



2 0 0 8 E D I T I O N



Twelve Weeks of **CONSOLIDATION**

**TWELVE BIBLICAL MESSAGES
FOR FRIENDSHIP GROUPS**

By

Ismael Martín del Campo
and Jacob Rodríguez

DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

the STRATEGY of *Jesus*
FRIENDSHIP GROUPS

APOSTOLIC ASSEMBLY
of the faith in Christ Jesus



© 2008 Apostolic Assembly of the Faith in Christ Jesus
10807 Laurel Street
Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91730

www.apostolicassembly.org

Published by Christian Education Department
Rancho Cucamonga, CA

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Printed in the United States of America

Southwest Offset Printing, Gardena, California.



Presentation



¡To Disciple is to Consolidate!

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

Acts 17:11

Dear pastors and brothers of all apostolic congregations in the United States of America and in the whole world, Praise the Lord!

The goal of our manual of lessons “Twelve Weeks of Consolidation” is to assist every church, every pastor and friendship group directors in the work to disciple new believers.

One of the great problems of our Apostolic Assembly, but also of any other apostolic denomination, is that we baptize a good number of people every year, but we only retain an average of ten percent.

The international program “The Strategy of Jesus” is the answer that our General Board offers to close the exit door through which we lose many of our new baptized members every year.

The first weeks of any new believer are critical. The enemy knows that during that period, it is easy to create doubt in the newly converted. Their lack of maturity makes them weak before all kinds of demons’ attacks.

The warm and spiritual care of a friendship group protects the new believers. **But our goal is that they immediately learn how to pray, to read the Bible, to fast, to live a holy life, to serve, to evangelize, to develop spiritual fruits and to be able to distinguish the sound doctrine. These are the practical topics of the lessons.**

May God use our friendship group leaders, timothies and hosts in the task of forming new believers: TO DISCIPLE IS TO CONSOLIDATE!

Bishop Ismael Martín del Campo,
Secretary of Christian Education.

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The **Foundation** of

Daily Nurture

WITH **GOD'S**
WORD



Ice Breaker:

When you think about the Bible, does it seem more like a historical story, or a guidebook for life?

Key Verse: Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)

Introduction:

To know the message or story in any book, you have to read it page by page. However, it's been said that the Bible is the only book that actually reads "you". As you read each line, each page and chapter, the Bible is actually revealing the script of your heart and helping you to fulfill your life's story.

God's word is alive and potent. It has the unique power to change your circumstances and shape your character. God's word penetrates the heart and soul with the precision of a surgeon's scalpel. It opens our lives to receiving divine guidance and assistance. As our key verse indicates, God's word examines the innermost desires and attitudes of the heart. Let's look at three key benefits to reading, hearing and applying God's word to your daily life.

Three Key Benefits of God's Word:

1. Guides your Steps (Direction)

a) We are Enlightened.

Have you ever hiked a trail at nighttime? It's nearly impossible to see your steps and navigate your path when darkness falls. Life is no different. In fact, many of the crossroads we come to, happen in the dark of uncertainty. Your heart is troubled as you question what to do and where to turn. ***Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."*** The word of God lights your path, and guides you into safety. It is a spiritual flashlight that gives you insight and wisdom into life's most important decisions.



b) We are Equipped. God's word doesn't just enlighten your path; it equips you with tools and principles to accomplish His purpose. The Apostle Paul told young Timothy, ***"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful...so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"*** (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

God's word equips you to carry out His mission. Consider the Bible your ultimate "how-to" manual for ministry and life.

2. Grows your Character (Development)

a) **Reflects your Image.** *James 1:23-24* says, ***“Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.”*** God’s word is a mirror that reflects the contents in your heart, and enables you to adjust your lifestyle accordingly. However, when God’s word reveals an area of improvement and we don’t act on it and obey, it’s like looking into a mirror only to forget what you look like. In other words, the mirror didn’t do anything positive because you didn’t change anything about yourself. The same is true with God’s word. It won’t affect or influence change unless we respond to its reflection.

b) **Removes your Impurities.** *Ephesians 5:26* implies that holiness and spiritual cleansing comes through ***“the washing with water through the word...”*** God’s word is like a spiritual soap that removes impurities and the build up of sinful debris. The more His word gets in you, it begins to flush out the attitudes, motives and unhealthy desires that live secretly in the heart. It develops your character and slowly brings your soul into alignment with God’s will. *Psalms 119:9* says, ***“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.”***





c) Refreshes your Inner Being. Moses penned a powerful metaphor when he said, ***“Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants” (Deut. 32:2).***

The teaching that comes from God's word is like rain showers that fall on new grass. As you know, water brings refreshment and vitality to every living thing. God's word does the same for us; it refreshes and quenches the parched areas of the heart.

3. Guards your Faith (Defense)

a) Protects against Sin. *Psalms 119:11 says, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”* Hearing and holding God's word close to your heart builds a defense against temptation and sin.

It's easy to just listen to sermons or read the Bible and not grab onto it. However, if you take God's word to heart, it will improve your judgment in situations and protect you from falling prey to sin.

b) Protects against Satan. When writing about the Christian's armor, the Apostle Paul said to, ***“take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17).*** A sword

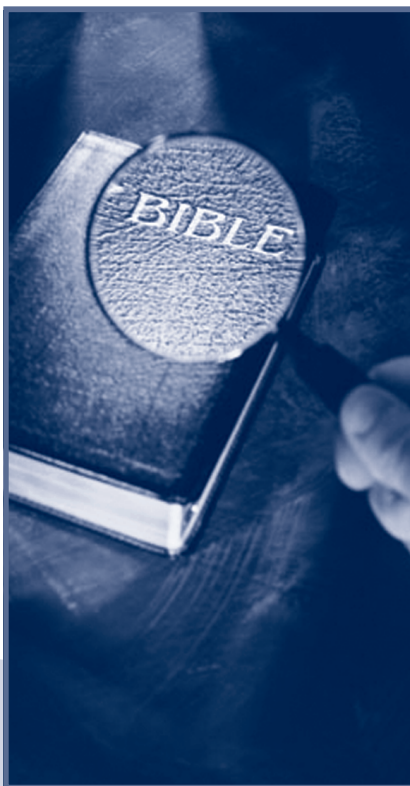
is meant for military combat and defense. Basically, the word of God is a weapon against Satan and all of his spiritual attacks.

That's why it is important to study and know the scriptures—even more, to speak them aloud! Each time Satan tempted Jesus, His response was "It is written" and then quoted him God's Word. (**Ref. Luke 4:1-13**).

Jesus Christ showed us how to use the Word as a weapon.

Final Thoughts:

The only way to know God is through His word. The more you read it and apply it, the more you discover about God and His will for your life. Each day you will find new strength and inspiration for all of life's difficulties. You could say that one purpose of the Bible is that it helps you write your own story. It isn't just a book to be read, it's a book to be lived. God's word provides the spiritual nutrients and sustenance we need to thrive as believers. Jesus said, ***"... Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"*** (**Matthew 4:4**). What food is to the physical body, God's word is to the spiritual body. That's why we can't go a day without it.



Steps for Growth:

What do you find most difficult about reading the Bible? (Terminology, not knowing where to begin, etc.)

b) Why is it important that God's Word "wash" us on a daily basis?

c) Of the three key benefits of God's Word, which one do you think is most overlooked, and why?

Bible Reading Plans:

God's Word isn't just for Sundays. In fact, it's meant to nurture everyday of your life. But like many of us, you may not know where to start. To begin or rekindle a Bible reading lifestyle, consider the following plans:

a) 30 Days with Jesus – Spend 30 days reading through the life of Christ. Travel back in time, 2000 years, and learn from the Master Himself. Get to know your Lord and Savior personally. **See chart on page (11).**

b) 30 Days in the Psalms – Devote 30 days to reading the Psalms. These are a treasure chest of prayers, poems, songs and meditations that will align your vertical relationship with God. **See chart on page (12).**



30 Days with Jesus **Bible Reading Plan**

<i>Day</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Passage</i>
1	Jesus Foretold	Isaiah 53
2	The Birth of Jesus	Matthew 1:18–25
3	John the Baptist Prepares the Way and Baptizes Jesus	Matthew 3:1—4:11
4	Water to Wine and the Samaritan Woman	John 2:1–11; John 4:1–26
5	Jesus Rejected in his Hometown	Luke 4:14–30
6	Jesus Calls his Disciples	Luke 5:1–11; Matthew 9:9–13
7	Sermon on the Mount	Luke 6:17–46
8	A Centurion, a Widow's Son and a Sinful Woman	Matthew 8:1–13; Luke 7:11–17; 7:36–50
9	Encounters With the Pharisees	Matthew 12:1–13; 22–45
10	Parable of the Sower, Weeds and Seeds	Matthew 13:1–43
11	Jesus Calms the Storm and Later Walks on Water	Luke 8:22–25; Mark 6:45–56
12	Jesus Heals a Man, Woman and Girl	Mark 5:1–43
13	Feeding of the 5000	John 6:1–14
14	Peter Identifies the Christ and the Transfiguration	Luke 9:18–27; Luke 17:1–8
15	Healing by Faith	Mark 9: 14–32
16	Teachings and Parables	Matthew 17:24—18:20
17	Teachings and Parables	Matthew 18:21—19:15
18	The Rich Young Ruler	Mark 10:17–31
19	Disciples Sent Out	Luke 10:1–24
20	The Good Samaritan	Luke 10:25–37
21	Jesus Teaches how to Pray	Luke 11:1–13
22	Jesus Revives Lazarus	John 11:1–44
23	Jesus Comes to Jerusalem	Matthew 21:1–27
24	The Last Supper	John 13:1–17; Matthew 26:17–35
25	Comfort for the Disciples	John 14–15
26	Jesus Arrested and Disowned	Matthew 26:36–75
27	Jesus' Trial	John 18:19—19:16
28	Jesus Crucifixion and Death	John 19:17–42
29	Jesus' Resurrection and Appearances	John 20–21
30	The Great Commission and the Ascension of Jesus	Matthew 28:16–20; Luke 24:50–53

30 Days in the Psalms Bible Reading Plan

<i>Day</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Passage</i>
1	Blessing	Psalms 67, 72, 84, 128
2	Calling to God	Psalms 4, 5, 22
3	Confidence	Psalms 27, 36, 71, 125
4	Deeds of God	Psalms 9, 18, 118
5	Doubt	Psalms 42, 73, 77
6	Faithfulness of God	Psalms 105, 119: 137–144, 146
7	Fear	Psalms 37, 49, 91
8	Glory of God	Psalms 19, 24, 29
9	God Is a Helper	Psalms 54, 115, 119:169–176
10	Identity	Psalms 8, 139
11	Justice of God	Psalms 7, 26, 82
12	Meditation	Psalms 119:9–16, 41–48
13	Mercy	Psalms 13, 28, 86
14	Music	Psalms 6, 149, 150
15	Nature	Psalms 50, 104, 147, 148
16	Peace	Psalms 23, 133, 119:161–168
17	Power of God	Psalms 68, 93, 135
18	Praise	Psalms 65, 98, 138
19	Prayer	Psalms 17, 20, 102
20	Protection	Psalms 59, 62, 124
21	Safety in God	Psalms 11, 16, 142, 46
22	Rejoicing	Psalms 30, 47, 97
23	Righteousness	Psalms 1, 15, 112
24	Salvation	Psalms 3, 14, 121
25	Sin and Repentance	Psalms 25, 32, 38, 51
26	Thanksgiving	Psalms 75, 106, 136
27	Trust	Psalms 31, 40, 56
28	Victory	Psalms 21, 76, 144
29	Wisdom	Psalms 90, 107, 111
30	Worship	Psalms 33, 34, 145

The **Foundation** of

Daily Conversations



WITH GOD

Ice Breaker:

When you think about prayer, what types of images come to mind?

Key Verse: Ephesians 6:18 (NIV)

Introduction:

What separates Jesus Christ from all other manmade gods is that He desires, and is capable of having a personal relationship with you. In fact, that is one of God's ultimate purposes for creating humanity. He desired to share His kingdom and relate with His creation on a personal level. This is where prayer comes in. Prayer is our mode for conversation with God.

If you learn to pray daily, by withdrawing to a quiet place, you will experience a fulfilling relationship with Jesus Christ. But maybe you're asking, "How exactly do I pray? And what should I pray about?" If so, don't feel ashamed or embarrassed. Jesus' own disciples asked Him the same question. This was His response:

“This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:9-13)

Jesus gave us a general pattern for prayer—so that we would know how to pray effectively. Let’s look at four important aspects of prayer.

Four Aspects of Prayer:



1. Relate

a) Relationship.

(Our Father in heaven)
– Before anything else, God wants a relationship with you. He desires a close, intimate relationship, where you see Him not only as Creator and Lord, but also as your loving father.

Jesus removed all of the excessive regulations and religious “red tape” to entering God’s presence. When you pray, approach God as your heavenly father. Doing so will develop the kind of connection God wants to have with you.

b) Reverence.

(Hallowed be Your name) – To “Hallow” simply means to show reverence, honor and sacredness. Showing reverence for God is a powerful way to relate to Him. God is pleased when we revere His name and glory. This is a form of worship. It’s a sincere acknowledgement and fear (utmost respect) of his holiness. Although God is your heavenly father, He is still a King. In prayer, we should put on a mindset of reverence and do our best to handle that time with care and purity.



2. Release

a) Pray that God’s kingdom Come.

(Your Kingdom Come) – “Your kingdom come” suggests that you are asking God to release, or loose His kingdom in your life. The kingdom of God is simply the reign of God in the hearts of believers. This request then, is asking God to exercise His kingship and authority. As you pray, ask God to reign over every area of your life. You can ask him to reveal his power over a sickness, impossibility, or a situation that seems hopeless.

b) Pray that God's will be Done. (Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven) – Unlike releasing His kingdom, our personal releasing deals with surrendering our will. Asking God's will to be done in your life is one of the greatest struggles we face as believers. Why? Because often times what we want is different from what God wants. Even Christ, before being crucified, prayed three times regarding the Father's will. If Jesus had difficulty with this, we will too. However, prayer is where we trade our will for God's will.

3. Request

a) Praying for Providence (Give us this day our daily bread) – In Biblical terms, bread represents sustenance, what you need to stay alive. That's one of the reasons why Jesus said He was the Bread of Life. Yet Jesus wasn't just talking about a loaf of bread.



He was talking about finances, provisions and wealth. When we ask for His blessings, we acknowledge our dependence on Him, and His ability to supply our needs.

b) Praying for Pardon (And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors) – **1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."**

Prayer is the opportunity for God to align our hearts through forgiveness. In prayer we confess our sins and faults.

The second part to this verse is that we also forgive others. Ask God to help you forgive your offenders.

c) Praying for Protection

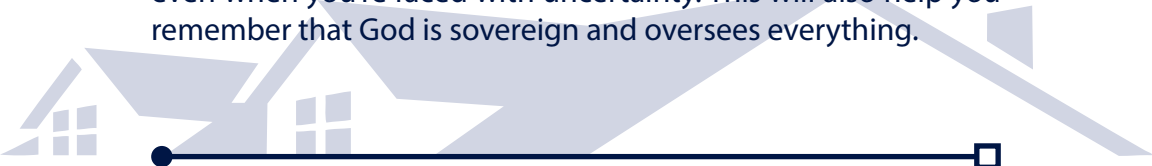
(And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.) – We need to ask God to protect our minds and lead us towards holiness. Prayer is an opportunity for God to strengthen your resistance against temptation and other seductions. If there is a particular area that you're struggling with, ask God to help you overcome it. In addition, you can ask God to set you free from Satan's influence in certain areas of your life.



4. Rejoice

a) Praise Him for His Position.

(For Yours is the kingdom) – When you pray, praise God for His position, His sovereignty. God bows to no one. He reigns above all the kingdoms and monarchs in the world. He is great and highly exalted. Always remember to praise God for His greatness and majesty. Praise him for being in control of all things, even when you're faced with uncertainty. This will also help you remember that God is sovereign and oversees everything.





b) Praise Him for His Power. (and the power and the glory forever.) – When you pray, also praise God for His power.

Thank God for every time He has demonstrated His strength in your life. There is nothing impossible for God. Through His awesome power, He can accomplish whatever He desires to do. Devote some time in prayer for praise and worship. As you begin to praise God, you will also be strengthened, encouraged and uplifted.

Final Thoughts:

Jesus Christ simply gave us a pattern, an example of how to pray. He showed us that prayer should be a daily practice, but also that it should not become a stale routine. Prayer should be a fresh experience, an intimate encounter.

According to Jesus' pattern, prayer is about Relating, Releasing, Requesting, and Rejoicing. Keep in mind that it all starts with relating. God is most interested in building a personal relationship with you. So whether you spend fifteen minutes or one hour in prayer, He's looking for closeness.

He's not impressed with fancy words or religious catch phrases. All He desires from you is an authentic heart.

Steps for Growth:

a) Of the four aspects of prayer, which one to you suppose is hardest to do, and why?

b) What are some common difficulties that arise when you attempt to pray? Examples:

- a. Finding adequate time.
- b. Not knowing what to say. (Running out of words.)
- c. Distractions. (Cell phones, text messages, TV.)

c) Now that we know some distractions and difficulties that arise, let's discuss some tips to dealing with them:

- a. Set a time and stick to it.
- b. Try your best to be consistent.
- c. Find an isolated place.
- d. Turn off your cell phone or other devices.
- e. Write down some notes of what to say and meditate on.

Prayer Plans:

Below are some practical ways to help jumpstart or perhaps rekindle your daily prayer life.

The 20-Minute A.C.T.S. Prayer: You may find this simple outline useful when praying. This structure combines the principles you learned in this lesson.

A – Adoration: Worship and praise God for who He is. (5 minutes)

C – Confession: Admit your sins and personal areas of improvement. (5 minutes)

T – Thanksgiving: Thank God for all He has done in your life. Be specific. (5 minutes)

S – Supplication: Make requests for others and ourselves. (5 minutes)

After a few weeks of praying this way, try to bump up each letter to 8 minutes. That will bring your prayer to 32 minutes. Every couple of months, try to increase your minutes per letter, until you reach one hour.

The Psalms Prayer:

Instead of using a technique every time you pray, try praying the Psalms. When praying the Psalms, the Holy Ghost unlocks new vistas of prayer, and before long you are:

- *Listening to God*
- *Praising God*
- *Thanking God*
- *Exploring your own soul*
- *Blessing other people*
- *Empathizing with the pain of others*
- *Recalling God's goodness*
- *Asking God questions*
- *Seeking God's face*
- *Enthralling at His majesty*
- *Trembling before His holiness*
- *Basking in His love*

Use the Bible reading chart on page (12) to navigate which psalms to pray daily. Don't simply read them, but digest the words and say them as if you wrote them yourself. Also, you might try keeping a journal nearby, to write down any thoughts that come to mind.

The **Foundation** of

Fasting for Spiritual Growth

Ice Breaker:

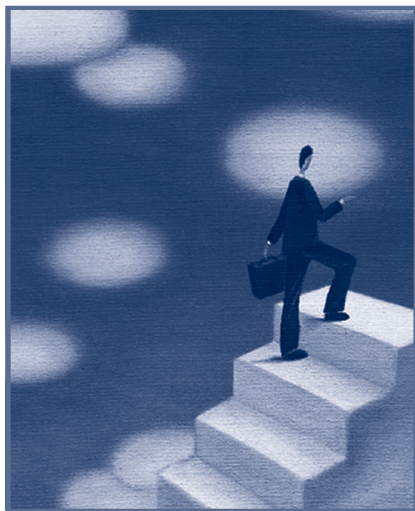
Based on your current understanding, how would you describe, "fasting"?

Key Verse: Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV)

Introduction:

Whenever you talk about fasting, people tend to have different ideas about it. Nearly every world religion has fasting as a part of their rituals. Christian fasting is different in the same way everything else is different from the religious community.

We worship, pray to, and fast for a living God who can respond and relate to us personally. According to the Bible, fasting is refraining from food, drink, sleep or other fleshly desires to focus on a period of spiritual growth or influence.



Specifically, fasting is to humbly deny something of the flesh to glorify God, grow a deeper relationship with God, and to gain spiritual authority. More often than not, fasting involves abstaining from food because it has the most tangible affect on the body. This is the tendency and practice we find in the scriptures, including with our Lord Jesus Christ. With that in mind, let's explore three purposes of fasting:

Three Purposes of Fasting:

1. Glorify God

a) It's about Dedication. Fasting itself is an act of sacrifice. When you fast, you forgo the time you spend eating or drinking, and dedicate it to prayer, worship and reading God's word. It's to submit yourself and to dismiss your physical desires in order to allow the Holy Ghost to work in your life. God takes notice any time we sacrifice something in order to please him, or draw closer to him.

Romans 12:1 says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship."

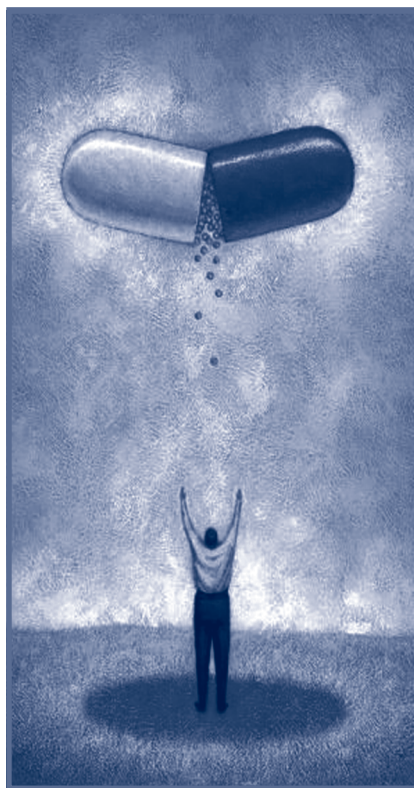


b) It's about Devotion. When you fast, it's also a spiritual act of worship. Fasting adds another layer to your worship and spiritual devotion to God. Worship is often viewed as music or

singing. However, worship involves more than lyrics, it involves your lifestyle. Fasting is about pleasing God, and pleasing God is what worship is all about. When talking about the Prophetess Anna, the Bible said, “...***She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying***” (Luke 2:37). ***Here we see fasting as a form of worship.***

2. Grow Closer to God

a) **For the Hungry.** In the Bible, fasting falls under the category of “highly recommended”. God never demanded or required anyone to fast. However, it is the path of those who desire a deeper and closer relationship with Jesus Christ. When you fast, your body experiences physical hunger. It yearns to be filled. This is the hope for your spiritual man—that you would deeply hunger for God, and that His Spirit and Word would fill you. Fasting gives you a physical picture of what your spirit is longing for. ***Matthew 5:6 says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”***



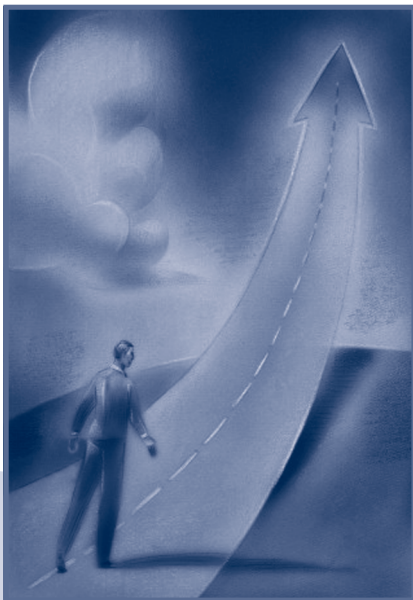
b) **For the Hurting.** In some cases, fasting was a way to feel closer to God during a particularly difficult time. While fasting, you can communicate feelings of fear, anxiety, distress, or grief

to God. When David's son became ill, ***"David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground" (2 Samuel 2:16).*** Anytime you're emotionally hurting, or struggling with a certain issue, fasting can be a mode of healing and recovery.

3. Gain Spiritual Influence

a) Spiritual Dominion. – *Isaiah 58:6 says, "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"* The secret power of fasting is that it can give you spiritual authority over bonds of wickedness. Fasting brings greater power when preparing to confront situations or people who are oppressed. There was an occasion where Jesus' own disciples were not able to deliver a demon-possessed man. When they asked ***"why"***, ***Jesus said, "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29).***

b) Spiritual Direction.
– Fasting causes a heightened sense of the presence of God. It also brings freshness to the spirit and allows God to speak clearly into your life. In other words, your heart picks up on a spiritual frequency that you normally wouldn't hear. We see an example of this in ***Acts 13:2-3, "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*** So



after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”

Final Thoughts:



It's important to note that prayer and fasting often go hand in hand. This isn't always the case however. You can pray without fasting, and fast without prayer. It is when these two practices are combined that they produce the best results. Fasting is not about self-punishment or self-rejection. God doesn't receive any glory when we afflict ourselves. In addition, fasting is not a way to manipulate God into blessing or approving your desires. Fasting is, however, a way to sharpen your spiritual focus and deepen your relationship with God.

Steps for Growth:

- a) Of the three purposes of fasting, which purpose do you find most interesting, and why?
- b) Discuss the key differences between Biblical fasting, and the fasting that other religions practice, such as Islam.
- c) Why do you think fasting is often overlooked and not emphasized enough in our relationship with God? (**Maybe because it's recommended, not required**).

Types of Fasts:

There are many types of fasts that you can use. Below are the three most common in the Bible:

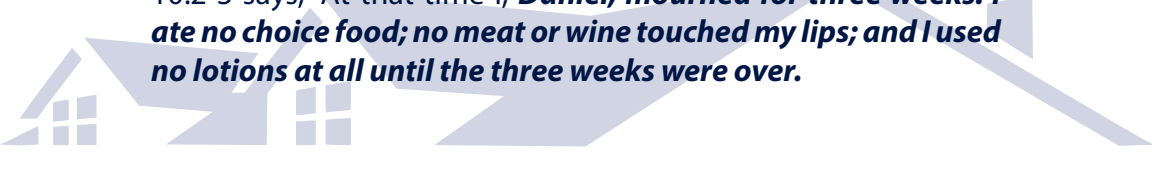
1. The Complete Fast – A complete fast is described in Esther 4:16 "...Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day..." A complete fast is abstaining from both food and drink. Paul went on a complete fast after his encounter with God on the road to Damascus. ***"For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything" (Acts 9:9).***

a) A Word of Caution: You should never go on a complete fast for more than three days. Limit your fast to three days because you cannot go without water for more than four or five days. Also, do not use fasting as a weight-loss plan. It's about focusing on Jesus Christ, not dieting.

2. The Regular Fast – A regular fast is abstaining from only food, not drink. When Jesus fasted in the desert, the Bible says, ***"After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry" (Matthew 4:2). This verse does not mention or suggest Jesus being thirsty.***

a) A Word of Caution: During regular fasts, do your best to stay hydrated with water. Some find it helpful to drink juices.

3. The Partial Fast – A partial fast generally means omitting a specific meal or type of food from your diet. Daniel 10:2-3 says, ***"At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.***



"This is often called The Daniel Fast. In Daniel 1:12, their diet only allowed vegetables and water.

a) A Word of Caution: For extended fasts, longer than four or five days, you should consult with your doctor to ensure your body is not at risk.

Before you Fast:

Below are some simple preparations you should make before fasting.

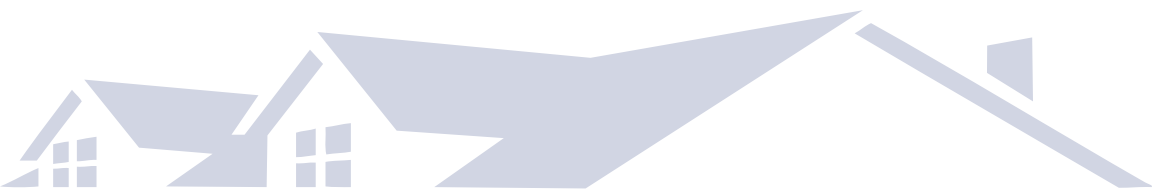


1. Prepare your heart

– Get ready for your fast by praying and asking God to give you direction. It is important that you have a clear purpose for fasting. Ask yourself, “What do I hope to gain from this fast?” Also, ask God to reveal the motives in your heart, to ensure that your heart is in harmony with God’s word.

2. Prepare your body

– In addition to heart preparation, get your body ready. A couple of days before an extended fast, reduce your food intake, eat raw fruits and vegetables, and avoid foods that are high in fat and sugar. It’s also recommended that you create a schedule of how long your fast will be and what activities you should avoid (i.e. sports, heavy labor, etc.).



The **Foundation** of

Financial Faithfulness



TO GOD

Ice Breaker:

In one or two sentences, what are your thoughts on giving money to the kingdom of God?

Key Verse: Leviticus 27:30 (NIV)

Introduction:

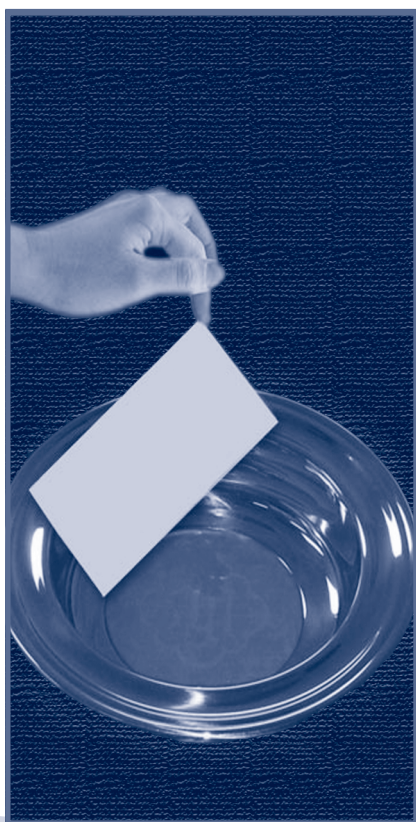
God owns everything. That's a big statement, but a true statement nonetheless. ***Psalms 24:1, "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."*** Because God owns everything and all blessings come from him, it's our job to be faithful managers of our financial resources. Simply put, money isn't our possession—it's God's possession. We are merely entrusted with the responsibility of managing it.

Giving is a testimony of God's ownership. And "tithing" is the leading standard of giving we find in the Bible. Tithing is a plan that God Himself created. The word "tithe" actually means "tenth". Our key verse says, ***"A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to***

the LORD; it is holy to the LORD” (Lev. 27:30). When we tithe, we return to God ten percent of our financial increase. So then, when we withhold the tithe, we actually steal what belongs to God. (Ref. Malachi 3:8) Let’s consider three power principles of tithing.

Three Power Principles of Tithing:

1. Encourages Greater Faithfulness



a) Greater Trust.

It takes faith in God to give up some of what He has given us. When you tithe of your income, you are putting your trust in God to supply your needs. ***Proverbs 3:5 says, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”***

Deepening your trust in God is like learning a new language, the more you do it—the more it grows. Tithing shows God that you believe He is able to sustain you, even through financially difficult times. Investing your money into stocks, bonds and real estate can be a wise

decision. However, investing into God’s work is the surest bet you can ever take.

b) Greater Tribute. Proverbs 3:6 says, “in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Tithing offers tribute and acknowledges how great God is. Don't worry; God isn't broke, so He doesn't need our money. However, giving is a tangible testimony that God owns both the material and spiritual things of our lives. Essentially, He desires a trusting acknowledgement that He is “your” God, and that you fully depend on His goodness. Returning your tithe is a physical form of worship, one that actually requires a material sacrifice. Remember this; worship is the greatest motivation for giving.



2. Expands Kingdom Work

a) Spreading the Gospel. When you tithe and give to God's work, you become a partner in spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. When the Apostle Paul wrote about his partnership with the Philippian church, he said, ***“Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only” (Phil. 4:15).*** Although this church couldn't physically travel with Paul on his missionary trips, their financial gifts made it possible for him to minister. Through their generous giving, they became collaborators.

b) Supporting the Gospel. Tithing not only helps to spread the Gospel, but it creates a support system for the men and women who dedicate their lives to ministry. In the book of Malachi, we're told that God wants us to bring our tithe into the storehouse (**Ref. Mal 3:10**). A storehouse in Old Testament times had four purposes, which still holds true today. Based on the table below, briefly discuss the importance of these four purposes.

The Storehouse System	
Old Testament Purpose	Present Day Purpose
<i>Tithing Supports:</i>	
1. The tribe of Levi and the priests of Aaron	1. The pastor and staff
2. The prophets	2. Missionaries and evangelists
3. The Hebrew widows and orphans	3. Widows, orphans, single parents, etc.
4. The widows and orphans of the Gentiles who were living in and around the city	4. The unsaved who surround the local church and community

3. Enlarges Financial Blessings

a) Brings Blessings. *Malachi 3:10 says, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse...Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."* Giving your tithe opens the window of heaven over you and your entire household. This is a promise we have from God, that if we bring the tithe, He'll bring us invaluable blessings. God's financial system has a better return than any stock, bond, or investment you can make. He guarantees your success when you give generously to His kingdom.

b) Brings Balance. When you learn to tithe, it actually changes the way you view money. Tithing helps you prioritize your finances and guards your heart against greed and the love of money. The Apostle Paul told Timothy, ***“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Tim. 6:10).*** When you give to God, it helps to bring balance to your spending habits and even helps you to become more content with what you have.



Final Thoughts:

Tithing is not a “get rich quick” program or a manipulation tool. It is God’s system for sustaining the work of His kingdom and blessing your life. It’s a system that has worked for ages and continues to work today.

Not only does it provide a basic need, but tithing also opens up a new landscape of opportunity for you. ***Proverbs 3:9-10 says, “Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.”*** Some will say, “I can’t afford to tithe”. However the truth is, “You can’t afford *not* to”.

How to Tithe:

Being a good manager of what God has given you involves giving a portion back to Him. The tithe (10 percent) should be paid on your gross income, the amount before taxes. For instance, when you tithe on your paycheck, simply move the decimal point one digit to the left. That will give you the “tithe” amount.

Steps for Growth:

a) Discuss why “money and church” tend to be a sore subject for certain people. (Idea: people haven’t learned the correct Biblical viewpoint.)

b) Of the three principles of tithing, which one makes the biggest impression on you, and why?

c) Discuss when and where your local church accepts tithes from its members. Answer any questions your group might have about this process.



The **Foundation** of

Living a Life

OF HOLINESS



Ice Breaker:

In just a few words, how would you describe a “holy” person?

Key Verse: 1 Peter 1:13-16 (NIV)

Introduction:

You may or may not realize it, but the closer you get to God, the more like Him you become. Not that we could ever be equal with God, but as our relationship with him grows, there also grows a desire to please him and become more like him. When you are baptized in water and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, a holy desire is birthed in your spirit. However, you begin to realize that there is a new inner battle being waged—between your old sin-led nature and your new Spirit-led nature. **(Ref. Galatians 5:17)**

Because your Spirit-led nature hungers for God, a lifestyle of purification begins. This lifestyle is referred to as “**holiness**”. Living a life of holiness is simply saying and doing what pleases God. Let’s dispel a few misconceptions about holiness:



- **Holiness is about legalism** – In fact, holiness is not about legalism, but about having a pure relationship with God. (**Psalm 24:3-6**).

- **Holiness demands perfection** – In reality, holiness is not about being perfect; it's about being obedient to God's word and passionate about pleasing Him. (**1 Peter 1:14-15; 1 Thessalonians 4:1**)

- **Holiness is unachievable** – The truth is, it's possible to live a holy life. God would not call us to do something if He knew we couldn't achieve it. (**1 Thessalonians 4:7**)

Romans 12:2 says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." This means we can live and interact with all people, but not to adopt or conform to a secular lifestyle. God desires for us to be holy and distinct. Let's consider three characteristics of a holy life.

Three Characteristics of a Holy Life:

1. Distinction from the World

a) **You are Sanctified.** Some think that holiness is simply about being different. However, it's far beyond that. God has called his people to be distinct. To become distinct, we must undergo what the Bible calls "sanctification". **Leviticus 11:44 says, "For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy..."** The word "sanctify" means to be "separate" or to be "set apart". God desires that we be set apart for his divine purpose in our lives. It is a process of inner and outer change, where the Holy Ghost and God's Word begins to separate us from lifestyles that prevent a pure relationship with God.

b) **You are Special.** Being distinct isn't just about separating from old habits or customs; it's about recognizing and living in your true significance. **1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."** Living a holy life means remembering how special you are to God. It means living in a way that reveals the change in your life—both in your inward and outward reflection.

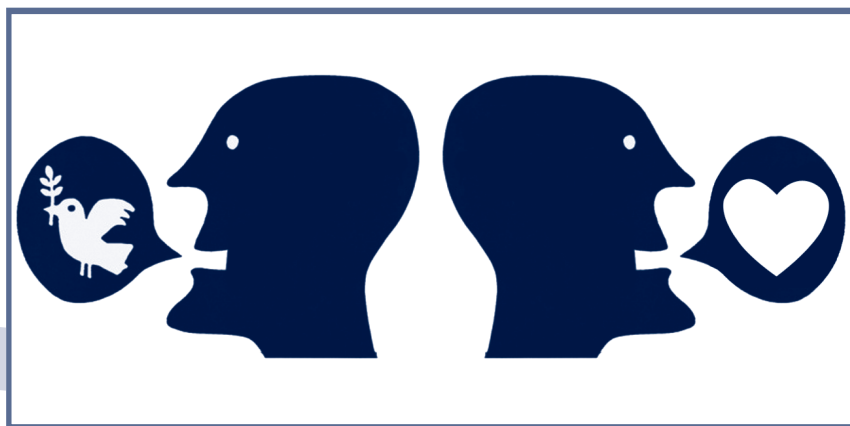


The more you realize how special you are, the more cautious you are about what you do and say.

2. Disciplined in Lifestyle

a) Do your best to Try. *Hebrews 12:14 says, “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”* Holiness doesn’t just come natural. It takes effort and may even make you a little uncomfortable at times. That’s because your old and new natures don’t agree—especially when you try to change something about your lifestyle. However, don’t give up. If God is speaking to you and asking you to change an area in your life, make the effort!

b) Do your best to Train. *1 Timothy 4:7-8 says, “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come”.* Living a holy life requires teaching and guidance. Paul’s advice to “train” means that holiness is a process of learning and becoming who God has called you to be. Have a teachable attitude regarding the principles of holiness in your everyday life.



3. Devotion to Spirituality

a) Purify yourself.

2 Corinthians 7:1 says, “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”

To grow in holiness, we need to purify ourselves of things that pollute the body and spirit. For example, doing drugs, drinking alcohol, smoking, and even certain foods poison the body. Likewise, certain things we watch, read, listen to and even places we visit can pollute our spirits.



Living a holy life means getting rid of impurities in your body and spirit.

b) Pursue God. *Hebrews 12:14 says, “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”* Here’s an interesting fact: Separation leads to the greatest connection. When we strive for holiness, which is separation, we’re able to plug ourselves into God’s presence. Like the scripture says, without holiness no one will see the Lord. In other words, without separation, we cannot fully experience and enjoy God’s presence. Holiness, then, is a personal pursuit of God. When you strive to live holy, you send a message to God that his presence is a priority in your life.

Final Thoughts:

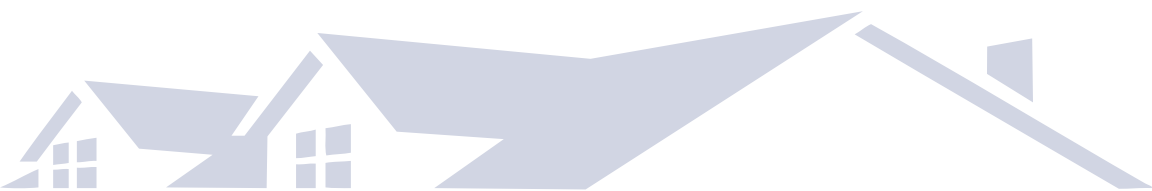
The more of God we desire, the more important our quest for holiness becomes. Perhaps the Apostle Paul said it best, ***“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1).*** Living a holy life is about pleasing God and having an unbroken relationship with Him. As the scripture implies, offering your body—your whole being—is your spiritual act of worship. Don’t let holiness become a forgotten act of worship in your life.

Steps for Growth:

a) Of the three characteristics of a holy life, which one seems most interesting to you, and why?

b) Discuss some of the misconceptions about holiness. What are some ways we can dispel these misconceptions, or prevent them from forming?

c) Of the three characteristics of a holy life, which quality tends to be overlooked, and how can we refresh its value?



The **Foundation** of

Serving with Purpose

Ice Breaker:

What do you love to do that you could use to serve others in the church and community?

Key Verse: Psalm 139:13-16

Introduction:

After giving their lives to Jesus Christ, many wonder, “What next?” “What’s my unique role in the church?” If you have ever asked these questions, don’t worry—you’re not alone. In fact, the greatest challenge for many is figuring out what their distinct function is. Each of us have been uniquely designed and shaped for God’s purpose. Everything about who you are and what you can do is no accident. God skillfully created you with a combination of strengths, abilities and gifts that make up your character. Here is a simple acrostic to help you remember these qualities:

S	SPIRITUAL GIFTS
H	HEART
A	ABILITIES
P	PERSONALITY
E	EXPERIENCE

Knowing your purpose and place in God's family can be discovered when you realize your God-given SHAPE. For the remainder of this lesson, let's reveal each capability that enables you to serve with purpose.

Discovering your S.H.A.P.E:

1. Unwrap your Spiritual Gifts

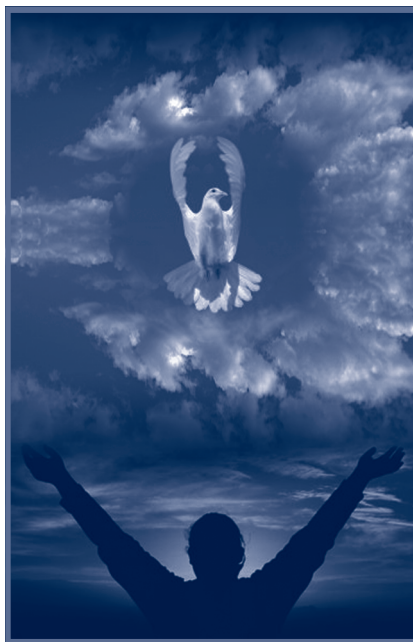


a) Your Specialty. *1 Corinthians 12:4-7* says, ***"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."*** Your spiritual gifts add a twist of flavor that cannot be replaced. What you have is special. Mistakenly many think that when they don't serve, someone else will pick up the slack. Unfortunately, no one else can substitute for

your special abilities. Your gifts are desperately needed in the family of God.

b) Your Spirituality. *1 Corinthians 2:14* says, ***"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and***

he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. Every Spirit-filled believer is equipped with certain spiritual gifts for the purpose of ministry. The keys to these gifts are found in our spiritual connection to God. In other words, in order to receive and develop your spiritual gifts, you must receive the infilling of the Holy Ghost. These gifts can only be unwrapped or realized through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Remember, an unopened gift is useless.



2. Understand your Heart

a) Enthusiasm. The term “heart” represents the total package of your desires, hopes, interests and affections. The heart embodies what you love to do and care about the most. It creates enthusiasm and motivation. ***Proverbs 27:19 says, “As water reflects a face, so a man’s heart reflects the man.”*** Your heart is a reflection of who you really are. It affects what you say, feel, and even your behavior. God has blessed each of us with a distinct heart that beats when we think of certain subjects, activities or situations. Listen to your inner heartbeat; it will give you hints and clues as to where you should serve.

b) Effectiveness. Serving from your heart is the key to being effective in any ministry, great or small. The more you care about a task or assignment, the likelier you are to excel in

it. If you volunteer time to a certain ministry that you're not passionate about, you will eventually lose motivation. This, of course, means that your work won't be very effective. When your heart is fully submerged into your area of ministry, you will produce greater results. Not only that, but you will feel a sense of accomplishment.

3. Unlock your Abilities

a) Abilities from God. In addition to your spiritual gifts,



you also have inborn gifts and natural abilities. These are the talents that take little effort to utilize, but have big payoffs. God gave these to you. ***Romans 12:6 says, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us..."*** Being that our natural gifts come from God, they are just as valuable as our spiritual gifts. Studies show that the average person has anywhere from 500 to 700 various skills and abilities. The common objection to getting involved in ministry is, "I don't have anything to offer." That's nonsense! God loaded you with plenty of natural abilities, which you can use for His glory.

b) Abilities for God. Once you recognize your most obvious abilities, you have to apply them for God's purpose.

Paul said, "...whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God"

(1 Corinthians 10:31). The Bible offers many examples of abilities that were used for God. Here are just a few of those mentioned: artistic ability, architectural ability, administering, baking, boat making, candy making, debating, designing, embalming, embroidering, engraving, farming, fishing, gardening, leading, managing, masonry, making music, making weapons, needle work, painting, planting, philosophizing, inventing, carpentry, sailing, selling, being a soldier, tailoring, teaching, writing literature and poetry. There is a place in the church where your abilities can flourish and make an impact.



4. Uncover your Personality

a) You are Unique. ***The Psalmist David said, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Psalm 139:14).*** When God formed you, He broke the mold. Your individuality is a scientific fact (i.e. DNA). You are God's custom design. There has never been, nor will there ever be another "you". Your personality is no accident. God made both introverts and extroverts. Some are "thinkers", and others are "feelers". Some play it safe, and others take risks. By now, you should know what type of personality God gave you. When you stay true to your personality, you not only give God glory, but you add irreplaceable value to the world.



b) You are Useful. 1 Corinthians 12:6 says, “There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.”

God exhibited his greatest craftsmanship when he molded your personality type. And few things bring him glory as when you use your personality for ministry. If you study the lives in the Bible, you will soon realize that God uses personalities of all shapes and sizes. The clearest example is found within Jesus’ twelve disciples. The mixture of their different personalities often created some conflict. However, when combined for a purpose, they produced immeasurable results.

Your personality plays a major role in determining what area of ministry is best for you.

5. Unleash your Experience

a) Examine your experiences. Romans 8:28 reminds us, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

God doesn’t throw away your experiences, but rather uses them for his purpose. Even your bad experiences contribute to who you are today. Life experiences help mold your “shape”—smoothing out rough edges and defining your attitude. Let’s examine six types of experiences:

1. Family experiences: Things you learned growing up in your home.

2. Educational experiences: Your favorite subjects in school.

3. Vocational experiences: The jobs that you enjoyed and were effective in.

4. Spiritual experiences: Your most significant moments with God.

5. Ministry experiences: How you have served God in the past.

6. Painful experiences: The problems, hurts and failures that you have learned from.

b) Employ your experiences. Now that you know what types of experiences define your shape, it's time to start employing them for God's purpose. For instance, your family experiences, good or bad, have molded the way you handle difficulties and manage situations. If you are the firstborn, perhaps you have untapped leadership skills. What many don't realize is that God uses painful experiences for His glory.

Sometimes people think, "I've been through too much, been hurt too many times, or made too many mistakes." The truth is, all that you've been through has given you a viewpoint that others can't see. Therefore, you are able to identify the silent hurt in others and minister to their needs.



Final Thoughts:

Knowing and applying your God-given shape is the key to living with purpose and serving in your local church. Don't be afraid to try ministries that interest you, or to expose a hidden gift that could bless the work of God. Unleash your abilities for God's glory and you will discover one of the most satisfying feelings in the world. Remember, gifts are meant to be opened, shared and enjoyed. Your distinct SHAPE will allow you to unwrap the gifts within you. Let the discovery begin!

Steps for Growth:

a) Ask yourself, "How much of my abilities am I actually using?" Discuss some examples of natural abilities that could be used for ministry.

1. For example: recruiting, researching, writing, landscaping, interviewing, promoting, decorating, planning, entertaining, repairing, drawing, and even feeding.

b) Discuss the types of personal experiences we can offer the church. As a group, try to dispel any fears or misconceptions there might be about revealing and using your personal experiences.

c) What can our group do to serve our church family?



The **Foundation** of

Leading People



TO CHRIST

Ice Breaker:

What do you think making friends has to do with evangelism?

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 9:19-22

Introduction:

Jesus Christ knew how to connect with others. He mastered the art of relationships, and knew how to use them for the purpose of salvation. He made friends with the friendless and understood the power of personal connection.

In a world that thrives on technology and electronic means of communication, the personal touch has been lost to some degree. For instance, instead of walking over to your co-worker's desk (20 feet away), you send them an email. This may improve business productivity, but it doesn't do much for leading others to Jesus Christ.

Before we move on, let's deflate the fears that often hold us back from sharing your faith.

- **Fear of Rejection** – Most people don't witness because they fear being rejected. But remember, they are declining the offer, not you personally. Also, just because they're not interested right now, doesn't mean they won't be later.

- **Fear of Not Knowing what to Say** – Some are scared that when they talk, they won't have the right words. Remember, you don't need be to perfect or rehearsed—just be yourself. You don't have to explain the whole Bible.

- **Fear of Embarrassing Others** – Some fear that they will embarrass or make the other person feel uncomfortable. Remember, it's all in your approach. Be clever about when and where you bring up the subject of Jesus.

Bringing people to Jesus requires a personal connection, an authentic relationship. Because after all, we are often the first impression people have of Jesus Christ, and what living for him is about. Fortunately, Jesus provided us the best method of connecting with people and leading them to salvation. Using the example of Jesus and the Samaritan woman (Ref. John 4), let's take a look at 3 keys to making an evangelistic connection.



Three Keys to an Evangelistic Connection:

1. Be Courageous and Take the Initiative

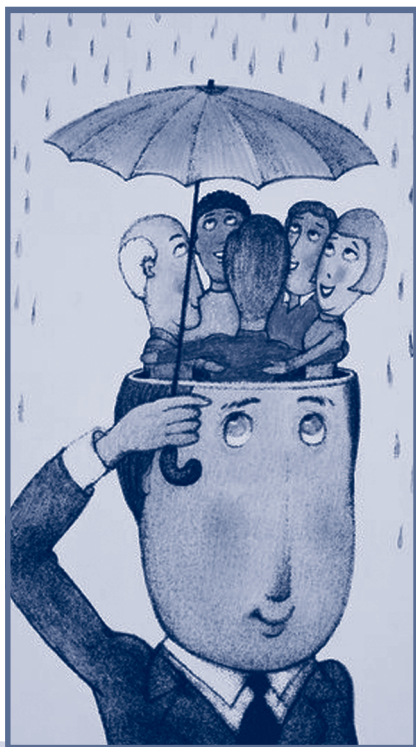
a) **Be Slow.** When Jesus witnessed to the Samaritan woman at the well, He started by saying, ***“Will you give me a drink?” (John 4:7).*** There is sometimes a tendency to rush or force the issue upon people. For instance, you turn every conversation into a Bible study. However, this could possibly push them away. And they may only be listening out of courtesy, not curiosity. Take your time. Invest into their interests, before you expect them to invest into yours. Jesus asked a question that pertained her job—before his.



b) **Be Simple.** In our enthusiasm to save a lost soul, we sometimes try “too” hard, and may say things that don’t have much value to an unchurched person. For instance, telling someone how powerful your worship services are won’t mean much of anything. Keep things simple. Build relationships with people and choose practical ways of introducing Jesus Christ and spiritual topics. Jesus kept his approach simple by focusing on things that the Samaritan understood—such as water from a well. In addition, he didn’t start by talking about spiritual things. Maybe your evangelistic connection will start with treating someone to dinner, a game of golf, or a drink at Starbucks.

2. Be Considerate of their Needs

a) **Be Sensitive.** Jesus told the Samaritan woman, ***“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water” (John 4:10).*** It’s important that when reaching out to someone, you be sensitive to his or her needs. Jesus immediately recognized a spiritual thirst in her heart—without her having to confess it. Jesus had great interpersonal skills. He could read body languages, moods, and personalities with accuracy. And it wasn’t just because he was God. It’s because we was paying attention, listening to and watching her gestures.



b) Be Selfless.

Not only did Jesus utilize his relational skills, but he focused first on her needs, not his. It wasn’t until later on did he mention his search for true worshippers. Creating an evangelistic connection with someone happens when we think outside of our bubble of circumstances and needs. It happens when we refuse to live selfishly, and make ourselves available to others. An old Chinese proverb says, “Seek to understand, before seeking to be understood.” You have to remember that the world does not revolve

around you. And leading people to Christ means stepping beyond your wants and wishes.

3. Be Constructive with your Lifestyle

a) **Your Words.** There was something about Jesus that stood out. So much so that the woman said, ***“Sir, you must be a prophet...” (John 4:19).*** Interestingly, Jesus never disclosed His identity or marketed His purpose for being there. Just by the way he talked and listened to her, she was able to tell that Jesus wasn’t an ordinary man. How we communicate (speak and listen) builds a bridge between you and your unsaved friends. ***Ephesians 4:29 says, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”***



b) **Your Ways.** Not only is healthy communication necessary, but perhaps the greatest factor in leading people to Christ is your lifestyle. How you live and conduct yourself outside the church walls will be your best instrument of evangelism.

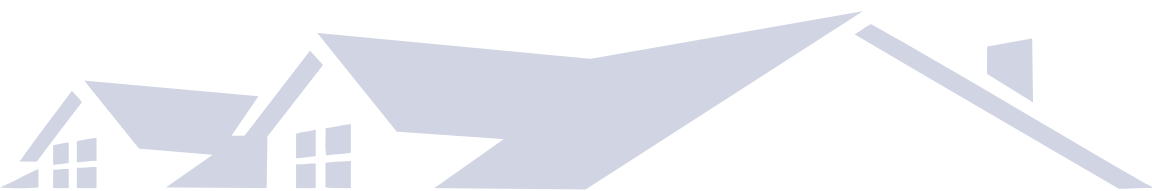
Although Peter is counseling on how to win your unsaved spouse, his advice is relevant for any relationship. ***“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives” (1 Peter 3:1-2).*** The Gospel must be demonstrated, not just spoken.

Final Thoughts:

Our greatest commission is to save lost and dying souls (Ref. Matthew 28:19). However, many Christians cringe when they hear the word “evangelism”. Likely because older evangelism tactics were very impersonal and often required a gregarious personality. But if you truly understand that it’s all about relational connection, you’ll find that it’s the most natural thing you can do. That doesn’t mean it won’t require some effort or practice, but you will definitely find your personal role exciting and rewarding.

Steps for Growth:

- a) What would you say is the most common excuse for not reaching our unsaved friends and family?
- b) Of the three keys to an evangelistic connection, which one would you say is the most overlooked or underestimated?
- c) How do you think this Friendship Group can play a key role in winning the lost?



The **Foundation** of

Spiritual Authority



Ice Breaker:

What are some examples of authority in our society?

Key Verse: Romans 13:1-5

Introduction:

God's throne is built on authority. In fact, anything we do as Spirit-filled believers, we're able to do because of God's authority upon our lives. Take prayer for example. When you pray for healing, you are simply exercising your spiritual authority when you invoke the Name of Jesus. You are using the delegated authority and power of Jesus' name. So, the sickness isn't subject to you individually, it's subject to the authority of God that works in you.

If you can grasp this simple example, then you can understand spiritual authority as it relates to God's leaders. Through God's framework of represented authority, we are required to obey and honor those who lead us. As Paul said, ***"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established..." (Romans 13:1).*** In

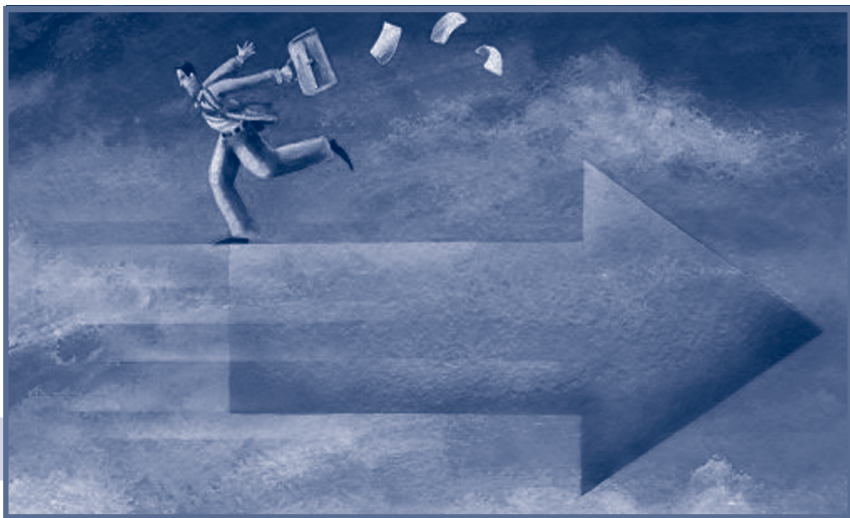
the local church, these authorities are the pastors and leaders who are responsible for guiding, guarding and governing the family of God. Let's examine the positive and negative responses to spiritual authority.

Two Responses to Spiritual Authority:

1. Rebellion

a) **Disobedience.** *Romans 5:19b* says, ***“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners...”*** God told Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Was the fruit itself poisoned? Perhaps not. However, God wanted to teach Adam the principle of obedience. Eve was placed under Adam's authority, as Adam was directly under God's authority. So when Eve was tricked into eating the fruit, she disobeyed God.

Ultimately Adam was responsible (he also ate the fruit), so their collective disobedience caused the great downfall.



Points to Ponder:

- **Value God's Leaders.**

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 says, "Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work..."

It was easier for Eve to justify disobeying her "husband", than it was "God". There is a danger when you undervalue your spiritual leaders. Even though they are human, they represent God. So whether you agree or disagree with them, be careful not to depreciate their authority.



- **Value God's Laws.** David told Solomon, **"Observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements..." (1 Kings 2:3).** God is a God of principle. The more value we place on His principles, the less likely we are to disobey spiritual authority.

b) Defiance. Defiance represents those who blatantly oppose. Such was the case with Korah and his followers. Numbers chapter 16 records that Korah, Dathan and Abiram, plus a large group, gathered together and planned a revolt against Moses and Aaron. They attacked him by saying, **"You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set**

yourselves above the LORD's assembly?" As described in Numbers 16, Korah and all his partners had to pay a severe penalty for their error.

Points to Ponder:

- **God's leaders Represent God.** Korah mistakenly thought he was only rebelling against Moses and Aaron. However, God and His delegated authorities are inseparable. Even when His leaders make mistakes, God will never side with a rebellious campaign.

- **God judges the Heart, not the Issue.** Korah's appeal may have been honest. But their mission was pointless the moment they aimed fire at Moses. A good cause against the wrong person is the wrong cause.



2. Obedience

a) **Obedience.** The definition of "obey" is ***"to follow the commands or guidance of. To conform to or comply with"***. When King Saul tried to recompense his disobedience with burnt offerings, the prophet Samuel said, ***"Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams"*** (1 Samuel 15:22). Samuel's

point was clear: obedience to God is the highest tribute we can offer. Because Saul didn't obey Samuel's instructions to destroy everything in Amalek, God rejected him.

Points to Ponder:

- **Obedience involves your Conduct.** Obeying is simply following orders, listening and doing as we're instructed. Be prepared, because your heart may not always be totally persuaded.

- **God Blesses those who obey.** If God frowns upon disobedience, the opposite is also true. Jesus said, ***"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."*** (Luke 11:28)



b) Submission.

The definition of ***"submit"*** is ***"to yield oneself to the authority or will of another"***. When referring to church leaders, Paul said, ***"Submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it"*** (1 Cor. 16:16). Paul isn't just talking about following orders, but about getting under the spiritual governance of God. As members of God's family, we should humbly submit to those who are over us, providing that they don't violate God's word.

Points to Ponder:

- **Submission involves your Heart.** It's possible to obey, and not submit, or have a submissive attitude. Obeying is simply following instructions. Submitting engages your heart and mindset.

- **Submission is about Authority, not Superiority.** Submitting to spiritual authority is not about becoming a slave to a superior person. We are equal in God's eyes. It's okay to ask questions when your motives are pure.

Final Thoughts:

The truth is, Jesus himself also submitted to authority, not only to the Roman government (as a man), but to divine authority (as God in flesh). Let's not forget how troubling it was for Jesus to submit as he prayed and fought with God's will in the Garden of Gethsemane. God's will required Jesus Christ to obey and submit himself to the sufferings of the cross. Living under authority is a process of spiritual growth and sometimes discomfort. As you grow in a relationship with Jesus Christ, this principle will become more and more significant in your life.

Steps for Growth:

a) Based upon what you've learned in this lesson, why do you think God places such high emphasis on spiritual authority?

b) What are some of the most common reasons why people disobey?

c) Discuss the main difference between obedience and submission, and also how they work together.

The Foundation of

Healthy Friendships



Ice Breaker: When you think about friendships, what types of things come to mind?

Key Verse: Proverbs 12:26; Ecclesiastes 4:9

Introduction:

God desires that we all have positive and enriching friendships. God never meant for us to live distant or lonely lives. He is actually pleased when we build, nurture and enjoy friendships. After God created Adam, He saw that it wasn't healthy for him to be alone. And although his partner became his wife, it still shows God's interest in our relationships and our need for friends. In addition, friendships also play an essential role in our emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing. That's why it's important to choose the right kind of friend.

If you happen to choose unsafe friends, you could be setting yourself up for friendly fire. **Proverbs 25:19 says, "Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint."** In other words, not every friend is actually a "friend". There are certain qualities that every good friendship should have. Let's consider five essentials of a healthy friendship.

Five Essentials of a Healthy Friendship:

1. Candor

Proverbs 27:6 says, “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.” In order for a friendship to be healthy, it must be framed with honesty. Friends should be able to speak candidly with each other, not hiding their true feelings, likes and dislikes, passions, interests and ideas. A friend is someone you can be real with, where you can just be yourself and not be judged. Not only that, but as Proverb 27:6 alludes, friendships allow space for constructive criticism. Even if a friend’s advice upsets you, that openness and candor builds authenticity.

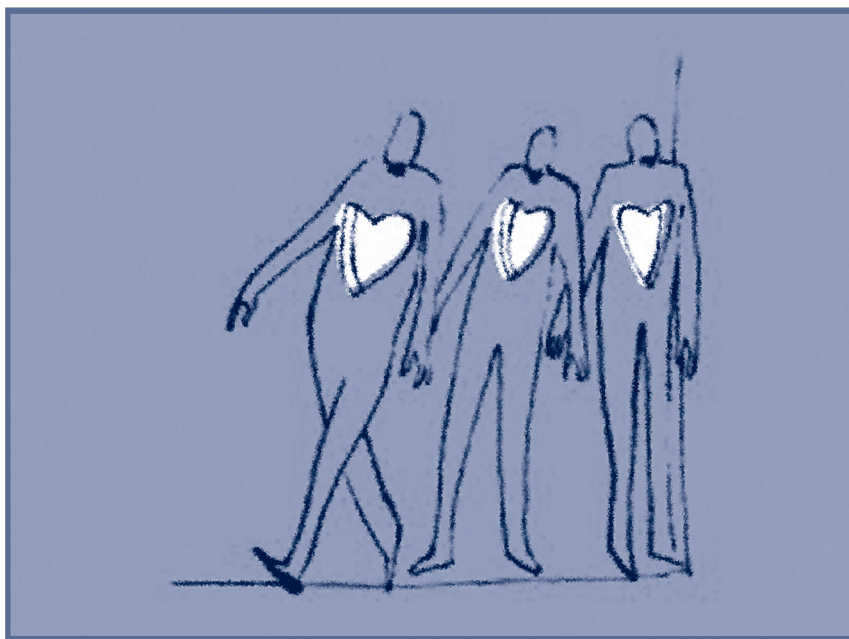


• **The Key to Candor is Trust.** Without trust and confidence, there is no safety in being honest. **Proverbs 27: says, “Wound from a friend can be trusted...”** Remember that trust is built with time and faithfulness.

2. Constancy

Proverbs 17:17 says, “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” Constancy and loyalty adds immeasurable value to friendships. Especially during difficult times, or seasons of great trial, a friend’s loyalty can mean the difference between

success and failure. One of the best examples of loyalty can be found in the friendship of David and Jonathan. Even while David was running for his life from Jonathan's father, Saul, Jonathan stood by him and defended his innocence. Because of Jonathan's commitment, David's life was preserved. Risking his own reputation, Jonathan shows us the power and blessing of constancy.



• **The Key to Constancy is Faithfulness. Proverbs 18:24b says, "...but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."** Faithfulness is the glue that causes friends to stick close. Learn to be dependable.

3. Communication

James 1:19 says, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." Open communication is the lifeline in healthy friendships. If friends don't communicate,



they become out of touch with each other's needs and experiences. First of all, be quick to listen. Be an active listener—paying attention not only to what your friend is saying with their mouth, but what he or she is saying with their body language. If you spend too much time talking, you might miss some hidden messages. Secondly, be slow to speak; in other words, talk with caution and respect. Choose your words wisely. And thirdly, be slow to anger. Don't let an intense conversation drive you to anger or vulgarity. Always keep your cool.

• **The Key to Communication is Respect.** *Romans 12:10* says, ***“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.”*** Communicating without respect can lead to insult or recklessness. Always treat your friends with respect and love, especially when communicating.

4. Commonality

Amos 3:3 says, ***“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”*** Sharing common values and interests are essential to a healthy friendship. In fact, without mutual ideals, you'll find it challenging to relate. For example, instead of enjoying that particular friend, you spend more time trying to figure out what to do, talk about and support. Having things in

common helps keep the friendship alive. It's also important to have diversity in your friends. You wouldn't want all your friends to be exactly the same. However, make sure your closest friends share common beliefs and principles.

• **The Key to Commonality is Accountability.** Commonality won't last unless there is accountability. One must be accountable to the other and guard the values that bring camaraderie. This is often the sign that a friendship has matured.

5. Compassion

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Compassion is love in action. This is likely the crowning attribute in any true friendship. Although Jesus meant a literal "laying down" of life, this also includes the laying down of your time, finances and energy. Anything you lay down for a friend, expresses the greatest kind of love. Compassion requires sensitivity and willingness. Whether your friend is stranded on the side of the highway, or recently lost his or her job, compassion will cause you to go the extra mile to help them.

• **The Key to Compassion is Selflessness.** Compassion involves doing something for someone else while expecting nothing in return. Real love is selfless. ***Paul said, "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor. 13:13)***



Final Thoughts:

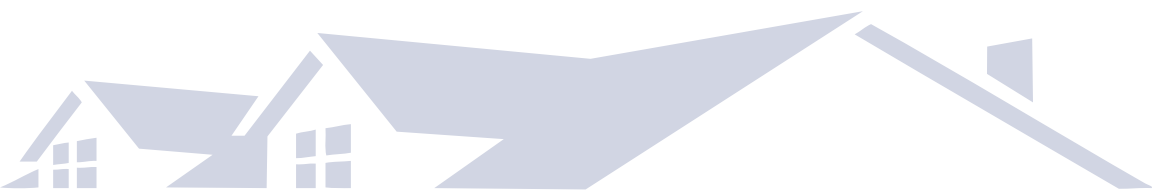
Friendship is one of the greatest gifts in life. However, it's also a gift that often goes unwrapped. **Proverbs 24:8a says, "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly."** To have friends, you first must be a friend. Be the kind of friend that you yourself would like to have. If you want a caring friend, take time to care for someone else. If you want a friend who listens to you, become a good listener. Healthy friendships begin with you. You will only get out what you put in.

Steps for Growth:

a) Of the five essentials of a healthy friendship, which one in your opinion lacks the most in friendships and why?

b) What are the dangers, if any, of not having all the five essentials, such as candor or compassion?

c) Describe a time when a friend was there for you or made a significant impact in your life.



The Foundation of

The Fruit



Part One

Ice Breaker:

What do you think is the best evidence of a Spirit-filled life?

Key Verse: Galatians 5:22-23

Introduction:

As you grow in a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, you begin to develop and produce what the Bible calls, “the fruit of the Spirit”. Producing fruit is the secret to living a fulfilled life. It is a process of growing and becoming the person God wants you to be. The key is that we must be closely connected to Jesus Christ. Jesus said, ***“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)***

Why did God choose fruit to symbolize a Spirit-filled life? Here are two reasons:

- **Fruit grows** – maturing into who God wants you to be takes time. It’s a continual process that must be worked at on a daily basis.

• **Fruit is proof** – fruit is sign that you are connected to a living source. For instance, apples grow on apple trees. A life connected to Jesus should reflect Him.

Below is a table that groups the nine fruits of the Spirit into two “fruit baskets”.

The Fruit of the Spirit	
<i>Basket One</i> The Relationship Fruits	<i>Basket Two</i> The Character Fruits
1. Love	6. Joy
2. Kindness	7. Peace
3. Goodness	8. Patience
4. Faithfulness	9. Self-Control
5. Gentleness	

In this lesson, we'll focus first on the Relationship Fruits, which deal mainly with our attitude and behavior towards other people.

The Five Relationship Fruits:

1. Love

Love is a lifestyle. It is not something you simply learn and understand—it's something you do. Biblically speaking, love is a behavior, not just warm emotions or feelings. In fact, how you treat others actually defines your love. **According to 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, love is: patient, kind, content, humble, undemanding, gentle, forgiving and fair.** Notice how all of these visible attributes are related to your attitude and behavior towards other people. For instance, dealing with difficult people often requires patience. Or sometimes you have to forgive

someone for an offense or hurt they may have caused. One of the greatest signs of love is unselfishness—putting others before yourself. Love sets the pace for all of the other fruits.

2. Kindness

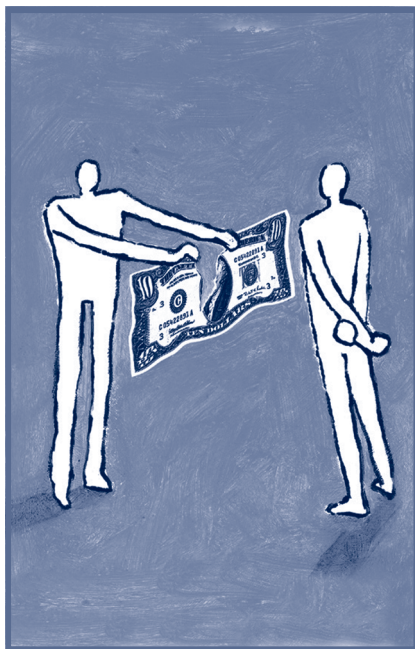
Kindness is reaching out. As told in Mark chapter 1, a man with leprosy came to Jesus and begged for healing. Feeling a deep sense of compassion for him, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. Miraculously, the man was cleansed at that exact moment. It's easy to focus on the "healing" as the only miracle. However, the hidden miracle here is that Jesus Christ reached out in kindness, and touched this man's problem. Whether it is a



friend in need, or a homeless man who is hungry, your kindness can change their lives. Far too often we feel sorry for others, but don't act upon it. Throughout your day, listen to the Holy Ghost as he prompts you to be kind to your family members, neighbors, coworkers, and anyone else who crosses your path.

3. Goodness

Goodness is living generously. The word “goodness” is used twenty times in the Bible, and it describes moral character. And again, this is more than about what you say, but about what you do. It is acting in good ways, as the Holy Ghost prompts us to treat people the way Jesus would. Yet there seems to be some confusion about goodness because Jesus himself said, ***“Why do you call me good?” “No one is good—except God alone.” (Mark 10:18)***. The point is not that God saves all goodness for Himself, but that apart from Him there is nothing good. In other words, goodness flows from our good God. Paul told the Romans, ***“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good” (Romans 12:9)***. Goodness is something we decide to do. It is to closely imitate the generosity of Christ towards others.



4. Faithfulness

Faithfulness is about loyal relationships. Being faithful to God and His word establishes our relationship with him. In fact, we will be judged on how faithful we were to God. It's everyone's goal to hear God say, ***“Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matt. 25:23)***. However, faithfulness is also a virtue needed in our human relationships. In the context of marriage, it's about honoring your vows and keeping your commitment to one another.

A marriage is held together by a foundation of faithfulness and loyalty to please your spouse. In parenting, it stands for a commitment to raise, teach and protect your children. Faithfulness in parenting is not only about being present; it's about being involved and taking interest in your child's life. In a friendship, faithfulness is being reliable, especially during difficult times. **Proverbs 17:17 tells us, "A friend loves at all times..."**

5. Gentleness

Gentleness is the strength of tenderness. Gentleness or meekness should not be misunderstood as weakness or a lack of strength. It is however, tempered strength, or power under control. In a culture that has become increasingly aggressive, hostile and callous, gentleness is a rare quality. The world says, **"Blessed are the strong, who can hold their own."** But remember what **Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."** (Matt. 5:5). The gentle ones inherit the earth, meaning; they gain Godly favor and spiritual dominion. Let's not forget that gentleness helps you form healthier relationships, even with difficult people. Instead of fighting with people who have negative attitudes, you can instill a sense of peace and composure. Gentleness is also contagious. As you practice being gentle, others will be influenced to do the same.

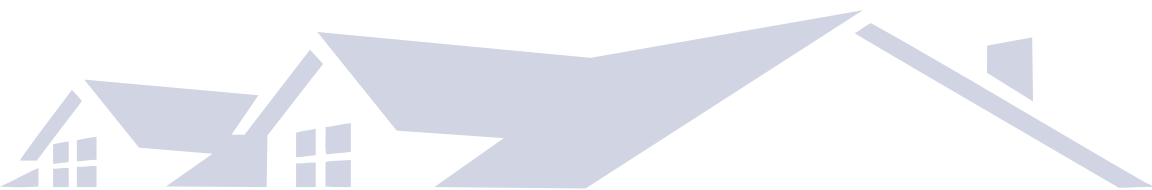


Final Thoughts:

Five out of nine spiritual fruits are directly connected to our relationships. It's clear that God wants us to represent Him well, and treat people the way Jesus did over 2000 years ago. We as believers are the only "image" of a loving God that our community, friends, and family will ever see. The more we nurture and cultivate these fruits, the more Christ will be seen through us. That is the greatest method of reaching our unsaved neighbors, family members, coworkers and friends. Start examining the fruits on your branches today. Maybe it's time to prune some wild limbs in your attitude and heart. When fruit is growing in your life, your relationships will be healthier, which makes for a fulfilling, more satisfying life.

Steps for Growth:

- a) Why do you think God chose "fruit" to symbolize a life that is filled with His Spirit?
- b) Of the five relationship fruits, which one or two are the most difficult to cultivate, and why?
- c) Describe a time when one of your relationship fruits made a significant impression on someone's life. How did you feel?



Lesson 11

The Foundation of

The Fruit



OF THE **SPIRIT**

Part Two

Ice Breaker:

Why do you think God chose fruit to represent a Spirit-filled life?

Key Verse: Galatians 5:22-23

Introduction:

Producing fruit is a process of growing and becoming the person God wants you to be. When our lives are fully committed to God and we are determined to obey him, we will bear the fruit of Christ. Jesus said, ***“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (John 15:8)*** Based on this scripture, we discover two indispensable truths about the purpose of fruit in our lives.

- ***Fruit brings glory to God*** – Jesus said, “This is to my Father’s glory.” Bearing fruit pleases God and brings glory to His name.

- ***Fruit shows that we belong to God*** – Jesus said that you are, ***“showing yourselves to be my disciples”***. Fruit tells the world that we are followers of Jesus Christ.

Below is a table that groups the nine fruits of the spirit into two “fruit baskets”.

The Fruit of the Spirit	
<i>Basket One</i> The Relationship Fruits	<i>Basket Two</i> The Character Fruits
1. Love	6. Joy
2. Kindness	7. Peace
3. Goodness	8. Patience
4. Faithfulness	9. Self-Control
5. Gentleness	

Let’s focus on the character fruits, which deal mainly with our heart and temperament. These particular fruits help you to deal with life’s difficulties, and also wean you away from habits and attitudes that could hurt your relationship with God.

The Four Character Fruits:

1. Joy

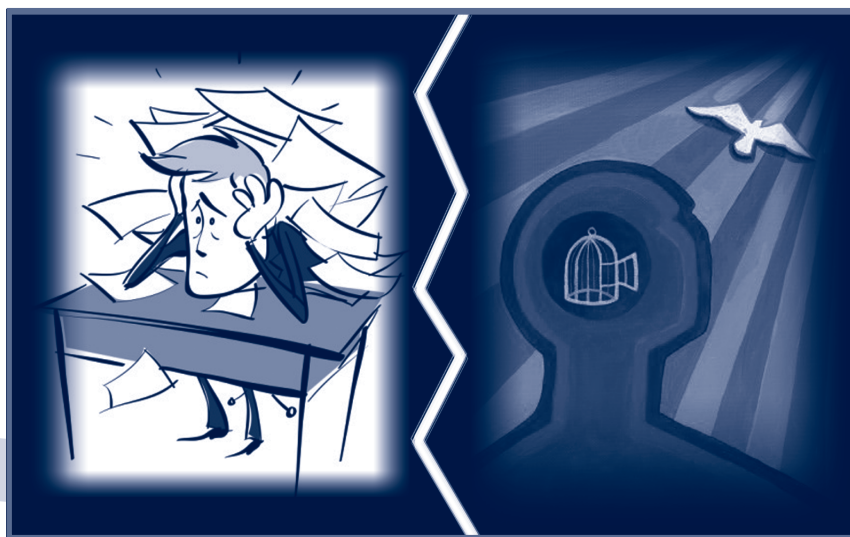
Joy is rejoicing in any situation. ***Paul told the Philippians, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Phil. 4:4).*** Everyone wants to be happy. The problem with happiness, however, is that it changes with your circumstances. You can be happy today and sad tomorrow. Joy is much different because it’s an attitude, not an emotion.

Paul also said, ***“...We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance.” (Rom. 5:3).*** You can have joy in the midst of pain and problems because your spirit knows that something positive is coming. Joy is not conditional—it’s relational. It’s based on your relationship with

Jesus Christ. Whether times are good or bad, rejoice in the Lord. When you make a decision to rejoice, you unlock the secret source of strength. (Ref. Neh. 8:10)

2. Peace

Peace is living without anxiety. ***Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** Anxiety is an unsettled feeling that haunts your heart and mind with unreal concerns. Much of it stems from negative thinking and worrying about things that haven’t even happened. You add further frustration and worry when you say things like, “Things will never get better”. Peace is the exact opposite of anxiety. When there is peace in your heart, you can maintain an optimistic attitude. How? Because you recognize that God is in control of everything. So even if your situation is uncomfortable, you can still live comfortably uncomfortable in God’s grace.



3. Patience

Patience is waiting without complaining. The Psalmist David penned, ***“Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him...” (Psalm 37:7-9).***

True patience isn’t when someone waits, yet complains and grumbles the entire time. Because you see, it isn’t just the time you spend waiting, it’s the attitude and heart you have while you wait. For instance, even though the Israelites waited to enter the Promised Land, a whole generation

could not enter because of “how” they waited. This is also the reason why God doesn’t bless certain people who are waiting for an answer. If your heart is angry with God, or bitter about the process, your character needs polishing. The other side of patience is tolerance when dealing with irritating or difficult people. It might mean biting your tongue, so to speak, or giving someone a second chance.



4. Self-Control

Self-control is taming your passions. ***Romans 8:13 says, “For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.” Self-control is about one word, “Control”.*** And the question is, “Who or what controls you?” An alcoholic is controlled by liquor. A substance abuser is controlled by drugs. A liar is controlled by the lies he or she tells. An angry person is

controlled by the things that get him or her angry. A lustful person is controlled by sexual images and urges, such as pornography or promiscuity. Sometimes even healthy things, such as eating or working, can become addictive and swing us out of balance. Without self-control, one lacks the ability to resist temptation or manage his or her mood. The human appetite is strong. But God's Spirit empowers us to overcome it.

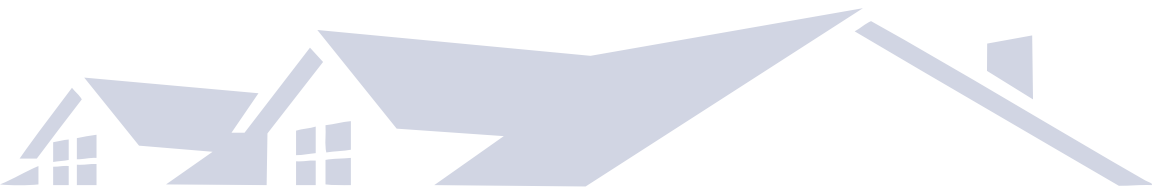
Final Thoughts:

The key to producing the fruit of the Spirit is to continue cultivating your relationship with Jesus Christ. The more time you spend with the Lord—praying, reading the Bible, and fellowshiping with other believers, the stronger your roots will become. The healthier your roots are, the healthier your fruits will be. Feed yourself a healthy spiritual diet. If you feed your fleshly passions, those will prevail and produce their own kind of fruit. But if you feed your spiritual hunger, you will produce fruit that is colorful, plump and ripe. Keep in mind also, that producing ripe spiritual fruit is a process of learning and growing. It's all worth it because you're giving God glory, and the world is noticing that you are one of His disciples.



Steps for Growth:

- a) In what ways do these fruits bring glory to God, and identify you as his follower?
- b) Of the five character fruits, which one or two are the most difficult to cultivate, and why?
- c) Describe a time when one of your character fruits made a significant impact in your life, or saved you from a problem.



The **Foundation** of



Ice Breaker:

Do you think our doctrine is being challenged more these days? If so, how?

Key Verse: Titus 2:1; 2 Timothy 4:2-4

Introduction:

The stronger your relationship with Jesus Christ becomes, the more valuable His principles will be. Especially in an age of delusion, false teachings, and misled movements, sound Biblical doctrine is sitting at center stage. Webster's dictionary defines "doctrine" as; something that is taught; a principle or position or the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or system of belief; a principle of law established through past decisions.

The Apostolic doctrine, then, are the principles taught and practiced by the Apostles. They are the principles that guide us and shape our distinct identity in Christ. However, blurred doctrinal lines and various branches of Pentecostalism can send mixed messages about what is truth—and what isn't. Perhaps you're wondering, why is it important to teach and apply sound doctrine?



- **To defend** – many have succumbed to enticing teachings, abandoning the Apostolic principles that saved them. **1 Timothy 4:1 says, “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.”** For this reason, we must learn how to defend and contend for the truth.

- **To decode** – in an age filled with charismatic and clever teachers who blend truth with lies, we must be able to distinguish what is truth. **1 Timothy 4:2 goes on to say, “Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.”**

Based on 2 Timothy 4:2, let’s consider four ways to preserve sound doctrine in our churches and lives.

Four Ways to Preserve Sound Doctrine:

1. Preach Openly

The word “preach” in Greek means: **“to herald, to publish, to proclaim openly, to preach, public proclamation.”** When thinking of a preacher, we generally visualize a pastor or minister standing behind a pulpit and delivering a sermon. That is definitely one way to preach. However, preaching (by definition) isn’t limited to the clergy. Think of all the ways and

methods you can proclaim or even publish the Gospel to your community. Don't let your pastor be the only one proclaiming the truth. Those who follow Jesus Christ are to be a light in a dark world, a witness of God's great mercy and grace. You have a voice, a vehicle for preaching and practicing sound doctrine. Away with the notion that you have to be a great orator to share God's word. You can preach, sing, write, publish, draw and **most importantly** demonstrate the Gospel every day. Like a family recipe or story, the more we repeat it...the more we preserve it.

2. Reprove Studiously

To correct is to admonish, to expose, to bring to light. This was part of Paul's counsel to Timothy about maintaining sound doctrine. In order to bring God's word to light, we must study it daily. Many are led off course from the Apostolic truth because they themselves have not studied and become knowledgeable in God's word. Their minds haven't fully grasped the principles that our faith is built upon. As a result they cling to a false teaching without reproof and testing its validity. Then there are those who were raised with sound doctrine, but only cling to the Apostolic heritage—not the doctrine. Because of this, a mind can easily be swayed by a teaching or philosophy that has the appearance of truth.



It's your responsibility to reprove and search the scriptures—ensuring that what you hear is supported by God's word. Paul also told Timothy to, ***“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”*** (2 Tim. 2:15)

3. Rebuke Carefully

Rebuking is similar to “correcting” and “reproving” because it too involves exposing the truth. However, the difference is that there is a much stronger and personal application to a rebuke. It is to: ***“reprove, to admonish severely, to censure sharply, to charge sharply.”*** Rebuking, then, is not enjoyable, but necessary to preserving sound doctrine. When Paul gave these instructions to Timothy, there were many false teachers and doctrines floating around. Such is the case in the 21st century. We are facing a



tidal wave of false doctrines, which are cleverly painted with a Pentecostal brush. If someone is adopting the traits of or is leaning towards a false doctrine, a rebuke may be appropriate. A rebuke is not meant to condemn, but to realign someone's direction. ***Here's a word of caution:*** unless you are a pastor, or in a position of spiritual leadership, you want to exercise great caution if rebuking anyone. As Paul said, these things should be done ***“with great patience and careful instruction.”*** The wrong approach could do more damage than help.

4. Encourage Lovingly

Finally, Paul instructs Timothy to encourage the family of God. It is to: ***“comfort, to entreat, to exhort.”*** True Christianity should be lived in a way that honors God, and gives people hope, strength, and guidance. Simply bearing the ***fruits of the Spirit*** will help you encourage others. You might be wondering, “What does this have to do with preserving sound doctrine?” The answer is this: no matter how true our doctrine is, if we have bad personal skills, people will be tempted to listen to a friendlier voice—a voice that could be teaching false doctrine. We simply cannot ignore the relationship factor and how it plays a role in people’s faith. God’s word must not only be spoken, but it must be demonstrated. ***2 Corinthians 3:3 says, “You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”*** Let’s do our best to be patient with people—considering their struggles, and sharing the Word through our actions. This will encourage people to cling tightly to the doctrine we preach.



Final Thoughts:

According to Ephesians 2:20, God's family (church), is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." Our very foundation is built on the doctrine and practices of the apostles, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone—holding everything together. If doctrine is tampered with, the foundation is weakened. The Apostle Paul said, "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." This describes exactly what is happening today. So it's our responsibility to do all we can to preserve and protect the Apostle's teachings.

Steps for Growth:

- a) Of the four ways to preserve sound doctrine, which one is often disregarded, and why?
- b) Based on the previous question, how can we as a church and as individuals improve this?
- c) Discuss some of the obvious false teachings that may be surfacing or gaining momentum in this generation. Also, what more can we do to contend for sound doctrine?

