

the STRATEGY of *Jesus*
FRIENDSHIP GROUPS

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12 Apostolic Foundations

TWELVE LESSONS OF CONSOLIDATION
for *Friendship* Groups

*By Ismael Martín del Campo
and Jacob Rodríguez*



DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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



Presentation



With great joy we present to all pastors in the United States of America and in all nations where the Apostolic Assembly preaches, the second manual of consolidation for our Friendship Groups, which we have titled **“12 Apostolic Foundations”**

Our desire is to connect the new believers which the Lord is adding to our congregations in our cell groups with the Apostolic Doctrine. For this, we have developed these lessons, based on 12 of our doctrinal principles.

These lessons are very important, because the key of the entire Strategy of Jesus program is consolidation.

Our Apostolic Assembly since the beginning has had much success in taking thousands of people, every year, to baptism in water in the name of Jesus Christ.

Our weak point (as in almost every Christian denomination), has been consolidating. Our challenge is to learn to retain all those who are baptized, know how to disciple them and then send them to also be fishers of men.

My prayers are for this manual to be very useful in the task of retaining new believers. We say as Jesus said, **“That no one should perish!”**



Bishop Ismael Martín del Campo,
President, Strategy of Jesus Committee.

Table of Contents

- 5** *The foundation of The Church your spiritual family*
- 11** *The Foundation of The Only God: Your Friend*
- 17** *The Foundation of Jesus Christ: God Became Man*
- 23** *The Foundation of The Holy Spirit: God Living in You*
- 29** *The Foundation of Baptism in Water: Obedience for Salvation*
- 35** *The Foundation of The Lord's Supper: Meal of the Master*
- 41** *The Foundation of The Resurrection of Jesus: Our Guarantee*
- 47** *The Foundation of The Resurrection of the Righteous*
- 53** *The Foundation of The Rapture of the Church: The Journey Home*
- 59** *The Foundation of Divine Healing: Jesus Heals Today*
- 65** *The Foundation of Holiness: Living to Please God*
- 71** *The Foundation of Marriage: Two Becoming One*
- 

The **Foundation** of

The Church

YOUR SPIRITUAL
FAMILY



Ice Breaker:

What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of a "church"?

Key Verse: 2 Cor. 6:18 (NIV)

Introduction:

When you were born again (baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost) you were born into God's family—namely "the church". Sadly, the church oftentimes falls prey to mistaken identity, and is misunderstood for being something that it's not. Many think of the church as a religious institution, a social club, a business, or perhaps a physical building. Before we discuss the benefits of belonging to God's family, let's dispel a few misconceptions about church.

• **The church is a religious institution** – if you look up "Christianity" in a dictionary, it will define it as a religion. On the

contrary, Jesus Christ never intended to start a religion, but a family of followers. Romans 8:16 says, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

- **The church is a building** – even though we often refer to church as a building, it’s actually not. In fact, the word “church” comes from the Greek word “Ecclesia” which means “an assembly,” or “called out ones.” The church is a body of people.

- **Attending a church service makes you a member** – there’s a big difference between attending a church service, and belonging to a church family. You can attend a service periodically or week-to-week, and never fully belong to the family. Church is not a place to attend, but a family to belong to.

Two relationships change when we become followers of Christ: **(1) God becomes our Father. (2) Other believers become our brothers and sisters.** This is your spiritual family tree.

A family tree is a tree-shaped chart showing how everyone in the family is related. For the remainder of this lesson, we’re going to look at your spiritual family tree, and how to nurture these vital relationships.



Nurturing my Spiritual Family Tree:

1. God is your Father

a) Treat Him like a Dad.

The apostle Paul said in *Romans 8:15*, “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’” The word “**Abba**” is an Aramaic word that implies “**daddy, or beloved dad**”. Although the title “father” is a frequent term for addressing God, it also has a formal tone. If you have a close relationship with your father, you probably wouldn’t call him “father”—but “dad”.

God desires an informal relationship with you. He wants to be your dad, someone you can approach and know on an intimate level. Talk openly to Him. Let your guard down and be yourself.



b) Trust Him like a Child. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (*Matt. 18:3*). In order for God to be our father—our dad, we must become His children. A child doesn’t worry about his needs; nor does he stress about tomorrow. That’s the kind of attitude that pleases God. In reality, God is glorified when we abandon self-reliance and fully depend on His goodness. God enjoys when

we leap up into His arms and forget about our worries. Let's not lose our childlike wonder, our pure and simplistic faith in Jesus. Let's preserve our sense of awe about God's grace and mercy.

2. Other Believers are your Siblings



a) Show Love. Like every family, you must love your spiritual brothers and sisters. In fact, it's a commandment, not a suggestion. Jesus said, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another"* (John 13:34-35). Love is not just an emotion; it's an attitude—a

behavior. We show love for one another by being kind, compassionate, friendly, forgiving, and patient. We all need the support and encouragement of each other to make it through difficult times and reach our potential.

b) Show Respect. The apostle Paul said, *"Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity"* (1 Tim. 5:1-2). Like every family, the church is made up of people with different ages, abilities, and characteristics. It's our responsibility to respect these differences and learn how to thrive together. Showing respect can be realized

when we follow the advice of Jesus, *“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets”* (Matt. 7:12). People know this as the Golden Rule. Basically, treat people the way you wanted to be treated.

Final Thoughts:

Whether in a home friendship group or worship service, your spiritual family creates the essential support you need. When we get together, we interact, encourage and nurture a strong network of faith. *Hebrews 10:25* says, *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another...”* Like a parent enjoys watching his or her kids get along, God enjoys seeing His family show love and respect for one another. Perhaps today you can evaluate where you are in God’s family and how you can develop stronger relationships.

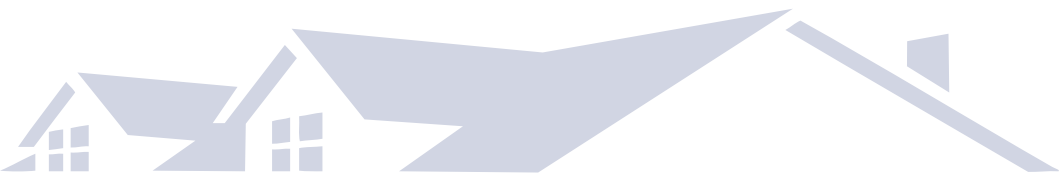


Steps for Growth:

a) Of the three misconceptions about church, which one do you think is most common, and most challenging to dispel?

b) Why do you think trusting God like a child is sometimes difficult to do? And, what can you do to trust Him better?

c) Concerning showing love and respect to your spiritual siblings, which one can we improve on and why?



The **Foundation** of

The Only God:



Ice Breaker:

How would you describe a true friend?

Key Verse: John 15:15 (NIV)

Introduction:

There's a growing consensus today, that God created man because He was lonely or needed a friend. While the notion seems harmless, it's actually a misunderstanding. In truth, God was **God** long before He ever created man. He is self-sufficient and completely secure in His own being. God has never lacked or needed anything—nor has He ever experienced loneliness.

None of these truths shed weight off your inherent value in the eyes of God. Consider this fact: not everything you **need** is something you instinctively **want**. The truth is, God wanted you alive. He did not need to create you; rather He chose to create you for His personal delight. Revelation 4:11



says, “...for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” God formed us for an intimate friendship with Him. Let’s discuss the kind of friendship God desires, and some tips to preserve it.

God Desires a Friendship that is:

1. Pure

The Apostle Paul said, **“I fear...your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ”** (2 Cor. 11:3). Over the course of time, we all collect ideas, experiences, knowledge, emotions and habits. Think of these things as filters. Filters can be useful to catch impurities or solids, such as coffee filter. Spiritually, however, filters can be harmful and actually dilute our relationship with God. We may not be guilty of great sins, but in the process of living, our pure affection for Jesus can wear thin. The filters of life can create frustration, undue burden and tension.

If we’re not careful, we can even become like the church in Ephesus, whose good works watered down their passion—causing them to lose their **“first love”**. (Ref. Rev. 2:2-4) **Jesus said, “Unless you become as a little child, you will not enter the kingdom of Heaven”** (Matthew 18:3). In other words, never lose your simple wonder about the grace and glory of God.

2. Personal


Anytime someone says, ***“This is off the record”***, what they’re about to say is personal and straightforward. It may be risky or even impulsive, but it’s ***honest*** nonetheless. The Old Testament system of relationship with God was overloaded with preconditions, bureaucracy and separation—most notably the veil inside the temple. This basically promoted division, instead of intimacy with God. However, when Jesus died on the cross, the veil in the temple was torn from the top down. This was God saying, “I want our friendship to be personal again, without ceremonial rituals and red tape.” Nothing pleases God more than when we engage an intimate, unscripted relationship with Him. David said, ***“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties”*** (Ps 139:23). Give God a backstage pass to your heart and allow Him probe even your deepest secrets.

3. Priority

Life is full of distractions. The demands at work and obligations at home constantly fight for our attention. Sooner or later you can find yourself strapped for time and wondering where God fits into the picture. Jesus said, ***“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you”*** (Matt. 6:33).



When we hear this verse, we sometimes think about the following list:

- 
1. God
 2. Spouse (Marriage)
 3. Children
 4. Ministry/church
 5. Career

The truth is, this list can put your key relationships at odds—something that God never intended. This lifestyle can create tension, dissatisfaction and guilt. Jesus wasn't implying that you had to select a church activity over your anniversary or child's birthday. That would mean He wants to **replace** that relationship with Himself. This mentality also breeds competition, whereby your loved ones have to contend for your time and attention. Rather, in all that you do, honor God and seek His covering. This way, your primary relationship with God establishes and blesses your relationships with others. Your list should look more like this:



1. God – Spouse (Marriage)
2. God – Children
3. God – Ministry/church
4. God – Career

Final Thoughts:

From the beginning with Adam and Eve, God desired a pure loving relationship. After the Fall, however, that pure friendship was broken. And because man was helpless to reclaim God, God came to us as Jesus Christ and paid for our sins on the cross.

The Lord reclaimed us! 2 Corinthians 5:18 says, ***“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ...”*** Relationship with God is possible only because of His grace. However, now it’s up to you to accept His invitation of friendship.

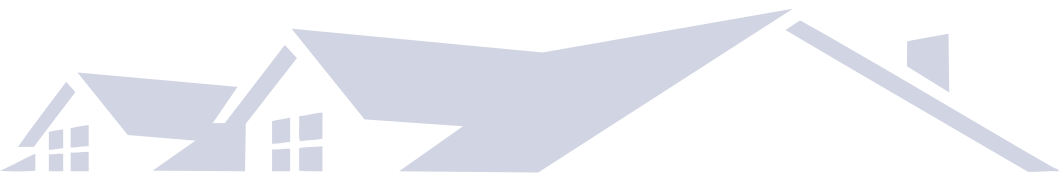


Steps for Growth:

a) How does becoming like a child keep our faith simple and pure?

b) What can we do to make our relationship with God more personal? (Example: Speak honestly in prayer).

c) Based on point #3, discuss the balance between your relationship God, and your relationships with others. Has your perceptiveness changed?



The Foundation of

Jesus Christ:

GOD

BECAME MAN

Ice Breaker:

Who is Jesus Christ to you?

Key Verse: 1 Timothy 3:16; John 1:1-3, 14 (NKJV)

Introduction:

The greatest miracle of all time happened when a baby named “Jesus” was born into the world. Why, you ask? The answer is because this wasn’t just any child, but God manifested in human flesh. Jesus Christ wasn’t just a philosopher, a prophet, or a third person in a trinity—He was, and is the only God.

Knowing **who** Jesus is cannot fall into the shadows of what Jesus did. In other words, many professing Christians today focus entirely on the works, teaching and lifestyle of Jesus Christ—which is not to be devalued. However, understanding the true nature of Jesus is paramount—which happens to be the dividing line between Oneness Apostolic doctrine and mainstream Trinitarian doctrine. According to scripture, we believe in two fundamental truths about God:

1. There is one indivisible God with no separation of “persons” (Deut. 6:4; Eph. 4:5-6).

2. Jesus Christ is the full embodiment of God—Father, Son and Holy Ghost (Col. 2:9; 2 Cor. 5:19).

The Father, Son and Holy Ghost describe the various roles and works of God. Unlike Trinitarian doctrine, however, we reject these titles as evidence of God’s threeness, but contend that all exist concurrently *in* Jesus Christ. Not only is the nature of Jesus essential for sound doctrine, but it also has real life significance. Let’s consider the dual nature (two roles) of Jesus Christ.



Understanding the Dual Nature of Jesus Christ:

1. Jesus is fully God (Divine Nature)

a) **The Son of God.** Long before Jesus came, His birth was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, ***“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel”*** (Is. 7:14). The name ***“Immanuel”*** literally means, ***“God with us”***. Colossians 2:9 says, ***“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.”*** Jesus is the full and total embodiment of God, not merely an incarnation of one of three divine persons. Accepting Jesus as the Son of God means accepting Him as God. Jesus is called the Son of God because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, not man. Essentially, Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the physical expression of God’s total nature.

Keep in Mind: If Jesus were not God, He would not have accepted worship (John 20:28), forgave sins (Mark 2:5-7), or claimed oneness with God (John 10:29-30).

b) **The Savior.** Isaiah 43:11 says, ***“...I am the LORD, And besides Me there is no savior.”*** The heartbeat of the Bible is that our Creator became our Savior. John 3:16 says, ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*** This scripture uncovers the greatest love story of all time—that a holy and glorious God would wrap Himself in human flesh, live among us, and then be crucified on the cross for our sins. 1 Peter 3:18 says, ***“For***

Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18).

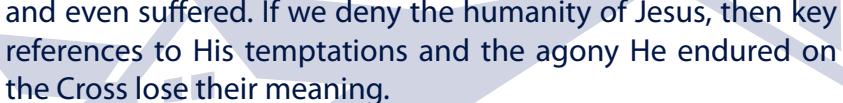
2. Jesus is fully man

(Human Nature)

a) **The Son of Man.** In order to truly understand who Jesus is, we must recognize that He was entirely human. Galatians 4:4 says, ***“...God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.”*** As God, Jesus existed in eternity (Micah 5:2). But as a man, He was born a baby (Luke 2:7). As God, Jesus never changes (Heb. 13:8). But as a man, He grew mentally, physically and socially (Luke 2:52). As God, Jesus was the Bread of life (John 6:35). But as a man, He hungered (Matt. 4:2).

Jesus can identify with us as humans in every way, except sin. Hebrews 4:15 portrays the delicate balance between the dual nature of Jesus. It says, ***“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”*** As a man, Jesus can empathize with our difficulties, but as God He has the ability to grant us mercy and grace.

Keep in Mind: As a real man, Christ prayed, wept, obeyed and even suffered. If we deny the humanity of Jesus, then key references to His temptations and the agony He endured on the Cross lose their meaning.





b) The Servant. John 13:4-5 describes a time when Jesus washed His disciples feet. He became a servant. Philippians 2:7-8 says that Jesus, “...**made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!**” Because Jesus was God, He could have demanded royal treatment. Instead, Jesus willingly humbled Himself. The One who had every right to be exalted and excused from work, did not want to puff Himself up.

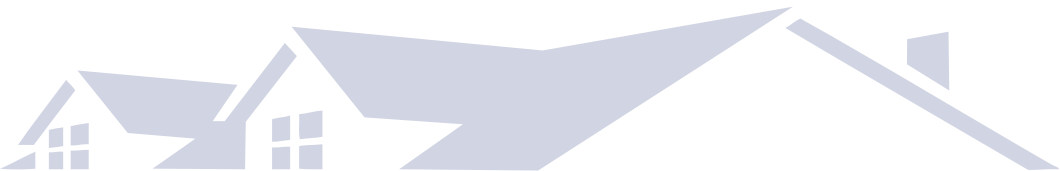
People line up for jobs they consider important, glamorous, or respected. But Jesus demonstrated humility by doing what no one wanted to do.

Final Thoughts:

Sadly, the true nature of Jesus often becomes the fine print in Christianity. Although some beliefs are shared between Trinitarians and Oneness believers, we do not share the same viewpoint about our most fundamental doctrines. This is where we must guard the truth with clear understanding and watch for blurred lines in what we read, see and listen to. As our key verse says, **“God was manifested in the flesh...”** (1 Timothy 3:16). God was made visible in flesh through Jesus Christ. Understanding this truth is more than an intellectual achievement. It’s about appreciating the untold depths of God’s love for us.

Steps for Growth:

- a) Why do you think it’s important to understand the human nature of Jesus Christ?
- b) According to John 3:16, what was God’s motivation for coming to us as a man? And why is that important?
- c) As a man, Jesus became a servant and even washed His disciples’ feet. What practical lessons can you take away from that example?



The **Foundation** of

The Holy Spirit:

GOD

LIVING IN YOU

Ice Breaker:

In a few words, how would you describe the “Holy Spirit”?

Key Verse: Acts 1:8; 2:38

Introduction:

In today’s lesson we’re going to discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian.

So that we have a solid base to work from, let’s quickly review the roles and works described by the terms Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “Father” refers to God in family relationship to humanity; “Son” refers to God in the flesh; and Spirit refers to God in activity. As we discussed in the prior lesson—all three functions exist in Jesus Christ.

Let’s answer three common questions about the Holy Spirit:



• **Who is the Holy Spirit?**

The Holy Spirit is simply God. God is holy (1 Peter 1:16) and He is a Spirit (John 4:24). The term speaks of God in action (Gen. 1:2).

• **Is the Holy Spirit different from the Holy Ghost?**

The terms “Holy Spirit” and “Holy Ghost” are interchangeable. They mean the same thing. Biblically speaking, either term is perfectly acceptable.

• **Why do we need the Holy Spirit?** Primarily, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is part of New Testament salvation—and is not an optional gift that only select Christians can receive (John 3:5; Titus 3:5).

Nearly two thousand years ago, on the Day of Pentecost, 120 Christ-followers were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues as the Spirit enabled them. In fact, there were men of God in the Old Testament who prophesied about this great outpour. One of the first references came from the prophet Isaiah when he said, “For with stammering lips an another tongue He will speak to this people.” (Isaiah 28:11). Stammering lips, or speaking in tongues, is the initial evidence that one has received the Holy Spirit. The prophet Joel also said, **“And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh...”** (Joel 2:28)

Three Essential Qualities of the Holy Spirit:

1. The Promise of the Holy Spirit

Acts 1:4 says, ***“And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father...”*** The same Spirit that fell on the 120 followers in the Upper Room is available for us today. Certain scholars today argue that the baptism of the Spirit with speaking in tongues is not for the present church. Quite the contrary, God desires to fill everyone with His Spirit. The apostle Peter said, ***“For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”*** (Acts 2:39). The Holy Spirit is promised to who believe on Christ and obey His word.

2. The Power of the Holy Spirit

Acts 1:8 says, ***“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*** Of all the possible words to represent what the Holy Spirit would bring, Jesus chose the word “power”. Essentially, when you receive the baptism



of the Spirit, God's power is transferred and imparted into your spirit. For that reason alone, your life will never be the same. When God's power dwells in you, you are enabled to be a witness for Jesus Christ. In Acts 1:8, you'll notice that Jesus didn't expect the disciples to fulfill their mission until they had received the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. The Purpose of the Holy Spirit

Receiving the Holy Spirit is not just about feeling good—it's about purpose. The foremost role of the Holy Spirit is to give us the same possibilities of relationship with God and power that Jesus had in His earthly ministry. Although Holy Spirit has multiple purposes, let's review four of them:

1) Guides to Truth (John 16:13) – having the Holy Spirit enables you to understand and grasp the meaning of Scriptures. Like a light switch turns on the light in a dark room, the Spirit illuminates truth and helps us comprehend God's will.



2) Gives Direction (Romans 8:14) – being filled with the Holy Spirit is like having an inner navigation system (GPS) that leads you through life's many choices, decisions and struggles. The closer your relationship with God is, the better you can hear His directions.

3) Grants Authority

(Mark 16:17-18) – the Holy Spirit gives us authority over sickness and spiritual powers. No matter what comes against the people of God, we are over-comers. 1 John 4:4 says, ***“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”***



4) Generates Fruit (Galatians 5:22-23) – when the Holy Spirit dwells in you, there should be a spiritual outgrowth that changes how you live. The Bible calls this ***“the fruit of the Spirit”***. Fruit is the ongoing sign that you are connected to a living source. For instance, oranges grow on orange trees. A life connected to Jesus should reveal His character.

Final Thoughts:

A person can receive the Holy Spirit by repenting, putting faith in God, and simply asking God for His gift (Acts 2:38). Also, we should always expect speaking in tongues as the initial evidence when someone receives the Spirit. Once you receive the Spirit into your life, you should nourish that relationship through prayer, reading your Bible, and communing with other followers of Christ. Doing these things won't change the Holy Spirit (who is God living in you), but it will change you from the inside out. You will gradually grow in holiness

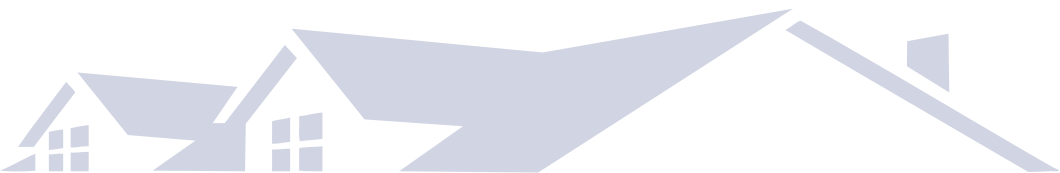
and obedience to God. Remember, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a normal, essential experience with God. If you have not received this gift, you are encouraged to seek it today. If you have already received this gift, perhaps your spiritual man needs to be rekindled with a fresh spark of desire for God.

Steps for Growth:

a) If you can recall, who is the Holy Spirit and what does this term speak of?

b) In this lesson we discussed four purposes of the Holy Spirit. Which one(s) do you feel is most overlooked or forgotten, and why?

c) Discuss as a group the personal blessings you have experienced because of the Holy Spirit—God living in you.



The **Foundation** of

Baptism in Water:

OBEDIENCE
FOR SALVATION



Ice Breaker:

If someone asked you what “baptism in Jesus Name” is, and why it’s important, would you be able to explain it?

Key Verse: Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21

Introduction:

As we discuss the various foundations of the Christian life, it’s important to discuss and revisit one of the hallmark doctrines of the Apostolic faith. This is none other than **water baptism** in the Name of Jesus. You will find, as with other Apostolic doctrines, the true meaning and practice of water baptism becomes the fine print that divides us from many Evangelical movements. Raising the bar of understanding will help us share, preserve and if necessary—defend the precious doctrine handed down from the Apostles.

God’s grace makes salvation possible, but we still must express faith by yielding to God and obeying His Word. Make

no mistake: water baptism (full immersion) in Jesus Name is indeed an act of obedience and is an **essential part of salvation**. It is more than an emblematic ceremony and not merely a public profession of faith. Water baptism is part of the New Birth experience that Jesus spoke of (John 3:3-5). For the remainder of this lesson, let's review what takes place when we are baptized in Jesus Name.

Through Baptism in Jesus Name, We Are:

1. Cleared of Sins

Acts 2:38 says, **"...Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** Forgiveness of sins is available through the atonement of Jesus, but is applied when we express faith in God and obey the formula given in Acts 2:38—repent and be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ. When you are baptized, God deletes the trace of sin in your life.



Baptism, along with authentic repentance, cancels out the ironclad penalty of sin. No longer are you a helpless captive, but the charges against you are dropped. Acts 22:16 says, **"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."**

2. Covered by the Blood of Jesus

The tangible water you're baptized into does not have any saving power in of itself. It is not a magic trick, and only has value when paired with genuine faith and repentance. God ordained baptism, and it is through your obedience that permits the blood of Jesus to scrub out the stains of sin on your life. Jesus said, ***"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"*** (Matthew 26:28). Through repentance and water baptism, the blameless blood of Jesus is appropriated to us.

3. Connected to God's Family

John 3:5 says, ***"...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."*** When you are baptized in the Name of Jesus, you are born again into God's family. This is part of the new birth process Jesus alluded to in John 3:5—which involves being born of water and Spirit. God's ***kingdom*** is synonymous with God's ***family***. No other method, including a sinners' prayer or public declaration can produce this essential new birth.

Keep in mind, for the new birth to be complete and to enter God's family, you need both baptism of water and Spirit. They are not two isolated experiences, rather one experience made up of two parts. If you've received baptism in water, but not the Holy Spirit (or vice versa), your new birth is unfinished.

4. Created in Christ

Galatians 3:27 says, ***“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”*** Through water baptism in Jesus Name, we are clothed with Christ. This doesn’t mean that God is going to buy you a new wardrobe, but a spiritual makeover—a change of identity. This is why the Name of Jesus is used at your moment of baptism. You are actually taking upon His Name and identifying with Him.

The Name of Jesus encompasses all the power and authority of God. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”*** Once you’re baptized, God no longer sees a depraved soul, but a son or daughter that bears His family Name.

Answers to Three Common Questions:

It’s one thing to believe these truths, and another to guard them. Let’s respond to several questions about water baptism in Jesus Name as a part of salvation. Hopefully you will feel more certain and better prepared to answer for your faith.

1. Does baptism really matter? Some may question the core purpose for baptism, which includes full immersion in water, and invoking the Name of Jesus. Baptism is a biblical command, not an option; nor is it left to modern interpretation or modification. Jesus commanded His disciples to go into the entire world, share the gospel, train disciples, and to ***baptize them*** (Matthew 28:19).

2. Didn't Jesus say to baptize in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Trinitarian doctrine usually points to Matthew 28:19 as the basis for baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, Matthew 28:19 describes only one "name" which is singular, not "names" which is plural. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three titles that describe the Name of Jesus Christ. Acts 4:12 says, ***"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."***

3. Isn't a public confession of faith or sinners' prayer sufficient? Trinitarian doctrine typically anchors on scriptures such as Romans 10:8-10 and 10:13 to support the claim that confessing Jesus as Lord and accepting Him into your heart is a formula for salvation. To begin with, Paul's letter to the Romans was addressed to Christians. He didn't need to rehash the blueprints of the new birth, because they had already experienced it. Paul simply wanted to remind them of how accessible salvation is. Secondly, to "confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus" (Romans 10:9) speaks of giving an honest, spoken confession that Jesus is Lord. For this to be valid, we must follow Jesus, yield ourselves to His Lordship and obey His commands.

True profession happens when we speak Jesus' Name at water baptism (Acts 22:16) and when we speak in tongues at the Spirit baptism (Acts 2:4). Oral confession can be a step towards salvation, but active faith and obedience must authenticate it.



Final Thoughts:

To be clear, a person doesn't have the power or ability to save himself. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."*** No matter how good of a life you lead, salvation cannot be earned. Salvation is a gift of God's lavish grace—made available through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus alone triumphs over every imaginable sin and breathes life into our souls. Salvation provides the escape route from the depravity of sin and reveals God's extravagant grace to repentant sinners. The water in the baptism can't save one thing about you. But the Name that is believed upon and called upon when baptized—Jesus Christ—has all the power and authority to rescue you from eternal suffering.

Steps for Growth:

a) As explained above, through baptism in Jesus Name, we are (1) cleared of sins, (2) covered by the blood of Jesus, (3) connected to God's family, and (3) created in Christ. Which one has made the biggest impression on you, and why?

b) Why do you think it's important to not only understand, but also share and possibly defend "Baptism in Jesus Name"?

c) Discuss as a group how being baptized has blessed your life, and how you can encourage others to take that same step.

The **Foundation** of

The Lord's Supper:

MEAL OF THE MASTER

Ice Breaker:

Have you ever participated in the Lord's Supper? If so, how was your experience?

Key Verse: Matthew 26:26-29

Introduction:

Today's lesson will focus on a spiritual sacrament that was instituted by Jesus Christ. As the Passover celebration approached, Jesus brought His disciples together for one last meal—called The Last Supper (Luke 22:7-20). Much to their surprise, Jesus changed a thousand-year tradition by claiming that the bread and the wine were symbols of His broken body and shed blood. Afterwards, Jesus commanded His followers to continue the sacrament in remembrance of Him. This practice is properly known as The Lord's Supper or Communion.

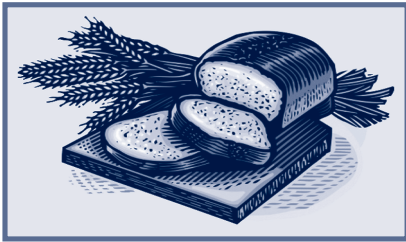
The Lord's Supper is not a somber tradition, but an intimate reflection on God's love. It's remembering how unimaginable

God's grace is; that the God who lives in eternity stepped into history, became a man, and then allowed Himself to be taken, beaten, brutalized and crucified. The Lord's Supper reminds us that the Author of life—Jesus Christ—allowed Himself to die in our place. Sin was our problem, not Jesus'. We should have been the ones on the Cross, not Jesus. When humanity begged for mercy, God gave us grace.

According to Matthew 26:26-29, There are three symbols in the Lord's Supper:

1. The Bread

The bread symbolizes the body of Jesus Christ.

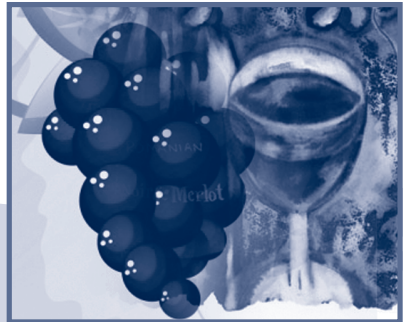


2. The Broken Bread

The broken loaf of bread symbolizes the death of Jesus Christ.

3. The Cup (fruit of the vine)

The fruit of the vine inside the cup symbolizes the blood of Jesus. His innocent blood is the permanent ink that seals our new covenant with God.



When Jesus introduced the communion to His disciples, it was never meant to become a heartless exercise, or a dull religious act. Rather a heartfelt, spiritual experience where followers of Christ remember His sacrifice. Although early Christians participated in the Lord's Supper, Paul was alarmed at how the communion was evolving in certain groups. As these issues bubbled up, Paul took action and restated the requirements for participating in the Lord's Supper.



Three Requirements to Participate in the Lord's Supper:

1. Enter the Body of Christ

(1 Cor. 11:17-22)

Paul insists that the Lord's Supper is all about Jesus, and for that reason, **is only for Christians**. However, being apart of the body of Christ isn't just about **conversion** (new birth), but **communion**. Paul drilled the Corinthians for participating in the Lord's Supper without authentic relationships. He basically accused the members of being "separately together", as cliques began to form based on social class. Back then, the Lord's Supper was held in people's homes. The wealthy would arrive first, sit in the best seats and were served the best food and wine. Sadly, once the poorer Christians arrived, the wealthy members were already stuffed and drunk. Not only did this dishonor Jesus Christ, it created division. The Lord's Supper is meant to be a source of unity.

2. Examine My Life (1

Cor. 17:23-34) – Before you partake of the Lord's Supper, you must examine yourself. Check your attitude, motives, desires, conduct and above all, repentant of any sin. Take inventory of your life and clean up the issues that keep festering in your heart. Maybe you need to patch things up with a friend or apologize to someone you may have offended. This could also be an opportunity to confront yourself about being selfish, judgmental, unfriendly, lazy or being too wrapped up in trivial matters.

Perhaps you need to ask yourself if you've lowered your spiritual bar and are not pursuing a holy life. All of this is done in preparation, so that when you partake of the Lord's Supper you don't violate or abuse its purpose.



3. Eliminate False gods (1 Cor. 10:15-22)

– The Lord's Supper is an outward mirror of an inward devotion to Jesus. We cannot please God and the world at the same time. Jesus once commented that a man couldn't serve two masters—two lords. This became an issue that the apostle Paul had

to tackle with regards to the Lord's Supper. The problem centered on Christians who were partaking of the Lord's Supper while keeping allegiance to paganism. They wanted to dine on meals that were dedicated to false gods, and then on a different day, participate in church communion. Paul stressed that you couldn't drink from the cup of Christ and the cup of demons. In other words, choose a side and sit at "one" table. The same is true today. You can't feast on the world's practices and philosophies, then try to partake of the Lord's Supper—which is an expression of devotion.

Final Thoughts:

The Corinthian church sadly abused and cheapened the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. They didn't fail to prepare the right unleavened bread or fruit of the vine. They failed to prepare their hearts. The physical food and drink doesn't



have divine value. Jesus wasn't trying to start a restaurant chain! What made the food honorable and significant were the washed and devoted hearts that participated. Not only is it important to understand the theological aspect of the Lord's Supper, but the personal aspect as well. After all, this sacrament is about remembering how the Creator became our personal Savior by paying your debt with His life. Here's a final thought to ponder: Adam and Eve committed the first sin by eating a forbidden meal—which brought death. But by eating the second meal (Jesus Christ), we discover the wellspring of life.

Steps for Growth:

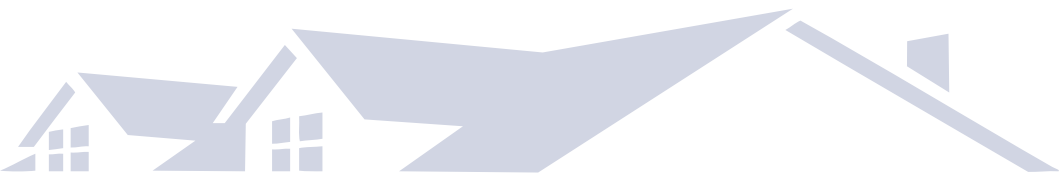
a) The Lord's Supper is not meant to be a lifeless tradition or dry ritual. What can we do to prevent this from ever happening?

b) Of the three requirements to participate in the Lord's Supper, which one do you feel is most difficult to do and why?

c) One issue that Paul addressed was loyalty to false gods and practices. As a group, identify and discuss some modern false gods that can divide our heart from Jesus Christ.

Special Note:

It's important to distinguish the main difference between our view of the Lord's Supper, and the false views practiced in other religions. Catholicism and Lutheranism teach that the bread and wine actually contain or supernaturally become Jesus' literal body and blood. This is completely false. According to Jesus, the bread and wine represent Him as symbols, not actual flesh.



The **Foundation** of

The Resurrection of Jesus:

OUR
GUARANTEE



Ice Breaker:

From a logical viewpoint, what makes the resurrection of Jesus difficult to believe?

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 15:20-22

Introduction:

Christianity is built entirely upon two reliable truths, the **death and resurrection of Jesus Christ**. If Jesus never rose from the dead, then Christianity would be the greatest religious hoax in history. Jesus Christ Himself would be a delusion and millions of followers throughout the ages would have trusted in vain. The apostle Paul said, **“And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith”** (1 Cor. 15:14). However, the resurrection of Jesus is true and authentic. Before we discuss the guarantees of the resurrection, let’s allow the evidence to speak for itself.

Three Facts that prove the Resurrection of Jesus Christ:

1. The Empty Tomb



This is by far the greatest archeological proof that Jesus rose. Archeology is the study of ancient times based on digging up buried artifacts. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then His remains—like other historical figures, should be recoverable. However, there's just one problem—archeologists can't find Him. Historically speaking, both Jewish and Roman sources and traditions acknowledge an empty tomb (Matt. 28:5-7).

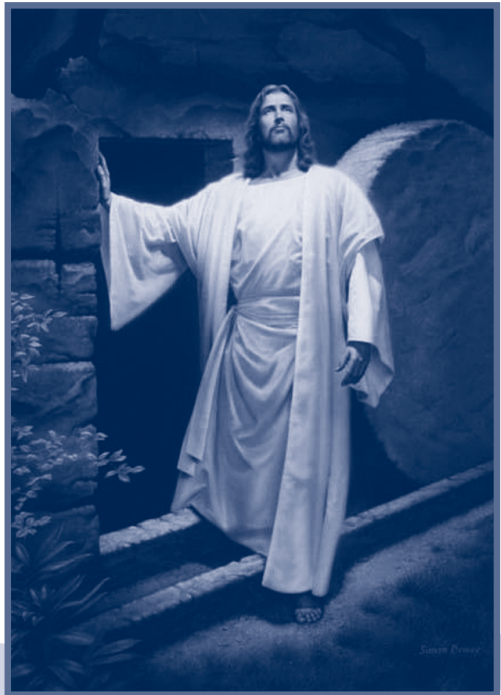
2. The Roman Guards who Fled

The elite Roman soldiers abandoned their posts at Jesus' tomb. This was an inconceivable thought in such a disciplined military. Soldiers feared backlash from their superiors and knew that failing a job meant more than just being unemployed, but **death**. Fearing their lives, the guards met privately with the priests, not their commanders. From there, the priests hatched a plan to deceive the Jews by saying Jesus' body had been smuggled by His disciples (Matt. 28:11-15).

3. The Sightings of Jesus

The New Testament records at least 12 different appearances of Jesus after His Resurrection. Many reported “Jesus Sightings” during a period of 40 days. Concerning the resurrection, Acts 1:3 says, **“After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.”** Also, the apostle Paul recalled a time when Jesus Christ appeared in front of an audience of 500 (1 Cor. 15:6).

Although other non-biblical references confirm the resurrection of Jesus, the Bible is the supreme authority, the ageless evidence that Jesus indeed rose from the dead. This cornerstone doctrine of Christ has championed centuries of assault by many of the world’s most notable philosophers. Even today, scientist and historians are baffled at how this miracle could have happened. However, now it’s time to discover the significance of the resurrection and how it affects us everyday.



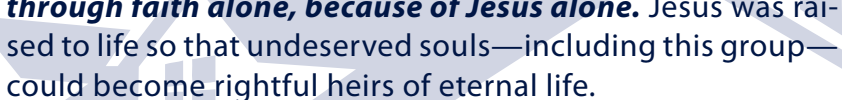
The Resurrection of Jesus gives us Three Guarantees:

1. Seals our Salvation

Romans 10:9 says, ***“That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,”*** and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Christian salvation hinges on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Jesus were still dead, then our faith and hope are buried also. A dead Jesus cannot save anyone, because then it would contradict His Deity. Together the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus complete His assignment of redemption. Any belief that prunes the importance of the resurrection actually denies the core message of the Gospel. Simply put, there can be no salvation without the resurrection of Jesus.

2. Settles our Justification

Romans 4:25 says, ***“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”*** ***The term “justification”*** is not a word you hear in everyday conversation, even among Christians. However, it was a dilemma that only the death and resurrection of Jesus could settle (Rom. 3:23-25). In short, because of our sinful nature and God’s just judgment, we as fallen people are inherently destined for punishment. Justification illustrates how guilty sinners are made righteous before God ***by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Jesus alone.*** Jesus was raised to life so that undeserved souls—including this group—could become rightful heirs of eternal life.



3. Secures our Resurrection

It's safe to say that everything we believe stands or falls on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ—including our very own resurrection. The apostle Paul summed it up when he said, ***“We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe***



that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him...after that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thess 4:14, 17). Because Jesus rose from the dead, He secured our promise that one day, should we pass on before the Rapture, we will be raised to meet Jesus in the skies.

Final Thoughts:

Romans 1:4 says, ***“and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.”*** Jesus Christ was crucified because the Jews accused Him of blasphemy, when He claimed to be God. The resurrection therefore is definitive proof that Jesus Christ is God manifested in human flesh. Essentially, the resurrection of Jesus is a non-negotiable doctrine of the Christian-Apostolic faith. Without the resurrection we wouldn't have a Savior, for-

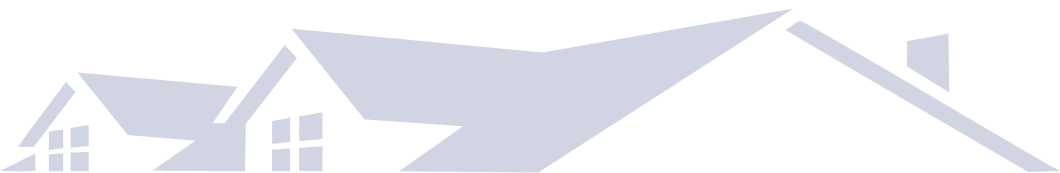
givenness, the gospel or eternal life. Despite credible facts, skeptics have repeatedly tried to disprove the resurrection of Jesus—to no avail. This reminds us that embracing the resurrection of Jesus isn't merely an intellectual assent, but a response in faith.

Steps for Growth:

a) What if Jesus Christ had never risen from the dead? What implications would it have on us today?

b) Of the Three Facts that prove the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which one do you find most compelling, and why?

c) Apart from Easter, is the resurrection of Jesus communicated enough? Discuss the answer and talk about how we can preserve this central doctrine.



The **Foundation** of

The Resurrection of the Righteous:

OUR
GUARANTEE



Ice Breaker:

What intrigues you most about the idea of “resurrection”?

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 6:14

Introduction:

The foundation of our faith stands on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. As mentioned in the previous lesson, if Jesus had never risen from the dead, then Christianity would be the greatest religious hoax ever. However, based on concrete evidence in Scripture and most importantly **faith**, our hope is secure that one day, we too will be miraculously resurrected unto eternal life.

Our future rests on the shoulders of one truth: **when Jesus returns, the dead in Christ will rise and will be caught up along with the living to meet the Lord in the air** (Ref. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

For the remainder of this lesson, we'll navigate the truths about the Rapture and how the dead in Christ will rise first and meet the Lord in the air. In the apostle Paul's letters to the Thesalonians and Corinthians, he used a lot of ink to write about the Rapture of the church and the resurrection of the righteous. So, without having to dig too deep, we can easily discover four aspects about the future resurrection.

Four Aspects about the Future Resurrection:

1. Redemption of the Righteous

(Christians are not destined for wrath, but salvation) – First Thessalonians 5:9 says, ***“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Unlike the unrighteous, us who have received God's righteousness through faith will inherit eternal life. This is why the Gospel is really “good news”.*** In fact, it's the greatest news we could ever hope to receive. We who were once lost, depraved, and headed down a slope of judgment, have been redeemed and are now on our way to be with Jesus for eternity. The hard truth is, everyone but Jesus deserves wrath. However,



God's wrath is appeased at the Cross—where Jesus substituted Himself in our place. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, ***“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”***

2. Resurrection of the Righteous

(Christians who die will participate fully in the Rapture) – The apostle Paul wrote, ***“because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence”*** (2 Corinthians 4:14).



The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of God’s blueprint for history and the basis for our hope. What exactly are we hoping for? When Christ returns for His church, those who are dead will be raised to meet Him. To an unbeliever, this scenario seems farfetched and may sound like something out of a science-fiction novel. However, this isn’t the product of someone’s wild imagination, but rather an actual event that will take place. Paul also wrote, ***“According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep”*** (1 Thessalonians 4:15). Those who are still alive will follow right behind the souls of those who have already died.

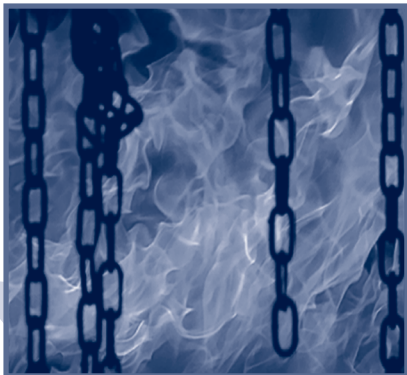
3. Reconstruction of the Righteous

(Our bodies will become immortal) – When the saints are resurrected, their new bodies will be real, but not the kind of physical body that we have now. First Corinthians 15:52 says, that “the dead will be raised incorruptible” and that those who

are alive when Christ returns for His saints “shall be changed.” Jesus Christ is the best picture of what our bodies will be like. The apostle Paul called Jesus the “the first fruits” of those who have died (1 Corinthians 15:20). In other words, Jesus set the example, the pattern for how his followers will be raised. We can expect all believers’ resurrection to emulate the resurrection of Jesus. What an exciting truth! This perishable body will be transformed and reconstructed into an imperishable, glorified body—one that will never become sick or die again. First Corinthians 15:54 says, **“When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”**

4. Retribution of the Unrighteous

(God’s wrath comes to those who reject the gospel) – First Thessalonians 5:3 says, **“While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.”** God has no intention of granting unbelievers immunity



from His wrath. Most people in today’s culture wrestle with this reality and choose to believe that as long as you are a nice person, you have a ticket to heaven. The truth of God’s wrath is widely unpopular, and even certain Christians consider this doctrine taboo and irrational.

Disheartened seekers ask, “How can God have wrath, if God is love?” You may be surprised to learn that the Bible speaks more of God’s anger or wrath than of His love. Without doubt, God is love. And it’s because of His boundless love that Jesus hung on the Cross—saving us from eternal punishment (Ref. Romans 5:9).

Final Thoughts:

Balance in Prophecy

Undoubtedly, we are living in the last days. The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ draws closer every day. Not only is there anticipation for this joyous event, but there is also much interest and speculation about how and when these future events will unfold. Throughout the ages, and especially these days, end-time enthusiasts have desperately tried to understand prophecy and decode the signs of Jesus’ coming.

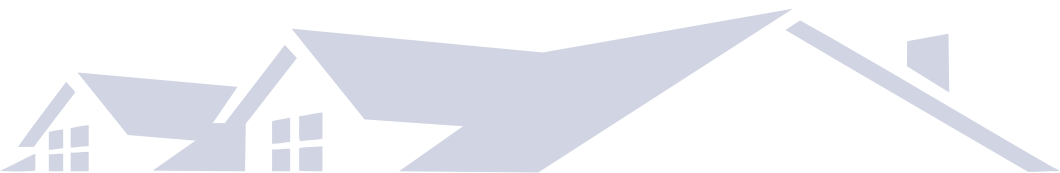
It’s important to remember that prophecy (the Rapture in particular) is not about cracking codes, interpreting current events, or making predictions. Some have become so infatuated with prophecy that they overanalyze the times, and then draw conclusions based on personal opinions. God didn’t give us a peek into “things to come” so that we could connect all the dots and fill in the blanks of His timetable. We must realize that **“For in just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay”** (Hebrews 10:37). Basically, Jesus cares more that live for Him, be ready for His coming, than to debate or obsess about when He’s coming.

Steps for Growth:

a) Why is the resurrection of Jesus Christ so essential to our resurrection?

b) In your opinion, why do you think the topic of God's wrath is not popular or accepted?

c) Why do you think there is so much interest in prophecy, the apocalypse, or end-times?



The **Foundation** of

The Rapture of the Church:



Ice Breaker:

What comes to mind when you think about spending eternity with God?

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 15:51-52

Introduction:

Prophecy, or the study of the “last days” is one of the Bible’s richest, yet most rewarding subjects to grasp. However, every truth in Biblical prophecy is centered on one specific, epic event that will change the landscape of time and usher in a series of final events. This event is none other than the **catching away of the saints**, or more commonly called the **Rapture**. Jesus Christ Himself said, **“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am”** (John 14:3). Every born-again follower of Jesus Christ can view this statement not only as a truth, but a promise. Jesus promised to come back for His church, to carry us home and be with him forever.



Paul wrote, ***“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever”*** (1 Thess. 4:16-17). This

Scripture describes the translation of believers from our physical bodies to glorified bodies as we meet the Lord in the air. Unlike the deceased saints who will be resurrected, those who are alive will escape death and be instantly transported into eternity. Concerning the Rapture, Paul went on to say, ***“Therefore encourage each other with these words”*** (v.18). Basically, the coming of Jesus is good news for Christians; it’s something to desire and hope for—especially in an age of global turmoil and war. Let’s review three aspects of Jesus’ coming.

Three Aspects of Jesus’ Coming (the Rapture):

1. His Coming is Personal

First Thessalonians 4:16 says, ***“For the Lord himself will come...”*** The intensive pronoun “himself” describes that Jesus and ***no one else*** is coming back for us. The Lord is not sending an angel or one of the patriarchs to pick us

up. Rather, this event is personal, a tryst between two lovers—Jesus and His church. Since everything about our relationship with Jesus is “personal”, why would His return be any different? Only this time, we will see Him face to face, in all His visible nature. It was promised that we will **“meet the Lord”** and will be **“with the Lord”**. In other words, when Jesus returns for His church, He will appear in a personal, literal fashion, not in a dreamy or imaginary way. Consider how wonderful it will be to see Jesus and enjoy unhindered, unending fellowship with Him.

2. His Coming is Pending

No matter how you feel about the timing of the Rapture, it will occur. In every age, the decree “Jesus is coming soon” never fades, but remains relevant. From a human perspective, it’s been a lengthy two thousand years since Jesus said, **“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect”** (Luke 12:40). But from a Divine perspective, Christ is coming at any moment.

Undoubtedly, the return of Jesus Christ is imminent—not because of what we read or hear about in the news, but because of what we read in Scripture. James 5:8 says, **“You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”** In fact, the imminent return of Christ is



echoed throughout the entire New Testament. Paul told the Romans ***“Understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here...”*** (Rom 13:11-12). In nearly every mention of the coming of Christ, we get a sense that time is short, opportunity is fleeting, and preparedness is vital.

3. His Coming is Pre-tribulation

Based on key scriptures, it’s widely believed that Jesus will return for His church before the time period known as the ***Tribulation*** ensues. During the Tribulation, also called the ***day of trouble***, or ***divine retribution***, the human race will experience a time of extraordinary disaster and judgment. The Tribulation will last approximately sevens—half of which will be peaceful and the latter half will be chaotic. Jesus said, ***“For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive...”*** (Matt 24:21-22). Differing views on the Rapture and Tribulation have surfaced and become more popular in recent days. The other theories are (1) mid-tribulation, which asserts that the Rapture will occur



halfway through the tribulation period, and (2) post-tribulation, which claims that the Rapture will occur at the conclusion of the tribulation. However, Scripture aptly affirms that Jesus Christ will Rapture His church prior to the Tribulation. Revelation 3:10 says, ***“Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth”***.



Final Thoughts:

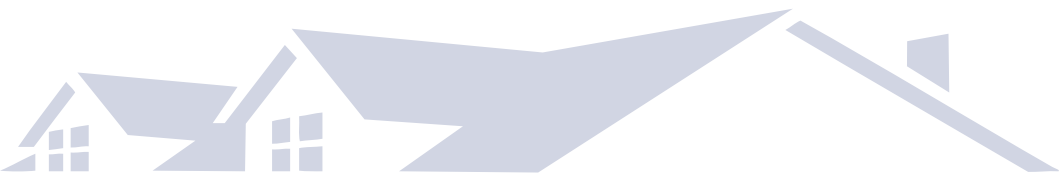
The Rapture will be a glorious event when Christ returns for the church. Knowing this, it's crucial that we focus on becoming devoted followers of Jesus Christ, by embracing every aspect and virtue that pertains to Him. The simple truth is that people (including some professing Christians) will be left out of this event. This doesn't mean we are supposed to be **perfect** Christians who never fail or make mistakes—otherwise God's grace wouldn't be necessary. Nor does this mean we must have an expert understanding of end-time events. Having knowledge about end-time matters is a blessing, but it is not essential for salvation. Also, rather than engage in debates over which prophetic view is more accurate or condemn another believer for espousing a different theory, focus your heart on being prepared for whenever Jesus returns, because after all, Jesus is still coming soon.

Steps for Growth:

a) When Jesus comes back for us, we will see Him personally. Until then, how or where do we “see” Him in this life? (i.e. in our circumstances, reflected in creation and providence, in each other)

b) Why do you think it’s important to remember that the coming of Jesus is imminent and could happen at any moment?

c) The world tends to view the end-times in a negative way. Many have a fear of the “end of the world”. How does the world’s view of the end-times differ from the church’s view?



The **Foundation** of

Divine Healing:

JESUS HEALS
TODAY



Ice Breaker:

Do you believe God continues to heal today?

Key Verse: Mark 16:17-18

Introduction:

Without negotiation or debate, God still heals! Our God is both able and ready to heal the sick and the diseased. James 5:14 says, ***“Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him...”*** According to Scripture, divine healing is a legitimate sign that follows believers. Among the many ways God revealed Himself to His people, He identified Himself as “Jehovah-Rapha”, meaning “the Lord who heals you” (Ex. 15:26). Healing is not just something that God does, rather it’s part of His nature. David said, ***“Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases”*** (Psalms 103:2-3). The greatest benefit of God is that He forgives our sins. But the psalmist reminds us not to forget that God also heals all sicknesses.

Many skeptics do not believe in divine healing—citing that it's impossible, irrational, or impractical. Unfortunately, among these skeptics are some Christians who believe that the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit has ceased and has no place in the church today. However, Jesus was—and **still** is—our healer. Matthew 4:23 says, ***“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.”*** If we serve and worship the same Jesus revealed in Scripture, then surely He's able and willing to heal today. Jesus said, ***“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father”*** (John 14:12). Let us look at three aspects of divine healing.

Three Aspects of Divine Healing:



1. Desire

On one occasion, Jesus asked a crippled man ***“do you want to get well?”*** (John 5:6). Why would Jesus ask the infirmed man this question? The man was obviously distressed. At first glance, one could boldly assume this man wanted healing. However, that's not always the case. This story reveals that just because someone is sick, doesn't mean he ge-

nuinely desires to be healed. Jesus asked this man that question because He knew that he had lost his sense of urgency and that his desire for healing had turned into self-pity. Sometimes being healed means taking responsibility for your health and lifestyle choices—which some would prefer to avoid. Desire for healing is so important because in some cases, people use sickness or disability as a crutch or tool to manipulate others. It made perfect sense that Jesus would basically ask, **“do you desire healing?”** In contrast, there was no question that a certain woman with an issue of blood for twelve years desired healing (Luke 8:43-47). Her faith was born in desperation and extreme desire as she simply touched the hem of Jesus’ garment. Without a conversation or prayer, she was cured.



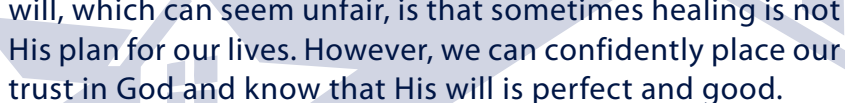
2. Faith

Matthew 13 tells of a time in Jesus’ ministry when His healing power was limited. Although Jesus is God in flesh, He was unable to manifest His power and change people’s lives. The bible says, **“Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief”** (Matthew 13:58). Did Jesus have a power-outage? Of course not. The reason Jesus was unable to operate miraculously was because the people lacked authentic faith. Their unbelief and skepticism gave Jesus no other option but to move on. The author of

Hebrews penned, **“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for...”** (Heb. 11:1). As great and mighty as God is, He will only respond based on the faith you have. Your faith doesn’t make God more powerful, but enables Him to work His power in your life. Oftentimes it’s just human skepticism that limits what God can do. James 5:15 says, **“And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well, the Lord will raise him up.”** Faith is the key that unlocks the door to divine healing. When we simply believe, we allow God to move in miraculous ways.

3. God’s Will

The truth is, all prayers are subject to God’s will. Jesus Himself prayed, **“Father, if it is Your will, remove this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done”** (Luke 22:42). As believers, our job is to pray for a sick person’s healing, and simply believe that God will hear and answer—according to His method and time, not ours. He may heal instantly or gradually. He may use what we consider natural means, such as medicine, surgery, physical therapy or diet. He may give grace and strength through a season of sickness, or He may even permit a person to die. Sometimes God allows us to remain sick for a season so that we can remedy the root causes. God may also use a sickness to carry out a certain purpose in our lives or the lives of others. For instance, John 9 tells the story of a man who was blind for many years. When he received the miracle of sight, Jesus explained that God had a purpose to reveal His power through this man. The more difficult side of God’s will, which can seem unfair, is that sometimes healing is not His plan for our lives. However, we can confidently place our trust in God and know that His will is perfect and good.



The Role of Doctors and Medicine:

What roles do doctors and medicine play in the Christian life?

First and foremost, we should always place our trust in God. We shouldn't place our faith in medicine or doctors as our ultimate source of life. Furthermore, divine healing and medicine are not competing factors. Paul once described his colleague Luke as "the beloved physician" without



any hint of disapproval for his career (Colossians 4:14). Doctors are valuable professionals who help us stay healthy and strong. Refusing to see a doctor or take proper medication is not a sign of faith, but rather a mistreatment of the body God gave you. You can trust God and still take advantage of medical resources and other disciplines such as healthier eating, exercise, and better sleep. Oftentimes, medication is a substitute for something that the body normally produces. A word of caution however: in a society that tends to overuse medication, and sees a pill as the solution to everything, we must keep our lives in proper balance.

Final Thoughts:

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

It's important to remember that divine healing is made possi-

ble through the blood of Jesus Christ. Not only did Jesus overcome spiritual illness, but also physical illness.

As previously mentioned, some believe that God no longer heals, or that it's simply a rare occasion for someone to receive a physical miracle. If that were true, then what about Jesus' own words, ***"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father"*** (John 14:12). If divine healing is allegedly silent in the modern church, what then should we say to the countless people who have experienced undeniable healing today? Finally, we need to be careful not to espouse the "name it and claim it" doctrine, which becomes more of an emotional experience, rather than true healing. Especially when dealing with a life-threatening illness, one should always consult and verify a healing with medical professionals.

Steps for Growth:

- a) Have you ever received a healing from God? If so, describe your experience.
- b) Why do you think many people are skeptical about divine healing?
- c) Of the three aspects of divine healing, which one do you feel is more challenging and why?



The **Foundation** of

Holiness:

LIVING TO PLEASE
GOD



Ice Breaker:

What do you think it means to be “holy”?

Key Verse: Hebrews 12:14

Introduction:

Many feel that holiness dangles just out of reach, like a carrot. It looks good, and we want it, but to live it seems impossible. Yet God requires us to be holy, **“I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy...”** (Leviticus 11:44). Overtime, many have developed unhealthy and unbiblical views about what holiness is. Until Jesus came, the concept of holiness had become nothing more than a rulebook, a rigid set of demands that made fellowship with God taxing and impersonal. Religious men (Pharisees) thwarted the pure laws of God and created a legalistic system that suppressed people. The ones who hated Christ the most, were the ones who the public considered as holy. But their holiness was counterfeit, and counterfeit is exposed by the truth.



The same tragedy happens today because certain people don't understand what true holiness looks like. Jesus is the complete picture and face of holiness. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, ***"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*** Unlike the Pharisees who called for strict conformity to the religious laws, Jesus calls us to be conformed to His image,

His character, and His portrait. Romans 8:29 says, ***"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."*** Holiness, in official terms, is the state of character of being holy. It is sanctity, separation and consecration. Holiness, in informal terms, is to resemble and imitate Jesus.

Three Hallmarks of Holiness:

1. Holiness is Personal

Jesus was perfectly conformed to the will of God. Jesus stated that He came ***"not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me"*** (John 6:38). When Christians talk about holiness, it's easy to emphasize rules, regulations, do's and don'ts. However, this concept tends to cultivate a "what-can-I-get-away-with" or "how-far-can-I-go" mentality. Holiness is

more about relationship, than rules. If your heart is totally surrendered to Jesus, and His Spirit is in you, then holiness is a response, an outflow of desire to please Him. John 8:29 says, ***“The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.”***

Holiness is the lifestyle evidence that the Holy Spirit is living in your heart. If we have an intimate relationship with Jesus, then we should become like Him, and seek to please Him by submitting to His divine will. 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). As the scripture implies, offering your entire being—is your spiritual, intimate act of worship.

2. Holiness is Purity

Holiness is one of God’s fundamental qualities—signifying total perfection and purity. Only God is holy by nature. In reference to Christians, it refers to those who are set apart unto God. It means distinction from sin and the world and dedication to God. We can either be sanctified, honorable vessels or dishonorable vessels. 2 Timothy 2:20-21 says, ***“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if***



anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work."

Holiness and purity are identical. God desires holy, pure, sanctified people to worship Him—people who are prepared for His use. The psalmist David said, ***"Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me"*** (Psalms 51:10). 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 heart and body.

3. Holiness is Practical



It is also important to remember that holiness is not just an internal assertion, but should also impact our lives in practical ways, such as our speech, our behavior, and even our attire. The core of true holiness is to produce spiritual fruit. Galatians 5:22-23 says, ***"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."*** If a person is filled and directed by the Holy Spirit, then all the virtues listed in Galatians 5:22-23 will be manifested in his or her life. The Spirit of God will control our behavior, as we allow Him. When a person comes under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, it affects seven areas of life:

1. Attitude (Ephesians 4:31-32) – The fruit of the Spirit—such as love, kindness, patience, and self-control—should be unmistakable marks in our attitudes.

2. Thoughts (Philippians 4:8) – It’s been said that “we are what we think”. In other words, we become what we allow our minds to dwell on. Regarding the mind, Paul told us, **“bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”** (2 Corinthians 10:5).

3. Speech (James 4:11) – We should avoid gossiping, backbiting, swearing, lying, and any other indecent communication. Christians should watch their written communication as well, such as Internet chatting, text messaging and blogging. Oftentimes it’s much easier to type suggestive or insulting words than it is to say them aloud.

4. Clothing (Deuteronomy 22:5; 1 Peter 3:1-6) – The Bible clearly establishes the principles of gender distinction in dress, modesty, extravagance and embellishment.

5. Body (1 Corinthians 3:16-17) – Being that the body is the temple of God’s Spirit, we should avoid anything that would defile, pollute or harm it.

6. Sexuality (Colossians 3:5) – The Bible clearly condemns all forms of sexual activity and relationships outside of the marriage covenant.

7. Fellowship (2 Corinthians 6:14) – Befriending and associating with unbelievers is encouraged. However, we must be careful not to identify too closely with sinful activities and lifestyles.

Final Thoughts:

In summary, it's important to remember that none of us become holy based on our own merit. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, **"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** Jesus took our sin upon Himself and granted us His righteousness, which enables us to live a holy life. Since we are new creatures in Jesus Christ, clothed with His righteousness, we have a new heart from which new desires for holiness surge. This empowers us to live like, for, and with Jesus. Maintaining this perceptive will keep us far from the "holier than thou" mindset, which basically is a self-righteous attitude that believes you're made holy by keeping rules. It will also navigate our values within the Gospel, not merely religion. Holiness is, and always should be an outflow of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Steps for Growth:

a) Of the three hallmarks of holiness, which one seems most important to you, and why?

b) As mentioned above, when a person comes under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, it affects seven areas of life. Which one do you think needs more emphasis today, and why?

c) What truth did you learn in this lesson that you didn't know before, or that you hadn't considered in a long time?

The **Foundation** of

Marriage:

*TWO BECOMING
ONE*



Ice Breaker:

Why do you think God created marriage?

Key Verse: Genesis 2:23-24

Introduction:

It may come as a surprise to you, but many people today are convinced that traditional marriages don't work and this institution should be abandoned. Marriage is also under constant assault by those seeking to redefine traditional marriage as only being between one man and one woman. In a culture where certain groups intend to reshape society by attacking traditional family values, Christians have a moral responsibility to protect and preserve the biblical definition of marriage. There's no question that the silent killer in the marriage institution is not cultural liberalism, however, but the downturn in healthy marriages. It's no secret that our society places much emphasis on having a beautiful



wedding, and not nearly as much attention on building a beautiful marriage.

Although the institution of marriage is ancient, its meaning and importance is ageless. The roots of marriage can be traced back to the beginning. The first man Adam said, ***“this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she***

shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:23-24). She was created to be alongside of Adam as his “other half,” to be his help. When a man and woman are married, the two must become “one flesh”—one entity (Matthew 19:6). Here are a couple of principles to remember:

- Marriage is about “leaving”, which is **commitment**
- Marriage is about “cleaving”, which is **cohabitation**

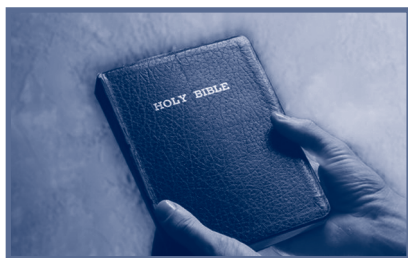
Oneness in marriage is often easy said than done. You’re two separate and distinct individuals. Yet, through your marriage, you and your spouse can become one with each other. The more you embrace the concept of two becoming one, the more you’ll grow towards each other, and to God. For the remainder of this lesson, we will look at several ways to becoming one.



Three Ways to Become One with your Spouse:

1. Believe Together

The imagery of marriage is applied to Christ and the church. Jesus Christ, the Groom, has sacrificially and lovingly selected us to be His holy bride. Ephesians 5:25-27 says,



“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” Each spouse must be wedded to Jesus Christ—through a personal relationship with Him—before you can be faithful and loyal to each other. It is a couple’s responsibility to invite Christ to take His proper place as the leader of your home. Becoming one flesh requires spiritual unity. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, ***“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?”*** God’s Word teaches that we should be joined to someone who has the same beliefs we do.

2. Join Together

Matthew 19:6 says, ***“So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”*** First, to the husband—answer the your call to cleave. If you’re a husband, join to your wife by elevating her above

your work, interests, and extended family. Genesis 2:24 says, ***“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife...”*** To cleave means to adhere closely, to cling, and to remain faithful. It also implies, to cut, to split. Basically, a husband is to cut off everything that would pull him away from his wife, and cling tightly to her. To leave and cleave is the unique fusing of two people into one unit. Second, to the wife—answer the your call to submit. Colossians 3:18 says, ***“Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”*** Submitting to your husband is about choosing to support his decisions after giving your honest input—as a way of expressing your love.

3. Work together



You and your spouse are meant to work together as related, but different parts of the same body. The husband is the head, and the wife is the body, but both are equally significant. When you understand that you’re ***“one flesh”***, you’ll see that what affects one, affects the other. Ephesians 5:33 says, ***“However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”*** When a

husband sacrificially loves his wife, he blesses himself as well, because she is connected to him. When a wife submissively respects her husband, she blesses herself as well, because he



is connected to her. When a husband feels disrespected, it's difficult to show love to his wife. When a wife feels unloved, it's difficult to show respect to her husband. Purpose to love and respect your spouse, every day, to the best of your ability, as opposed to worrying about how your spouse can love you better. Your efforts will encourage your spouse to love you, and cause your relationship to soar to higher heights.

Final Thoughts:

Oneness marriage is more than coming to an agreement. Rather, it is **coming into agreement**. If you are married, but are still looking out for "number one," you are not experiencing real marriage. Far too many people today want certain benefits of being married, without letting go of their own personal dreams and desires. They want to maintain their own individuality and independence (emotionally and financially). Marriage is not an event, but a lifestyle. It's a gradual learning process where each spouse surrenders himself/herself to each other. God's purpose for marriage requires **two becoming one flesh**. This isn't just physical oneness, but rather, the complete bonding of two people. It's a fusing of two hearts and two wills. It's about each person pursuing what is best for the relationship, before what is best for self.

Steps for Growth:

a) In your own words, why is choosing a mate who holds the same beliefs and values so important to a healthy marriage?

b) Of the three ways to becoming One with your Spouse, which one do you believe requires the most effort, and why?

c) In your opinion, why is the traditional institution of marriage under such heavy attack?

