

GROUPS THAT TRANSFORM LIVES

52 LESSONS
FOR FRIENDSHIP GROUPS

2015 MANUAL



Apostolic Assembly
of the Faith in Christ Jesus

Groups *that transform lives*

52 lessons for Friendship Groups / **Manual 2015**

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Apostolic Assembly of the Faith in Christ Jesus,
10807 Laurel Street, Rancho Cucamonga, California, 91730.

www.apostolicassembly.org

Department of Christian Education

Editor:

Bishop Ismael Martín del Campo

By Gabriel Pereira das Neves

Edited by:

Bishop Ismael Martín del Campo.

Layout and Design:

Eliseo Martín del Campo

Strategy of Jesus Committee:

Bishop Ismael Martín del Campo

Bishop Joe Aguilar

Pastor Rogelio Razo

Pastor Andy Provencio

Bishop Arcadio Peña

Bishop Francisco Quezada

Bishop Elías Paez

Pastor Misael Zaragoza

Pastor Steve Morán

Pastor Arturo Ocegüera

Pastor Jimmy Morales

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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 2015 Manual of 52 lessons for Friendship Groups, "Groups that transform lives".

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, 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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Lesson 1

Believe in the God of Miracles

Icebreaker: Have you witnessed a miracle? Do you want to share it with everyone?

I. INTRODUCTION

Read **Acts 4:30**; **1st Corinthians 12:28**. There are three words in the scriptures that have a similar meaning: wonders, signs and miracles. They relate to a supernatural phenomenon that is witnessed and observed, but cannot be explained by human knowledge because they are made by the supernatural intervention of God's power.

2. WHAT IS A MIRACLE?

Sometimes a miracle can be defined as “An act opposite to nature,” but it would be more accurate to say a miracle is a phenomenon contrary to what we understand as natural. In other words, miracles exist only for us, not for God who knows everything and can do anything. God can work in a higher level than the laws of nature He established in creation.

To illustrate the above, we considered the modern inventions that surround us. Cell phones or computers are miracles of modern technology, or at least that is what people from a hundred years ago would have thought. When God performs a miracle, He is simply working at a higher level. He can delay or cancel at any time the laws of nature and change everything; and He can do it because He is the Creator. A miracle is a supernatural event that we can see but not understand.

3. BELIEVE IN THE GOD OF MIRACLES

One of God’s greatest miracles is, without a doubt, the Creation. But the most wonderful miracle of all is the Redemption of Man. All other miracle is secondary compared to the act of love from God on the cross in Calvary.

Nature was created by God and sustained by God to help us know Him better. God, in His sovereignty, manages nature as the potter manages the clay in his hands. This is why He is able to change our nature and turn a sinner into a saint. Undoubtedly, there is no greater miracle than the salvation of a person.

Here, the faith in the God of Miracles is the most important element. Faith is the element that moves the hand of God to perform miracles. Lack of faith can prevent God's miracles. Jesus was unable to perform many miracles in His hometown of Nazareth because of the lack of faith: *"And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith."* **Matthew 13:58.** Believing in God is believing in miracles, it is impossible to believe in one and not the other, and it is impossible to witness a miracle if you do not believe in God. For *"Everything is possible for one who believes."* **Mark 9:23.**

4. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES?

Why does God perform miracles? Does He do it to entertain Himself or entertain us? Does He perform miracles only to prove He can? Is God some type of magician that can pull a rabbit from a hat? Absolutely not!

Every miracle happens for a reason and with a purpose. Almost without exception, God performs miracles to minister to our needs. He is always calling us, drawing us to Him. He performs miracles to get our attention and show us His infinite love. His mercy and compassion are revealed through His miracles. Even miracles of judgment are often acts of mercy. The miracles of judgment made against Pharaoh in Egypt were to show His power unto the people of Israel and produce faith in them.

After witnessing those miracles, Israel praised God with these words: *"Who among the gods is like you, Lord? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"* **Exodus 15:11.**

5. HAS THE TIME OF MIRACLES PASSED?

Agnostics and non-believers, even some “Christians” often say that the age of miracles is something from the past, but this is an empty argument. The Bible and the events constantly witnessed in church show us God continues to perform miracles for His people.

We are still in the Dispensation of Grace that started in the Upper Room at Pentecost, and will only end when Jesus comes for His Bride. The Church Age began with great miracles, and it is not over yet, thus we can expect many more miracles.

The Word of God states Christ placed in His body the gift to perform miracles: “*to another the working of miracles.*” 1st **Corinthians 12:10**. “*after that miracles*” 1st **Corinthians 12:28**. And since performing miracles was placed in the body of Christ, we still have the attribution of witnessing miracles in our lives.

Before departing, Jesus commissioned His disciples to perform miracles, as a fruit of believing in the Gospel of His name: “*And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.*” **Mark 16:17-18**.

6. CONCLUSION

There are those who present the argument that miracles were necessary in biblical times to defeat the powers of demons.

But clearly our faith today is under stronger spiritual attacks and the devil's power is now more active than ever. Therefore, if miracles were important in biblical times they are much more important nowadays. God still shows His power through miracles! The day of miracles is still here, because Christ is immutable. Read **Hebrews 13:8**

- ✓ What is your need?
- ✓ What miracle(s) do you need God to perform this week?
- ✓ You only need to believe in the God of miracles in order for them to happen!

Lesson 2



Jesus is your great Provider

Icebreaker:

Have you ever been in a great need and God met your need?

I. INTRODUCTION

In the Old Testament God is manifested many times as “Jehovah-Jireh”, name which means “the Lord will provide”. We believe God is today our Jehovah-Jireh, our Great Provider for all our needs; and many of His miracles prove it. We will see three miracles of provision Jesus performed.

2. JESUS TURNS THE WATER INTO WINE

Read **John 2:1-11**. This miracle was the first Jesus performed in His ministry. It took place at Cana, a village near Nazareth, during a wedding feast to which Jesus and His disciples were invited. It seems Joseph had passed away already, because in time of need Mary turned to Jesus as if Jesus were the head of the family. The supply of wine was gone; we do not know if this was due to the arrival of more guests or simply because the family did not have the necessary resources. In any case, it would have been embarrassing for the hosts if the guests found out they ran out of wine.

How was the miracle performed? Through an act of complete obedience, Mary told the servants to do whatever Jesus told them. Jesus told them to fill six waterpots with water and then extract it and give it to the master of the feast. They did exactly what they were told, and the miracle took place. Since the waterpots were filled to the brim and the capacity of each was around 36 liters, it is estimated that about 216 liters (57 gallons) of the most excellent quality wine was created, as testified by the master of the feast.

This is how Jesus began His ministry, with a miracle of provision that made His glory manifest to humanity and His disciples discover His identity as Creator; as someone said: “The water saw the face of its Creator and blushed.”

3. A GREAT CATCH OF FISH

Read **Luke 5:1-11**. Peter, James and John were disciples of the Lord already. They began to follow Him after His baptism

in the Jordan River. They had witnessed the miracle at Cana, but they had not yet made the decision to leave their occupation of fishermen and serve Jesus full time. While Jesus was devoted to His ministry on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, He observed His disciples washing their nets. They fished all night, without any success. They were discouraged and even though Jesus obviously understood the situation, He got into Peter's boat to teach to the people. There was a need to supply to these fishermen and their families, but another need was more urgent: to feed the multitude with the Word of God.

After preaching, Jesus performed the miracle. And how was this miracle performed? Through an act of trust. Peter thought it was in vain to try again, nevertheless he trusted in Jesus: "...nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." (v.5). Jesus asked him to do two things: row to deep waters and to cast his nets. Even though they had already washed his nets to set them to dry and they were very tired, the disciples obeyed Jesus and as a result, the catch of fish they obtained was so great they had to ask for help from other fishermen. The catch was such that not even two boats could handle the amount of fish.

Astonished and sorrowful, Peter realized his sin and cried out: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (v.8). The Lord answered: "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." (v.10). In other words, there is no reason for concern, but there are many reasons to trust in Jesus. He can take care of what worries us ... if we take care of what worries Him—the salvation of others.

4. FEEDING FIVE THOUSAND

Read **John 6:5-15**. A great multitude of people had followed Jesus out to the desert and He felt compassion for them.

Gathered were five thousand men, besides women and children. They were hungry, but the only food available was a young boy's lunch consisting of five loaves of bread and two fish. How was the miracle performed? Through the generosity of the young boy. Jesus looked towards heaven; He blessed the food, broke it and gave it to His disciples to pass out to the crowd.

That young boy gave everything to Jesus, who provided enough for all to eat and be satisfied. This teaches us that Jesus multiplies supernaturally when He finds generosity. He is the Bread of Life which came down from heaven, and expects us to offer everything we have for Him to bless us. And when He blesses us, we should be grateful and see that nothing is wasted. **(v.2).**

5. CONCLUSION

The Lord is our Provider, in every need. He is the creator of all, capable of transforming anything, or multiplying it limitlessly. For this, Christ needs to find someone who is ready to obey and trust in Him completely and give everything to Him.

- Are you prepared to release the supernatural provision from God in your life?
- What are you willing to do this week so a miracle from Jesus can take place?

Lesson 3



You are Free through Jesus

Icebreaker: What is the first thing that pops into your head when you hear the word “slavery”?

I. INTRODUCTION

Read **John 8:36**. “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

Also read **Luke 4:18**. There is no worse bondage than demonic bondage. Demons are spiritual beings, enemies of God that can afflict man with diseases, but more frequently bring spiritual contamination; this is why they are commonly called “unclean spirits”.

Demons oppress people outwardly, and many times they take possession of them. That is why being filled with the Holy Spirit is very important: demons cannot dwell in a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit. Demons believe in the power of God and tremble before Him (**James 2:19**). They recognize the power of Jesus' name. This is because the Lord Jesus Christ is our great deliverer, who can break any chain and give freedom to every captive.

Let us go over some miracles of liberation by our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. THE MAN IN THE SYNAGOGUE POSSESSED BY A DEMON

Read **Luke 4:31-37**. In the synagogue of Capernaum, Jesus found a man possessed by an unclean demon. The demon recognized Jesus immediately and shouted: "I know who You are—" "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" Jesus had compassion of this man, He rebuked the demon and ordered him to be quiet and out of the man. The demon had no choice but to obey. The man was thrown to the ground and the demon screaming ,violently shaking him, left him. Here we learn that demons speak through people; they recognize Jesus Christ, they fear and obey Him.

3. A LEGION OF DEMONS THROWN OUT

Read **Luke 8:26-39**. Jesus and His disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee and went to the country of the Gadarenes. Here

they met a man possessed by demons who lived in the tombs. Chains could not hold him down because he was a prisoner of a stronger spiritual power. This man wandered through the city, undressed, and hurting himself against the rocks, crying and screaming day and night. The demons that were in him recognized the Lord from afar and cried out to Him not to torment them. Jesus permitted them to enter the pigs, which drowned in the lake.

Once again we can see the demons know and fear Jesus. We see the tremendous potential of a man to hold evil: the demons said their name was “Legion”, because they were six thousand, and it seems they had been living inside this man for a long time. However, the pigs could not endure these demons, they didn’t even last one second. This means one man has a greater capacity to contain a demonical power than two thousand pigs! It also highlights the fact that while he was possessed by the devil, the man was undressed; but once he was freed, he was clothed and in his right mind.

A sad fact is that the men of that region were worried about loss of the pigs, and did not appreciate the fact that a man had been freed (they asked Jesus to leave). Many people today prefer to keep their business and demons, than to have Jesus and see the tormented freed.

4. THE MUTE BOY FREED

Read **Mark 9:14-29**.

This is the case of a boy that was possessed by the devil; he was thrown into the fire and into the water since his childhood. His situation was desperate and he needed to be freed. His father had led him to the disciples, but the disciples were unable to cast

out the demon and free him. Finally, Jesus came to the father and had mercy on the boy. Jesus also scolded His disciples for their lack of faith; then He rebuked the demon, ordering him to never come back, and the boy was finally freed.

Later the disciples inquired regarding their failure to free the boy, and Jesus taught them the unlimited power of faith, and the importance of prayer and fasting. In other words, He told them prayer and fasting provides the necessary faith for liberation.

5. THE BLIND AND MUTE MAN HEALED

Read **Matthew 12:22-32**.

This man was possessed by a demon that made him blind and mute. His need was evident. The miracle of his liberation was made in the presence of the Pharisees, who immediately began to find faults in Jesus. They accused Him of casting out demons by the power of the devil. But how wrong were they! If Satan casts out Satan, he would be divided against himself. So then, how could his kingdom stand?

This miracle helped so Jesus could teach about the unforgivable sin.

6. CONCLUSION

Do you have some type of bondage in your life? You do not have to continue living in slavery; the Lord Jesus wants you to be completely free. If only you believe in Him, you will receive your freedom.

There are people around who are held captive by the devil who need to be freed.

- Are you willing to pray for them and tell them Jesus can set them free?



Lesson 4

The Lord is your Healer

Icebreaker:

Share a testimony of physical healing in your life, or the life of someone you know.

I. INTRODUCTION

Isaiah 53:5: *“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.”*

Jesus carried our pain in the cross. He suffered for our illnesses and He does not want us to suffer any illnesses. Lets con-

sider three healing miracles Jesus performed to reaffirm the fact that we can fully trust in the mercy and compassion of our Lord.

2. THE SON OF A NOBLEMAN HEALED

Read **John 4:46-54**.

After being in Jerusalem Jesus went to Cana. A nobleman who lived in Capernaum had a very sick child in his deathbed. This concerned father traveled 30 km. (19 miles) to speak with Jesus. Upon his arrival to Cana, he begged Jesus to come to Capernaum and heal the boy, but Jesus did not want to go: He did not come to tend to all who wanted His help. Perhaps Jesus might have been more willing to help a poor man than this nobleman. In fact, Jesus reprimanded the nobleman for not believing until he saw signs and wonders.

Nevertheless, the man was desperate and continued to say: “*Sir, come down before my child dies.*” Jesus uttered a single word of healing: “*Go your way, your son lives.*” The nobleman ceased to ask and left, he believed the word spoken by Jesus. When he came to Capernaum he found his son was healed. Asking, he found out the boy’s health began to improve at exactly the same time Jesus had pronounced the word of healing.

It is useful to know that this healing was not instantaneous, the boy’s health began to improve and he began to feel better. Sometimes when Jesus heals, the healing process is gradual, even though there is always an exact time of victory over the disease. Furthermore, the nobleman and his family believed only after seeing the healing occur. Our faith should not be based on signs and wonders that can be seen, but on

the words of Jesus. If we have faith we will believe without seeing and nothing will be an obstacle for God's response. The power of faith is above all.

3. PETER'S MOTHER IN LAW HEALED

Read **Luke 4:38-39**.

Jesus was coming from the synagogue where he had cast out a demon. When they arrived to Peter's house, they found Peter's mother in law very ill with fever. Surely there was some type of virus in her body causing the fever, but Jesus commanded it to leave her body and the fever was gone. **Mark 1:31** tells us Jesus took the woman by the hand and lifted her. Peter's mother in law showed obedience by accepting the Lord's hand and getting up; we should do as she did, when Christ extends His hand to us we must take hold of it and not let go. She was immediately healed and began to tend to the disciples. This has always been God's purpose; to heal us so we can serve Him.

4. THE LEPER CLEANSED

Read **Mark 1:40-45**.

Leprosy is a terrible disease. The disease begins with small spots on the eyelids, on the palm of the hands and gradually spreads all over the entire body, destroying everything in its path. In those days, there was a belief among the Jews that leprosy was a punishment from God for a very serious sin. This is why lepers were subjected to complete segregation. Lepers were forced to warn everyone about their condition, shouting

“unclean.” There is no doubt this is the main reason why no leper had been healed until this moment: there were no lepers amongst the crowds.

The leper who came to Jesus knelt before Him, he knew who Jesus was and what He was capable of. His only doubt was whether Jesus would be willing to heal him. The leper’s need was great because he was slowly dying due to his condition. Jesus moved by love and compassion reached out and touched him. By doing so, Jesus violated the tradition and broke the social rules of segregation; He also risked being infected.

At that moment, Jesus declared His decision to heal the leper by saying: “I am willing, be cleansed!” Immediately the leprosy disappeared and the man was completely cleaned. There was something still pending: obeying the Law of Moses and coming before the priest with an offering. Only the priest could declare a leper clean, and a leper could not go home until this was done. So Jesus sent him to the priest. He also asked not to divulge what had happened, but the leper did not obey Him, he announced it to everywhere. He was not able to keep his healing quiet.

Through this miracle we see that Jesus has compassion for all. He is willing to help anyone in need, even if it means ignoring customs and traditions. The leper came to Jesus not sure of Jesus’ willingness to heal him. We should never doubt the willingness of Jesus to heal us. He is not just capable of doing it, He is eager to do it.

5. CONCLUSION

Brethren, friend: if you are ill, I invite you to pray to the Lord and say: Lord Jesus, I need a miracle. I pray You say a healing word

upon me. All You need is to say the Word and I will be healed. If You heal me, I will tell everyone what You have done for me, as the leper did. If I am healed, I will serve you like the woman You healed of fever did. Thank you Lord for being my Healer!

Lesson 5



Jesus is the one who will give you sight

Icebreaker:

What do you feel towards the blind?

I. INTRODUCTION

Isaiah 42:18:

“Hear, you deaf; and look, you blind, that you may see.” The Word of God tells us Jesus is the one who gives sight to the blind. We review three instances in which Jesus gave sight to the blind.

2. THE BLIND MAN FROM BETHSAIDA

Read **Mark 8:33-36**.

Jesus was in Bethsaida, Galilee when they brought a blind man for Him to touch. We do not know how long this man had been blind, and it is striking that healing him is not the first thing Jesus does, He takes him by the hand and leads him out of the town. Why? Because there was too much skepticism in Bethsaida. The lack of faith hinders the work of God. This man believed, as he blindly walked by the hand of Jesus. Sometimes, before we can receive a miracle we need to give our hand to Jesus and allow Him to lead us in the dark. And we need to separate ourselves from people who do not believe in Jesus. After Jesus healed the blind man he forbade him to return to Bethsaida and sent him straight home. This is because Jesus wants us to stay away from people who do not believe in Him.

Once outside of Bethsaida, Jesus anoints the eyes of the blind man with saliva, He placed His hands upon him and asked him if he saw anything. The blind man can now see the people, but not very clearly. The Lord now has to use the gradual method we saw in the previous lecture. Jesus places His hands on the man's eyes for a second time, and now when the blind man sees, he sees everyone perfectly. Sometimes the liberation is partial and a second touch from Jesus is needed. The New King James Version says after placing His hands upon him a second time, Jesus "made him look up". When a person begins to experiment liberation, they often make the mistake of focusing on others. If we look up we see Jesus, not others; this is how complete freedom comes.

3. THE BLIND BARTIMAEUS

Read **Luke 18:35-43**. This miracle took place when Jesus was headed to Jerusalem for the last time. When Jesus left Jericho, a great multitude of people followed Him. Along the way a blind man named Bartimaeus was sitting. When he heard Jesus was passing by, he immediately began screaming out: *“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”* This is something marvelous; this man knew who Jesus was and called Him “Son of David”; a truth that even many people who were not blind did not know. People told him to be quiet, but he cried out intensely. He knew it was “now or never” and therefore he persisted crying out in desperation. This is how we should cry out. We should cry out to God with desperation, when we have a need for a healing or a blessing, because the opportunity presents itself only occasionally and it is possible it may never present itself again, as it happened in Jericho.

Jesus stopped and ordered them to bring Him the blind man. Mark says that when Bartimaeus heard, he threw his cloak off and walked towards the Lord. Jesus wanted him to state his need, and asked him: *“What do you want Me to do for you?”* The blind man quickly answered: *“Lord, that I may receive my sight.”* Jesus simply said the Word: *“Receive your sight; your faith has made you well”* and Bartimaeus immediately received his sight. He could now see clearly the beautiful scenery that surrounded him, the men around him and the face of Jesus. Bartimaeus began to praise God and followed Jesus throughout the way.

4. A MAN BORN BLIND

Read **John 9:1-12**. In Jerusalem they came across a poor beggar who had been blind all of his life. This man had a great need, and when Jesus saw him He immediately felt compassion

towards him. His disciples, however, began to ask, “Lord, why was this man born blind? Because of the sin of his parents or due to his own sin?” The concept of hereditary sin was deeply rooted in the Jewish mentality of the Lord’s disciples. At that moment, they were trying to understand why the blindness of that man, but for Jesus it was (and is) much more important to minister to the man’s need, than to resolve a theological problem. This is why He answered to His disciples: *“I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”* In other words: “I have little time left; I will not have religious discussions with you now. Please let Me do the job I came to do.”

Jesus healed the blind man by sending him to wash in the pool of Siloam, which is translated “Sent”. This pool represents Jesus and washing in it symbolizes being baptized in Jesus. The man returned healed and began to testify of his miracle to all. The Pharisees could not accept that a blind man had been healed on the Sabbath (Saturday) and cast him out of the synagogue. Jesus had a purpose by allowing this: for this man to become His disciple. Read **John 9:35-39**.

5. CONCLUSION

The Lord has come to give sight to all the blind. He can open your eyes today, if only you take His hand and let Him guide you out of “Bethsaida”. Let Jesus touch you and give you sight, then place your eyes on Him and no one else but Him, don’t listen to what others tell you; just cry out to Jesus with all your might, for He is before you. This is your time, and your best chance to become a follower of Jesus Christ. Do not hesitate; go and submerge yourself into the “Sent”.

Wash your eyes in the waters of the Spirit! Amen.

Lesson 6



Arise, take your bed and go

Icebreaker: Have you ever had a problem to walk? Share your experience.

I. INTRODUCTION

Today we will study two miracles of healing the Lord did in paralytic people.

2. THE COMPLETE HEALING OF A PARALYTIC MAN

Read **Matthew 9:1-8**. When Jesus returned to “His own city” Capernaum, the news of His presence attracted a crowd

that filled the house and the courtyard of the house (probably Peter's house). Some many people gathered to see Jesus that the access to the door was blocked. Many came just to satisfy their curiosity; others to find fault in the Lord; but some had a real need. It was like this that four men approached the house carrying a man on a bed.

This man was very ill, completely paralyzed. But undoubtedly his greatest affliction was not due to his physical impairment but to the sinful life he had. Surely his paralytic illness was the result of a life of dissipation. He was someone aware that he was prepared to die, suffering under the burden of his guilt and sins. He needed physical healing, but his greatest need was spiritual; he could do nothing for himself. Only Jesus could help him.

The friends of the paralyzed man *“could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus.”* **Luke 5:19.** Jesus, realizing the need of the paralyzed man as well as the willing faith of his four friends (*“When He saw their faith”*) He took care of the most urgent need, telling the paralytic. *“Man, your sins are forgiven.”*

When the scribes heard His words, they began to accuse Jesus of blasphemy. When they saw Jesus used the divine prerogative to forgive sins, they concluded Jesus wanted to be like God. They did not understand that Jesus is God! And He was deciphering before them *“great is the mystery of godliness”* **1st Timothy 3:16,** who is God manifested in flesh.

Jesus confronted their thoughts with this question: *“Which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk?’ He did not wait for their answer, He ordered the paralytic: ‘arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.’”* The man was immediately

healed; he rose and began to walk. This silenced Jesus' critics and astonished everyone present; they glorified the Lord for the great miracle.

There are very important elements that we see here. First, the clear vision and determination of the four friends, without their effort and cooperation the paralytic would have never come to the feet of Jesus. Second, the obedient faith of the paralytic; he was not healed as he lay there; he had to get up, pick up his bed and walk. The miracle would not have happened without all these elements. There are also a couple of fundamental lessons we learn from Jesus. First, for Him the most important thing is to forgive everyone. Second, the opposition and criticism of the Church is silenced with signs and wonders, not words.

3. THE PARALYTIC OF BETHESDA

Read **John 5:1-14**.

There was in Jerusalem a pool with the name of "Bethesda", a word that means in Hebrew "House of Mercy". You could get to Bethesda through five different porches. In the Bible, the number five represents God's grace, and the water represents God's presence. Therefore, it is through His grace that we could come into His presence! At a certain time an angel stirred the water of Bethesda and when this would happen, the first ill person who would step into the pool would be healed. This is why the pool was surrounded by a multitude of sick people awaiting patiently for their opportunity to jump into the pool.

Jesus went to Bethesda to find this man who had been disabled for thirty-eight years. Of course, Jesus knew the reason

why this man was there, but still asked him, “Do you want to be healed?”. Jesus wanted this man to express his desire for healing. The principle here is that we need to tell God our need.

The paralytic at Bethesda just had to say, “I do”; but he said he had no one to help him get into the pool. Here we have a case of lack of faith; a man accustomed to receiving help from others. Like many people, the paralytic was looking for “means”. Many in their need hold on to different things; and some depend on faith and prayer from others; but in order to receive healing from God we need to have faith, and above all the desire to be healed. This man seemed to be resigned, nevertheless Jesus ordered him: “Rise, take up your bed and walk” **v.8**, and the paralyzed man who had thirty-eight years in bed, was healed instantly.

There are three lessons for us here.

1. “Arise”:

We must believe and obey God’s command, as soon as possible.

2. “Take your Bed”:

Healing comes so we can live for the Lord. Taking our bed is to show others where our Lord Jesus Christ has raised us from.

3. “Go”:

We must never look back. If a person is healed and goes back to a life of sin it is most likely that they will acquire an illness worse than what they had “See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.” **V.14.**

4. CONCLUSION

God has raised you so everyone can see His work in you; so the voice of your enemies is silenced; so you can walk in victory and holiness. “Arise, take your bed and walk.”

- How can you better your walk with God this week?



Lesson 7

Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life

Icebreaker:

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word ‘resurrection’?

I. INTRODUCTION

In this last lesson of our series “Seven weeks of miracles” we will study three miracles that prove Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Jesus is the source of life that makes each and every one of His creations breath. If we exist, live and move, it is because of Him. Read **John 1:4; 11:25; Colossians 1:17.**

2. JESUS RESURRECTS THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS

Read **Luke 8.40-56**.

This miracle took place in Capernaum. A large crowd surrounded Jesus when the ruler of the synagogue, Jairus, came to Him with the news that his only child of about twelve years of age was sick and about to die. Jairus fell at Jesus' feet, begging Him to go to his daughter and heal her. As Jesus was walking with Jairus, news came to him: the girl had died.

When they reached his house, Jesus said to the crowd gathered: *“Do not weep; she is not dead, but sleeping.”* When the crowd heard this they ridiculed Him. Nevertheless, Jesus sent them all out of the house, except for the father and mother and three of His disciples, Peter, James and John. They entered the room where the girl was lying; Jesus took her by the hand and said: *“Little girl, arise.”* her spirit returned to her and she immediately rose, He then commanded she be given something to eat.

1. The first thing we learn here is that if Jesus is not the resurrection and the life He would not have been able to perform this miracle.
2. We also learned that for Jesus, physical death is only sleeping (*“she is not dead, but sleeping”*).
3. Third, sometimes a crowd becomes an obstacle for the manifestation of God's miraculous power; this is why Jesus only allowed three of His disciples to stay.

3. JESUS RESURRECTS THE SON OF A WIDOW IN NAIN

Read **Luke 7:11-17**.

This miracle took place outside the gates of Nain, a city close to Capernaum. Towards the evening, Jesus was approaching the city with a large crowd of joyful followers due to all the miracles they had seen. They came across a completely different crowd; a sad procession of people headed by a widow, an inconsolable mother who had just lost her only son. Behind the widow was a crowd of mourning women and behind them a group of men carrying a coffin. The coffin was a basket woven with wicker in which the young man had been laid inside with only his face exposed. All future hopes of this widow were gone with her only son. He being dead left her abandoned and in a situation seemingly unsolvable.

Jesus had compassion on the inconsolable mother and said unto her: “*do not weep*”. He stopped the procession and touched the open coffin. This meant contamination of the worst kind, and certainly all present were horrified. But Jesus did not pay attention to superstitious fears, He raised His voice and said: “*Young man, I say to you, arise.*” Immediately the young man rose and he was turned over to his joyous mother. The young man began to speak; can anyone imagine what he said?

This is another miracle that proves Jesus is the resurrection and the life. It also tells us that Jesus cannot be contaminated with sadness or with death. It teaches us we must show compassion and comfort towards those who suffer.

4. JESUS RESURRECTS HIS FRIEND LAZARUS

Read at home the entire chapter **11 of John**.

Here we find one of the most outstanding miracles of our Lord, and probably the last of His public ministry. Bethany was a town located close to Jerusalem; three of Jesus' friends lived here, Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. Jesus had been their guest on several occasions and He loved them very much. **(v.5)**.

Jesus and His disciples were by the Jordan River, a several days' journey by foot from Bethany, when they were informed that Lazarus was sick. But Jesus said: *"This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."* He remained there for two more days. When Jesus spoke of returning to Bethany, His disciples tried to stop Him because of the dangers He would face there, knowing that Jesus' life was threatened in Jerusalem and its surroundings.

Nevertheless, Jesus went to Bethany even though He knew Lazarus had died. Upon His arrival He found His friend buried, and the house filled with mourners. Martha went out to meet Jesus, but Mary stayed inside the house. Martha reprimanded Jesus for not coming sooner: *"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."*

The body of Lazarus had already begun to decompose, but this was not an obstacle for the compassion and love of Jesus: *"Jesus wept." Lazarus' body was well wrapped in a shroud. Jesus ordered the stone covering the entrance to the tomb be removed and cried out: "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out, his hands and feet banded with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a*

cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.” Lazarus came back with life and good health, for great joy of many!

Jesus took His time to go to Bethany, here we find an important lesson: sometimes God does much more for our faith by making us wait instead of immediately giving us what we ask for. Moreover, Martha’s faith focused in the past (“*if You had been here*”), but Jesus answered: “*I AM*”. Jesus is not a miraculous God of the past, He is the God who is always present, for every present need. Jesus is always sufficient, even when it comes to resurrecting the dead. And something else: before this miracle, Jesus prayed. Here we see the clear contrast between the human nature of our Lord and His Divinity. As a man, He grieved and wept, but as God He commanded the resurrection.

5. CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life. If we believe in Him we will surely see the Glory of God. Never doubt Him or what He is capable of doing.

- How does your viewpoint of Jesus change when you think on how He can give life to the dead?

Lesson 8



Reborn

Icebreaker: Do you know someone tormented by their past? Share the story.

John 3:3-4: *“Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”*

I. INTRODUCTION

A man walked carrying two bags on his shoulders, one hanging on his chest and the other on his back. Another man

stopped him to ask, “What do you have in those bags?” He replied: “In the front bag I have my memories of positive things that have happened” “And in the back bag?” the man asked, “In the back bag I throw in all the negative things, sorrows, mistakes, bad days, faults I’ve had, etc.” “But have you not noticed this bag has a hole in the bottom?!” The curious man told him. “Yes, that’s why” replied the wise man with the two bags; and then he added: “What is the point of carrying what is worthless?”

2. A DARK PAST

If you turn back to see your past and think about everything you’ve done, I’m sure there are things you would like to forget because you’ve done bad things knowing they were wrong. Even worse, knowing God, you still made the same mistakes....

“For You write bitter things against me, And make me inherit the iniquities of my youth.” **Job 13:26**

“So she said to Elijah, “What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?” **1st Kings 17:18**

“Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; According to Your mercy remember me, For Your goodness’ sake, O Lord.” **Psalms 25:7**

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” **Ezekiel 36:26**

3. A COMPLETELY NEW LIFE

Revelations 21:5: *“Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new....”*

God makes all things new. It’s true that in life we reap the consequences of our actions, however, we should stop tormenting ourselves with our past. Today God wants to give us another chance, He wants to remove the heart that has been growing cold and replace it with a new heart and help us overcome the consequences of our past: *“Do not remember the former things, Nor consider the things of old.”* **Isaiah 43:18.**

Do you know what the beauty of a newborn is? They do not have a past! Yes! And this is how God wants you to continue this year, as a newborn, without remembering or considering your past and for this, all you have to do is return to the arms of God with a repentant heart, being honest and with the commitment to start again with all your strength.

“and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” **Ephesians 4:24.**

4. CONCLUSION

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

It is difficult for everyone to start from scratch because our present is a result of our past, however, our future will be a result

of our present. So don't worry about the past, seek to be like God, live in righteousness, holiness and truth. Make new plans and set new goals for this year because God wants to start over with you!

Have a wonderful week! And do not look back.

- Let us pray and give up to God all the things from our past; He does not want us to carry them anymore.

Lesson 9



The Work of an Anonymous

Icebreaker: What is better, to work behind the scenes or on stage?

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1994 Massimo Moratti, president in those years of the powerful Italian soccer team Inter Milan, traveled to Argentina with the goal of recruiting a soccer player from this country. His intention was to see the game between the teams Banfield and Boca Juniors. This last team always had outstanding professional players, while Banfield, with a more humble budget, had unknown players.

The game began, and to the surprise of many, among the players of Banfield a young man named Javier Zanetti would shine, he demonstrated his great talent and outstanding skills with the ball. The accurate passes to his teammates were outstanding, and that night against all odds, Banfield obtained the victory.

After the game, the outstanding player received a phone call, “Do you want to play for the Italian club Inter Milan?” It was none other than Massimo Moratti, who had seen the entire game from a preferential box. He had gone to see flashy soccer figures and ended up hiring someone who originally was not in their plans and someone who they didn’t even know existed.

Javier Zanetti became the undisputed captain of the team and the player with the most matches in the history of the famous Italian club, for almost twenty years. He recently retired with honors and was named the lifelong director of the club.

2. A PERFECT STRANGER

The Bible gives us a similar story. Trained and strong men lined before a man who had been sent to choose one of them. They had the appearance needed to be chosen, however, to his dismay, the man asked the father once again: are these all your sons? Jesse immediately sent for his youngest son, who was tending the sheep. When this young man named David arrived, He was anointed with the promise to be king: *“And the Lord said, “Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!” Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.”*

1st Samuel 16:12-13.

Just like Javier Zanetti from the story we previously read, David, the legendary king of Israel, was not recognized by his people, or even by his father, but still someone had seen his sacrifice and had seen everything he did. David never intended to get the attention from others; His sacrifice had a much more profound conviction that set aside selfishness and any excessive pride. God saw David had a heart pleasing to Him, and made him King: *‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.’* **Acts 13:22.**

All authorities are set by God, therefore, all promotions are given by Him: *“For exaltation comes neither from the east Nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another.”* **Psalms 75:6-7.** *“For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”* **Romans 13:1.**

This is why the Apostle Paul advises us to serve all *“with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord.”* **Ephesians 6:7-8.**

3. CONCLUSION

God never overlooks what you do, regardless if your teacher doesn't see your effort, if your boss doesn't recognize your extra work, or if your family doesn't appreciate what you do. God is always watching and the promotion is coming from His hand. Just as in the soccer game, God is watching everything you do from a preferential box.

Do not be discouraged; God will soon allow you to see the fruits of your sacrifice: *“...until the Lord comes, who will both bring*

to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God." 1st Corinthians 4:5.

And it is about to happen! Amen.

- What will you do this week to show God that you serve Him with all your heart and not to “draw attention” from others?

Lesson 10



Our Intimate Life

Icebreaker: Where is it easier to be a Christian, in public or in private? Why?

Psalms 51:6: *“Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom”*

I. INTRODUCTION

All human beings enjoy a private life; those areas reserved for those close to us or just for ourselves. Few people know our private lives; only a very close circle can actually say they know who we really are when we're not in a crowd.

2. DISHONEST INTIMACY

It's funny to see how some households appear to be perfect in public, but in private they are disrespectful, they mistreat and abuse. Often times it is the leaders who portray to have a "perfect" life in public but in private take money inappropriately, they visit inappropriate places and are prisoners of hidden passions and temptations. Many engaged or dating couples in church have a good testimony and even serve in some ministries, but in private they are fondling or committing inappropriate acts not approved by God outside of marriage...

"When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer." **Psalms 32:3-4.**

Like many today, King David tried to live a dishonest intimate life, but as time passed, he felt his bones and his whole body aged, prey to a false life by the lack of intimacy with God. Like David, at certain times in our lives we are convinced that this intimate space is our personal property and therefore we can use it for whatever we want. But intimacy is not for such use.

3. INTIMACY WITH GOD

It is impossible to pretend to be followers of Christ when intimately, behind closed doors we deny Him with our actions, pretending He does not notice. According to God's perfect plan, intimacy is what allows us to strengthen our relationship with Him. It is our intimacy that God seeks and uses to show us His purposes: *"The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, And He will show them His covenant."* **Psalms 25:14.**

In the moments when nobody sees us, the eyes of the Lord Almighty are upon us and intimacy becomes the best opportunity to honor Him in a transparent and genuine way. In fact, our Maker loves to share intimate moments with us. He knows us in secret and only there, in private, when no one sees us and our heart is exposed before Him, is when we can really get to know Him.

Intimacy is all that is valid for Jesus, the only reliable thing: “... *when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*” **Matthew 6:6.** Therefore, it depends on each one of us if God approaches us or if we break all intimacy with Him because of our actions.

4. CONCLUSION

Brother, sister, use your intimacy to live out what you preach. Use it for all that is honest, everything pure and of good name. If you take care of your intimacy, there will be no judging finger pointing at you. But if there are things in your personal life stopping you from having a perfect relationship with God, this is the time to give them up and start living openly in a genuine communion with God.

It is not easy, but you can do all things in Christ who strengthens you!

- What steps will you take this week to grow in your intimacy with God?



Lesson 11

True Faith

Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word ‘inconsistent’?

Hebrews 11:1: *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

A small town in a rural area had been suffering of a long drought that threatened to leave its population in ruins because the whole town subsisted on the fruits produced in their fields. Since many of them were believers, faced with the adverse situation they went to see the church’s pastor:

- Pastor, since God is so powerful, let's ask Him to send the much needed rain to reverse this distressing situation.

- All right, we will ask the Lord, but you will need to meet an indispensable condition, said the Pastor.

- They all answered, tell us what it is!

- The Pastor answered: We must ask Him with faith, with true faith.

- We will, and we will come to church every day! They all answered.

The people began to go to church every day, but the days passed and the expected rain never came. One day, they all went to confront the pastor to complain:

- Pastor, you told us that if we asked God with faith, He would answer our prayer and send the rain. But several weeks have gone by and we still haven't received an answer.

- He asked them: Have you asked with true faith?

- Yes, of course! They replied in unison.

- Is that so? Then why, throughout all these days, none of you have carried an umbrella with you?

2. A PRAYER WITHOUT FAITH IS NOT A PRAYER

Acts 12 gives us a similar story. While Peter was imprisoned in Jerusalem, many were gathered in the house of Mary the moth-

er of John Mark unceasingly praying for his freedom. That same morning, Peter was freed by an angel of the Lord and immediately went to the house where the brethren were praying. But at first, the disciples refused to believe it was Peter who was knocking on the door, thinking that the Apostle was dead and what they saw was his spirit:

“They said, ‘It is his angel.’ Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.” **Acts 12:15,16.**

We often pray with intensity but without waiting for concrete results. Many times we doubt the miracles and wonders God can do. We say we have faith in what He will do, but we do not prepare ourselves with conviction to receive the blessing. In other words, we do not have true faith.

It is very important that whenever we ask for something in prayer, we do it with faith, believing we will receive it, acting with consciousness and without losing sight of the tremendous power in prayer:

“...The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” **James 5:16b.**

3. CONCLUSION

I invite you today to stop being an inconsistent Christian who contradicts himself. If you have desire or need and have been praying for a long time, I encourage you to set your faith in action, convincing yourself that God will do it; And get ready! God is faithful and will work in His perfect time doing His part. Do your part as well, and show your trust in Him is genuine and it's not only in words.

True faith is to anticipate victory, preparing oneself and thanking God before it happens, without doubting: *“But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.”* **James 1:6.**

- How are you planning on setting your faith in action this week?
- Let’s pray and ask God for true faith!



Lesson 12

Giants and Pillars of Salt

Icebreaker: What consequences can vision problems bring?

Colossians 3:2: *“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

A newspaper reporter from World War II once described the atmosphere of a room with 35 men who had been assigned to a bombing mission that, on average, 75% of them would not return. However, the reporter noticed there was no fear in these men, but “a great reluctance to dodge the future.”

The vast majority of us in the West are people of ‘here’ and ‘now’. In spite of the sermons we hear on a weekly basis, our daily devotionals, our time reading and memorizing the Scriptures and all of the care we give to our spiritual life, we have not yet become Christians possessing eternal vision.

2. DOWNWARDS OR UPWARDS?

Read **Hebrews 11:9-10**.

Most of the time we do not have our hearts set on the things from above; we do not invest on what is endless. We are not looking for the heavenly city whose Builder and Maker is God. A brief review of our physical and emotional profile would give us testimony of this, and our physical and emotional illnesses (if they could talk), would shout a loud “Amen!” to what I’m saying.

What needs to happen in order for us to turn our eyes to heaven, our eternal home? Perhaps only the appearance of a terminal illness can achieve this. I know it is a terrifying thought, however all of us suffer a terminal illness! Yes, we are all passing by, we are all going to die; yet we continue to look down instead of up. This world is nothing but a giant cemetery, still we all continue to store treasures in it. The more I think about it, the crazier it seems!

3. INTIMIDATING GIANTS

The possibility of leaving behind in this earth the people we love, leaving them to face an unknown future, probably needing care from others, someone who may take our role of father or mother, of husband or wife, undoubtedly troubles any human

heart. Adding to this the helplessness our departure would bring, not being able to complete the desires of our heart in our lifetime, career dreams and the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of our labor. When we put these thoughts together, death becomes a very bitter pill to swallow.

The sense of loss because of the transience of life and the uncertainty of our future are giants with greater force than the fear of death. Read **Numbers 13:33; 14:1-2**. These giants will not leave our side while we live. They are heavily armed; skilled warrior demons who stand on the doors of all human happiness. However, their power can only be felt and is effective when we allow it, when we stand before them looking into their piercing eyes.

So starting today, commit to not looking into the eyes of these giants, because the truth is they are defeated and have no power over a Christian. Unless you insist on staring into their terrible eyes and want to be humiliated and abused by them; or you want to be turned into a pillar of salt...

4. PILLARS OF SALT

Read **Genesis 19:24-26**. Thousands of pillars of salt “Christians” testify to this. Many of us have thought of returning to Egypt; we have looked back to Sodom’s perishable doors only to encounter the terrible eyes of these giants, to be beaten and left for dead in the desert.

We have important changes to make in our lives, dear brethren, perhaps the most important one is on our neck: you and I must look up! When you’re in the desert, you see sand everywhere. You look back and see sand. You look to the sides and see

sand; or ahead, and there is more sand. You look down, and again sand. But when you look up, you don't see sand, you see the sky!

5. CONCLUSION

Wherever you find yourself today, look up! Ignore those giants who have no power over you. *“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.”* **Hebrews 12:2.** Also read, **Philippians 3:8-9; Judas 1:20-21.**

Brother, sister, this week ask the Lord to help you set your eyes on the things from above and not allow you to look downward, to see the eyes of those very terrible (but already defeated) giants. Amen.



Lesson 13

Children of God

Icebreaker: Do you know someone who is not sure who his/her real parents are?

Galatians 3:26: *“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

Many last names have a suffix that indicates the origin of the family. In Spanish for example, the Gonzalez are children of Gonzalo, the Rodriguez are children of Rodrigo. In English, the Williamson are children of William, and the Johnson children of John. Being the child of someone identifies us.

2. BELOVED CHILDREN

Read **Matthew 4:1-11**.

“If You are the Son of God” (v.3) said the devil to Jesus. When John in the River Jordan baptized Jesus, the heavens were opened and with a strong voice the Heavenly Father said: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17). What a beautiful affirmation! With what great pride did the Father present His Son. But someone else was listening: the devil, who confronts Jesus in the desert to question His identity, “If You are the Son of God ...” do this nonsense I ask. How insolent is the devil, tempting God Himself, and questioning the clear affirmation of the Father. But Jesus was not fooled, and answered with the Word of God.

You and I are also children of God. We have an identity that was given to us in baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. That was the day God said, “I forgive all of your sins. You are my beloved Son in whom I am pleased.” Surely the devil also heard this statement and very early in our lives, placed before us his temptations to doubt our identity as children of God.

3. EMPTY PROMISES

I know that sometimes I have not kept my promises. I’ve promised myself to exercise and change my eating habits to feel better physically, though I’m filled with good intentions I don’t always achieve what I promise.

There are times that I have made promises with all seriousness to my loved ones, yet I break them. How great is it that God is not like us! He keeps all of His promises.

The devil also makes promises, but with bad intentions. He is so bold, that he dares to make promises even to the Son of God, knowing from the beginning that he will not keep them. He does not keep them for two reasons: because he has no power to do so, and because his promises are only to make us fall into his trap. His words can be sweet and gentle, and what he offers can be very tempting, but he never has good intentions. For example: did you ever give into the temptation of yelling at someone, thinking that by doing so you were going to feel better? Or have you ever ignored someone thinking that you would teach that person a lesson and that person would change towards you? That was the devil promising you things he did not intend to keep, and would only hurt you.

Jesus was prepared to face such temptations and false promises. He knew who the devil was, and how much cunningness and power he had to remove Him from the will of His Father. That is why He did not consider his promises, He simply applied the Word of God: *“Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”* **(v.10).**

The Word of God is the best remedy for false promises and temptations from the devil. The famous hymn A Mighty Fortress says, *“(the devil) ... is already condemned by the Holy Word.”*

4. CONCLUSION

It may be that when we openly sin against the divine will, the doubt that God can forgive us and will receive us once again as His beloved children emerges. When things do not go according to our plans, we wonder if God really loves us as much as He says. But God has not changed His mind. Once He calls us His

children, He loves us until the end. The death and resurrection of Jesus confirms it. What power has God given to us through His Word, to help us face empty promises! Our Lord has given us the identity of His beloved children.

Let us pray that God will continue to strengthen this precious relationship we have with Him and ask Him to continue guiding and affirming us through His Word. Amen.



Lesson 14

Eagles

Icebreaker: What do you think about this phrase: “God is not interested in our comfort but in our character”?

1st Peter 2:11: *“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

The eagle makes its nest on the mountaintops, intertwining twigs of thorn bushes, to form an interlaced and firm structure to lay its eggs. Then they pull out soft feathers from their chest to convert the nest into a cozy haven for their chicks. After their birth, the chicks live warm and comfortable in their nest. Their

mother feeds them daily and protects them from any surrounding danger... for some time. Soon comes the time when the eaglets, fully grown, must learn how to fly and feed themselves. Since they will not undertake this stage of their lives spontaneously, their mother must force them to do so. She starts by pulling the feathers out from the nest until only the thorns are left. Then she reduces their daily portion of food and finally, with strong pecking, she pushes them out of the nest, directly to the abyss. This way, quite radically, the young eagles learn how to fly; they become independent from their mother and enter adulthood.

2. NOMADIC

God saved you in this world and has you in the world so you can tell the world Jesus saves. He pours you out like a precious seed: *“For sure, I tell you, unless a seed falls into the ground and dies, it will only be a seed. If it dies, it will give much grain.”* **John 12:24.** You’re not only poured out like a precious seed, you are also poured out like a brave saint:

Ephesians 6:19-20: *“...that I might open my mouth without fear. Pray that I will use the right words to preach that which is hard to understand in the Good News. This is the reason I was sent out. But now I am in chains for preaching the Good News. I want to keep on speaking for Christ without fear the way I should.”* You are an ambassador of the King of kings in a foreign land. You are a foreigner on Earth and you march on a different rhythm than others.

You do not make this world your home, because this world is not your home: *“I have given Your Word to My followers. The world hated them because they do not belong to the world, even as I do not belong to the world. Make them holy for Yourself by the truth. Your Word is truth.”* **John 17:14, 17.** If you entertain and delight your-

self in this world, despite knowing that your citizenship is in heaven, you will have one foot in the world and the other in heaven; you will have enough religion to feel miserable in the world, and have enough of the world to be miserable in your spiritual life.

Don't you feel like a nomad? Perhaps you've had to change your residence several times, for different reasons. Perhaps you've had to change career, work or business. Change seems to be the only consistent thing in our lives, but it is through change that God reminds us that we are only pilgrims on this earth, even though we will always have a home with Him, no matter where we are now.

3. CONCLUSION

1st Peter 1:13-21, *“Get your minds ready for good use. Keep awake. Set your hope now and forever on the loving-favor to be given you when Jesus Christ comes again. Be like children who obey. Do not desire to sin like you used to when you did not know any better. Be holy in every part of your life. Be like the Holy One Who chose you. Scripture says, “You must be holy, for I am holy.” The Father is the One Who judges you by what you do. He does not respect one person more than another. If you call Him Father, be sure you honor Him with love and fear all the days of your life here on earth. You know you were not bought and made free from sin by paying gold or silver which comes to an end. And you know you were not saved from the punishment of sin by the way of life that you were given from your early fathers. That way of life was worth nothing. The blood of Christ saved you. This blood is of great worth and no amount of money can buy it. Christ was given as a lamb without sin and without spot. Long before the world was made, God chose Christ to be given to you in these last days. Because of Christ, you have put your trust in God. He raised Christ from the dead and gave Him great honor. So now your faith and hope are in God.”*

- How much do you believe that God has you on passage through life?
- How does this affect your future plans?
- Let us pray saying: “Lord, if I’m building a nest, put thorns in it.”



Lesson 15

Wait upon the Lord

Icebreaker:

When you feel your life is falling apart, what do you do?

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1972, the Polaroid Camera SX-70 revolutionized the world of photography. A magazine article described it as “a miracle of physics, optics and electronics.” When a photograph was taken, “a black square would come out from the front of the camera and the photograph would develop before our eyes”. People were mesmerized by the speed and immediate results.

2. YOU YEARN THE IMMEDIATE

Oswald Chambers perceived the existence of a close relationship between our desire for the immediate and the uncontrolled passions, which he defined as “simply wanting something instantly: a bodily desire or spiritual wellness.” This is how a passion acts: “I cannot wait on God’s time, He is indifferent; I must have it now.”

We all face circumstances that challenge our patience; painful and prolonged situations in which, unless we have a well-targeted focus, our joy will fade and hope will seem impossible.

3. PEACE IN THE MIDST OF TURMOIL

There is a very good way to get peace in turmoil; it is by reading Psalms, reading how its writer concentrated on the Almighty God. Psalms are the testimony to the depth and passion with which that young shepherd boy and then King of Israel took delight in God.

King David experienced extreme hardships, amongst them the profound pain of losing a child and his best friend; also that King Saul, for selfish reasons chased him to take his life; and later, one of his own sons led a rebellion against him. But these dramatic trials are just a few of the hundreds of hardships he endured, and yet, in all those days of deep suffering, he managed to find peace and hope in God. How did David’s soul endure, when others in similar situations would have drowned in despair? Answer: David knew how to meditate and concentrate his soul in God -in his character; his things, his will- to know the Lord better and this way obey Him. Read **Psalms 135:1-5**.

We should follow the example of David. Our role in difficult situations is to set our eyes on our heavenly Father and meditate in His Word. By meditating daily on the attributes and the things of God, we too can find peace and comfort amidst the turmoil of life. Read **Psalms 27**. Here, David writes about waiting on God through a great difficulty when there is no solution in sight. Instead of despair, instead of losing hope, David trusts he will see: *“I would have been without hope if I had not believed that I would see the loving-kindness of the Lord in the land of the living.”(v.13).*

Text extracted from “Desiderata”, a poem by Max Ehrmann (1872-1945):

“Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible without surrender be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story..... If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time. Exercise caution in your business affairs; for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals; and everywhere life is full of heroism. Be yourself. Especially, do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is as perennial as the grass. Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth. Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune... Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness... keep peace with your soul. With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world..... Strive to be happy!

4. CONCLUSION

We live in a world that worships the immediate, a world overwhelmed by the race of materialism, frustrated with their unfulfilled dreams and desires. But we are not like them. Or are we?

I'll give you some advice: when you do not see any signs of your deepest desires coming true, take hold of God: *“Wait for the Lord. Be strong. Let your heart be strong. Yes, wait for the Lord.”*

(Psalms 27:14)

- What issues consume your thoughts throughout the day?
- Do you set time aside to think about God?

If you are not doing this, you need to recover today your ability to focus on Him; control your desire for the immediate and focus on the eternal!

- What steps will you take this week to overcome the anxiety?



Lesson 16

A Strong Emptiness

Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word ‘strategy’?

Zechariah 4:6b: “...Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.”

I. INTRODUCTION

In the historic novel, “Romance of the Three Kingdoms”, its author Luo Guanzhong describes “the strategy of a strong emptiness” by using reverse psychology to deceive the enemy. When 150,000 warriors from the Wei Kingdom arrived to Xicheng, who only had an army of less than 2,500 warriors, they found the gates into the city wide open and the famous military strategist

Zhuge Liang quietly playing the harp with two children beside him. General Wei, bewildered by the scene and thinking it was an ambush, ordered his troops to retreat.

2. GOD'S STRATEGY

The Bible gives another astonishing example of a battle. In Judges 7, God had Gideon use three hundred men, trumpets, empty jars and torches against armies that were “*as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number.*”**(v.12).**

Judges 7:2-8:

“*And the Lord said to Gideon, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’ Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.’” And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained. But the Lord said to Gideon, “The people are still too many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, that of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ the same shall not go.” So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, “Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink.” And the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water. Then the Lord said to Gideon, “By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place.” So the people took provisions and their trumpets in their*

hands. And he sent away all the rest of Israel, every man to his tent, and retained those three hundred men. Now the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.”

Could Israel defeat a massive enemy? This was humanly impossible! They had no resources or military equipment, but they did have something working on their favor; and it was all they needed: God’s promise: *“By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand....” (v.7).*

The result? Victory!

Referencing this same event, Salomon says: *“The horse is prepared for the day of battle, But deliverance is of the Lord.” Proverbs 21:31.* He also writes: *“Plans are established by counsel; By wise counsel wage war.” Proverbs 20:18.* And what wiser leadership can exist than that of our God? You and I need to return to Him; place all our trust in Him once more; He is all the protection we need in our lives. *“Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.” Proverbs 30:5.*

The Apostle Paul also reminds us....

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 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 10:4-5. In other words, we must always depend on Jesus, in every adverse situation.

3. CONCLUSION

Are you facing a great danger? Seek the Lord’s direction; it will lift you up to achieve the victory your personal strength has

failed to achieve thus far. The strategy of “a strong emptiness” can be of great help because it’s certainly not trusting on your own strength to win the battle. The Lord said:

“Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?” **Jeremiah 32:27.**

Everything is possible through God, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” **(Romans 8:31).**

- Are you ready to stop fighting with your own strategies, so God can be the one who fights for you?
- What steps will you take this week to achieve this?



Lesson 17

Hard to Kill

Icebreaker: Do you know the story of someone who gave up before time? Share the story.

Proverbs 23:18. *“For surely there is a hereafter, And your hope will not be cut off.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a popular saga of films called “Hard to kill”, in which the star of the film is always about to die, but he never does. For about two hours the man is saved from all: they shoot hundreds of bullets at him, they throw bombs at him, and they attack him in every conceivable way, yet he always comes out alive, un-

harmed... and his hair perfectly combed. It seems impossible for someone to continue living after all that.

2. SEE-SAW BELIEVERS

Contrary, in the Christian life we see believers who are not well targeted or receive a few punches, they are easily discouraged, to the point of wanting to give up and leave everything. They are members who frequently disappear from church, something that saddens us because in them we recognize gifts, talents and strengths for the service of God. Almost always, insignificant problems are the reasons that we suddenly no longer see them in church. What happened to them?

Why are there so many “see-saw” believers that go away, then they repent and return, and then they go away again? Today they worship God, it seems they can touch the sky with their hands, but the next day we see them discouraged, criticizing others ... especially the pastor and church members. Shouldn't they have more solid foundations, deeper roots? If a tree has strong roots, it is difficult to cut it down. Although we may see the tree weak, its real strength isn't visible; it's in the roots that it developed under the earth.

How are your spiritual roots? Read **Psalms. 1.**

3. IT'S RAINING STONES?

“Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.” **Acts 14:19-20.**

Perhaps like Paul, you have received many stones, under different names: family problems, failures, criticism, envy, arguments, betrayal, wickedness, fraud... a long list of very difficult issues to bear. After receiving so many stones it is very possible that many have believed you dead and thought: "he/she will not overcome this; it is impossible to continue to live like this; this is as far as he/she will go; this is where he/she will remain, buried under the stones."

But the Bible says that after being stoned, Paul was surrounded by his friends and walked out into the city! Paul rose from the ground, returned to where his attackers were and he continued to do God's work. He was believed dead but he rose again! His story reminds us of one still much greater: our Lord Jesus Christ, whom neither death nor the grave could hold Him.

4. START AGAIN

There is a Christian singer who sings: **"Start again":**

"Even if you feel tired, even if triumph leaves you, even if a mistake hurts you, start again. Even if a dream dies, even if a betrayal hurts you, if pain burns your eyes, start again. Even if they ignore your sacrifice, misunderstanding erases your laughter, even if ingratitude is the pay, even if everything seems like nothing, start again. Even if sad things happen, even if you don't understand them, and your mind does not understand, start again. Even if you think you'll fall, even if your body diminishes, and fear startles you, start again. Even if you have no means and have no strength, even if you think you're alone, there's someone on your side who will not leave you helpless; start again. Start again, for there is still far to go; many trials you still need to face. Start again, because the trial is necessary, and even gold is tested. For that and many things: Start again!

5. CONCLUSION

Just as Paul, just as Christ, you are hard to kill. If the enemy has managed to knock you down, God wants you to get up again. Not with your own strength, but with His. Perhaps you believed yourself dead and with nowhere to go, but what the enemy planned for destruction God transforms into a blessing. A new opportunity for you to get up again, with the power of the Lord, *“For a righteous man may fall seven times And rise again, But the wicked shall fall by calamity.”* **Proverbs 24:16.**

- Would you like to share a difficult situation you are currently facing?
- How do you think you will overcome it?



Lesson 18

Victory in the midst of Problems

Icebreaker: Do you remember a victory you've had over a problem? Share your testimony.

Psalms 91:7-8: *“A thousand may fall at your side, And ten thousand at your right hand; But it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, And see the reward of the wicked.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

During the most difficult period of the oppression of atheistic communism in China, the Christian church managed to survive and even thrive and multiply. Sung Neng Yee, a girl who was adopted by a wealthy family in Shanghai in 1941 lived like

a princess until the Japanese swept Shanghai and her family disappeared. As a teenager she joined the Communists, believing that they would be freeing China, but some years later, married with three children and pregnant, she decided to give her life to Jesus Christ. Due to her new faith, she began to be persecuted and even subjected to severe physical abuse, despite being pregnant. Yet, she never denied Christ, she continued praying to God for her freedom, which she finally obtained. This is the true story of Nora Lamb (her new name), who escaped from communist China to Hong Kong thirty years ago and now lives in the United States. Other members of her family became Christians as well.

2. WHAT ARE YOU MADE OF?

Suddenly in Babylon a new law was issued, stating that for a while everyone should worship the king as if he were a god and no one else. If anyone disobeyed by worshiping other gods, they would receive a severe punishment. “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.

What a brave answer from Daniel, and what a determined attitude! Even though he knew the risk he was taking he did not hide, on the contrary, he opened the windows of his house as if he wanted all to see. Then he tripled his prayer, thanking God every day. This, of course, brought him consequences.... “So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, “Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you.”” **Daniel 6:16.**

God did not deliver Daniel from the lion's den, but He was with him, caring for him, controlling his difficult situation. Therefore, you must understand that even if God does not deliver you from something, He is still with you. God is not indifferent to your needs. It just happens that through a trial you will see what you're made of. The next day, when the king came to the den he heard the calm voice of Daniel saying: *"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."* **Daniel 6:22.**

3. GOD GIVES THE COMPLETE VICTORY

God brought honor and glory to His name through this victory. His people, who were captive in Babylon, also reclaimed their faith; all thanks to the personal victory of Daniel in the lions' den:

"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. And the king gave the command, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions—they, 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. Then King Darius wrote: To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, And steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, And His dominion shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, And He works signs and wonders In heaven and on

earth, Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.” **Daniel 6:23-28.**

4. CONCLUSION

You have to be a good soldier for Jesus. Do not ask God to deliver you from the problems, ask Him to bring you out victorious from them. Asking God to remove a problem is taking the easy road; it’s like a soldier asking his commander not to send him to war; it is depriving others from seeing the wonders that our God can do. Soldiers are specifically prepared for war; and it is in battle where you will see if you are well trained, if you’re ready or not to implement everything you have learned so far. Without a battle, there is no victory!

Are you in the midst of problems? Cry out to the Lord like Jeremiah did by saying:

“You drew near on the day I called on You, And said, “Do not fear!”

Lamentations 3:57.



Lesson 19

Sustained by the Vision

Icebreaker: What do you think about the word ‘vision’?

Acts 20:22-24: “And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself,[a] so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

I. INTRODUCTION

In the movie, “Jakob, the liar” starring Robin Williams, based in a Jewish ghetto in World War II, one of the characters tells

a friend “I believe we are the chosen people, but I wish the Almighty God would’ve chosen other people!”

Perhaps the Apostle Paul must have felt like this on some occasion. Whenever Paul arrived to a new place, he would hear the Holy Spirit say, “you will get yourself into trouble here too!” Imagine the same threat kept repeating itself every single time, no matter where you go. There is a paraphrase of Paul’s comment in **1 Corinthians 4:9-10** which describes to us his daily harsh reality: *“For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!”*

Nevertheless, in the Bible we also have evidence that shows us that the life of Paul journeyed quite far from the path of defeat and self-pity.

2. A VISION FROM GOD

Since the beginning Paul suffered because of the name of Jesus. First, the Lord revealed it to Ananias: *“I will show him how much he will have to suffer because of Me.”* (**Acts 9:16**). And that was how it happened exactly:

“Do they work for Christ? I have worked for Him much more than they have. (I speak as if I am crazy.) I have done much more work. I have been in prison more times. I cannot remember how many times I have been whipped. Many times I have been in danger of death. Five different times the Jews whipped me across my back thirty-nine times. Three times they beat me with sticks. One time they threw stones at me. Three times I was on ships that were wrecked. I

spent a day and a night in the water. I have made many hard trips. I have been in danger from high water on rivers. I have been in danger from robbers. I have been in danger from the Jews. I have been in danger from people who do not know God. I have been in danger in cities and in the desert. I have been in danger on the sea. I have been in danger among people who say they belong to Christ but do not. I have worked hard and have been tired and have had pain. I have gone many times without sleep. I have been hungry and thirsty. I have gone without food and clothes. I have been out in the cold. More than all these things that have happened to my body, the care of all the churches is heavy on me.” **2 Corinthians 11:23-28**

My question is: What prevented this man from going crazy with bitterness and indignation? I am sure that nothing, except a vision from God; a vision of God Himself. Only a divine vision could sustain and empower Paul to carry out his mission in midst of difficult circumstances.

3. THE DRIVING FORCE OF YOUR LIFE

Do you agree with me that we should yearn to have a similar vision to Paul’s, one that inspires us that same power? Of course, we need a vision for our lives. God’s vision for his life sustained Paul as a real driving force, throughout many years: *“I know a man who belongs to Christ. Fourteen years ago he was taken up to the highest heaven. (I do not know if his body was taken up or just his spirit. Only God knows.) I say it again, I know this man was taken up. But I do not know if his body or just his spirit was taken up. Only God knows. When he was in the highest heaven, he heard things that cannot be told with words. No man is allowed to tell them.”* **2 Corinthians 12:2-4.**

Paul clearly knew where he was headed, and what he had to do to get there. Now let me ask you, what is your vision? Can you see what is in front of you, what God has prepared for you? If not, you can start by asking Him to cover you with His light and show you the heavens, just as He showed Paul on his mistaken road to Damascus.

4. CONCLUSION

The road of a Christian is much more dangerous today, filled with darkness and coldness. More than ever, you need the Lord's light; ask the Lord to manifest His care and direction for you. Ask the Lord for a vision that will sustain your life through all circumstances! So you can say as Paul said:

“But I am not worried about this. I do not think of my life as worth much, but I do want to finish the work the Lord Jesus gave me to do. My work is to preach the Good News of God’s loving-favor.”

Acts 20:24

How are you planning on facing your problems of this week?



Lesson 20

The Life that deserves to be lived

Icebreaker: Have you ever heard about the ‘last rites’? What is your opinion on this?

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

I. INTRODUCTION

Constantine the Great ruled the Roman Empire in the early IV century A.D. Many considered him the first Christian emperor; it was he who gave legitimacy to Christianity in that vast em-

pire. Certain Christian groups even consider him a “saint” for his work. The truth however, is that Constantine was baptized only when he was on his deathbed. He wanted to “make the most of his life” to maintain a licentious and depraved life until the end of his days.

2. BEFORE YOU START....

A famous preacher said back in the 1920s that repentance on your deathbed is like “burning your candle of life for the devil, and then blowing out the smoke in God’s face”. Today’s preachers say many times “Make your peace with God, you may die today! But it is better to say: “Make peace with God, so you may live!”

If you came to Jesus thinking the only thing you had to do was believe, that you do not have to confess your sins and be willing to turn away from the evil of this world, you did not understand the message of salvation. Nobody can live for Jesus Christ unless they repent first. “*For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live..*” **Romans 8:13.**

Jesus began His ministry proclaiming the need for repentance: “...Jesus began to preach and to say, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” **Matthew 4:17** Peter and Paul continued to proclaim. This is decisive. Repentance is a conscious decision to leave behind the world of sin and evil. Repentance means change!

3. REPENTANCE IS CHANGE

The lives of many people have not changed since they supposedly believed in Christ. For example, some were immoral and remain immoral. Some committed adultery and continue to

commit adultery. Some committed fraud and continue to commit fraud. That is the crude reality; the Church has always had “bad repentant” people. But according to **I Corinthians 6.9-10**, fornicators, adulterers, liars and many others who practice sin and injustice, will not inherit the Kingdom of God

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals,[a] nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” In other words, if we truly want to serve our Lord Jesus, we must strive ourselves to get away from all things forbidden by God in His Word. We must truly repent from all that and we must do it quickly!

4. SO WE CAN SERVE GOD

Christ died for us in the cross to obtain the forgiveness of our sins and give us life with Him. But before receiving this life, we must “die” to sin, turn away, and leave it behind. This is not always easy, but it’s the only way we can have a life of true service to God.

Three scriptures that teach us this fundamental truth:

Hebrews 9:13-14, *“For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”*

Romans 6:12-14, *“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your*

members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

I Peter 4:1-2, *“Therefore, since Christ suffered for us[a] in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.”*

5. CONCLUSION

Friend, brethren: a life without Christ is a wasted life. Why waste more time? There is a life to live! The greatest joy in life is living for Jesus. If you are not yet saved, it is not too late for you. Whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever you did, Jesus wants to save you. Repent, believe and be baptized in His name, and be filled with His Holy presence:

“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**

- What things are you willing to leave behind to serve Jesus? When will you start?



Lesson 21

Jesus, the perfect piece

Icebreaker: Have you ever had an experience of ‘incompatibility’ with someone or something?

I Corinthians 15:28b “...that God may be all in all.”

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a toy with several pieces of different shapes: squares, triangles, rectangles, etc. Its idea is for a child to fit the pieces into their corresponding shapes. But there is always that one person who tries to force the pieces into the incorrect shape, sometimes forcing them and beating them to make them fit. This illustrates perfectly an important fact of life. There are people who,

no matter how good, persistent or firm they can be, they still live in frustration. They invest great effort into their things, nobody can deny it, but something in their life does not fit.

2. IDENTITY CRISIS

We all have a void, a hole in our hearts that has a certain shape and can only be filled with something specifically designed for it. But when we try to fill the void in our hearts with something that does not fit or does not belong there, we feel frustrated and fall into an identity crisis.

We all long to be loved and feel satisfied, but our problem is that we look for love and satisfaction to fill our void in the wrong places, in the wrong form. The love and satisfaction we so desire can only come from a specific source, the only one who can provide the perfect fit.

King Solomon is the classic example of someone who seeks wrongly. Solomon was the richest man of his times and probably in history. Bill Gates and Carlos Slim would look like ordinary people next to him. On one occasion Solomon wrote in his diary: *“I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure’; but surely, this also was vanity.”* **Ecclesiastes 2:1.** He adds: *“Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure...”* **Ecclesiastes 2:10.**

Solomon had every resource at his disposal; the best food, the best wine, the best music, the best parties. He had mansions, palaces, real estate, gardens, parks, dams and many women; but none of this helped. It took several years until he himself acknowledged: *“I applied my heart to know, To search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, To know the wickedness of folly, Even of foolishness and madness.”* **Ecclesiastes 7:25.**

Solomon had tried everything “under the sun” trying to find something that could fill that void, but it was like trying to fit a square into a circle: “I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind!”

Ecclesiastes 1:14

3. THE ONLY PIECE THAT FITS

In other words, deep in our hearts there is a void that can only be filled with God; no one else can fill this void. This is what God’s Word teaches us: that what every man and every woman want is a love that will not fail. Our hearts go through life searching for that unfailing love. And that love is Christ! His love is the only piece that fits and satisfies our hearts, and clears our identity.

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

Ephesians 3:17-19

4. CONCLUSION

Brethren, friends: what you need in order to be happy is to simply understand how wide and how long, how high and how deep is the love of Christ for you; allow His unfailing love to capture your heart, let His love flood your soul. And when you allow this, you will never again have an identity crisis; you will have discovered your true identity. You are a daughter, a son, and treasure of the Most High God. This is your true identity.

As you can see, your heart has the shape of God, a perfect fit for Jesus in every way. No heart is too big or too small for Him, because He is the answer for everyone.

Jesus is the perfect piece that adjusts to all!

- Have you been searching for love in the wrong places?
- Are you ready to stop searching?
- What steps will you take this week to draw closer to the true love of your life, Jesus?



Lesson 22

About to Sink

Icebreaker:

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word ‘shipwreck’?

Isaiah 55:6-7, *“Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

Imagine for a moment that you are standing before the sea, watching while a large ship passes by slowly. The sun is shining;

there is no wind and the sea is calm. To your surprise, a few people jump from the ship into a lifeboat. You shake your head and think, what fools they are! Who thinks of jumping off that beautiful ship! But then, without warning, the ship hits something and begins to sink. The ship sinks quickly, taking with it all passengers who were on board...

In 1912, while the famous passenger liner Titanic sank, most of its lifeboats were sailing away from it with less than half of their passenger capacity. Thus, the lifeboats that could have saved over 1,200 people only saved 710. Why didn't most of the passengers on the Titanic get on the lifeboats on time? Simply because they did not believe the great Titanic was sinkable. Perhaps they said: "How can such a thing happen? Don't they remember? The architect that designed this ship said 'not even God could sink this ship'!"

2. FIND A SPACE IN THE LIFEBOAT

The story of the Titanic parallels to the Biblical plan of salvation. As one ship sank in the icy ocean, the world is now rapidly sinking into the coldness of evil and death... taking with it all of those who are still living in it. Paul says: "*because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.*" **Romans 1:21-22.** The passengers, who seemed foolish for leaving the ship, were truly wise; and those who seemed to be wise because they stayed on board, were the real fools!

The world mocks those who abandon the ship of sin and jump into the lifeboat of Jesus, but Christians know that this great pleasure cruise will soon collide with the immovable Law of God

and will sink in hell. Just as the unprepared passengers on the Titanic ignored the danger, people today glance at eternal damnation, disregarding the truth of God's Word; they don't want to know anything about the great iceberg of God's Moral Law-the Ten Commandments.

It's a fact of physics that most of an iceberg is hidden underwater, invisible. Well the gravity of sin is far greater than most people think. If you ask people, almost none of them think they are a bad person. They rarely recognize their need to repent; they even see their own faults as harmless. But the Bible teaches us that, for example, if we see someone with lust, we are guilty of adultery; or if we despise someone, we committed murder; and if we lie, regardless of the type of lie, we become children of the devil.

Read **Matthew 5:28; 1st John 3:15; John 8:44.**

The truth is that every unrepentant sinner faces a sad end. Those who have had sex outside of marriage; have swindled, stolen or lied will not enter the kingdom of heaven; not without first confessing their sin and leaving sin behind. Read **Proverbs 28:13.**

How wonderful is it that our God is rich in mercy and does not want anyone to go to hell! He established a mean by which we can be saved. "*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** We refer to the only one who is capable of saving, because only He could carry our punishment, and endure the cross. We speak of Him who is now the Captain of our lives; who gave His own life on Calvary so each one of us could secure our place in this lifeboat. We are talking about Jesus Christ!

3. CONCLUSION

The Lord Jesus Christ has placed at your disposal a lifeboat: the friendship group where you are now. I wonder how long you will wait to get on. When will you become a committed member of our group and our church? As mentioned in a previous lesson, some people postpone their decision until the last day, but how dangerous is this! Remember, if you do not repent in time, each of your sins will become evidence against you before the judgment throne of God.

As we read at the beginning in Isaiah, now is the right time to seek God. Do not hesitate, or leave it for another time. This is exactly what being wise means: seek God while He may be found; trust in Him as the only and sufficient Savior of your life. Turn to God today. Start to pray every day, read the Bible and action it (obey it). Get in the lifeboat!

- What steps will you take this week to ensure a place in our Lord's lifeboat?



Lesson 23

Cut the Rope

Icebreaker: Do you know someone that is excessively dependent on someone or something?

John 20:289b: “...blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

I. INTRODUCTION

A climber was desperate to conquer a very high mountain, so after several years of preparation he began his journey. Wanting the prize for himself, despite all warnings, he decided to climb on his own without a team. It began to get late, but instead of camping he continued climbing determined to reach the top.

Nightfall came and the climber could see absolutely nothing. Still he kept going up a cliff, and when he was one hundred meters from the summit he slipped and began to fall, flying down at great speeds. In that terrible moment many beautiful memories of his life began to pass through his mind; and incidents he would've preferred to forget.

He was convinced he was about to die, when suddenly he felt a strong pull. The rope tied around his waist stopped his fall; it was stuck on the stakes he had pounded into the mountain while climbing. At this time he decided to ask God for help and began to shout: Help me God! A voice from heaven answered:

- What do you want me to do my son?
- Save me please; replied the man.
- Do you really think I can save you? Asked God.
- I'm sure You can, Lord; said the climber.
- Then God said, cut the rope that is holding you.

After thinking about it for a while, the man held on stronger to the rope, not daring to cut it. The next morning, when the rescue team found him, the man was still holding on strongly to his rope, hanging from it ... dead frozen just two meters above ground.

2. STEPS OF FAITH

Just as the climber, we prepare ourselves in life to conquer our dreams and undertake resolutely the path towards them.

Suddenly, things get tough and then we seek God's help. So far everything was working in our favor. The problem is, that although we know that God can help, we insist on holding on to all those things that give us "security" while we expect God to offer us a less "risky" solution.

Many times we've asked God for something, but we have not seen answers. It seems that God does not want to grant us our request. However, what are we doing to make our dream come true? I'm not referring to "helping God" because He is powerful enough to do anything; I'm referring to taking the steps of faith that God is asking from us. That's exactly what Peter did when he got off the boat and went to Jesus walking on water.

"And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. 30 But when he saw that the wind was boisterous,[a] he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."
Matthew 14: 28-33

Peter believed enough to get out of his comfort zone, and although it is true that after he doubted he began to sink, he never would have had that amazing experience of walking on water if he had not dared to take that step of faith of getting off the boat. Jesus rebuked Peter's lack of faith, but it is much better to have little faith and take some steps on water, than no faith at all and just stay seated in the boat watching how someone else walks towards Jesus!

3. CONCLUSION

There is nothing that can give us greater assurance or be better than what God commands us to do. He only wants the best for us. His only intention is to bless us, for this He asks us, to take the first step of faith, letting go of the things that give us a false sense of security. Living by faith means being willing to do what God asks us to do, even if we do not know the reasons. Living by faith means believing God, even in complete darkness, faith is being convinced of what we do not see.

We serve a God of miracles and wonders, as we've learned in previous lessons. To witness His miracles all you need to do is believe in Him. Today you can start to believe, to live a life of faith, to be a Christian who walks, not by sight but by faith, as He says in **2nd Corinthians 5:6**. Where do you start? A life of faith begins with your first step of faith. I encourage you today to give that first step. Believe in God's Word; obey His Commandments, and He will take care of the rest.

Cut the rope today!

- Have you discovered what is the rope you have to cut?
- What will you do this week to show God you are one of those who dare trust in Him?



Lesson 24

The Control of your Life

Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the phrase ‘out of control’?

Psalms 37:3-6: *“Trust in the Lord, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

A woman who was about to graduate as a private airplane pilot said that in her last test flight she performed a maneuver

five thousand feet (1,640 m.) up in the air. When suddenly she lost control of the Cessna 150 aircraft she was piloting, the plane began to give uncontrollable turns into the emptiness. After several seconds of panic, she recalled the words of her instructor: “If ever you begin to spin in a Cessna 150, let go of the controls; it is made to fly itself”.

Let go! She cried out to herself several times, but could not do so, until finally she took her hands off the controls and covered her face. After continuing its rapid descent for a while, the plane regained stability and resumed its normal flight. The inexperienced pilot had lost much altitude, but she avoided an accident and a sure death, because she obeyed her instructor.

2. WHO HAS THE CONTROL?

Lets read about a similar story that comes from the Word of God. It is the story of a man whose life also went into a tail-spin, seemingly out of control. Things just seemed to get worse each day for David. For several years he had to live on the run from a dangerous enemy who wanted him dead or alive: King Saul, none other than his own father in law! The first book of Samuel tells us:

“Now it happened, when Saul had returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, “Take note! David is in the Wilderness of En Gedi.” Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men on the Rocks of the Wild Goats. So he came to the sheepfolds by the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to attend to his needs. (David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave.) Then the men of David said to him, “This is the day of which the Lord said to you, ‘Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do

to him as it seems good to you.” And David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. Now it happened afterward that David’s heart troubled him because he had cut Saul’s robe. And he said to his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.”

1st Samuel 24:1-6

As human beings we find it difficult to trust in God when everything in our life is spinning out of control. Our feelings are crying out to us to succumb to panic, to doubt God’s promises, to ignore His intervention and for us to try to solve our problems without Him. But this is impossible, because only with His guidance are we able to face any trial and come out victorious.

David’s men had been pressuring him to take the life of King Saul with his own hands, and they cited the promises of victory that God had given them in the past. But David did not agree with them, and managed to convince them to let Saul go. If David had done what his men were asking, he would have never become the man “according to God’s heart” mentioned in the Bible. If David had taken control of his future into his own hands that day in the cave, he would have never become the noble king of Israel he later became... he would’ve had his hands stained with blood; he would have ruined the excellent plans God had for his life. Are you catching the message? In the most confusing times of our lives, we need to trust God like David did.

As much as adversity seems to be sweeping our dreams, we must remember that our God never loses control of the situation; He is always in control of everything that happens, guiding us to a safe destination.

3. CONCLUSION

If you feel you are in a state of confusion, today is the day for you to allow God to take complete control of your life and fulfill His wonderful purpose in you. He has the power to do what you cannot do. As of today, the best thing for you to do is to obey your flight instructor and place the controls of your life in His experienced hands. Jesus loves you and will never let you fall. Now place all your trust in God, who will never let you down.

Perhaps you know the Spanish worship song “God is always in control” by Christian singer Samuel Hernandez. Here are some parts of the lyrics:

God is always in control, why are you afraid?

God is always in control, why question Him?

And although I do not understand what happens, I live calmly.

I live in peace, because God is always in control.

- What steps will you take this week to turn over the control of your life to God?



Lección 25

Only two Options

Icebreaker: Have you ever found yourself before a “Y” road, without knowing which path to take?

Hebrews 12:2, *“Jesus..... 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.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the second century AD, a lawyer named Tertullian gave his life to the Lord when he watched how Christians sang before they died. Later he wrote a book on martyrdom, which made

a statement that became famous: “The blood of martyrs is the seed”; seed of Christians, seed of the Church. According to historical records, this type of message that literally called to martyrdom was one of the main catalysts of the wonderful progress of the Church in the first century of life.

Like many Christian martyrs, Christ died victim of hatred, rejection and jealousy of men. The big difference is that He died being completely innocent; He had committed no sin. Read: **1st Peter 2:22**. Jesus really never thought, said or did something wrong, but still had to endure the cross, with the sole purpose of becoming seed that fell to earth and died to produce fruit. Read **John 12:23-24**.

2. JESUS, OUR EXAMPLE

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” **1st Peter 3:18**. It is incredible to think that someone perfectly fair had to die for the unfair. Pilate recognized it: “I find no fault in this Man.” **Luke 23:4**. The accusations against Jesus were made up: witnesses, bribed; and He was wrongfully condemned. **Isaiah 53** (take some time at home to read this chapter) it tells us that Jesus suffered an unjust martyrdom, and never did He try to defend Himself.

Like Jesus on Calvary, we choose suffering as part of the wise and sovereign plan of God for our lives. This is the first of our two options; fulfill the will of God, even if the result is suffering. **1st Peter 3:17** tells us: “For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” At the end the other option, which is to do evil, also results in suffering, because God never leaves unpunished who does evil. Therefore, suffering is not optional; only provoking it for the wrong reasons is.

God does not want us to suffer due to evil doing, if we suffer it should be for His cause, so we receive spiritual strength and glorify His name, fulfilling the purpose of leading others to Him. Suffering for the right reasons causes the purpose of God to be fulfilled in our lives: *“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.”* **1st Peter 2:21.**

3. AND IF I DON'T WANT TO SUFFER?

Christ suffered for us so we can imitate His example. You might say: “But I don’t want to suffer” I must tell you; somehow you are going to suffer. When you submitted yourself to Jesus Christ, you obeyed His Word and you were baptized in His name, He placed a rainbow of hope over your suffering, but He did not remove the suffering from your path! And if you have not yet given your life to Jesus, be sure that when you do, He will not take the suffering away from you. Why?

First, because our suffering helps others, just how watching Christian martyrs sing before they died led Tertullian to his encounter with the Lord. Believers do not have to suffer for our salvation, but God will use on several occasions our Christian response to unjust suffering to bring others to His feet. Just as when Paul and Silas sang praises to the Lord in prison and the other prisoners were listening. What a tremendous impact did the faith of the Apostles have in those men!

Furthermore, suffering because of our obedience to the Lord will bring happiness to our hearts: “He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. **Isaiah 53:11a.** This satisfaction is the same joy that was before the Lord on the cross, which enabled Him to despise the shame or embarrassment (**He-**

brews 12:2), and He was able to withstand to the end the humiliation that His enemies brought upon Him.

4. CONCLUSION

Dear Brethren, God is writing **Romans 8:28** about you right now: *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”* Do not hesitate; each trial is a way to find grace and power. Suffering for Jesus is inevitable, but it is always followed by the joy of knowing that you are serving and pleasing in truth.

When the Lord asks you to suffer for His sake, be confident that He will never ask you to suffer more than what you can bear. Surrender to God’s purpose today and dare to suffer for His cause, so you can lead others to Him. If you do, peace and happiness are insured before you.

This is by far, the best option you have for your life!



Lesson 26

The Hope of Dying

Icebreaker:

Do you fear death? How do you feel about death?

Philippians 3:7-11, *“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings,*

being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

I. INTRODUCTION

Issac Asimov tells the story of a difficult journey he made navigating the ocean, during which a Mr. Jones became very ill. In a particularly bad moment, a friendly waitress gave him a pat on the shoulder and said, “Sir, I know that seems horrible, but remember: no one has ever died from seasickness”. The man raised his greenish face to look up to the young worried waitress and said, “Do not tell me that! The only thing that keeps me going is the wonderful hope to die “.

2. THE HOPE TO DIE

In Mr. Jones words there is more than a touch of irony; you can also hear an echo of the words of Paul directed to the Philippians, those we have read in the beginning. It also reminds us of this other declaration: *“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.”*

Philippians 1:21-24.

Paul kept his hope in Christ, after that first encounter with Him on the road to Damascus. From there, Paul’s faith focused on the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins, rose from the grave on the third day, ascended into heaven and one day soon He will come for His Church.

Paul did not walk through life looking for relief to the suffering that being a servant of Jesus caused, but through his sufferings he received constant comfort that gave him hope to die. Paul's desire to see Christ—whether through death or the Lord's return gave meaning to every moment of his life; this gave him a powerful reason to keep going, and a great incentive to stay focused on those who needed his help and encouragement. It should be the same for us, serving God has never been just a matter of believing, or of beautiful worship and praise, or congregating faithfully. Serving God, is above all to please Him, to do His perfect will, focus all our attention on His purpose for us:

“So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. 7 For we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. 9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” **2nd Corinthians 5:6-10.**

3. KEEP MOVING FORWARD

Perhaps you still fear death and you still are a bit far from experiencing “the hope of dying” Paul felt. But have courage! There will come a day when God will complete His work in you: *“Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.”* **Philippians 3:15-16**

A very important rule is that you cannot win the race without a consistent effort. Getting to be with Christ one day de-

pends on our constant search for His presence here in Earth. The Greek verb that is translated into “keep moving” in Philippians 3 refers to “walking in a line” Paul is telling us we must remain spiritually in line, to keep moving forward. The same word he uses in **verse 14**: *“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

4. CONCLUSION

Are you moving forward? Are you living to achieve the goal of pleasing God and aiming to live with Him for all eternity? Or are you playing around looking everywhere, going from one place to another? Today, you need to have a special encounter with Jesus and truly consecrate yourself to the goal of the “supreme calling”. Until the Lord decides you are ready to see Him face to face, you must keep fighting for Him to be the reason of your existence, the center of your attention and the hope in midst of all suffering you may face.

“Only those who are prepared to die are prepared to live.”

- And you, are you prepared to die?
- What steps are you going to take this week to be prepared?



Lesson 27

Wake Up

Icebreaker: Do you know someone who sleepwalks? What do you think of this phenomenon?

Hebrews 2:1 “...we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.”

I. INTRODUCTION

Beloved, have you settled with who you are and what you have? Have you stopped feeling the hunger and thirst for the Word of God? God reprimanded the Hebrew believers that had closed their ears to Him, they stopped listening to Him,

stopped paying attention; for which they automatically stopped growing. This is the same claim that the Lord has for us today; instead of being obedient, we have fallen into the old mistakes and we need to re-teach the basics. We are far behind; we still have to push prayer, reading the Bible, and even attending church. We are practically in the same place; crawling when we should be walking or running, and we should be living the life God has for us. What does God do in these cases? “He also opens their ear to instruction, and commands that they turn from iniquity.” **Job 36:10**

2. WAKE-UP AND CALL OUT TO GOD

Living below what God called us to be, is to belittle the sacrifice of Jesus! He does not want us to stay in one place, settle. He is concerned about us and somehow He is going to draw our attention so we can get back the love for His Word. How does He do it? “... and opens their ears in oppression.” **Job 36:15**

The sheep that do not obey their pastor grow ill. God does not want to see you ill, therefore, for love and mercy He will open your ears. He might have to shake the boat you're in, as He did with Jonah to wake you up. So you can walk in His will once more, so you can obey again: “*But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. So the captain came to him, and said to him, “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.”* **Jonah 1:4,6.** Just like Jonah, you must do your part; arise and call out to God.

Evidently, in the society we live in most people focus only on themselves. This condition tends to be present in the church.

Many Christians want their church to be warm and comfortable. They get there expecting to hear a beautiful message, find answers to their needs and fellowship with friends. But God never intended the meeting of His people to be like a club. He calls us to join an army that will take the Gospel into enemy territory:

3. WAKE-UP AND SEEK THE LOST

“So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”

Luke 14:21-23

When a local body of believers focuses too much on themselves, their effectiveness in their ministries begins to decrease, and the Christian walk of members is paralyzed. But a church committed to its mission, -which represents a real threat to Satan- is composed by people coming together to live in the truth of the Word; people trained for service, they have matured spiritually through discipleship.

But none of this is to become a quiet sanctuary of Christian comfort, but for us to go to the world. The urgency of the Lord’s command, and the desperate need of humanity must motivate us to leave the security of our Christian sociability, to deliver the message of salvation for the Lord Jesus. Avoiding this responsibility is neglecting our Heavenly Father’s plan for our lives and throwing away the opportunity to help build His Kingdom:

“Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” **Mark 16:14-18**

4. CONCLUSION

None of us must waste our time and energy in trivial things. God has not called us to a life of ritualism, but to an adventure of obedience. Answer today to this calling; help in some way to fill the Kingdom of God with people from all nations. Brethren, wake-up!

- What steps will you take this week to leave the spiritual parking lot?



Lesson 28

At the Service of the Lord

Icebreaker: What comes to mind when you see a sign saying “out of service”?

Read: **Exodus 28:1-4, 36-38**

I. INTRODUCTION

After the liberation of Israel from bondage in Egypt, the time came to separate them for the spiritual ministry. Exodus 28 describes how the Lord set aside men for the holy ministry. By reading this chapter you feel moved by the deep seriousness of the consecration of priests. They were Aaron and his sons. Nothing went unnoticed before the eyes of the Lord. Nothing was temporary or improvised.

2. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THOSE TIMES AND NOW

In those times, only the sons of Levi were set aside by the Lord for holy service, to be priests and ministers of Israel. But now, under the pact of the new covenant, every person born again is king and priest according to **REVELATIONS 1:5-6:** *“To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.”* **1st Thessalonians 1:9:** *“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.”*

But if we look at the Church today, a tremendous emptiness appears before our eyes. There are many believers whom we have to recognize as believers, who have been set free from bondage or slavery of sin. But where does the deep seriousness of separation for ministry appear? Where is their holy commitment of service to the Lord? When a conversion from idols to the living and true God is not followed by the holy service to God, such conversion has virtually no value.

3. THE SEAL OF THE SERVICE

“You shall also make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet: Holiness to the Lord.” **Exodus 28:36.** “Holiness to the Lord” had to be engraved in a plate made of gold. In the Bible “gold” symbolizes the Glory of God; His presence and His power. He who is holy and leads a holy life, unconsciously carries the essence of God: the glory. This plate of gold with the engraving “Holiness to the Lord” had to be placed

on the front of the turban, there where the center of all human thoughts are and where the orders to all of our body come from in order to make them function according to our orders. There, in the midst of the personality, the Lord places His hand and His seal “*Holiness to the Lord*”.

A sealed object is an unchangeable and irrevocable fact. Similarly, it is as if the Lord seals His servants, thus demonstrating to the visible and invisible world: “You are Mine”. **Isaiah 43:1**. Solomon wrote: “*Set me as a seal upon your heart, As a seal upon your arm; For love is as strong as death.*” **Song of Solomon 8:6**. In what place was “*Holiness to the Lord*” written? Aaron, the high priest, was wearing this engraving on a blue cord, on the front of his turban, where everyone could see and read it. He did not need to say, “I belong to the Lord” because this could be seen at first sight. This means that the truly sanctified people speak more clearly through the life they lead, than through their words. These people are letters of Christ, known and read by all men. **(2 Corinthians 3:2-3)**.

4. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SET ASIDE FOR THE SERVICE OF GOD?

(1) To be blocked to sin: “*Whoever abides in Him does not sin.*” **1 John 3:6**. To be set aside for the Lord means to stay in the Lord! It is true that after being in the Lord, sometimes waves of sin come upon us, but they crash against the barrier of the “*Holiness of the Lord*”; they lose their power before the engraving on our forehead, which clearly warns the enemy we belong to Jesus.

(2) Be untouchable to the enemy. Even though Satan, like a roaring lion, walks about seeking whom to devour (**1**

Peter 5:8), the sanctified have been sealed by God (**Ephesians 1:13**). We are a possession of the Lord and therefore, untouchable to the enemy (**1 John 5:18**).

(3) Be a living sacrifice, holy to God (Romans 12:1). Aaron had the words “Holiness to the Lord” on his forehead and according to **Exodus 28:38**, they always had to be there: “...it shall always be on his forehead...”. Just like the priest placed his hand above the head of the animal he was about to sacrifice, the same way Aaron, the High Priest, was completely consecrated to the Lord, and in the words on the turban they could see the Lord’s hand placed upon his head saying: “*You are Mine*”.

(4) In essence, it means two come to form one complete union. Who forms this union? Jesus Christ and you, because “...he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.” **1 Corinthians 6:17**. Herein lies the deep secret of the blessing, the power and the sanctification: to become one with Him. Not me, but Him!

5. CONCLUSION

In these times, the will of God to human beings is revealed through our lives. What a privilege we have that the Lord has set us aside for this service! What a priestly power those of us who are a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord have to save souls! The result of this is a tremendous power to reconcile sinners with God: “...that they may be accepted before the Lord.” **Exodus 28:38**.

Do you think as servant of God, you should be holier? In what ways do you think you need to improve?



Lesson 29

Holiness to God

Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word ‘interest’?

Exodus 28:28: *“They shall bind the breastplate by means of its rings to the rings of the ephod, using a blue cord, so that it is above the intricately woven band of the ephod, and so that the breastplate does not come loose from the ephod.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

Continuing with our series “Twelve calls to obedience” today we will learn the why of sanctifying ourselves to the Lord.

Aaron had to identify to the motives and interests of God, and with the names of the sons of Israel (**Exodus 28:21**). As we do, the closer we get to the Lord; His interests and His burdens become ours.

2. FOUR REASONS WHY HOLINESS LACKS

Signs of holiness to God are becoming less frequent in the church, and there are several reasons for this. First, holiness to the Lord is lacking due to the hardness of our hearts. We are unyielding to the voice of the Holy Spirit who urges us to surrender completely to the Lord. This hardness of heart is disobedience, rebellion, immorality, etc. Read **Hosea 11:7**. In the church there are many people that persevere, but they do not want to obey.

The Lord Jesus, in His prophetic sermon “The Coming of the Kingdom”, in **Luke 17:20-37**, speaks about these types of people who on the outside are committed but inside they remain indifferent, suddenly their train of thought is interrupted and they turn to a person of the O.T., who became immobile. Jesus exclaims: “Remember Lot’s wife” **v 32**. Married to a Christian man, Lot’s wife entertained angels of God, lived in the shadow of a mighty hero of faith, as was Abraham; she was even dragged by angels of God outside the city of Sodom, which only awaited its trial. But along the way, when everyone would’ve said: “She was saved” Lot’s wife turned into a pillar of salt forever hardened. What was her sin? She turned around, ignoring the voice of the Lord. If we harden our hearts and persist in disobeying, we run the same risk she did. We need to look to the Lord Jesus Christ today and run to Him!

The second reason today we rarely see signs of holiness to the Lord in our lives is our spiritual immaturity. Poignantly, we see this in Aaron. In **Exodus 28** we saw how he was ordained to become a priest chosen and set aside for the holy ministry; but then he gave in and adhered to the public opinion, when they turned against Moses (**Exodus 32:1-4**). Aaron's sentimental attachment to the people was stronger than his relationship with the Lord. The lack of the sign of Holiness to the Lord on the forehead of many believers is the result of their spiritual immaturity, because they allow themselves to be controlled by the inclinations of their soul, rather than by the Holy Spirit. No one gets excited of bearing the sign of Holiness to the Lord on their forehead without immediately provoking opposition from the people around them!

Just like Aaron, very few dare to swim upstream, to face public opinion and stand firm. People like that are so sorely missed in the Church! See **Ezekiel 3.8-9**. Today, both Christian leaders and their followers speak of love, but at the expense of truth. Hardly anyone speaks of total surrender to the Lord. Each day there are less and less servants with foreheads as hard as a diamond. Most Christians live dominated by the inclinations of their soul without spiritual discernment, carried away by the wave of public opinion.

The third reason holiness to the Lord in the Church of the Lord is disappearing is an attitude without commitment from the majority of the members. The lack of commitment is fashionable nowadays. This is something very serious. If we lose our commitment to the Lord and His Church, we lose our right to exist as a church! Because we have abandoned the important mission that He gave us, to represent Him in the world. The pervasive attitude today of being without a commitment to the Lord makes Him to sadly move away from many churches and groups, because Holi-

ness to the Lord is, as we've read earlier, a matter of love. The Lord is not with us without a commitment. Read **Hosea 2:19-20**.

The last reason for the lack of holiness to the Lord is a personal conviction of impossibility. Many say: "I can't! I am a sinner; there is nothing good in me". But what really is this impossibility? In essence, disbelief; because the Lord wants to possess for Himself precisely those who recognize their unworthiness, yet still come to Him.

3. TWO REASONS TO LIVE IN HOLINESS TO THE LORD

We must live in holiness to the Lord primarily because He is holy! Read **I Peter 1:15-16**. But beware; here the truth and falsehood are very close to each other. The Lord said many bless with their lips, but they curse with their heart. They seem to have faith, but their works are like those of non-believers: only appearances. All those who have faith give fruit, but not all who give fruit have faith! Aaron's priestly garments, his white turban, the precious stones on his chest, the gold plate, their presence in the sanctuary: all this was only an outer expression of a heart like we should have today: a heart that sanctifies the Lord!

The second reason we must live in holiness to the Lord is that we belong to Him. Four times the Lord says it in **Exodus 28**: "...that they may minister to Me." **V. 1,3,4,41**. Here we find the deeper meaning of the term Holiness to the Lord: the Lord has made us His own because of His great love. It is because of love that He says, "you are Mine!". All outer appearance of holiness without the genuine surrender of the heart in pure love for Him is worthy of curse. **I Corinthians 16:22** "*If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.*"

4. CONCLUSION

Just as we are, after being washed with His precious blood, the Lord wants to dress us with His beautiful priestly garment; and on our foreheads engrave the sign of Holiness to the Lord. He wants to be one with each of us, and make each one a cause for praise of His wonderful grace.

- What steps will you take this week to place God's interests above your own?

Lesson 30



The Sign of Salvation

Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word ‘mark’ or ‘sign’?

Revelations 9:4 *“They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

It is very clear that the dark clouds of God’s judgment are gathering over the world. With hurried steps, the end of the era of the Church of the Lord Jesus on earth approaches. Little time

remains for our encounter with the Lord, it will happen unexpectedly and instantly (**1 Corinthians 15:52**).

2. THE SIGN OF SALVATION

God's sign or mark on the forehead represents the salvation of the upcoming judgment. The Church of Jesus consists of those people whose foreheads show the engraving sign: "Holiness to the Lord". Holiness is an essential requirement to be part of the rapture of the church. **Hebrews 12:14** is very clear: without holiness no one will see the Lord.

If we carry the "Holiness to the Lord" sign on our foreheads, nothing and no one will prevent us from meeting the Lord in the heavens. If you are serving "in the beauty of holiness" as **Psalms 96:9** says, the Lord promises to take us with Him (**Revelation 3:10**). But if we do not have the sign of salvation, God will have to leave us here to suffer the painful punishment prepared for those who did not sanctify themselves for Him. This judgment will come with full force upon earth. During the great tribulation, after the rapture, the people who did not accept to have the sign "holiness to the Lord" on their foreheads will be forced to worship the image of the beast; and if they refuse, they will be killed! (**Revelation 13:15**).

3. THREE TIMES SIX

The people living in the time of the great tribulation will be required to bear the sign of the antichrist. And what will that sign be? "... the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666." **Revelations 13:17-18**. Three times six is the

maximum power of evil that a man can get, inspired by the spirit of the antichrist. Today we see more and more people with this sign over their lives, in preparation for what is to come with the antichrist.

Paul said these would be “dangerous times” **2 Timothy 3:1**. He also described the people of these times, whom we will call “666 people”: “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” V.2-5.

The Bible responds to the Bible! Through Paul’s letter we can “count the number of the beast” which John says in **Revelations 13:18: First six: (1)** men lovers of themselves **(2)** lovers of money **(3)** boasters **(4)** proud **(5)** blasphemers **(6)** disobedient to parents. **Second six: (1)** unthankful **(2)** unholy **(3)** unloving **(4)** without self-control **(5)** slanderers **(6)** unforgiving. **Third six: (1)** brutal **(2)** despisers of good **(3)** traitors **(4)** haughty **(5)** headstrong **(6)** lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

With tremendous prophetic insight, the apostle Paul describes the essence of the spirit of the antichrist, showing the characteristic features of the “666 people”. Consider this fact: the sign “three times six” is appearing on the forehead of people of this age, with increasing intensity. The generation who worships the antichrist is here. The most dangerous part of these people is that in many cases they resemble us: they bring a “form of godliness”; they arrive with the Bible under their arm; use Christian terminology and preach appealing messages of love and unity.

Every visible aspect of their lives makes them appear as good Christians. But watch out!

When the antichrist is revealed he will come with a message of peace and love. Satan, who dwells in him, will turn him into a unifying leader like never before seen in the world; a gifted leader with a power of influence so irresistible, and an appearance of life so similar to that of Christ, that almost everyone will believe he is Christ! Without a doubt they will be very dangerous times. But there is still a way out; we still have time to decide whom we want to be “666 people” like most, or true worshipers of God. It is true that the pressure of the world today to reject the “Holiness to the Lord” sign is very strong; but if we yield to this pressure, we will be converted into worshipers of the antichrist, and the judgment of God will come upon us, inevitably.

4. CONCLUSION

Read 2 **Timothy 4:3-5** and let each one of us answer this question: Who’s sign do I want on my forehead? Brethren, friend; you need to recognize the time in which we live. The antichrist is coming, but before, Jesus Christ will come for His Church! He shed His blood on the cross to enable your sanctification; He gave His life for you. I encourage you to choose today the mark of the “Holiness to the Lord”. Your salvation from the coming judgment depends on it.

- What steps will you take in the upcoming days to have Jesus’ mark in your life?

Lesson 31



Give your life to Jesus

Icebreaker: Love and care, are they the same thing?

John 21:14-17, *“This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead. So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.” He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

Christian life is a gradual process. We see this in the life of the apostles during the earthly ministry of Jesus. They walked slowly from religion to a relationship with Jesus; and from a relationship to a commitment and unconditional surrender. After His resurrection, Jesus finally reaches for the heart, and asks one of them the crucial question: “Do you love me?”

The word ‘love’, according to the dictionary of the RAE means “intense feeling from a human being who, from his own insufficiency, needs and seeks contact and union with another being.” Also “Feeling of affection, inclination and surrender to someone or something.”

2. LOVE VERSUS CARING

Let’s read the dialog between Jesus and Peter:

*“This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead. So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.” He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep.” **John 21:14-17.***

The Greek word that in **John 21:14-17** was translated into ‘love’ is “agape”, while the word ‘caring/affection’ comes from the Greek “phileo”. They are two very different terms, so it

is unlikely that Peter misunderstand the Lord. Peter knew what Jesus wanted to hear from his own lips... he just didn't want to say it. Was it because Peter still did not love Christ? Three times Jesus asks, "Do you love me" (although the third question from Jesus really was 'Do you care for me?') And three times Peter replied with a shy "I care for you".

'Love' and 'care/affection' are not just different, they contrast. 'To love' is to give without expecting anything in return; but 'caring' is expecting something from someone. We come to God because we 'want' something; we need a certain thing and we have faith that God can provide. Not that it's wrong to approach God in that way, because faith was designed by God to do just that: for us to come to Him and obtain what we need. But faith is just to start something much more important: our personal relationship with Jesus. Faith alone cannot sustain this relationship. Love is required to stay united to Jesus through time, and we especially need love to serve Him faithfully. This is why Jesus connects His question "Do you love Me" with the command "Feed My sheep." If the service we give to Jesus is not motivated by our love for Him, He simply does not want our service.

3. LOVING GOD IS THE END OF OUR LIFE

Love is God's language, His nature, and it will also be the atmosphere in heaven. God made us to love us. He did not need to because He was not alone. God has given us the reciprocal capacity to know Him, communicate with Him and come to love Him. **Hosea 6:6** says: "*I want loving-kindness and not a gift to be given in worship. I want people to know God instead of giving burnt gifts.*" Then, what are the two most important things in life? (1) to know God and (2) learn to love Him.

We can only please God if we love Him. Jesus said: “*If God were your father, you would love Me.*” **John 8:42.** And the last verse of the letter to Ephesians shows what the seal of a true Christian is **(6:24):** “*Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.*” Here we have five reasons of why we should love Jesus with an unchanging love: **(1)** He created us, according to Colossians 1:16. **(2)** He came to this world and suffered for us, dying on the cross, according to John 3:16. **(3)** He loves us! Read 1 John 4:16,17,19. **(4)** He always takes care of us, and meets our needs. And **(5)** He will take us with Him and make us citizens of His eternal kingdom, according to **Revelations 1:5-6.**

4. CONCLUSION

The story tells us Peter finally loved Jesus, when he offered Him his life in Rome and was crucified because of His name. Ask yourself now: Do I love Jesus? Do I find joy by thinking of Him? Do I find joy in reading about Him? Do I like being by His side and talking to Him? Do I enjoy hearing about Him? Do I enjoy being with His friends and do I love them as much as Him? Am I jealous for Him, for His honor? Am I willing to give my life for Him?

John 15:13:

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”

Lesson 32



Dining with God

Icebreaker: Why is dining so special? What do you think?

Revelations 3:20: *“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.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

We can fall into a routine if we are not careful. We can pray, read the Bible and go to church throughout the week, and still be on the verge of losing our first love. It’s not that we no lon-

ger love the Lord, but the routine of everyday life can make us lose the spiritual enthusiasm and sensibility. If in your home the same meal is served everyday of this week, or everyday of the month, surely someone would say: “the same meal again?” “Why don’t we eat something else?” In **Psalms 50:12-15** God tells Israel their rituals no longer please Him: that if He wanted to, He could feed on everything He created. Like us, God does not like leftovers. I can practically hear Him say: “Again this religion?” He expects us to serve Him more than our usual routine; He wants to feed on our sincere worship. Things often done by inertia, are not to His liking; He expects from us a living and holy sacrifice (**Romans 12:1**).

2. GOD WANTS TO SPEAK TO US

God wants to move powerfully in our lives. Just as He talked to Abraham, He wants to talk to each one of us. Two angels accompanied God to Sodom and Gomorrah to judge the wickedness of these cities, but He stopped at Abraham’s camp first. How would you feel if you saw the Lord standing in the door of your house? Abraham was a man who had been worshiping God for decades. For many years he had fed God with his obedience and faithfulness. Now Abraham had the opportunity to feed God in the natural sense. Abraham knelt to worship; then washed the feet of his guests and prepared a meal for them.

When we feed God, He tells us things that we would otherwise never know. After eating, the Lord and the angels get up to leave, but God stops and says: “*Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?*” (**Genesis 18:17**). Then God shares His plan for Sodom and Gomorrah with Abraham, and He shares more, He announces to Abraham that he and his wife Sarah will have a son the following year. When we leave the ordinary and take steps to

worship God how He deserves, God begins to share His secrets about Himself; His plans and purposes for each one of us.

3. MAGNIFY GOD

We need to magnify God! David, a man of God, was anointed as king when he was very young, but he spent many days on the run to save his life. David wrote Psalms 34 while he was alone, in Philistine land, hiding from Saul. In the midst of his difficult situation, David encourages himself to worship God and proclaim: *“His praise should continually be in my mouth.”* (v.1) And in **verse 8**, he exclaims: *“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good;”* David knew how to magnify God in the midst of difficult situations.

A few days ago we gave magnifying glasses to our children and they have been playing with them, discovering they can pass the sunlight through the glass and toast a distracted ant.... But they especially noticed that by bringing their magnifying glass closer to objects, they discover certain aspects on the objects that cannot be seen with their normal vision. With the magnifying glass we can magnify an object; not making it bigger, but we are able to see details on it that we could not distinguish before. When we worship God, we magnify Him. There are times in our lives in which our enemies and problems seem to be so big that we are unable to see anything else; but when we worship God, we magnify Him, and at the same time we make everything else around us smaller: *“I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.”* (v.4). When we magnify the Lord, we shrink the devil. So the best we can do today in the midst of this war is to exalt Christ, for in doing so we stop telling God that we have a big problem, and begin to tell the problem we have a great God.

4. REAL FOOD

Nearby Jacob's well, Jesus told the Samaritan woman "*true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.*" (**John 4:23**). Listening, the woman became convinced that Jesus was sent by God, He was the promised messiah. She ran back to town and told everyone: "*Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did.*" (**v.29**) They people went out to see and hear Jesus; in other words, they came to worship Him.

Meanwhile, Jesus' disciples returned with food, but Jesus tells them He is not hungry, He has food to eat they do not know; (**v 32**) and adds: "*My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me.*" (**v 34**). The worship of the woman and the other Samaritans satisfied Jesus so much that He no longer had a hunger for natural food. While the disciples were busy getting food, the Samaritan woman and the others took time to feed Jesus what He most desires from us: true worship.

5. CONCLUSION

Brethren, What would God say of what you offer to Him every day? Would He say: "religion again? The same superficiality of always!" Or would the Lord really enjoy dining with you? Jesus wants to have communion with you; He wants to share secrets and plans with you; He wants you to pay attention to His greatness and to magnify Him. If you have fallen into the routine, if your worship does not flow like before, if it's been a while since you've heard His voice speaking to you, wait! Stop everything! And listen closely: Someone is at your door, knocking! Abraham knew and came out to receive Him joyously. Come out to receive Jesus and magnify His name! Dine today with God!

Lesson 33



Wake-up, again

Icebreaker:

What do you think of someone that falls asleep during a speech or a conference?

Genesis 28:16-17:

“Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!””

I. INTRODUCTION

Jacob did not know he was in the presence of God until he woke up from his sleep; and when he realized it, he instantly worshiped Him. Jacob's life changed after that. Recognizing and worshipping God changes our lives. The Bible tells us that God seeks worshipers. God has no problem finding worshipers in heaven, but He has trouble finding them on Earth. This problem for God is also our problem, because if you and I do not worship God, we do not have His presence, and only in His presence we find salvation, healing, strength, joy, peace and wisdom.

2. PRIORITIES CHANGED

We will examine three interesting scenarios of our Lord's ministry, in which three women played a leading role. The three women were named Mary; they had more than just their name in common.

We find the first scenario in **Luke 10:38-52**.

Knowing how to give priority to God's presence is very essential. The word priority means, according to the dictionary "something that is more important than other things and that needs to be done or dealt with first." God does not reject the work of people like Martha, but what He seeks are worshipers, not impressers. In other words, it is not our intense activity or talent, but our intimate worship, which makes us good servants of God. Work is always stressful and frustrating without the empowering presence of God. There are too many "marthas" who do not understand what is the one thing they need in their lives today: the presence of God.

3. HOW MUCH DO YOU APPRECIATE GOD'S PRESENCE?

Let's read **Luke 7:36-50**. In the house of Simon, Jesus noticed they did not value His presence. But Mary, a sinful woman, knowing that He was there, showed up without being invited carrying an alabaster jar filled with perfume. The preparations of the "simons" are important, such as the decor, tending to the guests, etc. but with so much preparation sometimes we forget to tend the main guest! We resemble Simon too in our church. But what Mary did teaches us that our chores are not the most important part; the most important part is the presence of Jesus. When Jesus visits our church, we must simply leave everything aside and worship.

4. A WAIST OF MONEY OR TIME?

Read **John 12:1-8**. While the "marys" worship God, the "judas" criticize. Their cold and bitter lips complain and demonstrate the values of their hearts, "that's a waste." But Mary did not mind criticism; she had gratitude in her heart. The oil of spikenard she used was very expensive, since it was imported from the distant India; but when there is appreciation and love, the cost does not matter.

The "judas" try to keep appearances, but those who are like Mary break traditions. It was not accustomed for single and honorable women to come to the table of men. Women should stay in the kitchen, unless they are called. Only bad women sat with men. But Mary was there to worship Jesus; she knew Jesus would soon be sacrificed and she thought: "it's now or never". She knew appreciation needs to be shown during life and not after the person dies.

5. CONCLUSION

With frequency God visits our church, but He finds us sleeping like Jacob. There are even some cases in which the worship is not just asleep, but it's already dead. Today God is calling us to awake from the dream ... again. Obsessive commitments of the "marthas"; the pride and arrogance of the "simons"; materialism and greed of the "judas"; are all things that kill our worship to God.

We can try to justify ourselves: "I am depressed"; "my problem is terrible". But the truth is the problem does not exist; the only thing that exists is the lack of God. Your problem has a solution. With just a few minutes before His presence you may notice that your exhausted life, your tired mind and discouragement are transformed into strength. The answer to your need comes now from His presence. The Holy Spirit of God has come to wake you up. Now I invite you to leave for a moment the decorated table and guests; to drop the tools, computer and papers. Forget about everything. Wake up and worship the Lord!

- What steps will you take this week to wake up and offer the Lord your best worship?

Lesson 34



Build Bridges

Icebreaker:

Why are bridges so necessary and important?

Ephesians 4:32:

“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

I. WALLS VS BRIDGES

There is a story of two brothers who lived in harmony for many years, but one day there was a small misunderstanding between them that kept growing. While the brothers lived in separate farms for many years they farmed together, sharing machinery and exchanging products. Together they made a great team. But unfortunately this insignificant disagreement between them continued to grow until one day there was an explosion of hurtful words, which were followed by weeks of silence.

One morning someone knocked on the door of the eldest brother; it was a carpenter who was looking for work. . I have some work for you -said the older brother. In that farm across the creek, lives my neighbor; well, actually it's my younger brother. Before, there was a beautiful meadow between us, but he detoured the creek so it would run between our farms. I'm sure he did it just to spite me, but I'll do something even better. See that pile of discardable wood by the barn? I want you to build a wall two meters high with it, because I do not want to see my brother anymore!

He then helped the carpenter get the materials together and went to town to get supplies. Upon his return, the older brother was stunned. There was no two-meter high wall; instead there was a bridge across the creek connecting the two farms. It was a fine piece of art, complete with handrails and all. At this moment, the younger brother came from his farm and hugging his brother said: -You are a great person. Building this beautiful bridge after all I've done to you!

While they reconciled, they realized the carpenter was gathering his tools to leave. No, wait -said the older brother. You cannot leave; I have many plans for you. I would like to stay -said the carpenter, but I still have lots of bridges to build....

2. A BRIDGE OF RECONCILIATION

Two thousand years ago a carpenter lived in this earth. He also turned discardable wood into a bridge of reconciliation. We are talking about Jesus, who transformed the cross—an instrument for torture, a symbol of curse and death, into a bridge of love and forgiveness from God towards us. It was through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary, that God reconciled us with Him:

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” **2 Corinthians 5:18-19**

Jesus Christ did His part in the reconciliation of earth with God. Now the word or ministry of reconciliation has been placed under our responsibility. However, often we allow misunderstandings to separate us from the people we love; we allow pride to be what controls our actions, and something that can be fixed easily is transformed into years of fighting and separation. We forget that we are called to be peacemakers, to love our neighbor, forgive offenses, no matter who was wrong.

God made the decision of forgiving us, and He now asks we do the same: *“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”* **Matthew 6:14** We must forgive, and we must do it every day. When we forgive, we build a bridge to the other side, just as God builds it towards us every time He forgives us and allows us to come back to Him. But if we decide to do the opposite, to build walls of conflict and animosity, the cross and the resurrection of Jesus can no longer operate in us, and our sins cease to be forgiven: *“But if you do*

not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” **Matthew 6:15**

3. CONCLUSION

Just as the carpenter made of the bridge a work of art with the discardable wood, we must do the best we can with what we have. An attempt is not enough; we must do our best to build bridges to draw us close to the people we love, even if they are trying to build walls against us. Resentment does more harm to the person holding on to it than to the one that caused the affliction. We should not allow our hearts to grow roots of bitterness. We must forgive today. Build bridges!

“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” **Ephesians 4:32**

- What steps will you take this week to build bridges of reconciliation with others?

Lesson 35



Listen to His voice today

Icebreaker: Can you talk to someone that does not want to hear you? Have you ever been through this exhausting experience?

Luke 13:34-35:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, [a] I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

I. INTRODUCTION

Here we have part of the scripture whose objective is, on one side to show us God's great mercy, and on the other the hardness of the heart of men. It is also a clear warning to the fact that the person who decides to ignore God, can not expect anything good, but pain and despair, in a cruel and merciless world.

2. EACH OPPORTUNITY A BETRAYAL

Every time the people of Israel had problems, God's prompt help was there; through His great power He did wonders for His people. That is also part of our reality, because now those were not His people, are the people of God through His mercy. We are always ready to cry out to God for our needs and we will gladly receive His gifts. Our God is good and He always hears our cry and extends His hand; but just as Israel, after the crisis we quickly forgot the God who has helped us and we run to other gods. Without caring much for the greatness of God and His gifts, just as we try to justify the lack of attention we often place to the guidance of His Word. We easily accept the gift, but we reject the correction.

The people of Israel were stubborn people who killed the prophets that God sent with the word that would correct their mistakes. But it is exactly the Word of truth that gives us freedom that we dare refuse, and we do not give room for Jesus in our hearts to correct us. We are like those who were after the loaves of bread and fish, or as Balaam, who for dishonest earnings rejected God's command. Or worst, we are like the people who stoned Stephen: *"But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed*

*into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him." **Acts 7:55-58***

3. DEFEAT YOUR PRIDE

Jesus came to serve, to help humanity. He also came to announce the Kingdom of God and give freedom to the captives, and if we want to obtain these blessings, we need to listen carefully to His voice and obey His Word. However, many who hear the word of Jesus, see their mistakes discovered and they get up and leave. Even knowing they are wrong, they try to somehow justify themselves, sometimes even by using the same Word of God. This is where the saying "there is no worst deaf than the one who doesn't want to hear" comes in. It is also said: "You want to know how much pride a person hides? Ask them to change"....

This is where the great problem of the Jews consists: in their pride. They considered themselves being all right and loved keeping their traditions, but they did not actually submit themselves to God. We often do the same; we harden ourselves to God because of pride; we do not want to submit to the only one who deserves our surrender, honor and obedience. For this same kind of pride many profits died. And surely we have killed in a figuratively form many of the messages and/or messengers that the Lord our God has sent to us.

Matthew 3:10-12 "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is

mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

If we want to be a tree that gives good fruit, one that will never feed the fire, we must let the Word of God prune us and clean us today. Jerusalem received its pay at the end, when the Romans burned it down in the year 70 of our times. Let us pray the same does not happen with us! It is better to follow the Lord's guidance and submit to Him. Don't you believe so?

4. CONCLUSION

In the Gospel we find the good example of the Samaritan women, which not just paid attention to the Words of Jesus, but also served Him as His messenger for the Samaritans. But something about her draws our attention according to John 4:28, because before going into the city she left her water pot next to Jesus, in other words, she put aside her personal issue, her means of providing for her needs. Often times we do the opposite; we want to serve God.... But we also want to serve ourselves and our interests, and this, simply cannot be done!

We must change our focus today and turn back our heart to the Lord, in an honest and unselfish way. He will always be willing to receive us and speak to us with His Words of love and forgiveness.

- Do you recognize you need to pay more attention to God's voice?
- What steps will you take this week to achieve it?

Lesson 36



Facing the Unknown

Icebreaker:

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the word ‘uncertainty’?

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s command. 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. By faith he forsook

Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.”

Hebrews 11:23-29

I. INTRODUCTION

In **Hebrews 11:27** we find a brief phrase that outlines Moses' focus in life: “*for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible*”.

2. MOVE FORWARD BY FAITH

Moses' life did not lack uncertainty. How could someone “slow of speech” address Pharaoh? (**Exodus 4:10**) How could a murderer become the man chosen by God? Did he have to be the one to lead those stubborn Israelites? How would they cross the Red Sea, survive for forty years in the wilderness, and conquer Canaan?

Moses knew what the Lord expected of him, but he did not have a supernatural vision of the future. Therefore he could not see the result of his obedient actions. Nevertheless, the leader of Israel walked by faith, trusting in the power of God to guide him, protect him and help him overcome. Moses found security only in God, who always kept His promises.

Life has not become safer throughout the millenniums since Moses guided the Israelites to the Promise Land. Believers today ask ourselves these questions:

- Will I ever get married?
- Will I have a stable job?
- What will happen to my kids if I get sick?
- How can I complete all the tasks I have?
- What will happen to me when I grow old?

Thankfully, the fountain of security has not changed in all this time and God is still the only certainty in this life.

3. FACE THE DESERT

Some years ago, during a severe economic crisis, many people lost their jobs, and sadly many of our brethren and family members lost their businesses and homes as well. With the passing of time, some of them fell into a depression and left their homes and churches. But happily others, despite the hopelessness of the situation, kept their peace, believed God would take care of them and they were sustained until recovery came.

- How might those that gave up feel now?

Believers in Christ can have peace and continue moving forward with faith in the midst of uncertainty, because our security is not set on the things from Egypt, but in heaven, where our heavenly Father who loves us and takes care of our difficulties and needs is. We can pray and present to Him our needs each day with an attitude of trust and faith, believing that He will help us confront and resolve problems that may arise.

God is willing to provide us all we need as He did with Moses and Israel in the desert. The Apostle Paul writes: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” **Philippians 4:6-7**

4. CONCLUSION

Even in hard times as the ones we are living in, we can count with Him who is faithful: “*If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.*” **2 Timothy 2:13**. We can continue to trust He is fair: “*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face.*” **Psalms 89:14**. We can always believe in His love, because “*God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us*” **Ephesians 2:4**.

What is Moses’ life lesson? We need to hold on tightly to the Lord to face the unknown. Even though the road looks dry, dark and never walked before, Jesus goes before us, and all situations, even those that seem impossible, are in His sovereign hand.

We must keep moving forward with confidence, facing the invisible!

- What steps of obedience and faith will you take this week, showing you trust in the Lord your God?

Lesson 37



Return to His perfect Will

Icebreaker: Why do people hide when they are going to do or have done a bad thing?

Jonah 1:3: *“But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

Jonah fled God’s will, only to find out it is impossible to do such a thing. The prophet was convinced he could outsmart God’s plans: He thought that going the opposite direction would

prevent him with complying with what the Almighty, Omniscient and Omnipresent had established. Unfortunately Jonah found himself in the belly of a giant fish, and there surrounded by algae and without hope he understood that going against God's plans brings terrible consequences.

2. GOD'S PURPOSE

Just as Jonah, many of us have gone against God's will. Countless times we thought that our choices are the best and so we followed our own agenda instead of His. Perhaps because God's commandments don't always seem attractive to us, we tend to impose our own rules and follow what our own hearts dictate. Sometimes we act as if we did not know God! But like Jonah, we learn how ineffective it is to draw away from Him; the results of disobeying Him are always the same, and the disappointments are all similar.

The impressive thing about the story of God and us is that no matter how much we draw away from Him or the number of mistakes we've made while fleeing, in the very moment that we recognize our sin, He is willing to change our history and therefore our future. Nothing prevented God to fulfill His purpose in the life of Jonah, and nothing can prevent Him from fulfilling it in our lives. God is skilled in acting in spite of ourselves and He does it as many times as necessary.

3. GOD IS EVERYWHERE

David the Psalmist writes:

“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[a] 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. For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.

*And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them." **Psalms 139:7-16***

And the prophet Jeremiah testifies:

*Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: "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." Then said I: "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth." But the Lord said to me: "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' For you shall go to all to whom I send you, And whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, For I am with you to deliver you," says the Lord." **Jeremiah 1:4-8***

4. CONCLUSION

If you have turned away from God, keep in mind there is no place you can hide from His presence and He will do all that is necessary for you to turn your eyes to heaven, return to the path of righteousness and experience the undeserving love and forgiveness that He has for you.

This is the day to make a change of direction, turn to God and surrender all your plans and projects. Jesus has great a purpose for you. Do not make Him wait. Procrastination is also disobedience. Do not think for one second, “tomorrow”, because tomorrow may be too late ... Return today to His perfect will!

- What is the ship in which you have been sailing into the opposite direction?
- What steps will you take this week to change the direction of your life (before the giant fish appears)?

Lesson 38



Once more, Wake up!

Icebreaker: What comes to mind when you hear the words “day off”?

Romans 12:11: *“not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord”*

I. INTRODUCTION

Today we complete the series “Twelve callings to obedience”, underlining the concept of “diligence”. In the dictionary, the word “diligence” means “careful and persistent work or effort.” Some of its synonyms are meticulous, detailed, careful, and attentive.

In different parts of the Bible God calls us to be diligent. God expects diligence from our part; when we serve when we work, at home and in church. God wants us to be diligent and not neglectful in every aspect of our lives!

2. NOT A SINGLE DAY OFF

Years ago there was a renowned singer, who thought he could change the world with his music, introducing concepts such as love and peace through lyrics. Two days before he went on stage, some gunmen gave him two shots on his leg, in order to intimidate him so he would never sing again. But after two days and his bad leg, this brave singer appeared to go through with his show. Eventually many reporters came to interview him and asked, why did you come back so soon, and did not wait until your recovery? He replied, “Those who are responsible for making the world a worse place, do not take the day off. Why would I?”

3. THERE ARE NO BREAKS, WE ARE IN HARVEST

The Lord refers to our days as days of harvest. He said: “*lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest*” **John 4:35**. Jesus responded to His disciples with these words when they told Him to eat what they had brought for Him; although their worry was sincere, for Jesus eating would only have been a distraction, for in that moment He had something greater to do: capture the heart of Samaria. Jesus was not there on vacation!

“After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where

He Himself was about to go. Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road." **Lucas 10:1-4.**

Each expression from Jesus in this scripture denotes urgency. He tells them: "you have a great harvest before you", in other words, time to work! Then He tells them they will be like sheep amongst wolves. And what does a sheep surrounded by wolves do? It moves as fast as it can! Therefore, the seventy had to travel light. Jesus even tells them not to get distracted with greetings, because their mission is much more important than to socialize with others.

In Acts 8 we find when Saul persecuted the church in Jerusalem, believers scattered throughout Judea and Samaria took advantage of every opportunity they had to preach the Word: "... those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word" v4. Chapter 11 tells us they reached far away regions such as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch where they also preached the Gospel. And thanks to this diligent missionary work "The churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit." **Acts 9:31**

Just as Jesus, the Apostles and the early believers, the Apostle Paul did not rest during the harvest either. He wrote to the believers in Rome: "I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, but as it is written:

"To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand." **Romans 15:19-21**

4. CONCLUSION

The Lord warns us through John: “.....*For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.* **Revelations 15:19-21** In these days of harvest, the devil is working fast, consistently damaging the human soul through pornography and hallucinogens; destroying marriages and relationships through spirits of adultery and fornication; filling the earth with abandoned children, single mothers and homosexuals. Satan does not take a day off. Can we afford to rest on days like these? Edmund Burke said, “In order for evil to triumph it is only necessary for good men to do nothing.”

Salomon said: “*He who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame.*” **Proverbs 10:6.** We have a lot of work to do and the Spirit of the God is calling us to work: “*awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength....*” **Isaiah 52:1** The world urgently needs a church clothed with the power of God to rise up and preach the message of salvation.

You are holy; you’re not just anything, and for this reason you should not get stuck in one place. Today you must make the decision to serve the Lord with all your might, with all your mind and with all your heart. Jesus deserves the best from you; He deserves your diligent service. Brethren, one more time, **wake up!**

- What will you do this week to wake up to the Lord’s call?
- What will you do this week to wake up others to the call?

Lesson 39



Recover what was taken from you

Ice-breaker: What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word “recovery”?

I Samuel 30:18-19: *“David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken....Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken. David brought everything back.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

Are you in a critical and chaotic situation in your life, a situation that has brought you anguish and you do not know what to do? Have you cried until no more tears come out? Perhaps

you are currently facing an illness, financial difficulties, or family problems. Perhaps you have lost your job, or you've received bad news. But wait; there is help for you! Our God is still in the business of strengthening and helping His people.

2. GOD'S LANGUAGE

Let's read **I Samuel 30:1-8; 16-17**. This story is short but powerful. The city where David lived was destroyed because he left it unsupervised. Depressed and desperate, David turned to the priest to consult with God. This is a healthy spiritual habit: asking the Lord for direction. It is normal that when problems come we feel discouraged and sad; but we must not let the sadness cloud our decisions. Before you can defeat the enemy, we must consult with God about what we should do.

When we experience failures, it is usually God speaking to us. Although David did not have an impeccable life, it was a good and successful life largely because he understood the language of God. One of the songs that David had written when he was a young shepherd said: "He leads me." But this time David had gone in the wrong direction, allying himself with an enemy of God's people (**I Samuel 29:1-5**). The destruction of Ziklag was the consequence of this.

Let us learn four things from David's mistake:

1. Discouragement is inevitable when we try to face the problems in our lives with our own strength.
2. Commitment with the world only offers a temporary solution to our problems.

3. Generally God's punishment is to make us face the consequences of our incorrect actions.
4. The problem is not to break us; it is to make us fall to our knees.

3. RECOVER THE LOST

Let's ask some questions:

- How do we respond before persecution and destructive criticisms?
- Are we growing in our trust and faith?
- Or do we let ourselves be dragged by the desires of retaliation (vengeance)?
- What type of words do we use when we are going through difficulties?
- How do we face pain and discouragement?

David must have felt alone through that situation. His only friend Jonathan was not there. His parents and his brothers were far away. Where would he find comfort? Who would cheer him up? David found strength in his God! **(1 Samuel 30:6)** And as a new day began to dawn on Ziklag, a new day began to dawn also in the heart of David. He had spent the night dressed in ephod linen seeking the Lord. At midnight, God came to him, saying: *"Pursue them," you will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue.*" **V.8.**

The day before it all seemed lost, but now things are changing. David received a word from God and through it he found new hope. At one point, all he could see was a bleak future, but

now he had a new and victorious vision of his future. Finally, David recovered all. He brought back everything the Amalekites had taken from him, and that which God had given him before.

Today we also fight battles where casualties are not small; but we cannot abandon those who the enemy has taken captive. We need to develop a strategy to recover them. When we see one of our church members drawing away from the church and the service to the Lord, we must do everything possible to get together and come to their rescue. That is the strategy of Jesus.

4. CONCLUSION

The Amalekites are a type of Satan and his demons; and as the coming of the Lord draws near, it becomes more urgent that we recover what they have taken from us. In times of great anxiety and generalized fear, while people going to and from looking for strength and peace where there is none, you and I have the true God. We can turn to Jesus every day and receive the strength to continue being what He has called us to be: witnesses of His power and His business partners –the business of recovering the lost.

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost”

Luke 19:10

- What have “the Amalekites” taken from you? How are you planning on pursuing them?
- What strategy will you follow this week to recover what the enemy has taken from you?

Lesson 40



Something new today

Ice-breaker: Friedrich Nietzsche said: “How can you be born again without being reduced to ashes?” Share your opinion about this phrase.

Isaiah 43:18-19 “Do not remember the former things, Nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness And rivers in the desert.”

I. INTRODUCTION

For ten years, Thomas Edison tried to create a battery that stored electricity. All his efforts finally had a disastrous impact

on his finances. To make matters worse, in December 1914 a spontaneous combustion in his laboratory left him in ruins. In minutes all compound packages for records, tapes and other flammable substances went up in flames. Even though fire departments from the eight surrounding cities came to help, the intense heat and low water pressure made it impossible to extinguish the flames. Everything was destroyed and the damages exceeded two million dollars.

Charles the inventor's son, searched desperately for his father, fearful that his spirit would be damaged due to his loss. Finally, he found him calmly contemplating the fire; his face gleamed while he thought ... My heart ached for him, 'said Charles, as my father was no longer a young man, but a man of sixty years of age, and the flames had destroyed many years of his work. But the next morning, Edison looked at the ruins and said: -An experience is never a failure it always demonstrates something. And three weeks after the fire, Edison invented the first phonograph.

2. THE STORY OF JOB

In the Bible we find the story of a man who rose from the ruins, against all odds. Job's troubles began on a day like any other, and they were not insignificant. Within a few hours, Job lost everything: possessions, children and his own health. All of this was caused by Satan, whose purpose was to show God the faithfulness of His servants ends when His blessings stop.

The devil was sure that Job would give up his faith before many calamities, but Job's response is wonderful and memorable: *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the*

name of the Lord.” **Job 1:21.** And he was right; God had played a part in his situation, because he allowed Satan to take everything from him, but “spared his life” **Job 2:6.** The Word of God tells us that “In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.” **Job 1:22.**

Then Job’s “friends” show up to constantly repeat that his misfortunes were the punishment for his sins. For them, there was no doubt Job had committed a grave sin, and God was punishing him for it. Still today those titled “teachers of the faith” exist, when someone is going through great trials and illnesses they appear with their clothes torn, shouting: “confess the sin!” But Job knew he was not guilty of the situation and he decides to place all his trust in God. He hopes God Himself is a witness of his innocence and justifies him.

After heated speeches by his friends, the young Elihu intervenes. His words are different and invite us to think. Elihu speaks of wisdom, holiness, sovereignty and greatness of God, emphasizing the pedagogical value of human pain. The last speech belongs to God speaking to Job out of the whirlwind. By hearing God for the time, Job realizes his ignorance: “...I have uttered what I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, ‘I will question you, and you shall answer Me.’ ‘I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes.” **Job 42:3-6**

After hearing his confession, the Lord speaks about Job’s faithfulness and rebukes his friends, sending them to Job to pray for them. Then God restored Job’s losses giving him twice as much than what he had lost, of family, finances, friendships and physical strength. “After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children and grandchildren for four generations.” **Job 42:16**

3. CONCLUSION

From this story we learn a very important lesson. Whether the Lord gives us or not health and temporary blessings, if we suffer patiently according to His will, in the end we will be happy. The blessing of the Lord will enrich us without adding sorrow to it. God is who gives us power and strength as well as success to honest businesses. The last days of a good man, sometimes turn out to be the happiest; his last works the best; his last advice, the wisest; because his path as well as the shining light, shines ever brighter unto the perfect day (**Proverbs 4:18**).

Perhaps you find yourself going through a very difficult situation. The circumstances seem to be taking you to ruins. But today I encourage you not to focus on it, because like me, you have an Almighty God that knows the impossible and promised to be with you always, in the good times and bad times you will face. The test always has a purpose in life. The test does not last forever; but while it lasts, you must learn to trust and depend completely in God, so that your faith can grow and move to another spiritual level. In His great mercy, God will give you another chance. Something new will happen today!

- In what way do you think your issues may help you?
- How are you planning on confronting them after reading this lesson?

Lesson 41



Serve Him Again

Ice-breaker: What do you think of the following phrase? “Anyone can count the seeds they see in an apple. But only God can count the apples that will come out from one seed.” Robert H. Schuller.

Micah 6:8 *“He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

One day I was buying apples in the supermarket, carefully choosing them: “not this one because it has a bruise... this one

either, it is too ripe... this one has some weird spots... this other one is still green..." Finally, I found the four that seemed to be the best ones, and when I was about to pay, I thought: "I am so glad God is not like me, choosing through so many apples, to keep only those which seem perfect!"

2. HE IS NOT LIKE US

He is not like me, even though He became a man, and I call Him by His name, He is not like me.

He is not like me, even though He was tempted in all, He is clean and without sin, He is not like me.

Purity and Holiness are the color of His skin.

He is not like me, He is holy and perfect, He is sublime and eternal, there is no comparison.

He is not like me, He transcends that which exists, and dresses in majesty, there is no comparison.

He is not like me, even though He became flesh, and He calls Himself my brother, He is not like me.

He is not like me, the heavens are His throne, His power fills all, He is not like me.

Creation will bend all knee at His feet!

(From the album "El Aire de tu casa",
by Jesus Adrian Romero).

What a relief to know God is not like us, right? Can you imagine God choosing through a multitude of human beings, trying to find one that does not have any spots or bruises; “one that is not too ripe” or “too green”? How wonderful that our God is not like that! His word offers us a multitude of examples of “imperfect apples”, He still chose and used for His glory. Let’s read....

- A stutterer was called by God and became the greatest leader in the history of Israel. Then he led the people to freedom from Egyptian bondage and ultimately led them to the land promised by God. This man was Moses.
- A former prostitute was included in the genealogy of Jesus. She was named Rahab.
- An adulterer and murderer was pronounced by God “man after mine own heart.” From his lineage came the Savior of the world. This was King David.
- An orphan and plebeian girl (no royal blood) was elevated by God to the royal throne, from which she changed the history of the Jews. She was known as “Queen Esther”.
- An illiterate fisherman, impatient and hasty tempered, was appointed by Jesus as “fisher of men”. Then he preached to crowds and even with his shadow did great miracles. It is the Apostle Peter.
- A relentless religious persecutor of Christians became the greatest missionary in the history of the Church. With his pen, much of the New Testament was written. Born as “Saul”, but died as the Apostle Paul.

3. WHAT GOD IS LOOKING FOR

The brief list should be enough for you to understand God is not looking for perfection in humans. He knows very well that perfect people do not exist. But there is something God does ask from us and the Prophet Micah tells us: God wants people who do the right thing, to feel compassion for others and to walk humbly with Him **(Micah 6:8)** *“He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God.”*

For God, perfection is not an inconvenience; it is us who struggle with the problem of perfection: “I cannot serve God; I’m not ready yet” “I cannot teach children.; I still do not know the Bible very well,” “I cannot tell others about Jesus.; I still have no experience” “I cannot preach.; there are younger and better prepared people here than I.” And the list continues, always with a “cannot” in between.

Where did we get the idea that we have to be perfect for God? This idea has to be one of the biggest lies of the devil, to ensure that we continue idly and do nothing to make a difference in the world, without sharing with others the treasure we have in Jesus.

The Apostle Paul wrote:

“But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are” **1 Corinthians 1:27-28**

4. CONCLUSION

When God comes to His supermarket, He does not choose the perfect apples; He picks the apples that are willing; willing to humble themselves before Him, to serve and be used, with imperfections and all. This is true service to God; we recognize in Him the only perfect one, and we bend our knees to give praise, honor and glory.

Today it is necessary for you and I to serve God once more with joy. Lets put ourselves at His service today!

- Have you been refusing to serve God with some of the excuses we read today?
- What steps will you take these upcoming days to offer what He expects from you?



Lesson 42

Receive freedom from sin

Ice-breaker: Is being forgiven and being freed the same thing?

Romans 7:15-25, *“For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the*

inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.”

I. INTRODUCTION

A newly converted young man expressed to me the frustration he felt for not being able to do what he always wanted to do, to do what was right. This young man, sincere and eager to please God asked me, “Pastor, do you understand how I feel?” I said, “Yes, we all feel this feeling from time to time; even the apostle Paul felt that way.”

I looked up Romans 7 and read. He interrupted me and asked: “Where is that scripture, I need to read it again”. I told him where he could find it and I also told him to read Romans 8, where Paul speaks about freedom: “*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*” **Romans 8:1**

2. THE MOST DECEITFUL ILLUSION

In Romans 7 Paul writes about the greatest conflict that exists in the world: of the two natures that are within us. One of them tells you: “Do what is good,” while the other drags you down. On how to identify the latter, the mother of John and Charles Wesley, said this shocking truth: “*Whatever weakens your reason, hardens the sensitivity of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes your joy for spiritual things, is sin.*”

Our attitude quivers when sin enters our lives, and a mean, hard, carnal nature invades us as a result. At first sin is attractive, then terrifying; in the beginning it is fascinating, then alienating; in the beginning it deceives, then it convicts; it promises life but it produces death. Sin is the most disappointing thing of this world!

3. DAVID STRUGGLES WITH HIS SIN

Psalms 51 is known as David's prayer for forgiveness after falling into a double sin of adultery and murder. Before that, in **Psalms 32**, David notes how he felt during the time he tried to cover his sin: "*When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long.*"^{V3}. For a year he tried to live with a cool attitude and his guilty conscience. Finally, after the confrontation with the prophet Nathan, David prayed to God for forgiveness. That prayer is in **Psalms 51:1-2**:

"Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin."

David is forgiven when he recognizes his sin, he accepts his fault and exempts God of fault: "*For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge.*" **Psalms 51:3-4**. However, receiving the forgiveness of sins is one thing, and to overcome them another. David cries out for cleansing power in verses 5 to 13, and his prayer teaches us there are eight steps for this freedom; eight steps we will take to get the power to overcome sin.

4. EIGHT STEPS FOR FREEDOM

- 1. Help me understand what is within me:** *“Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.” v.6*
- 2. May your blood cleanse my heart:** *“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” v.7*
- 3. Fill me with joy and gladness:** *“Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice.” v. 8*
- 4. Lord, do not remember my sins:** *“Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.” v. 9*
- 5. Give me a new heart that will do good:** *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” v. 10*
- 6. Give me the assurance of Your presence:** *“Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.” v.11*
- 7. Give me a will that will only do what You want me to do:** *“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.” v.12*
- 8. Allow me to teach others what I have learned:** *“Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.” v.13*

5. CONCLUSION

- What would happen if every time we discover something sinful within us we confess it to God, in the same terms David did in Psalms 51?
- Do you believe you can be freed with a simple prayer like that one?

You must be sure you can!

Shall we pray?

Lesson 43



The pain that heals you

Icebreaker:

Pain is a good sign: it lets us know we are still not dead.

What is your opinion?

Deuteronomy 32:39:

“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.”

I. INTRODUCTION

We will continue with our series “Seven weeks of restoration” with some questions. What is your first reaction to adverse life situations? Do you blame the devil, blame the person who has hurt you, blame God? Do you believe that pain in you is removing the desire to obey God? Do you admit your reluctance to serve God could be due to the pain in your heart, which perhaps you are not even aware of? Do you think we have difficulty understanding suffering as something positive in our lives? Why?

2. THE LORD HURTS YOU WITH A PURPOSE

God not only heals us: He also hurts us! This is somewhat difficult to understand when we say that God is so good He gave Himself for us on the cross. So if He hurts us, He surely has good reasons to do so... and He does. First, God allows our fallen nature to cause us different problems. Second, He put a curse on the earth, and while we live here we will have to endure the difficulties that are part of mortality. Finally, God allows Satan to sow hatred and evil in human hearts, which is the cause of many of our interpersonal conflicts.

So the pain we experience is the result of our fallen nature, the curse of God on Earth and satanic influence in the world. However, God in His sovereignty utilizes all that suffering for a purpose. Our part here is to have a positive attitude towards pain, always remembering that it is allowed by God to achieve His highest purpose, which is to save us.

3. DISOBEDIENCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The fact that we live under grace does not mean we can live as we please. God's commandments are still valid today. In **Deuteronomy 6:1-2** we read that God expects us to obey all: us, our children and our grandchildren. The purpose of this is simply to live!

Colossians 3:20 and **Ephesians 6:1-3** emphasize on the obedience of children towards their earthly parents, as something that pleases God and brings blessings to life. Parents expect their children to obey the rules they have established in every home. The purpose of having rules at home is to bring peace and order to the family as well as protection for all in the home. The responsibility of children to obey is based on the fact that their parents are older and wiser, but above all, God has given them the authority to establish rules in the home. Therefore the minimum a child has to do is follow the rules set by his/her parents, and if they do not, it is common for their parents to discipline them.

Let's read **Job 33:19; Hebrews 5:9; 12:5-7**. These scriptures teach us that our disobedience to God and the pain we suffer are closely related. God hurts or disciplines us because He loves us as a father who loves His child and disciplines him/her in order for the child to be obedient. This is how many children of God suffer due to their disobedience.

4. THE CHURCH AND HUMANISM

The Lord is the authority of His church, the great spiritual family in which we all must obey His rules. Just as a parent is

more inclined towards the obedient child than the disobedient one, our Lord blesses those who obey Him and disciplines those who disobey Him. It seems easy to understand, but in the world an ancient wave of thinking called “humanism” exists, whose main purpose is to bring God down to the same level as the corrupt humanity. According to this philosophy, pain is bad and good is being in disagreement or unhappy.

The humanist thinks: “if God exists, He must be bad and inconsiderate, since He allows so much suffering and pain in the world”. Does this sound familiar? This humanistic spirit has infiltrated into our churches and in us. For example, when our things go wrong inside of us we tend to blame God for not looking after us. And if God asks us for some type of sacrifice, we think He is unfair. Perhaps we might not tell anyone, or we might not be completely aware of it, but that feeling is there, well hidden in our hearts.

What humanism forgets is that in the beginning God created paradise for man to dwell; also forgetting it was the disobedient behavior of man to the rules of paradise, which brought so much pain and suffering to this world. Therefore Solomon said: **Proverbs 20:30** “Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, As do stripes the inner depths of the heart” The Lord allows pain in the world to convince them to return to Him and obey His laws. Most of the world does not seem to understand this. Do we?

By not wanting to obey His Word we question everything He declares to be, and our deeds deny His goodness. But if we obey, we show faith in Him and testify to the world of our love for Him. This is why Jesus says: “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” **John 14:15.** Obeying God’s commandments is equivalent to loving Him unconditionally. The pain we sometimes feel is simply the way God tries to teach us the way back to Him.

5. CONCLUSION

Like a good doctor who decides to cause pain when it is necessary to heal a patient, the Lord allows suffering and even tragedies in our lives, to save us. Let us be grateful to Him. His ways are the best, but sometimes we have to be hurt. Remember: God's pain heals us.

- Why not surrender all that pain to God, right now?



Lesson 44

Fill yourself with His spirit again

Ice-breaker: Why is it important to seek being filled with the Holy Spirit?

Ephesians 5:16: “....be filled with the Spirit.”

I. INTRODUCTION

Many believers mistakenly believe they must fatigue themselves trying to become better and good more each day. The truth is that neither the Lord nor His Holy Word requires us to seek to improve our own efforts. It is impossible for anyone to become better in life, at least not permanently, without divine

intervention. The Holy Spirit, which is in those of us who have given our lives to Jesus helps us grow every day, so we can be all that God wants us to be.

2. THE FLESH IS DEFICIENT

God devised a simple way for us to have access to His power every day. That way is being filled with the Holy Spirit. The power of God is available to us from the moment we are baptized with His Spirit: "...you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" **Acts 1:8**. The power of the Holy Spirit allows us to imitate Jesus. The Apostle Paul says God strengthens us "to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man," **Ephesians 3:16**. The Spirit fills us "with all the fullness of God." v.19, which means we can be like Him—in terms of His character, but not on our own, but by being filled with His Spirit.

From every point of view, our flesh is weak. Only the Holy Spirit living in us has the power and wisdom to make us live in victory over sin. The Spirit of God releases supernatural power in our lives; takes us beyond the level of our limited human nature. This is why God has given His Spirit to us; so that through Him we may be blessed each day with a righteous life pleasing to God.

Although the works of the Holy Spirit in us are many, five of which are basic to our Christian life:

1. The Spirit enlightens our mind so we can understand God's things. **1 Corinthians 2:14**
2. It prepares our will and intentions in order for us to persevere in doing the right thing. **Philippians 2:13**

3. It ennobles our thoughts and emotions, so we can express the fruits of the Spirit. **Galatians 5:22-23**
4. It energizes our physical bodies to serve the Lord **Ephesians 6:10**
5. One day it will transform our mortal bodies into glorious bodies, so we may enter into eternal life with the Lord. **Romans 8:11**

3. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SIN

Blame pursues the footsteps of humanity; it devours all joy God designed for us. Will the ghost of our guilt always haunt us? Is there freedom from these feelings? Yes, through His Holy Spirit! The devil is the prosecutor pointing towards us his accusing finger, but the Holy Spirit is really our defense. With love, He guides us to confession. We can come trusting to God and ask Him to cleanse us. No psychologist or psychiatrist can do that, only our Lord Jesus Christ.

John 16:8: *“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment”* The devil accuses us of sin. The Holy Spirit convinces us of sin. You know what the difference is? The devil accuses you to get away from God. The Holy Spirit convinces you to get closer to God. The devil wants you to feel under the burden of guilt and say, “I’m not good at all, I’m a failure as a Christian” And when you believe those lies, you do not see any reason to approach God. Instead, the Holy Spirit convinces you so you can confess your sins to God and be forgiven and cleansed; to help you restore your friendship with Him. At the same time, the Holy Spirit makes you know the fullness of His joy.

4. DO NOT GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Ephesians 4:30: *“do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”* The Holy Spirit is grieves when believers do not change their old life and embrace their new one. He feels pain when believers lie and conceal the truth, when they are angry and are relentless when they steal and refuse to share, when they say obscene words or lack a merciful spirit.

Ephesians 1:13: *“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise”* When the Lord saved us, He placed upon us a seal that declares we are His forever. If God has been so merciful with us to give us salvation, has sealed us for an eternity, and every day He keeps us until the day of our redemption comes, how can you grieve the Holy Spirit?

Sometimes Christians are proud of the good we have done, or the number of years we have been in Church; but in order for God to work in us we must serve Him humbly. We must accept that our sinful nature often prevents us from doing His will, no matter how capable we are or how much experience or strength we believe we have. Every day we must surrender our lives to the guidance and government of the Holy Spirit, allowing our spiritual walk -and also our profession, finances, family and relationships- to go where God wants us to go. The Holy Spirit of God never releases His power over a life that continues to be in rebellion: *“the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”* **Acts 5:32.**

5. CONCLUSION

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is basically a matter of faith. Faith is the “switch” or ignition that turns on the power of the Spirit. To have faith is to think that I cannot do it, but God can. Therefore, every morning try praying with words like these: “Lord, I think You have a plan for me today, and I trust You will give me what I need to do Your will. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit throughout the day.” If you integrate this principle into your lifestyle, surely rivers of living water will flow from you **(John 7.38)**. Amen.

Lesson 45



Restore your family altar

Ice-breaker:

What do you know about the family altar? What is your opinion about this subject?

Psalms 145:4: *“One generation shall praise Your works to another, And shall declare Your mighty acts.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

God designed the home as a castle that protects each member of the family from the influences of a hostile world. Every

castle has its strength in the walls that surround it. The family altar raises the protective walls of our home. How important it is that we transmit to our children the ability to worship God! They do not grow up and automatically the desire to worship arises in their heart. Rather it is the opposite. So we need to teach them, and the best way is through the family altar. We can say in a few words that the family altar is a time when families gather to do at least three things: read the Bible, present our needs, gratitude or confessions, and praying to God together.

2. DISCOVERING THE ENEMY

The church is at war for the growth of the Kingdom of God on Earth, and the battles we win or lose are fought mostly at home. The phenomenon of family disintegration and the progressive extinction of the family as God established it is precisely the lack of His presence in the homes. But “the family that prays together stays together”. So every apostolic home should be a training and preparation center. Our homes should not only provide food for the family and hospitality to visitors, but also generate the spiritual resources to be spiritual warriors.

It’s because the apostolic home aims to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, that the enemy attacks it. The enemy wants the domain of our home, and to achieve this, the first thing he does is open a hole in the wall of spiritual protection of our house, which is the family altar.

The first attack of the enemy is to make the believers think they are not sufficiently “prepared” to establish the family altar. This is accentuated when the children reach the teen or youth years. But the key is not to “know” enough, but the willingness to learn together. God gives us the grace to build the family altar,

producing in us not only willingness, but also the power to do so. Another attack of the enemy is to generate more and more consumerism in our family. Parents have to work more and more outside the home to cover increasingly large expenses. Many live in such a hurry, busy and tired, that their family altar has been completely abandoned.

Salomon affirms *“He who digs a pit will fall into it, And whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent.”* **Ecclesiastes 10:8**, and a great part of the attacks of the enemy are due to the heads of the home opening the doors to their castles to him, allowing the enemy to enter with all kinds of bad influences, through television, internet, secular music, non-Christian literature, etc. Through these open doors, Satan ransacks the health, harmony and spiritual peace of our families. May the Lord rebuke him!

3. RAISING THE FAMILY ALTAR

Deuteronomy 6:6-8: *“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.”*

This is the time when God is calling us to account and asking us to be brave and make a decision on this important matter.

Even though the scriptures do not provide specific instructions on how to do it, we can say it is not very difficult to carry out family worship. First: our family devotions need not be very long. For most, perhaps 15 to 20 minutes will suffice, at least ini-

tially. It is important to consider the age of the family members. It is best done on nights of the week when there is no church service or friendship group meeting. The ideal is to have one or two fixed days of the week and give full priority to family altar these days. It should not be canceled, unless there is an emergency. The family altar is basically the same as the meetings of friendship groups, with the difference that the number of participants is reduced to the family; no outsiders participate.

What if initially a family member refuses to participate? It is important to start with those who can. A sister started her family altar alone! Although at the beginning it was hard for her, afterwards she could feel the Lord's support; He honored her efforts by gradually bringing her family to accompany her.

4. CONCLUSION

Read **Genesis 22:1 - 14**

Abraham obeyed God, believed in His Word and built altars to make covenants with God and offer sacrifices. Practically all his life evolved around the altars and in a spirit of worship. We see the great work that Abraham did at home by seeing how he and his son Isaac went up to Mount Moriah together to worship. It is obvious Isaac had been well prepared by his father to surrender everything to God, even his own life...

This touching story teaches us that we must also take time to educate our own, and prepare them for when the time comes when they have to make crucial decisions in their lives. Where can we better develop this time of learning than in the family altar? There you can find everything a family needs to be happy: love, reconciliation, joy and many blessings more.

- What are the obstacles that prevent you from carrying out the family altar in your home?
- What steps will you take this week to overcome these obstacles?



Lesson 46

Self-discipline

Ice-breaker:

What was the first thing that came to your mind when you read the title of this lesson?

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 *“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

We will begin the series “Seven truths for today”, focusing on the value of Christian self-discipline.

The globalized world of today is obsessed with materialism, entertainment, sports and emotional pleasure. As an example, just remember the euphoria that the last World Cup (soccer) erupted, even in countries in which this sport had not been so popular. In reality, these exaggerated reactions of many people have become characteristics of our superficial and increasingly immoral society.

A century ago, President Theodore Roosevelt predicted these results when he said: “The things that will destroy America are prosperity at any price, peace at any price, rights instead of duty, love for an easy life and the theory that life is about getting rich quick.” But a safe antidote for this lethal way of thinking is self-discipline that is shown in the genuine Christian life.

2. A SELF-DISCIPLINED CHRISTIAN

Self-discipline is the capacity to set a realistic goal, develop a strategy to reach it and follow it timely. Self-discipline requires fulfilling the promises and commitments we have made. It is the foundation of many other qualities of firm character. It is also the ability to resist the temptation of doing things that can hurt others or ourselves.

Regarding being self-disciplined, Richard Shelley Taylor writes: “The disciplined character belongs to the person who achieves a

balance to bring under control all his faculties and all his powers ... Resolutely facing his duty. It is dominated by a sense of responsibility. It has inner resources and personal reserves that are the admiration of the weaker souls. Makes adversity help it.”

Our direction and spiritual power come from the Lord, but we need self-discipline in order for God to work efficiently through each one of us. The Lord only uses the disciplined mind that thinks with clarity, understands His Word and efficiently presents the truth to the world. Only the disciplined mind distinguishes truth from the error, and only a disciplined Christian is a good testimony, within the church and before the world. Simply, Christian discipline is obedience to the Word of God and the willingness to submit anything in life to His will, for His excellent glory.

3. PRACTICAL ADVICE

We need God to make self-discipline a reality in our lives; and as Christians we must learn to cultivate it. Our children should also be taught self-discipline, especially in their early childhood years, because if they learn during that stage, then it will be easier to regulate their behavior and have the strength of character to make good decisions and then make the right choices in life. However, if a child does not develop self-discipline, he/she will be subject to a self-destructive behavior and they will be unable to control or evaluate their impulses. This will make young persons to find themselves in trouble or dangerous situations.

Paul wrote to young Timothy guidelines aimed to self-discipline. These are just a few: *”For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now*

is and of that which is to come.” **1 Timothy 4:8.** “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God” **2 Timothy 2:15** “*But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”* **2 Timothy 4:5.**

Below you will see some practical guidelines to achieve the objective of self-discipline:

- a. Have order in your life. In your home, for example: begin by organizing and cleaning your bedroom.
- b. Resolve the most difficult tasks first. If we deal with the difficult tasks first, we will not leave them half way.
- c. Be organized. Instead of reacting before the circumstances, have a plan for the day and the week.
- d. Be punctual. Make being on time to your meetings and reunions a habit.
- e. Practice refusal. For example, replace an unhealthy food for a healthy one.
- f. Exercise. The discipline you have with your physical body transfers to the spiritual kingdom.
- g. Accept responsibilities. Accepting with pleasure a new task will force you to be organized.
- h. Appreciate criticism. Do not avoid constructive criticism; accept it as a means to self-improvement.

4. CONCLUSION

The above advice may seem a bit redundant, but it is demonstrated that they are key elements for us to become better servants of Christ. It is through them we must begin:

“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man’s, who will give you what is your own?”

Luke 16:10-12.

- What specific steps will you take this week to turn into a self-disciplined Christian?

Lesson 47



Consumerism

Ice-breaker: What do you think about this phrase: “Consumerism is horrible, but it looks good because advertising is responsible for applying makeup to it”?

Ephesians 5:5, *“For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

It is a few the number of Christians who have a critical approximation towards the consumerism culture in which we are

immersed. On the contrary, in many churches consumption is seen as part of the blessings of God upon the life of the believers. Few people can discern between a real need from an artificial need, and when the gratification is not immediate, frustration, bitterness, spiritual coldness, doubt and unbelief are in the lives of many believers. Worse, the source of personal worth and affirmation stops being their identity in Christ to become the social recognition which is the result of access to such products advertising sells to us as indispensable in order to achieve happiness, having prestige and the admiration from others. When this happens, you fall into idolatry, which is much more than just kneeling before a statue, as Paul calls 'idolatry' exact greed.

2. PEOPLE OR CHICKENS?

Consumerism is the great religion of our time; has a mesmerizing character and an addicting fascination. It can be compared to the things of God, which produce an irresistible attraction, but unlike them, cause deep frustration. Consumerism is the subtlest form of manipulation. Most of the current religions preach a lie, when they promote a gospel in which blessings are associated with materialistic wealth and the ability to consume whatever you want. The initial euphoria of those who follow this lie soon gives way to misery and the outbreak of roots of bitterness in their lives.

The French sociologist Giles Lipovetsky, in his book *The Paradoxical Happiness*, presents precisely the deception of consumerism: "The dissatisfaction is directly proportional to the offer of a consumerist society." Moreover, Sergio Sinay, in his book *The Moral Blackout*, resembles the process through which a society of consumerism depersonalizes people through advertising, the process by which chickens are fattened.

According to Sinay, the victims of compulsive consumerism resemble chickens who are encouraged to eat in hatcheries, in order to achieve as soon as possible the weight that will lead to slaughter and from there to the supermarket's freezers and butchers.

Twenty-four hours a day the lights at the hatcheries stay on, so the chickens do not stop eating their food. The big difference between chickens and us is that they (victims of sophisticated human ability to submit to martyrdom every living being) do not have a conscious or will. If they knew the purpose of what they are induced to, perhaps they would opt for a hunger strike! But we human chickens cram malls, knowing very well what we do; we have the tools to know and even to not do it. One of these tools is the Word of God.

3. CONSUMERISM OR CONSUMED?

We will now pay attention to the interesting story found in **2 Kings 5** (read at home). The Syrian general Naaman went to the prophet Elisha looking for a miracle of healing for leprosy, which actually occurred. Naaman then tried to reward the prophet with expensive gifts, but Elisha refused. The Syrian general then went back and was still close by when Gehazi, the servant of the prophet, reached him. Gehazi made Naaman believe Elisha had sent him and that he had changed his mind about the reward. Gehazi got two full bags of silver coins, and hid them in his house.

“Now he went in and stood before his master. Elisha said to him, “Where did you go, Gehazi?” And he said, “Your servant did not go anywhere.” Then he said to him, “Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and

oxen, male and female servants? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever.” And he went out from his presence leprous, as white as snow.” **2 Kings 5:25-27**

The words of the Prophet Elijah on verse 26 are more current than ever. If his was not time to accumulate material goods, certainly ours is even less. We need more than ever to experience true and permanent conversion from consumerism to true Christianity. We must be free from the snares and traps of consumerism, or in the end, like chickens, like Gehazi and his descendants, we too will be consumed.

4. CONCLUSION

On a certain occasion, someone asked Jesus to mediate between him and his brother the division of their inheritance. “But He said to him, “*Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?”* And He said to them, “*Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”* **Luke 12:14-15**

And the parable that follows this story calls “dumb” the consumerism! Let’s pray to God for wisdom and sanity, to escape the current consumerist fever. The money and the things that can be bought with it do not bring happiness to our lives, much less deserve our devotion; only Jesus deserves it, because He alone gives us true identity and happiness.

- How are you planning to face the problem of consumerism in your life?
- What steps will you take in the upcoming days to be freed of this evil?

Lesson 48



Food

Ice-breaker: On a certain occasion a preacher said: “Apostolics do not smoke, we do not drink, we do not do drugs.... But do we eat!” What do you think about this?

Romans 14:17: *“for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

Gluttonus Maximus was a Roman butcher who had a small shop on the Appian Way; a nice man, famous for his sausages, liver and leg of lamb. However, Gluttonus died at the age of 28, weigh-

ing 206 kilograms (about 400 pounds). His huge excesses and his sumptuous style and wild life, caused him a heart attack.

Many people of our generation may well follow the same direction and die driving their car towards one of those fast food places or those places where one can be filled with plates up to the ceiling with complete abandonment. In almost all of our countries, we are chewing more and walking less. We are killing ourselves, and I am sorry but that is a sin! Meanwhile, the food left over on our plates everyday, if put all together could feed a small African nation!

2. OUR BODIES

Every time news programs report on any act of vandalism at a church, believers are startled. It is difficult for us to support the idea that someone could paint graffiti on the walls of the sanctuary, or damage windows or set fire to the place where worship is offered to God. It's a sacrilege! The church is a sacred place, yes, but we are saddened even more with the fact that many Christians do not feel the same scruples when it comes to damaging the temple of the Holy Spirit: their own bodies. Some put junk in their stomachs, in their veins or lungs. Others are worn out due to the weight of stress or exhaustion. Some people justify these abuses as their right, saying, 'This is my body and I can do what I want'; but that's not true.

I Corinthians 6 says believers are property of the Lord. (v.19). He has formed these vessels of clay to serve Him and carry out the work He has set for us. God created us with a spirit, a mind and body; the latter allows us to interact with our environment. People cannot achieve their full potential if they neglect the care of their bodies. What good are education, talent and gifts, if

we are too tired or ill to do the job right? In this world we cannot do anything without our physical body. Since it is the only one we will have in this life, we must strive to keep it in good condition. We also recognize our responsibility to treat our earthly body as the sacred and special abode it is.

3. GLUTTONY

A man who lost 30 kilos in six months said: “Once the doctor gave me the right medication for my thyroid, my good eating habit and exercise achieved their effect and I lost weight.” Hmm? Perhaps some of us have a medical problem that needs attention. Moreover, every overweight person should visit his or her doctor first, before starting an exercise program or diet. However, if the doctor visit goes well, and you’re still overweight, then brother, sister, you are simply eating too much. And the Bible calls that gluttony. End of story!

If under pressure we seek drugs continuously and habitually, we fall into the classification of ‘drug addicts’. If we regularly use liquor under pressure, we fall into the classification of ‘alcoholics’. If under pressure we continually seek chocolate, ice cream, cakes or food in general, then, at most, we fall into the classification of ‘compulsive eaters’. But make no mistake. Gluttony is definitely rebellion and excess, which leads to slavery and death.

Gluttony is idolatry, because it arises in us as a response to our lack of spiritual satisfaction. Gluttony is seeking satisfaction in something other than God: food. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of how wonderful it was to experience finding all satisfaction or delight in God: “*Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.*” **Jeremiah 15:16**

4. CONCLUSION

The Lord tells us: *“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 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 21:34-36

Therefore, contemplate, smell, and enjoy food; even stuff yourself on special occasions, but if food is controlling you, it's devouring you and has become the object of comfort you turn to when you are facing difficulty, then your excess is a sin for which you need to repent and is probably already a chronic problem that needs attention. God helps all sinners who repent; He can help the gluttonous too.

- Do you agree that perhaps you need to review your eating habits?
- What changes will you do in the following days to address this issue?

Lesson 49



Internet

Ice-breaker:

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word ‘technology’?

Proverbs 22:12: *“The eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge, But He overthrows the words of the faithless.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Technological innovations we now have at our disposal are more and better than we could have imagined three or

four decades ago. Who in the days of monochrome television or computers ‘dinosaur-sized’ would have thought today we would have in our hands a gadget called “cellular phone”, so powerful it can capture photos and videos in HD and broadcast them on the internet in a matter of seconds? But with all this technological advancement, believers face new challenges and questions. How are we using these advances? Do we have the required care when using them? Do we use for our blessing and the blessing of others? How would God want me to use it? Are we in danger of developing addiction to technology? Let’s learn how to have a healthy use of the Internet.

2. WHAT IS THE INTERNET AND IT’S USE

Internet is a system of interconnected computer networks, created in 1969, which enables communication and collaboration between users in different parts of the world, instantly -”on line”. It is a technology that, if used correctly, can be of great help in our daily lives. Internet offers many advantages, such as a tool for academic study. It is estimated that 90% of students now use it for their research. So, tasks that previously demanded workweeks, can be resolved today in much less time. On the Internet we can find helpful information concerning science and health. Many people find medical treatment they need; or buy different items without leaving their home; or finding jobs. Some have even found a husband or wife on the Internet! And contrary to what was thought at first, many of these marriages have actually worked.

Also for the believers, the Internet can be a great blessing, because in its vast means we can find all kinds of Christian sites with resources such as lessons, sermons, worship, movies, etc. These resources can be very useful for our spiritual growth.

The Internet is an excellent communication tool: you can write, speak and even watch live a family member or friend who is across the world through applications like email, chat or video conferencing. However, it is also necessary that from a Christian perspective we analyze the other side of the Internet. This is the dark side, which is causing serious spiritual and social problems for millions of people worldwide, including many Christians. Misuse of the Internet is driving individuals and families into a spiritual and material bankruptcy.

3. INTERNET DANGERS

Through the Internet, Satan is placing spiritual bondage on people, more than through any other modern means. This is a very serious problem that we must confront, such as pornography. Today, the main distribution of pornography is through the Internet. There are millions of sites and web pages with sexually explicit content, and it has been demonstrated that over 75% of people who surf the web, visited a porn site. More and more Christians are tied to Internet pornography; it is a true addiction that many are falling into, thereby jeopardizing their relationship with God and spiritual salvation.

As we said, it is great to have contact with friends who are far away, but it is not good to become addicted to this type of communication. Today many Christians spend excessive time on Facebook and other social networks. It is a fact that the uncontrolled uses of these platforms are causing an increase in divorce rates throughout the world. We hear everyday news of adolescents and children who end up abused and/or killed by criminals who used a social network to contact them through deception.

Nor can we ignore the proliferation in the Internet of false religions, Satanism and witchcraft; or what is lately in style: gambling; criminal organizations or deceiving people, taking their money, or human trafficking. The list could go on... but these warnings should not prevent any Christian from using the Internet, for example, to testify of Jesus and minister to others. Be assured that if the Internet had existed in the time of the Apostle Paul, he would have published his letters in blogs! Now, if at any time the Internet stops being a blessing for you or to others and becomes a nuisance for your devotional life, you have to recognize that this has become a bondage.

4. CONCLUSION

Paul said: *“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”* **1 Corinthians 6:12.** In other words, we must not allow the Internet to separate us from God. The Internet should not be a priority in anyone’s life Jesus should be our priority.

If you are a user of technology, please use it to raise the name of Jesus high and to glorify Him in front of those with whom you communicate. Take advantage of the Internet to collaborate in our mission: to make everyone aware of our Lord Jesus Christ, and believe He is the true God and eternal life. Amen.

- How do you think you will be able to give the Internet a better use?
- Are you being controlled by an addiction related to this?
- Have you considered disconnecting for some time?



Lesson 50

Evil

Ice-breaker: Terentius the philosopher said: “When you can avoid evil it is foolish to accept it” What do you think?

I. INTRODUCTION

Continuing with our series “Seven topics of today”, we will now review a very old matter, and yet it is more present than ever in the world: evil. We are living in the days Jesus foretold, when evil would have multiplied. These are days of great darkness, so today we ask the question: How should we conduct ourselves in this world of evil? What should be our attitude as believers against the evil that is taking place before our eyes?

First of all: what is evil? Evil is the antithesis of mercy. Just as darkness arises from the lack of light, evil arises from the lack of kindness. However, the Word of God says that just as the light shines in the darkness, the goodness of God reverses evil. Consider three guidelines from the Apostle Paul about this confrontation.

2. ABHOR EVIL

“Abhor what is evil...” **Romans 12:9.** Just as God abhors evil, the children of God must also abhor it. If we truly love God, we will despise any form of evil. King David, a man who loved God deeply, decided to move away from every evil intent and not accommodate his heart to evil (**Psalm 101.4**).

David decided to reject any friendship with unrighteous people. Undoubtedly, it was not easy for David to live up to that commitment, but we cannot say he did not try. In times like these, when evil is being called good and good is called evil, a society without God cries -unknowingly- for Christians who are true abhors of evil.

3. REFRAIN FROM EVIL

“Abstain from every form of evil” | **Thessalonians 5:33.** The abhorrence of evil leads us to refrain from it. You cannot seek justice while tolerating evil. We cannot have an interest in sin and avoid falling into it.

Isaiah 55.7 says that to turn to the Lord, we must first leave the evil path and perverse thoughts. As children of God, we must refuse to be seduced by temptation, living each day as a unique opportunity to meditate in His Word, and making it

our delight (**Psalms 1:2**). We must flee lust in order to pursue “...righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart”. **2 Timothy 2:22**.

4. REBUKE EVIL

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.” **Ephesians 5:11-12**. Paul is not telling us we must be like CIA Celestial agents on Earth, but to be cautious not to turn ourselves into accomplices of sin. “Let them return to you, but you must not return to them.” **Jeremiah 15:19**. Our work in this world is to rebuke the works of evil, not wooing them. For this our best tool is the Word of God: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” **2 Timothy 3:16**. Another great tool we have is our testimony; it is when we do not need words, but our very lives rebuke evil around us.

Our way of life should be our best sermon. Our presence among unbelievers should produce transformative effects. For example, do your co-workers change the subject of their indecent conversation when you join them while they're in the middle of a conversation? Do the following test: When you meet someone, let him or her speak about their life first, and then let them know you're a Christian. Chances are their words and attitude will change immediately; then proceed to confront them (respectfully) of their bad behavior. This is how it should always be! We do no good to anyone by letting their sin slip by. How can a person see their need for a Savior, if they don't understand and acknowledge they are sinners?

5. CONCLUSION

A person once said the most dangerous thing of evil is how easily we can become accustom to it. We need to be careful and not forget: the fundamental work of a Christian is to abhor evil, refrain from it and rebuke it. This is why the Church of Jesus is in the world; not to condescend and sympathize with evil, but to overcome a spiritual warfare against it, every day. Let us be like our God who loves the sinner but hates the sin: *“For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity hidden from My eyes.”* **Jeremiah 16:17.**

- Have you allowed evil into your own life or home?
- What steps will you take this week to free yourself from it, to get away from it?
- Do you feel you have been very tolerant or permissive with the evilness some people practice?
- How are you planning on changing the way you confront or rebuke the evil that surrounds you?



Lesson 51

Simplicity

Ice-breaker: What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word ‘simplicity’?

Ecclesiastics 7:29 *“Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, But they have sought out many schemes.”*

This lesson was taken from the book “Praise to the discipline” by Richard Foster, whose reading is strongly recommended.

I. INTRODUCTION

Simplicity is living free. Experimenting the freeing spirit of simplicity will affect all of the way we live. Simplicity is an internal

reality. But it must nourish an external expression. Applying simplicity to our outer life carries the risk of falling into legalism, but this is a risk we have to take. We will review seven principles that will help us to manifest simplicity in our lives.

2. PRINCIPLES FOR A SIMPLE LIFE

First, buy things for the purpose they represent not for the social level they suggest. Cars must be purchased for their usefulness, not for their prestige. When building or buying a home, think about the living conditions and not the way you will impress others. Do not have a larger home than what is reasonable. Think of your clothes. Nowadays, people buy more, not because they need it, but to keep up with fashion. Stop with fashion and impress others, not with your wardrobe but with your life.

Second, reject anything that may produce propensity in you. Learn to distinguish between a real need and a propensity. Eliminate or reduce the use of beverages that have added chemicals and are not nutritious such as: energy drinks, coffee, tea, soda and others. If you have become addicted to television, sell it or give it away. Get rid of any social media outlet you think you cannot live without: radios, stereos, magazines, movies, newspapers, and books. Many people become addicted to chocolate. If money has a grasp on your heart, give a little, and feel internal freedom. Simplicity is freedom, not slavery. Refuse to be a slave to anything other than God.

Third, develop the habit of giving things away. If you think you're holding on to a possession, think of giving it away to someone who needs it. Yesterday, my six-year-old son heard a study partner needed a lunchbox, he asked if he could give

his away to him. Hallelujah! Reduce accumulation. Accumulating things that are not necessary complicates life. Most people could get rid of half of their possessions without making any serious sacrifice.

Fourth, be careful with the words: “This new device will pay for itself in six months.” What has been invented to save time has almost never achieved it. Most artifacts are made superfluous to breakage and wear; and thus complicate our lives instead of simplifying it. This problem is a plague in the toy industry, entertainment, home, etc. Generally, superfluous artifacts constitute an unnecessary consumption of energy resources in the world.

Fifth, look with a healthy skepticism anything that says: “Buy now, pay later”. That is a trap that serves to deepen your slavery. So much that the Old and New Testaments condemn usury, referring to it not in the modern sense of an excessive interest, but as any kind of interest. The fact of charging interest was considered inhuman exploitation of the calamity of another and therefore a denial of the Christian community. Certainly, both prudence and simplicity require us to be cautious before incurring any debt.

Sixth, learn to enjoy things without possessing them. Owning things is an obsession of our culture. If we have something, we think we can control it; and if we can control, we think it can give us more pleasure. That idea is an illusion. There are many things in life that can be enjoyed without possessing them or controlling them. Share things. Enjoy a park, without thinking you have to buy a plot there.

Seventh, obey the instructions of Jesus regarding a simple and sincere language: “*But let your ‘Yes’ be*

‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.” **Matthew 5:37**. If you consent to do a task, do it. Avoid flattery and half-truths. Make honesty and integrity the hallmarks of your language. Often the fear of what others might think or a hundred other reasons is what determines our **“yes”** or our **“no”**, not obedience to the divine impulses.

3. CONCLUSION

Philippians 2:15:

“...that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”

The purpose of simplicity is to avoid anything that distracts us from our main goal: the Kingdom of God. Jesus gives us the courage, wisdom and strength to always have as the first priority of our life to “seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness,” and for us to understand all that this implies:

“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” **Philippians 4:11-13**

- What steps will you take this week to nurture a lifestyle of simplicity?



Lesson 52

Transcend

Ice-breaker: In order to transcend we must serve. What is your opinion?

Ephesians 2:10: *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

In a restaurant in Florida, U.S., there is a handwritten note by Bruce Lee called “My main objective defined”. The note reads: “I, Bruce Lee, will be the first oriental superstar best paid in the

United States. In return I will give you the most exciting performances and surrender to the maximum quality in the capacity of an actor. Starting in 1970, I will reach a worldwide fame and from then on until the end of 1980, I will have in my possession \$10,000,000. Then I will live the way I want and will reach harmony and inner happiness. Signed: Bruce Lee, January 1969. "Four and a half years later Bruce Lee was dead. He was radically committed to an inconsequential and unimportant cause, so I guarantee that Bruce Lee is eternally sorry.

The question for us today is: are we committed to a just cause, or will one day we be eternally sorry too? We need to find a valid reason for living, a cause that transcends this life and will echo in eternity.

2. DO YOU SAVE OR DO YOU WASTE?

Imagine a bank credits your personal account \$86,400 every day in the morning; but this credit is not transferable to the following day and at the end of the day the account goes back to zero. What you don't spend out of the \$86,400 is lost daily. What would you do? Surely you would try to spend every penny. You'd try to do good investments and perhaps even open another account to which you would transfer your remaining balance.

The reality is that this bank does exist; it is the bank of time. Every morning, you and I receive a credit of 86,400 seconds to use, and every evening the bank deletes whatever time we have failed to use, invest or transfer. This bank does not offer insurance of any kind and each account may be closed at any time, without notice. It's owner and general manager? God.

3. YOUR TIME IN THE HANDS OF GOD

You are very concerned about making the right decisions for your commitments. You have so many options that you are constantly overwhelmed with the question: “What should I do and what not?” You are asked to answer many specific needs. There are people to visit, people to receive, people you simply need to be with. There are issues that require attention, books that seem important to read, more and more things to see and buy. But what truly deserves your valuable time for all this? Start by not allowing these people and these issues to take ownership of you. While you think you need all that to be yourself, you are not truly free. Much of the urgency of others comes from their own need to be accepted and recognized. But you must go back to the source: God’s love for you and His perfect plan for your life.

In many ways, you still want to organize your own agenda. You act like you have to choose among many things, all of which seem equally important. This happens because you have not fully surrendered to God’s guidance. You are still wrestling with God over who is in control. But try to leave your agenda in the hands of God. Continually saying, “Thy will, not mine.” Surrender to God every part of your heart and your time and let Him tell you when and how to respond. God does not want to destroy you. Depletion, extinction and depression are not signs that you are doing the will of God. God is kind and gentle. He wants to give you a deep sense of security in His love. Once you’ve allowed yourself to fully feel that love, you will be more able to discern whom you are sent to on His behalf. He has prepared good works in advance for you. You must simply walk in them.

It is not easy to give God your agenda; but the more you do, the more it becomes the “time clock” in “God’s time” and God’s timing is always the fullness of time...

4. CONCLUSION

Many believers may feel embarrassed on the day they are before their Creator. Perhaps they might need to admit before Him that their “main objective” was not so important after all, and that everything that consumed their valuable time, their talents and their resources on Earth, were really not worth it. And there will be no other life to live! **Hebrews 9:27:** “*And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.*”

Therefore I challenge you today to seek a mission and a place from which you can impact eternity; a cause that eventually will allow you to say in the end: “It was worth my existence”. Start today by asking yourself these questions:

- Is what I’m doing today in God’s agenda?
- What is truly my gift or ability?
- What am I passionate about?
- What can I do that has not been done?
- Where is there a need that I can resolve?
- Will what I am about to do have eternal implications?

Answer these questions and soon you will become “an expert capital investor of the bank of time”. Answer these ques-

tions and find fulfillment in your life, transforming you into a fuller and happier person. Place your time in the hands of God today. Transcend and create echoes in eternity!

- What things nowadays take up your time unjustifiably?
- Are you willing to give them up today?
- What cause are you going to commit to?
- What decisions will you make today that will impact eternity?

