophet that had killed hundreds of false prophets, and had caused fire to fall from the heavens. Next to the brook, and with the provision from the crows, Elijah was in the perfect place and moment to swell up with pride.

Therefore, God orders Elijah to go to the city and ask help from a poor widow: *“Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you” (1 Kings 17:9).* Elijah could have answered, *“But Lord I am your prophet, I cannot humiliate myself to depend from a widow I did not even know.”* since his pride had already died, Elijah did not hesitate. He moved to the correct place and once again was blessed.

4. SUPPORTS DISCOMFORT

We hold in very high esteem our security. We are afraid of leaving that zone. It is only when the necessity factor exceeds the fear factor that we become willing to change. It is like when the mother eagle destroys her nest, so that the eaglets become driven to fly. We will never fly if we are comfortable. This is why God uses a method to move us- it is called discomfort.

When God wants to perform a wonder, He begins with a difficulty. The brook named Cherith dried up because it would no longer be the source for Elijah. We tend to get married with methods and attached to memories. We should not fall in love with anything from this world but with God. God is the source of all His children. He desires us to go to Him, and if it were necessary, He will cut off any other source; that we may move towards Him.

5. ESCAPES SINFUL AND TEMPTING SITUATIONS

When we do not obey the voice of God, we become vulnerable. For this reason God asked man: "Where are you?" God is concerned with His children's safety. He knew that Adam and Eve's disobedience had removed them from a safe place.

Leaving God's place will only expose us to sinful and tempting situations. Lot left his uncle Abraham to go to Sodom; he was set on becoming rich. Was that the appropriate place for him? No! In the end Lot lost his riches, and in his escape he lost his beloved wife as well. All for not being in the right place.

Where does each of us find ourselves today?

6. AVOID FUTURE PROBLEMS

Being where God wants you to be makes all the difference in life between blessings and curses. In order to avoid many problems we must belong to the correct church, be in the right ministry, find the right employment and live with the right person. We cannot be Christians with any roots, moved by the wind.

Psalms 92:13 tells us, *“Those who are planted in the house of the Lord, Shall flourish in the courts of our God.”* We must take root, affirming ourselves in the right place.

7. THE GLORY OF GOD

In **Exodus 33:21** God tells Moses, *“Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock.”* Moses stood in that place. Then God speaks to him of another place: a place that Moses would build as a habitation for God, the tabernacle.

After much work, the tabernacle, its furnishings and all the utensils were finished. Everything was put in its rightful place: the priest in their place, all according to what God had commanded. What was the result of all this? *“Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle”* **Exodus 40:34.**

In **2 Chronicles 7:12** God tells Salomon, *“I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice.”* Oh the potential of the right place! After Solomon arranged everything for the temple, the scriptures tell us, *“fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the temple”* **2 Chronicles 7:1.**

Everything has its rightful place. We too have a place in the house of God. To be in the right place allows the glory of God to manifest in our lives. It also allows that same glory to illuminate the lives of those around us.

CONCLUSION

God continues to ask each of His children, *“Where are you?”* In other words, which is the place that we must abandon? Where

is the place we must move to? Where is the right place in which God wants to bless us? Let us not take for granted that we are already at that place. Perhaps we must repent as the prodigal son who was far from his home, and pray to understand the new place God has assigned for us.

Let us pray that the Lord will speak to us promising Him that we will hear. Let us demonstrate today to God that we desire to go with Him to the right place.



Ice Breaker: Why do most people tend to have a plan “A” and a plan “B” for all their projects?

Jeremiah 29:11, *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”*

INTRODUCTION

When we ask God for a miracle, in general He gives us a series of instructions, a plan. On rare occasions, God does something in our lives without a plan. Each one of us was created with

a purpose, programmed to fulfill his plan. The enemy tries to alter our course from God, this is why it is necessary to learn to discern the moments when God shows us the next destination on the map of our life.

From the Old Testament until the New Testament, God arrives in moments of need to provide, bringing in His hand a name and a task. Today we will see a passionate story from the book of Esther. The leading roles are: Esther, her uncle Mordecai, King Ahasuerus, queen Vashti, Haman and Jewish people. For a better understanding of this story, study the book of Esther at home.

I. GOD PRODUCES UNEXPECTED CHANGES

Many times God allows unexpected events to occur, to change the direction of our lives and subsequently move us toward His plan. Read **Romans 8:28**. The powerful king Ahasuerus decided to cast out queen Vashti, because she refused to dance for him in the middle of a feast. Vashti was an independent woman who did things on her own terms, and for this reason she lost the favor of the king. She represents those Christians whose plans are not subject to the will of King Jesus.

In order to find a new queen, Ahasuerus announced a national beauty contest. 127 women were picked, Esther was among them. Unlike queen Vashti, she knew the blessing that came from following God's plan.

2. GOD WORKS WITH ANTICIPATION

It would seem that God likes to use common people, even those from a dis-advantaged background. He is glorified in con-

verting a no one into someone of importance. Esther was a young Jewish orphan girl who planned to live an ordinary life. But while she was thinking of the ordinary, God was preparing extraordinary opportunities.

I Corinthians 2:9:

“But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” God is also planning extraordinary things for our future. We should not allow anyone to tell us other wise, no matter the situation- just trust in God.

Mordecai, Esther’s uncle who adopted her as his own daughter was a compassionate man. He raised her with a firm foundation from her childhood; he gave her wisdom and direction. Those of us who are parents should speak wisdom to our children, preparing them for the great opportunities that God will present tomorrow. Mordecai founded in Esther a life of faith for she would determine the destiny of her nation.

Esther 2:17 tells us that Ahasuerus put on Esther’s head the royal crown. Esther was not selected because she knew the royal courtesy, or because she had fine manners. Si did not even know of protocol. Esther was picked because she was in the will of God. Therefore, Ahasuerus was not who choose her, but God, with a plan in mind.

Let us consider that Ahasuerus was an enemy of the Jews. The unexpected selection of Esther reminds us that being in the the will of God, in the right plan; allows even our enemies to be converted into God’s instruments clearing the way for us. Read

Proverbs 16:7.

3. GOD PURIFIES US

As she arrived at the palace, Esther goes through a 12-month purification process. This teaches us that for every call from God there exists a discipline. During the first six months, Esther had to soak in oil, to smooth her skin. The oil in the Bible is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Esther's feet had calluses from her walking barefoot. Before God can use us, He needs to soak us in His Holy Spirit, to smooth all the rough areas of our life. In order to serve God we need the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

The last six months of purification were done through perfumes. Perfume attracts people. The perfume represents our praise to God. In the Old Testament, incense was used over the hot coals on the altar. This was done so that the aroma would ascend as an offering of fragrance to God. Today we are the temple of God, and that fragrance that he desires is our praises. Read **Hebrews 13:15**

We should learn to become worshippers that we may fill His throne with the perfume of our praise. This causes our king to extend his scepter towards us, just like Ahasuerus extended his to Esther. Praise brings God's favor, with it comes prophecy, divine direction, God's plan. *"Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name"* (**Psalms 100:4**).

4. MAINTAIN THE OBJECTIVE

Read **Esther 4:13-14**. In the palace as the months passed it seemed that Esther was bored. We must be careful with our comfort, for we can forget the reason why we are here. This is not a time to be too comfortable! During these times, there is

conspiracy that exists to annihilate our children, our homes, our marriages, and our churches. The spirit of Haman is more alive today than ever, plotting our death.

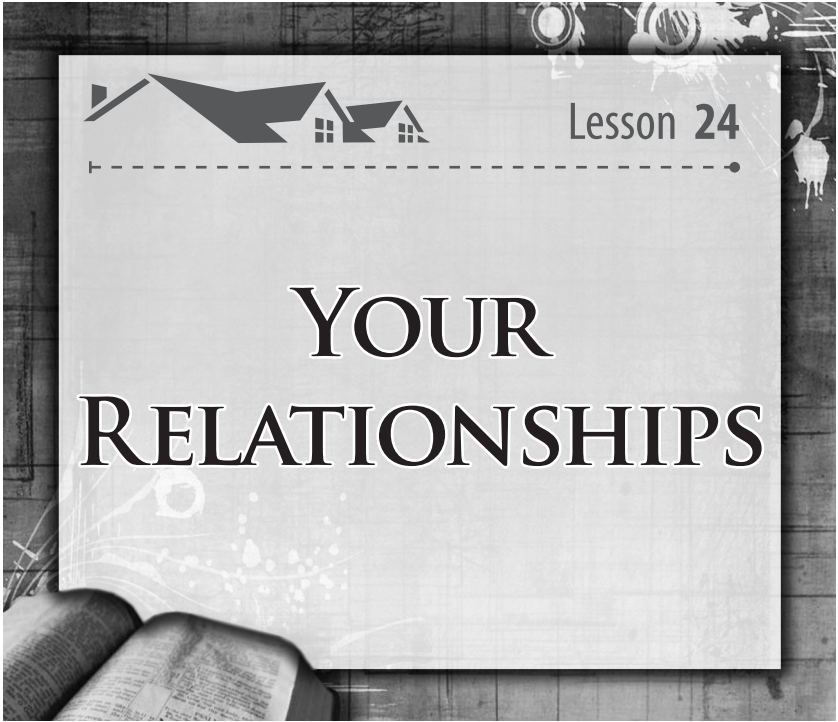
Haman hated Mordecai and the rest of the Jews, just as the devil hates our faith, our doctrine, and our apostolic values that do not bow to anything that he has to offer. Mordecai comes to Esther dressed in sack clothes. This clothing was rough and unattractive meant to represent affliction. This was to remind Esther that the beautiful attire was not her life's mission.

Esther understood this and called a three-day fast among all her people. This fast saved the lives of the Jews whose lives Na-man had threatened. From time to time we need to “get ugly” like Mordecai, afflicted with the sack cloth of prayer and fasting, for we have a serious cause, a calling from God, a date with our destiny- the salvation of many souls.

CONCLUSION

The journey of fantasies must end for some. The Lord's church is not a stadium in which to sit as spectators, nor is it a fashion catwalk for women to model. We need to make a decision about our purpose; we must take steps towards God's calling. Our moment is arriving in which we must decide between moving towards God's plan or playing church. The time has arrived for us to immersed in the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the perfume of praise. Let us be passionate for God, asking Him to give us the right plan for our lives.

- What steps would you take in the next few days to discover what is God's plan for you?



Icebreaker: What do you think of this common saying, “Tell me who you are with, and I will tell you who you are?”

Jonah 1:7, *“And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

God send the prophet Jonah on a mission to Nineveh. However, Jonah disobeys God’s will and he boards a ship toward Tarshish. During voyage the ship on which the prophet was, “fleeing

from God” begins to sink because of a severe storm. On this journey of life, there will be occasions in that we are not the problem yet the people we are associated with are. If we truly want to discern the voice of God, it is vital that we find the appropriate people to connect with.

When we speak of Jonah, very seldom do we think of all of the innocent people that we on the verge of losing their lives because of one disobedient person. Why is it so common for good people to be mixed up with bad relationships? This always brings disastrous results. It is probable someone here believes that his vessel is taking water. In this case, you need to ask God if perhaps there is someone else that is causing this. God wants to help us pick wisely the people that we will allow into our lives. He wants to be Lord of our relationships.

2. SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

Spiritual discernment is a great tool to prevent entanglements and storms. To have this discernment is to have the ability to find relationships that are good for us helping us avoiding those that are not. It is to be able to differentiate between people with good character and those with bad character.

Romans 8:5 says, *“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.”* Carnal people are those who make us lose time, reduce our efficiency, and consume our energy. In turn, spiritual people feed our faith, edify us, and take us to a higher level in God. Spiritual friends are our strength when we are weak, are honest even though it may hurt us, they fill our lives and bring out the best in us; that we may become people that God keeps in mind.

If Jesus wants to bless us, He will send us someone to do so. If Satan wants to curse us, he will send another person. The apostle Paul said, *“You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (Galatians 5:7)*. Note that Paul did not ask, “What things hindered you” but “Who hindered you.” The people that the devil sends cause us to delay in our journey.

It is not that we should ignore carnal people. Jesus wants us to love all people. However, carnal people should not belong to our inner circle. If we allow them in, they will distant us from good friends, and more importantly the presence of God. It is for this reason that it is necessary that we pray asking discernment in the spiritual world, that we may always be able to decipher the good person from the bad one.

3. THE “BRIDGE” PERSON

Lets read **Acts 9:10-12; 17-18**. God send the right man into Paul’s life. In contrast to those who oppose us, Ananias became a bridge so that Paul could be saved and arrive at the place God desired. Later God sends Barnabas to connect Paul with the disciples, allowing him access to the church. Finally, God places Titus in the life of Paul, to encourage the apostle in one of the most difficult times of his life. Read **2 Corinthians 7:6**.

Lets put aside for moment the ministerial and let us visit the emotional aspect of our life.

At home, study the book of Ruth. There you will find a story of Naomi’s daughter in law. Who was left a widow in a foreign land with very little probability a finding a good man to remarry. However, God took care of her and sent her a husband named Boaz. He was sensitive, spiritual man who was also a wise admin-

istrator. God blessed this young widow because she had followed the counsel of her mother in law Naomi, to wait for the right person **(Ruth 3:18)**.

Boaz and Ruth were married and had a son named Obed. He had a son named Jesse. He had a child named David who became the king of Israel. King David had a descendent name Mary, who gave birth to son name Jesus. In summary, thankfully Ruth knew how to wait and discern. God not only blessed her with a husband, but also placed her in the genealogy of Jesus Christ!

Marriage is a lifetime commitment. The decision that we make will affect every area of our being: The spiritual area, financial area, our future, and our children's future. God also has a plan our romantic relationship. Young person, it can go very well for you tomorrow if you take time today to ensure yourself that the person you marry is ordained by God.

4. THE JONAH'S

Lets return to Jonah's boat. The crew cried out to their gods and they began to throw their precious cargo overboard. This would allow the boat to be lighter and hopefully avoid it from sinking. Meanwhile, Jonah was in the interior of the boat asleep. Carnal people never see danger! Finally, the crew woke up Jonah and asked him, "*What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?*" **(verse 11)**. Jonah responds to throw him into the sea, so that the sea would be calm **(verse 12)**.

Jonah knew very well that he was the problem. Therefore, why would he ask them to throw him into the sea? Why did he just jump from the boat himself? It is because rebellious people like to manipulate other and make them feel bad. They are like

the 45 year old “son” who does not want to work, nor get married so that he can continue to live with mom. Every time she gets tired of him and sends him to work, he responds with: “You are right, I will go and sleep under a bridge” manipulating her into feeling guilty.

That relative, associate, friend, girlfriend or boyfriend that plays with you will not jump from the boat by his or her own will. Because carnal people rarely do anything for themselves, as they should. You have to act on their behalf. If the crewmembers had not thrown Jonah overboard, they all would have perished. Truly, they must have felt bad for the life of Jonah, however as soon as they tossed him out the sea became calm.

Lets read **I Corinthians 5:9-13**.

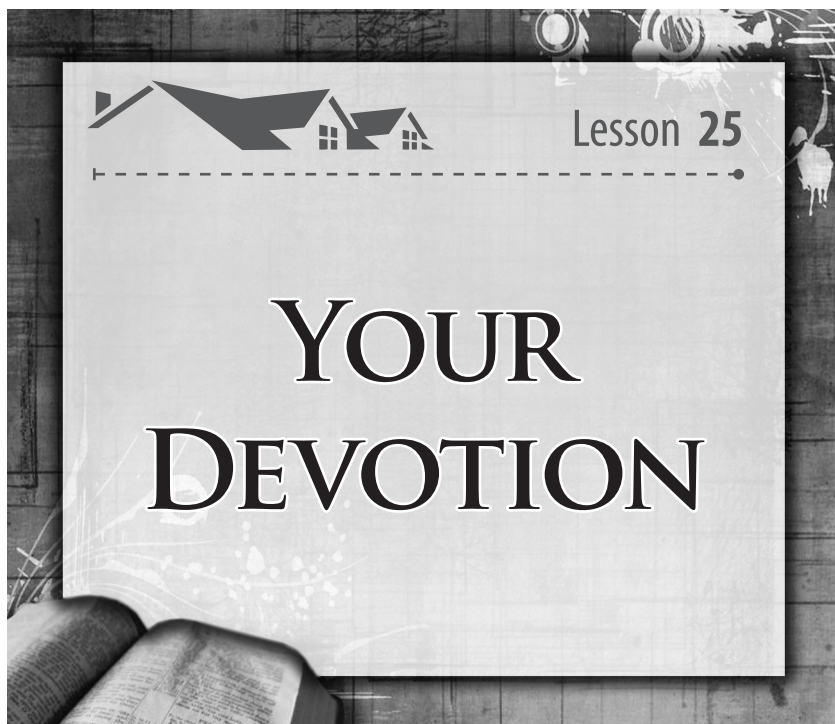
Jonah can even be a brother! He can be baptized and if you allow him onboard in your life, he will break your heart and cause you to shipwreck. Perhaps you loved them very much, but sooner or later you will have to throw them overboard. God is preparing a great fish to swallow him and throw him up on land; so that He can continue his journey to Nineveh. In other words, we are not helping Jonah by allow him into our life. When he is removed, God will deal with him.

5. CONCLUSION

As soon as Jonah was tossed from the boat, the crew began to worship God. Read **Jonah 1:16**. We cannot worship God as we should when our relationships are turbulent, and out of His will. Whatever is removing our appetite and rest, stealing our peace, or removing our smile needs to be taken today and thrown from our lives.

Lets ask God to reveal whom “The Jonah’s” are in our life those cause our vessel to rock. Lets pray for wisdom, and valor to toss them overboard. Lets no longer doubt and act upon what is best. Lets leave certain people in God’s hands, for He knows exactly what to do with them....and let us begin to worship God.

- Can you identify a Jonah in your life?
- When and how will you rid yourself of him?



Icebreaker: What is better: do things out of obligation or for our own satisfaction.

Luke 4:1-2;14, *“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

Jesus was led to the desert for a time of personal devotion. The word establishes that He was tempted there by Satan for

forty days and forty nights. The number forty is important. Moses was on the mountain for forty days. Elijah walked for forty days on Mount Horeb just to hear God whisper. Forty speaks to us of fullness, of a high level of consecration. Jesus rose to that level and was victorious.

After His desert experience, Jesus returns with the power of the Spirit and begins to operate in it. Amazing stories about Him began to spread throughout the region! Today we will direct our attention to the theme “Our Devotion Toward’s God. We will learn that different levels of spiritual devotion exist. Finally, we will discover which level we are on.

2. THE LEVEL OF DUTY

“Duty” is a word with a strong military connotation. “Duty calls” voices the army’s need for soldiers. A soldier should train; fulfill all type of tasks, and report to his superior. In times of war, they will stand watch under the sun or rain, completing dangerous missions, using their weapons against the enemy, etc... All of this is part of a soldier’s duty.

Just like in the visible world, the church is faced with warlike conflict, although it is invisible. If each one of us could measure the war we face, and its seriousness, would we change our response to the task at hand? As Christians, we must pray, study the Bible, fast, attend church, worship, pay our tithes, give offerings, evangelize, and much more.

Now, at the level of duty we do these things mainly because other people expect we do them. We view our spiritual tasks as a duty, and not as something of enjoyment. It is okay to take on our Christian responsibilities with seriousness. What is not okay

is to believe that serving God is only a list of responsibilities. We must overcome this basic level as soon as possible. If we do not, we will quickly tire, become discouraged, and eventually desire to desert God's army.

Do we still consider our devotion as a duty? This would be like a young man taking flowers to his girlfriend and then saying, "I brought you flowers because it is my duty. I only did this because it is my obligation as your boyfriend." Imagine how she would feel. Would she not feel devastated? Would she even accept the flowers?

3. DISCIPLINE

Now, if you exercise your responsibilities enough, they will quickly become a discipline. Discipline can be defined as a training process that guarantees the proper behavior. It is a control system for your life style. Disciplines happen automatically and as a routine.

At this level, when it is time to do something for God, we do it because it has become a responsibility. We no longer struggle to do it. A disciple Christian, prays, fasts, tithes, serves, and participates whenever there is an opportunity to do so. He has been trained in everything. See **Hebrews 12:11**.

There is big difference between our duty and discipline. Discipline plays the fundamental role in our Christian walk with God. It is true that spiritual disciplines carry a certain risk, in that they have a tendency to make us self-sufficient. However, we prefer taking this risk, and become trained in the spiritual disciplines. When we have become discipline enough, what we do for God is turned into...

4. DESIRE

A Christian lifestyle that combines duty with discipline can become something desirable. Desire draws us closer to Jesus. When Jesus perceives our desire, he draws near to us. This is a high level of devotion, when our heart feels it is drifting from Him, and it has an intense desire to return to Him as quickly as possible.

As we draw closer and closer to Jesus, that desire to be with Him becomes more real. It becomes a hunger, a longing for the presence of God. See **Psalms 40:8; 84:1-2**. The disciples also said after some time, “*Lord, where else can we go?*”

Many brethren stay for long periods of time at the levels of Duty and Discipline without knowing the satisfaction from entering into the sphere of desire. What is needed to destroy the works of the enemy? A congregation moving from discipline to desire. A church increasingly submerged deeper into the presence of God. This without question shakes hell. Read **Ezekiel 47:3-5**

Who is responsible for initiating the desire and hunger for God? We are. We need to feel the longing and the desire for God, and then remain at this level. So that when we desire God enough, seeking Him becomes...

5. DELIGHT

“*Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart*” **Psalms 37:4**. God is seeking passionate hearts that desire Him. When He finds them eager, He will transform the desire into delight. Delight means, “happiness, great joy, and pleasure. It is to appreciate and enjoy something completely.

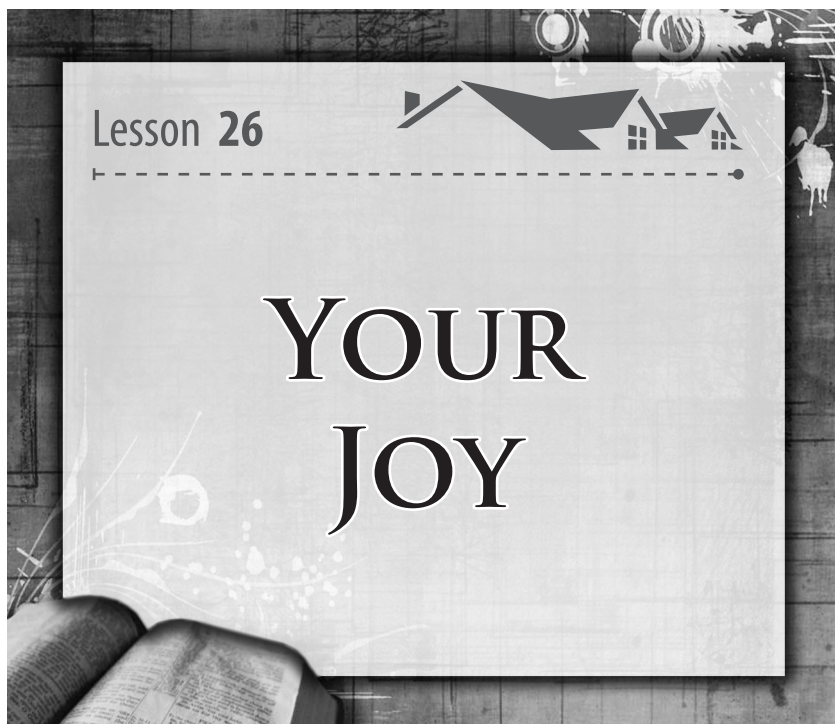
This is the greatest dimension in our devotion to God. It goes much further than our responsibility and commitment to religion. At this new level, we are allowing God to become our delight and pleasure. In other words, He becomes the Lord of our devotion. Read **Psalms 1:1-3**

6. CONCLUSION

When we allow Jesus to become the Lord of our devotion, we rise above our Christian responsibilities to an experience of fulfillment and delight in His presence. We can allow our spiritual disciplines to become a burden. God's purpose is that we serve Him with joy, and that we may find great delight and pleasure in our spiritual walk with Him.

With sincerity ask yourself.

- what level of devotion do you find yourself at?
- How do you plan to climb from such level to the highest level?



Adapted from the book, “The Applause of Heaven”, Max Lucado, 1999, Thomas Nelson Publishers

Icebreaker: What do you think of when someone says, “Jesus is the Lord of my Joy?”

Matthew 5:11-12, “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

I. INTRODUCTION

His first home was a palace.

He had servants on hand. With the snap of a finger, the course of his story changes. His name was well known and loved. He had it all: riches, power, respect. Then he is left with nothing. Students still consider his case. Historians stumble as they try to explain it. How could a king lose everything in an instant? In one moment, he belonged to royalty, the next he was in poverty.

His bed became on occasion at best a borrowed cot, but mostly was the hard ground. He never owned even the most basic form of transportation, and depended on donations for his income. At times, he went so hungry that he ate uncooked grain or a fruit from a tree. He knew what it was to be in the cold and rain. He knew what it was not have a home.

His palace once was immaculate, but now he was exposed to filth. He had never known sickness, but now he was surrounded by disease. He was revered in his kingdom, now he was ridiculed. His neighbors even tried to kill him. Some said he was a lunatic. His family tried to confine him in his house.

Those that did not ridicule him, tried to use him.

They wanted favors. They wanted him to perform tricks. He had become a novelty. Everyone wanted to be seen with him that is until it was no longer fashionable to be seen with him. Then they tried to kill him. He was accused of a crime he did not commit. False witnesses were even hired to lie. The jury was prepared. No lawyer was assigned to his defense. A judge driven by politics handed down the death sentence. They killed him.

He departed the same way he arrived, without a cent. He was buried in a borrowed tomb and his funeral was financed by one of his compassionate friends. Although at one time he had it all, he died with nothing. He should have been unhappy. He should have been bitter. He had every right to be as a boiler heated with anger. However, he was not. He was joyful.

Those that are sour do not attract followers. People followed him everywhere he went. The children turned away those with a bad attitude. They would run before this man. The multitudes did not gather to hear the cries. They would rejoice to hear him. Why? Because he was joyful. He felt joy even in his poverty. Even when he was abandoned and betrayed, as he hung on an instrument of torture, with almost 6 inch Roman nails through his hands.

2. THE JOY OF THE LORD

Jesus personifies unbreakable joy. A joy that refuses to fold before the wind and difficult times. A joy that remains standing in the midst of pain. A joy whose roots extend deeper than the eternal foundation, *“who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame”* **Heb. 12:2b.**

What type of joy is this? What kind of joy is this that dares wink at adversity? What bird is this that sings in the darkness? What is the source of this peace that defies pain? Lets call it a sacred joy. It is sacred because it is not of this world. That which is from God is sacred. This joy is from God. It is joy because it can satisfy and amaze at the same time.

Joy is the shepherds from Bethlehem dancing outside a cave. Joy is Mary gazing at God asleep in a manger. Joy is the white

haired Simon worshipping Jesus, who what about to be circumcised. Joy is Joseph teaching the creator of the world how to hold a hammer.

Joy is the expression on Andrew's face when he sees baskets that never become empty. Joy is to see the wedding guest astonished by tasting wine that had been water. Joy is a leprous man watching a stump grow into a finger. A widow who prepares a party with the food she had prepared for a funeral, a paraplegic jumping and doing somersaults. Joy is Jesus doing impossible things in an unbelievable way, healing a blind man with saliva, paying for taxes with the coin taken from the mouth of a fish, and bringing back to life a man before Roman guard who was falling asleep.

What is the joy of the Lord? It is when God does what others would only do in their craziest dreams: Use diapers, mount donkeys, wash feet, sleep during storms. Joy is when he is accused of eating too much, attending too many parties, and spending too much time with the sinners around the corner. Joy is a day's salary for workers who have only worked one hour. A father who bathes his son in order to remove the stench of swine. A shepherd who throws a party because he found a lost sheep.

Joy is the discovery of a pearl, a multiplied talent, a beggar walking to heaven, and criminal in paradise. Joy is the surprise on the faces of the beggars invited to the king's banquet. Joy is a shocked Samaritan woman, an adulterous woman walking away from a street covered with scattered rocks.

Sacred joy is good news that enters the back door of our hearts. It is that which we have always dreamed of, but never believed would happen. It is that which is too good to be true, but become reality. It is to have God as a lawyer, father, and best friend.

To have God on our side, in our heart, before us, while protecting our back. It is hope in the place that we least expected to find it.

Joy is to embrace Jesus' promises: *"Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy"* **John 16:20**; It is the same joy that provoked a celebration on the other side of the Red Sea. It is what caused Mary to sing and sound the trumpet in Jericho. This is the Joy of the Lord!

3. JESUS' PROMISE

Lets read **Matthew 5:1-10**. Here, Jesus promises joy; eight times, he makes this promise. He makes this promise to the group of people who we least expect: *"The poor in spirit" "those who mourn" "the meek" "those that hunger and thirst for righteousness" "those that are merciful" "the pure in heart" "the peacemakers" "those persecuted for righteousness sake."* This is the type of traveler that God promises a special blessing, a heavenly joy. However, this joy is not free. Its price is the complete conversion of the heart, something that only God can make possible. Observe the following sequence:

- (1) We recognize our needs – we are poor in spirit.
- (2) We repent from our self-sufficiency- we mourn.
- (3) We relinquish control of the situation giving it to God – we are meek.
- (4) We are so grateful for his presence that we desire more of Him – we hunger and thirst.
- (5) As closer we get to Him, the more we resemble Him and we forgive others- we are merciful.

- (6) We change our perspective – we are pure in heart.
- (7) We love others – we are peacemakers.
- (8) We bear injustice – we are persecuted.

4. CONCLUSION

It is not about a casual modification of our attitude. It is the demolition of the old structure in order to build a new. The greater the change is, the greater the joy will be. The price of the joy that comes from the Lord is to live as He lived, and die as He died. **Hebrews 12:2**, *“looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

Eight promises for an unbreakable joy, and even a ninth make by the Lord; along with an invitation: *“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you”* (**Matthew 5:11-12**). Jesus is inviting us to allow the Lord to be our joy, in every situation, remembering that every difficulty is an opportunity to receive the joy that He has promised.

- Why do you believe that on many occasions you do not experience the joy of the Lord?
- What steps would you take in order to transform all sadness in your life into joy?



Icebreaker: Why do many people feel fear or uncertainty about the day of tomorrow?

I. INTRODUCTION

The future of the church and the world is revealed in the Bible, exclusively. The Bible foretells of events that have not yet occurred with all detail.

We introduce the series “12 Trumpet Blasts.” We will consider the main prophetic events, in the chronological order they will appear, according to the Word of God.

2. COMING OF CHRIST FOR HIS SAINTS

The next event that will occur on God's calendar is His coming to take His people to a celestial home. This is known as the rapture of the church (the word rapture is not found in the Bible). Christ will come down from heaven, the trumpet will sound and the bodies of the believers that have been dead will resurrect. Immediately, the believers that still live, will be taken up together with them to meet the Lord in the air.

See **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**.

The rapture of the church will happen in a blinking of an eye, according to **1 Corinthians 15:51-57**.

Let us read this scripture carefully, for it describes the events that will happen step-by-step. This speaks to us the importance that Christ be our Lord, and reminds us to always be ready, for all of this can happen today!

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

3. THE GREAT TRIBULATION

Lets read **Matthew 24:5-31**.

This scripture a large part of the book of Revelation cover this time, which will last seven years. After the rapture of the church, the earth will experience a time of great suffering and sadness, known as the Great Tribulation. During this time, the Jewish people will return to their land, even though they will do so with disbelief.

At the same time, a great evil leader known as the “Anti-christ” – literally in Greek “Instead of Christ,” will rise up with great authority. He will demand adoration from the people and will deceive Israel. It will be a time of great suffering, in which no one would survive if the days were not shorten.

In the first three years and a half of the tribulation, the Anti-Christ will convince the Jews that he is their friend and that he will protect them. However, half way through the seven years, he will turn on them, revealing who he really is. Great persecution and battles never before seen in our history will take place. Regardless, God will preserve the Jews that have been faithful to Him. This will all end with the war of Armageddon. See **Malachi 4:1-3**.

4. THE COMING OF CHRIST TO REIGN

At the end of the tribulation period, the Lord Jesus Christ along with those that had been taken up, will return to the earth with great power and glory. This is what we know as the second

coming of Christ, in which He will destroy his enemies, including the Anti-Christ. He will judge the nations that persecuted the faithful Jews. Satan will be bound and cast into the pit for one thousand years.

“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while” (Revelation 20:1-3).

5. THE MILLENNIUM

When His work judging has been completed, Christ will establish His Kingdom on the earth. Jerusalem will be its capital. He will reign over the earth for one thousand years. This period is known as the Millennium. It will be a time of peace and happiness. See **Isaiah 32:1-5; 35:1-7; 65:17-25**. In these scriptures, we read that nature will be completely different. The lion and the lamb will be together; the desert will flourish like a rose, man will live for many years, there will be great prosperity and there will be no war.

Sin will not be absent during the millennium, however, it will be judged immediately, whenever it occurs. We will govern with Christ as kings and priest *“And have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth”*

(Rev. 5:9b-10).

6. THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

Lets read **Revelation 20:11-15**. At the end of the Christ reign in the millennium, the great white throne judgment will occur. This is the judgment of all the dead and those that were not saved. The tombs will return the bodies of those that did not believe, Hades will return souls, and all will stand before Christ to be judged.

Finally, the books will be opened (**Revelation 20:11-15**) and the people will be judged each one according to his or her works. For those not found in the book of life, will be found guilty and sentence to the lake of fire to suffer eternal condemnation.

7. ETERNITY

The final picture of the future is eternity (**Revelation 21:1-8**). The earth that we know will be destroyed by fire. Time as we know it will cease. Every true believer will enjoy happiness without end. All those that rejected will suffer in darkness forever. As we get close to, what the Bible teaches will happen in the end, each one of us is faced with question that needs to be answered:

- Where will you spend eternity?



Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word “heaven?”

I. INTRODUCTION

Lets read **John 14:1-16**. In this scripture, we see the Jesus’ plan of love for those that are His. It was a few hours before Judas would hand Him over, and the Lord wants to calm down and give hope to His disciples. In order to do so, He gives them two great promises: **(1)** He would return in person (This would stop the fear of death). **(2)** He would return as a Spirit (this would end the fear of life).

The Lord begins His discourse speaking about heaven. What a great theme. A famous Scottish preacher would get up every morning, open the door facing the street, lift his eyes to the heavens and say, “Lord Jesus, perhaps today, perhaps today you will return?” It is magnificent to begin a day with this attitude. This is the attitude the Lord wants to see in all of us; because He promised...

2. PEACE IN TRIBULATION

Verse 1: *“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.”* The disciples had just received news that would cause wonder and perturbation. They were distressed for the existence of a traitor in their midst. Jesus was leaving and they could not follow; also, for the prediction that Peter would deny the Master. Seeing them distressed and confused, Jesus speaks to the heart of the need to put their faith in God. Man can have many reasons to be troubled and distressed, however, there is peace in Jesus’ promise.

3. MANY MANSIONS

Verse 2: *“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you.”* The Lord wanted the disciples to have peace when thinking of death, and in a natural way, He refers to heaven, as the Father’s house in which there was a place of all of them. This is a great revelation by Jesus. He says there are many mansions in His Father’s House. Additionally, since His ascension to heaven almost two thousand years ago, He is there preparing a place for us. This is one the activities happening presently and this is how he desired us to remember.

There is a story of an old Christian woman who was sick. Her son was the director of a Biblical Seminary. He would visit

her every day for breakfast. He would speak to her and they would pray together. One day, when the son arrived the old woman was sitting on her bed, dressed in her best clothes. “Mom, why are you wearing that clothes? Where are you going?” She replied, “I am going home.” He said, “Mom, you are home,” thinking perhaps that his mom was losing it. She said, “Son, you don’t understand, I’m trying to tell you i am going to heaven, that is why i am dressed this way.” Not paying to much attention to the old woman, he said, “I agree, but first eat your breakfast.” She said, “I don’t need it, son. Today, I will be in heaven, and if i need something to eat, I will do so when i arrive.” That same day, the old woman went to be her Lord.

4. HE WILL COME AGAIN

Verse 3: *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”* See Acts 1:11. Christ has promised to come back to earth, and He insists for us to wait for His coming, which will happen as a *“thief in the night”* (1 Thes. 5:2). He will come when no one is expecting it. He will take us from this world in a blink of an eye, and we will meet Him in the air (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thes. 4:17).

5. WHERE HE IS

Verse 3b: *“that where I am, there you may be also.”* So that we can be where He is, is the divine purpose of the rapture of the church, and the deepest desire of our Savior. That is why He died on the cross, carrying our sins and shedding His blood.

A husband that loves his wife wants to be with her, and greater yet is Jesus Christ love for us. His desire and plan is to be with Him for eternity. Although, on earth, death is an enemy to

humanity; believers have a joy, a peace, and assurance that what follows death is eternity with our Lord Jesus. See **2 Corinthians 5:6-8**.

6. ONLY ONE WAY TO THE FATHER

Verse 4-5, *“And where I go you know, and the way you know.” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?”* When Jesus tells his disciples that they knew where He was going, Thomas says, he did not know. We do not know for sure if Thomas really did not know, or if he was overwhelmed at that moment because of the current events.

Let us read **verses 6-11**. Many people ask how do we know which is the true way to God? How can I be sure of finding God, and the way to eternal life? The way is Jesus! He is the way, the truth, and the life. There is only one path, one true way, and only one life worthy of being called life. The way is not religion, neither is it intellectual understanding of the truth without Christ Himself, who even today reveals Himself through His word, His Holy Spirit, creation, and at times in individual revelation. He is the only way, and that is definitive. For this reason, we His followers strive in proclaiming this truth to the entire world.

Some ask, where is truth? “If there are so many religions, how can we know what is the correct way to God? Those that have placed their faith in Jesus Christ have found truth, because He is embodiment of truth. By saying this we do not imply to be intellectually meager, neither that we are satisfied with things that are superficial. God wants us to know the deep truths that have been revealed for our blessing. However, Christ Himself is the essence of that truth that sets our soul free (**John 8:32**). It eliminates intellect and allows us to know Christ in a more profound and personal manner.

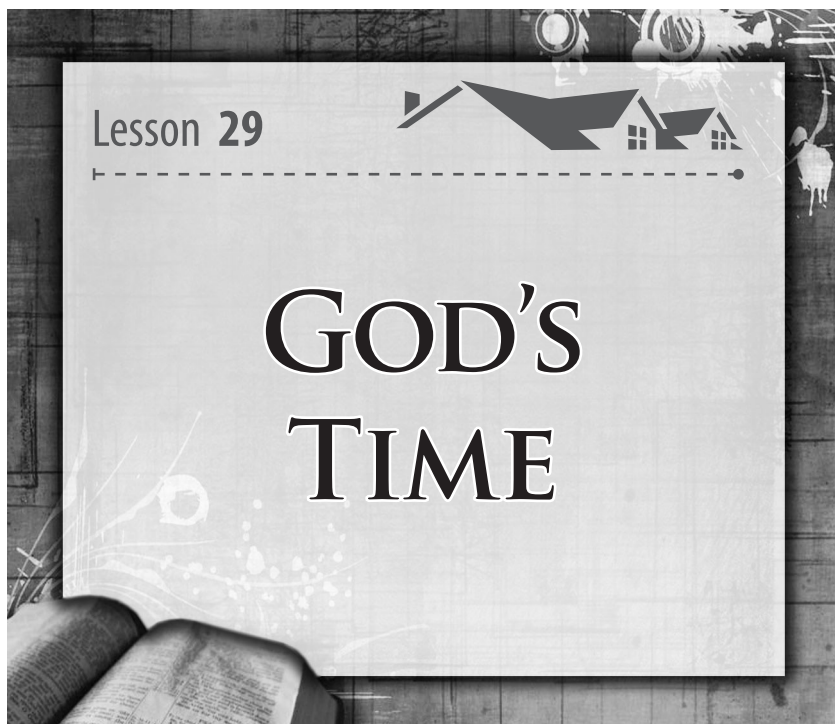
Only in Christ can true life be found. Christ gave Himself, and whoever has Him has life. Life can only be lived in abundance when you know Jesus Christ. The life that Jesus speaks to us about is the life of God in the human soul. To receive Jesus is to receive the Father. Phillip, being one of the disciples and having spent three years with Jesus, had not yet received the revelation of the oneness of God. Thanks to the Lord's mercy, we have already received it!

The Father and Son are inseparable. **(verse 10a and 11a).** Father and Son are the same thing. This shows that Jesus is God **(1 John 5:20)**. We cannot differentiate between the words of the Father and of the Son, since we cannot separate their origin. This mystery also applies to the works of one and the other **(verse 10b and 11b)**. This is a truth that is difficult to understand even for the most astute theologians; a truth that must be understood spiritually. See **1 Corinthians 2:14**. For this reason, although it is almost impossible to clearly explain in its entirety the mystery of the Oneness of the Father and Son, as Apostolic we accept this with our whole heart.

7. CONCLUSION

Our king will return for His church. *“For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”* Let's live peacefully, with the hope and faith in Jesus' promises. Let us live ready at all times to go to heaven to be our Lord.

- How are you preparing yourself for the coming of the Great King?



Icebreaker:

Have you ever been late to an appointment or important commitment? Share your experience.

Romans 13:10-12

“Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.”

I. INTRODUCTION

Time means: a nonspatial continuum that is measured in terms of events which succeed one another from past through present to future. Synonyms or related terms with “time” are: day, period, era, season, phase, stage, moment, instant, hour, minute, etc. Some adjectives derived from time are: ancient, modern, recent, and mature. Adverbs of time: always, never, today, tomorrow, now; just to name a few. In the New Testament of the King James Bible, the word time occurs 207 times.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF GOD’S TIME

God give much importance to time, in His plans related to humanity. The angel told Zachariah that his announcement of the birth of John the Baptist would be fulfilled when it was time **(Luke 1:20)**. Regarding Christ, we read, “*Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem*” **(Luke 9:51)**.

The truth that everything has its time in God’s agenda is recognized even by the demons, for when Jesus arrives in Gergesenes, the evil spirits that possessed those men cried out, “*And suddenly they cried out, saying, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?”*” **(Matthew 8:29)**. In this manner, they showed that God’s judgment awaits them on a predetermined day, and that the arrival of Jesus to earth, was too soon for such judgment.

Paul preached to the Athenians that God, “*and He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundar-*

ies of their dwellings” (**Acts 17:26**). He also wrote to Timothy saying, “who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began”

(2 Timothy 1:9).

In other words, God has subordinated the ages and eras to eternity, prepared the plan of salvation, and the call of each one of His children. In a nutshell, God preordained the precise moment for all things, and because of this He never has arrived late or early to His appointments, nor will He.

3. TIME SHOULD BE IMPORTANT FOR THE CHURCH

When Christ sent the seventy disciples to preach, he gave them the necessary instructions to carry out successfully their mission. One of these was to not greet anyone along the way (**Luke 10:4**). This was interesting because the ceremonial exchanges when greeting in the Orient could take much time- in some cases up to half an hour! While the disciples had only a short period of time to fulfill their mission. Therefore, they needed to completely dedicate themselves to it, avoiding the loss of time at these greetings. In this manner, Jesus underlines the speed at which we should take salvation to the lost.

The apostle Paul looked into the future in his writings to the church and he affirms in one of them that in the last days “perilous times will come” (**2 Timothy 3:1**). Years later, Paul speaking of his current days said, “because the days are evil,” (**Ephesians 5:16b**). This was because the life of the church had become very difficult due to the persecution of Roman Empire.

Before that situation, Paul counseled the believers to live, “redeeming the time” (**Ephesians 5:16a**). In other words, do not let any opportunity to preach the gospel of salvation escape you, in this manner fulfilling as quickly as possible the great commission of Christ to His church (**Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15-16**). This command continues valid for us today.

Paul urges us to fulfill our duty of preaching the gospel of salvation to the lost: “*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (**2 Peter 3:9**). Here, the apostle addresses first the church – “*God is patient towards us,*” then he addresses the lost, “*So that all will come to repentance.*” How can the lost repent and be saved if the church does not preach? See **Romans 10:14**. In other words, not preaching the gospel with the diligence that Jesus requires is to delay His coming for us, and the unfolding of His plan for the rest of humanity.

2 Peter 3:14, “*Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.*” This advice from Peter brings various questions. Are we diligent today in our service to God? If the Lord were to return today, would we be found irrepressible by Him? Would we be without spot? Are we reflecting Him? Are we living in peace with other? In holiness? See **Hebrews 12:14**.

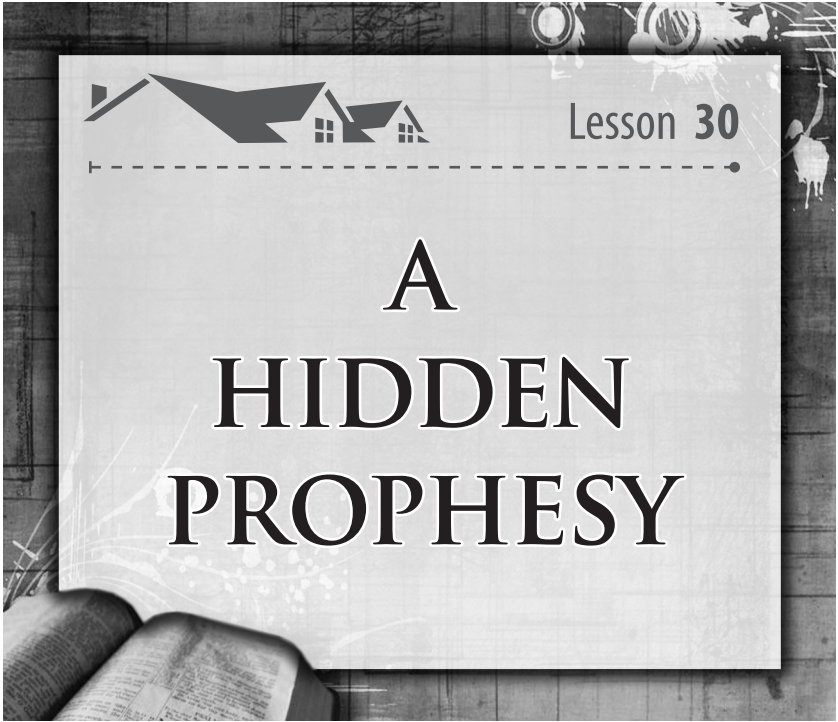
4. CONCLUSION

Read **Hebrews 10:25**. This speaks to us of congregating faithfully, of exhorting one another, and to think of the rapture of the church as it approaches. We should always live ready for His arrival, giving our very best to the service of the Lord. It is time to

serve God more and better. It is time to worship in spirit and in truth. God's time is depleting- the era of Grace is finishing soon! Let us do what Paul says:

“And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light”
(Romans 13:11-12).

- Do you know what time it is in God's time?
- What steps will you take to better take advantage of the time, serving God with more diligence?



Icebreaker: Has it ever occurred that when you read a well-known Bible scripture a new message surges, a new truth that was always there hidden?

I. INTRODUCTION

Lets read **Luke 10:30-35**. This well-known parable tells the story of a Jewish man who was assaulted by thieves as he was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. A Samaritan man found him on the road, helped him, and placed him in a safe place so that the Jewish man could recover.

In this scripture, we find a fundamental spiritual lesson about love and mercy. Without doubt, the main purpose of this parable is to remind us that as children of God, we need to help our neighbor in need. We cannot be indifferent to people that are suffering calamity, but must offer them our help whenever possible.

However, as is the case with many other portions of scripture we find other meanings, perhaps not as evident, but equally important: the prophetic perspective. Let's study the prophecy that is hidden in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

2. THE GOOD SAMARITAN

The elevation above sea level of Jerusalem is 757 miles, while Jericho is 18 miles. To the north east of Jerusalem, it is 265 miles below sea level. This means that in order to travel from Jerusalem to Jericho you must descend 1,022 miles.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was continually descending. It was a very dangerous road with many ravines, which thieves used to hide and wait for their victims. The Jewish man was attacked and left undressed and dying. Soon after a priest passed by then a Levite but, neither of them stopped to help him (**verses 31-32**).

Then finally a Samaritan arrived, who seeing this wounded man had compassion (verse 33). This is very noteworthy because the Jews of then did not interact with the Samaritans and vice versa.

See **John 4:9**. This Samaritan bandaged the Jewish man's wounds, and put wine and oil on them. He placed him on his own animal and takes him to an inn where he paid for his care, promising to return for him (**verse 34-35**).

3. THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

This parable presents the message of salvation in a beautiful manner. Jerusalem presents God's dwelling place on earth, while Jericho is symbolic of sin, paganism, and curse. The Jewish man going from Jerusalem to Jericho represents humanity traveling on a downward road away from God. *"All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"*

(Isaiah 53:6).

Man has been traveling downward, giving their back to God and separating it more and more. *"But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear"* **(Zechariah 7:11)**. The result of this is falling wounded, naked, and badly injured; all because they were going the wrong way. Now we are a people displaced from the glory of God, according to **Romans 3:23**; a people that have replaced God's things with those of the world.

The thief represents the devil whose primary purpose is to steal, kill, and destroy **(John 10:10)**. However, let's not blame the devil for everything. The priest and the Levite seeing the wounded man, were unwilling to help him; becoming in a sense accomplices of the thief.

The religious system results useless to save humanity. See **Matthew 23:13**. Religion has been nothing but a hindrance to God's plans. That which was supposed to draw us closer to God, actually, has pushed us further away from Him!

For this reason, God became man to reconcile us to Himself, without the need of a mediator. See **2 Corinthians 5:19**;

I Timothy 2:5. The Samaritan man in this parable represents Jesus, who being moved by mercy, came near to us. The Samaritan put wine and oil in the wounds of the Jewish man...Jesus poured out his Spirit over us. John said, *“I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”* **(Luke 3:16).**

The Samaritan bandaged the wounded man’s wounds...Jesus cloths the sinner with His justice: *Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him”* **(Romans 5:9).** Finally, the Samaritan takes the wounded to an inn, which is symbolic of the church. This is what David meant when he said, *For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock”* **(Psalm 27:5).**

The innkeeper represents the ministry of the church, who receives under its care wounded sinners. Jesus deposits this delicate task in our hands saying, “Take care of him.” What a great responsibility we have. The church is like a hospital for the spiritually sick. Our mission to save the lost is crucial and we must accomplish it with all diligence until His return. See **Luke 12:42-43.**

4. THE LORD IS NEAR

The denarii perhaps are the most intriguing element of this story. In those days, a day’s work was paid with one denarii. See **Matthew 20:2.** The Samaritan gave the innkeeper two denarii, enough to tend the wounded man two days. According to **2 Peter 3:8,** one day is like a thousand years. Therefore, this parable also teaches the church will minister to the sinner for two thousand years, or two prophetic days.

Considering the date when the church began, after the ascension of Christ, we can confirm that the return of our Lord is very near. The two days, or two thousand years, practically have been fulfilled (In reality we entering into the third hour). Hosea prophesied, *“Come, and let us return to the Lord; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight”* (**Hosea 6:1-2**). Jesus also declared, *“Go, tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected’”* (**Luke 13:32**).

5. CONCLUSION

The spiritual and prophetic aspects of this parable come together to give us a great message. Two millenniums ago, Jesus did His part in coming to this sinful world to rescue what had been lost. Like that Jewish man going to Jericho, left for dead, we too were dead in our transgressions and sins, until Jesus found us, healed, and saved us.

Now is our time to do our part; offer help, and care for those that Jesus wants to save in this last hour of His church. We cannot spare our efforts in this, for He has promised that all we overspend he will pay us back when He returns (**Luke 10:35**).

- What will you do in the next days for your neighbor? Will you pass them by, or will you offer your help?



Icebreaker:

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word, “forgery”?

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3^a:

“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first.”

I. INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ is coming for His church. He said to His disciples, *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3).* When will this happen? The Bible says that no one knows with certainty. However, Jesus warns us that before His arrival there will be a great apostasy. Apostasy means, abandoning the truth faith and embracing an imitation of it. Apostasy is the undeniable sign of the imminent rapture of the church.

2. THE APOSTASY OF LAODICEA

Lets read **Revelation 3:14-17**, *“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”*

At the end of the first century, Laodicea was an economically prosperous city that attracted many people from different places. As the city grew, the supply of water became insufficient for the residents. In order to solve this problem, Laodicea started to import water from two adjacent cities, Hierapolis and Colossae. The water from Hierapolis was very cold and refreshing in the summer, although they arrived at Laodicea lukewarm. The waters from Colossae were very warm, from earth wells that were used for medical purposes. These waters not only arrived lukewarm when they reached Laodicea, but they also lost their medicinal properties.

According to **Revelation 3:15-16** the works of the Laodicea church were neither “*cold nor hot*.” This message preached in this church was lukewarm like the water of the city. The preaching of Laodicea had lost its ability to refresh, and its power to heal. It was so blended with the worldly philosophies of the city that the only effect they had was to cause one to vomit. It is similar to the preaching at many churches today, a lukewarm gospel, unacceptable to God, very different from the preaching of the Apostles.

Laodicea represents the church of apostasy in the last days. It is a church gifted with many things: knowledge, influence, popular acceptance, money, professionalism; however, at the same time its faith is in all those other things and not in the power of God to save the believers. This is precisely what we observe today: churches filled with people, luxurious building, good finances, influence in many places, and an excellent reputation among the nonbelievers. However, all this apparent richness is nothing if there is no spiritual power, if there is not fire of the Holy Spirit.

“Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (verse 17). Even with the terrible message that the church of Laodicea receives, God is still calling at its door, asking permission to come in!

“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:18-20).

How many churches today boast to be Christian, but do not let Christ in them! It should not surprise us that from these churches surge the worst enemies of God, instruments to persecute the church of Philadelphia.

See **Revelation 3:7-13**.

The post-modern churches are the field where the seeds are being planted that will bring as a result the manifestation of the Antichrist.

3. APOSTASY ON THE PULPITS

2 Timothy 4:3-4

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”

What Paul writes to Timothy is exactly what we see in many “Christian” groups today. Worldly preachers and teachers; religious leaders with great charisma and influence through the Internet and television; multitudes that follow them; sermons, teachings, and books that become best-sellers over night.

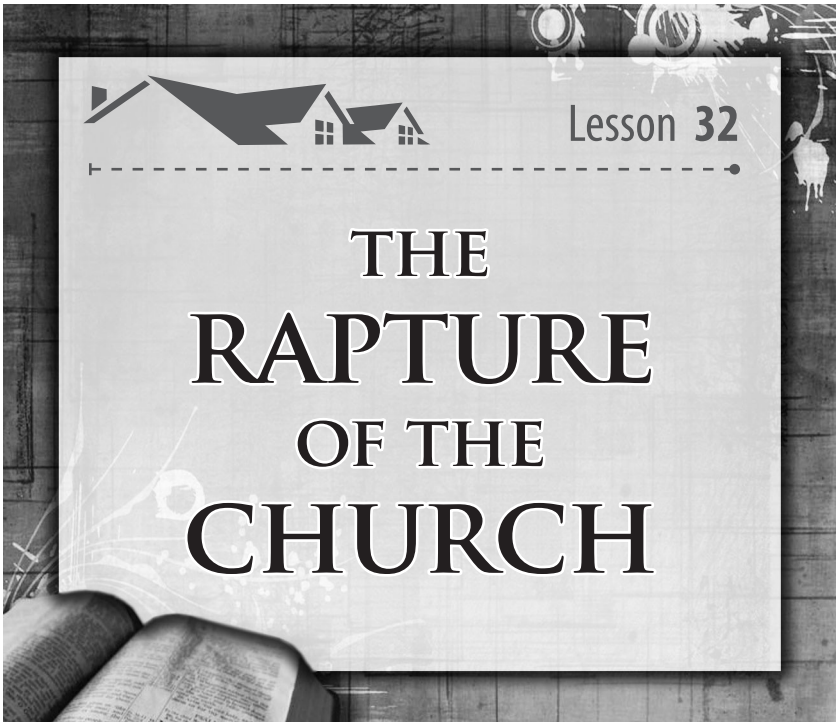
However, there is something missing with this blueprint: sin is not rebuked, and in many cases, it is celebrated. The people are no longer invited to salvation as before. Neither is a serious commitment with God encouraged. Of course, holiness has been lost in almost every case; if we were to consider the Bible standards on this.

4. CONCLUSION

As we observe the surge of apostasy, we can understand that there is not much time left for our departure. As true Christians, we are saddened to see so much sin around us, however, we feel comfort in knowing that God is at the door, and soon He will return for us.

Until that glorious day arrives, how will we act? About three thousand years ago, David considered the same question, “*If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?*” (**Psalm 11:3**). Paul responds: “*But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry*” (**2 Timothy 4:5**). John encourages us, “*And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming*” (**1 John 2:28**).

- Are you bewildered by the wave of religious apostasy that is beating the church?
- What steps will you take to not fall into discouragement because of this?



Icebreaker: Have you heard of the people that are preparing for the end of the world? (Known as “preppers”) What is your opinion of them?

Revelation 16:15, *“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”*

Matthew 24:42-4, *“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

The thief does not announce his arrival; the whole point is to steal without being seen. The thief does not come to stay, after he obtains what he wants, he quickly leaves. The thief does not take everything in the house, only that which is of value to him, leaving much more behind. This is how the rapture of the church will be: only those that are faithful to the Lord will be taken into heaven. Many will be left here on earth, probably surprised and trembling because of our sudden disappearance.

2. WHO WILL BE TAKEN IN THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH?

This question is very important and affects everyone. The only manner to answer it correctly is to allow the Scripture to do so:

I Thessalonians 5:1-9, *“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ”*

Lets look at other scriptures that will allow us to answer this question of who will be taken in the rapture of the church:

- a. Those that carry the name of Jesus: *“Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name” (Acts 15:14).* Jesus is coming to take a gentile bride that carries His name. Therefore, we must be baptized in His name so that we may belong to His family. See **Ephesians 3:15**. The plan of salvation establishes as a fundamental prerequisite the baptism in water by immersion, in the name of Jesus Christ, *“Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).*
- b. Those that have been baptized into His body: *“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).* The power of the Holy Spirit places us in His body, being His Body, His church.
- c. Those that have been filled with the Holy Spirit, *“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8:11).* Without the power of the Holy Spirit abiding in us, our mortal bodies cannot be taken up.
- d. Those that are Holy and without blemish, *“that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27).* See also **Hebrews 12:14**.

- e. Those that have remained in Christ until the end, “*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first*” (**1 Thessalonians 4:16**).
- f. Those that are awaiting His return, “*so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation*” (**Hebrews 9:28**). “*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory*” (**Colossians 3:1-4**). Only those that are ready will be looking up, consequently only those that are looking up will be ready.
- g. Those that love His appearing, “*Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing*” (**2 Timothy 4:8**). This means that our expectation should be focused on His appearance.

3. CONCLUSION

There is a precious verse that says, “*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” (**2 Corinthians 4:6**). Our heart will be in a wonderful condition, darkness will not prevail against it, but the glorious light that proceeds from Him, that is the light of the world (**John 8:12**).

We are children of light, and of the day; we are not of the night or darkness. For this reason, that day should not surprise us. The same Holy Spirit that abides in us and illuminates our understanding will help us interpret the word of God and apply it our daily life, so that we may be ready, and not unprepared.

- Is the rapture of the church an important event for you? Do you await it with anticipation?
- How do you get ready for this?



Icebreaker: Have you ever received a surprise? Share your experience.

Luke 19:41-44,

“Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

I. INTRODUCTION

The Jews were celebrating the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem. They were very excited. However, a sudden change took place when Jesus declared a painful prophecy over the city that was before him. Jesus “cried for the city” knowing the rejection that He would suffer from it, and for the judgment that they would suffer, which arrived in the destruction of the capital by Roman powers in the year 70 A.D.

Jerusalem was strategically positioned, like was a custom in those days of war. The enemy would build a barricade around it to prevent anyone to enter or exit. They would starve the majority of its inhabitants this way. The Romans then conquered Jerusalem with much cruelty and loss of life. All of this occurred because Israel did not acknowledge their God, who came to save it, *“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him”*

(John 1:11).

2. JESUS COMES TO OUR LIFE

Jesus would have desired that Jerusalem repent and seek what was for their own good. However, those people that once received him with songs, only a few hours later rejected him, pushing for His crucifixion. The name Jerusalem means, *“city of peace,”* however, those inhabitants lived a life that had very little peace.

Today, we like them praise God and proclaim to be His; but do we live according to what He said? Do we truly honor His name? The name that was invoked over us? How are we living before God? Perhaps after reading the following story we will be able to consciously answer these questions.

“I have yet to understand how it happen, if it was a dream or real. I only remember that it was late and I was on my favorite sofa with a good book in my hand. My fatigue started to overcome me and I started to nod off. In a place between the subconscious and my dreams, I found myself in a large room. It did not have anything special except a wall full of filing cabinets. The filing cabinets went from the floor to the ceiling and seemed to never end. They had different signs.

As I came closer, a box with a sign that read, “Girls that I liked” got my attention. I opened it carelessly and started to look at the index cards. I had to pause as I realized that I recognize every name on each of the cards. Without anyone telling me, I started to guess where I was. This large room with its many filing cabinets was an unedited catalog of my entire existence. Every one of my actions was written down, small and great details, even moments that my memory had forgotten.

A sense of anticipation and curiosity, along with intrigue began to come over me as I opened the filing cabinets randomly to explore its contents. Some brought me joy and sweet memories; others, on the other hand a sense of embarrassment and guilt so intense that I had to look around to make sure no one was watching me.

The archive name “*Friends*,” was next to “*Friends I betrayed*,” and “*Friends I abandoned when they most needed me*.” There was “*Books I had read*,” “*Lies I’ve said*,” “*Counsel I have given*,” even “*Jokes I have said*.” Other titles were, “*Things I have fought about*,” “*Things I’ve done when upset*,” “*Murmuring I did when my mom scolded me as a child*.”

The titles kept surprising me. In some filing cabinets, there were many more cards than I expected, while in others there

were much less, than I imagined. I was astonished of the great volume of information that my life had accumulated. How was it possible to write down each one of those millions of cards? However, each card confirmed the truth. Every card was written with my handwriting, each one was signed with my signature.

When I saw the archive, "*Songs I have hear,*" I was surprised to discover that it went three blocks deep, and not even then could i see when it ended. I was embarrassed, not for the quality of the music, but for the great deal of time lost doing it. When I saw the archive, "*Lustful thoughts,*" a shiver ran across my body. I only opened it a few centimeters, for I was ashamed of its size. I randomly picked one card and was unsettled by its content. I felt disgusted in confirming "that" moment, hidden in darkness had been registered.

I did not need to see anymore. An animal instinct surfaced in me, a thought took over my mind, and "No one should see these cards- ever I need to destroy this place! In frenzy, I tore a card from the cabinet, I needed to empty and burn its contents. However, I discovered that I could not even remove one single card from the drawer. I become infuriated and tried to yank it with all my strength, only to discover that they were harder steel. Defeated and completely defenseless, I returned the draw to its place. Laying my head on the filing cabinet, as a witness to my miseries, I began to cry.

Then, a title from another drawer appeared to relieve my situation, "*People I shared the Gospel with.*" This handle was shiny. When I opened it, I found less than 10 cards. Tears started to run down my cheeks, I was crying so deeply that I could not breath. I dropped to the floor on my knees crying bitterly from shame. A new thought crossed my mind, No one can see this room, I need to lock it forever, and then as I wiped away my tears, I saw Him.

Oh No! I cried out. Please-No! Not Him! Anyone but Him! It was imposing to see Jesus opening the drawers and reading each card. Intuitively Jesus would approach the worst drawers. I could not bear to see His reaction. Why did he need to read all of them? At that moment, I did not want to make eye contact.

With sadness in His eyes, He looked for my face, but I dropped my head in shame. He holds my face with his hands, and I once again began to cry. He then put His hands on my shoulders. He could have said many things, but He did not say a word. He was there with me in complete silence, and then He cried with me.

He returned to the archives, and from one side of the room he began to open them, one by one, and on each card, He would sign His name over mine. No! I yelled running to Him. I kept yelling, No! No! No! I took the card from His hand. His name did not need to be on those cards. They were not His faults. They were mine! However, His name was there written in a vibrant red. His name-covered mine, written in His own blood. He took the card from my hand; he looked at me with a sad smile, and kept signing the cards. I do not know how He did it so quickly. Instantly I saw Him close the last drawer, then he approached me. He looked at me with tenderness in His eyes, and said, *"It is finished, I have carried your shame and fault."* We left the room together, a room that is still open for there are many cards that need to be written...

I still do not know if it was a dream or a vision; but if that room really does exist, I am convinced that the next time Jesus returns to it, he will find less vain and embarrassing cards. He will find fewer cards with wasted time, and more cards to be pleased with.

3. CONCLUSION

Jesus arrives in Jerusalem without any prior announcement. In His word, He assures us that He will return in the same manner. I wonder how many people are ready to face Jesus. It is time for His coming. It is time to love others, and stop only looking out for ourselves. It is time to serve God with all our heart. It is time to be ready, for our king will appear at any moment.

- Do you feel you need to make any changes in your life?
- What changes would you make? When will you begin to do so?



Icebreaker: Can a good and merciful God condemn people that do not believe in Him?

Deuteronomy 30:15: *“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

Aside from being one of the central teachings of the Bible, eternity is a theme forgotten by the majority of churches. There are places where eternity is spoken of but incorrectly. For example, some believe that eternity is located on earth. When reveal-

ing what the souls eternal destination is, the Bible considers two places: Heaven and Hell, both not on earth.

In His earthly ministry, Jesus taught extensively about Heaven and Hell. The rest of the New Testament also speaks of these places, in particular the book of Revelation. Therefore, we can be certain of Heaven and Hells existence. Both places that God has prepared are with very distinct purposes. Heavens purpose is eternal life, and the joy of salvation. Hell was made for the punishment and separation between God and those disobedient creatures; this is referred in the Bible as the second death. See **Revelation 21:8**.

Let us consider some scriptures that will help us understand the great contrast between heaven and hell.

2. THEY ARE DIFFERENT PLACES

Hell is described as a lake of fire, *“The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10)*. Also it is described as a cold and dark place, *“Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’”(Matthew 22:13)*. In contrast, heaven is a place of eternal light, *“They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:4-5)*.

Heaven is also a place of great beauty, *“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side*

of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him” **(Revelation 22:1-3)**. While hell is below **(Revelation 20:14)**, Heaven is above, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” **(John 6:38)**.

3. YOU ENTER THEM DIFFERENTLY

You arrive in hell because of your disbelief, “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” **(John 3:18)**. “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” **(Mark 16:16)**. “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” **(Revelation 21:8)**.

You enter heaven with childlike faith, “and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” **(Matthew 18:3)**. You also enter into heaven through Jesus Christ, “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” **(John 10:9)**.

Hell does not require any type of resignation. Heaven demands we lose some things, “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— where ‘Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame,

rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where ‘Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’ And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire— where ‘Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched’” (Mark 9:43-48).

4. ITS INHABITANTS ARE DIFFERENT

Hell will be inhabited by those that rejected Jesus Christ, *“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11-12).*

Heaven is inhabited with those that believed in the name of Jesus for salvation, *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13).* *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).*

Heaven is inhabited by those whose sins have been washed by the blood of Christ, *But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life” (Revelation 21:27).* *“And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Revelation 1:5).*

Currently and for all eternity heaven is inhabited by God’s angels, while hell was prepared for the devil and his demons to occupy. See **Matthew 25:41**.

5. OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF HEAVEN

In heaven, we will find Jesus, *“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord”* (**1 Thessalonians 4:17**).

There we will be like Jesus, *“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is”* (**1 John 3:2**). We will find praises to Him, *“They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: “Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints”* (**Revelation 15:3**).

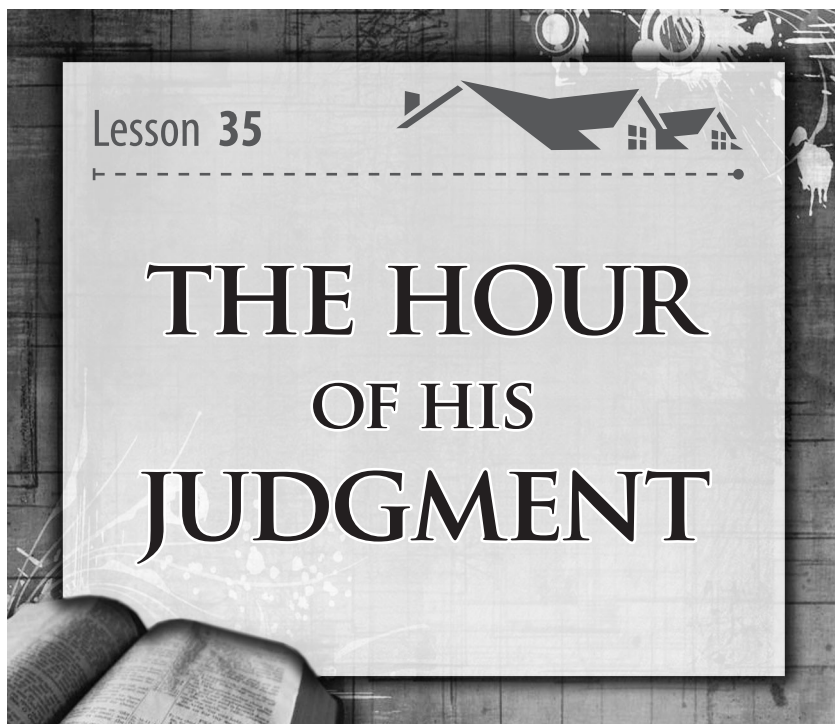
In heaven, we will serve the Lord, *“And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him”* (**Revelation 22:3**). He will comfort us, *“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away”* (**Revelation 21:4**).

6. CONCLUSION

In spite of it being two thousand years ago that our Lord Jesus Christ took from the enemy the keys to death, and gave us life, the battle for our souls is not yet over. Heaven and hell continue to fight for us. A writer once said, that the doors of hell are closed from the inside out, by men and women's own will. We should take our rightful place and do what we can to ensure our citizenship is in heaven.

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:20-21).

- What feelings or emotions are awakened in you knowing that you are a citizen of heaven?



Icebreaker: What is the first word that comes to mind when you hear the word “judge?”

Revelation 14:7, *“saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

The word “judgment” Biblically means “separation.” We will continue our series “The 12 Trumpet Blasts,” and we will study some of the prophetic events that are most related to the concept of judgment and separation.

2. THE JUDGMENT OF DEATH

When a person dies, his or her soul separates from the body. This is the result of God's judgment because of sin. See **Genesis 2:17**. When the body dies, the soul enters into a state, which the Bible compares to sleep, waiting to resurrect, or be reunited with a new body that God will provide. The soul of the heathen wait in place of restlessness, while the soul of the just rests. See **Luke 16:22-28**.

The temporary habitation for the soul of the dead is the She'ol (Hebrew) or Hades (Greek). We trust in God's promise of an afterlife. **Psalm 16:10**, *"For You will not leave my soul in She-ol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption."* **Acts 2:27** speaks of this also.

When Christ resurrected from the dead, He conquered Hades and death. As part of His victory apparently He took out the just souls that were Hades, *"Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.' (Now this, 'He ascended'—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)"* (**Ephesians 4:8-10**). Today, when a Christian dies, his soul rests in the presence of God. See **2 Corinthians 5:8**.

3. THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

The next major event of significance will be the rapture of the believers. This is another divine judgment that will serve to separate many from this world to salvation, while many will be left on earth to suffer and die.

We will “*looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*” (**Titus 2:13**). In the rapture of the church, the dead in Christ will be resurrected and the believers that live will be transformed, both will receive glorified immortal bodies. See **I Corinthians 15:51-54; Philippians 3:20-21**, and **I Thessalonians 4:13-18**. This is how we will meet with our Lord in the heavens, to live with Him for eternity.

4. THE GREAT TRIBULATION

Then, an incomparable great tribulation will come upon the world, “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (**Matthew 24:21**). Read this week chapters **6** to **19** of **Revelation**. The great tribulation is the judgment or divine punishment for skeptical humanity, and in particular the people of Israel.

During the great tribulation, Satan will seek to dominate the earth through one man, and one system that at times is described as, “the antichrist” and “the beast” respectively. The beast and its false prophet will establish a religious, political, and economical system to control the world. These satanic ploys will bring war, hunger, and death. Eventually, the antichrist will pretend to be God, and desecrate the rebuilt Jewish Temple. Those that oppose the ungodly system will be persecuted, and martyred; some will have divine protection.

Many believe that the church will be taken before the great tribulation; others believe that the church will go through part of it. In the next lesson, we will discuss this. Regardless, the church is protected from the wrath of God, “*Watch therefore,*

and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36).

At the end of the tribulation, the satanic armies will come together in the valley of Armageddon, to destroy all opposition. Being apparently victorious, they will march towards Jerusalem to reclaim its reward. Then, Jesus Christ will physically return along with His saints to the earth, descending upon Mount Olives. See **Zechariah 14:1-5**. The Jewish nation will acknowledge Him as their Messiah, and He will destroy the beast and its armies.

5. THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

The judgment seat of Christ will be a moment of immediate surrender. Every believer will stand before the Judgment seat of Christ, see **2 Corinthians 5:10**. We will stand before our Lord Jesus Christ, who as judge will reward each one's service according to his or her works. See **1 Corinthians 3:12-15**.

This judgment is not to verify if we deserve heaven or hell. All that appear there will be saved. The judgment seat of Christ is a judgment for believers who are washed and justified by the blood of Jesus.

6. THE JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS

Jesus will establish His kingdom on earth for one thousand years, this is known as “the millennium,” in which the saints will rule with Him. During the Millennium, the Lord will carry out the judgment of the nations, blessing those whose solidarity was

with Israel, and will punish those who were not. See **Matthew 25:31-33**. “Left” in this scripture represents punishment, while “right” is reward. Read **Revelations 20** at home.

During the Millennium Satan will be bound, however, at the end he will be set loose for a short time. He will promote a final rebellion, which God will destroy with fire from heaven.

7. THE FINAL JUDGMENT

Then the final judgment, the Great White Throne Judgment will come. See **Revelation 20:11-15**. All whose name is not found in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire, also known as Gehenna in Greek. It is there that they will be eternally separated from God. God will destroy the present world and He will make a new heaven and new earth. The saints will live with Him forever in the New Jerusalem. See **Revelation 21-22**.

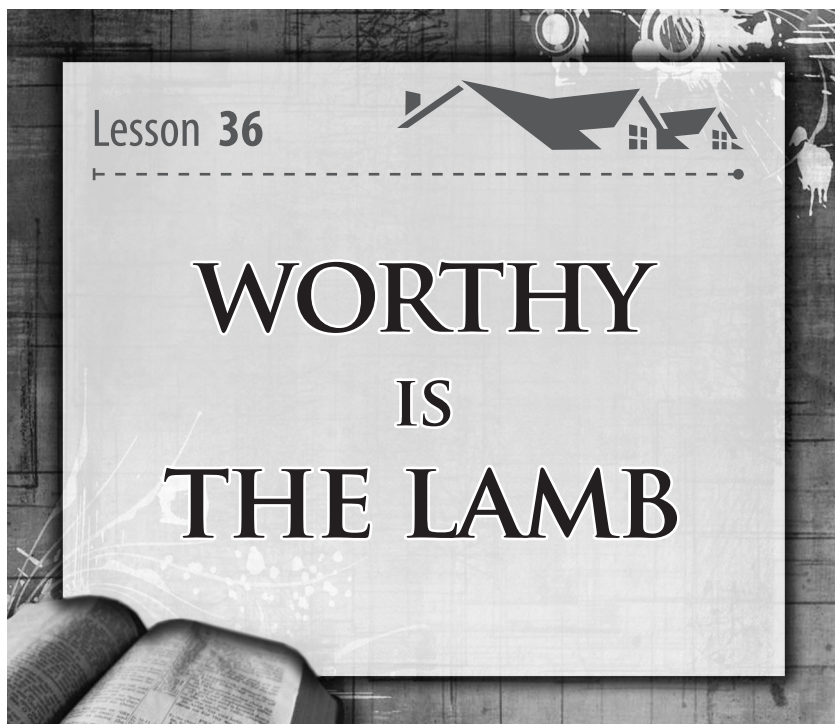
8. CONCLUSION

Lets review a few key truths: **(1)** Jesus Christ will physically return to earth. **(2)** No one knows neither can determine the time of His coming, yet we know it is soon. **(3)** The church need be always be ready. See **Mark 13:33-37; Romans 13:11-14**. **(4)** Each person will stand before him in the judgment to receive the reward of eternal life, or eternal death. See **Daniel 12:2**

Consider at home **Matthew 24:1-39; Luke 21:7-31; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8**, and **2 Timothy 3:1-13**. These scriptures mention many signs that will precede God’s judgments, and these are being fulfilled now. This time will soon end; the hour of God’s judgments is fast approaching.

What is the correct response to all of this? *“And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”* **Revelation 22:17, 20.**

- What is your response to all these imminent events?



Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word “adoration?”

Lets read **Revelation 5:1 - 14**

I. INTRODUCTION

We will continue on the series, “The 12 Trumpet Blasts.” To-day we will study one of the most profound portions of the book of Revelation, chapter 5 from this book. It is here that we find a prophecy that is unfolding now, whose main characters is Jesus and His church.

2. EARTH'S REDEMPTION

In **verse 1** we find that there is a book, or in reality a scroll, a special scroll that is in the hands of He that is sitting on the throne; it is sealed with seven seals. The number seven speaks to us of His perfection or fullness.

In Biblical times, when someone because of need had to rid himself or herself of a property, terms were written down so that a family member of the owner could recover or redeem that property from a buyers hands. When the person that had the right to that property, would return the title, or deed they would deliver it completely sealed. The redeemer would then open it, read it, and would agree to fulfill with the terms required for the redemption of that property.

God has at this present time the book that contains the price and terms for the universes redemption, which happens to be under condemnation since the fall of Adam. On the scene of verse one, the believers are already with the Lord and we are preparing to reign over the earth with Christ. However, this problem of condemnation is still present, for the earth is still under this curse. Sin still reigns, and someone needs to be found, who is worthy and willing, someone that can meet the terms underlined in the book that is God's hand.

3. THE LION OF JUDAH

Verse 2-3. Heaven is under great suspense, a great silence reigns, for a diligent search is being made to find someone who is worthy to break the seals, open the book, and read its content. Until that person is found, nothing that is in the book can be revealed.

A strong angel is given the task of finding someone worthy to open the book. The search extends across the entire world, from sea to sea, however there is no one from the human race that is worthy. Neither is there anyone from the host of angels in glory. No one appears worthy to open, read, or even look in the book. What a great challenge! If no one worthy of breaking the seals appears, sin will continue to reign, and the prince of this world will continue to accuse mankind.

The apostle John becomes so impatient in the vision that he begins to cry. His heart is broken, however one of the elders tells John, ““Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals” **(Revelation 5:5)**. Hallelujah!

In the animal kingdom, the lion is king; the lion does not have adversaries. The lion that John sees is none other than Jesus Christ. How do we know that it is Jesus? Because, it was Jesus who prevailed against the decree of condemnation against man. Only Jesus could pay the price for our redemption, offering His precious blood, and shedding it on the cross of Calvary. This is why Jesus Christ is worthy! *“And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” **(verse 9)**.*

4. THE ONLY ONE WORTHY TO OPEN THE BOOK

Good works cannot make anyone worthy. The Virgin Mary is not worthy because she does not have the name that is above every name; she did not suffer; neither did she die on a bloody cross, much less did she rise from the dead. The saints from the sculptor

have eyes but they can not see, they have hands but cannot clap, they have mouths but cannot speak, and they have feet but cannot walk- these are also not worthy. See **Psalms 115:3-11**.

Who can open the book with the seven seals? Only the Lamb that was slain. Why only Jesus? Because He has overcome temptation, "...but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (**Hebrews 4:15**). Because He has overcome death, "I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore" (**Revelation 1:17-18**). "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (**1 Corinthians 15:55**).

Jesus is worthy of the name above every other name, "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"

(Philippians 2:9-11).

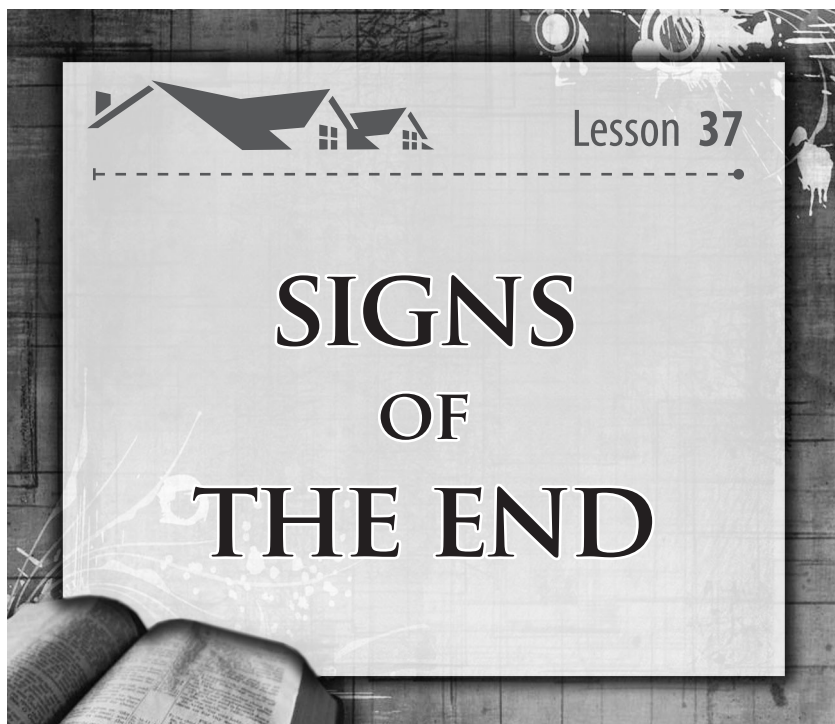
Jesus is worthy, and only He is worthy, because of whom He is. He is the one that fulfills the Old Testament prophecies. Because He left the splendor of glory to be born in a manger. Because He was miraculously born from a virgin. Because he amazed the wise of His time. Because He healed the sick, and fed the 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fish. Because he walked on water, and calmed the storm. Because he rose the dead to life. Because He cried tears of compassion for the lost souls. Because He suffered death on a cross. Because the tomb could not keep Him, and He rose on the third day. Because He taught us the truths hidden from the beginning of the ages. Because He is our mediator between God. He is worthy!

5. CONCLUSION

“Far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:21-22).

Jesus is worthy of our praise and gratitude, or our service efforts, and our obedience. He is worthy of our love, our total consecration towards Him. Jesus is worthy that; we give Him our time, talents, and resources. Jesus is worthy of our worship. **Worthy is the Lamb!**

- Are you living in worship and obedience to Jesus, the Lamb of God?
- What will you do to give the Lord a better worship day to day?



Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word, ‘countdown?’

Matthew 25:13, *“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Bible lets us know that our meeting our Lord in the heavens is very near. No one knows the exact day in that Christ will take us up, for as we reviewed in the lesson, “A Sign for the Church,” the only sign given to the church is apostasy.

However, we can also consider the signs relating to the second coming of Christ. These are signs that He Himself mentioned would appear on earth. These signs or prophetic warnings we are beginning to see at this current time, and this suggests the Rapture of the church, which is to occur seven years before the second coming of Jesus.

2. THE END

Matthew 24:29-31, *“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”*

The signs of **Matthew 24** are directed towards Israel, not the church. Here Jesus is speaking of His second coming that will mark the end of the Great Tribulation. This does not deal with the rapture of the church, but with redemption of Israel. The Jewish people chosen by God will be gathered by angels (**verse 31**) in a specific place, which we know will be Jerusalem. However, the church will be taken by Jesus seven years before this:

I Thessalonians 4:16-17, *“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”*

3. SEVEN SIGNS OF THE END

- a. **Wars, famines, pestilence, and earthquakes in various places. Matthew 24:7-8,** *“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.”*
- b. **Wickedness will multiply, and love will grow cold.** Wickedness is spreading throughout cities and nations, and it will continue to grow with greater strength throughout world. **Matthew 24:12,** *And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.” Consequently, indifference, fear, and anxiety are also increasing.*
- c. **Knowledge will increase. Daniel 12:4,** *“But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.”* The quantitative and qualitative leap of science and technology in the last 100 years is overwhelming.
- d. **One global government.** The U.N. (United Nations) by its initials is already prepared for a one-world government, led by one world president. “Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done. He shall regard neither the God of his fathers nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall exalt himself above them all” (Daniel 11:36-37). There will be a global market, and currency. See **Revelation 13:16-17.**
- e. **One Religion.** The Pope and the Vatican state are continuously working to unify the world religions to turn them over

to the antichrist the multitudes of followers. **Revelation 13:7-8**, *“It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”* Many that appear to be Christians will also be involved with this one religion, during the Great Tribulation.

- f. Global apostasy. The antichrist will be at the heart of a great apostasy. The apostasy is already in our midst. Preaching is about money, success, and influence with no warning to the people that we are living in prophetic days, and that Christ is coming soon. **2 Thessalonians 2:3**, *“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition.”*
- g. False prophets and false christs. **Matthew 24:11**, *“Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.”* **Matthew 24:24**, *“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”* A false Christ is not only those who try to pass a Christ, but also every person who preaches in the name of Jesus however with erroneous concepts.

4. THE MOST ELOQUENT SIGN

The eighth and most clear sign of our imminent departure is the development of the nation of Israel.

Matthew 24:32-35, *“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all*

these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”

Verse 32, “Now learn this parable from the fig tree...” the leaves of a fig tree are sprouting now. In the Bible, Israel is compared to the fig tree, and the fig tree is the actual national symbol of Israel. This nation which had a long social and political winter of twenty-five centuries, entered into their spring in 1948, when England drove and financed the transfer of 150,000 Jews from Europe and other parts of Palestine, founding the modern state of Israel. The population of this small territory has reached 8 million inhabitants and counting...

Verse 32, “So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!” The second coming of Christ is that summer that is near, and with it the end of the human government system, false religion, as well as the persecution against the Jews. **Verse 34**, “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.”

Lets review the first seven end time signs: wars, pestilence, famine, earthquakes, increase of wickedness, love growing cold, increase of knowledge, impulse for a world government, one world religion, apostasy, false prophets, and false christs. **Verse 34** indicates that the generation that sees the appearance of these signs, and especially the eighth sign- the resurgence of Israel, will be the same generation that will see the return of Jesus.

Many confirm that the Biblical time for a generation is from 70 to 80 years, this is in accordance with **Psalms 90:10**; others consider it 100 years. Regardless, the generation that witnessed the resurgence of the nation of Israel in 1948 is still on this earth,

although not for much longer according to the actual life expectancy. This generation should last until the coming of Christ, for Jesus confirmed that they would not pass, until He returned.

5. CONCLUSION

How much time is left then? We believe that the rapture of the church could be in a few years, months or even today. In reality, the time of our departure is imminent.

In light of this reality:

- what will we do?
- How should we live?



Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the phrase, ‘hideaway?’

Revelation 3:10, *“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

With this lesson, we conclude this series, “The 12 Trumpet Blasts.” Christ will return in the heavens very soon, to take with Him those alive, and dead that trusted in Him as their savior. As

believers we will go with the Lord, “in the twinkling of an eye.” We will be delivered from the imminent punishment that God has prepared for this planet.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION

The Great Tribulation, a period of seven years is compared in the Bible with the days of Noah. The flood was not meant for Noah and his family, but for all those that did not believe in the message that Noah preached. *“For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be”* (**Matthew 24:38-39**). Those that do not “enter into the ark”, which now is Christ, will stay on earth to face the coming destruction.

That is the purpose of the Great Tribulation: The outpouring of God’s wrath on the earth, which will produce anguish like never seen before, *“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be”* (**Matthew 24:21**). *“And said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”* (**Revelation 6:16-17**).

However, Israel will suffer the greatest suffering, *“But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people”* (**Luke 21:23**). During this “time of Jacob’s trouble,” which is mentioned in **Jeremiah 30:7**, most of the earth’s inhabitants in particular Israel will die during The Great Tribulation, in one way or another.

3. BEFORE THE GREAT TRIBULATION

The church will be taken before all of this happens. If the purpose of the Great Tribulation is to punish Israel, as we have seen, the rapture of the church is to keep her from that punishment. Paul speaking to the Thessalonians says, *“For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come”* (**1 Thessalonians 1:9-10**). Then Paul adds, *“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (**1 Thessalonians 5:9**).

The Church of Thessalonica was one of the first churches established, and they were confused and discouraged because some had begun to die and they did not see Christ appear in the clouds for them. Paul is trying to comfort the believers of Thessalonica, and he shares with them a mystery that perhaps he had not wanted to reveal before:

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep” (**1 Thessalonians 4:13-15**).

In his second epistle, he tells them more, *“since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,”* (**2 Thessalonians 1:6-7**).

4. THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH IS NOT THE SECOND COMING

Many confuse the rapture of the church with the second coming of Christ. However, as we have seen, the rapture of the church precedes the period of the Great Tribulation that will come over all those that did not believe the Lord Jesus as their Savior.

In the rapture of the church, Jesus will descend from heaven, but He will not be seen on earth for we will receive Him in the clouds, the sky. On the other hand, in His second coming, “every eye will see Him,” according to **Revelation 1:7**. This will happen at the end of the Great Tribulation when the Lord Himself will come with all His angels and those believers who were taken up in the rapture.

The Lord will return to fight against the armies of the world that will be led by the antichrist in his final attempt to rid the world of Israel from the earth. Then God will establish His kingdom for 1,000 years on earth and we will reign with Him. Hallelujah!

5. HISTORY’S FIRST RAPTURE?

Many groups of Christians no longer believe in the rapture of the church, and in some way they are preparing to go through the Great Tribulation. This is a sign of the last days:

“Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they

were from the beginning of creation.” For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” **(2 Peter 3:3-7)**.

What they do believe, speaks of, and teaches perhaps speculating that God had never before taken anyone up from the earth. Nevertheless, this method of taking people into heaven has already been used by God. Lets look at some examples:

- a. Enoch. This was the first rapture we find in Biblical history. “And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” **(Genesis 5:24)**. Enoch was taken up because he had lived a life that pleased God. See **Hebrews 11:5**.
- b. Elijah. “Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” **(2 Kings 2:11)**. This was another faithful servant of God that went to heaven without seeing death.
- c. Jesus. “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel” **(Acts 1:9-10)**.

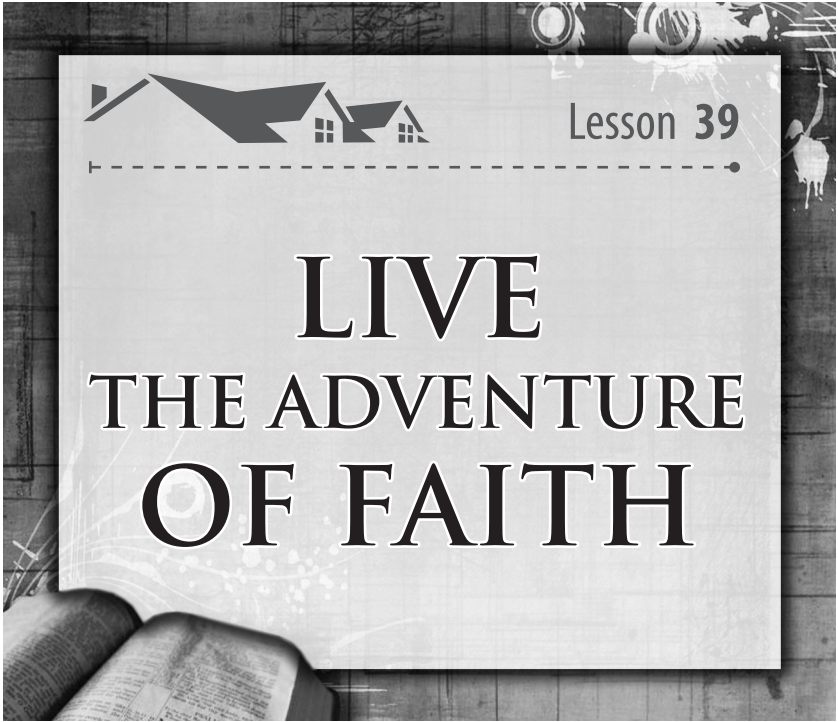
This is what Paul taught to those in Corinth, “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” **(1 Corinthians 15:51-52)**.

6. CONCLUSION

The promise of the Lord is firm. He will keep us from the Great Tribulation that is coming over this land. He will deliver us from those terrible days. See **Psalm 27:5**. Therefore, our commitment with Him should be stable and permanent. Lets keep His word; lets walk in obedience and holiness, serving with confidence and gratitude. Remember ever day the admonition of the Lord:

“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36).

- What steps have you taken or would you take to be delivered from the wrath that is coming?
- What steps have you taken or would you take to participate in the Rapture of the Church?



Icebreaker: What does it mean to “act?”

I. INTRODUCTION

With this lesson, we begin the series, “Seven Decisions to Live Happy.” Happiness is something everyone should choose. Everyone can make the decisions that will help him or her live happily.

Lets read **Ecclesiastes 11:1-8**. In this scripture, “bread” is a euphemism, a way to refer to wheat: the raw material for bread. Furthermore, the word bread is used in the Bible to allude to the

manner that we make a living: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (**Gen. 3:19**).

“Cast your bread upon the waters” literally, refers to putting wheat in a boat, so that it can be taken elsewhere to be commercialized.

2. FAITH IS TO TAKE ACTION

In **1 Kings 10:22** it says that Solomon owed a fleet of boats that would take Israel’s produce from the harvest to Tarsus (probably Spain) they would then return with the payment in gold, silver, ivory, animals, and other valuable elements. The round trip for these journeys lasted three months! This commercial system required a considerable amount of trust and patience from the seller. Solomon refers to this delay when he says: “For you will find it after many days (approximately 100 days).”

Another special feature of this method of business was the risk of a shipwreck caused by the many storms that were common in the Great Sea (old name of the Mediterranean Sea). There was another danger for the ships: the pirates that would stalk those waters.

Was Solomon trying to give a class on commerce or agriculture? Yes, however, it is much more than that. **Ecclesiastes 11** gives us advice for life. It tells us that in every business, there are risks and uncertainties even if we are cautiously take risks. Life is filled with many opportunities, but these generally come with many difficulties. Therefore, “Cast your bread,” implies to take advantage of the opportunities in life, although it may risk our security and comfort. “Casting the bread” is to lose one thing to gain another.

The best way to summarize this portion of scripture in Ecclesiastes perhaps is with the word: “Faith.” The life of someone with faith is at times an adventure, and there is no adventure without taking action; therefore, faith is to take action. We demonstrate that we have faith if we take action:

- (1) whenever we can.
- (2) Even if we do not know the outcome.
- (3) The soonest possible.

3. TAKE ACTION WHENEVER WE CAN

Verse 1. This verse refers to supplying the needs of others, because in the end this will produce recompense. “Waters” in the Bible generally symbolizes people, or multitudes. Giving charity appears like a task that will never end, but in the end, it has been proven nothing is wasted. People forget, but not God. See **Hebrews 6:10**. The spiritual needs of others, also form part of this truth.

Verse 2. What is evident here is that we should have more than one way of making a living, because if we only have one, and that fails, our ruin will be total. Donald Trump once said, “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.” If we deeply explore this verse, we will find an exhortation to be generous with our goods (“give”) in every possible circumstance (“serving seven”) and beyond (“also eight”).

Seven represents perfection: eight symbolizes “super-abound.” “Waters” means “multitudes” in **verse 1**. John Wesley said, “*Do all the good you can. By all the means, you can. In all the*

ways, you can. In all the places, you can. At all the times, you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can.”

4. TAKE ACTION EVEN THOUGH WE DON'T KNOW THE OUTCOME

In life, the majority of times we have to take action without enough information. For example, the businessman has to invest; although he cannot be certain that his business will have success. The farmer has to sow and harvest without knowing beforehand the weather conditions. Those that help others don't know who will be grateful and who won't be.

Although Solomon speaks of calamities and evil, he does not support a hopelessness attitude. He is not saying that since life is full of uncertainties we should not do anything. On the contrary, he is saying that we need an adventurous and confident spirit, willing to confront the risks and opportunities of life with enthusiasm and faith lead by God.

Verse 3. When the clouds are dark, it will rain; this is as certain as a tree that has fallen will not move. We can anticipate certain events, but we cannot control them, neither determines with accuracy the results. A tree falls anywhere; rain comes when God wants it to, and where He chooses. We must learn to live with enthusiasm even when we cannot control all that happens in life.

Verse 4. Many hope to have an assurance of a harvest, when they sow, therefore, they never sow. They do not sow out of fear that the wind will blow the seeds away. If they do sow, they do not want to harvest for fear that the rain will ruin their work. No farmer with this mentality can prosper. Rather, they must work hard, without knowing beforehand if their decisions of when to

sow and harvest was accurate. Similarly, we must be committed no matter what God allows to happen. See **1 Corinthians 9:10**. We cannot keep our arms crossed; we need to act with faith. Remembering: that faith is to take action.

Verses 5 and 6. Waiting for the perfect situation will provoke inactivity. This practical reasoning is applied in particular to the spiritual life. If we wait for the perfect place to read the Bible, we will never begin to read. If we wait for the perfect church, we will never congregare. If we wait for the perfect leader, we will never serve. We cannot be so demanding. In general, whoever is very demanding towards others, is indulgent with themselves.

We need to take steps today to grow spiritually not waiting for those conditions that may never be. If one day those conditions do appear, it will probably be too late. We need to act with faith and not sight. God is the one that does all things. We should take care of what we must, as Paul said: *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase”* (**1 Corinthians 3:6**).

5. ACT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

Verse 6-8. In this verse, “morning” represents the years of youth, of strength; “evening” the years of decline; and “darkness” the last days of ones life, when all begins to become dark. Lets read **Ecclesiastes 12:1-8**. This portion of scripture and other in this book confirms death’s certainty and the need for us to act quickly.

Solomon never asks if the difficult days will come; he only says that one should prepare, because it is certain they will come, and many times before we expect it. In the presence of this unavoidable truth, we cannot afford to delay things. The Lord is fascinated with the word “Today!”

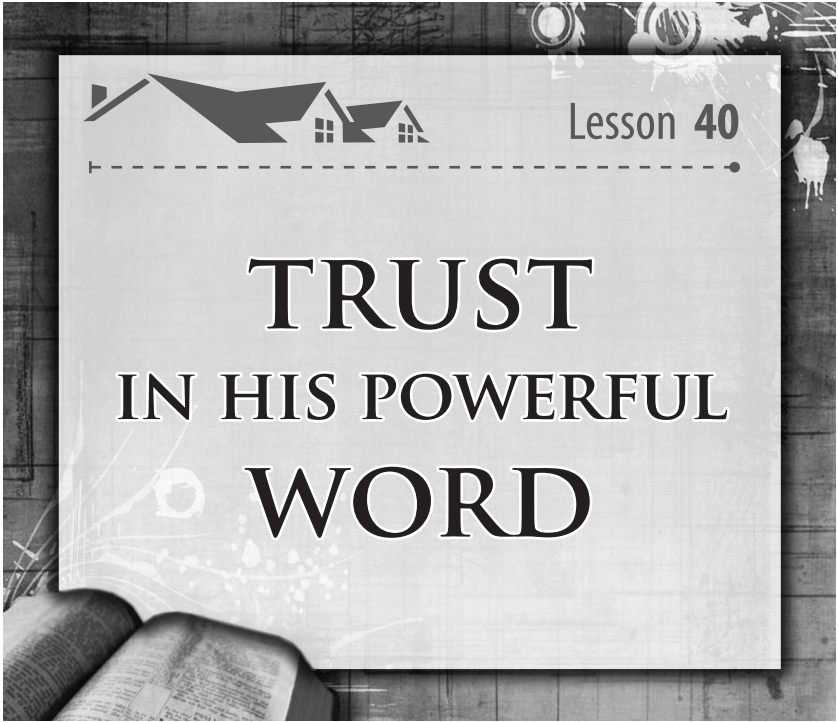
In **Ecclesiastes 10:16** Solomon laments: “Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, And your princes feast in the morning!” Referring to those that want to harvest before sowing, receive before giving, benefit before having committed. This is not how faith works. First, you sow, then you harvest. **Ecc. 3:2.**

6. CONCLUSION

In life, many allow big opportunities to pass; others allow to be paralyzed by fear. We should never doubt that eventually we will take your bread, if today we are casting it upon the waters with faith. All that we give will come back to us. What we invest will be well kept in God’s deposit. See **2 Timothy 1:12.**

A person of faith does not consider the impact of the moment, but is focused on the long term. Lets begin to make our decisions more broadly focused. Asking ourselves everyday, what results will we see in 10 years, 20 years from what we are doing, and what outcome will it have in heaven, for this is where we will be with God forever.

- What stage of life do you find yourself: In the morning, afternoon, or evening?
- What decision are you postponing knowing that time is passing and will soon finish?
- What fears do you need to conquer so that you can set sail on the adventure of faith?



Icebreaker: What do you think of this phrase: “The Bible is the Book of books?”

2 Timothy 4:13: *“Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

The apostle Paul was held captive when he wrote the second epistle to Timothy. It is probable that his arrest was so sudden; he did not have time to return home to pick up his personal things.

Because he was in a damp and cold cell, Paul asked Timothy for his cloak. However, more than his cloak he wanted his books and parchments. These perhaps included parts of the Old Testament, the gospels, copies of his own letters and other important documents.

The word of God is not a matter of small importance. Many have this word in an old forgotten Bible under a stack of magazines. Many Christians are completely oblivious to the potential they have in their hands. Although the Bible is a book forgotten by many the:

2. WORD OF GOD IS POWERFUL

- a. It has the power to create. *“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible”* (**Hebrews 11:3**). God speaks and the universe is made from nothing; He declared it and it was. *“Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light”* (**Genesis 1:3**). Our faith is in God who created the universe with His word. The word of God has impressive power.
- b. It has the power to cleanse. *“You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you”* (**John 15:3**). Jesus tells us that His word cleanses as a gardener trims the branches of a fruit tree, so that it will produce more fruit. The word “trim” is used referring to the aspects of our character that are preventing our faith to grow.
- c. The word has power to heal. *“Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tor-*

mented.” And Jesus said to him, “I will come and heal him.” The centurion answered and said, “*Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed*” (**Matthew 8:5-8**). If a Roman soldier, who is naive to the things of God, was able to understand that just a word of Jesus was sufficient to heal his servant; How much more should we trust in His word in our moment needing a healing.

- d. The word is powerful to convert and save: “*For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it*” (**Isaiah 55:10-11**). “*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (**Romans 10:17**). “*For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe*” (**1 Corinthians 1:21**). Therefore, the word does what God wants it to, it produces faith in those that hear it, and salves the believer when it is preached with anointing. How do we listen to the word of God and in what manner do we respond?
- e. The word discerns and reaches the depths of the soul: “*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*” (**Hebrews 4:12**).
- f. The word of God is food for all: “*But He answered and said, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word*

that proceeds from the mouth of God.” But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4).

- g.** It fills you with life: *“I am afflicted very much; Revive me, O Lord, according to Your word” (Psalms 119:107).*
- h.** It is powerful to rebuke the devil: *“Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him” (Matthew 4:8-11).*

We could have mentioned many more things that the word of God can do.

3. THE FORGOTTEN BOOK

What a great loss that today many brethren have put the word of God to one side, ignoring its great power. In many large Christian ministries and above all in the youth, there exists a concerning tendency to focus primarily in the music, videos, theater, arts, and Internet.... while the Bible has taken at best second place.

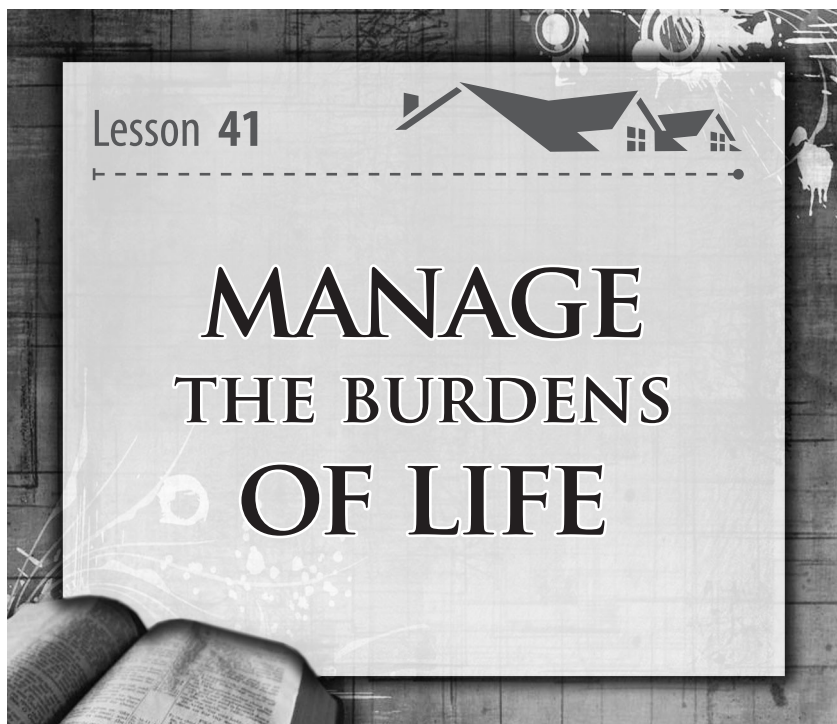
The rhythm of the music and the spectacular of a presentation always end. While the word of God, in addition to all the extraordinary things we have seen it can do remains forever. *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matthew 24:35).*

4. CONCLUSION

When someone does not return periodically to the Bible, it indicates a lack of faith. When we abandon reading the Bible, by replacing it with other things it only shows that we do not really trust in its power, and that sadly we are not interested in knowing its author better.

The Lord promised eternal life when we seek the scriptures along with abundant living and a victorious life as we pass through this world. Therefore, brother, sister, friend, today we encourage that you read and study your Bible with great audacity. If you do so, you will experience in your life the power of God in a completely new way. *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).* Amen.

- How much time have you used lately to read the Bible?
- Are you aware of the power that you could have and perhaps are letting escape you?
- What will you do about this?



Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the expression, “the burdens of life?”

Psalms 55:4-8, 22: *“My heart is severely pained within me, And the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, And horror has overwhelmed me. So I said, “Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. Indeed, I would wander far off, And remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape From the windy storm and tempest. Cast your burden on the Lord, And He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

When we speak of “burdens of life”, it is only natural that we are reminded of previous experiences. It is also possible that our thoughts go to the difficult situation we are dealing with now. We all go through difficult moments. The question is: What do we do in certain circumstances? How should we handle the burdens of life? The scriptures give us at least three answers to this question. However, before we consider what we should do with our burdens, let's look at what we should not do:

- (1) It is not right to ask God for wings to fly away as David did (**verse 6**).
- (2) Much less desire our death as Job did: *“May the day perish on which I was born, And the night in which it was said, ‘A male child is conceived. May that day be darkness; May God above not seek it, Nor the light shine upon it’” (Job 3:3-4).* Let's consider how we should act on difficult days.

2. ENDURE ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

Let's read **Galatians 6:1-5**. In the first verse, we find Paul who was a spiritual man, asking the brethren of Galatia to be spiritual, for if one of them failed God, to restore them into the congregation. In **verse 2**, the Greek word “burden” is “βάρος (barē),” which means problem or heaviness. In other words, the Lord demands for us to use our spiritual strength in reserve to encourage those that have fallen, helping them with the heaviness of the burden that they carry. This is to be done with meekness and integrity never with impatience or criticism.

There are many burdens that cause brethren to become weak, tired, and even neglect their spiritual lives. It is here that the vigor of the law of Christ comes into effect; to do unto others as we would want them to do to us: *“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets”* (**Matthew 7:12**). We all have the right to receive help from others, and all have the responsibility to offer help each other. Even Christ, as a man needed help. See **Matthew 27:32**.

To fulfill the law of Christ means to have the same feeling that was in Christ, our example for everything. He is the example to follow in enduring the burdens of others. **Isaiah 53:6**, *“All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”* **Matthew 8:17**: *“that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘He Himself took our infirmities And bore our sicknesses.’”* He left the ninety-nine and went to seek the one that was lost, carrying it back into the fold (**Luke 15:4-7**).

When our body suffers from an infection, the defensive cells of the body immediately come together to fight the infection. This is what should occur in the church: we should become united in the face of difficulty so that the part of the body in trouble- the brother or sister in crisis can heal. Our victory largely depends on the support, and strength that the rest of the congregation offers us in the moments of difficulty.

Romans 15:1, *“We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.”* | **Thessalonians 5:14**: *“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.”* **Romans 12:15**: *“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”*

3. EACH ONE CARRIES HIS OWN BURDEN

In **Galatians 6:5** it would seem that Paul changes his position when he says, “.” This appears to be contradictory to the previous verses; however, the word “burden” is not “βάρη (barē)” in the Greek, but “φορτίον (phortion),” which refers to the task, labor or a particular commitment.

Paul is concerned with the fact that in the process of helping others, with their own burdens or weakness we are overcome with a feeling of superiority- the sin of boasting. It is necessary when performing an examination that it is done for oneself only, in other words, when we see the weakness of others it should only be for compassion, and not a comparison. In this sense, each one should carry their own. We could paraphrase it like this: *“If you want to boast, only look at yourself; don’t be like the Pharisee that compared himself with the tax collectors. Instead use God’s standard, then you see that the only boasting you can do is in Him.”*

Some scriptures that also talk about carrying our own burdens: **(1) Matthew 11:28-30** teaches us that each one should carry the yoke of Christ over him or herself. **(2) Romans 12:1-2** tells us that we should present our bodies a living sacrifice. **(3) Luke 9:23** tells us to be Jesus disciples we must deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Him. **(4) Matthew 25:14** tells us to use the gifts that He has given us wisely.

The previous paragraph can be summarized with the word “commitment.” God has called us into a serious commitment with Him. No one can truly be happy in life if he or she is not sincerely committed to someone or something. Each one of us

needs to accept the challenge of being committed with Christ, especially in our local church. If we want to be an integrated part of the church, we need to endure the burdens that pertain to us as members.

4. PLACE OUR BURDENS ON THE LORD

Returning to **Psalm 55**, we read.

(verse 22). The burdens that until now we have considered up to this point (those who are weak, and those that are our own responsibility) cannot be placed on the Lord. However, we will now refer to a different kind of burden. The Hebrew word for “burden” in this verse is “Yahab (yə hā bə kā)” is the only time used in the Bible to literally mean “A heavy burden.” “Yahab” refers to a burden that God allows us to carry, although it is humanly impossible.

In life, there are “heavy burdens” of sickness, financial crisis, family problems, persecution and various types of tragedies. It deals with extremely difficult situations, like what king David wrote about in **Psalm 55**. These types of burdens should be placed on God; otherwise, they will cause frustration and bitterness in us. We should never allow a root of bitterness, resentment, or doubt sprout in our hearts, regardless the circumstances.

In regards to this, Peter teaches us, “*casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you*” (**1 Peter 5:7**). When we put our burdens on God, David says that God will sustain us. “Sustain” equals to help, support, hold up, conserve, maintain, strengthen, comfort, and encourage.

God can sustain us in two ways:

- (1)** Removing the burden: God resurrects the dead, heals the sick, converts the heart. Our God does wonders!
- (2)** Otherwise, He simply helps us endure the burden: at times, His will is not to heal or resolve our problem. For example, He gave the early church the strength to endure in the midst of persecution. He did not stop the persecution. God helps Paul, not removing the thorn in his side, but giving him grace and strength to endure his sickness.

5. CONCLUSION

We should learn how to manage the burdens of our life, or our life will be crushed by them. We have considered how we should endure (help) others with their burdens; endure the burdens that only we should carry, and those that we need to place on the Lord. Let's each one of us focus on doing our part, trusting that God will do His.

- Would you like to pray, and take all your burdens to the Lord?



Icebreaker: What are some victories in your life you are most proud of?

Proverbs 21:31: *“The horse is prepared for the day of battle, But deliverance is of the Lord.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

We are continuing with our series, “Seven Decisions To Live Happy.” Our key word for today is “victory.” Some anonyms of this word are: defeat, loss, failure, and ruin. Synonyms are: gain, advantage, triumph, and excellence. It is very interesting to find

what “victory” means in the dictionary: What is achieved through the subjection of vices and passions.

Solomon’s thought in **Proverbs 21:31** shifts towards the triumph that is produced in our life when God is with us. Paul speaks of the same in **Romans 8:37** saying, “*Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.*”

2. FIGHTING THE BATTLE WITH GOD

Life is full of many difficulties and failures. It is to no one’s surprise to say that everyone has problems. Failure is present at every level: Individual, family, business, institutions, national, and global. The entire world is seeking success, yet it is elusive short lived. It appears that the only constant in human existence is failure.

Today we see wars, sickness, and hunger multiplying throughout the planet; violence and delinquency without refrain in every place. Why is there so much failure? Why is progress so difficult to reach? Answer: Because of the mankind’s spirit of independence.

We all understand that in order to reach success we must struggle. Let’s put as an example someone who is going to get married. He is saving money, working extra hours, organizing himself to obtain what he needs. Who does not know that to gain something important, we must first strive, renouncing other things. See **Genesis 29:27**.

However, few admit that the only battles in life that are victorious are those that are fought with God’s help. We must under-

stand that in order to have victory, we must refuse to fight with our own strengths and take John the Baptist position that said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (**John 3:30**).

3. WHEN FAILURE BECOMES VICTORY

A Chinese proverbial story says there was an old farmer who hand an old horse to cultivate his fields. One day, the horse escaped into the mountains. When the farmer’s neighbors told him that he had back luck for losing his horse, he responded, Good Luck? Bad Luck? Who knows?

A week later, the horse returned with a herd of wild horses. Then the farmer’s neighbors congratulated him for his good luck, to which he responded: Good Luck? Bad Luck? Who knows?

When the son of the farmer tried to tame those wild horses, he fell and broke his leg. The whole world saw this as a disgrace. Not the farmer, who simply said, Good Luck? Bad Luck? Who knows?

Weeks later, the Red Army entered into the town and recruited all the young men that were in good condition to fight. However, when they say the son of the farmer with a broken leg, they left him.

Moral of the Story: What can appear good at first can be harmful; and what appears to be a setback, can be hiding good. Luck does not exist; God exist. If anything occurs, it is because He allows it. Therefore, it would be wise to let God decide what is good or bad for us.

We would also be wise to thank Him for everything that He allows us to go through, for all things in life become good for those that are called by Him, according to His purpose. See **Romans 8:28**. A short phrase can summarize the previous: We should love God, not success.

4. TO HATE OUR OWN LIFE

Many followed Jesus at the beginning of His ministry, surely attracted by His many wonders, and miracles. However, slowly the multitudes began to dissipate, and only a handful of disciples remained with the Master. See **John 6:66**. What scared the people away? Surely, it must have been the pressure of commitment and having to renounce certain things before being able to receive other things.

“Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:25-27).

How difficult it is to surrender one's personal affections! However, Jesus is overwhelming: If we want to be His disciples, we must hate what is ours. In the gospel, “hate” does not mean to despise, but to love less; in other words, Jesus asks that we put everything beneath Him, and that including our own lives.

It is like the concept that Solomon handles in **Proverbs 21:31**: The problem arrives in our life and we almost always think, “I need to get the horse ready”, in other words, I will do this or that, I will respond like this or like that, I will defend myself with this or that, etc. However, when we act like this, we are

forgetting one of the most important things- the only one that can give us the victory is God.

To hate our life means to renounce our self-confidence and begin to depend in God for everything.

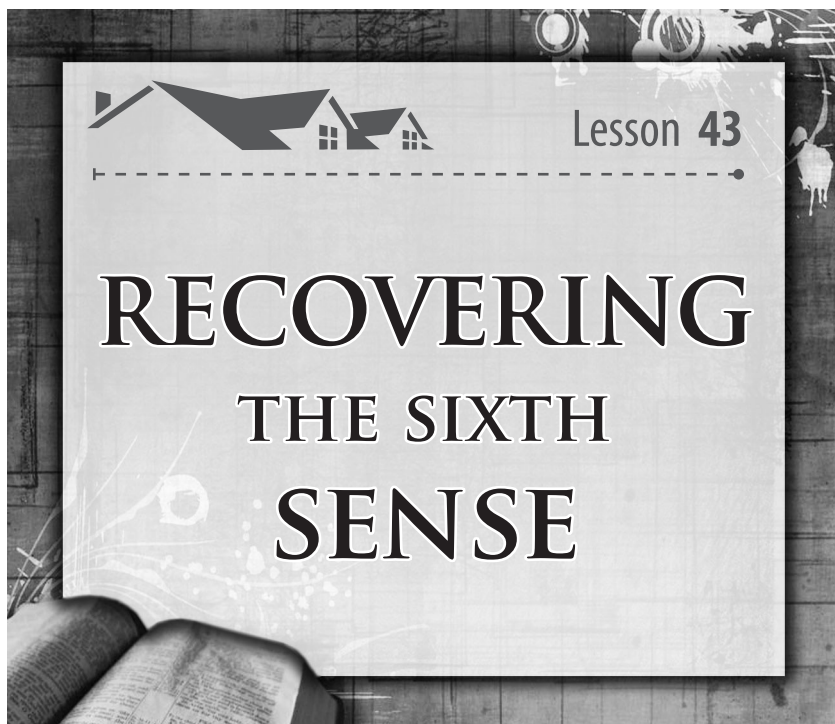
We run the risk of being bound to the past, to the aftermath of our childhood or youth, lack of determination. Everyone seems these days to say, “I am not responsible.”

However, we have the example of Joseph in Egypt, that in spite of his sad past, he became the most important person after Pharaoh, because God is greater than anyone’s past.

CONCLUSION

It is not in God’s plans that you fail. However, in order to obtain the victory it is necessary for you to place Him in your plans. He has left us the elements to be triumphant, with the objective to take us to a higher place and make us true protagonist of the dynamics of the work of God.

I Corinthians 15:57-58, *“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”*



Icebreaker:

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word “boredom?”

Job 37:14, “Listen to this, O Job; Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God.” **I Chronicles 16:12**, “Remember His marvelous works which He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth.” **Psalms 77:14**, “You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples.” **Psalms 139:14**, “I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well.”

I. INTRODUCTION

Today's world has lost its ability to be amazed. This is a sign of old age. Almost nothing grabs an older person's attention; a child on the other hand is continually amazed. This must have been one of the determining reasons why Jesus said, "*Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it*" **(Luke 18:17)**.

2. THE SIXTH SENSE

He or she that develops the sense of admiration is as someone who is born blind and suddenly acquires his or her sight. At first, they are in a new world, a world once ignored, yet a marvelous world. It is as if that person has been unexpectedly transferred to another planet, a place of beauty and newness without end.

To feel admiration is like bringing heaven to earth. The Bible invites us to stop and consider God's wonders **(Job 37:14)**. There is so much to admire about Him and His works! We should say as the Psalmist: "*I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.*" **(Psalm 139:14)**. David had developed a sixth sense, the ability to admire. We need to develop this as well. If we hope to live in a perfect and marvelous place called heaven, we must first become admirers of God here on earth.

3. ADMIRATION AND ADORATION

The apostle Paul said, "*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are with-*

out excuse” (**Romans 1:20**). The visible is a reflection of the invisible. That which is natural reflects the spiritual. The power of God and His character can be understood through the things He has created.

There are many people that oversee precious things that surround them: mountains, trees, flowers... If their feelings are too bottled up to appreciate that which is within sight, they will be more limited in perceiving, knowing, and admiring God. The reason God had to put so many things around us is to capture our attention and help draw us to Himself. To help us know the greater wonders like: faith, love, grace, forgiveness, salvation, the Holy Spirit, joy, peace, and many other gifts. It is necessary to feel admiration for everything that God has made. Without admiration, there is no worship.

David worship God saying, “*You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples*” (**Psalms 77:14**). For well-opened pupils, creation is always wonderful. The wings of a butterfly, a snow crystal, a sunset, birds, the sea, the fish, the stars, etc. “*This was the Lord’s doing; It is marvelous in our eyes*” (**Psalms 77:14**). We prostrate in worship before the Creator of so many wonders!

4. THE LOST SENSE

The sense of admiration has been lost at this time, largely due to the fact that we live saturated with information: news on television, text messages on our cellular phones, emails, social media notifications, full agendas, electronic gadgets of all kinds, etc.

Let us think! Just a few decades ago none of this existed and in many cases was not even considered possible. However, today we handle so many things at once; everything seems urgent, and

we don't seem to find time for what really is important. Our lifestyle reduces the probability of something capturing our attention or admiration.

However, this problem is not new. The Gospel of Jesus almost did not impact the Greek Athenians of Paul's time. Why? Because they were only interested in new things. They heard Paul preach for a while at the Areopagus but quickly tired of doing so. See **Acts 17:21**. The Athenians were easily bored, does this sound familiar?

People that are lethargic or indifferent are this way because of an empty interior. Many try to fill that void with pleasure, diversion, etc. For example, what is the reason that the consumption of hallucinogens in the world has sharply increased? Simply because these drugs help a person escape reality, allowing his or her mind to fabricate unreal images, that are generally absurd, and even frightening-this is known as "tripping out" or "pyschedelia."

People that use hallucinogen substances know that they are destroying parts of their own brain and body. Nevertheless, they cannot stop. To them it is the only way that they have found to contend with the fatigued that they feel with their life, and from all that is around them.

5. RECOVERING THE FEELING OF ADMIRATION

To stop for a moment and feel admiration is an indispensable vitamin for one's spiritual life and mental health. To feel admiration once again we must purify our spirit, body, moral, and mind. We need to have a wholesome body, mind, eyes, an easy spirit, and pure heart. If there isn't purity in the soul, body, and spirit the sixth sense cannot develop.

Brother, sister, friend, we need to appreciate and admire God's wonders. The whole spiritual, moral, and physical universe are an emotional special. The enemy wants to keep us insensitive and indifferent, but listen to the counsel of the Biblical singer: *"Remember His marvelous works which He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth"* (**1 Chronicles 16:12**).

6. CONCLUSION

We need to renew our admiration for Jesus and for all that He has done for us. We need to return to see the sublime in the common things. How many delights and simply joys are within our reach if we only opened our physical and spiritual eyes!

The following days, whenever you can remember the sixth sense and ask yourself: What can I admire here? What is sublime around me? Observe the people around you: your family, your friends, your brothers and sisters in the faith. See them with admiration and express gratitude to God for them, your happiness for being so blessed.

- Lets do this today- Let's worship Jesus.



Icebreaker:

What's the first thing you think of when you hear the following expression: "Him and I are close friends?"

1 Kings 10:1-2,

"Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions. 2 She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels that bore spices, very much gold, and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart."

I. INTRODUCTION

We continue in our series, “Seven Decisions to Live Happy.” Today we will explain the importance of being our Lord Jesus Christ’s confidant.

In general, it is not prudent to tell others what is in our heart. Samson reached the climax of his foolishness when he did this with Delilah. See **Judges 16:17**. However, if we could find someone like Solomon, who was able to answer all our questions, and resolve all our difficulties- telling them everything may not only be prudent, but also vital.

We now have one greater than Solomon: our Lord Jesus Christ, the embodiment of wisdom. We must come to Him with all confidence, to tell Him everything about us.

2. COMMUNION WITH HIM

A common error we make is that we are too quiet with Jesus, while we are very communicative with other people. Should we make man our confidant while concealing our matters from God? This bad habit must be rectified. We need to communicate with Jesus everything that is in our heart.

We endanger our very existence when we neglect our communion with Him. *“For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: “Seek Me and live” (Amos 5:4). “But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:40).* Should we deprive our God from the communion with our soul He loves so much?

When we hide anything from a true friend like Christ, it reveals the sad fact that we have something bad to hide. David tried to do this for some time, until he could bear it no more, and he prayed like this:

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You.

(Psalm 139:7-12).

3. LET NOTHING SEPARATE YOU FROM HIM

See **Romans 8:35**.

Our communion with Jesus should never be interrupted, not even for...

- a. Our sadness: God knows how weak we are, and He desires to comfort us on our bad days. See **I Kings 19:3-8**. God helps us in our difficulties, helping us many times to benefit from them and remove them at the proper time.
- b. Our Joys: Joy without Jesus is like the sun without light, and perfume without aroma. Joy without Jesus is as bad as, the party they had for the calf, which provoked His anger: "*So the Lord plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made*" (**Exodus 32:35**). Jesus wants to be the only reason for our joy and happiness in life. When we refer our joy to Jesus, He keeps us reasonable, by adding balance to our lives.

- c. Our fears: Fear of falling, or suffering needs; fear to face sickness or even death. All our fears end when we mention them to Jesus. *“Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you”* (**1 Peter 5:7**).
- d. Our failures: We should mention them to Jesus. After John the Baptist had been beheaded, his disciples took the body, buried it, and then went to tell Jesus. See **Matthew 14:12**. Jesus Himself did not conceal His feelings of anguish in Gethsemane- **Mark 14:34**.
- e. Our successes: It is necessary to tell the Lord our successes as well. When the Lord’s 70 evangelist returned, they told Him everything they did. See **Luke 10:17-20**. Telling Christ of our accomplishments helps us to keep giving Him the glory in our life.

4. LOVE COMMUNICATES

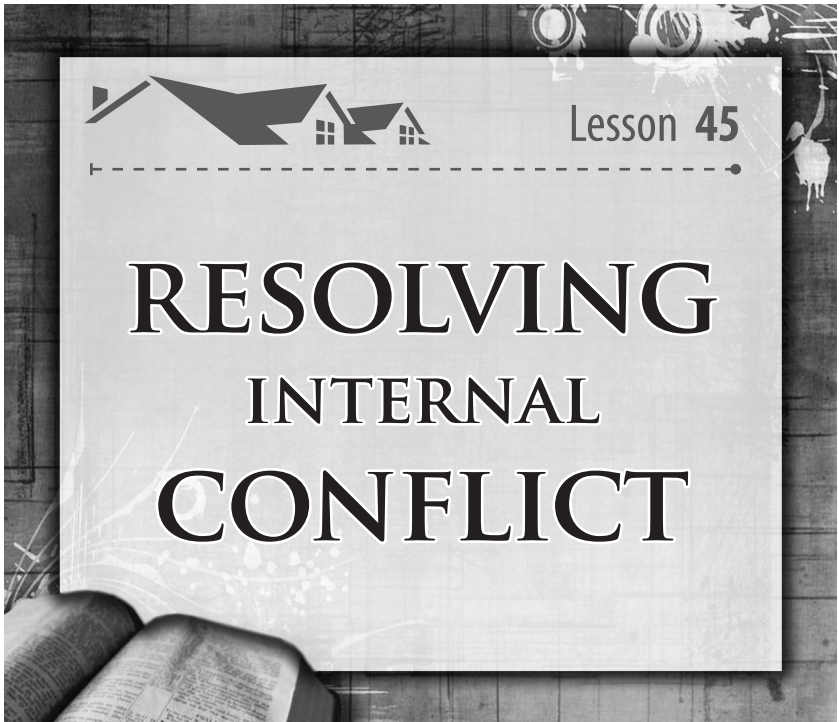
A carpenter in time of need would release everything, except his tools; for losing those would mean to lose everything. The reading of the word of God, prayer, fasting are a Christian’s tools we cannot be without. Why then do we forget these holy things when problems rage? Would this not be like selling all our tools?

The lack of communication with God is something serious. True love communicates. You cannot keep your secrets from your loved one, neither be kept from speaking to them. The strongest faith needs to speak, and be confessed from the heart. **Ephesians 3:12** speaks to us of one in whom we have “confidence.” The word confidence is directly translated from the original language and it means, “to say everything.”

5. CONCLUSION

“The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here” (Luke 11:31). If the queen of Sheba with much less revelation and opportunity than us, was willing to travel such great distance to open her heart to King Solomon. How much more should we seek Jesus with a sincere heart, not hiding anything! Lets come before Him with confidence, telling Him everything about our life.

- What is holding us back from beginning to tell Jesus everything?
- Is there anything that you cannot tell your Lord?



Icebreaker: What are some examples of things people wrestle with internally?

Proverbs 26:2: *“Like a flitting sparrow, like a flying swallow, So a curse without cause shall not alight.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the universal laws that God has established is the law known as “Cause and Effect.” According to this law, nothing happens by accident. From a divine perspective, accidents do not exist. God’s entire plan for your life is subject to this law.

We must understand that many of the good or bad things that happen are the result of what we have sown. What we do today whether good or bad is sown for tomorrow's harvest. "They sow the wind, And reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no bud; It shall never produce meal. If it should produce, Aliens would swallow it up" (**Hosea 8:7**). *"For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life"* (**Galatians 6:8**).

In this manner, we conclude our series, "Seven Decisions to Live Happy." We will consider the important topic of what we sow in life, the internal conflict that our sowing many times produces, and the manner in which to resolve those conflicts.

2. THE CAUSE OF PROBLEMS

Difficulties do not come alone: they arrive with questions. In the midst of a problem, we usually say: Why? We often seek explanations for our situations with little or no success. At other times, we blame the devil for our problems. Although many of our afflictions are started by him, as was the case with Job.

Study at home chapter 1 of that book.

Other problems arrive because of people that do not fear God. The early church was persecuted by cruel governors. In relation to this, we know that the Lord Himself allows affliction in our lives to test our faith. *"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,"*

(1 Peter 1:6-7.)

3. INTERNAL CONFLICTS

Today we will look underline three types of problems that exist. These are a result of our own conduct and attitudes. Bad attitudes and wrong decisions produce internal conflicts in us. We all carry these types of conflicts and struggle to resolve them; at times not really knowing how. How can we face, and resolve our internal conflicts?

A good starting point is to acknowledge that in our life there is disobedience to the principles and rules that God has established. We will now observe eight areas of conflict, which are the most common in our lives. We will also ask certain questions that will allow us to find the cause and effect connection in each area.

Area #1: MY COMMITMENT WITH CHRIST

Have I made a true commitment to serve the Lord with all my heart? Am I presenting myself as a living sacrifice as the apostle Paul mentions in **Romans 12:1**? Am I in His will? Am I a channel for the love of God to flow towards others?

Area #2: ACCEPTANCE OF MYSELF

If I were standing in front of a mirror and could change anything of my appearance, would I do it? Have I accepted how God has made me? Am I grateful for the way that I am? Have I learned to live with my physical defects?

Area #3: HARMONY WITH MY AUTHORITY

God has established three basic structures of authority: The Family, The Church, and the Government. Am I sensitive and obe-

dient towards those those who are my authorities? If one day I hold a position of authority, would I like to be treated as I am treating my authority today?

Area #4: A CLEAN CONSCIENCE

Prayer is something very important. However, on occasions certain things surge with more importance than prayer. Jesus said, *“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift”* (**Matthew 5:23-24**). Have I asked for forgiveness to those I have offended? Have I tried to make amends as much as possible?

Area #5: SPIRIT OF FORGIVENESS

Jesus said in prayer: *“And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors”* (**Matthew 6:12**). He was explaining to us that if we forgive men their offenses, our heavenly Father will forgive us; however if we do not, our Father will not forgive ours (**Matthew 6:14-15**). Have I forgiven those that have offended me in these last few days? Am I a person who angers easily? Have I submitted my rights to God, so that I don’t have to defend them, or defend myself?

Area #6: MY MORAL WORLD

Am I learning how to discipline my mind and heart? What has been on my mind lately? Is my personal and moral behavior just before God, in particular when no one from my family or church can see me? Am I living under the direction of the Holy Spirit? Am I reading daily the Word of God? See **Psalms 119:11**.

Area #7: MY FINANCES AND ADMINISTRATION

Have I dedicated my possessions, my money, and my abilities to God? Am I diligent and sincere in the way that I administer my finances? *“Incline my heart to Your testimonies, And not to covetousness” (Psalms 119:36).*

Area #8: MI PURPOSE IN LIFE

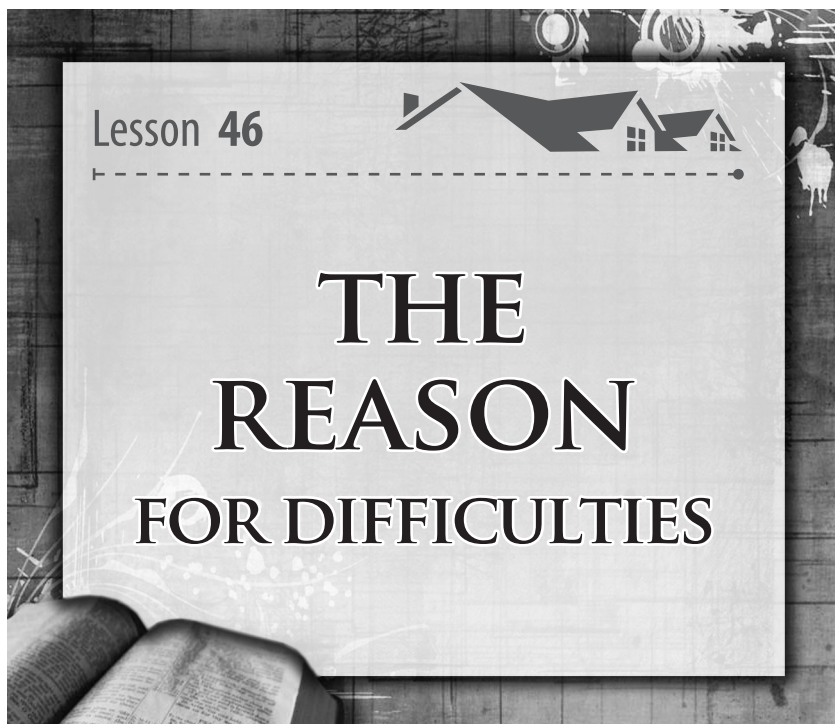
Do I have clear defined goals regarding God and my service? The Lord told Jeremiah: *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5).* My friend, brother or sister, God does not show partiality **(Acts 10:34)**. He does not make a plan just for a few; He has a plan for each and every one of us! Are you trying to align your life with God’s plans?

4. CONCLUSION

Solomon wrote, *“Like a flitting sparrow, like a flying swallow, So a curse without cause shall not alight” (Proverbs 26:2).* In reality, almost every conflict that we experience in our personal life can be linked to a violation or negligence in the eight areas just mentioned.

If this is happening in your life, there is only one exit: get close to God and tell Him of the matter. If you ask God the reason, He will show you His will. Then He will bring internal peace, and the assurance of victory, regardless how difficult your problem may be.

- Can you identify two or three areas of conflict in your life in which you are having problems?
- What steps will you take in the next few days to resolve them?



Icebreaker: Briefly share an important difficulty you have had to face.

I. INTRODUCTION

We begin, “The Seven Purposes of Brokenness,” we will be studying the various difficulties of the Christian life, and how to face them.

Lets read **James 5:7-11**.

Serving the Lord is a vocation, not a vacation. As children of God, we are not exempt from suffering difficulties. A Christian life implies that on occasions we will have to live through difficult moments, and understanding this is the key to living victorious.

2. ENDURE EVERY SITUATION

As believers, we trust in God's power, in that He can work miracles, healings, and wonders. However, this trust that we have deposited in Him must also be professed when difficulties arrive. When facing setbacks, it is very important to understand that God may offer an immediate exit, nevertheless, in other cases He may choose to allow us to go through a storm, in which there is no escape.

God allows many of the problems in our lives with the purpose of teaching us to endure. In the Bible the word 'Endure' comes from the Greek work "humpomeó" and is related with the concept of resistance, tolerance, and persevere, etc. To endure difficulties means to continue to serve the Lord in the midst of the trial, because we are convinced that He is faithful. He will not allow us to suffer more afflictions than we can bear.

1 Corinthians 10:13 contains the promise that with every temptation, God allows an escape. However, this promise is only applicable to those that obediently serve the Lord. This means that if a Christian does not live according to the Word of God, it is very probable that they will not have the strength to conquer temptation when it comes into their life. If we stop obeying God, He is free from His commitment to help us from our difficulties, although in most cases He still brings us out. See **2 Timothy 2:13**. God is good!

3. DIFFERENT DIFFICULTIES

- a. Affliction. This is due to misfortune, suffering, shortages and other similar things. See **2 Timothy 4:5**. Everyone has problems, and as Christians, we are not except. The Thessalonians were faithful Christians, obedient to the Lord, however Paul says that they received the word in much affliction (**1 Thessalonians 1:6**). Life is full of affliction because of situations we cannot control. However, although we cannot decide whether or not to enter into affliction, we can be prepared to endure it.
- b. Hardship. Believers are called “The Lord’s Soldiers.” The life of a soldier is not an easy one. We live in the midst of a spiritual battle, in which every possible difficulties presents itself. There are battles, conflicts, confrontations, and dangers. This is how it should be, if we are true children of God. We need to be willing to suffer for the cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (**2 Timothy 2:3**).
- c. Persecution. The Lord promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against the church. However, the church has been, and will continue to be the target of intense persecution. Has God forgotten His promise? No, but persecution has been the vehicle He has used to grow His church. For centuries, the blood of martyrs has watered the fields, making it more fertile so that the seed of the Gospel will sprout and give fruit. See **2 Thessalonians 1:4**. Salvation is free, but Paul says to the brethren of Thessalonica that his sufferings for Christ and the persecution targeting them made them worthy of entering into His kingdom. (**2 Timothy 3:12**). In other words, there is no way of being a Christian in this world, without being persecuted.

d. **Despised.**

This implies sadness, anguish, shame, and grief caused by false accusations, negative criticism, and rejection. When we try to draw closer to God, to be used by Him in His work, many times criticism surges from unbelievers. Other times the criticism comes from people pretending to be on our team, but they are not with us. When we go through this situation, we must remember the Lord Jesus Christ: **Isaiah 53:3; 1 Peter 2:19-20.**

e. **Discipline.**

The Lord uses discipline with us to correct us. Therefore, God does not just bless us. He will also discipline us, and rebuke us when He wants to correct our errors. He does this because He loves us. See **Hebrews 12:5-11**. We must understand that God's correction is never for our destruction, but for our edification and individual growth. Without it, we would lose our rights as children, becoming illegitimate children. Let's accept God's discipline and make the necessary changes.

f. **Temptation.**

James says, *"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him"* (**1:12**). Temptation consists of a power that entices us to do evil. That power is in us, in our sinful nature. God never tempts us to do evil, although on occasions He allows Satan to do so, to test our consecration and faithfulness towards Him. It is inevitable for temptation to come, but falling into it is avoidable if our relationship with God is firm. Study the book of Job.

4. DENY ONESELF

When the time of affliction, hardship, persecution or despise arrives we should not despair like those who do not have God. He is with us, giving us grace and strength to be able to continue forward. So that we may be able to say as Paul, “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (**2 Corinthians 4:8-9**).

Jesus has called us to deny ourselves and take up our cross daily, and follow Him (**Luke 9:23**). This is the calling has never been, neither will it be something easy. However, those that love God will be able to do it. In **Hebrews 11** we find the precious testimony of Moses, “*By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward*” (**Hebrews 11:24-26**).

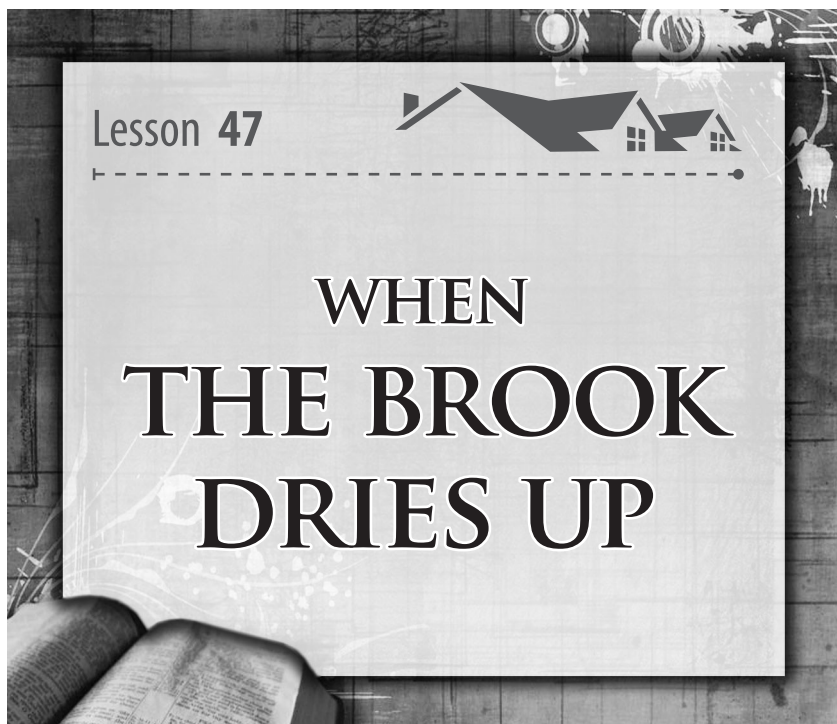
5. CONCLUSION

Romans 8:18,

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” An old hymn expressed it like this, “I will cling to the old rugged cross, and exchange it some day for a crown.”

1 Corinthians 13:7 affirms that love endures all things. Therefore, let us fill our hearts with the love of God that we may be able to endure all that may come.

- Mention a difficulty that has been hard to overcome.
- Do you think you can improve the way you confront the difficulties of life?
- What will you do accordingly?



Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word “drought?”

1 Kings 17:1-9, “And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.” Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.” So he went and did according to the word of the Lord, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the

brook. And it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.”

I. INTRODUCTION

In the days of the prophet Elijah, there was a drought in Israel. This drought had been sent from God because of the nation's sin. To preserve Elijah's life during the drought, God ordered the prophet to hide next to the Brook Cherith. The name “Cherith” means to “cut” from the Hebrew “Karat.” Elijah drank water from the brook for many days, while ravens would feed him bread and meat. Shortly after, the brook dried up, and God sent Elijah to another place.

2. OBEDIENCE AND MIRACLES

Verse 10-13. Without water to drink, Elijah receives a word from God to go to Zarephath. There lived a poor widow with her only son. Elijah arrives in Zarephath and asked the widow for something to eat, according to what God had ordered. However, she only had a bit of flour for one last meal. “So she said, “As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die” (**verse 12**).

Verses 14-16. Despite the extreme need in which the widow of Zarephath was, she obeyed the prophet and then God multiplied the flour and her oil in a miraculous manner. See **verses 17-22**. Shortly after, the widow's son died, but through Elijah's prayer, God resurrected the young man.

Elijah did not stay next to the brook protesting why did God dry it up. Instead, he diligently obeyed the order to go Zarephath without knowing what would happen. The widow of Zarephath did not protest either, although she was asked to give her last piece of bread to a complete stranger, but this is what God had requested **(verse 9)**. Elijah and the widow trusted that God would act in some manner during those difficult moments, and that's what happen! If they had not taken steps of obedience and faith, two great miracles would have never happened; the multiplication of the meals and the resurrection of the widow's son.

Faith is the step between the promise and safety. Miracles appear beyond our reach because of our weak faith. However, every miracle great or small begins with an act of obedience. Perhaps we will not see the solution until we take the first step of faith.

3. FROM THE BLESSING TO PURPOSE

Every blessing that God gives us, has a purpose. The blessing of God never is more important than the purpose that He has for each one of us. We live so occupied with our personal welfare, but not always to be in God's purpose. We ask Him to use us, but there is no way for God to use us, if we do not first find His will for our lives.

God knew if He did not dry up the brook of Cherith, Elijah would continue to live there, enjoying its water, and the daily meals brought by the ravens. It is important to remember that "Cherith" means to "cut." This is precisely what God does every time He wants to move us from our comfort towards His will.

God cuts our supplies with a clear intention. Many times God removes the Cherith from the material, finances decrease, employment finishes, and our business fails. We do not understand what failed. Nevertheless, many that have been in this drought, testify that this moved them to seek God more than when they were in abundance.

In other cases, Cherith is our health, which deteriorates without an apparent reason. God says, “Now see that I, even I, am He, And there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand” (**Deuteronomy 32:39**). Sometimes, God’s hand does not bring us health, but sickness to remind us how much He suffered for us, and how much He suffers to see us neglecting our mission, and the ministry He has entrusted us.

Many times our “Cherith” is the lack of understanding from our friends and family. See **Matthew 10:34-39**. Divisions and interpersonal conflicts are not always the work of the enemy. Many times God Himself brings disagreement to make us uncomfortable, and bring us out of the refuge of our relationship, families taking us in the direction to be His disciples.

4. CONCLUSION

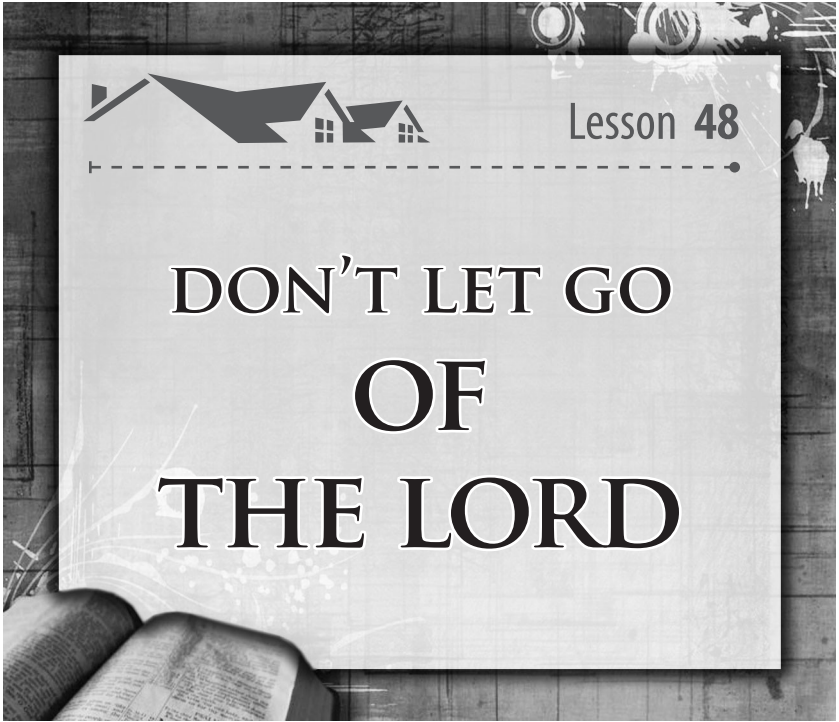
God’s desire is that we leave Cherith (what’s ours) behind, and for us to go to Zarephath (The desire of His will). Let’s think.

- where does God want us to be today?
- What ministry or service does He want to place us in for His glory and honor?
- Where will the next miracles take place?

Let us take our Lord Jesus Christ as an example, who suffered the greatest sufferings because of us. In the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done” (**Luke 22:42**). We should also seek to do God’s will and not ours.

See **Matthew 16:25**.

- What is your Cherith?
- What steps will you take to leave the comforts and safety holding you back from the will of God?



Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word “transformation?”

I. INTRODUCTION

Lets read **Genesis 32:22-32**. The struggle of Jacob and the angel is one of the stories with the most mystery in the Bible. It is story that reveals Jacob’s willingness to confront God in a moment of great need. After wrestling with the angel of Jehovah all night, Jacob gets his blessing and a new name: the name Israel means, “*who wrestles with God*.”

2. JACOB'S PAST

Chapters **27** to **31** of **Genesis** give us the context of our story.

In his youth, Jacob usurped the birthright blessing from his brother Esau (**27**), then came the first encounter with God in Bethel (**28**) where Jacob made a pact with God; then later he served Laban his uncle in the north of Syria for 14 years and married his two daughters Rachel and Leah (**29**) whom gave birth to many children. Finally, and after demonstrating he could surpass his father-in-law Laban in cunningness (**30**), Jacob begins to return to his home in Canaan (**31**).

All appeared okay, however trials had weakened Jacob; he had become older with many people under his care, his walk was more sluggish. Enemies like Esau were more powerful than Jacob and he was afraid. What could he do? Now Jacob marches to face his brother, and although the experiences with God from the previous days encouraged him, the reunion with Esau appears very dangerous.

Had Esau forgiven Jacob? Could 20 years undo old grudges? Would Esau take advantage of this situation to kill his brother Jacob? These were anxieties that filled the mind of Jacob, while they walked towards the land of Canaan.

3. JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD

Verses 22 and 23.

Jacob rises and surely because of fear decides to move his camp sheltering himself with the night. He crosses the Jabbok

River, a tributary of the river Jordan but sends his wives, servants, and children ahead and stays behind alone. Then suddenly, Jacob finds himself wrestling with a man (**verse 24**). Jacob and this man wrestle until dawn began to break.

Jacob still ignores the identity of this man, however in **verse 28** that same man tells Jacob that he is God, and in **verse 30** Jacob recognizes Him as such, when he says, “I have seen God face to face.” This adds to the mystery, why was God attacking Jacob, and couldn’t or didn’t want to defeat him?

Verse 26. The wrestling match lasts hours, until began to break. Jacob resisted, and continued to fight to obtain a blessing that he evidently needed. Here Jacob reveals a piece of his character: persistence. When God finally realizes that Jacob is not going to give up, he knocked Jacob’s hip out of its socket. Even though he was at a disadvantage, Jacob does not let go, and the angel tells him, “let me go.”

Jacob stole a blessing in the past, usurping the Esau’s place with deception. Now he had to fight for his blessing. Through the reconciliation with his brother, he would be blessed greater than ever before. However, he first needed to ask the angel for a blessing, whom was only willing to give it to him after they wrestled. Thanks to this encounter with God, Jacob began a new path that took him from being a usurper; thief of blessings to a man truly blessed; a man willing to abandon fraudulent shortcuts, and now walk down a straight path.

This is the merciful work of God that David speaks of, a God who does not always strive with us, one that does punish man according to his iniquities, neither does He dealt him according to his sins (**Psalms 103:9-10**).

He is one that gives second opportunities, but who also demands a clean heart, which without one is not possible to see God (**Matthew 5:8, Hebrews 12:14**).

4. GOD CHANGES THE NAME OF JACOB

Now God asks, “What is your name?” With this question, God is challenging Jacob to seek deep within himself so that he may answer with honesty. Of course, God knew Jacob’s name, but he needed to proclaim it, because of its significance: “supplanter” or “deceiver” (**Genesis 27:36**).

Jacob had to acknowledge his weakness before he could be transformed. When he pronounced his own name, Jacob in reality was confessing, “I am a deceiver.” When he responds this to God, Jacob discovers his identity, and he has a confrontation with himself, and his sin. Now God can change Jacob. Is this not the same for us as well?

Jacob’s conversion is confirmed with the name change (**verse 28**). Why does God change his name? Because God had chosen to put aside his character flaws and celebrate his tenacity and persistence. See **Hosea 12:2-6**. The prophet Hosea sees Jacob as a model to imitate when there is a need for a complete transformation.

God gave many people in the Bible new names, Abraham, Sara, Peter, Paul, and others. Their new names expressed how God had filled and transformed their lives. Jacob’s old name brought to memory his sad past. However, his new name, Israel, was the promise a better future for himself and his family. See **Revelation 2:17**.

5. GOD BLESSES JACOB

Verse 29 finishes saying, “*and He blessed him there.*” An affirmation that makes up the summit of this story. After wrestling all night with Jacob, God blessed him in the same manner He blessed his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac (**Genesis 25:11**). It was new beginning for Jacob, “the sun rose on him” (**verse 31**). A new day, a new hope for Jacob and his descendants.

Verse 30. The end of this story begins with the angel’s departure, and Jacob named that place Peniel, which means face of God in Hebrew. Jacob says, “*For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.*”

Jacob was astonished by this exceptional experience because no one can see God and life (**Exodus 33:20; Judges 13:22**). The apostle John confirms this in his gospel (**1:18**).

This brings us to suppose that what Jacob saw was a theophany, a manifestation of God’s divinity.

Verse 31. “*he limped on his hip*” symbolizes the cost he paid in losing his pride. This limp is a symbol of the divine power that leaves its mark on the “natural” or religious man.

God was letting Jacob know that the divine realm that he now had access to could only be walked with great difficulty, under complete dependence of divine grace.

See **2 Corinthians 12:9**.

6. CONFRONTING OUR PROBLEMS

Jacob's encounter with God happened because of the reconciliation of his brother Esau. This teaches us that God is very interesting in helping us resolve our interpersonal and family conflicts. However, our conflicts can only be resolved by confronting them, not running from them like Jacob did.

Jacob was alone when God appeared. This reminds us that when we are alone with God, good things begin to happen. He rewards publically what we have done in secret (**Matthew 6:4**).

The struggle of Jacob also teaches us that our life must have trials and setbacks. The purpose of these problems is for spiritual transformation. The strength of our character is developed according to the measure we fight in the midst of difficult conditions.

At times, the anguish that we come to feel appears to crush us. We lose sleep, and the desire to eat. We feel that all of the misfortunes have come over us, however, behind every great trial, there is a great opportunity, behind every great struggle, there are hidden spiritual blessings and treasures that we do not know.

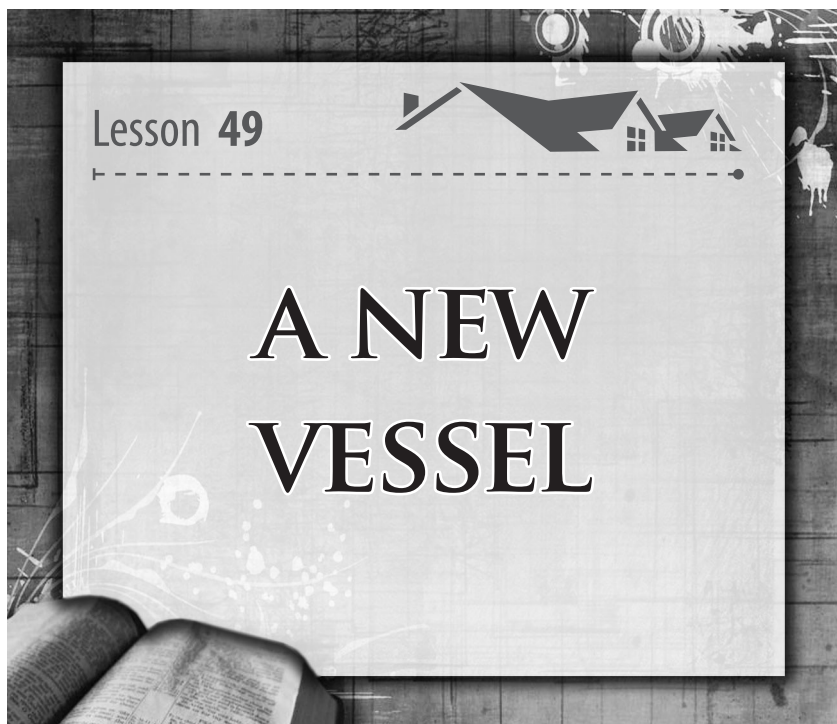
Jacob's struggle with the angel lasted all night. God could have touched Jacob's hip at the beginning of the struggle, but the Lord wanted to break him and bring him to a place where Jacob could sincerely say as Paul, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (**Galatians 2:20**). All night Jacob defended himself, refusing to give up and admit he had sinned. Then God weakened Jacob, and the wrestler could only hang on! Finally, instead of

coming up with a new scheme to obtain the blessing, Jacob humbled himself and asked God for his blessing...and he received it!

7. CONCLUSION

How can we obtain God's blessing? We need a transforming encounter with Him. "I will not let you go, until you bless me" was what Jacob told God. Let's do the same! Clinging on to the Lord and telling Him the same.

- What is your most urgent need today?
- How willing are you to fight for it?



Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word “clay?”

I. INTRODUCTION

We continue our series “The Seven Purposes of Brokenness.” Today we will look at the story of the vessel in the hands of the potter. Lets read **Jeremiah 18:1-6**. The prophet visits the house of the potter and observes how the clay is shaped. Here we find a picture of the grace of God, and our lives and our relationship with Him. Every object of this story has a great significance.

2. GOD, THE POTTER OF OUR LIFE

God is not simply an invisible “force” that created us. He is our father who has a personal interest in each one of us. He is the potter of our lives, *“But now, O Lord, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand” (Isaiah 64:8).*

The clay cannot shape itself, however God who is sovereign over all things has the power and authority to do with us how He pleases. *““O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?” says the Lord. “Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!” (Jeremiah 18:6).*

At times, we question what God is doing, but no one trying to tell God what do do next can be blessed. *“But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?” (Romans 9:20).*

The divine potter has a perfect plan for each one of us. In His mind, He does not see a formless lump, but a final product. *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).*

Our potter shapes us with patience until we become the vessel that He has purposed us to be. From time to time He uses the hands of others to help shape us: fathers, bosses, teachers, other believers, even those that persecute us.

God leads our lives patiently taking us to His will. Although this may take a long time, He is faithful and will make of our life a

vessel of excellence. *“Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”* **(Philippians 1:6).**

3. WE ARE THE CLAY

In Jeremiah’s message, it is obvious that the clay represent the people of Judah. However, we do not error in applying this teaching to our lives. The believers are truly God’s vessels, shaped by Him to possess His word and His presence. *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us”*

(2 Corinthians 4:7).

Here Paul reminds us that we are made from clay, and clay is nothing more than dust mixed with water.

The clay cannot shape itself- it must have a potter. Without God, we are nothing more than dust, according to **Psalms 103:14**. The living water of the spirit has given us life through the faith in Christ. The clay lacks worth on its own, however it can become something excellent if expert hands shape it, for its rightful purpose.

4. THE WHEEL OF LIFE

The potter makes the potter’s wheel turn at the necessary velocity to be able to carry out his work. Our lives as believers are not controlled by luck or chance. God is in control! He conducts all the circumstances that surround us, to shape us according to His plan.

God places the young man Joseph on the wheel of Egypt, to shape him until He made him a governor. God places Moses on the wheel of the desert until he becomes a liberator. God works through the wheel of difficult situations, and at this time, He has each one of us turning on it.

Perhaps we feel discontent with the circumstance in our life, and we think that God has been to severe with us, but one day we will realize the truth of **Romans 8:28**. We will then affirm that all things work for the good. Thank you Lord!

5. WHEN THE WORK OF THE POTTER IS RUINED

It would be wonderful if the clay would always submit to the potter's hands, but this is not always the case. The prophet saw how the vessel that the potter was shaping was ruined, this happen when the clay did not submit to its owner. Does the potter throw out that lump of clay and begin with a new one? No, instead he reshapes it once again.

This is a power picture of God's grace working over humanities rebellion. Every time we insist in having our way, we are like the vessel that is ruined. God's grace forgives us, and makes us new. However, this is not how it should be. See **Jeremiah 18:11-12**.

We often ruin our lives by making our own plans outside of God's will. We think we know more about our future than He does. If only we could see the final product that He has in mind, we would never disobey Him. Nevertheless, when we resist Him, God has to use trials and difficulties until we submit once again.

God invested 20 years in shaping Jacob, who at the end became a useful instrument, giving a beginning to the nation of Israel. Other men like David, Johan, and Peter after harsh interactions with God, received a new opportunity. God is faithful and just to forgive our sins (1 John 1:9), but His wonderful promises of forgiveness and new beginnings should not give us an excuse to be disobedient.

6. THE FURNACE OF TRIALS

Solomon said, “*The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the Lord tests the hearts*” (**Proverbs 17:3**). Jeremiah does not mention the potter’s furnace, but it was there. No vessel is of any use if it has not passed through the furnace. The heat of the furnace gives the clay strength and beauty. It increases its usefulness and value. Likewise are God’s children, who are perfected when they pass through the furnace of trials.

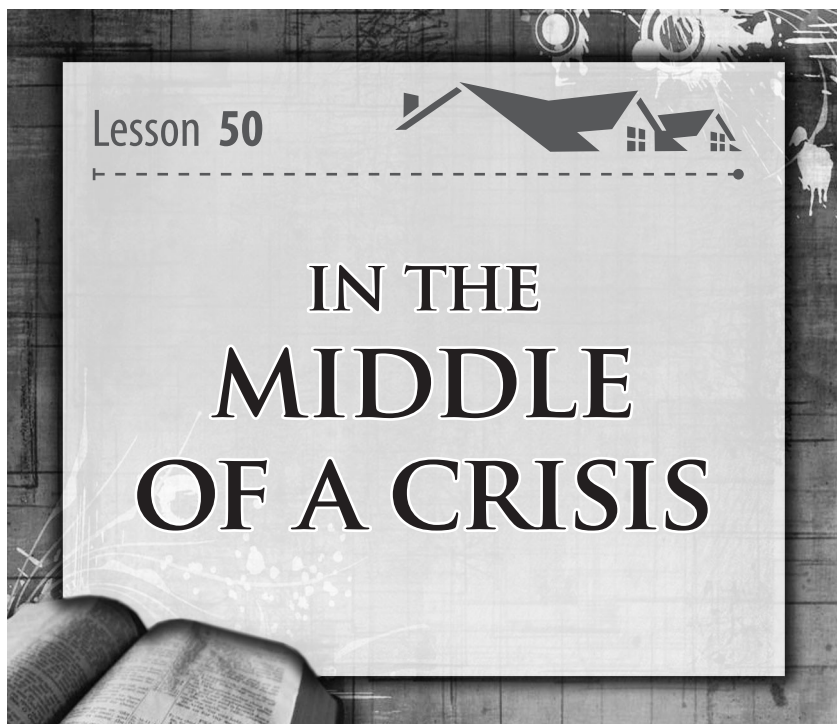
Job passed through the furnace of pain (**23:10**), Peter the furnace of persecution (**1 Peter 4:12**), the three young Hebrew boys, the furnace of Babylon, heated seven times more than the norm (**Daniel 3:19-25**). God knows exactly when, how and how much to heat the furnace; He knows how many trials we need to and can endure. See **1 Corinthians 10:13**.

7. CONCLUSION

God wants to transform us into useful instruments for His work. A vessel on its own does not produce anything. It only receives, contains, and gives. We have received the God’s blessings to pass them to others. If we are full of ourselves, God cannot use us.

Every time a trial comes our way, let us submit to the potter, allowing Him to do His will. No one can calculate the tremendous value of a life that allows itself to be led by the Lord. May the Lord transform us into new vessels, vessels of honor and usefulness, vessels that the potter can use for His honor and glory, at this final hour of the church.

- What steps have you taken or will take to allow God to shape you according to His pleasure?



Icebreaker:

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word “hunger?”

2 Kings 6:24-25a

“And it happened after this that Ben-Hadad king of Syria gathered all his army, and went up and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria.”

For a better understanding of this lesson, study **2 Kings 6-7** at home.

I. INTRODUCTION

As we have been learning, there is no way in a Christian life to avoid pain and difficulties. We can live in obedience and practice spiritual disciplines, but even then, our problems will not disappear.

We tend to interpret any type of suffering as something negative. When faced with pain, we say, “Who sinned, this man or his parents?” (**John 9:2**). However, the existence of difficulties does not necessarily mean that it is God’s punishment or lack of spirituality in someone’s life. Even our Lord Jesus Christ, according to **Hebrews 5:8** learned obedience by what he suffered. John Stott said, “Experiencing some suffering is necessary for holiness.”

Crisis is something positive for us in at least two forms: it reveals what is truly inside of our hearts, and it gives us the opportunity to see the hand of God working wonders in our favor. The Biblical example that we will examine will allow us to obtain some guidelines on how to face times of crisis and emerge victorious.

2. ATTRACTED TO THE UNTHINK- ABLE

Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, united his entire army and surrounded Samaria. This type of tactic was very common during this time. The generals of old would surround a city and cut off their supplies. With patience, they would wait for the gradual weakening of the people, until they surrendered. The process was slow, but extremely effective.

Verse 25. The inhabitants would become so desperate, that at times they would be willing to eat the heads of their own donkeys, and even doves dung...even paying for them. In today's currency, the amount being asked for a donkey's head in Samaria was six months worth of salary! The Israelites had surpassed what was normal and found themselves in an overwhelming crisis.

Verses 28-29. In the middle of this situation, we are presented a scene of horror. Two women had agreed to eat they respective children, on one day the son of the first women, the next day the son of the next women. However, after the first women gave up her son, and he was eaten, the second women hid hers. Capture the dejection they had reached. The women's complaint was not her sons loss, but with the injustice of her neighbor. During difficult times of extreme anguish, we are willing to consider alternatives that in another time we would consider abnormal.

In a different story, that of John the Baptist, the Messiah arrives to the edge of the river Jordan. The prophet John did not doubt in proclaiming that Jesus was the Lamb of God (**John 1:29**). However, a few months later, being held in a prison and waiting for his execution, John sends one of his disciples to ask Christ, "*Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?*" (**Luke 7:24**). Surrounded by darkness, the prophet lost the conviction that he once had.

When our desperation surpasses our level of tolerance, even the unthinkable becomes attractive. A father desperate because he cannot find work begins to think about stealing. A marriage, exhausted by arguments and discussions, consider separating as an exit. A church leader, tired of the people, begins to write his resignation...

We must understand that in any crisis we lose the correct perspective. What in the moment of tribulation seemed logical

and acceptable will most likely bring us much grief. Here we learn that in times of crisis, we should not make any decisions unless they are indispensable to continue living.

3. BRING ME, WHO IS RESPONSIBLE!

Verse 31. When the king heard the words of this woman, he tore his clothing because of the magnitude of calamity that he was witnessing; and he blamed the prophet Elisha. However, the king of Samaria had not provided any type of leadership during this time of anguish and suffering. Here is a clear example of another typical type of behavior during a moment of crisis: we seek whom to blame for what we are going through.

When we feel overwhelmed by a crisis, it is very common that we use the little energy we have to denounce fervently those we consider responsible for our calamity. Adam blamed his women (**Genesis 3:12**); the Hebrews blamed Moses (**Exodus 14:10-12**); David's men blamed their leader (**1 Samuel 30:6**); Gideon blamed God (**Judges 6:13**).

The fact is that these accusations provide an escape for our frustrated emotions. However, rarely do they contribute for a solution to the problem we face. To blame others only distracts us and prevents us from concentrating on the real solution. In times of crisis, it is completely useless to blame others.

4. WHERE DOES OUR HELP COME FROM?

The king of Samaria decided to kill Elisha. Of course, the prophet knew the king's intentions, because God had revealed

them to him. When the king's servant arrived at the door of Elisha's house, He heard the prophet say, "*Hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord: 'Tomorrow about this time a seah of fine flour shall be sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria'*" **(2 Kings 7:1)**. The prophecy of Elisha was surprising and outlandish, and the officer's reaction was filled with doubt and he mocked him **(verse 2)**.

This new incident tells us that in time of crisis only the Lord has the right instructions for our lives. The only thing that can guide us in difficult times is a word from His throne. What should our response be then? To seek Him! However, this seems difficult for us during a time of crisis because our emotions invite us self-examination, obsessing about ourselves.

In order to seek God's face during a crisis we need to be willing to impose our will over the cry of desperation that comes from our soul. This was also an exit that David found,

See **Psalm 42:5**.

5. WALK BY FAITH

From the king's reaction we find another indispensable element when handling a crisis, the challenge to walk by faith. That official did not pass the test. When we hear the Lord's instructions we should believe the word and put it to practice. This is great challenge because the word surely will sound crazy to our ears. We consider more routine solutions. You may be without money, and the Lord shows you to give the last of your money as an offering. Perhaps you are sad because you lost your job, and the Lord is saying, rejoice, and again I say rejoice!

No matter what angle we look at it, God's suggestions will always make us uncomfortable, and it should not be any other way, for God's thoughts clash with our values and carnal desires. See **Galatians 5:17**.

In a time of crisis, it is fundamental to walk in the Spirit, and with faith-because, our perspective and our ability to react are not trustworthy, but God's will always be.

6. CONCLUSION

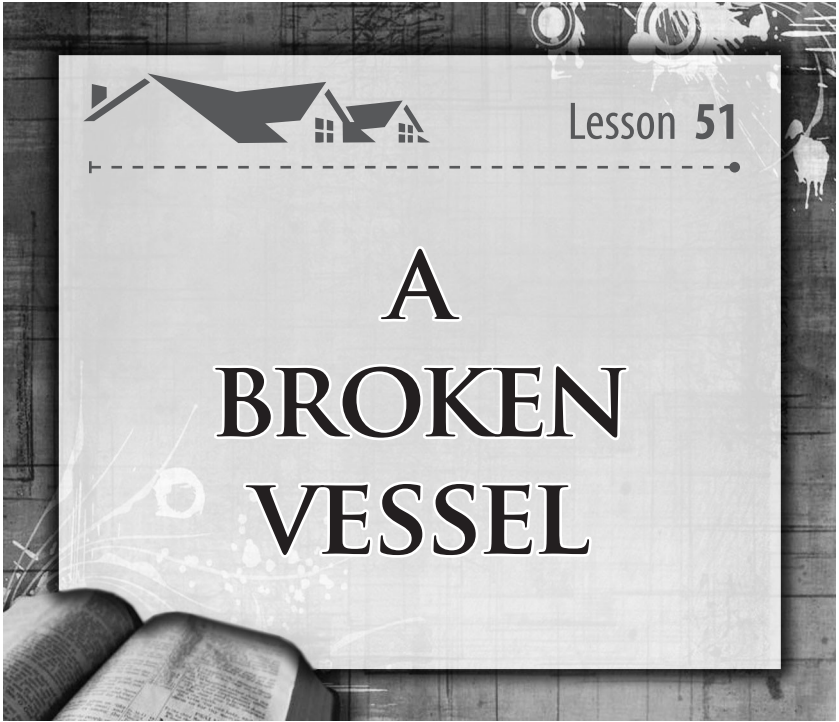
The story that we have seen today ends in an extraordinary fashion. There was at the door of the city four lepers. They could not enter into Samaria, and outside of the city, there was no food. Giving up, they decided to go to the enemy's camp, only to find that the enemy had left **(2 Kings 7:5)**.

The men, who were unworthy in the eyes of society, were the first to have access to resources that the enemy had left in their camp (verse 8). They ate and drank in abundance, and then they took the good news to their city. Just as the prophet had said, "a seah of fine flour shall be sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria" **(verse 16)**.

This miraculous conclusion also has a lesson for us. In any tribulation, there is an opportunity to see the hand of God working wonders in favor of His people. His intervention was astounding and went against all human predictions as a solution for this crisis.

If we dare to follow the path indicated by God in a time of crisis, we could enjoy extraordinary spiritual experiences, coming out triumphant, regardless the difficulty of the situation.

- Which of the principles or lessons taught in this lesson has captured your attention?
- In what area of your life do you desire to improve to better face an upcoming crisis?



Icebreaker: What first comes to mind when you hear the word ‘perfume?’

I. INTRODUCTION

Lets read **John 12:1-3**. In this scripture, we are told of an ointment or perfume. The NIV, ESV, ASV, HCSB and other translations uses the word ‘pure’; this ointment or perfume truly must represent something spiritual.

The pure nard perfume was in a small alabaster box or jar. The alabaster is material similar to plaster, however it is transpar-

ent; similar to marble, but easier to cut. The flask of alabaster was made out of one piece and sealed after the perfume was inserted. Therefore, in order to release the perfume, the vase needed to be broken.

See **Mark 14:3**.

2. BREAKING THE OUTER MAN

We have an interior and exterior man. Many believe that their exterior man is more important than their interior man. It is strange that many people value the flask or vase more than the ointment. The church is facing this problem today.

It is possible to place too much value on our wisdom, thinking we are exceptional people. However, we should know that we are no collectors of antiques, nor admirers of alabaster vases, but we seek the aroma of the ointment. If our exterior is not broken, the contents inside cannot be released.

The pure nard is in the alabaster vessel. Who wants to admire vessels? What the church needs is the perfume, not the vessels. The world also needs the perfume, not the vessels that contain it. If the vessel is not broken, who can appreciate the treasure inside? This is crucial! Unless the exterior man is broken, no spiritual work can take place.

If we consecrate to the service of the Lord, we must be prepared to be broken by Him. We must allow the Lord to break our exterior man completely, so that He can flow freely through us.

He never does anything in vain.

When we understand the Lord's goal is to break the outer man, we understand that everything that happens is important. We must understand that each experience, difficulty, and trial that the Lord sends, results in our benefit. If we were to turn displeased to God and say, "Lord, I don't want this, let me choose something better." He will answer, "I already have. What you are going through is the most beneficial to you."

The Lord arranges all our circumstances with the purpose of breaking our outer man. Our spirit can be most beneficial to us when the outer man is broken, and the spirit is free.

3. THE PROCESS OF BROKENNESS

Generally speaking, the Lord needs a few years to complete the brokenness process. We cannot reduce the time it takes, but we can prolong it. In some, the Lord completes this process in a few years, while in others it can last 10, 20 or more years. This is serious, for there it is terrible to waste God's time.

If until now, we have never totally completely consecrated our lives to God, this is the time to do so. We should say,

"Lord, for the good of your church, the advancement of your Gospel, so that you can work through me, and so that I can progress in my individual life I surrender my life unconditionally. Lord, with joy I place myself in your hands. I am willing for you to flow freely through me."

4. THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

We have heard much about the cross; however, do we really know what the cross is? The meaning of the cross is simply the breaking of the outer man. The cross puts an end to the

outer man, destroying it completely. The cross destroys our opinions, methods, wisdom, ego and everything else. Once this happens, the interior man can be released freely, and the spirit can function.

When someone has been broken, everyone that he meets touches his or her spirit and not his or her human virtues; regardless of how intelligent or capable they may be. Every time other people fellowship with him or her they touch their spirit, the pure nard of a broken person. The brokenness of the outer man is a serious matter. After being broken by the Lord for five or ten years, we never have the same aroma for everyone else. The broken believer is a person that is very attractive to others.

5. TWO REASONS FOR WHICH WE ARE NOT BROKEN

Some believers are easily broken by the Lord, while others are not. Why is there so many that appear unchanged, in spite of being broken by the Lord?

There are two reasons why this happens.

The first is that these people live in darkness and they cannot see the hand of God working. Since they do not live in the light, their vision is much reduced, and they only see men. They consider others as their adversary. These people give much importance to the circumstances and they constantly complain about them. However, brokenness does not come from the world, our families, neither from the brethren, but from the hand of God; He disciplines us. Open your eyes to this light and accept all that the Lord does, for He never makes a mistake.

The second reason why many are broken is because the love themselves too much. Self-love is a great obstacle to brokenness. Love for self is the root of many of our problems. We need to ask the Lord to remove this self-love. Misunderstandings, complaints, and discontent originate from the love we secret have for ourselves. When we love ourselves, we always try to defend ourselves. Jesus never defended himself, for He wanted to be broken to be able to bless us with the pure nard of His presence.

See **Isaiah 53:7** and **Matthew 26:53**.

6. THE WOUNDS OF BROKENNESS

Lets look at the case of Jacob in the Old Testament. He wrestled with his brother since they were in their mother's womb. He was clever, problematic, and a swindler. The way he was brought him many sufferings in live. When he was a young man, he had to flee his home. He was tricked by Laban for the next 20 years. When he returned home, the woman he loved Rachel died. Joseph his son whom he loved most was sold as a slave. Years later, his son Benjamin also was held in Egypt.

Jacob was broken by God over and over again. His story is one of divine punishment. However, after all these lashes, Jacob changed. During his last years, he becomes a transparent person. This is beautiful picture! A mature person, who after various decades, God was able to achieve external brokenness in him.

As Jacob, we need the Lord to break our outer man, until the interior man can be set free, and manifested. This is something of great value, and is the destiny of the Lord's servants. We will only be able to serve and guide others to God, when we have been

broken. Nothing else produces results, not theology, doctrine, not even all the knowledge of the Bible would benefit us. The only thing that is of benefit will be for God to flow from our interior.

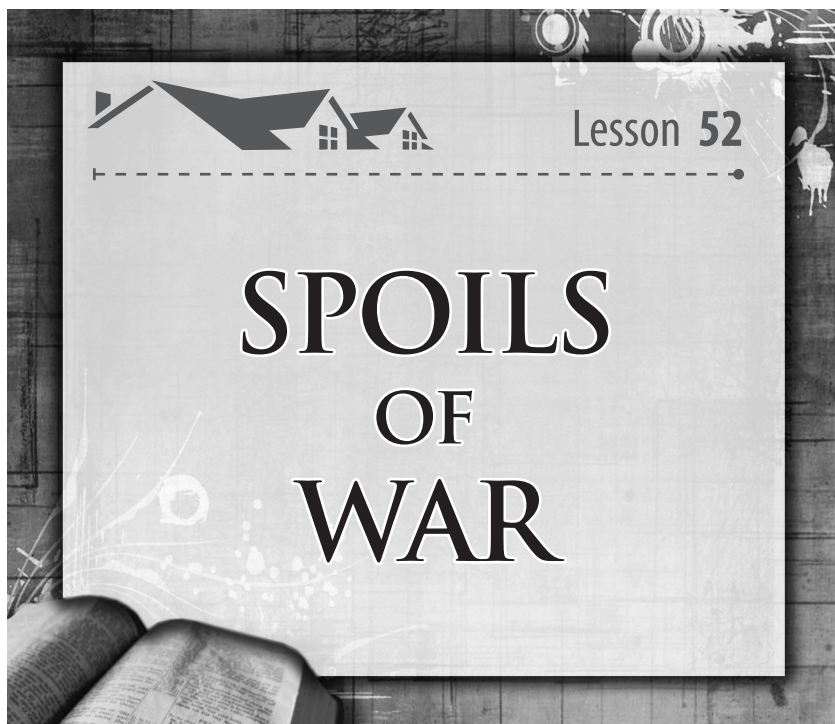
7. CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit has never ceased to work in our lives. We constantly face trials and problems, but this is because the Holy Spirit has a goal for us: to break us and cast aside the outer man, so that the inner man can find a way out. Our problem is that when we face even the smallest of difficulty, we murmur. Every time we suffer loss, we complain. However, the Lord's goal continues to be the same: break our self, break our outer man.

When our outer man has been beaten, wounded, and humbled because of all sorts of misfortune, the wounds and scars that are left become channels from where the Spirit flows from our interior.

May the Lord have mercy of us, that we may be able to see that the only way to move forward, and for all these wounds that have received from Him, have had a supreme purpose. Let us ask the Lord to completely break our vessel, that the pure nard of His presence can be set free in us, so that the house in which we live will be filled with the aroma of the perfume. **John 12:3.**

- What does it mean to you to be externally broken?
- Which areas in your life need to be broken by God's hand?



Icebreaker: What are spoils of war?

I Chronicles 26:27, *“Some of the spoils won in battles they dedicated to maintain the house of the Lord.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

Many Christians believe that once they are saved, their struggles finish, and the rest of their lives will be smooth sailing. However, contrary to this God allows our struggles, because through them, He has a purpose. In this lesson, we will complete our series, “The Seven Purposes of Brokenness,” considering the important theme, ‘Spoils of War.’

2. THE SPOILS OF WAR

The spoils of war are goods taken by the victor.

The Bible mentions them for the first time in **Genesis 14**, when a confederation of kings invaded Sodom and Gomorrah. These invaders, “...took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. They also took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed” (**Genesis 14:11-12**). When Abram knew that this had happen, he united his army of 318 servant men and pursued the enemy kings; he reached them, “He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people” (**Genesis 14:15-16**).

Abram returns victorious, leading a procession of satisfied people and carts filled completely with all sorts of goods, when he is met by Melchizedek, king of Salem (the primitive Jerusalem). Abram then is moved to tithe to this king and “priest of Most High God” from all the spoils, with the obvious purpose of supporting the work of God. See **Genesis 14:18-20** and **Hebrews 7:4**.

The tithe that Abram gave was a portion of the spoils, what was belonging to Sodom. However, Abram kept the rest of the spoils he recovered from the invaders, that which came nine other cities that had been plundered. There is a principle here that God wants us to understand. The Lord is not only interested in making us victorious; He also wants to give us the spoils: the spiritual riches of our battles. He wants us to emerge from the battles of life with carriages filled with resources that will bless His work, and the lives of others.

3. CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE OF THE HOUSE OF GOD

After every military victory, David would take the abundance of spoils of gold, silver, bronze, money, etc. These goods had a purpose in the heart of David: the construction of the house of God. We see this in a decree he makes at the end of his life. After naming his son Solomon as the successor to his throne, David united the leaders of the nation, and left clear instructions regarding the future house of God.

David was concerned with the maintenance of the temple, before the temple had even been built! He assigned funding for any repair needed because of putrefaction, because the house of God needed to be maintained in optimal condition; that it would not lose its original luster. This is how even years after Solomon finished the temple; it remained in good condition thanks to the spoils taken from past wars. The house of God remained alive, because His people had not only come out victorious from conflicts, but rich with goods.

4. THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE

Where is the temple of God today? Paul teaches that now the temple of Holy Spirit is in each one of us. As in ancient Israel, our Lord maintains His temple with the spoils won in battle.

We need crisis for this reason, so that through each battle God can accumulate and reserve spiritual goods that may be used to edify and maintain His temple, which is the church. However, in order to obtain these resources, we need to fight and win battles like David. History says that while David and his army was

away, the Amalekites came and plundered the people of Ziklag, where David has barracks. The intruders took women and children. When David returned, *“Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God”* (**1 Samuel 30:6**).

We are speaking of spiritual warfare! This was not just an attack against David. It was a direct assault against the purpose of God. Someone was pursuing the seed of God. The Messiah had been prophesied to come from the descendants of David, and now Satan had taken every woman and child through whom that seed would come. This is the focus of every spiritual battle: the enemy has always wanted to destroy Christ's seed, and that has not changed. Two thousand years after the cross, Satan is still looking to destroy God's seed; scheming to steal our testimony.

David knew that his heart was right with God, therefore strengthened he went out swiftly and pursued the Amalekites, reaching them and rescuing each person and possession that had been stolen (**1 Samuel 30:19**). However, the Amalekites had plundered other cities, and David took those spoils (**30:20**). Like Abram (and us), David was more than a conqueror. He did more than just fight to survive. God granted David more than the testimony of the victory: when he returned he had his family, but also the flock of livestock, bags of silver, gold, and jewels, etc.

What did David do with those spoils of war? He maintained the purpose of God. David had been anointed to be king over all Israel, so now he needed to repair all the damaged Saul caused to his reputation. David sent spoils trying to unite the people of God (**30:26**). David also sent spoils to each city where he and

his men had hid, including Hebron **(30:31)**. With time, Hebron would be the city that took him to the throne. Here we find another principle of God's purpose in our spiritual battles: Take from the spoils of war not just for yourself, but also to bless others in the body of Christ.

5. THE GREATEST SPOIL IN HISTORY

How many can see the picture now? You are starting to understand the reason for your present battle. Those that place their trust in the Lord are promised glorious victories over the power of the enemy. God makes us more than conquerors. God works in us with great purposes, because He, *"...is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us"* **(Ephesians 3:20)**.

See Colossians 1:15. Now Jesus is the one that plunders the devil at Calvary, stripping him of all power and authority. When Christ rose from the tomb victorious, He transfers an uncountable army of captives from the grasp of Satan and his kingdom **(Ephesians 4:8)**. There is a procession that was purchased with the His blood, which continues to march today.

The triumph of Christ at Calvary has given us victory over death, and it has given us all the resources necessary to live a victorious Christian life: grace, peace, forgiveness, strength, and power. His Holy Spirit has the resources that maintain the temple clean and blessed. Nevertheless, now that Jesus has given us these resources, we need to cooperate in the conflict. Paul said we glory in the tribulation. Why, because of the spoils we obtain. *"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance"* **(Romans 5:3)**. The battle against

the enemy forms our character. The struggles and trials we face are allowed by God to obtain spoils like experience, wisdom, valor, hope, faith, and love.

6. CONCLUSION

In our spiritual battles, we find all the resources for the maintenance of our life. This is the reason why the devil wants to remove us from the battle. He wants us to quit, and avoid every struggle in life, because he knows in doing so, with no conflicts, no pressure, we become passive and careless. By this manner, there are not spiritual spoils; resources to keep our temple holy and clean- this allow rotting to take place.

Are you in the battle today? Be encouraged! God has a purpose in all of this. Are you facing intense spiritual battle? Do not give up, fight for your treasures. You will do more than survive; you will emerge enriched from the conflict, with more resources than when we entered battle. You have a responsibility to maintain your temple. If you become slothful and neglect your mission of maintenance, rotting and ruin will come. Do not neglect daily prayer, the nourishment of the word, and the companionship of the saints.

See **1 Peter 1:6-7**. One day, when we are before the Lord, He will say, “Do you remember what you went through during that time, in that terrible battle? Look what you have achieved through all of this: A house maintained, in order, precious, without spot or blemish. All thanks to the battles that you fought and won. Look at the result of your trials now.

Was it not worth it?”