



2 0 0 8 E D I T I O N

Seven Weeks of **BLESSINGS**

**SEVEN BIBLICAL MESSAGES
FOR FELLOWSHIP GROUPS**

DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

theSTRATEGYof *Jesus*
FELLOWSHIP GROUPS

APOSTOLIC ASSEMBLY
of the faith in Christ Jesus



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Editor

Bishop Ismael Martín del Campo

By

Ismael Martín del Campo
and Jacob Rodríguez

Layout and Design

Eliseo Martín del Campo

Cellular Church Committee

Bishop Ismael Martín del Campo
Pastor David Tobar
Pastor Joe Aguilar
Pastor Elías Paez
Pastor Rogelio Razo

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Presentation



Let the New Apostolic Harvest Begin Throughout the Whole World!

***“In the temple and in every house”
Acts 5:42***

Dear pastors and brethren of the Apostolic congregations in the United States of America, Mexico, Canada, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Italy, España, Tanzania and Kenya: ¡Paz de Cristo!

Our “Seven Weeks of Blessings” lesson manual marks the beginning of the mandate given at the 2007 International General Convention, that is the launching of the Friendship Groups (home-cells) program as part of the “Strategy of Jesus” program.

We have prepared these lessons in a spirit of fasting and prayer, trusting that our Lord Jesus will use the thousands of leaders and “timothys” that will be sowing the love of God’s message in the thousands of households that will be reached.

Our recommendations:

1. That every pastor teach the lesson to all of his leaders, “timothys” and hosts/hostess.
2. That every pastor fast and pray on behalf of his leaders, “timothys” and hosts/hostess.
3. That every leader with his/her helper study the lesson thoroughly before presenting it.
4. That every leader, “timothy” and “host” fast and pray for those whom the “Lord will add” to the Friendship Groups.

You may obtain a DVD with the lesson included in order to present it via a TV set in your home in an audiovisual presentation.

Our prayers are that God may send many workers to work on His Strategy, now that “the fields are white, ready for harvest”.

Bishop Ismael Martín del Campo
Secretary of Christian Education.



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Lesson #1

The Blessing of God's Love

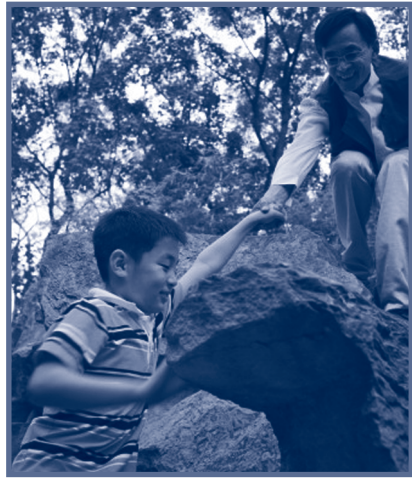
Ice Breaker:

In one or two sentences, how would you describe love?

Key Verse: John 3:16

Introduction:

The only real hope that you and I have is found in God's unconditional love. So many have tried to illustrate and explain it. Songs have been written about it. Sermons have been preached. Books have been written—all hoping to somehow gift-wrap God's love to the world. However, John 3:16 is still unbeatable when it comes to portraying the blessing of God's love.



John 3:16 is more than just a Sunday school memory verse, a banner to display at large gatherings, or a theme to musical lyrics, it's the lifeline—the absolute core of our promise for eternal life. Let's visit, or perhaps revisit this pearl of hope for all humanity.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)



John 3:16 uncovers three distinct blessings about God's love for you.

Three Blessings of God's Love:

1. God's Love is Global (God so loved the *world*)



a) He *Includes* us. Any time there is a prestigious ceremony with distinguished guests, the red-carpet is rolled out from the entrance to the sidewalk. If someone other than a special guest strolls down the red path, security guards will swiftly escort him or her off. God doesn't have a red-carpet kind of love, where only certain people are allowed. Jesus Christ said, "*whoever believes*". No matter where you're from, or who you are, God accepts you just as you are.

b) He *Invites* us. If God had a doormat to heaven, it would definitely say, "Welcome". Everyone is welcomed to know God on an intimate level. Just because God doesn't have a red-carpet, doesn't mean you are any less special. You are priceless, a rare gem in God's eyes. Because you're so special, He hopes to spark a personal relationship with you.

2. God's Love is Giving (He *gave* his one and only Son)

a) Consider His *Gift*. Most gifts that we give or receive have a short lifespan. The coat you bought your wife last year may already be out-of-style. The bottle of fragrance you received



two years ago may already be empty. This is why most of us enjoy gifts that keep on giving. The love of Jesus Christ is a gift that never runs dry. It never loses its splendor or appeal. It never tarnishes or breaks down. Jesus once told a Samaritan woman, *"whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."* (John 4:14)

b) Consider His Grave. The greatest demonstration of God's love is that He clothed himself in human flesh and died on a cross for our sins. Jesus Christ, who was sinless, paid the wages of sin so that we could have eternal life, and know him personally.

The Creator became our loving Savior by dying a criminal's death. Yet three days later, He rose from the dead and walked out of the tomb. Romans 5:8 says *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Jesus Christ gave the ultimate gift—*His life*.

3. God's Love is Gracious

(whoever believes in him shall not perish)

a) Grace works with Faith. Notice how Jesus says, "whoever believes". Although God's love is open for everyone, not everyone will experience it. Believing is the key to receiving. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, **through faith**—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."* Faith doesn't create grace, but it unlocks the power of grace in our lives.

b) Grace is Free. Grace is God's unmerited favor towards humanity. There is nothing we can ever do to earn God's



acceptance. In fact, most religions in the world believe that salvation is earned through how well you perform, or the deeds you do. Remember what Ephesians 2:8-9 says about grace, *"it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."* Grace makes it possible for us to experience God's love—despite our weaknesses, imperfections and impurities.

Final Thoughts:

God's love is the most powerful force humanity has ever seen. Not only did love motivate God to come to earth, but love led Christ to the cross of Calvary. Jesus once said, *"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."* (John 15:12-13) Truly Jesus Christ followed this model when He laid down his life for us. That's the blessing of God's love!

STEPS FOR GROWTH:

a) Accepting God's love starts with believing that Jesus Christ died for your sins. Discuss what this means, and why it's so important to "believe".

b) Of the three blessings mentioned in this lesson, which one is the most significant to you, and why?

c) Jesus Christ said, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love." (John 15:9). Discuss some ways you can "remain" in God's love, once you have believed in Him.



Lesson #2

The Blessing of God's Forgiveness

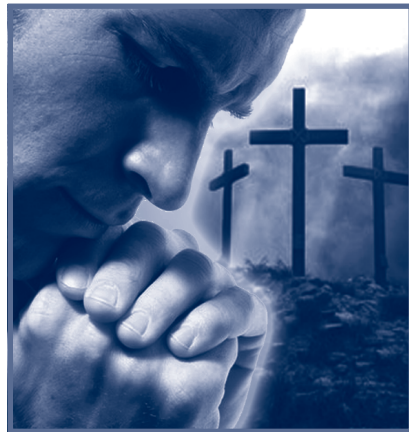
Ice Breaker:

When you think about forgiveness, what are some things that come to mind?

Key Verse: 1 John 1:9

Introduction:

Forgiveness is a simple, yet difficult concept to live by in today's culture. Many people choose revenge instead of forgiveness when someone offends them. It's a natural impulse to "get even" or perhaps punish those who hurt you. However, Jesus Christ taught that forgiveness is the key to living in peace. This is a principle He demonstrates to us every day.



Sin is the ultimate offense, and even warrants judgment. According to the Bible, everyone is marked with sin and living shy of God's glory. However, out of pure grace and love, Jesus Christ offers us undue forgiveness through the shedding of His blood. Consider words of the Apostle Paul, *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace."* (Ephesians 1:7)



Together let's consider some important factors about God's forgiveness.

Three Factors of God's Forgiveness:

1. The Sacrifice Factor

a) The *Price* was *Paid*.

Hebrews 9:22 says, "... *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*" In the Old Testament, flawless lambs had to be continuously sacrificed for the sins of the people, and to satisfy God's judgment. This is no longer the case because Jesus Christ became the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. His innocent blood paid the debt of sin against humanity.



- b) The *Path* was *Paved*.** Since Jesus Christ shed his blood for our sins, we can live a life that is totally forgiven. Not only were your past sins excused, but even your future sins and mistakes can be forgiven. God doesn't just pardon your past, but his forgiveness covers your whole life—from start to finish. As the Apostle Peter remarked, "*For Christ died for sins once for all...*" (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus Christ doesn't need to die again, every time we sin; He's covered us once and for all.



2. The Sincerity Factor

a) **Our Sincerity.** When a suspect in a criminal case wants to come clean and be honest about his actions, he must give a formal confession. This is simply an open acknowledgment. Of course, nobody is accusing you of being a criminal—however, this principle applies to sin and forgiveness. 1 John 1:8-9 says, *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* God isn’t looking for shame; He’s looking for honesty.

b) **God’s Security.** When we openly confess our sins to God, He doesn’t accuse us or degrade our value. In fact, his goal is to prove his faithfulness and fairness in our lives. No matter what you’ve done, God wants to be approachable. For that reason, He uses forgiveness as an opportunity to cleanse our hearts and improve our relationship with Him. If we are sincere about sin and confess them when we are aware of them, God will faithfully secure us with grace.





3. The Seventy-Times-Seven Factor

- a) **Forgive *openly*.** It is also our duty to forgive others. In fact, God requires those who have received forgiveness, to openly pardon others when they offend, insult or hurt us personally. Instead of leveraging people's guilt, or seeking revenge, forgive them. Jesus said, *"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."* (Luke 6:37). For us to continue benefiting from God's forgiveness, we must exhibit grace and mercy to others. Forgive because you've been forgiven.



- b) **Forgive *often*.** The reason why the third factor of God's forgiveness is called "seventy-times-seven" is because of what Jesus told Peter about forgiving others. "Then Peter came to Him and said, *"Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times? Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."* (Matthew 18:21-22, NKJV). Jesus isn't giving us a math lesson, but a life lesson. Live a forgiving life and don't keep track of people's sins.



Final Thoughts:

Whether you're considering giving your life to Jesus Christ, or simply wanting to improve your relationship with Him, the blessing of God's forgiveness makes it possible.

God could have decided to leverage His kingdom with guilt, but thankfully he chose to set us free. Forgiveness is as much about *relationship*, as it is *redemption*. Jesus Christ shed his blood to purchase our salvation and to initiate a personal relationship with us all.

STEPS FOR GROWTH:

- a) According to The *Sacrifice Factor*, why was it so important for Jesus to lay down his life?
- b) Why is it at times difficult to be sincere with God and confess our sins?
- c) Jesus Christ said, "...Forgive, and you will be forgiven." (Luke 6:37). Discuss why God would implement this principle.





Lesson #3

The Blessing of Believing in God

Ice Breaker:

What does it mean to you when someone says, "I have faith"?

Key Verse: Hebrews 11:6

Introduction:

Contrary to popular belief, faith is not a blind leap in the dark. It's actually a solid trust based on real substance and true evidence. With so many attempting to redefine faith, its pure meaning has been watered down with man's philosophies. Let's quickly debunk some misconceptions:



- *Faith is not a religion.* Some will say, "I am of *this* faith, or *that* faith." However, this is not the Biblical concept of faith.
- *Faith is not a mental consent.* Simply being optimistic or positive about life is not genuine Biblical faith.
- *Faith is not a manipulation tool.* Many believe that faith is a magic formula to manipulate God for personal gain. This is far from reality.



There's no need to repaint or refurbish Biblical faith. The most important thing is that we understand faith and desire to grow in it. During this lesson, we are going to explore three truths about faith and how believing in God produces so many benefits.

Three Truths about Faith:

1. Faith Proves God

a) Proved with *Substance*.

The first half of Hebrews 11:1 says, *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for..."* Faith is the material that God uses to build and create the things we hope for. If God were a silversmith, faith would be the silver he uses to craft fine utensils. If God were



a potter, faith would be the clay he uses to mold and shape ceramic objects. Since God exists in the unseen spiritual world, He uses our faith in Him to create the solutions to our deepest desires. Faith doesn't make God *more* powerful, but rather allows him to work his power in our lives.

b) Proved with *Support*. The second half of Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is, *"the evidence of things not seen."* Faith works as support and evidence. One example of how



evidence works is found in our judicial system. Most all court cases are decided upon the evidence that is presented. Intellectual arguments, emotional debates or rebuttals are *not* evidence. True evidence is physical proof or testimony that asserts the truth of a matter. Faith is the proof for things not seen—including God and the rewards He has for us.

2. Faith Pleases God

- a) **God is *Real*.** Hebrews 11:6 tells us *“without faith it is impossible to please God...”* From this we discover that without faith we cannot truly satisfy God. However, let’s consider “why” faith is so pleasing to Him. The verse goes on to say, *“...because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”* Firstly, God is delighted when you believe that He exists. He smiles wide when you acknowledge and embrace his realness in your life.
- b) **God is a *Rewarder*.** Secondly, faith pleases God because it recognizes his ability to reward our lives. It places trust in his sovereignty and capacity for meeting all of our needs. Like a child who jumps in his father’s arms without concerns about falling, God is pleased when we leap into his love and trust him without reservation. His heart is warmed when we faithfully rest in his supreme care. The greatest reward we have for believing in God is eternal life. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, **through faith**—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”*



3. Faith Prompts God

- a) **Faith moves God.** Faith creates opportunities for God to showcase his power over human circumstances. Often times God is not able to perform miracles or wonders due to a lack of faith. Even Jesus Christ was at times unable to reveal his power or change lives because of unbelief (Ref. Matthew 13:58). However, when there is faith in the heart, God is able to defy every law of nature. Our faith in God determines the extent of his influence in our lives. Our faith can either loose or limit his power.
- b) **Faith moves Us.** When you're faced with an impossibility or problem, and you live by faith, you expect God to take action on your behalf. So then, faith will compel you to trust him. It will move your heart into action like it did for so many others who came to Jesus Christ for help. Whether it was a woman with a blood problem, or a centurion whose servant was paralyzed—when your faith is alive, it will move you closer to the Master.





Final Thoughts:

If you desire to grow in faith, simply be open to God's word. Romans 10:17 says, "*Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*" Believing in God and his power to help you will add invaluable rewards to your life. You will begin to discover a path that is rich with peace and joy.

Steps for Growth:

- a) With regards to the misconceptions about faith, discuss the kinds of problems they can create.
- b) Based on Hebrews 11:6, what are the two reasons why faith pleases Him? Discuss these values together.
- c) The third truth in this lesson is that *Faith Prompts God*. What are some other reasons why faith moves the heart of God?







Lesson #4

The Blessing of Turning to God

Ice Breaker:

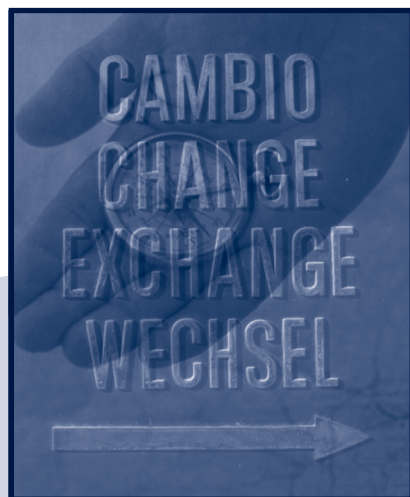
When you think about the word “repent”, what comes to mind?

Key Verses: 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV)

Introduction:

The most common misconception about repentance is that it means to apologize, feel sorry or feel remorse after doing something wrong. However, both of these descriptions are untrue. The Biblical meaning of repentance is a *change of mind and direction*.

Take a close look at our key verse. 2 Chronicles 7:14 says, *“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”* Based on this verse, true repentance requires several turning points in your life.





Three Turns of Repentance:

1. Turn your mind around (*humble yourselves*)

- a) **Be convinced.** When Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost and preached that the people had rejected the Messiah, they were humbled and deeply convinced that Jesus Christ was actually God in flesh (Ref. Acts 2). The word “repentance” in its original Greek form means “a change of mind”. Repentance requires a change of mind about Jesus Christ and his kingdom. You must repent for rejecting or simply ignoring Christ as your Savior.



- b) **Be convicted.** When the audience heard Peter’s message, their hearts were pierced with reverence and dishonor. Suddenly, they saw the error in their ways. The sins in their hearts were exposed. They were now fully aware of their offenses. Today, we all must allow our hearts to be humbled and convicted—not with guilt, but with the awareness that we need God’s grace.

2. Turn towards God (*pray and seek my face*)

- a) **Pray.** Prayer is simply our spoken or unspoken communication with God. It’s how we plug ourselves

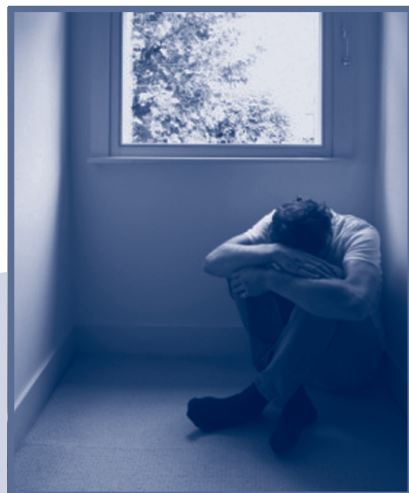


in to God's Spirit. Turning to God involves beginning or rekindling a relationship with him. Notice how God said, "pray and seek my **face**". God wants a personal, face-to-face relationship with you. He desires for you to know him intimately.

- b) Pursue.** In order to turn to God, we must shift our priorities. Perhaps you've spent most of your life chasing a career or some other personal interest. Repentance involves seeking God's will and purpose for your life. It's about placing his desires above yours. Jesus once told a crowd, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and **follow me**."* (Luke 9:23) When you turn to God, you must disown your selfish desires and pursue him.

3. Turn from old ways (turn from their *wicked ways*)

- a) Be Changed from the Past.** Acts 3:19 says, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..." Oftentimes people will confess Christ as their Lord and receive baptism, but avoid the power He has to transform their lives. Old habits still rule. Old





tempers still flare. Past addictions and behaviors still thrive. Turning to God means giving up your old ways. It means leaving your past...in the past.

- b) *Be Challenged to Produce.*** John the Baptist challenged people to “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8). A challenge to produce fruit has been issued to all those who have repented, and have been forgiven. Fruit is simply the practical proof that you have repented. For example, if you used to use profanity when you got angry, the fruit of repentance is that now you choose better ways to let out your steam. “Fruit” typically represents our conduct and the attributes of a person that is filled with the Holy Ghost.

Three Blessings of Repentance:

Blessing No. 1 The Blessing of Remission

(will forgive their sin)

When you humble yourself and seek God’s forgiveness, He has the power to remove the consequences of sin in your life.

Blessing No. 2 The Blessing of Relationship

(then will I hear from heaven)

When you turn to God, by praying and pursuing, you open the doors to a meaningful relationship with Him.

Blessing No. 3 The Blessing of Restoration

(and will heal their land)

When you fully turn to God and allow His Spirit to change your life, He has the power to restore and heal broken areas in your life.



Final Thoughts:

Every turn of repentance points toward where you will spend eternity. Ultimately, this is God's search and rescue plan for our salvation. Also, repentance is God's gift to us. Acts 11:18 says, "...God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life." God grants us the opportunity to turn our lives towards Him and become citizens of his kingdom. God has already made His move to save you, now it's your "turn".

STEPS FOR GROWTH:

- a) Of the three turns in repentance, which one do you feel we struggle with the most and why?
- b) Of the three blessings of repentance, which one means the most to you and why?
- c) Review and discuss the differences between feeling remorse, and repentance.







Lesson #5

The Blessing of God's Family

Ice Breaker:

Most people think of “church” as a building or cathedral. How would you describe a church?

Key Verses: Ephesians 1:5 (NIV)

Introduction:

God desires a family, and he created us to be a part of it. In fact, the Bible can be viewed as God's family album, where he shows His desire for us to love him, respect him, and reign with him for eternity. When we give our lives to God, He becomes our Father and we become his children. When it comes to God's family, we have to consider the facts below:



- God created everyone, but not everyone is a child of God. (Matthew 7:21)
- Being born again is the only way to get into God's family. (John 3:3)
- Although we don't deserve to be God's children, His love gives us this benefit. (Romans 8:15)



As our key verse implies, it has always been God's plan to form a family by making us his children. All baptized believers become our siblings, and the church becomes our spiritual family. Together let's look at three degrees in God's family.

Three Degrees in God's Family:

1. Membership: Choosing to Belong

- a) **Membership through *Rebirth*.** Jesus Christ once said, *"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."* Then he went on to say, *"no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit."* (Ref. John 3). Membership in God's family doesn't start when you fill out a guest card or attend a class. It starts when you are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. You must be born again into God's family.

- b) **Membership through *Relationship*.** Romans 12:5 says, *"so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."* Simply being born into a family automatically makes you a member.





However, this does not mean you have a relationship with your family. Even after being born again, many people are estranged from God's family. In order to belong to the body of Christ, you must build relationships with other members. This provides a net of strength, unity and purpose. Remember, you are called to *belong*, not just *believe*.



2. Fellowship: Learning to Share

- a) **Share your life.** Fellowship goes a step further than relationship. You can relate with others without sharing similar experiences. Fellowship requires an investment of time and energy. When the Bible talks about believers in the book of Acts, it says, *"All the believers were together and had everything in common"* (Acts 2:44). The key to fellowship is togetherness and commonality. These are the traits you'll find in any loving family.
- b) **Shoulder the load.** Galatians 6:2 says, *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."* Part of having fellowship is shouldering the burdens and troubles of your spiritual brothers and



sisters. As members of God's family, it's our duty to protect and care for one another. Life's burdens are easier to handle when you have godly family members who help you, pray for you, and lend their support.

3. Partnership: Doing my Part

- a) **Learn your part.** You have a role to play. If you have ever acted in a drama, you know that everyone on the cast and crew must play their part in the production. That's the only way to successfully tell the story. The same is true in God's family. You offer extraordinary qualities that no one else can replace. When you give your life to God and join His family, you learn your special part in telling God's story.



- b) **Live your part.** Ephesians 4:16 says, *"From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."* It's so important that after you discover your special role, you begin to live that role to the fullest. Join a ministry in your church family where you can bless others. If such a ministry isn't available, seek to find other ways where you can live out your part in God's family.



Final Thoughts:

Whether in a small group atmosphere or worship service, meeting together is greatly encouraged. It is much like having a weekly family get-together. You interact, inspire, and cultivate a strong community of faith. Hebrews 10:25 says, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another..." Nothing pleases a father more, than when his children come together in unity. The same is true about God, our heavenly father. When His family comes together, you're in good company.





STEPS FOR GROWTH:

- a) Based on the degree of Membership, why might it be difficult for people to form new relationships within God's family?
- b) Based on the degree of Fellowship, what are some real ways you can shoulder the load of your brothers and sisters in Christ?
- c) Based on the degree of Partnership, what challenges might one have to overcome when attempting to carry out their role in God's family?





Lesson #6

The Blessing of God's Purpose

Ice Breaker:

What would your family and friends say is the driving force in your life?

Key Verses: Proverbs 19:21 (NIV)

Introduction:

You are not an accident or mistake. Whether or not your birth was planned, God recognized and chose you long before your father ever knew your mother. You are alive today because God wanted to create you. That alone says that you are special and extraordinary. However, God didn't just make you for the fun of it. God made you for a purpose, and everything about your life is designed to support that purpose.



Discovering your life's purpose is probably the most important discovery you'll ever make. It's more valuable than



a buried treasure and more fulfilling than a high-paying career. Knowing and living your God-given purpose is the secret to true significance in life. Our key verse says, *"Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails"* (Proverbs 19:21). Truly we all plan our lives out, but God's purpose will always take precedence. In this lesson, we will briefly discover three purposes that should drive our lives.

God's Three Purposes for your Life:

1. Worship: Grow in a Relationship with God

- a) **Grow in *Worship*.** Our primary purpose in life is to worship God. Worship represents anything we do that pleases God. It isn't just a style of music or hymns sung by a congregation. Worship is a lifestyle made-up of acts and attitudes that bring God pleasure. You could say that



worship is about having reverence for God and living a life that satisfies him. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, *"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."*

- b) **Grow in *Friendship*.** There is nothing more important than knowing God and building a real friendship with



Him. The apostle Paul wrote, *"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death"* (Philippians 3:10). Knowing Christ as a friend means sharing his values, his sufferings, and his mission. It also means spending valuable time with Him, such as prayer and reading the Bible.

2. Fellowship: Grow your Relationship with others

a) **Grow "in" Fellowship.**

Fellowship is simply a relationship with purpose. You can relate with people and still lack common values and goals. However, fellowship requires a harmony of heart and principle. The book of Acts describes fellowship when it says, *"All the believers were together and had everything in common"* (Acts 2:44). Seek out opportunities to link up with other believers.



You will find strength and support for your life.

b) **Grow "the" Fellowship.** Not only is your purpose to grow "in" fellowship, but to also grow and extend



“the” fellowship. You do that by simply befriending others and being a living example of God’s love. This is about creating new friendships, and along with it, the opportunity to meet practical needs and introduce Jesus Christ. This is to show that God’s love is real and present. Proverbs 18:24 says, *“A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly...”* This applies to your family relationships as well.

3. Ministry: Grow God’s Relationship with others

- a) **Grow through *Ministry*.** God created you to make a difference. This is called your “ministry”, or your “service”. Ephesians 2:10 says, *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* We are God’s craftsmanship, a reflection of His power. He designed us with the gifts and abilities to do good works. Ministry, then, is your heavenly assignment to serve other people and reveal God’s grace.
- b) **Grow through *Missions*.** God had a mission in mind when he made you. A mission puts legs to your ministry potential. Unlike an ordinary job, a mission has eternal impact and importance. Part of our shared mission is to continue the work of Jesus Christ.

The Bible says, *“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation...**”* (2 Corinthians 5:18). We have been given the mission to reconcile the world’s relationship with God.

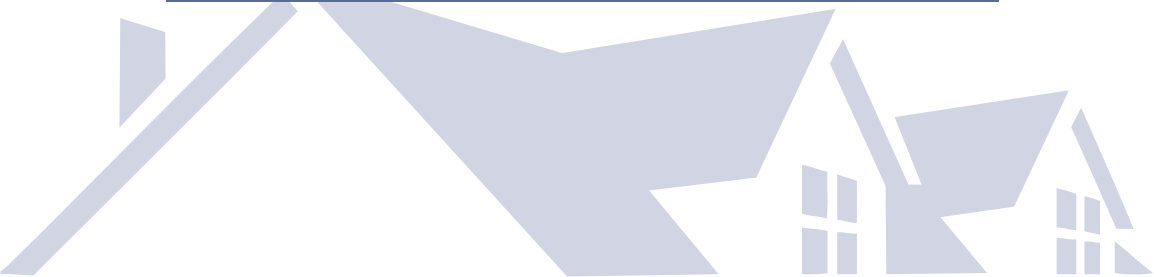


Final Thoughts:

Most if not all people will ask themselves the question, “why was I born?” That question alone has baffled even the sharpest minds. Yet, God clearly explains our purpose throughout the Bible. Like a father, God wants a healthy and vibrant relationship with his children. Secondly, He wants his children to all get along and work together. Last but not least, he wants us to reconcile those lost people who are estranged from his family. This was made clear in the parable of the Prodigal son. God desires to have all of his children under one eternal roof. Hopefully this helps you understand what your primary purpose in life is.

STEPS FOR GROWTH:

- a) How is a friendship with God similar to any other friendship, and how is it different?
- b) What are some of the barriers that keep us from loving and caring for each other?
- c) What are some of the typical fears people have when it comes to ministering?







Lesson #6

The Blessing of Baptism

Ice Breaker:

What comes to mind when you hear the word “baptism”?

Key Verses: Acts 2:38 (NIV)

Introduction:

Throughout these seven weeks of blessings, you’ve learned about everything from God’s forgiveness, God’s family, and even God’s purpose for your life. Yet today, we will discuss how you can access all of these blessings, and most importantly inherit eternal life. Our key verse says, *“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:38).*





Practically every religion claims to have the formula or key to eternal life. Even Christians debate over which method is the correct. However, Acts 2:38 clearly states what “every one” must do to be saved. The primary keys to avoiding judgment and spending eternity with God are 1) repentance, 2) water baptism (full immersion) in the Name of Jesus Christ, and 3) receiving the free gift of the Holy Ghost. Let’s consider three purposes for being baptized in Jesus’ Name.

Three Purposes for Being Baptized in Jesus’ Name:

1. To Express your Faith in Jesus Christ

a) **Your faith *Expressed*.**

One purpose of water baptism is to express your absolute faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It shows that you believe—that your heart is convinced about Christ, and has accepted His sacrifice. When listeners in the New Testament believed the Gospel message, they were baptized (Ref. Acts



2:41). Water baptism is a sign, a public declaration that you have believed in Jesus Christ. It is not just a ceremony or religious act; it is a personal assertion that you have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior.



b) His Name *Confessed*.

Acts 19:5 says, *“When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”*

Expressing your faith is important, however, there is also a Biblical method for baptism. The proper way to express saving faith in Jesus is to have His Name confessed at the moment of baptism. In the verse just cited, the candidates expressed



their faith in Jesus by being baptized in the name of Jesus. Any other method is incorrect according to what Jesus and his apostles taught.

2. To Experience Genuine Salvation

- a) Into the *Water*.** Without doubt, baptism is a vital part of our salvation experience. Although some conclude otherwise, the Bible specifically says, *“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned”* (Mark 16:16).

In order to be saved and receive eternal life, you must be baptized. The Bible never suggests that sprinkling or dousing is a form of baptism—only full submersion into water.



- b) **Into the Name.** Acts 4:12 says, *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other **name** under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”* The proper way to mix water baptism with New Testament salvation is to invoke the **Name of Jesus**. Some will use other names, titles or descriptions of God when baptizing, but the Biblical way is clearly identified in Acts 2:38.

3. To Empathize with Jesus Christ

- a) **Baptism is a Burial.** Another reason for being baptized is to empathize with Jesus Christ. To *empathize is to identify with another—to put yourself in someone else’s shoes* so that you can relate with them. Baptism is part of our personal discovery with Jesus Christ. Through it, we symbolically identify with his death, burial and resurrection into new life. The Bible says, *“We were therefore **buried** with him through **baptism into death** in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life”* (Romans 6:4).
- b) **Baptism is a new Birth.** Baptism is part of our new birth into the family of God. Titus 3:5 says, *“...He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”* To experience the new birth, you must be baptized with water, and with the Holy Ghost. Jesus said, *“...no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit”* (John 3:5). No other formula, prayer or spoken confession can produce a new life. Your fresh start begins when you receive baptism in Jesus Name.



Final Thoughts:

In summary, baptism in the name of Jesus shows that we trust in Jesus alone. It's an expression that we believe He is our Lord and supreme Savior. Only Jesus Christ can take away our sins and grant us eternal life. When we are baptized, we take on His precious and powerful Name. Every blessing we have discussed in this series hinges on the blessing of baptism. If you have not been baptized in Jesus Name for the remissions of sins, perhaps it's time to consider making that step.

STEPS FOR GROWTH:

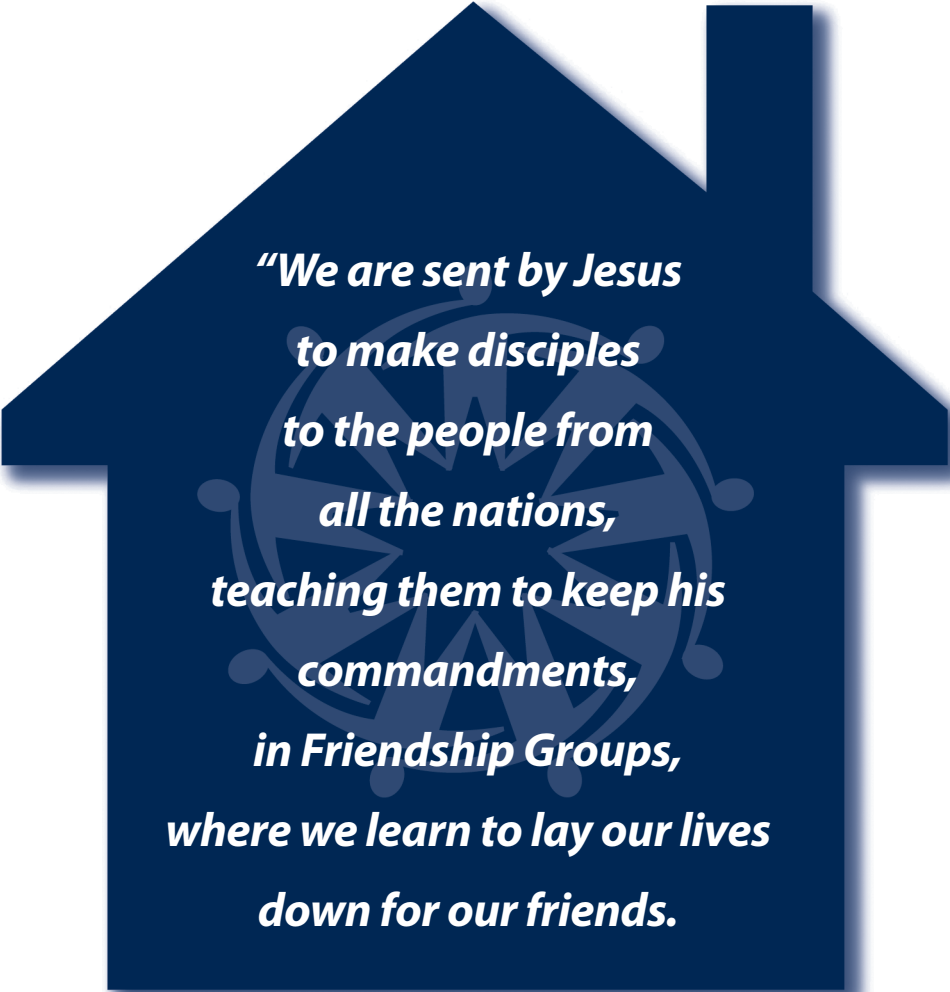
- a) Of the three purposes for baptism, which one is often overlooked and why?
- b) Discuss why it's important to identify with Jesus Christ through baptism.
- c) Ask if anyone is interested in baptism, or learning more about it. Pray with them and follow up.





Motto

*Remember the group that the goal is
that all memoricen the motto*



***“We are sent by Jesus
to make disciples
to the people from
all the nations,
teaching them to keep his
commandments,
in Friendship Groups,
where we learn to lay our lives
down for our friends.*”**