

Becoming Like Jesus

**Small Group Bible Study
on Intimacy & Purity**

By Charlotte Stangeland

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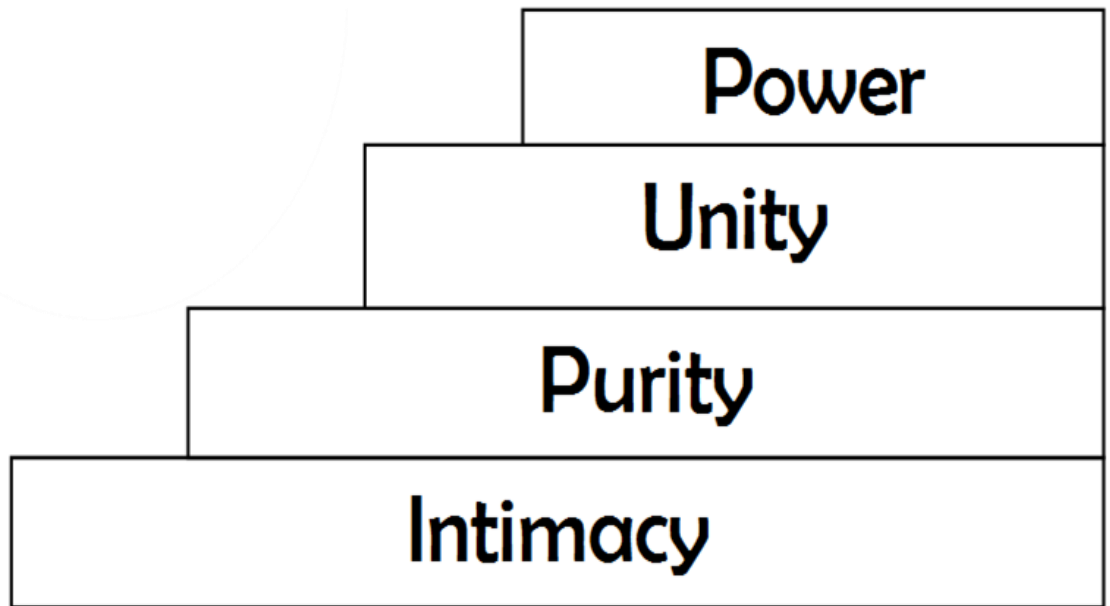
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Pursue Intimacy with God

Intimacy will lead to Purity

Purity will lead to Unity

Unity will lead to Power

Notes to Leader

Activating Believers: These lessons are not just for head knowledge. The goal is to continually become more and more like Jesus. This requires that people don't just listen and learn, but that they *DO* the things Jesus did. This includes demonstrating the character of Christ, praying for the sick, and so on. These lessons offer concrete ways to do that, and a small group provides a safe place to practice. Doing something new can be challenging so make your group a safe place to experiment by offering lots of encouragement and by thanking people for trying and for sharing. Avoid being too quick to correct or criticize. Sometimes you will need to lead by doing. If someone is uncomfortable reading or praying aloud, assure them they can pass. Do not force participation, but encourage it.

Time: These lessons were used with a small group that met once each week from 7-9 p.m. The group started by sharing praise testimonies and prayers of adoration and praise (10-15 minutes). Then the lesson was read and discussed (60-75 minutes). The class time ended by sharing prayer concerns and praying together (30 minutes). There was time for snacks and fellowship at the end. If you need to shorten the lessons, read them through ahead of time and decide which parts to skip or which questions are most important to share.

Prayer: Prayer is the key to increasing our intimacy with God and to strengthen our fellowship with one another. Each lesson has suggestions for your Group Prayer time. Also encourage participants to incorporate the Personal Prayer suggestions into their daily prayer times.

Facilitate Participation: Your role as leader is to facilitate participation. The lessons are very easy to lead. Have your class members take turns reading the scripture and the readings in the lesson. When you see a *question in italics*, stop the reading and allow discussion. Your job is to encourage everyone to participate and to keep the discussion on track. Some people may be more willing to speak or pray if you occasionally divide into partners or groups of 3-5. If someone tends to dominate discussion say, "Thank you for sharing. You've shared some good ideas. Let's see what others have to say." Offer your own ideas, experiences, and examples only after others have had a chance to share and make sure you, as the leader, listen more than you talk. However, if others are reluctant to share personal experiences, your honesty and personal examples may encourage others to share.

Permission to copy: Students will need a copy of each lesson so they can read along. Leaders have permission of the author to make copies of the lesson for students in your class, but not for sale or for distribution.

Becoming Like Jesus

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Lesson 1: God is Worthy

Life Experience:

*Have you ever participated in or planned a treasure hunt? What was it like?
Which was more important—the fun of the hunt or the treasure?*

Treasure Hunt

Once upon a time a Daddy thought it would be fun to plan a treasure hunt for his little girl. When he had the treasure hunt all laid out, he sought out his little girl and asked her to come and play with him. She interrupted him with a request for something she wanted. He didn't answer her request, but invited her, again, to come seek the treasure. She eagerly took the first clue. The little girl set off to look for the treasure. She found clue after clue. Occasionally she found a small treasure but with it would be another clue, and so the hunt continued. As she read the clues she realized many notes included love messages. She realized how much effort Daddy had put into making this treasure hunt, and she felt loved and cherished. One time she caught him watching her from the shadows, and it became part of the game for her to catch glimpses of him. They were having so much fun following clues and playing hide and seek with each other that the little girl began to enjoy the journey as much as the treasures that were hidden along the way. The journey became her focus, and her father's love became the treasure. At the end of the hunt she found the gift that she had requested earlier, but that gift was less important than the fun and the love that she had discovered on the journey.

Our God is not the angry, vengeful judge that many picture Him to be. He is, instead, a loving Father who wants to *play with* and *partner with* His children as He builds His Kingdom on earth. Sometimes we don't understand where God is leading us, but we need to learn to enjoy the journey, and the love God showers on us. The journey will eventually lead to wonderful treasures and love gifts, but the real point of the journey is to discover the greatest gift of all—to truly know and love God and to understand God's great love for us.

*Is your image of God like the father in this story? Why or why not?
How has your journey with God been similar to this treasure hunt?*

Introduction to this study

Many years ago, my prayer partner and friend, Vicki Sawyer, asked God, **“What would it take for the church to once again walk in power like it did in the book of Acts?”** God responded by giving her this strategy:

Pursue Intimacy
Intimacy will lead to Purity
Purity will lead to Unity
Unity will lead to Power

God's answer was a riddle and it introduces us to a treasure hunt to discover what it means. God *wants* to restore power to His church, but He cannot trust the church with power until they learn to love and trust Him. We must be purified of selfishness and sin, and we must learn to walk in unity with one another, before God can release the power of the Holy Spirit through the church. The journey begins with the first step—pursuing intimacy. These lessons are designed to help you grow in Intimacy

with God by considering His character. **Praise is the key to intimacy with God.** As we admire who God is our love for Him increases. Each lesson focuses on one name or characteristic of God and the prayer time begins by praising God for that name.

The second part of each lesson we look at ourselves and ask how we can be more like God. If God is faithful, how can we be more faithful? If God is a giver, how can we give generously?

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit,"
[italics mine] 2 Corinthians 3:18.

You may find the lessons challenging as we consider what it means to be like a Jesus. Jesus was wise, good, faithful, a healer, a prophet, and a helper. How can we hope to be like Him? Only by the help and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and the encouragement and support of fellow Christians. We will depend on God to help us, and commit to support and encourage each other.

What characteristic of God would you like to see developed more in your own life? Why?
Will you commit to support and encourage each other during this study?

The Word

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being," Rev. 4:11

Each week we will start our prayer times with praise and adoration. Today we consider that God is holy and worthy of our praise. When we think of God's worthiness we consider His "value" or how He deserves our honor, respect, and worship. In California, Highway 101 runs beside the ocean. You can drive by focused only on traffic and your own concerns. However, you will be enriched and blessed if you take time to stop and enjoy the beautiful views of the ocean and beaches. The ocean does not change, but as you take time to admire it, *you are changed*. In the same way, God is good and worthy of praise, whether we take time to worship or not. However, if we don't take time to admire Him and praise Him for who He is, we are poorer for it. We are commanded to put God first in our lives. We do this by taking time to worship Him, by setting aside one day as a day to honor Him, and by taking time each day for worship and praise.

How does honoring one day as a day of worship God, show value for God?

How does worship change us? How does failing to take time to honor God, diminish the quality of our lives?

Old Testament

Let's consider how the Israelites in the Old Testament responded to God's holiness.

- Read Exodus 19:7-15. *What activities preceded the appearance of God to the people? What does this indicate about the preparation we need to make in order for the presence of God to come among us?*
- Read Exodus 19:16-22. *What physical manifestations were there of the presence of the Lord? What feelings do you suppose these manifestations inspired?*
- Read Exodus 20:18-21. *How did the people of Israel respond to this manifestation of God's presence among them?*
- Read Exodus 24:8-15. *What would it be like to actually see God and eat and drink in His presence? What does it mean in verse 17, "His glory was a like a consuming fire"?*
- Read Exodus 25:8. *What was God's desire?*

We see God's desire to have a dwelling place among men from the very beginning of creation. God spent time fellowshiping with Adam in the cool of the day. Later He told Moses to build a Tabernacle so that He might dwell among the Israelites (Exodus 25:8). His glory filled the Wilderness Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple revealing His desire to dwell among His people. On the day of Pentecost, God's people became His dwelling place (1 Cor. 3:16). We know that one day Jesus' physical presence will dwell in Jerusalem. Until that time, *we are God's dwelling place*, His Tabernacle. Sometimes we are intimidated by God's holiness, and we want to hide from Him as the Israelites did. We do serve a Holy God, but He is does not want to be distant from us. He wants to dwell among us.

How does God's holiness cause you to react?

How do we sometimes hide from God?

The Power of God's Presence

During Revivals, when the power of God is present in an overwhelming way, often there are spontaneous confessions of sin similar to Isaiah's confession (Isaiah 6:1-9). During the Azusa Street revival (1906) sometimes the presence of God would be so intense that people within a couple of blocks of the building would be overcome by the Holy Spirit and spontaneously begin repenting¹. Similarly, during the Prayer Revival of 1857-58 the presence of God hovered over America to such an extent that that, in some places, crews on ships coming into harbor were spontaneously overcome with conviction. At least 30 captains of ships testified to being saved in this way².

Why do you suppose manifestations of the presence of God bring spontaneous repentance or worship? Have you ever witnessed examples of this?

How do people today try to hide from God?

New Covenant

Read Hebrews 12:18-24.

- *What two places are being compared? Who is included in the group of worshippers?*
- *What are some of the contrasts between the Mt. Sinai experience and the Mt. Zion experience?* (There are at least seven contrasts. For example, the Israelites were in terror. The angels are joyful.)

Read Hebrews 12:25-29.

- *What is the shaking that it talks of in this passage?*
- *What does it mean when it says, "For our God is a consuming fire"?*

The Israelites worshipped God from afar in fear and trembling. Because of the blood of Jesus we can come into the very throne room of God with confidence and joy. As we contemplate the worthiness and holiness of God, our natural response should be to humbly bow and worship Him. As we consider the fact that Jesus made a way for us to enter into the throne room of God, we should be filled with joy and hope.

Going Deeper:

Do you think, in the church, we take seriously the holiness of God? What evidence should there be if we do? How does all this relate to our theme of Intimacy to Purity to Unity to Power?

¹ Bartleman, Frank. *Azuasa Street*. Whitaker House, 2000

² Green, G.R., *The 1859 Revival in The Evangelists of the 1859 Revival*. Retrieved 12/26/16 at www.liverpoorevival.org.uk/1859

Prayer

Group Prayer

- Read Revelations 4:6-11, 5:8-14 and each person pick a name or characteristic of God. Share why that attribute has meaning for you.
- Offer Prayers of Adoration focused on the names or attributes each person chose.
- Thank God for the Blood of Jesus which allows us to come boldly before the throne of grace.
- Sing a couple of choruses about the worthiness of God such as *Thou Art Worthy, Worthy is the Lamb, Revelation Song, or Isaiah 6 (Holy, Holy)*.

Each week start your group or your prayer time with several minutes of praise. This can be songs, sharing testimonies of God's goodness, or offering prayers of Adoration honoring different names and characteristics of God.

Personal Prayer:

- Praise God because He is so worthy of adoration and praise. Confess any ways you have failed to honor God with heartfelt worship.
- Thank Jesus for His blood which gives us access to the throne of God. Thank God that we can approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

Each week use the Personal Prayer Guide as part of your daily devotions. I suggest that if you don't already have a daily plan for devotions that you set aside 30 minutes every day. Intimacy only comes if we spend time with God. ***Each day as you start your quiet time, begin with adoration and praise.*** Sing a praise chorus, choose some names of God and praise Him for those characteristics, or find verses that tell about God's character and praise Him for who He is. Below is a list of names of God.

NAMES OF GOD THAT TEACH US GOD'S CHARACTER

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. God with Us: Mt 1:22-23 | 16. Living Water: John 4:10 |
| 2. All wise: 1 Timothy 1:17 | 17. Father: Matthew 6:9-11 |
| 3. Redeemer: Isaiah 49:26 | 18. Provider: Genesis 22:13-14 |
| 4. Good: Psalm 135:3 | 19. Judge: Isaiah 33:22 |
| 5. Word: John 1:14 | 20. Savior: Isaiah 60:16 |
| 6. Prince of Peace: Isaiah 9:6 | 21. Always Present: Isaiah 43:1-2 |
| 7. Mighty God: Jeremiah 32:18 | 22. Almighty: Genesis 17:1-2 |
| 8. Light of the World: John 8:12 | 23. Stronghold: Nahum 1:7 |
| 9. Good Shepherd: John 10:11 | 24. Love: 1 John 4:8 |
| 10. Friend: John 15:9-16 | 25. Healer: Exodus 15:26 |
| 11. The Way: John 14:6 | 26. Door: John 10:7 |
| 12. King of Kings: Revelation 19:16 | 27. The Truth: John 14:6 |
| 13. Master: Colossians 4:1 | 28. Wonderful Counselor: Isaiah 9:6 |
| 14. Alpha and Omega: Rev. 22:13 | 29. Vine: John 15:1-8 |
| 15. Bread of Life: John 6:48-51 | 30. Faithful: Deuteronomy 7:9 |
| 31. Helper: John 14:16-18 | |

Lesson 2: God is Wise

Life Experience

Think of examples of God's wisdom – in Scripture, in nature, and in life.

When have you felt like you especially needed God's wisdom? How did you seek His wisdom?

Is there a situation in your life right now where you could use more of God's wisdom?

The Word

Romans 16:27 says, "To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen."

The Bible has much to say about wisdom and its importance. Today we will compare God's wisdom and Man's wisdom. Some people have a false identity based on their own wisdom or knowledge. People may take great pride in their education or their intellectual ability and that becomes their identity. Or sometimes we feel inferior because we don't have as much education as someone else, or we had trouble in school. Then our identity might be "I am stupid". In either case we are basing our identity on human wisdom rather than on who we are in Christ. In Jesus we have access to all the wisdom of God. Read Genesis 3:6-7

- *How did the pursuit of knowledge lead to trouble in the Garden of Eden?*
- *When and how does pursuing human knowledge lead to trouble today?*

The wisdom of God is different than human knowledge. God knows more than all the libraries of the world combined. He has "insider" knowledge about what is going to happen in the universe. He can see what is going on in every person's life and in every nation on earth. God's wisdom reveals secrets that only God could know.

Read 2 Kings 6:8-12

How did Elisha know what the king was going to do?

What kind of impact did that have on his nation?

Revelation knowledge is the wisdom God reveals to us through the Holy Spirit. It is supernatural impartation of facts or understandings. For example, there was a time when our whole family was sick. My husband and I fasted and prayed one day a week for several weeks as we asked God what to do. One day, as we prayed, I saw a picture of a house. It was a white ranch house with black shutters, a wrought iron railing on the front steps and a sidewalk that went to the driveway on the right. God said, "I have a place for you." A few months later we moved to that very house. This house gave us relief from mold and dust allergies and our health improved somewhat. Eventually someone prayed for us and we experienced more healing. God had revealed something to us about the future He had planned for us. It was information that we had no human way of knowing.

Can you think of a time God's revealed wisdom guided you, your family, or church?

Heavenly Perspective

Read 1 Corinthians 2:11-16. God's wisdom gives us a heavenly perspective. This is a view of the situation that we could never have from our own limited perspective. With our limited human knowledge we see situations in our own life and events in the world from a perspective that centers on ourselves. God sees everything from the beginning to the end. He sees how events all around the world are interrelated and working. He knows how, eventually, His plan and design for the whole world will be accomplished. He knows how each event in your life fits into a larger picture that affects not

just you, but people all around you. He knows so much more than any human being that we can never fathom the depths of His wisdom. However, we can ask Him to help us have his heavenly perspective. When we do, it is like we are looking at things from far above the earth.

One example of this comes from the life of Hudson Taylor³. Taylor went to China as a missionary. He experienced a number of difficulties including the death of his infant daughter, conflict with his mission board, fire that destroyed his possessions, and poor health which forced him to go back to England. From a human perspective, things may have looked bleak, and he might have felt he had failed. If he had relied on human wisdom, he might have concluded that he should not be a missionary. However, God had a greater plan. While in England, Taylor traveled and raised support for missions in China. He then started his own missionary organization called China Inland Mission. That organization became one of the largest and most successful missionary organizations of its time. God's perspective is so different from ours because He uses failures and tragedies as well as successes to bring about His glorious purposes for the Kingdom of God. Our goal, as we pray, should be to get God's perspective on all the situations of life.

- *What are some things that we cannot know unless God reveals them?*
- *Can you give an example of how prayer has changed your perspective about a person or situation?*
- *How does a heavenly perspective change our view of world events?*

Asking Questions

Read James 1:5-8. There are two things we must do if we want God's wisdom. 1) Ask, 2) Believe God will answer. Faith is a prerequisite for revelation. We come to God with questions and with expectancy that He will give revelation, and then He rewards us with answers.

We can make God a part of our everyday activities by asking Him questions and listening for the answers. **Keep a prayer journal and each day sit with God and ask Him questions related to your work, family, ministry or personal needs.** Later as you go back and review, you will often see patterns that God is using to teach you.

We can trust that if we ask God for wisdom, He will give it. It may come as an idea, a picture, an opportunity presented by a friend, a nudge or a "feeling." It may come as a suggestion for a way we can learn more about the situation such as taking a class, consulting with the right person, reading a specific Scripture, or attending a special meeting. It could be a creative idea, or it may be a very specific action we need to take. Someone we know bought some American Airlines stock for a \$1 a share. When asked why, he said he just felt like God was nudging him to do it. A year later he sold his 1,000 shares at \$10 per share for \$9,000 profit. Following God is often risky. If this person had been wrong, he could have lost money, but obedience proved to be the wisdom of God. As we learn to follow God we will find that it is, in part, a journey of trial and error, and requires some risk taking. But as we grow in our relationship with God, we grow in confidence that we can hear His voice. Sometimes we may misunderstand what God is saying, but we learn from our mistakes. And sometimes what appears to be a mistake is something God uses in our lives or someone else's life for good. We keep trusting God to use even our mistakes to work together for our good (Romans 8:28).

- *Does fear of making a mistake or fear of what others think keep you from following through on what you think is wisdom from God? Give an example.*

³ Rawley, Phil. *All by Faith: James Hudson Taylor, Ambassadors for Christ*. John D. Woodbridge, ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.

- *Do you ever get nudges that might be from God? How often do you ignore them?*
- *What could you do to double check if something is wisdom or not?*
- *Share times when God gave you wisdom for a situation. Share how His wisdom was revealed.*

Daniel's Wisdom - Read Daniel 2:14-16, 19-23.

- *How did Daniel show wisdom in this passage?*
- *What does Daniel say about the wisdom of God and the benefits of that wisdom?*
- *How was the wisdom of God at work in allowing the Babylonian king to rise to power and conquer Israel? How do you think God's wisdom is still at work in the rise and fall of leaders today?*
- *What kinds of decisions do you consult God about? Where do you tend to rely on human wisdom?*
- *Are there any additional situations that come up regularly where you need to rely on God's wisdom more?*

I am Wise

Sometimes we have a false identity based on our abilities, wisdom, or our strength—or our lack of them. Often people take their identity from their work or ministry role or their success (or failure) in their career. This is not your true identity and it can be severely shaken by events beyond your control such as an accident, sickness, unemployment, or retirement. Without your career you may feel that you have lost your value and your identity. God wants us to find our true identity and purpose in Jesus Christ. He wants us to rely on him for wisdom, strength, and the abilities we need. If our confidence is in Him instead of our own abilities, we will not be shaken by events or circumstances around us. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 says,

“He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

We should thank God for all the gifts and abilities He has given us. However, we should also be thankful for our weaknesses and imperfections. They are a gift from God because they help us learn to rely on God and to work interdependently with others. If we are overly confident in our abilities, God may allow us to experience situations where we fail, so that we learn to rely on Him.

Some people, rather than being overly confident of their abilities, see themselves as weak, helpless or victims of their circumstances. This, too, is a false identity. Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” When we depend on God, He helps us do more and accomplish greater things than if we just depend on our own ability. God will frequently call us out into a difficult task where we must rely on Him for help. In this way He teaches us both humility and confidence in His faithfulness.

When have you had to rely on God's strength and wisdom instead of your own? What was that like? Where do you tend to rely on your own wisdom and ability? How can you depend more on God?

Prayer

Group Prayer

- Praise God that He is the only wise God and that He chooses to share His wisdom with us. Thank Him that His grace, wisdom, strength, and ability are sufficient for all our needs.
- Invite group members to share specific situations at work, in their family or their ministry where they need God's wisdom or strength right now. Pray about those specific situations asking God for revelation. Then spend time in silent waiting to see if God gives a word, a verse, a song or a picture that might give wisdom to that person and their situation. Sometimes the key to getting an answer is asking the right question. Help each other form appropriate questions
- If revelation does not come immediately, continue to have faith that God will reveal His answers in due time, and remember to pray for one another during the week.

Personal Prayer

- Praise God that He is the all wise God, and that He wants to share His wisdom with you. Thank Him for the abilities He has given you and for His ability which is greater than your own. Thank Him for weaknesses that cause you to depend on Him.
- Confess any way you have been relying on human wisdom and ability instead of depending on God.
- Get a journal to write in and take time each day to ask God a **specific question** about the situations that come up in your life. Then sit and wait for 3-5 minutes to see if God shows you anything. Persist in faith believing the answers will come.
- Choose a situation or person in your life and ask God how He sees that person or situation. Wait for His answer.
- Faith declarations are statements or confessions of what you are believing. Here is a great faith declaration to pray over your life: "I thank and praise you, O God because You give me wisdom and knowledge," (Daniel 2:21).

Lesson 3: God is Love

Life Experience

*With whom have you experienced unconditional love and acceptance?
What was that like?*

The Word:

Understanding that God is a loving Father helps us relate to Him as His children. God is not expecting perfection from His children any more than we expect perfection from our own children. However, He does want us to grow and mature, and continually become more like Jesus, just as we want our children to mature and grow up. As you think about being a child of God, don't just think of little children. Think of a father's relationship with grown sons and daughters who work in the family business. God wants us to grow up and help with the family business of Kingdom work.

Read these verses about God's love.

- 1 John 3:1 says, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"
What does it mean to be a "child of God"? What privileges and responsibilities come with that position? How does thinking about children help us better understand the love of God?
- Psalms 86:15 says, "But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."
*In this verse, what characteristics of God are associated with His love?
How does a loving parent demonstrate these same characteristics?*
- Read Romans 5:8, John 3:16, Galatians 2:20
*How many different ways does the cross demonstrate God's love?
What events or circumstances helped you understand God's love for you?*

Love "without a hook"

God cherishes you and delights over you, not because you deserve love, but because He created you as His labor of love, and you have been purchased back from the powers of darkness at a very great price. Jesus died for you. God asks us to love everyone, even our enemies. This sounds impossible until we learn to love as God does. God is able to separate who we are from our sins and bad behaviors. We must learn to do this as we look at others. We look beyond their hurtful behaviors and see the person God created them to be. We see the potential they have to be children of God and a reflection of His image. We love that person God created, even as we hate the sinful attitudes and behaviors.

Bob Mumford teaches about "love without a hook." So many times in families and in churches we love people "with a hook." We think we are giving our love freely, but in the back of our minds we have an expectation that the person will do something we want in return. When they don't do the things we expect, we become angry and hurt. God calls us to love without any hooks and expectations and to be willing to lay down our lives for others, even when they are hurting us, just as Jesus did. That kind of love draws people to Jesus. Love without a hook is only possible when we are confident that God is pouring out His love on us and through us.

Share about a time when it was difficult to love without expectations or "hooks".

Imperfect Love

Because we are imperfect human beings we often fail to love each other with this perfect love. Most of us have experienced conditional love in some important relationship. We felt loved only if we did certain things. Perhaps it was a parent who always seemed to have higher standards than we could meet, or a spouse who threatened to leave us, if we didn't meet their expectations. Maybe it was a friend who stopped being our friend when we didn't do what they wanted. Sometimes, even if others *do* love us unconditionally, we misinterpret the situation and believe that love is conditional. These kinds of experiences with imperfect love can color our view of God. We begin to think that God, too, expects us to live up to impossibly high standards before He will love and accept us, and if we do anything wrong He will stop loving us. The good news is that God loves us because He created us and because Jesus died for us. Even when we sin, God may hate the sin, but He still loves *us*--now and always.

Share how your experiences have made it harder or easier to believe in God's love.

No Condemnation

Romans 8:1 says, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Fear of condemnation separates us from God's love. In the Old Testament righteousness or right standing with God was based on works, but under the new covenant right standing with God is based on our relationship to Jesus Christ. To be "in Christ" means that we love Him and desire to serve Him. We may fall short of that goal at times, but when we do, we are quick to repent and pick ourselves up and go on. Giving up is the only thing that can cause us to fail.

Have you ever struggled with feelings of condemnation? How does Romans 8:1 speak to you?

It has been said that conviction is from God and causes us to repent, but condemnation is from Satan and causes us to give up. Conviction recognizes our behavior needs to change, but realizes God still loves us. It causes us to run to God for forgiveness and help. Condemnation makes us feel like we are a bad person who can't be any different. It fills us with shame and hopelessness. When we feel condemned we avoid God.

King David is an excellent example of how God looks beyond our bad behavior and looks at the heart. David sinned dramatically. He committed adultery, and then to cover up that sin he had the woman's husband killed. You might think God would reject someone who committed murder and adultery. However, when David was confronted with his sin, he was quick to repent and turn back to God. God forgave him. David still suffered the consequences of his sin (death of the child and turmoil in his kingdom), but his place in God's love was secure.

Read 1 Samuel 13:4 and Acts 13:22. *What does God call David?*

David made some very bad choices, but he was quick to repent and He loved the Lord with all His heart. That is the kind of heart God seeks. Once we know we are loved and accepted, we will find the courage and motivation to change our behaviors, but if we constantly feel condemned or ashamed, hope will seep out of our heart. When we lose hope it leads to despair and we will not be able to change. God is asking us to receive His love and love Him in return.

Proverbs 8:17 says, "I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me."

According to this verse, what characteristic attracts God's love toward us? How does this encourage you?

Share your experiences or thoughts about shame and condemnation.

Share examples of the difference between conviction and condemnation.

Healing our view of God's love

If you have had trouble believing God loves you, these things may help you be more aware of God's love.

1. Forgive those who have loved you conditionally or did not love you at all.
2. Repent for believing God's love is as imperfect as human love.
3. Meditate on verses that tell you how much God loves you and attach great faith to what the Word of God says. Turn these verses into declarations of faith.
Some examples: 1 John 3:1, 1 John 4:16, Zephaniah 3:17, John 15:16.
4. Take time to soak in God's love. Think of God surrounding and wrapping you in a blanket or shield of His love, and then relax and rest for several minutes. Do this often.
"You surround your righteous with your favor as a shield," Psalms 51:12
5. Start your prayers each day with reminders of God's love. "Thank you, Lord that your mercies are new every morning. Thank you that you love me. I love you, too."
6. When feelings of anxiety and fear arise, rebuke them and remind yourself that God does not give a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power and of love and of sound judgment (1Timothy 1:7).

Which of these suggestions do you think would be most helpful to you? Why?

Do you have other suggestions that might help others?

Declarations

One of the most powerful ways to pray is to make "faith declarations". If you have believed God's love is conditional or any other lie about who God is or who He says you are, find a verse which states the truth and then turn that verse into a statement of faith. For example, 1 John 4:16 can be made into this declaration: "I know and believe the love that God has for me, for God is love!"

When I first started using declarations, I would just *think* the words, saying them silently in my head. This kind of prayer lacked power, and I couldn't see why people thought declarations were important. However, when I finally became bold enough to speak the declarations aloud and from my heart, I found that there is real power in speaking out God's word as a declaration of truth. James compares the tongue to the reins on a horse. The tongue sets the direction for our life. When we speak declarations aloud, our ears hear it, and reinforce it to our brain, our emotions, and our heart. Faith rises up within us and our confidence in who God is and in who we are in Christ becomes strong and sure. Try it this week.

Prayer

Group Prayer

- Read the declaration below together.
 - "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love." 1 John 4:16
 - "The Lord your God, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with His love. He will rejoice over you with singing." Zephaniah 3:17
 - "You did not choose me but I chose you..." John 15:16
- Praise God for His love and compassion, and then pray for concerns of individual group members.

Personal Prayer

- Praise God for His love.
- Confess any ways that your love for others has been conditional. Ask God to help you love as He does.
- If you have had a wrong view of God's love, go back to the suggestions for "Healing our view of God" and work through those steps.
- Write 2 declarations about who God is or about His love for you and repeat them daily for a week. You may want to make declarations a regular part of your prayer life.

Lesson 4: God is Good

Life Experience

Go around the group and let each person share a recent example of how God has been good to you.

The Word - Read what the Bible says about God's goodness. *Take turns reading each verse.*

- Psalm 34:8 "Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him."
- Psalm 100:5 "For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations."
- Acts 10:38 "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him."
- Romans 8:31-32 "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"

According to these verses, what are some ways God demonstrates His goodness?

Is God ALWAYS good?

Before we had children of our own, we had a foster daughter who was a teen-ager. Her parents had divorced when she was young, and she had been shuffled back and forth between parents. She became rebellious and uncooperative, and eventually ended up in a group home. She came to live with us when she was 16 and stayed 1-½ years. We came to care for her as a daughter. She had a number of unresolved emotional issues, and we didn't know how to help her. Eventually, as she neared her 18th birthday, her rebellious attitudes became more than we could handle. She left our home and finished out her senior year of high school in a different foster home. I felt angry with God that He hadn't done more to help me and to help her, so that things would have worked out better for all of us. That was the first of many times that God didn't do what I expected Him to do. Sometimes when we have experiences like this, where God doesn't do what we want, or expect, we conclude that God is *not* good.

When have you been tempted to doubt God's goodness?

Who is to blame for suffering?

Some people blame God and doubt God's goodness because of the difficult things that come into this life. Ever since the Garden of Eden we have been looking for someone to blame for our troubles. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. Let's look at what the Bible says about the causes of pain, suffering and death. Read these verses.

- Ephesians 6:12-13 "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."
- John 10:10 "The thief [Satan] comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

- Acts 10:38 “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”

According to these verses, where do most of the difficulties of life really come from? What do these verses say about the goodness of God?

Another cause of suffering: Choices

There are different causes for suffering, but we need to be careful to not blame God. Read James 1:12-17 and answer these questions.

- *What are we warned to never do?*
- *What does this passage say about the goodness of God?*
- *This passage suggests that sometimes our own choices lead to suffering. Can you think of examples?*

Sometimes our own poor choices or the choices of people around us cause us to miss out on God’s goodness and grace. Certainly not all suffering is caused by our own choices, but let’s look at another passage that highlights ways we can cause problems for ourselves. Read Hebrews 12:14-17

- *List at least three things this passage says can cause us to miss out on God’s best for us?*
- *How should we react if we realize our own sin or poor choices caused our suffering?*
- *How should we react if we realize someone else’s sin caused our suffering?*

Another cause: Training

Consider another reason why we experience trials and difficulties in life. Read Hebrews 12:1-8 and 1 Peter 1:6-7.

What do these verses suggest is the good result of trials?

According to the verses, how should we respond to this testing?

Hebrews 12 says that God trains us as a father trains a son. Don’t think of this as punishment. Instead, see it as training just as a coach trains his or her team, or a sergeant trains his soldiers. Sometimes a coach or a sergeant requires difficult, painful things from his team, but the end result is for the good of the one being trained and for the whole group to be successful. A loving father challenges his children to do more than they think they can do and trains them even when they are resisting, but the training is for a good purpose.

What do you think of God as a Trainer? Do you accept God’s discipline gracefully or not?

Can you identify a time in your life when you experienced God’s training? Explain.

Another cause: Preparation

If we study the Old Testament we see a pattern that God uses over and over to train and prepare His people for a great assignment. We can see that pattern in the life of David.

- a) First, **God gives a Word or Promise**. David was anointed as king by Samuel. This was done in private and happened many years before he actually became king.
- b) Second, **God allows that Word to be tested with great trials**. These trials help mature the person so they are ready for the responsibilities of the promise. David was hated by Saul and had to flee for his life. He lived in caves and was hunted by Saul’s men. However, it was during this time he developed leadership skills, perseverance, and learned to be a successful warrior.
- c) **God brings about the blessing He promised**. Eventually David became king. At first he was just king of Judea. When he matured and was ready, God promoted him to king over all Israel.

Ps 105:19 NKJV says, "Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the LORD tested him." There are two parts to this testing. God allows trials to come to prepare us, train us, and determine if our faith is strong enough to endure. He uses tests and trials to develop the very abilities and character traits we will need to carry out our assignment.

At the same time, the powers of darkness contend against the Word of God to try to keep it from being fulfilled. They tempt us to blame God, to give up, or to give in to self-pity rather than trust God. God tests our hearts to see if we will remain faithful in spite of the spiritual battle we face.

When have you been tempted to give up or give in to self-pity?

What did you do (or what could you have done) to keep your faith strong?

Another cause: Mystery

Isaiah 55:8-9 says "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'" *What does this verse suggest about our understanding of things?*

There is an element of mystery in life, and sometimes we just have to accept that we don't know why certain things happen the way they do. At those times, I remember what it was like to take my two-year old son to the doctor for a vaccination. In my son's mind there was no adequate explanation for why I would take him to the doctor and let the nurse poke him with a needle. Still, my son knows I love him and he trusts me even though he doesn't understand. He even turns to me for comfort. Some of the suffering in life is tied to the supernatural realms of darkness, light, and eternity that I can never fully understand. Therefore, when the mysteries of life are too much for me, I lay down all my questions at the cross. I put my hand in Jesus' hand and declare that God is good, and I will trust Him to walk with me through the darkness. There are times we just need to humbly accept that we don't understand, but we trust in God's goodness anyway.

Has there been a time when you had to trust God even though you didn't understand? What was that like? When there is no known cause for suffering, how do you respond?

The Gift

When Joseph's brothers were fearful that Joseph would take revenge against them, Joseph said, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive," Genesis 50:20 NLT

God takes what Satan means for evil and turns it for good. Romans 8:28 says,

"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."

There is often a gift and a purpose hidden in the darkness of suffering. Even great tragedies can release a blessing, if we are trusting God. My experiences with my foster daughter led to many good gifts. Because of my experiences, I went back to school and earned a Masters' degree in counseling and became a school counselor. I was more patient and understanding with my own children because of my experiences with her, and my faith was strengthened because it was tested and found sure.

According to Romans 8:28 what are the two requirements for God to work out good in our lives?

Can you share a time when you went through a trial but found, in the midst of it, a great gift?

Summary

God is always good and we cannot let circumstances around us cause us to question His goodness. There are many causes of suffering including the powers of darkness, God's testing and training, our own sins, and the sins of others. There is some suffering which is so senseless we do not know what causes it. It is a mystery. However, we always know that in every circumstance we can trust in God's goodness and love for us, and have confidence that He is for us and with us. We can turn to Him for comfort and to find hope. We can also trust that He can take what others meant for evil and turn it, in some way, for good.

Healing our view of God

After our foster daughter left, I was angry with God because I had expectations of how things would go, and it didn't work out that way. Someone finally told me that I needed to "forgive God." That doesn't mean God had done anything wrong. Forgiveness is letting go of bitterness, anger, hurt, disappointments and unmet expectations. Forgiveness is more about me than about the one I am forgiving. I went to Jesus in prayer and told Him how I felt, and then I laid down at the cross all my disappointment, anger, and unmet expectations. I let it go. I also repented for my bad attitude and for the way I had distanced myself from God. God assured me that He had never left me. It was I who turned my back on Him. My relationship with God was restored.

Forgiveness, or letting go of bitterness, is the key to healing whether we are angry with God, ourselves, or someone else. If we are angry with God it is probably because He has not met our expectations the way we wanted Him to. We have to let go of control and admit that God is God. His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than ours (Isaiah 55:9). When we don't understand, we trust Him because we know He loves us, and He is always good. We give up our expectations and disappointments and turn to God for comfort.

How can giving up our expectations bring peace and acceptance?

Sharing God's goodness

Because God is good, we want to share His goodness with others. We do that by showing others the same patience, kindness, and love that God shows us.

When do you have the hardest time being patient and kind?

How can you show God's goodness to someone this week?

Prayer

Group Prayer

- Have a time of silent prayer. Each person silently ask God if you are holding any anger toward God or frustration because of unmet expectations. If so, take all the hurt, angry, bitter feelings to the cross and dump them there at Jesus' feet. Then tell Jesus you choose to let go of control and trust Him. Put your hand in His and determine to trust Him, even if you don't understand why certain things happened to you. After several minutes of silent prayer, share as much as you feel comfortable sharing.
- Affirm that God is good by offering prayers of praise and thanksgiving and singing songs about His goodness.
- Have group members share personal needs and pray for each other.

Personal Prayer

- Praise God for His goodness. Use the verses at the beginning of this lesson to guide you.
- Confess any way you have blamed God for problems or trials. “Forgive” God by letting go of your anger, hurt and unmet expectations, and ask Him to forgive you for not believing in His goodness.
- Thank God for all the good gifts and blessings you have in your life.
- Ask God to show you the gift that comes from your past trials. If you are not yet able to see the gift, put your hand in Jesus’ hand and trust Him to continue walking with you through the darkness until you come back into the light and can see the gift.

Lesson 5: God is Faithful

Life Experience:

Share examples of people you have known who have shown themselves faithful and people who have shown themselves unfaithful. (No names, please, on unfaithful.)

The Word - Silently read the verses below. *Each person pick a verse from those below and give an example or an explanation of why it is meaningful to you.*

1. Deuteronomy 7:9-10 "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the **faithful** God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands."
2. Deuteronomy 32:4 "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A **faithful** God who does no wrong, upright and just is he."
3. 2 Sam 22:26 "To the faithful you show yourself **faithful**, to the blameless you show yourself blameless."
4. Psalm 33:4-5 "For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is **faithful** in all he does. The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love."
5. Psalm 145:13 "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is **faithful** to all his promises and loving toward all he has made."
6. Psalm 146:6 "The Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them — the LORD, who remains **faithful** forever."
7. Isaiah 49:7b "Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is **faithful**, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."
8. 1 Corinthians 1:9 "God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is **faithful**."
9. 1 Corinthians 10:13 "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is **faithful**; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."
10. 1 Thessalonians 5:24 "The one who calls you is **faithful** and he will do it."
11. Hebrews 10:23 "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is **faithful**."
12. 1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is **faithful** and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Example of Faithfulness: Sarah

Read Hebrews 11:8-12. We are told in the Old Testament that Sarah laughed when God told Abraham they would have a baby in one year (Genesis 18:10-14). However, here in Hebrews it tells us that Sarah **considered God faithful** and as a result she conceived a child. At some time between the time she laughed and the time she conceived she must have remembered God's faithfulness. As a result, it stirred her to faith to trust in the promise. We may struggle from time to time with doubt, but as we affirm God's faithfulness we will find faith to guide our lives.

How did Abraham and Sarah show their faith?

What is the connection between faith and faithfulness? How does our assessment of God's faithfulness affect our own faithfulness?

Share about a time when God's faithfulness was especially important in your life.

There are promises from Scripture that each of us can apply to our life through faith. Often there is a time of waiting and testing between the time God promises and the time it is fulfilled. Trusting in God's faithfulness helps us rest in His promises.

How does God's faithfulness encourage you? How would life be different if God were not faithful? What promises of God do you trust Him for right now?

Becoming like Him

Because God is faithful, we want to be like him. We want to be faithful in all our relationships – family, work, church, and friendships. Below are some characteristics of faithfulness. After each one are some clarifying examples. Score yourself on each one (5=Always, 3 = Sometimes, 1= Never). You don't have to share your answers.

___ I keep my promises. (Consider wedding vows, promises to your spouse and children, commitments at work and church, etc.)

___ I am dependable in the workplace. (Do you get to work on time; do you do your share of the work; show up for meetings; follow through on responsibilities?)

___ I am dependable in my family. (If you say you will do something, do you remember to do it; pay your bills on time; show up for activities of family members?)

___ I am dependable at church (If you agree to be on a committee or participate in a small group do you show up for meetings; do you do your share of the work at church; do you follow through on your responsibilities?)

___ I am loyal (honest, have integrity, love others; available for others when needed; not talk about others behind their back)

___ I am consistent (predictable, the same yesterday, today and forever)

As a group add additional characteristics you associate with faithfulness and score yourself on those. How are you doing? What are some ways you can improve your faithfulness?

Helping others learn to be faithful

Paul Manwaring⁴ was asked why people today seem so unwilling to make commitments in marriage, church, and other relationships. He answered that people need to know the Father's love. They need to experience what it is like to be loved by a "father," and they need to understand how to be a "son." When children grow up observing the faithfulness of their parents to each other, to God, and to their commitments; they are more likely to demonstrate faithfulness and dependability in their own relationships

God is the perfect faithful Father. Our earthly fathers are to be a reflection of the God the Father's love, care and faithfulness, but no man is perfect. David Blackenhorn in his book, *Fatherless Families*, (Harper Perennial, January 5, 1996), shares research that shows fathers protect, provide for, and train their children. They also do something he calls "sponsorship." By sponsorship he means that fathers help their children make the transition into the community. They help children leave childhood behind, and accept their roles as adults. Rev. Hadley of Focus on the Family shares one more thing fathers do. When a father becomes a Christian, 90% of the time his family will also follow the Lord. The statistics for mothers or children leading their families to the Lord are much smaller.

⁴ Video conference for LDP 1 of Global Legacy, October, 2014.

Discussion.

1. *How has your own parents' example impacted your faithfulness or willingness to make commitments?*
2. *Consider the 5 important ways a father makes a difference and helps others learn to be faithful. If your father was not able to do these five things, how has that influenced your view of your Heavenly Father?*
3. *In many homes today children are growing up without the influence of a father. Some do not even know who their father is. Give specific examples of ways this impacts children's understanding of their Heavenly Father's faithfulness or how they relate to God.*
4. *Sometimes a mother is disrespectful or says derogatory things about the children's father. How do you think this impacts children's understanding of God as father?*
5. *How can the church model the Heavenly Father's love and faithfulness to children and young adults who have never known a father's love?*
6. *How can I better reflect the Father's love and faithfulness?*

Prayer

Group Prayer

- Sing *Great is Thy Faithfulness* or another worship song about God's faithfulness.
- Use the verses at the beginning of the lesson and turn them into prayers of praise.
- Pray for one another's needs—especially areas where you are trusting God's faithfulness for a promise.

Personal Prayer

- Adoration for God's faithfulness. Use the verses at the beginning of this lesson to guide your time of adoration.
- Confess any unfaithfulness in your life, and thank God that He is faithful even when we are not. Remember times when you *were* faithful and ask God to help you be consistently faithful.
- Healing our view of God.
 1. Consider any ways your own father or others have failed to reflect God's love and faithfulness. Forgive those who have hurt you, especially your father.
 2. Ask forgiveness if you have blamed God for others' unfaithfulness. Thank God that He is different. He is always faithful.
 3. If you felt like God was distant during a difficult time, ask God to show you how He was there for you. Then wait for His answer.
- Thank God that He is faithful to keep His promises. Write down some Scripture promises that you are believing for. Continue thanking Him for His faithfulness until you see the promises fulfilled.

Lesson 6: God Our Helper

Life Experience

Read Joshua 1:9, Isaiah 43:1-2, and Matthew 28:20.

What promise does God make over and over in Scripture? How does that promise impact your life? How has God helped you this week?

The Word

“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor [also translated “Helper”] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you,” John 16:7

The Holy Spirit is probably the most ignored part of the Trinity. Although we know He is there, we often don’t appreciate how much He wants to help us. Read John 16:7-15.

List at least 5 characteristics or attributes of the Holy Spirit given in this passage.

Give examples of times when God has helped in each of these ways.

Weakness of the flesh

Read Philippians 4:11-13 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

What is the secret Paul learned that helped him?

Some people think Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was a physical ailment. It is more likely that he is referring to the people who went from city to city persecuting him. Whatever the problem is, Paul explains that he has asked God to remove it from his life. God’s answer is “my grace is sufficient for you.” Paul accepts this and even adds, “Most gladly, therefore, I will boast about my weaknesses, **so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.**”

We may not be facing physical abuse at the hands of persecutors as Paul was, but we all have weaknesses of the flesh that we have difficulty dealing with. Our weaknesses may be sins that we have trouble overcoming (addictions, overeating, sensual desires, etc.) We may be weak in our struggle to be faithful with the disciplines of the faith (daily Bible reading, faithfulness in worship and fellowship, fasting, prayer and so on). We may be weak in our ability to forgive, to overlook offense, and to trust in God. We may lack the wisdom we need to deal with problems in the church, in our families, or in our businesses. We may struggle with health issues, financial issues, relationship issues, impatience or doubt. There are so many ways that our human weakness weighs us down.

What weaknesses of the flesh are a struggle for you?

Paul was *thankful* for his weaknesses because they kept him trusting and depending on the power of Christ within. God never intended for us to be self-sufficient. He knows our weaknesses and He sympathizes with us (Hebrews 4:15-16). He intends for us to depend daily, even hourly and minute by minute, on the power of Christ to help us.

Many Christians depend on Jesus to forgive their sins, but then rely on their own strength, wisdom, and resources to deal with the problems of the day. They may sincerely desire to meet the demands of Christian living and strive (by the power of the flesh) to achieve them. However, they are often discouraged and disillusioned because they fall short. Others have realized how difficult it is and have given up and quit trying. They are compromising with the world because they feel there is no way to be victorious. A few people claim they have succeeded and have an attitude of self-righteousness and

pride. If we are trying to live the Christian life in our own strength we will never be all that God intended for us to be. *God calls us to do impossible things.* He means for us to rely on the Holy Spirit to be our Helper. With the help of God, all things are possible (Philippians 4:13). Our attitude needs to be one of humble dependence on God.

What evidence is there that you might be relying on your own strength and wisdom instead of God's? How about in your church?

What "impossible things" are you attempting with God's help and grace?

The Gift of Grace

"For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ," Romans 5:17.

Do you feel like you are "reigning in life"?

What are the two things that we have through Christ Jesus that will help us to reign?

The gift of righteousness is the forgiveness of sins and the confidence that there is no condemnation in Christ (Romans 8:1). The "abundance of grace" includes this gift of righteousness but it includes so much more! Grace includes all the benefits of God that are bestowed on us that help us be victorious in this life. Grace is the gift of the Holy Spirit which empowers us each day to accomplish all that God is calling us to do. The Holy Spirit wants to help us with every aspect of life—personal, family, church, work, and everything we do.

The Power of Grace

Read the verses below and for each verse *list the benefits of grace or how the Holy Spirit helps us.*

- Acts 14:3-4 "So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders."
- Romans 6:14 "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace."
- Romans 8:26-27 "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."
- Romans 12:6-8 "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."
- 1 Corinthians 1:25 "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."
- 2 Corinthians 8:6-7 "So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us - see that you also excel in this grace of giving."
- Ephesians 2:4-6 "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved."
- Hebrews 4:16 "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Which benefits of grace do you need most right now? Why?

Extra Grace

Many times we look at other people's situations and think, "I could never do that," or "I don't see how they can bear that." Or we look ahead to situations we are afraid we might have to face and think we could never bear it. We need to realize that God gives grace for what we must bear today—not for someone else's burden, and not what we are facing tomorrow. We are each given the measure of grace we need for today. We must trust God for the grace we will need tomorrow.

When have you needed, and received, an extra measure of grace for a difficult assignment or situation? What was that like?

Receiving God's Help

Those with the most resources and most natural ability often have the hardest time depending on God. To receive God's help and grace we must humble ourselves and admit our dependence on Him. We need to humbly turn to God and receive this grace *daily*—sometimes several times a day. In Christ we have everything that He has—purity, love, wisdom, health, wholeness, and strength. Even faith is a gift of grace. We have God Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit living in us giving us the power to be overcomers. By daily acknowledging our dependence on Him and receiving the power of the Holy Spirit, we start out with a new infusion of grace each morning. Then throughout the day we intentionally turn to the Holy Spirit and ask for His wisdom as we make decisions, His love to be our love for the people around us, His joy to be our strength, and His power to enable us to deal with difficult situations. As we learn to depend on the Holy Spirit for help throughout the day, the power of God begins to flow to us and through us all day long. It not only changes us, it touches people around us.

When are you most conscious of relying on the Holy Spirit for help?

Where do you need to rely more on the grace and power of God? What aspects of grace do you need most?

Prayer

Group Prayer

- Praise God for His gift of grace and for the Holy Spirit, our Helper.
- Think again about the Scriptures under "The Power of Grace". Divide into small groups. Each person can share which benefit of grace they need most right now. Then pray for each other.

Personal Prayer

- Praise God for the power of the Holy Spirit living in you.
- Confess any ways you have relied on your own wisdom, strength, and ability rather than depending on the Holy Spirit to be your helper.
- Each day this week start your day by declaring your dependence on God and receiving grace for another day. Try to make this a regular part of your daily prayer time.
- Intentionally depend more and more on the Holy Spirit throughout the day. Several times each day, consciously seek the help of the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to give you His love for the people around you; His wisdom for the decisions you must make; His power to help you with difficult situations; and His joy to be your strength.

Source: Harold Eberle, *Grace the Power to Reign*. Yakima, WA: Worldcast Publishing, 2001, explains what grace is and how to receive it. It is recommended for further reading about the power of grace.

Lesson 7: God is Just

Life Experience:

Jolene was attacked in a parking lot at the mall. She was forced into her car and driven to an isolated location in the woods. Her attacker abused her, raped her, stole her car, and left her to freeze in the subzero temperatures. Fortunately, she was rescued by a passing motorist. Later her attacker was arrested and brought to court. Jolene had to testify against him.

What kind of judge and jury do you think Jolene wants? What does justice look like for Jolene?

When have you (or someone you know) experienced injustice? How did you feel? What would justice have looked like in that situation?

The Word

"The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice...

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne." Psalm 97:1-2

Sometimes we think we want a God who does not worry about our sin, or we imagine an angry judge who is eager to punish us for our smallest mistake. Neither of these is an accurate view of God's justice. God's justice is tempered by mercy. He always offers many opportunities to repent and is quick to forgive whenever we return to Him. However, if you have ever suffered a great injustice, you do not want a judge who overlooks those crimes against you forever. You want justice! When we think of others who have suffered great loss because of unscrupulous people or unrighteous laws, or children who have suffered at the hands of terrorists or been forced into sex slavery, we do not want a judge who will ignore brutalities and injustices. We want righteous justice. It is a comfort to know that our God is merciful, but He is also just and righteous.

What kinds of injustices most upset you?

God's way of establishing justice

Read the parable in Luke 18:1-8.

What was the woman's plea? Who in our society might cry out with this same plea?

What personal characteristic was required to receive justice? What does this mean for us?

Why is the question of faith raised? Do we believe that our prayers will impact justice?

Jesus taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," Matthew 6:10. The foundation of God's kingdom is justice and righteousness, and the goal of the kingdom is peace (wholeness) in the whole world. We partner with God to lay the foundation for this kingdom now in this age, knowing that complete peace and justice will not be established until the return of the Prince of Peace.

Do you see prayer as an important part of establishing righteousness and justice on earth? Why or why not? If yes, tell how you pray for justice?

Sometimes, as we pray, God gives us strategies to partner with Him and work for justice. For example, we may be called to serve the poor, work for just laws, or offer redemptive programs for those who have been victimized. When we work for justice, we need to make sure our efforts are in agreement with God's plans and purposes. God empowers people to take responsibility for their own lives. He offers help and encouragement, but he does not take away their responsibility, choices, and accountability. Stuart Greaves, in his book *False Justice* (Destiny Image, 2012, p. 27) tells how the Lord

spoke to him and said, *“The present social justice movement is preparing the poor of the earth to receive the Antichrist”* because it encourages dependency and a lack of personal responsibility. We must learn to seek God’s ways so we establish His justice and not man’s ways on earth.

- *Can you think of examples of “false justice” which do not require personal responsibility or accountability, and may encourage dependency rather than empower others?*
- *Are there ways you or your church are involved in working for justice? Are you empowering people or encouraging dependency and a lack of personal responsibility?*
- *What are examples of justice that do empower and encourage personal responsibility?*

An Example of God’s Justice: Sodom and Gomorrah

Let’s look at God’s kind of justice. Consider the example of Sodom and Gomorrah.

- Read Genesis 18:20-21. *Why was God considering destroying these towns? How does this relate to what we read in Luke 18?*
- Read Genesis 18:22-26, 32-33. *How was God willing to show mercy?*
- Read Genesis 19:15-26. *How did God balance mercy and justice?*

Note these things about God’s justice and mercy:

1. Many people had been wounded by the sins in Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19), yet someone had to cry out to God before He came to bring justice. *What does this tell us about the importance of intercession and crying out for justice? What injustices are you praying about?*
2. God told Abraham what he would do. He was inviting Abraham to ask for mercy. He does the same with us. He warns us through prophets and shaking, but He longs to bring mercy. He wants us to intercede for mercy. *Can you give examples of ways God warns and yet longs to show mercy?*
3. There does come a time when God’s mercy ends and there is punishment for sin. Yet even in the midst of judgment, God shows mercy to those who love Him. *What are your thoughts and feelings about God’s justice.*

Appeal to Heaven

In the 1600s John Locke made popular the concept that there was a higher law than the laws of man. It was what he called “Natural Law” and the great judge is our Creator. He used the phrase “Appeal to Heaven” to refer to the fact that there is a higher authority than the authority of man’s laws. This became the basis for our Declaration of Independence.

In the 1775, at the beginning of the Revolutionary War, General George Washington commissioned six ships to be the first navy and he ordered them to intercept English supply ships. He chose a flag for those ships that had the phrase “An Appeal to Heaven” and a green pine tree. The pine tree was inspired by the Iroquois tribe who used it as a symbol of peace. The Pine Tree began appearing on flags and was referred to as the Liberty Tree. General George Washington’s flag became popular in the early days of our nation as it reminded everyone that there is a higher authority than the laws of man—it is the justice of God⁵.

Today when we hear of laws that we believe are unjust or court decisions that are not consistent with God’s law, we need to remember the confidence our founding fathers put in “an appeal to

⁵ *Appeal to Heaven Story* at <http://www.ath.us.com/appeal-to-heaven-story>. Retrieved March, 2015 and

heaven.” We have a Judge and a King who has greater authority than any earthly court or king. We can appeal to God as the widow did in Luke 18 and cry out for justice.

Are there laws or court decisions that you believe are unjust?

What do you think about the concept of appealing to heaven as a higher authority? Do you believe God will intervene?

Just Rewards

Justice is not just about punishing sin, but also about rewarding the righteous. If you have been a faithful servant of God, a righteous judge is good news for you. Skim through the verses below and pick a reward that you look forward to. *Explain why you chose that verse.*

- Isaiah 49:25 “But this is what the LORD says...” I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save.”
- Matthew 16:27 “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”
- Luke 6:22-23 “Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man...because great is your reward in heaven.”
- John 14:1-3 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 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.”
- 1 Corinthians 9:24-25 “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”
- Revelation 20:4 “I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge.”

What kind of heavenly rewards can we look forward to?

Final Judgment

Read 2 Peter 2:4-11. *What is the good news and the bad news of this passage?*

We now live in the Age of Grace and God is willing to have mercy on anyone who will cry out to Him. However, at some point God will say, “Enough!” and we will no longer be in the Age of Grace but in the Day of Judgment. We can trust that even in that day, just as God spared Lot out of Sodom and spared Noah from the flood, those who are trusting in Jesus will be cared for even in this time of Judgment. Judgment Day will not be a time of sorrow for the church, but a time of rejoicing as Jesus comes to reward the righteous and establish justice throughout the whole earth.

Are you looking forward to the time when Jesus comes again or are you fearful? Why?

How can it comfort you to know that God is both just and merciful?

Prayer Time

Group Prayer

- Praise God that He is just and merciful.
- Share ways you are involved in seeking righteousness and justice. Consider other areas where there is a lack of righteousness and justice.
- Cry out to God for justice in the situations you just discussed as you pray together.

Personal Prayer

- Praise God that He is just and righteous and He is bringing peace and wholeness to the whole earth.
- Confess and repent for ways you have promoted “false justice” which required no personal responsibility, or ways you have failed to take personal responsibility for your own life.
- Pray for those who are mistreated and marginalized. Ask God to contend for them and to bring about justice and righteousness on earth.
- Ask God in what ways He wants you to work to help bring justice for others.

Lesson 8: God is Creator and Builder

Life Experience

Share something you have helped create or build. How did you feel about your creation?

Word

God Our Creator

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” Genesis 1:1.

God is the Master Creator. Think of the wonders of God’s creation. Consider the intricate engineering it took to create a bee, or the genius required to create a whale. Think of the way God made us so our bones mend and our bodies work to overcome disease. Think of the marvel our brain is and the wonderful way our hands work. Consider the way birds know when to fly south and caterpillars know when to spin a cocoon. Consider the mighty oak tree and delicate violet. Who could have designed such an amazing variety of plants and animals, except God?

God wants us to partner with Him so He can inspire us with creative ideas and master designs. We will never create as well on our own as we will when we partner with the Master Creator. We are told in Exodus 31 that God filled Bezalel with the Holy Spirit and gifted him with wisdom and knowledge as a craftsman so he could design the artistic works of the Tabernacle. We have gifted artists today who produce uplifting movies, great musical presentations, and inspiring paintings. God’s craftsmen also work in fashion design, engineering bridges, writing books, designing creative programs for worship and learning, and many other endeavors. God gives creative ideas for inventions, for business and to solve the problems of family life. He wants to give us creative ideas for all our activities.

Name some other wonders of creation or share about a time when you felt inspired by God’s creative genius.

What is the most creative worship service you have ever participated in?

God the Builder

“For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything,” Hebrews 3:4

God is not only a Creator, He is a Builder. He is Building His Kingdom. He invites us to participate with Him as co-laborers and fellow workers. He has a master plan for how His kingdom should be built in government, education, church, family, media, arts and the marketplace. We are called to be co-laborers with Him. God wants to partner with us, as a father partners with His son or daughter, in building the family business—the Kingdom of God.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:6-15.

How does God build His Kingdom? How do we “co-labor” with Him?

Created for good works

Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” You are God’s masterpiece. God created you with unique gifts, abilities, and personality. You are God’s wonderful, amazing creation. Sometimes we wish God had made us differently – with different color hair, or different shape or size, or different abilities. But God designed you for His special purposes. He created you with a plan and a purpose for your life. He has planned good works that no one but you can do.

Consider how your uniqueness gives you opportunities to impact others that no one else would have. Share examples.

Seven Mountains

In *The Book that Transforms Nations* (YWAM, 2011), Loren Cunningham tells how he and Bill Bright each received a message from God. When they compared the messages they realized they were almost identical. God revealed that He wanted to restore His Kingdom values in every sphere of life. The seven “mountains” or spheres that God identified were family, church, education, economy (marketplace), government, media, and the arts (including sports, dance, music, drama). 2 Corinthians 5:20 says, “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”

God needs His ambassadors in every workplace, home, and community to represent the Light of Christ and to bring His creative ideas and Kingdom values to the attention of people who can change the atmosphere in that sphere of culture. Daniel served kings who were not righteous, but God raised him up to a position of influence with the highest authority in the land. The servant girl of Naaman’s wife had a position that seemed insignificant, yet it was her faith that encouraged Naaman to go to Elisha for healing. Your position may seem insignificant to you, but you have the ability to impact the people around you and help build the Kingdom of God.

Consider your own sphere of influence. How can you bring Kingdom values and God’s creativity into your area of influence?

Your Kingdom Assignment

Matthew 6:33 says, “But seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [food, clothing, other basic needs] will be given to you as well.”

We are to “seek first the Kingdom” which means Kingdom should be our top priority in life. All our priorities shift when we become followers of Jesus. We are no longer focused on our own needs, because we are trusting God for those. Instead our focus is on how we can create and build the Kingdom of God—sometimes at great expense to ourselves. Building the Kingdom together is the family business. As sons and daughters of God, we each have a part to play in our Father’s Kingdom. Your gifts and abilities were not given for your own enjoyment. They are for you to use to bless others and advance the Kingdom of God. Just as God is always working for our good, we are always working for the good of His Kingdom.

Read Matthew 11:28-30. We don’t work alone we are yoked together with Christ, and Jesus carries the heaviest load. As co-laborers with Him, we let Him lead and find rest for our spirit even as we create and build for the Kingdom.

What are some ways your priorities shifted after you became a Christian?

Do you feel like you know what your Kingdom assignment is? Why or why not?

Do you find it easy to rest in Christ at the same time you are building with Him? Explain.

Kingdom Callings

Every Christian has a Kingdom identity and a Kingdom calling. These are roles you play not just in the church, but also in your work situation, your home, and your community. I first learned about the concept of Kingdom Callings from Bob Hartley and Bob Fraser at a Joseph International Conference where they were teaching about Kingdom callings for the workplace. The list below is modified from their list. *As you read, consider which person you identify with most closely.*

- **Joshua** had gifts of faith and leadership. He had a vision for what God wants to do.
- **Dorcus** had the gift of compassion. She enjoyed doing acts of kindness and helping the poor.
- **Daniel** had gifts of intercession and wisdom. He had great revelation during a time of national darkness.

- **Abraham** was gifted in business and in the things of God. Because of God's favor, everywhere he went he prospered and created an oasis in the desert.
- **Bezalel** was gifted in craftsmanship. He had spiritual anointing to craft artistic objects for the Tabernacle.
- **Cyrus** had gifts of generosity. He used his treasure to bless God and His people.
- **Nehemiah** rebuilt the city. He had a vision for restoration. He also was the king's cupbearer. He had the ear of people with resources.
- **Joseph** had gifts of administration especially in the area of economics.
- **Elijah** had prophetic gifts that called people to repentance. He called out "sons" [Elijah and Jehu] to be kings and prophets.
- **Samuel** also had prophetic gifts that anointed and called out kings and leaders.
- **David** was a worshipper and had governmental anointing. He loved God. He changed the atmosphere of a nation with his worship and wisdom to rule. He was also a great warrior who took new territory for God.
- **Solomon** had gifts of wisdom that created great wealth.
- **Ruth** had a gift of faith and faithfulness. She often represents care for the Jews because her faithfulness to Naomi preserved the lineage of Jesus.

Our calling may not seem like something big, but God loves the seemingly insignificant things. One lady who was in her eighties felt she had no purpose anymore, but God made her into a prayer warrior that helped turn her church around from dying to great. Notice how many of these leaders encouraged a son, daughter, or younger generation to follow the Lord. We can help others identify what their Kingdom calling is and encourage them to use it for the Lord.

- *What Bible character do you identify with? What are their outstanding gifts? How do you see yourself using your gift? If someone in your group has trouble identifying their Kingdom Calling, let group members share what gifts they see in that person.*
- *How are you helping others to recognize their spiritual gifts and Kingdom callings? Who are your spiritual "sons" and "daughters"? How are you preparing them to serve the Lord and use their own gifts to build the Kingdom of God?*

Prayer

Group Prayer

If the group is larger than 6 or 8, divide into small groups of 3-4. Identify each person's Kingdom calling, and how they believe they are called to build with God. Then pray for each person individually. Pray for God to increase His anointing on that person and give them opportunities to create and build with God.

Personal Prayer

1. Praise God that He is Creator and Builder. Name some of the things He has made.
2. Ask God for more creativity to build the Kingdom of God. Ask Him specific questions related to your area of ministry or work, and then listen for the answers.
3. Ask if there is some step you need to take to fulfill your Kingdom assignment and build creatively with God.

Lesson 9: God is Our Healer

Life Experience:

Share examples of times when you or someone you know prayed for healing and saw God answer.

The Word

Exodus 15:26 says,

"He said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you."

When Jesus came, he came preaching, teaching, and healing. Read the following scriptures.

1. Matthew 8:16-17
2. Mathew 14:35-36 *Note the part compassion plays in healing.*
3. Luke 7:21-22
4. Mark 1:40-41
5. Mark 5:34 *Note the part faith plays in healing.*

What part does healing play in Jesus' mission?

What kinds of healing are specifically mentioned here?

How do compassion and faith both have a part in healing?

Healing in the cross

Isaiah 53:4-5 offers us much hope for healing. Sometimes we spiritualize this passage, but if we look at the meaning of the words in the original language we discover that it clearly promises healing, along with salvation. As you read Isaiah 53:4-5 (below) consider the words in parenthesis which are alternate translations of the original language. Some Bibles show these words in the footnotes.

"Surely he took up our infirmities (pain) and carried our sorrows (sickness), yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions (rebellion, sin, trespass), he was crushed for our iniquities (fault, mischief, punishment, sin); the punishment that brought us peace (well-being, happiness, health, prosperity, safety, wholly well) was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed (mend, cure, heal, repair thoroughly, make whole)."

Jesus quotes these verses in Matthew 8:16-17 and makes clear Isaiah 53 refers to physical healing.

"When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."

Peter also refers to these verse in I Peter 2:24b, "By his wounds you have been healed."

What do these passages say about the connection between healing and what Jesus accomplished on the cross?

We are to be like Jesus

Just as Jesus went about doing good and healing the sick and demonized, we are commanded to pray for the sick and cast out demons. Each time Jesus sent out disciples to preach, they were also

instructed to heal the sick and cast out demons (Luke 9:1-2, Luke 10:1-2, 9 & 17, Mark 16:15-17 and James 5:14-16). Have individuals in the group look up these scriptures and then read them to the group.

Do you pray regularly for the sick? Why or why not?

How to Pray

When we pray we should pray very specifically about the cause of suffering, expecting God to answer our prayers and thanking Him that He is healing the person. God has given us authority over sickness and we can command it go. I do not believe we should pray, "If it is Your will..." Jesus *commanded* us to "heal the sick," so God has already told us it is His will to heal, and when large crowds came to be healed, Jesus healed them all (Matthew 8:16, Matthew 14:36, Matthew 15:30). Using the phrase, "If it is your will," diminishes our authority and our faith. However, we should always be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. There have been a few times when I was praying for someone that the Holy Spirit stopped me from praying for healing.

What do you think about praying, "If it is your will"?

Do you think the command to "heal the sick" applies to you? Why or why not?

Share experiences of praying for healing.

Why are some people not healed?

One question that always comes up when healing is discussed is why a certain person did not get healed. The truthful answer is we don't know why some people are not healed, and we should not speculate or assume anything about a particular person. However, the Bible does indicate that there are some reasons why healing might be blocked, and we may want to ask God if any of these are an issue in our own lives.

1. **Sin** needs to be confessed before asking for healing (James 5:14-16).
2. **Unforgiveness** can block healing because when we have unforgiveness in our hearts, our hearts are closed to the mercies of God (Mark 11:25).
3. The wholeness that Jesus came to bring includes spirit, soul and body. If we are weighed down with **fear, worry, depression, discouragement, or doubt**, it may block the flow of healing. Dealing with these issues may help soul and body to prosper (3 John 1:2).

Share examples or thoughts you have about these first three issues.

4. **Faith** seems to be one factor in healing (Mark 5:34). Reading scripture and testimonies of healing may strengthen our faith. Listening to sermons or songs about healing also may build faith.
5. Sometimes **repeated prayer** or prolonged (soaking) prayer is needed (Mark 8:22-25). Francis MacNutt in *The Power to Heal* (Ave Maria Press, 1977) reports gradual improvements when using soaking prayer repeatedly for conditions like Down's Syndrome and arthritis.
6. Sometimes the **social environment** needs to be healed before the person can be healed. For example, a child in a home with much conflict may not experience healing until the home is peaceful. A person who attends a church which teaches that healing is not for today, may find it difficult to receive healing.

Share examples and thoughts about numbers 4-6

7. Sometimes there is an **appointed time** for someone to be healed (John 9:3-4).
8. **Intense prayer and fasting may be necessary** in some cases (Mark 9:29).
9. There is always **an element of mystery** when we partner with God (Isaiah 55:8). As we learn more about God and His ways, we may see more healings, but there will always be some

situations we don't fully understand. We should not blame either ourselves or the person who is sick when healing does not happen immediately. Acts 10:38 says,

“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”

Sickness is part of the kingdom of darkness. Praying for healing is a form of spiritual warfare. We do not see the spiritual battle so we have to trust God with those things we don't understand.

What does Acts 10:38 say about the cause of sickness? What does it say about Jesus?

Share any additional thoughts you have about praying for healing.

Prayer

Group Prayer

- Read and discuss the Suggestions for Praying for Others (see the next page).
- Invite anyone who would like prayer for healing to sit in a designated chair.
- Have one person “interview” the person about what their concern is. Use “active listening”. Then ask if the person is comfortable having a couple of people lay hands on their shoulder or back. (Always ask before laying hands on people.) Pray for the person following the suggestions. Repeat with other group members who desire prayer. If the group is large, divide into small groups of 4-5.

Personal Prayer

- Thank God that He is the Great Physician and He is our Healer.
- If you personally need healing, try doing the following:
 1. Read and meditate on verses about healing; for example Psalms 103:1-5, Psalms 118:17, Isaiah 53:4-5, Jeremiah 30:17, Matthew 8:2-3, Matthew 8:16-17, and Acts 10:38.
 2. Spend a few minutes each day talking to Jesus about any infirmities you have and thanking Him that He is your Healer. Then just soak in His presence for several minutes believing that His healing power is at work within you.
 3. Continue to thank God that He is your Healer and declare that His healing power is at work in your body. Keep your focus on what the Bible says, not on your symptoms. As you pray, picture yourself healthy and strong.
- Ask God to give you an opportunity this week to pray for someone who needs healing. Then look for opportunities to pray for others. As we give to others, healing flows to us and through us. Use the suggestions on the next page to guide your prayers for others.

Suggestions when Praying for Others

These are a compilation of suggestions from the teachings of John Wimber, Francis MacNutt, Randy Clark and Mike Bickle.

1. **Use active listening to hear what the person wants.** Let the person share and then summarize both the content and the feeling you think they expressed. In active listening you do not ask any questions except very open-ended, clarifying questions like “Can you give me an example?” You do not offer advice, suggestions or your own experiences. Instead you paraphrase and summarize reflecting back what the person said. Just listening carefully expresses respect and love and can be healing.
2. **Listen to the Holy Spirit** – “Dial down” emotionally so you can hear what the Holy Spirit is saying. Tell the other person you are going to pray silently before praying aloud, then just listen. Thoughts, pictures, emotions or impressions will come to you as you listen to the Holy Spirit. These can guide your prayers.
3. **Pray.** Sometimes God will show you something that is just for your information to guide your prayer. After listening, shape your prayer accordingly. Other times there will be a thought or picture that you need to share directly and let the other person tell you what it means. For example, if God shows you that bitterness is a problem, you might pray for a spirit of forgiveness or ask the person if there is anyone they need to forgive. Be sensitive to both the Holy Spirit and to the person you are praying for.
4. **Pray as the Holy Spirit leads or, if there is no clear direction, pray for God to heal and bless** the other person. It is important that whether the person is healed or not, you communicate God’s love to them.
5. **Linger and Listen. Feel free to pray with your eyes open so you can look at the person.** The Lord will show us more as we wait—less talking and more listening to Him will bring more results. Pray again as you feel led. Stop when you sense the activity of the Holy Spirit has stopped, or the person seems ready to stop.
6. **Soaking prayer** is lingering in God’s presence to experience His love and healing power. If you or the person you are praying for are experiencing a strong sense of His presence, you may just want to rest in Him without speaking or praying for an extended period of time. This is called soaking prayer because you are “soaking” in His presence. You do not need to stay next to the person. Both of you may just sit quietly and enjoy His presence.
7. **Thank God.** Encourage the person to thank God that He is at work answering their prayers. Encourage them to keep thanking Him, even if they don’t immediately see results. Sometimes healing is instant, but often it is gradual and may continue over a period of time.

Lesson 10: God is a Giver

Life Experience:

When has someone given you an unexpected and welcome gift?

When have you given a gift that you felt was especially appreciated by others?

The Word

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

God is a giver. He gave His most precious Son that we might be saved. He continually showers us with good gifts of grace, mercy, strength, help, and material provision. Sometimes we have a tendency to focus on what we don't have instead of the abundance that we do have. My husband and I have made several trips to Kenya, sometimes staying in places where there is no running water. I always come home with a fresh appreciation for the abundance we are blessed with here in America, not the least of which is running water, warm homes, and plenty of good food. Abraham called God, "Jehovah Jireh, God who Provides" (Genesis 22:14). In Matthew 6:33 we are told that if we will seek first the Kingdom of God, we can trust God to provide for food, clothing, and our basic needs.

Each person name one gift of God that you are especially thankful for this week.

Share some ways God has provided for your needs in the past.

Some families seem to always focus on what they don't have, or if they have everything they need, they live in constant fear of lack. This cultivates a spirit of poverty rather than a spirit of generosity. Others are so focused on gaining wealth it becomes a spirit of mammon. A spirit of mammon trusts in money and loves money, instead of trusting in and loving God.

In your home, as you were growing up, what was the attitude toward money and giving? Was there an attitude of lack, generosity, or love of money? How has that impacted your own attitude? What attitude about money does your church reflect?

Tithes and Offerings

Because God is a generous giver and provider, we want to be like Him. We want to be generous givers. The Old Testament established the principle that the tithe (10%) of our income belongs to God. It is not ours to use. The Law required that the tithe was to go for the care of the priests and the temple. Read Malachi 3:8-12.

Paul reaffirmed this principle of giving for the care of the church in 1 Timothy 5:17-18. He says, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."

Paul is saying here that we need to honor our leaders by being generous in giving for their care. Honor opens the door for God to bless you through your church leadership with spiritual blessings. Many Christians today struggle with tithing, but most have found that when they are faithful with the tithe, their other income seems to stretch farther, and they are able to increase their giving.

Share about your experiences with tithing or your struggles to tithe.

Ten percent is a good place to start as a giver, but our goal can be to increase that as we are able and become generous givers. In addition to the tithe, the Jews periodically gave a second tithe which was to care for the poor. They also brought offerings and sacrifices several times a year during their annual festivals which they presented to God. God promised that if they would be faithful in their tithes and offerings, He would provide for them.

Bill Johnson of Bethel Church in Redding, California says that **generosity is the best way to break the spirit of poverty off of your life** or off your church. When Johnson came to Bethel Church he preached for several Sundays on generosity, and they gave a “repentance offering”. They were repenting for not having tithed faithfully. They gave that offering to another church in town. It started a domino effect of giving, and several churches gave to other churches. Giving releases the blessings of heaven⁶. We do not give so we can get, but we give with an awareness that God is our Provider. Luke 6:38 says,

“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

- *Share about times God has prompted you to give generously of your money or your time – perhaps to where it was a sacrifice.*
- *Share about times when God provided for your needs.*

Spiritual Gifts

Besides the gifts God gives in the natural, He also gives spiritual gifts. There are several lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament. These lists are not exhaustive, but they show us some of the ways God blesses us. The gifts in Ephesians are given by Jesus. They are people who have a role of leadership in the church. The five gifts listed are **apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers**. In order for the church to function as it should, all five gifts need to operate in the church. Their role is not to do the all the works of the Kingdom, but to *equip the church* and help her mature into the fullness of Christ’s image (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Are all five of these leadership gifts evident in your church? Why or why not?

The gifts in Romans are given by God and some of them appear to be natural abilities which are bestowed on us at birth as part of our natural personality. Others, like prophecy are a supernatural gifts. All gifts become more effective when the Holy Spirit empowers us for service. The list includes **prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and compassion** (Romans 8:6-8).

Share examples of people who have these gifts in your local fellowship.

The gifts in 1 Corinthians are given by the Holy Spirit. They are supernatural gifts which only function through the power of God. Each of these gifts is given “for the common good”. The gifts are **wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues and interpretation of tongues** (1 Corinthians 12:7-10). Some people may continually operate in one of these gifts like discernment or wisdom, but God sometimes gifts us for a particular moment in time. For example, faith may rise up in us when we need an extra measure of faith to pray for healing.

Discuss each of these gifts and make sure you understand what each one is. Share examples of people you have seen operate in those gifts.

1 Corinthians 14:1 tells us to “desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially the gift of prophecy.” We can pray for gifts that we would especially like to see operating in our lives.

⁶ Bill Johnson sermon titled *Generosity, A Military Move* available from <https://shop.ibethel.org/>

Spiritual gifts are given to us so we can give to and bless others. These gifts not only operate in the church, but they equip us for service in the workplace and community. Everyone has a gift. We need to look for the gift in each person and help them recognize and use it.

Share a time when you used your gifts in the workplace or community.

How can the church encourage the use of spiritual gifts?

Prayer

Group Prayer

If your group is bigger than 8, divide into small groups of 3-4.

1. Share ways you have seen the gifts operating in your own life and in the lives of the other members of your group.
2. Share if there is a particular spiritual gift you would like to see operating more in your own life.
3. Is there a financial or material need that you have? Share with your group.
4. Pray for one another. Especially pray for the needs and desires that have been mentioned by group members.
5. Close by thanking God for His many generous gifts. Name some of those gifts as you praise and thank Him.

Personal Prayer

- Praise God that He is a Giver.
- Ask Him to help you be like Him. Ask if there is any way He would like you to give more of your time, abilities, or money.
- If you have been guilty of a spirit of poverty or of love of money, ask God to show you the lies you have believed and the roots of those beliefs. Then repent and replace those lies with truth.
- Evaluate your money management skills and confess any ways you have not been a faithful steward. Ask God to help you learn to manage money better.
- Ask God to give you spiritual gifts.

Resources for better money management

By being good stewards of our money and material resources we honor God and offer a good testimony to the world. Money management is a skill that can be learned. If handling money is difficult for you, seek out resources so you can learn financial skills. Here are three suggestions.

1. Take a class such as Dave Ramsey's "Financial Peace University".
2. Ask someone in your church to help you set up a budget and meet with you once a month to hold you accountable until you can learn better management skills.
3. Read books on money management such as Stephen De Silva's *Money and The Prosperous Soul: Tipping the Scales of Favor and Blessing* (Chosen Books, 2010), Dave Ramsey's *Complete Guide to Money* (Lampo Press, 2011), or John Muratori's *Money by Design* (GK, 2010).

Lesson 11: God of Comfort

Life Experience:

- *When has God comforted you? How did He comfort you?*
- *When and how have you offered comfort to someone else? What was that like?*

The Word

“And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. 1 Thessalonians 4:13 NLT

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Everyone experiences loss, death, sorrow and disappointment. We all grieve. However, believers should not grieve in the same way as non-believers, because we always have hope. Even in death we have the glorious hope of resurrection, and the knowledge that we will see our loved ones again. We also have a loving Heavenly Father that we can turn to for comfort and strength in times of sorrow.

We don't know a lot about heaven, but we know it is a place where there will be no more pain, tears or sorrow (Revelations 1:1-4), and we will have new, glorious bodies (Philippians 3:21). Jesus is there, preparing a dwelling place for us, and He will come again to receive us (John 14:2-3). It is comforting to know that our family and friends who loved the Lord will be with us there in heaven for all of eternity.

Do you live with an awareness of the joy and hope of heaven that is ahead? Why or why not?

Stages of Grief

We experience grief when a loved one dies, or when we are facing death ourselves. However, we experience similar emotions every time we experience a serious loss or trauma. A lost job, lost friends, a move to a new location, having our children leave home, a health crisis, or an unfulfilled dream can all cause us to grieve. Learning how to let God comfort us in our grief can help us heal those hurts, so we go forward in a positive way. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross studied grief and discovered that there are five emotional stages that we go through when we grieve – denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. **Denial** is when we deny the pain and pretend that everything is okay. This may help us get through the initial stages of shock and confusion. However, to heal, we must face our pain and learn to deal with our emotions. **Anger** and **depression** often follow denial. Both emotions are reactions to feeling helpless and out of control. Anger turns our hurt feelings toward others. We may blame the doctor, the person who caused the accident, or the person who died. Depression turns the anger on ourselves. We wonder if we should have done something differently, or if the loss was really our fault. **Bargaining** is a conditional acceptance. We say, “This may be alright if. . . and then we add our conditions for what we think we need to heal. We know we are really being restored when we reach the stage of **acceptance**. This is when we let go of our conditions, our expectations, our need for control, our anger and our hurt feelings. We realize there is a gift we have received in the midst of our sorrow. We are able to look back and see how our suffering has helped us grow, and realize we have become more sensitive to the suffering of others.

Can you share about any times you or someone you know got stuck in one of the five stages of grief? Share about the “gifts” you have gained through suffering.

God of Comfort

Dennis and Matthew Linn (*Healing Life's Hurts: Healing Memories through the Five Stages of Forgiveness*, Paulist Press, 1978) share how God can help us move through the stages of grief. We must know two key things, if we are to experience God's comfort. First, we must know that God is good and He loves us unconditionally. Second, we must know that we can share all our feelings with a loving God. Kubler-Ross found that people who were dying were comforted by being able to share their feelings with a loving friend. We, too, are comforted when we realize God loves us and wants us to tell Him how we feel. If it is hard for you to picture a loving God comforting you, the stories from scripture can help us. My favorite is the story of Jesus walking with the disciples on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13-32). They were grieving over Jesus' death on the cross. Their hopes and dreams of a Messianic King seemed to be destroyed. They did not recognize Jesus, but they poured out their hearts to Him and He comforted them with scriptures and hope for the future. In the same way, we can pour out our feelings of hurt, and pain and loss. Then listen as Jesus assures us of His love and comfort. We may find it harder to express our anger than our feelings of grief, but Jesus is not afraid of anger. He faced the angry crowd that chose to release Barabbas and cried out for His crucifixion. Still he said, "Lord forgive them." You may find that you are angry with others, with yourself, or even with God. Go ahead and tell Jesus how you feel. He will understand. He, too, suffered betrayal, brutality, death and loss.

Do you find it easy or difficult to trust in God's unconditional love? Why?

Can you share about a time when you shared your feelings with God? What was that like?

Forgiveness

Matthew 6:9-15

Forgiveness is letting go of pain, anger, hurt, grief, and our expectations for how life should be. It is giving those feelings to God and letting Him deal with them. It requires trust in God's goodness and faithfulness. It requires letting go. In order to forgive we must realize that the pain someone caused us (or the pain we caused someone else) is not the same as the person. The sin is separate from the person. We can forgive someone, even when we hate their sin, or the thing they did that hurt us. We can let go of the pain of loss, and still keep our good memories of the person. We can let go of our expectations and demands on life, and still have hope for the future. God recognizes that our behavior is not the same as who we are. That is why He loves us, even while He hates our sin.

The hard part is letting go. Once you have brought your feelings to Jesus, you must leave them with Him. You may find it helpful to imagine taking all your feelings to the cross and dumping them out on the ground, and then *leaving them there with Jesus*. Some people find it helpful to actually write down how they feel, and then tear up the paper and throw it away as a visible act of letting go. Letting go is, in itself, an act of faith and hope. It expresses our desire to go on with life. We choose to let go of our pain, and while we are still in the darkness, we take Jesus' hand and acknowledge our trust that He can lead us back into the light.

Have you learned to let go of painful emotions or do you tend to carry them around with you?

If you are hanging on, what do you believe that makes it hard to let go?

Lies we believe

Read John 8:31-32

Sometimes we believe a lie that keeps us from letting go of our pain. We may believe that letting go of our grief is letting down the person who died. We may believe that something we did caused suffering. We may believe that there is no hope for our future. We may believe that no one loves us. We may believe any number of lies that keep us caught in pain and suffering. Larry Low (*8 Steps to Inner Peace*) offers suggestions for dealing with lies we believe. If you continue to feel pain even after sharing your feelings with God, ask God what lie(s) you are believing. Then listen quietly and write down what thoughts come to you. Next ask God, "What is the truth?" Again write down the thoughts that come to you. Once you have recognized the lies, repent for believing them, and affirm the truth God has shown you. You may have to repeat the truth to yourself over and over until your heart really believes it, but truth will set you free. Romans 15:13 NKJV says,

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

If we continue to believe the lies of the powers of darkness we will live in darkness and grief. If we choose to believe the hope and promises of God, we will live in joy, peace, and hope.

What are you believing? Is it bringing you joy and hope, or despair and darkness? Why?

Comfort Others

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the **Father of compassion** and the **God of all comfort**, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows." 2 Corinthians 1:3-5

God comforts us and then He wants us to offer comfort to others. If you have suffered the loss and pain of divorce, you are uniquely equipped to offer comfort to someone else who is experiencing the rejection and loss of divorce. If you have suffered through cancer, you can offer hope and comfort to those who are currently experiencing cancer treatment. If you have lost a loved one, you understand the pain of loss. Once we have healed from our own loss, we are better able to comfort others. Sometimes we offer comfort just by being there. Other times we offer comfort in practical ways like helping with a meal or cleaning someone's house. We offer comfort just as Jesus does, by loving unconditionally and listening as our friend pours out his or her feelings. We offer comfort to each other by reflecting God's unconditional love as we listen to others share their emotions. One very effective way to do this is to use reflective listening. Reflective listening is different than the way we usually listen because we **do not offer any suggestions, advice or comments**. We just LISTEN and reflect back what we heard. When using reflective listening try to hear the person's heart (their emotions as well as their words). Then **summarize** what you heard. For example you might say, "It sounds like you are grieved that you didn't have a chance to say good-bye," or "You are really angry at the driver of the other car." This kind of listening may be too intense for everyday conversations, but when someone is expressing deep emotions of loss it can be a great comfort to feel that the listener is giving their undivided and attention and really hears one's heart and understands what your feelings.

Who comforted you in your time of grief or suffering? What was that like for you?

Prayer

Group Prayer

Practice reflective listening with a partner. The partner can share about a current problem or prayer concern. Let the person talk for one minute and then trade places – the listener becomes the talker and vice versa. Remember the four rules for reflective listening. After both have shared, pray for each other.

1. No advice, suggestions or comments
2. Use **minimal encouragers** (nods, “uh-huh”, etc.) to help the person continue talking
3. The only questions allowed are **clarifying questions** (for example, Can you give me an example, Tell me more about that)
4. Periodically **summarize** what you heard and **name the feeling** that you believe the person expresses.

Personal Prayer

1. Praise God that He is a good, loving, kind Father. Thank Him that He is the God of comfort and of Hope
2. Consider any unhealed hurts or feelings of grief or loss. Share those feelings in prayer.
3. As an act of faith, tell Jesus you are giving all those feelings to Him and leaving them with Him. If there is anyone you need to forgive say, “With the help of God, I forgive _____.”
4. Ask God if there are any lies you are believing. Then ask Him what the truth is. Renounce the lies and affirm the truth.

Healing is a process and you may heal one layer of hurt only to discover there is another layer that needs healing. Be patient with yourself and with others as you take the time you need to heal.

Sources

These books have been a great help to me in learning to forgive and in learning to process grief. I highly recommend them to you as you work through painful emotions.

- Low, Larry. *8 Steps to Inner Peace* It can be purchased at www.larrylow.com. It gives a very simple eight step process for healing memories.
- Linn, Dennis & Matthew. *Healing Life's Hurts: Healing memories through the five stages of Forgiveness*. (Paulist Press, 1978). This book also gives questions to help you work through painful memories. It is a more in-depth approach with chapters on each of the five stages—denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

Lesson 12: God of Hope

Life Experience

If you worry, what do you worry about? What do others worry about?

If you don't worry, what helps you stay joyful and hopeful?

Strongholds of worry

"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

God is not worried, anxious, or upset. Psalms 2:1-4 tells us that He looks down on the nations' uproar and the kings' evil plans and laughs. Psalms 16:11 says, "In your presence is fullness of joy." If we are to be like Jesus, we will have to give up our strongholds of worry and anxiety. "In Christ" we should be like Him. Unfortunately, for many of us, we are stuck in habits of worry and anxiety. Steve and Wendy Backlund,⁷ help us understand how a stronghold of worry works. Research shows that a strong belief about something causes our brain to look for proof to reinforce that stronghold. We will not even notice things which contradict it. For example, if someone thinks, "People don't like me," they may ignore it when others give a compliment, but latch onto any criticism. If someone walks by without speaking, they assume they are being snubbed, rather than recognize the person may have other things on their minds. We have to identify these strongholds, and resist the lies we have believed. We have to consciously *retrain* our subconscious mind and our emotions. Steve quotes from Francis Frangipane's book *Three Battlegrounds*:

"Any area in your thinking that glistens with hope in God is an area which is being liberated by Christ but any system of thinking that does not have hope, which feels hopeless, is a stronghold which must be pulled down⁸."

Strongholds of lies block out the truth so we cannot hear God or receive His help in those areas of life. Wendy Backlund adds a powerful statement that is helpful to me. She said, "I know I am listening to the wrong voice when it does not have peace, rest, and dominion attached to it."

Is there any area of your life that lacks "glistening hope"? Talk about it.

What thoughts steal your peace, rest, and dominion?

The Word

2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV says, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

1 John 4:18 says, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."

Fear is not from God. God wants to replace our fears with love, power, and a sound mind.

What do you think about the connection between fear and love? How does a lack of love cause fear? How does "perfect love" (God's love) drive out fear?

Henry W. Wright describes the spiritual roots of various diseases. Research shows fear, anxiety, and stress cause a multitude of health problems that can lead to chronic illnesses like high blood

⁷ *Abounding Joy and Hope Curriculum* available at <https://shop.ibethel.org/products?search=joy+and+hope>.

⁸ Frangipane, F, *Three Battlegrounds* (Frangipane, 1989)

pressure, headaches, allergies, asthma, immune disorders, chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, ulcers, endocrine disorders, overeating, and more. Wright says this about fear:

“Fear...is the opposite of faith! Fear and faith are equal in that they both project into the future and both demand to be fulfilled. The bottom line is: which authority are you going to listen to . . . by entertaining the spirit of fear, your actions are saying that you cannot trust God and that you have to take control of your own life. Your heart says: “God I just don’t trust You. You cannot meet my needs as my protector,” (Henry Wright. *A More Excellent Way: Be in Health*. (Pleasant Valley Church, 2005, p A-8).

Wright adds that fear is sin because it demonstrates a lack of faith in God. It is not the circumstances of our lives that steal our joy. Instead it is what we believe—about God, about ourselves, about our circumstances, that either gives us hope, or causes us to fear. When the Israelites stood before the Promised Land, most of them focused on the walled cities and people who seemed like giants. Only Caleb and Joshua focused on God and His promises. We have to lift our eyes above what we can see in the natural and BELIEVE God for help from the supernatural realm.

Romans 15:13 says, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace **as you trust in him**, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Some versions translate this joy and peace “**in believing**”. It is by trusting God or believing in God that we are set free to have joy, peace, and hope. It is by focusing on Him, and not our circumstances that we lift ourselves out of the pit of discouragement and fear.

What is your reaction to the quote from Henry Wright?

When have you had to focus on God to have hope for your circumstances?

Fear or Power

2 Timothy 1:7 also promises us *power* instead of fear. The word used here is *dunamis* which means ability, might, or miracle working power (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary*). Faith believes in a future where God intervenes to help us. Fear and hopelessness come when we imagine a future without God’s help. Some of us think our circumstances have to be perfect before we can have joy and hope, but Nehemiah 8:10 says, “The joy of the LORD is your strength.” How will we find strength to deal with our circumstances, if we lack joy? Our joy, like our peace and hope, are directly related to what we believe—not what we are doing or what our circumstances are like. Regardless of our circumstances, if we lack joy and hope, then we need to change what we are believing about ourselves, about God and His goodness and about our circumstances.

For example, someone struggling with chronic illness might wonder if there was something wrong with them that God didn’t heal. These thoughts steal our joy and hope. However, when we begin to believe that God loves us, and He is helping us, our joy and hope are restored even though circumstances have not yet changed. That joy gives strength to fight for health.

What circumstances are stealing your joy? What beliefs do you have related to those circumstances? Help each other identify lies you are believing.

What beliefs help give you joy and hope?

Fear or a Sound Mind

In addition to power and love, 2 Timothy 1:7 says God gives us a “sound mind”. The Greek word is related to the word *sozo* which means to save, heal, and make whole. Sometimes mental health problems including depression, paranoia, and schizophrenia are related to fear and a lack of hope and

joy. Poor judgment and a lack of self-control are also related to fear. The Amplified Bible gives additional understanding of 2 Timothy 1:7. It says:

“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (of cowardice of craven and cringing and fawning fear) but [He has given us a spirit] of power and of love and of calm and well-balanced mind and discipline and self-control.” AMP

There are several key words in this translation. Consider what each of them mean.

- *Does the word “timidity” bring to mind different behavior than the word “fear”? Explain.*
- *When would it be important to stay calm? How is staying calm related to fear?*
- *How is a lack of self-discipline and self-control related to fear?*

Letting go of worry

Worrying can become a bad habit and we have to retrain our brain to hang onto truth instead of lies. The worry thoughts will try to return, and we have to resist them and declare the truth over and over. This is spiritual warfare and every Christian must put on their armor and fight, if they want to gain the victory. If we are passive, we will lose the battle. Victory is a process, and it takes time to overcome and change old habits. We must continue to stand firm in faith.

When have you seen passivity lead to defeat?

The problem is not with giving mental assent to truth. We can know truth with our head, but if our heart, emotions, and subconscious mind disagree with the truth, we don't really believe it. Wendy Backlund says, “The way to know if you really believe something is to see how you react under stress.” Do you revert to old, unredeemed ways of thinking, or can you hang on to your joy, peace, and hope under pressure? Below are suggestions to overcome these subconscious beliefs and emotions.

1. Identify the lies that feed your fear and worry. Ask God to show you lies you have been believing. Also, invite your friends to point out lies you believe because often we can't see them ourselves.
2. Then ask God to show you the truth or hope that you can believe to replace those lies. Find verses that support what God is showing you.
3. Repeat the truth to yourself in the form of faith declarations or prayers. Faith declarations can be a big help in strengthening our hope. As you speak Truth aloud, your mind and emotions begin to accept and believe it. Below are examples:

“God is not giving me a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” (1 Tim. 1:7)

“God of hope fill me with all joy and peace in believing, so that I overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13)

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” Philippians 4:13 NKJV

4. Attach faith to your prayers and picture the answers to your prayers. For example, when you pray to be healed, picture yourself well. When you pray for wisdom, believe God is giving it to you. Keep your focus on God and not on your circumstances. Believe that God is at work and, by faith, picture a positive outcome to your circumstances instead of dwelling on what could go wrong.
5. Look for things to be grateful for. There always good things and bad things going on around you gratitude helps you focus on the good.

How do you react when you are under pressure?

Which of these suggestions is most helpful to you?

How can you foster an attitude of gratitude?

Full of Joy and Hope

The world is lost and has no hope. People are drawn to those who radiate joy, peace, and hope and the world avoids those who carry a cloud of worry and negativity with them. As we transform our minds by focusing on God and not our circumstances, and by believing what God says instead of believing lies, we will be filled with hope. Then we become carriers of God's presence and are able to share joy, peace, and hope wherever we go.

Who do you know that radiates joy and hope?

How will you strengthen your own joy and hope?

Prayer

Group Prayer

- Share any personal fears and worries. Help each other discover the lies that are supporting those fears and the truth that could replace those lies.
- In your small groups, pray for one another to be free of worry, anxiety, and fear, and ask to be filled with joy, peace, and hope.
- Praise God that there is joy and hope in believing.

Personal Prayer

- Praise God that He is the God of Hope and His Joy is your strength.
- Ask God what area of your life lacks "glistening hope". Then ask God what lies or wrong beliefs are stealing your joy and hope. Use the suggestions under *Letting Go* to reinforce your new beliefs.
- Meditate on the verses in this lesson—2 Timothy 1:7, 1 John 4:18, and Nehemiah 8:10.

Sources –The following resources were used in these meditations. They are recommended for further reading on joy and hope.

- Francis Frangipane's book, *The Three Battlegrounds*, (Francis Frangipane, 1989) identifies the mind as the primary battleground for spiritual warfare.
- Steve and Wendy Backlund offer a number of helpful resources at their website *igniting hope.com*. Their *Abounding Joy and Hope Curriculum* is available at the *ibethel.org* store.
- Henry W. Wright's book *A More Excellent Way: Be in Health*, (Pleasant Valley Church, 2005) gives insight on the connection between emotional issues and physical health problems.
- Many of Joyce Meyer's books and DVDs are helpful in retraining the mind. *The Battlefield of the Mind* especially focuses on transforming our thinking.

Lesson 13: We Become Like Him

Life Experience

*What aspects of God's character have become more important as you completed this study?
How do you see intimacy with God and purity being related in your own life?*

Word

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them,'" Genesis 1:26-27

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit," 2Corinthians 3:18

As we behold or meditate on who God is and come to love and worship Him, we become more and more like him. This is reflected not only in our personal lives, but also in our culture. Today we consider how our view of God impacts culture. The fact that we become like the god we worship is a core truth of any religion. As we study how intimacy leads to power, we realize that the foundation of purity, unity and power is loving and worshipping the God of the Bible. Any other view of God will lead to a very different kind of culture. As we come to know and love God more, we become more and more like Him and begin to reflect His image in all of life.

God is Logos

John 1:1-2 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Genesis tells us that in the beginning God *spoke* and all things were created. The importance of the Word and the concept that the Bible expresses God's words or truth to us is a foundational principle of Christianity.

In a speech at Fairfield, Iowa, Vishal Mangalwadi explained the relevance of God as the Word. Vishal Mangalwadi, a Christian philosopher from India, does a superb job of explaining how people's view of God shapes their culture and how eastern culture developed very differently from western culture as a direct result of having a different view of god⁹. The concept that the Bible, the Word, gives us God's view of truth stabilizes our search for truth and guide our arguments for reason. The importance of language and reason, and the concept that Truth can be known guided western culture and inspired investigation and exploration of truth. It has given rise to the great universities and originally was the foundation of science. Without this anchor of God's Word as Truth we eventually undermine the truth of Scripture with our skepticism and come to the conclusion that truth cannot be known. We then flounder in a sea of conflicting ideas and turn to polytheism or our own ideas of truth or to eastern religions. Eastern religions start from a different premise. Buddhism, TM and Hinduism idealize *silence* and the absence of thought. The belief that thought leads to all manner of problems caused Indian sages to teach that the way to enlightenment is through "primeval silence, senseless sound (mantra), energy or impersonal consciousness"¹⁰. The result is a devaluing of reason that makes rational discussion of issues (a requirement for effective democracy) impossible. Trying to build a

⁹ Mangalwadi, V. at Fairfield, IA on October 19, 2013 and in his book, *The Book that made your World* (Thomas Nelson, 2011).

¹⁰ Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book that Made Your World*, p. 78

democracy or even a university system in this kind of culture is undermined by the diminished importance of truth and the word. Mangalwadi sums up the Christian view very well in this statement, “If God is Truth, if he can speak to us in rationally understandable words, then human rationality is really significant. The way to know the truth is to cultivate our minds and meditate on God’s Word. These theological assumptions constitute the DNA of what we call Western civilization.”¹¹

How does the understanding of God as Word and the Scripture as an expression of God’s words (Truth) shape culture?

How does skepticism toward Scripture undermine a culture? Consider education, politics, church government, even marriage and family life.

God is Love

1 John 4:8 says, “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” Our understanding that God is love, that He created all people in His image, and He requires us to show love not just to our brothers but also to our enemies is a profoundly life-changing view. Most religions do not understand this kind of God, and therefore do not love in this way. Mangalwadi tells of observing many women and children carrying water in Uganda. He was puzzled as he knew there was plenty of water and electricity in the region, and Ugandans know and understand how to pump water into houses. Why were so many people experiencing the drudgery of carrying water every day for basic needs? He then realized that women and children are not as highly valued as men and therefore they can be relegated to doing this menial work. In India the dharma caste has been relegated to being water carriers for the more elite Hindus. Because some people are not valued as highly as others, there are plenty of water carriers. The culture determines that there is no need for modernization.

Mangalwadi gives multiple examples of how inventions were discovered in the east, but were never developed because there were people who were considered unimportant who could be relegated to do menial work. However, monks in western monasteries who were seeking to have more time for meditation, and Christians caring for the poor saw how technology could be developed to make life easier. In this Christian environment, technology was valued and used.¹² This created a culture that encouraged innovation and technological development. Technology resulted in its own set of problems. However, those with a Christian worldview worked to lessen the negative effects by working for child labor laws, safety regulations, and other laws to protect life. The length of life and the number of children dying in childbirth actually improved with the Industrial Revolution because of these efforts. Christians have been at the forefront of social reforms such as prison reform, religious liberty, abolition of slavery, and better treatment of women. A view which sees God as the Creator and God as love results in compassion and concern for the poor and marginalized, and encourages creativity to solve social problems.

- *If Mangalwadi is right, what are the implications related to poverty and developing countries?*
- *Consider how believing that God is Love influences western civilization. Give examples.*
- *Do you see places where the weakening of Christian influence is leading to less value being placed on human life? Give examples.*

¹¹ Ibid, p. 82

¹² Mangalwadi, V. *The Book that Made Your World*, (Thomas Nelson, 2011) Ch 7.

Triune God

2 Corinthians 13:14 says, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” This speaks of a triune God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The God of the Bible is a triune God. He has three distinct personalities – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Yet God is one, reflected by the unity and mutual submission within the godhead. Loren Cunningham explains that the name for God given in the very first chapter of Genesis is *Elohim* which is neither singular nor plural. It is a “compound unity, like a bunch of grapes.”¹³ Monotheistic religions, like Islam, see god as one supreme being and have little tolerance for diversity. They tend toward dictatorial forms of government, society, and family life. This is the culture of most Middle Eastern and North African nations. In nations that are polytheistic, with many gods, diversity runs rampant, but there is no unity. Often one people group tries to dominate other people groups. This view of God characterized traditional sub-Sahara Africa and much of the traditional Native American culture. Diversity without unity is also expressed in India in a very rigid caste system which reflects the multiplicity of gods of Hinduism. This diversity without unity is often expressed in deeply ingrained tribalism and on-going conflict because there is no model for finding unity with diversity. Our God, however, models unity with diversity. This encourages us to respect and encourage diversity while seeking to maintain unity.

- *Think of ways this triune character of God is reflected in nature, for example gas, liquid and solid; length, breadth and depth.*
- *Think of examples of how our view of God impacts our culture concerning diversity and unity?*
- *More and more our nation is encouraging the worship of multiple gods rejecting the one true God who is triune in nature. How do you see this affecting our ability to deal with diversity?*

God is Judge, Lawgiver and King

Isaiah 33:22 says, “For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us.”

In the 1500s John Calvin was asked by the leading citizens of the city-state of Geneva to set up a government that would be consistent with Protestant beliefs. Calvin read Isaiah 33:22 and decided that government should be divided into three parts--judge, lawgiver (legislature or parliament) and king (or leader). In light of the fact that all men are sinners (Romans 3:23), another truth of Scripture, he felt that letting any one person or group have too much power would inevitably lead to corruption. By dividing the power of a nation to three separate groups it would help stop corruption in government because no one group would have all the power. He also incorporated the idea of decentralized power with both national and local governments. This idea was based on Moses’ revelation that leadership should be shared (Exodus 18). This kind of government was so successful that many other countries, including our own, copied this pattern and made it part of their constitutions.¹⁴

- *Is there evidence that our nation is giving less honor to God as judge, lawgiver, and king? How does that effect the balance of power in government?*
- *Can you think of other examples where our view of God effects our culture?*

¹³ Cunningham, L. *The Book that transforms Nations* (YWAM, 2007) p. 112

¹⁴ Thomas A. Bloomer, (2008) “Calvin and Geneva” in *His Kingdom Come* by J. Stier, R. Poor, and L. Orvis, (Seattle, WA: YWAM, 2008), Ch 6.

Intimacy to Purity

As we meditate on God's character and His names, we come to love Him more, and we desire to be more like Him. That is why intimacy leads to purity. As we purify our lives we begin to look more and more like Jesus and to reflect His character and His ways. Purity in our lives helps us to love as Jesus loves and come into greater unity with God's people. When we are walking in intimacy, purity, and unity, God can release His power to and through us. As we finish this study, you will want to consider how you will continue this journey to Intimacy, Purity, Unity and Power.

How have you grown in Intimacy and Purity during this study?

How will you continue to pursue Intimacy with God and become more and more like Jesus?

Prayer

Group Prayer

- Let each person in the group chose one of characteristics of God that was discussed in this lesson, or another attribute of God that that was discussed during this unit. Tell why that attribute is important to you and at least one way it impacts culture.
- Spend time as a group praising God for who He is and how great His ways are.

Personal Prayer

- Spend time this week reviewing the different attributes of God. Praise Him for who He is.
- Ask God which attributes of His character He would like you to reflect more accurately.

Sources for the concepts in this chapter come from the following resources:

- Vishal Mangalwadi speech at Fairfield, IA on October 19, 2013 and Mangalwadi's book, *The Book that made your World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011).
- Cunningham, Loren. *The Book that transforms Nations*. (Seattle, WA: YWAM, 2007).
- Bloomer, Thomas A. "Calvin and Geneva" in *His Kingdom Come*. J. Stier, R. Poor, and L. Orvis, ed. (Seattle, WA: YWAM, 2008), Ch 6.
- Francis Schaeffer, founder of L'Abraï also taught on concepts about the importance of Who God is.

Additional Resources for Intimacy and Purity

Adoration Prayer Book by Bob Hartley (2010) gives a list of names of God in alphabetical order and gives at least one verse for each name. I highly recommend this book to help you learn to offer adoration prayers. It is available at bobhartley.org or as a Kindle book from Amazon.com. Start your prayer time each day with prayers of adoration and praise. (Theme: Intimacy)

PRAISE: Six Ways to Empower your Prayer Life —PRAISE is an acronym for Praise, Receive grace, Align our hearts with God, Intercession, Say what God says, and Encounter God in the Word. This is a short spiral bound book for revitalizing one's own prayer life. (Theme: Intimacy)

Becoming Like Him – A weekly study for small groups. Each lesson focuses on one name or characteristic of God and considers how we can become like him. 13 lessons. Available as PDF. (Themes: Intimacy & Purity)

UNITY - Intimacy and purity lead to UNITY in the Body of Christ. This study explores important themes related to unity such as Responding to Conflicts, Praying Together, Discerning God will and Radical Surrender. Designed to be used for individual daily study with weekly group discussion and prayer. 13 lessons. Written by Mary Glenn Hadley & Charlotte Stangeland. (Theme: Unity)

Pursuing Pentecost – An overview of Intimacy, Purity, Unity and Power with many stories of revivals. This book is designed to help individuals and churches prepare their hearts for revival. The book has daily readings for individual study and weekly questions for discussion and prayer. Written by Charlotte Stangeland. (Theme: Intimacy, Purity, Unity and Power)

Coming Soon - *Pursuing the Power of God* focuses on the the power of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit Written by Charlotte Stangeland. (Power of God)

Additional resources

Peacemaking for Beginners: A Biblical Approach to Peacemaking for Children (K-2nd) Each lesson includes a Bible Story, game, craft idea and several activities to teach peacemaking skills such as listening, staying calm, problem solving together, using kind words, being fair, asking forgiveness, and valuing differences. *Profits from this book go to peace curriculum for Kenyan Schools or for scholarships for girls in Kenya.*

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