



GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

HOUSTON

GROWTH GROUP

WELCOME TO GROWTH GROUP AT GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

Whether you've been worshipping at Grace Bible Church (GBC) for years or have just recently joined us, you have likely heard or read GBC's purpose statement:

WE EXIST TO GLORIFY GOD BY MAKING DISCIPLES WHO TRANSFORM THE WORLD.

It's a short sentence, but it defines and focuses our ministry efforts at GBC. We believe that God uses discipleship to equip *His* people for *His* kingdom work, all for the glory of *His* name. God gets the glory, and we get the privilege of participating in His plan of redemption. It is for this reason that we are excited to welcome you to Growth Group.

We are convinced that participation in a Growth Group is a very important way for God to shape our church into worshipping, serving, and faithful disciples. The purpose of all our small groups is to equip people with foundational truths and ministry skills that will help them worship God more fully with minds, hearts, and lives devoted to His service.

There are two principle components of a Growth Group that we believe God uses to transform and equip faithful participants. The first is the *curriculum*. For over two thousand years the Church has followed the model of Jesus' disciples. Just as the first Christians "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching," (Acts 2:42) so we do today. We must know core truths about God and ourselves in order to follow Him. The second component of a Growth Group God uses to equip people is *community*. In the same way that those in the early church devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, they also devoted themselves to "fellowship" (Acts 2:42). By discussing and practicing the glorious truths of the gospel in community, we find that God uses other people to shape and strengthen our individual faith.

EXPECTATIONS

Being a devoted participant in a Growth Group is not easy. Our goal is to equip and mobilize you for God's kingdom purposes. In order to accomplish this lofty goal, we ask that you commit wholly to the task of developing community while prayerfully and thoughtfully interacting with the curriculum. Like most things in life, you'll gain from the experience to the same degree that you give to it.

PARTICIPANTS SHOULD COMMIT TO:

- Consistently complete the assignment each week.
- Consistently attend weekly meetings.
- Consistently attend Sunday worship.
- Share their life story with the group in 10 minutes.

LEADERS SHOULD COMMIT TO:

- Live a life above reproach in both action and speech.
- Answer reasonable questions pertaining to the week's topic.
- Hold group members accountable for Scripture memorization.
- Commit to pursuing at least one relationship with a person of the same sex for further discipleship.
- Send out an email detailing the group's prayer requests weekly or delegate this assignment.
- Commit to pray consistently for each group member throughout the course of the Growth Group.
- Attend leader meetings.

A NOTE ON SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION

Why does memorizing Scripture matter? Or does it? We tend to think of Scripture memorization as something that is valuable primarily for children. However, throughout the Bible, we find that Scripture memorization is esteemed as an important part of the Christian life with no distinction made for age.

We believe memorizing Scripture helps us to be consistently aware of and obey it. Joshua 1:8 says, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

By keeping the truth of Scripture fresh on our minds and in our hearts – by *meditating* on it – we will be shaped to do the Lord’s will. Moreover, memorizing Scripture aids us in our fight against sin. “How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word... I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:9, 11). We see this very discipline used by Jesus when He was tempted by Satan in the desert (Matt. 4:1-11). Finally, if Scripture reveals Christ, then memorizing Scripture allows us to see Him more consistently and thus to worship Him more fully. Keeping these things in mind, when Scripture is stored in our hearts we can trust that the Holy Spirit is faithful to bring it to mind at just the right times. Be encouraged. Be challenged. Memorize Scripture for God’s glory and for your own good.

LIFE STORY

A Life Story is a clear, concise overview of the most formative moments of your life. We include this as part of our time together in Growth Groups to help people get to know one another. It also presents you with an opportunity to reflect on your life and consider how God has moved and worked over the years. We hope you will find the following exercise edifying!

HINGE POINTS

A hinge point is something that has had a significant impact on the trajectory of your life. While these moments can be positive or negative, they've helped shape or influence who you are today. Choose 7-10 high AND low hinge points and list them in the chart below.

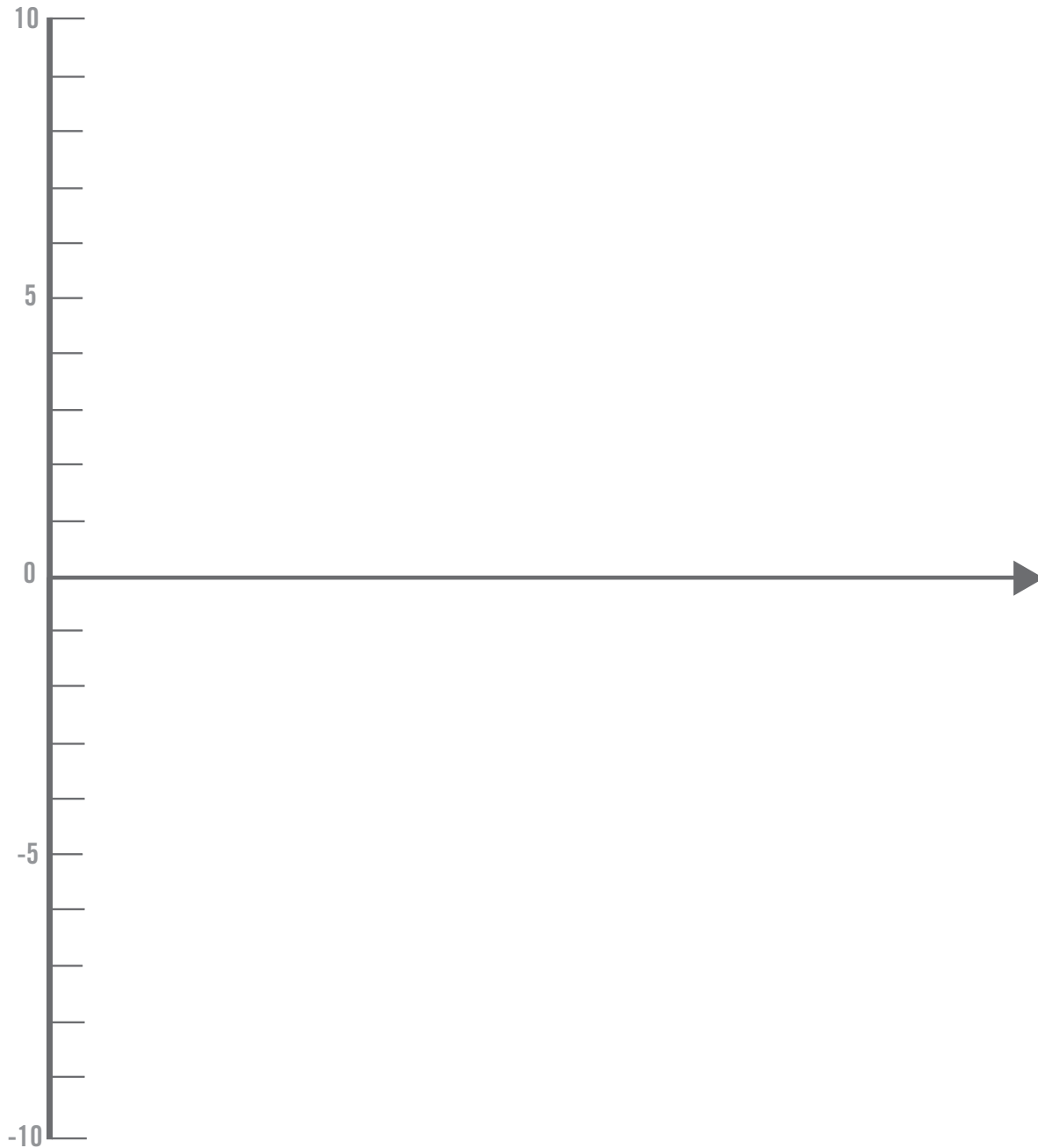
HIGH POINTS	LOW POINTS
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

Next, determine the 7-10 most impactful events from your high and low hinge points by circling them. Then, rate each event, positively or negatively, by giving a -10 to +10 rating. Place the numerical score next to the corresponding event.

LIFE STORY

TIMELINE

Chronologically chart your 7-10 most significant high and low hinge points on the graph below. This will serve to visually depict the most formative moments of your life on a timeline.



On the following page, select 5 of your most significant hinge points to consider more deeply. As you do this, we'll ask you not only what happened and why it was significant, but also how it shaped or influenced your life.

LIFE STORY

Spending time reflecting on your most significant hinge points is the critical part of this exercise. The goal is to put your thoughts to paper to explain what happened and why it was significant. Please note that one of your hinge points must be when you became a Christian.

HINGE POINT 1:

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT 2:

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT 3:

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT 4:

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT 5:

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

LIFE STORY

The last step of this exercise is to organize your thoughts to share with your group. Start by providing basic background information. Then, share your most significant hinge points with the group. After, conclude by giving a snapshot of where you are right now. We've provided an outline to help you do this.

BACKGROUND / BIOGRAPHY (1-2 MINUTES)

Briefly provide general background and biographical information.

HINGE POINT (1-2 MINUTES)

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT (1-2 MINUTES)

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT (1-2 MINUTES)

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT (1-2 MINUTES)

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

HINGE POINT (1-2 MINUTES)

What happened? Why was it significant? How did it shape or influence you?

CONCLUSION (1-2 MINUTES)

How would you describe your current relationship with God?

Are you actively engaged in discipleship? If so, how? If not, why not?

You should make every effort to share your Life Story in 10 minutes. This will require extended preparation in advance of your meeting. After you have shared, allow time for the group to ask questions. In total, this portion of your meeting should not exceed 15 minutes.

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WEEK 1

DISCIPLESHIP

WEEK 1

DISCIPLESHIP

MATTHEW 28:19-20

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them
in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.
And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

DISCIPLESHIP

DAY 1 – THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Grace Bible Church exists to glorify God by making disciples who transform the world. If we take our purpose statement seriously, then we can also say that discipleship is the principle way we glorify God and transform the world!

We define discipleship as an intentional, relational process by which people are equipped and mobilized to do God's kingdom work. Over the next five days, we will explain how we came to that definition and challenge you to think about ways you can participate in disciple-making ministry.

1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A DISCIPLE OF JESUS?

2. READ MATTHEW 4:18-22. HOW DID JESUS CALL HIS DISCIPLES? HOW DID THEY RESPOND?

3. WHAT DOES, "I WILL MAKE YOU FISHERS OF MEN" (V. 19) MEAN?

"Every one of us must be about the business of catching men and women for Christ. If Christ has caught us, we must catch others."
– Charles Spurgeon

DIGGING DEEPER

In first-century Judaism, it was customary for a few, privileged Jewish males to select a rabbi, or a teacher, under whom to study as a disciple. However, as we see in Matthew 4, Jesus breaks with the norm by selecting His own disciples. In doing this, He was following a precedent that God had initiated since the beginning of time. God always seeks out and chooses His followers. He chose Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. He also chose the prophets, and He chose the nation Israel to be His people. Jesus affirms this idea in John 15:16, saying to His disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit."

Remarkably, Jesus did not choose the disciples because they were among the cultural elite. In fact, the men that Jesus chose were lower class, rural, and uneducated, hardly the type of men that usually studied under a rabbi. Even further, the disciples were certainly not the most spiritually qualified. Throughout Jesus' ministry, they proved themselves to be full of Jewish animosities, misconceptions, and prejudices.

We point this out because it's not like the disciples became the men who established the Church overnight. Instead, it was time spent with Jesus that made all of the difference in each of their lives. The same is true for us, although, like the disciples, maturity as a disciple comes at a great cost.

The word disciple literally means "follower." In Jesus' time, a disciple would follow his rabbi wherever he went, learning from the rabbi's teaching and observing how the rabbi lived.

4. READ LUKE 14:25-33. WHAT DID IT COST JESUS' FIRST DISCIPLES TO FOLLOW HIM?

5. IF YOU CHOOSE TO OBEY THE CALL TO FOLLOW JESUS, WHAT WILL IT COST YOU? BE SPECIFIC.

*"Unless we clearly see the superiority of what we receive as Jesus' disciples over every, other thing that might be valued, we cannot succeed in our discipleship to Him."
— Dallas Willard*

DAY 2 – A CLAIM AND A COMMAND

Over the next couple of days, we're going to study the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), which Jesus conveys to the disciples after His resurrection. By focusing on a handful of key words, we hope to better understand what Jesus was saying to His disciples and, by extension, to us, as well.

"It is the unique and universal authority of Jesus Christ which gives us both the right and the confidence to seek to make disciples of all the nations."

– John Stott

6. READ MATTHEW 28:16-20. WHAT CLAIM DOES JESUS MAKE (V. 18)? ON WHAT BASIS IS JESUS ABLE TO MAKE THIS CLAIM?

7. HOW WOULD JESUS' CLAIM TO AUTHORITY HAVE EMBOLDENED HIS DISCIPLES? HOW SHOULD IT BE AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO YOU AS YOU MAKE DISCIPLES?

8. WHAT DOES JESUS COMMAND HIS DISCIPLES TO DO (VV. 19-20)?

DIGGING DEEPER

In Matthew 28:19-20, there is one imperative verb (a command) and three participles in Greek. An imperative verb in English is typically a single action word, followed by an exclamation mark. For instance, "Run!" or "Fight!" or "Eat!" A participle is a word that ends in "ing." For instance, "running," "fighting," or "eating." In this text, the key is to understand which word is the command and which words are the participles. The command will tell us what we are supposed to do, and the participles will explain how to do it.

Often pastors who preach on these verses will say the emphasis of the text falls on the word "go." Typically, this text is used to challenge people to engage in overseas missions. However, in Greek, the command Jesus gives His disciples is the word *mathayteusatay*, which should be translated simply, "Disciple!" The "go" (*poreuthentes*) found at the beginning of verse 19, along with baptizing (*baptidzontes*) and teaching (*didoskontes*), are adverbial participles that explain how we should disciple. A simplified way to view this text in its original language is: Going, disciple by baptizing and teaching.

9. DOES THE ABOVE CHANGE THE WAY YOU UNDERSTAND THE GREAT COMMISSION? WHY OR WHY NOT?

10. DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THE COMMAND TO DISCIPLE IS FOR ALL CHRISTIANS OR JUST THOSE GATHERED IN MATTHEW 28? WHY OR WHY NOT?

From the beginning, God's redemptive plan has always included the nations (Gen. 12:3; Ps. 67; Isa. 49:6). In the Great Commission, Jesus is fulfilling the promise that the gospel would extend far beyond Israel to every tribe, tongue, and people (Rev. 7:9). This calls the Church to active participation in God's mission, whether by going, sending, supporting, or praying (Hab. 2:14).

11. READ REVELATION 7:9-10. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR THE CHURCH TO PURSUE PEOPLE OF ALL NATIONS WITH THE GOSPEL?

12. HOW CAN YOU PARTICIPATE WITH THE CHURCH IN MAKING THE GOSPEL KNOWN?

DAY 3 – GOING AND BAPTIZING

Now that we have seen Jesus' claim of authority and His command to disciple, let's take a look at the other key words – going, baptizing, and teaching.

As we learned in Day 2, the "go" at the beginning of verse 19 literally means "going" or "as you go." This means that we don't necessarily have to go overseas or live abroad to obey Jesus' command to disciple, although some of us might. Instead, all of us need to be intentionally relational with the people who are consistently in front of us. This might be a coworker, friend, family member, or a neighbor. It could even be someone in your group right now! The idea is that we should be investing our time and energy in other people as we go about our normal lives.

13. WHERE ARE THE PLACES YOU SPEND MOST OF YOUR TIME? WHO DO YOU SPEND THE MOST TIME WITH IN THOSE PLACES?

"The gospel empowers peoples of multiple ethnicities and cultures in a congregation to function as one family, thereby displaying the wisdom of God to the world."
– Juan Sanchez

"The 'how' of discipling is not that complicated. It's about doing life together with other people as you all journey toward Christ. We make friends and then walk them in a Christward direction."
– Mark Dever

"The one, indispensable requirement for producing godly, maturing Christians is godly, mature Christians."
 – Kevin DeYoung

The word baptize means "to immerse" or "to totally identify with" We'll talk more about baptism in Week 16.

14. IF THOSE PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW JESUS, WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW TO BEGIN TO PURSUE THEM FOR JESUS?

15. IF THEY DO KNOW JESUS, HOW CAN YOU ENCOURAGE THEM TOWARD MATURITY?

The next key word to cover is "baptizing." When someone gets baptized, they are publicly declaring that their life has been transformed by the gospel and their identity is rooted in Jesus. Just like baptism is a physical picture of a spiritual reality, Jesus' use of the word "baptizing" here is not limited to physically baptizing people. Instead, what Jesus is trying to communicate to His disciples is that they should be a part of people's spiritual transformation. Simply put, if they are to make disciples, they must participate in evangelism.

The same is true for us. If we desire to obey Jesus' command to make disciples, then we must be actively sharing our faith with the people around us. Evangelism is not simply sharing facts about Jesus and asking if a person agrees. Likewise, evangelism is not being a good person but never sharing the gospel. Instead, we should evangelize in both word and deed, encouraging the people God has put in our lives to identify with and follow Jesus.

16. READ ACTS 8:26-40. WHAT DO YOU NOTICE ABOUT HOW PHILLIP FOUND THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH (VV. 26-30)?

17. WHAT "GOOD NEWS" (V. 35) DOES PHILLIP TELL THE EUNUCH? WHY IS THIS SIGNIFICANT FOR US TO NOTICE?

18. HOW CAN YOU BE MORE AWARE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AS YOU PURSUE RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE AROUND YOU?

DAY 4 – TEACHING

The last key word in verse 19 that explains to us how to disciple is the word “teaching.” In other words, it’s not enough to simply baptize people and move on. Instead, Jesus is telling the disciples they must also teach people to obey all that He had commanded them. The word “teaching,” used here, conveys two things.

First, teaching implies the communication of biblical ideas. In other words, discipleship has to involve the conveying of doctrine. This is not limited to the gospel, but also includes all the exhortations, promises, and warnings found in Scripture.

19. WHAT DOES YOUR TIME STUDYING GOD’S WORD LOOK LIKE? HOW CAN YOU GROW IN MAKING IT A PRIORITY IN YOUR LIFE?

20. HOW ARE YOU “TEACHING” (V. 19) WHAT YOU ARE LEARNING FROM SCRIPTURE TO OTHERS? IF YOU AREN’T, WHY NOT?

While teaching is an important part of discipleship, it’s not enough to boil discipleship down to a cognitive, teacher-student process. The second implication expressed by the use of the word “teaching” is consistent modeling of what is being taught.

Like Paul, we must be willing to say to those around us, “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:9). More directly, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

“You are a Christian because somebody cared. Now it’s your turn.”
– Warren Wiersbe

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If we hope to obey Jesus’ command to disciple by teaching others, we must make personal time in God’s Word a priority. We’ll talk more about what this can look like in Weeks 9-12.

"Experiencing the Christ-like qualities of someone close to us provides a powerful illustration of what God in a person looks like."
– Bill Hull

"The will of God is for every disciple of Jesus to make disciples of Jesus. None of us need to wait for still, small voices or supernatural signs in the sky to realize what God wants us to do with our lives."
– David Platt

21. WHO IN YOUR LIFE, PAST OR PRESENT, DO YOU ATTEMPT TO IMITATE? WHAT PARTS OF THEIR LIFE ARE WORTHY OF IMITATION?

22. DOES ASKING OTHER PEOPLE TO IMITATE YOU IN YOUR WALK WITH THE LORD MAKE YOU UNCOMFORTABLE? WHY OR WHY NOT?

DIGGING DEEPER

Putting it all together, we see a great example of going, baptizing, and teaching in the relationship of Paul and Timothy. From the book of Acts, we know that Paul chose Timothy to accompany him on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-3). Over the next fifteen years, Timothy became Paul's disciple, friend, and co-laborer, ministering with him all over the known world (Acts 16:6-19:21).

At the end of his life, Paul uses three simple but powerful images in 2 Timothy 2:3-7 – a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer – to inspire Timothy to faithfulness in ministry. With each example, Paul is commending endurance, discipline, and hard work respectively. In other words, he's telling Timothy that passing along the Christian faith (2 Tim. 2:2) is not for the faint of heart!

Based on this, we must realize that developing and engaging in disciple-making relationships will be demanding. This is largely because discipleship involves relationships and, therefore, requires time, vulnerability, and trust. However, just like each example Paul gives in 2 Timothy 2:3-7, the end is always worth the means.

DAY 5 – A CHALLENGE AND A PROMISE

If Jesus was clear in His instruction, why don't we see more people engaged in disciple-making ministry? As we discussed in Day 4, discipleship is hard work, and most Christians can give a number of reasons why they cannot disciple others. "Between work and kids, I just have too much on my plate right now." "I'm not qualified to disciple someone – I have enough problems of my own." "I have never been discipled myself – how am I supposed to know what discipleship looks like?"

As convincing as these excuses may seem, Jesus doesn't tell us to follow Him as soon as our schedules clear or once we feel prepared. Instead, His command carries with it the expectation that those who claim to be Christians would not just follow Him but lead others to follow Him as well.

23. READ LUKE 9:57-62. WHAT EXCUSES DID THE PEOPLE IN THIS PASSAGE MAKE TO JESUS? HOW DID HE RESPOND?

24. WHAT EXCUSES DO YOU MAKE THAT KEEP YOU FROM FOLLOWING JESUS' COMMAND TO MAKE DISCIPLES?

"Security smothers sacrifice. That's tragic when the kingdom of God is at stake because time is short, hell is real, and souls are at stake."
— Thabiti Anyabwile

25. WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO IN ORDER TO MOVE PAST THE EXCUSES YOU MAKE?

DIGGING DEEPER

So, what does disciple-making look like for you? We have to be very careful in the way we answer that question. For some of us, our church experience has been so focused on programs that we expect our church leaders to create some sort of disciple maker campaign where we sign up, get matched with someone, and check discipleship off our to-do list. However, making disciples is far more than a program – it is the mission of our lives.

We must also beware of elevating one particular model of discipleship over another. As we disciple, each relationship will look different. This is as much a function of different personalities as it is different contexts and times in life. Yes, discipleship can involve deep, prolonged, one-on-one relationships, but it might also be seasonal and temporary. It might involve varying degrees of influence and time commitment. At the end of the day, we must avoid the temptation to think of discipleship in a "one-size-fits-all" fashion.

Perhaps the most important principle to keep in mind as we think about discipleship is to simply make ourselves available to others. Unfortunately, the demands of our jobs and/or families coupled with our own sinful tendencies cause us to neglect the command to make disciples. The reality is, we will never be less busy than we are now, and our natural focus will always be toward ourselves. In light of this, we must be resolved to start where we are and take necessary steps to invite others into our lives.

The call to God's service is always accompanied by the promise of God's presence. This is not just something we see in the Great Commission, but also throughout the Old Testament (See: Ex. 3:12; Josh. 1:9; Judg. 6:16; Jer. 1:8).

26. READ MATTHEW 28:20. WHAT ENCOURAGEMENT DO YOU HAVE AS YOU TAKE THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD MAKING DISCIPLES?

27. WHOM HAS GOD PLACED IN YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW THAT YOU CAN DISCIPLE? WHAT STEPS DO YOU NEED TO TAKE IN ORDER TO DISCIPLE THAT PERSON?

While making disciples might seem difficult or overwhelming right now, we hope that you see how imperative it is for all followers of Jesus to make other followers of Jesus. Regardless of where you are in your walk with the Lord, we pray that this curriculum will equip you with the biblical knowledge and ministry skills you'll need to make disciples!

WEEKS 2 - 5

GOD'S GLORIOUS SALVATION

WEEK 2

THE RECONCILING WORK OF CHRIST

ROMANS 5:8-9

But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God.

"It is an argument a fortiori. If the greater benefit has been bestowed, the less will not be withheld. If Christ has died for His enemies, He will surely save His friends."
 – Charles Hodge

"The Christian does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us." – CS Lewis

THE RECONCILING WORK OF CHRIST

DAY 1 – THE LOVE OF GOD

To begin our discussion examining salvation, there is no better place to start than with love, which is said to be the very character and nature of God (1 Jn. 4:8). While Scripture reminds us of God's love time and again, one of the clearest declarations of God's love occurs in Romans 5:8-9.

1. READ ROMANS 5:8-9. HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT GOD LOVES YOU?

2. IN YOUR OWN LIFE, HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED GOD'S LOVE?

3. HOW IS GOD'S LOVE SIMILAR TO AND DIFFERENT FROM THE WAY WE LOVE OTHERS?

DIGGING DEEPER

While there are a handful of ways we are able to emulate the love of God, a unique, inimitable aspect of God's love is that it is unconditional. Even in the closest human relationships we have, there are aspects or degrees to which we love because others are lovable. God, on the other hand, chose us as the objects of His affection despite our rebellion, basing His love for us on His character and provision rather than our actions.

DAY 2 – SIN: PART 1

It's a great encouragement to know that God loves us despite our sin. However, unless we appreciate how great our sin is, we'll never fully grasp the depth of God's love. To better understand our sin, we need to look at the beginning of the Bible.

4. READ GENESIS 3:1-7. HOW DOES EVE'S STATEMENT IN VERSES 2-3 COMPARE WITH GOD'S COMMAND IN GENESIS 2:16-17? WHY IS THIS SIGNIFICANT?

5. WHY DO YOU THINK THE APPEAL THE SERPENT MAKES ENTICES EVE (VV. 4-5)?

6. READ GENESIS 3:14-19. WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF ADAM AND EVE'S DISOBEDIENCE?

DIGGING DEEPER

The doctrine of "original sin" states that Adam's sin in Genesis 3 has resulted not only in the punishments doled out in verses 14-19, but also in all of Adam's descendants – including you and me – inheriting a sin nature. Because of this, we have all incurred guilt before God for which we deserve punishment. This idea is made most explicit in Romans 5:17-19.

7. READ ROMANS 5:17-19. HOW DID YOU BECOME A SINNER?

8. BASED ON THESE VERSES, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A SINNER?

The Greek word for sin is an archery term that means "to miss the mark." In the ancient Greek games, if an arrow missed the absolute perfection of the bull's-eye, they considered the effort "sin."

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*"As the salt flavors every drop in the Atlantic, so does sin affect every atom of our nature. It is so sadly there, so abundantly there, that if you cannot detect it, you are deceived."
– Charles Spurgeon*

*"Sin may be comprehensively defined as lack of conformity to the law of God in act, habit, attitude, outlook, disposition, motivation and mode of existence."
— JI Packer*

*"Sin is not a mistake. A mistake is taking the wrong exit on the highway. A sin is treason against a holy God."
— Rosaria Butterfield*

DAY 3 – SIN: PART 2

Understanding that sin is, in fact, a part of our nature and not limited to a specific set of actions, we can more closely examine some passages that speak about sin.

In Psalm 51, David is confessing the infamous sin of committing adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11-12). In sleeping with Bathsheba, David had obviously sinned against many people, including Bathsheba, Uriah, Joab, and the people of Israel.

9. READ PSALM 51:1-4. WHY DOES DAVID SAY HE SINNED AGAINST GOD AND GOD ALONE?

10. WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT SIN FROM THIS PASSAGE?

DIGGING DEEPER

Sin is often understood today as offending others or harming ourselves. Many people today rationalize their sin by saying, "Nobody got hurt – we were just having a good time." But, as David makes clear, the Bible does not define sin primarily in terms of what we have done to others or even to ourselves.

Further, David is not denying that he has sinned against other people. He's acknowledging that sin is first and foremost deliberate rebellion against God.

11. READ ECCLESIASTES 7:20 AND 1 JOHN 1:8. WHAT DO THESE VERSES ADD TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF SIN?

12. READ ROMANS 6:23. DOES DEATH SEEM LIKE A FAIR PUNISHMENT FOR SIN? WHY OR WHY NOT?

DIGGING DEEPER

The Bible teaches us that the severity of sin is not determined by the action itself. Instead, the severity of sin is determined by the one who is sinned against. To explain, this concept can be better understood by applying it to our own lives.

For instance, if you slapped your Uber driver in the face, he'd probably pull over and kick you out. If you slapped a police officer in the face, you'd probably end up in jail. However, if you slapped the President of the United States, you'd likely get shot by a Secret Service agent. In each scenario, the same offense is committed, but each offense results in a different punishment. As with biblical sin, the punishment depends on who is being slapped!

Because our sin is against God, the punishment is magnified even more. When we sin against an infinitely holy God, our punishment is not just death, but eternal death.

"As there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation, so there is no sin so great, that it can bring damnation on those who truly repent."

– The Westminster Confession

DAY 4 – GOD'S WRATH AND PROPITIATION

So far, we've seen that God is loving, even as we sin against Him. However, because God is a God of justice, He can't simply overlook sin. Because of this, propitiation must be made. If you're not familiar with the word propitiation, it means the "pacifying or turning away of someone's wrath." Specifically, it means that God's wrath could only be turned away by a payment for sin.

13. READ ROMANS 2:5-11. HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE GOD'S WRATH?

"The doctrine of the propitiation is precisely this — that God loved the objects of His wrath so much that He gave His own Son to make provision for the removal of His wrath."

– John Murray

14. WHY ARE YOU DESERVING OF GOD'S WRATH?

The Bible teaches that man is totally incapable of satisfying God's wrath except by spending eternity in hell. In other words, Scripture makes clear that there is no work man can do that will appease the holy wrath of God. Instead, the only way for us to avert God's wrath was for Jesus to come into the world in human flesh to be the perfect sacrifice for our sin. This and only this was able to make propitiation for the sins of the people (1 Jn. 2:2).

15. READ ROMANS 5:8. WHAT DOES THE PHRASE, "CHRIST DIED FOR US" MEAN?

16. READ MARK 15:16-39. DESCRIBE WHAT HAPPENED TO JESUS AT THE CRUCIFIXION PHYSICALLY ON THE CROSS AND RELATIONALLY WITH THE FATHER.

"Come and see the victories of the cross. Christ's wounds are thy healings, His agonies thy repose, His conflicts thy conquests, His groans thy songs, His pains thine ease, His shame thy glory, His death thy life, His sufferings thy salvation."

– Matthew Henry

DIGGING DEEPER

Crucifixion is perhaps the cruelest form of torture and execution that has ever existed. A crossbeam was placed at or near the top of a vertical stake, and the victim was fastened to the beam with nails driven through the wrists or forearms. To breathe, it was necessary to push with the legs and pull with the arms to keep the chest cavity open and functioning. By pushing upward, the victim could avoid suffocation, but it was extremely painful because it required putting the body's weight on the nails holding the feet, while bending the elbows and pulling upward on the nails driven through the wrists. Eventually, the victim would become too weak to pull up, and would die of asphyxiation.

No other act in human history matches the magnificent sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross nearly 2,000 years ago. His obedience to God's perfect plan of redemption makes the forgiveness of our sins possible through faith in Him. This is ultimately because Jesus was both God and man. His divinity allowed Him to be the ultimate sacrifice, covering all sin. At the same time, Jesus' humanity fully appeased God's wrath against all men and women who trust in Him.

17. WHY DIDN'T GOD JUST SAY, "I FORGIVE YOU" TO SINNERS? WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO DIE?

18. BASED ON THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS, IS GOD PRIMARILY LOVING, JUST, OR BOTH? EXPLAIN.

*"If Christ had not gone to the cross and suffered in our stead – the just for the unjust – there would not have been a spark of hope for us. There would have been a mighty gulf between ourselves and God, which no man ever could have passed."
– JC Ryle*

DAY 5 – REDEMPTION AND RECONCILIATION

By His death on the cross, Jesus achieved our redemption through His blood. To redeem means "to buy," "buy back" or "to make a payment that releases from slavery." As we learned in Day 4, Jesus redeemed us by placing Himself under the curse that falls upon all who do not keep God's Law perfectly (Gal. 3:13). In doing so, Jesus made way for us to be reconciled to God.

19. IN YOUR OWN WORDS, HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE REDEMPTION?

*"Redemption is a greater work even than creation, especially when we consider that God has achieved it through the sending of His only Son into this world and – above all – in delivering Him up to the death upon the cross."
– Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

20. READ ROMANS 5:1-11. HOW WERE YOU FORMERLY GOD'S ENEMY?

21. WHAT IS TRUE OF OUR LIVES BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN RECONCILED TO GOD? LIST AS MANY BENEFITS AS YOU SEE FROM ROMANS 5:1-11.

"Love is an act of the will accompanied by emotion that leads to action on behalf of its object."

– Voddie Baucham

DIGGING DEEPER

Reconciliation is primarily concerned with God's attitude toward us rather than with our attitude toward God. This is due, as we've discussed, to the fact that God is the perfectly holy and righteous sovereign of the universe who hates sin. Since we are utterly sinful, we are the enemies of God and the objects of His wrath.

In Romans 5:8, however, a wonderful truth is revealed to us. At the same time that God considered us His enemies, He also looked upon us as the objects of His love. It was this love of God that motivated Him to initiate the process of reconciliation. In Romans 5:10, we learn that the basis of reconciliation is the death of Jesus. The love of God is so great that He sent His only begotten Son to bear the penalty of sin in our place, so that if we believe in Jesus, we will be reconciled to the Creator of the universe, and we will "have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

22. WHY DOES JESUS' DEATH ASSURE US THAT WE WILL BE SAVED FROM GOD'S WRATH AT JUDGMENT?

23. READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:18-21. HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO OUR REDEMPTION AND RECONCILIATION?

WEEK 3

GOD'S GIFT IN CHRIST

EPHESIANS 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

GOD'S GIFT IN CHRIST

DAY 1 – GRACE

This week, we will spend almost all of our time studying Ephesians 2:1-10, which is one of the most important New Testament passages concerning salvation. In Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul explains that our salvation – from beginning to end – is a work wholly accomplished by God alone.

1. READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10. WHAT IS THE MAIN POINT OF THIS PASSAGE?

2. WHAT DO VERSES 1-3 SAY ABOUT MANKIND OUTSIDE OF GOD'S GRACE?

3. WRITE OUT EPHESIANS 2:8-9 IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

4. WHAT IS GRACE?

5. HOW DOES GOD SAVE US BY GRACE?

"These verses say that we are not only diseased, but dead – absolutely void of all spiritual life. As incapable of quickening yourselves, as persons literally dead."
– John Wesley

"What! Get to heaven on your own strength? Why, you might as well try to climb to the moon on a rope of sand!"
– George Whitefield

DIGGING DEEPER

As we read in Ephesians 2:1, we are spiritually “dead,” which entails an inability – in and of ourselves – to seek or pursue God (Rom. 3:10-12). Because of this, something must occur outside of us in order for us to be made alive. This is what is often referred to as being “born again” (Jn. 3:3), which is entirely a work of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:5-8) and completely undeserved (Eph. 2:8).

So, when we affirm the reformers conviction that we are saved by grace alone (*Sola Gratia*), we are acknowledging that our sin has caused a need for total regeneration of our nature, not just renovation, reformation, or reorganization. Further, regeneration – because it is unearned – is the ultimate act of grace (Tit. 2:11) and is something that only God can accomplish.

DAY 2 – FAITH

Faith is an interesting concept. It’s often secularized to take on many different meanings. You can have faith in the economy, in the U.S. military, or in a football team. You can have faith that Santa will come again this year, or that you will win the lottery. Biblical faith, on the other hand, is much different than trusting in chance, luck, fate, genies, charms, astrological alignments, palm readers, or soothsayers. Today, we’ll take a look at biblical faith and examine how it saves us.

6. READ HEBREWS 11:1. HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE BIBLICAL FAITH?

“Faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace, so sure and certain that a man would stake his life on it a thousand times.”
– Martin Luther

7. WHAT ARE MARKERS OR DEMONSTRATIONS OF SAVING FAITH?

8. WHO HAVE YOU SEEN EXHIBIT THIS TYPE OF FAITH? HOW?

"Faith is knowledge passing into conviction, and it is conviction passing into confidence."

– John Murray

DIGGING DEEPER

Saving faith has three, ascending components. The first is knowledge. To be born again, you must know the simple truths of Jesus – His life, death, and resurrection. From there, the second aspect of faith is assent or agreement. In other words, to have saving faith you must move beyond knowing facts to actually considering them to be true.

While the first two levels of faith are necessary, they are inadequate by themselves to save. A critical and final component of authentic, biblical faith is trust. To trust in Jesus means that you rely on Him as both Lord and Savior and devote yourself to living in congruence to His commands. Put simply, trust takes intellectual assent to the facts concerning Jesus and applies them in life-changing ways.

9. READ EPHESIANS 2:4-5. HOW AND WHY DID GOD SAVE US?

10. READ EPHESIANS 2:5-7. WHAT DO YOU NOTICE ABOUT THE VERBS IN THESE VERSES? WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO POINT OUT?

11. GIVEN THE LARGER CONTEXT (VV. 1-10), WHY IS FAITH IN JESUS SPECIFICALLY NECESSARY FOR SALVATION?

DAY 3 – GIFT(S) OF GOD

In Ephesians 2:8-9, the words “grace” and “faith” are both singular, feminine nouns. The word “this” that precedes “is a gift from God” is neuter, which means that it doesn’t reference either word directly, but rather refers to the whole salvation process. So, both grace and faith are a gift from God, not one or the other. The reason this is important is because all of salvation, even our faith, is a gift from God. Therefore, God deserves all the credit!

12. BASED ON EPHESIANS 2:8-9, WHAT DO YOU CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR SALVATION?

13. DO YOU EVER FIND YOURSELF TRYING TO EARN FAVOR IN GOD’S EYES? WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES?

DIGGING DEEPER

The most important distinction between Christianity and every, other world religion is God’s grace in providing salvation. In fact, all major religions emphasize mankind’s doing enough good works to secure a place in some sort of afterlife.

For example, Islam teaches that there is one supreme deity, Allah, who is worshiped through good deeds and disciplined, religious rituals. After death, a person is rewarded with paradise or punished with hell according to their religious devotion. Buddhism, which does not entail the worship of any god or gods, charges its followers to seek spiritual enlightenment, or nirvana, which is accomplished by adhering to a list of religious principles and by living a life of restraint. Lastly, while Hinduism allows freedom in how spiritual perfection is attained, the path is marked by a seemingly endless cycle of reincarnations in which its followers strive to inch closer toward salvation through various actions of virtue. With each of these religions, it’s all work, all the time!

In contrast, as we’ve been discussing the past couple of weeks, Christianity claims that a loving God freely offers salvation to a sinful, rebellious people on the basis of His Son’s substitutionary work on the cross. In light of this, we are able to rest from our achieving, earning, and performing, confident that Jesus’ shed blood is sufficient for our salvation.

“The gratuitous nature of salvation is most effectually shown by saying, ‘Ye are not only saved by faith in opposition to works, but your very faith is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.’”

– Charles Hodge

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“If we believe that we are capable of working up faith in our souls, we cannot boast in Christ alone. But, if we understand that we have faith only because of the work of the Holy Spirit, then we can truly give God all the glory for our salvation.”

– RC Sproul

"The man who has faith is the man who is no longer looking at himself and no longer looking to himself. He looks entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work, and he rests on that alone."

– Martyn Lloyd-Jones

"The last bastion of pride is the belief that we are the originators of our faith."

– John Piper

14. READ ROMANS 3:9-20. WHAT IS PAUL TRYING TO CONVEY ABOUT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF MAN APART FROM GRACE?

15. READ ROMANS 3:21-26. HOW DOES GOD OVERCOME OUR LACK OF RIGHTEOUSNESS?

16. HOW SHOULD THE GIFT OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPACT HOW WE VIEW OURSELVES?

DAY 4 – DO NOT BOAST

Based on the idea that both grace and faith are the gifts of God, Paul then says that no one has room to boast in their salvation. In fact, Ephesians 2:9b slams the door shut on human pride. Because He is responsible for 100 percent of the transaction, God alone deserves worship and glory for our salvation.

17. WHY IS IT FOOLISH TO BOAST ABOUT YOUR SALVATION?

18. WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN BE GUILTY OF BOASTING AS DESCRIBED IN EPHESIANS 2:9?

19. READ PHILIPPIANS 3:4-14. DESCRIBE PAUL'S THOUGHTS ABOUT HIS OWN ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND JESUS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

20. HOW SHOULD PAUL'S THOUGHTS FROM PHILIPPIANS 3:4-14 INSTRUCT YOUR IDEA OF YOUR OWN ACCOMPLISHMENTS?

DAY 5 – GOOD WORKS

Ephesians 2:8-9 makes clear that we are not saved by good works. Instead, as we've seen, we can only be saved because God is gracious and merciful and has designed a way for us to be declared righteous when we are not. In addition to saving us, though, God also desires that we would reflect His character and goodness to the world. To understand how to do this, we must first have a proper understanding of good works.

21. IN YOUR OWN WORDS, WHAT ARE GOOD WORKS?

22. CAN YOUR GOOD WORKS SAVE YOU? WHY OR WHY NOT?

23. WHAT DOES EPHESIANS 2:10 ADD TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF EPHESIANS 2:9?

"Do we impress people with ourselves or with the Lord? This is genuinely vital. It determines the value of all our work and labor."
– Watchman Nee

"Good works are good because they spring not from a lifeless faith but a true and lively faith."
– The Westminster Confession

"We are saved by grace through faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone."

– John Calvin

"Christian spirituality is seen in two expressions. The first is faith, which is our response of trusting Christ and His saving grace. The second is works, the resulting demonstration of our faith and thanksgiving to Christ for His saving grace."

– Carl Lewis

24. DESCRIBE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING SAVED BY WORKS AND BEING SAVED FOR WORKS.

DIGGING DEEPER

No man has ever been perfect except Jesus. Therefore, any life that falls short of the absolute moral perfection of Jesus is sinful and deserves to be punished. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8 that we are not saved by works. In other words, there is no religious activity you can do that will earn God's love and forgiveness – we learned that in Week 2.

As you grow in your relationship with Jesus, you begin to realize the massive debt that was erased on the cross. Further, you appreciate the grace poured out to you through the Holy Spirit. As you understand the masterful plan of God, you begin to grow in your desire to serve the Lord. Ultimately, you are not saved by works, but when you are saved, you do good works.

25. READ JAMES 2:14-17. HOW DO THESE VERSES DESCRIBE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS?

26. IS THERE ANY OTHER WAY TO DEMONSTRATE TRUE FAITH OTHER THAN BY WORKS? WHY OR WHY NOT?

WEEK 4

THE ORDER OF SALVATION

ROMANS 8:29-30

For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified.

"You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary."
 – Jonathan Edwards

THE ORDER OF SALVATION

DAY 1 – GOD'S PROMISE

In Romans 8:28-30, we're introduced to five great doctrines: foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. These five ideas are inextricably tied together like links on a chain. In fact, this has led to these verses being referred to as "the golden chain of salvation."

Although this chain does not specifically mention everything that God does in redeeming us – we'll talk about sanctification next week – it does tell us that salvation is from start to finish a work of God. In other words, it's not that God initiates our salvation, and we complete it by our obedience. Instead, God alone saves. He starts the work of salvation and finishes it without any help from us.

Before we examine each one of the doctrines mentioned in Romans 8:28-30, we'll start by looking at the overall point of these verses.

1. READ ROMANS 8:28-30. WHAT IS PAUL'S MAIN POINT?

2. WHAT PROMISE DOES PAUL MAKE IN VERSE 28? WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS FOR RECEIVING THIS PROMISE?

3. WHAT "GOOD" DO YOU THINK PAUL IS SAYING GOD WORKS TOGETHER (V. 28)?

4. WHAT DO YOU NOTICE IN VERSES 29-30 ABOUT GOD'S ROLE IN YOUR SALVATION?

5. HOW IS ROMANS 8:28-30 AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO YOU AS YOU ENCOUNTER DIFFICULT OR HARD TIMES?

DIGGING DEEPER

In Romans 8:28, Paul is not promising Christians an easier or more comfortable life than non-believers. He's also not saying that when we have troubles, they will work out in some general or abstract sense. Instead, by adding verses 29 and 30, Paul clarifies that everything that happens to us is "[working] together" (v. 28) for our final and ultimate salvation. In other words, every good and bad circumstance is collaborating for "His purpose" (v. 28). Specifically, that we would be "conformed to the image of His Son" (v. 29).

This shows us that "the good" God is always working for us is character change. In other words, through all of life's circumstances, God is working to make us as loving, content, wise, strong, good, joyful, and kind as Jesus.

DAY 2 – FOREKNOWLEDGE, PREDESTINATION, AND CALLING

When we are told in the Bible that God "knows" someone, it doesn't mean God is generally aware of that person's existence. Instead, it means God has set His love in a personal way on that person. That said, the concept of foreknowledge simply adds the thought of "beforehand" to the word "know" as used in its relational sense. Putting it all together, the word foreknowledge can be accurately thought of as "forelove."

6. BASED ON THE ABOVE, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE CONCEPT OF FOREKNOWLEDGE?

7. READ JEREMIAH 1:5. WHAT DOES THIS VERSE ADD TO YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF FOREKNOWLEDGE?

*"Our vision is so limited
we can hardly imagine
a love that does not
show itself in protection
from suffering. The love
of God is of a different
nature altogether. It
stands in the very teeth
of suffering."
– Elisabeth Elliot*

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*"God foreknows what
will be because He has
decreed what shall be."
– AW Pink*

"If the final decision for the salvation of fallen sinners were left in the hands of fallen sinners, we would despair all hope that anyone would be saved." – RC Sproul

For more on the doctrine of predestination, see Appendix A.

The word predestine means exactly what it appears to mean in English – to set a destination for ourselves or someone else. In Greek, the word is *prohoridzo*. It's a combination of two words – *pro*, which means "before" and *horidzo*, which means "to mark out." Putting it together, *prohoridzo* means "to mark out before." In context, this means that God, because of His love for us, has set a destination for us beforehand. As we've already discussed, that destination is to be conformed to the likeness of Christ.

8. BASED ON THE ABOVE, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PREDESTINED?

9. READ EPHESIANS 1:3-5 AND 2 TIMOTHY 1:8-9. WHAT DO THESE VERSES ADD TO YOUR THOUGHTS ON PREDESTINATION?

10. HOW IS THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION A COMFORT TO THOSE IN CHRIST?

DIGGING DEEPER

John Calvin is the theologian most closely associated with the doctrine of predestination. He has commonly been portrayed as an uncaring, unfeeling figure who preached about predestination for the purpose of holding his hearers in a state of anguish and uncertainty. However, that isn't the case at all. Calvin thought the doctrine of predestination provided tremendous comfort for his people. He encouraged his people with this doctrine, saying, "And as Christ teaches, here is our only ground for firmness and confidence. In order to free us of all fear and render us victorious amid so many dangers, snares, and mortal struggles, Jesus promises that whatever the Father has entrusted into His keeping will be safe."

The Greek word for called is *ekkaleo*. Again, it's a combination of two words – *ek*, which means “out from” and *kaleo*, which means “to be called.” *Ekkaleo*, then, means “to be called out from.” This is also the root word for church (*ekklesia*) – which describes those who are called out from the world unto God.

It's important to note that this definition is different than the way the word called is used in Matthew 22:14. There, Jesus says “many are called but few are chosen.” In that context, “the called” are any who have heard the proclamation of the gospel. However, that cannot be the sense in which the word is used in Romans 8:30 because “the called” are the same group of people who are subsequently “justified” and “glorified.” In other words, anyone who is called by God, as the word is used in Romans 8:28-30, must eventually become justified and glorified.

11. BASED ON THE ABOVE, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “CALLED”?

12. READ 1 PETER 2:9-10. WHAT ARE WE CALLED TO BELONG TO?

*“God has given us our
identity that His identity
might be proclaimed
through us.”
– John Piper*

DIGGING DEEPER

In terms of timing, calling is the point at which the things determined beforehand in the mind and counsel of God come to pass. We have to remember that, strictly speaking, there is no time frame for God – He is outside of time. God simply knows and determines. That said, what God decrees in eternity becomes actual in time. Therefore, calling is the point where His eternal foreknowledge of some and His predestination of them to salvation is manifest.

DAY 3 – JUSTIFICATION AND FORGIVENESS

The Greek word for justified is *dikaioo*, meaning “to be declared righteous.” It is a legal term that means to be pronounced and treated by God as legally righteous and blameless because of the work of Jesus. Its meaning is the exact opposite of condemnation, which means to declare guilty.

In Romans 8:30, we see that justification is not an isolated incident, but that it's inseparable from the whole plan of God's purpose and activity, beginning in eternity (foreknowledge and predestination), coming into time and history (calling), and ending in eternity (glorification).

"To be justified means more than to be declared 'not guilty.' It actually means to be declared righteous before God."
 – Jerry Bridges

"No child of God sins to that degree as to make himself incapable of forgiveness."
 – John Bunyan

13. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE "JUSTIFIED"?

14. READ ROMANS 5:1-10. HOW WERE WE JUSTIFIED?

15. WHAT DO THESE SAME VERSES SAY IS THE RESULT OF OUR JUSTIFICATION?

DIGGING DEEPER

Most people fail to see their need for justification because they don't recognize the extent of God's holiness and their sin. Though some people might acknowledge that they sin, many think they can satisfy the demands of God by their own good labors, which they believe will offset their failings.

In the end, it is only when we realize how depraved we are and how holy God is that we will turn to God by trusting that He is also loving and gracious. Instead of singing, "God helped me become a better person, even though I wasn't that bad off to begin with," we must sing, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!"

There are two important aspects of justification. We'll start by looking at forgiveness and then look at the concept of imputation.

16. READ EPHESIANS 1:7. WHAT MADE GOD'S FORGIVENESS POSSIBLE?

17. READ HEBREWS 10:17-18. WHAT DO THESE VERSES ADD TO YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF FORGIVENESS?

18. WHY DOES IT MATTER THAT YOUR SINS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN? HOW DOES THIS ENABLE YOU TO LIVE?

DIGGING DEEPER

In the Old Testament, forgiveness required a priest and a sacrifice. As we move through the Bible, we see an endless succession of both priests and sacrifices – until Jesus. The book of Hebrews declares Jesus to be both the great, eternal high priest and the final sacrifice (Heb. 7:23-27).

Because of this, we can put our guilt and shame to rest! In paying for our sin on the cross, Jesus completely forgave our sin, and Hebrews 10:17-18 reminds us this also means that He no longer remembers our sins. In other words, our sin never counts against us again. This is of infinite practical importance to us because it means that there is no place for shame in the life of a Christian. Even more, instead of shame, God offers us freedom (Gal. 5:1).

"If I cast up a confessed, repented, and forsaken sin against another, and allow my remembrance of that sin to colour my thinking and feed my suspicions, then I know nothing of Calvary love."
– Amy Carmichael

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DAY 4 – JUSTIFICATION AND IMPUTATION

In Day 3, we saw that part of justification is the forgiveness of sin. Today, we'll look at the second aspect of justification in which God credits Christ's righteousness to us. The technical, theological way to say this is that God imputes the righteousness of Christ to us.

The concept of imputation is easiest to understand in opposition to amputation. Amputation means to take away. Imputation means to give. Even more, imputation means, "to reckon or to charge to one's account." Regarding salvation, it revolves around the idea of receiving the righteousness of another. Jesus' imputed righteousness comes through faith and is our only hope for salvation.

19. READ HEBREWS 7:26-28. WHAT DO THESE VERSES SAY ABOUT THE PERFECT, SINLESS LIFE OF JESUS?

*"This is our acquittal
– the guilt that held us
liable for punishment
has been transferred
to the head of Christ.
We must remember
this substitution, lest
we tremble and remain
anxious throughout life."
– John Calvin*

*"God not only declares
that we are forgiven, He
also declares that we are
positively righteous. He
puts to our account the
righteousness of Jesus
and then pronounces
that we are righteous in
His holy sight."
– Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

20. HOW SHOULD THE IMPUTATION OF JESUS' RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPACT THE WAY WE LIVE?

DIGGING DEEPER

We read in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." On the one hand, God the Father took our sins, placed them upon Jesus, and inflicted upon Him the punishment that we deserved for those sins. On the other hand, God the Father took the righteousness of Jesus and gave it to us.

As Charles Spurgeon often pointed out, we wear the righteousness of Christ like a robe. When God looks upon us, He does not see the awful things we have thought and done. Instead, He sees Jesus. This is a wonderful truth!

21. READ ROMANS 4:1-8. WHAT DO THESE VERSES SAY ABOUT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF JESUS "IMPUTED" OR "COUNTED" TO US?

22. WHAT DOES "IT WAS COUNTED" (V. 3) MEAN?

23. HOW DOES A PERSON RECEIVE CREDIT FROM GOD AS BEING RIGHTEOUS?

DAY 5 – GLORIFICATION

The Greek word for glorified is *doxadzo*. It is the same word from which we get the word doxology. It means "to magnify, to honor, or to extol." In this context, it refers to the position we will one day assume in heaven!

24. BASED ON THE DESCRIPTION ABOVE, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “GLORIFIED”?

*“We are more sure to
arise out of our grave
than out of our beds.”
– Thomas Watson*

25. WHY CAN PAUL USE THE PAST TENSE “GLORIFIED” IN ROMANS 8:30? WHAT DOES THIS TELL US ABOUT THE CERTAINTY OF OUR SALVATION?

The ultimate expectation of the believer is the return of Jesus. That remarkable moment in time when He comes to this earth will be the most spectacular event in the history of the world. Christians should have in their hearts a great ambition to witness this miracle.

26. READ TITUS 2:13. WHAT IS THE “BLESSED HOPE”?

*“Hope for the Christian is
confident expectation of
a guaranteed result.”
– Paul David Tripp*

27. IN WHAT THINGS CAN PEOPLE PLACE THEIR HOPE? IF YOU’RE HONEST, WHERE DOES YOUR HOPE LIE?

28. LIST A FEW REASONS YOU STRUGGLE TO MAINTAIN HOPE IN THE RETURN OF JESUS.

29. READ REVELATION 7:9-17. DESCRIBE WHAT HEAVEN WILL BE LIKE.

"Let your hope of heaven master your fear of death. Why should you be afraid to die, who hope to live by dying!"
– William Gurnall

30. HOW SHOULD THINKING ABOUT HEAVEN SHAPE OUR AFFECTIONS AND OUR FEELINGS TOWARD GOD?

DIGGING DEEPER

How does it make you feel to know that you are a part of the “people of God” whom God has predestined, called, justified, and who, one day, will be glorified along with a host of other redeemed saints of God? Do you realize that God set His sights on you before the foundation of the world? His plan from the very beginning was to set you apart and declare you righteous. And one day, God will take you to be with Him for eternity.

We don’t deserve any of this! But, through Jesus’ work on the cross, God extended a righteous mercy so that His love could be appropriated to His children!

APPENDIX A

THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION

Before we explain GBC's position on predestination, it's important to make clear that we hold our position loosely. This discussion is an intramural conversation, meaning there are sincere, orthodox Christians on both sides of this topic. If you disagree with our position or find our argument unconvincing, that's fine. We don't want this matter to be one that would cause anyone to break fellowship with us. However, as you either agree or disagree, our hope is that you would do so in humility and from a position grounded in Scripture.

There are many places in Scripture that talk about predestination, but none is more thorough than Romans 9. As we saw in our study this week, Romans 8 ends with the guarantee of our salvation, specifically due to the fact that God is responsible for every aspect of our salvation.

As we move into Romans 9, it might appear that Paul is transitioning to a totally new subject. However, as he often does, Paul is actually anticipating a potential argument of the reader. Here, that objection is, "If God promised to Israel that they would be His people, but the majority of Jews do not believe in Christ, does that mean God's promise, power, or mercy is failing?" Underlying the question is an even more practical concern. The readers will likely think, "If the promises of God can fail for the Jews, can they fail for us too?"

After lamenting his Jewish brothers wasting the advantage of their heritage (vv. 1-5), Paul begins to answer these questions by stating in verse 6, "the word of God has not failed." He supports this claim by making a distinction that might seem confusing at first, saying, "Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." In other words, some who are racially descended from Abraham are not truly God's people, Israel. Conversely, others who are not physically descended from the Jewish patriarchs are God's people.

To support his point, Paul uses two Old Testament examples – Isaac and Ishmael (vv. 7-9) and Jacob and Esau (vv. 10-13). In both, Paul says one brother (Isaac and Jacob) is a child of promise, but the other is not (Ishmael and Esau).

Given that physical descent alone does not make one a child of promise, it's important to ask the question – what does make someone a child of promise? Paul addresses this clearly by going deeper in his treatment of Jacob and Esau. In verse 11, he explains that in order to be a child of promise, a person has to be chosen by God even before they are born. Paul says clearly, "they were not yet born..." when God chose Jacob. Equally as important, Paul tells us that being a child of God is not based on performance. Paul says, Jacob and Esau "had done nothing either good or bad" when Jacob was chosen by God.

"In the Bible, divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not enemies. They are not uneasy neighbors. They are not in an endless state of cold war with each other. They are friend, and they work together." – JI Packer

"When you look toward heaven, you begin to see a sign that reads, 'Whosoever wills may come.' After you enter heaven, you look back and see the same sign and read on the other side, 'Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.'"
– John MacArthur

*"Thou didst seek us
when we sought Thee
not; didst seek us indeed
that we might seek
Thee." – Augustine*

Some people counter this last point by arguing that perhaps Paul means God's choosing is really a "foreseeing" of who is going to accept and who is going to reject God. However, verse 11 contradicts that argument by saying, God's election is "not by works, but because of Him who calls." So, all in all, what Paul is saying is that it's by God's choice – not our own – that we are saved.

Based on that statement, you might be thinking, "Well, what about free will? If God is choosing, does that mean I am a robot and have no choice?" To start, free will is simply not a biblical term. It's not found anywhere in the Bible. However, the concept of free will, properly understood, is consistent with Paul's teaching in Romans 9. Free will, in the biblical context, means that a man is free to act in his own will, confined by the limits of his sinful nature. Therefore, before we are regenerated – which is a work of the Holy Spirit – we are unable to seek after God. Romans 3:10-12 says as much.

The best way to illustrate this point is to say that we are like a goldfish in a 10-gallon tank before we are saved. The goldfish can swim wherever it wants in the water and do what it wants at any time, but it can't jump out of the water and start breathing. Essentially, it's free, but only as far as its nature allows. Likewise, before we are regenerated, we can freely sin in any number of ways, including ways that have the appearance of morality. However, when God regenerates a Christian, we are no longer slaves to sin. Instead, we can choose to disobey or obey God. We are now new creations in Christ with an entirely new nature, one that is able to choose good from bad.

To close out this section, Paul says in verse 13, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." The concept of hatred in this verse is not the same as the emotion we ordinarily call by the same name. Instead, there's a Hebrew idiom behind the use of this phrase. Another example of the idiom is when Jesus tells His disciples that they had to "hate" their families and follow Him (Lk. 14:26). Of course, Jesus does not mean we should literally hate our parents, but that we should prefer Jesus over them – to put Him above them.

So, the idea here is that God didn't prefer Jacob over Esau because of anything about Jacob that was morally superior to Esau. Instead, the only reason Jacob received the promise was because of God's gracious choice.

To this, another objection is often raised. That is, "Does this mean that God is arbitrary? Does God choose people, in a sense, by saying, 'Eeny, meeny, miney, moe?'" The answer to that question is no. Paul is not saying that God has no reason for His choices. All we're told is that the reason is not in us. Said a different way, there is justification and thought behind God's choosing, it just has nothing to do with us.

Practically, this should cause humility. Think about the alternative. If the difference between the unbeliever and the believer is ultimately something in us – our moral sense, our willingness to repent, our openness, whatever it might be – then, effectively, we are the authors of our salvation. On the other hand, if salvation comes as a result of God's choosing for reasons that are not in us, there is clearly no room for arrogance – no room for boasting, as Ephesians 2 puts it.

So, in summary, we started with the question, "If God is true to His promises, why are so many Jews unbelievers?" Paul reminded us that the promises of God given in the Old Testament were never given automatically to anyone who was physically descended from the patriarchs. In other words, there is a spiritual faith that is necessary to inherit salvation. Second, Paul showed that the spiritual faith that inherits salvation is ultimately a function of God's choice, not ours.

At this point, you might be thinking, "That doesn't seem fair!" Paul, again, anticipates this objection and addresses it in verses 14-16. In verse 14, Paul says "What then shall we say, that God is unjust?" His response is, "By no means!" To support his response, Paul begins to address the concept of mercy, quoting what God had said to Moses in Exodus 33:19, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy."

Mercy, by its very definition, can never be an obligation. In other words, mercy is always undeserved and free. Paul's argument is that for a situation to be unfair, something that is due must be withheld. Because we are sinners in open rebellion against God, we are not due, or owed, salvation from God. He's not obligated to give us anything, much less salvation.

Therefore, to think that God's mercy, expressed in His choices, is unfair is misconceived – it shows a lack of understanding of the nature of salvation. Ultimately, the basis on which God saves sinners is not justice – it's mercy, which is a really good thing. If salvation was based on justice, nobody would be saved.

Finally, in Romans 9:22-23, Paul says that God is showing the riches of His glory through having mercy on some and passing over others. No doubt, this is a profound mystery. What Paul seems to be saying is that, somehow, if God had mercy on all, or if He condemned all, we would not see His glory as profoundly as we do.

That God saves some, but not all, raises another point of contention with the doctrine of election. That is, if God could save everyone, why doesn't He? In verses 22-23, Paul says that God's chosen course – to save some and leave others – will, in the end, be more fit to show God's glory than any other scheme or plan we can imagine. While that might not make sense to us – it might not satisfy our curiosity – God's plan is good and wise, and, as created things (vv. 19-20), we have neither the right nor the wisdom to question God (vv. 21-22).

"The doctrine of election promises humility, not arrogance; assurance, not apprehension; responsibility, not apathy; holiness, not complacency; and mission, not privilege."
– John Stott

"The marvel of marvels is not that God, in His infinite love, has not elected all this guilty race to be saved, but that He has elected any."
– BB Warfield

WEEK 5

TRANSFORMATIONAL GRACE

TITUS 2:11-12

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age...

TRANSFORMATIONAL GRACE

DAY 1 – OUR ROLE

"None can know their election but by their conformity to Christ. For all who are chosen are chosen to sanctification."
– Matthew Henry

5

This week, we will look at the "So what?" question of salvation. In other words, do all of the things we've learned in the previous weeks affect or impact our day-to-day living? The overwhelming teaching of Scripture is that being saved by God will necessarily produce a changed heart that will be revealed in a changed lifestyle. Obviously, this transformation will not be complete until we go to heaven, but God guarantees that He will complete the good work that He started (Phil. 1:6)!

Philippians 2:12-13 describes maturing in our faith in Jesus. Theologians call this process sanctification, which is a progressive, synergistic work of both God and man that results in our looking more like Jesus. To sanctify literally means "to set apart" or "to make holy." As we discussed last week, God declared us holy when He justified us, so we can see sanctification as the process of becoming who God has already declared us to be!

1. READ PHILIPPIANS 2:12. SUMMARIZE THIS VERSE IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING" (V. 12)?

3. HOW DO WE RECONCILE SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH WITH "WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING" (V. 12)?

"Sanctification is God's work, but He performs it through the diligent self-discipline and righteous pursuits of His people, not in spite of them."
– John MacArthur

DIGGING DEEPER

In verse 12, we are told about the responsibility we have in our salvation. Salvation in this verse does not refer to the initial act by which we are “born again” – these first steps are entirely the result of God’s gracious work in our hearts.

Instead, salvation in verse 12 refers to the increase in personal holiness that is supposed to occur after we place our faith in Christ. As used by Paul in this verse, salvation is a process stretching from our conversion to our glorification at death. In other words, we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved.

However, the guarantee of our glorification does not enable us to just sit back as if growth in godliness will occur automatically without any exertion on our part. Quite the contrary – we are to work vigorously, doing everything possible to grow as Christians. This work includes spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, Scripture memory, worship, evangelism, and fellowship with other Christians.

5

4. READ JOHN 14:15-24. WHAT DO THESE VERSES SAY ABOUT THE CHANGED LIFESTYLE THAT SHOULD RESULT FROM BECOMING A CHRISTIAN?

*"The blood of Christ has
changed our standing
before the sight of God.
Our lives should
demonstrate this
glorious change before
the sight of men."
– Anthony Carter*

5. READ 1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27. IS YOUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH CHARACTERIZED BY THE SAME TYPE OF DISCIPLINE DESCRIBED HERE? WHY OR WHY NOT?

DAY 2 – GOD’S ROLE

While Philippians 2:12 tells us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, Philippians 2:13 reminds us of the flip side of the coin. It is God who is working in us to act according to His good purpose.

6. READ PHILIPPIANS 2:13. SUMMARIZE THIS VERSE IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

"If God gives you the grace to make you believe, He will give you the grace to live a holy life afterward."

– Charles Spurgeon

"We tend to base our justification on our sanctification, instead of our sanctification on our justification."

– Tim Keller

7. READ PHILIPPIANS 1:6. HOW DOES THIS VERSE RELATE TO PHILIPPIANS 2:13?

8. READ 1 KINGS 8:57-61. HOW DOES THIS PASSAGE AID IN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S ROLE IN SANCTIFICATION?

9. SUMMARIZE GOD'S ROLE AND YOUR ROLE IN SANCTIFICATION.

10. HOW DOES YOUR ANSWER TO QUESTION 9 DIFFER FROM GOD'S ROLE AND YOUR ROLE IN JUSTIFICATION?

DIGGING DEEPER

When we apply Philippians 2:12-13 to our lives, we should neither emphasize human responsibility at the expense of divine sovereignty, nor do the opposite. Even though we do "work out our salvation," it is "God who works in us!" This illustrates the dynamic tension of God's sovereignty and our responsibility. Must we work? Yes! Does God give us all the grace to make sure that happens? Yes!

DAY 3 – STRUGGLING WITH SIN

Part of our role in sanctification is fighting and striving against sin. For each one of us, this struggle will look different. At times, it will look like forsaking sins of word or deed that are outwardly noticeable. Other times, combating sin is less overt, as we focus inward on sins of attitude and motive – desires such as pride, selfishness, jealousy, greed, among others.

11. READ ROMANS 6:11-18. WHY DO WE STRUGGLE AND FIGHT AGAINST SIN?

12. HOW SHOULD WE STRUGGLE AND FIGHT AGAINST SIN AS CHRISTIANS?

DIGGING DEEPER

Although Christians grow in grace and godliness over time, we will never reach a state of sinlessness. Prior to our death and glorification, we still sin. The mark of a true Christian, then, is not perfection but the struggle against our sinful nature. As we mature in Christ, we will become increasingly aware of our sin and be more and more grieved by it. Not only that, as we are able to recognize sinful patterns or tendencies over time, we become better equipped to overcome temptation.

13. READ ROMANS 7:14-25. WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE TEACH ABOUT OUR CONTINUAL SINFULNESS?

14. WHAT IS AN AREA OF PERSISTENT SIN WITH WHICH YOU STRUGGLE? WHY DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH IT?

15. READ 1 JOHN 1:9. WHAT DOES CONFESSING YOUR SIN TO GOD LOOK LIKE PRACTICALLY?

"Struggling means that you are seeking the way of the Spirit to escape from your sin, that you are removing every possible obstacle to your overcoming this pattern, and that you are relying on others in the Church to hold you accountable."

– Russell Moore

"I don't believe it is wise or truthful to the power of the gospel to identify oneself by the sins of one's past or the temptations of one's present but rather to only be defined by the Christ who's overcome both for those He calls His own."

– Jackie Hill Perry

"I know of no other way to triumph over sin long-term than to gain a distaste for it because of a superior satisfaction in God."

– John Piper

"When obedience to God contradicts what I think will give me pleasure, let me ask myself if I love Him."

– Elisabeth Elliott

16. ARE YOU VULNERABLE IN CONFESSING YOUR SIN? WHY OR WHY NOT?

17. HOW MIGHT CONFESSION HELP YOU IN YOUR STRUGGLE AGAINST SIN?

DAY 4 – RENOUNCE UNGODLINESS

The book of Titus stresses the need for good works in the lives of Christians. Throughout the epistle, Paul repeats terms like "godliness," "good deeds," and "good works," and even lists moral qualities that characterize godly leadership and behavior. Titus 2:11-15 continues this emphasis, concentrating on the practical ramifications of the transforming power of the grace of God.

18. READ TITUS 2:11-15. HOW DOES GOD'S GRACE TEACH US TO "RENOUNCE UNGODLINESS AND WORLDLY PASSIONS" (V. 12)?

19. WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF "UNGODLINESS AND WORLDLY PASSIONS" IN OUR CULTURE TODAY?

20. IS THERE ANYTHING YOU LISTED IN QUESTION 19 THAT IS A PARTICULAR STRUGGLE FOR YOU? EXPLAIN.

DIGGING DEEPER

In the Bible Exposition Commentary, Warren Wiersbe says that in this passage from the book of Titus:

"Salvation is not only a change in position, but it is also a change in attitude, appetite, ambition, and action. The same grace that redeems us also reforms our lives and makes us godly. 'Teaching' has the idea of 'disciplining.' We are disciplined by God's grace, trained to be the kind of people that glorify Him. Godly living involves both the negative and the positive. We deny 'ungodliness' (whatever is unlike God) and 'worldly passions,' and we pursue God's pleasure."

DAY 5 – ZEAL FOR GODLINESS

Jesus lived what theologians call an impeccable life. That means Jesus was perfect in all aspects of His being and life. As we discussed in Week 3, it was Jesus' perfect life that made Him the appropriate sacrifice to meet God's justice and to assuage God's wrath on the cross. Also, Christ's life – the life that brings salvation to all types of men – is the life that we endeavor to imitate daily.

21. REREAD TITUS 2:11-15. WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS TO BE "ZEALOUS FOR GOOD WORKS" (V. 14)?

22. WHAT'S THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-CONTROL AND GOOD WORKS?

23. WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE SOME OF THE GREATEST HURDLES IN "THE PRESENT AGE" (V. 12) TO LIVING A GODLY LIFE?

*"If you are going to resist
the desires of the flesh,
you will need to live in
the power of the
Holy Spirit and walk
according to His
disciplines."
– Sinclair Ferguson*

24. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS TEXT REGARDING GOD'S PLANS FOR OUR SALVATION?

DIGGING DEEPER

God's intent in salvation is not merely to cancel the consequence of sin but to redeem a people who would live differently than they were before salvation. In redeeming us, God calls us away from a life enslaved to sin to a life marked by purity, holiness, and relationship with God. Again, this transformation won't be complete until glory, but our hearts as Christians are set apart for God's purposes.

WEEKS 6 - 11

THE WORD OF GOD

WEEK 6

GOD'S GLORIOUS WORD

2 TIMOTHY 3:16

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching,
for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...

GOD'S GLORIOUS WORD

DAY 1 – GENERAL REVELATION AND SPECIAL REVELATION

As we begin our unit on God's Word, the best place to start is with the concept of revelation. Revelation is the theological term describing God's communication of Himself to His creation. The wording of that definition is very specific and important as it highlights the fact that we would know nothing about God unless He first revealed Himself to us. The study of God's revelation of Himself to humanity has been classified in two ways: general revelation and special revelation.

The idea of general revelation is that we can know things about God based on the world around us. General revelation includes what we learn of God in areas such as nature, history, and humanity.

1. READ ROMANS 1:18-23. WHAT DOES THIS TEXT SAY ABOUT MANKIND'S GENERAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD?

2. WHAT CAN WE KNOW ABOUT GOD FROM HIS REVELATION THROUGH CREATION?

3. READ ROMANS 2:1-4. WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS TEXT REGARDING OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND BAD?

4. WHAT DOES THIS TEXT SAY ABOUT OUR RESPONSE TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND BAD?

*"To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God Himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of His divine majesty."
– John Calvin*

5. IN SUMMARY, WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT GOD AND MANKIND FROM ROMANS 1:18-23 AND 2:1-4?

While general revelation evidences much of God's character, the effect of sin prevents unbelievers from coming to a saving knowledge of God. The salvation of souls, therefore, comes through God's kindness to reveal Himself specifically.

Special revelation is a term used of God's specific, personal, and progressive revelation of Himself, culminating with His Son, who is the living Word of God. Throughout history, God has chosen to reveal Himself through a variety of means: dreams, visions, theophanies, angels, and prophets. While God certainly has the prerogative to communicate through various means today, He has guaranteed that He will communicate through His Son and His Word.

6. READ HEBREWS 1:1-3. WHY DO YOU THINK THAT JESUS WAS GOD'S BEST AND MOST COMPLETE REVELATION OF HIMSELF?

"God makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation."
– The Belgic Confession

6

DIGGING DEEPER

While most people would agree that God speaks to us through Scripture, some would also insist that God speaks in a variety of other ways as well – direct words, inner promptings, visions, dreams, various feelings, etc. In light of this, we must remember that God consistently urges us, through Scripture, to attend to the reading and teaching of Scripture, to study and meditate on Scripture, and to apply Scripture to our daily lives. Nowhere does God urge us to seek signs, visions, dreams, voices, or any other subjective means of new revelation.

Does it really make a difference when we expect God to speak to us through Scripture rather than waiting to hear a divine voice in our heads? Absolutely! When we know that God speaks personally and powerfully through His Word, we can be confident in making big and small decisions without having to hear God audibly give us a green light.

As we delight ourselves in the law of the Lord day and night (Ps. 1:2), we can expect His Word to be living and active (Heb. 4:12). As the Word transforms us by the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:2), we will find that our thoughts, feelings, dreams, and desires are being shaped more by His Word than by our flesh. In turn, we will ask Him for guidance and wisdom and receive it out of His generosity through His Word.

Outside the Bible, we have fallible, uncertain impressions and messages. Inside the Bible, we have rock-solid, dependable messages.

DAY 2 – INSPIRATION

As we discussed in Day 1, the best and most complete revelation God has made of Himself is in sending Jesus to dwell among us (Jn. 1:18). However, since Jesus has ascended into heaven (Lk. 24:51) and is seated at God's right hand (Heb. 1:3), how can we now know God if He no longer physically walks among us? The answer is through His divine Word, and by the empowerment of His indwelling Holy Spirit.

Over the next couple of days, we will look at theological concepts that should give us great confidence in the Bible and its ability to save and sanctify us.

Inspiration is the theological term describing how God carried men along as they wrote down His revelation in the Bible.

7. READ 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17. WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS THAT SCRIPTURE IS "BREATHED OUT BY GOD"?

8. READ 2 PETER 1:19-21. ACCORDING TO THIS PASSAGE, HOW DID GOD USE PEOPLE TO COMMUNICATE HIS MESSAGE?

9. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF INSPIRATION FOR US AS WE READ SCRIPTURE?

10. HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN INSPIRATION TO A NON-CHRISTIAN?

"By supernatural inspiration the Bible became the Word of God for all coming generations. In it, God continually speaks to all the generations of men, and the Holy Spirit makes this continuous speaking effective where and when He pleases."
– Louis Berkhof

DIGGING DEEPER

The sixty-six books of the Bible were written by forty different authors, over a period of 1,500 years, on three different continents, using three different languages. The authors ranged from common fishermen to kings, and, yet, the Bible displays amazing internal and external consistency. Internal consistency means there is nothing within Scripture that disagrees with itself. External consistency means that there has never been any outside evidence, including archaeological or historical, that has disproven anything within the Bible. How could a book written over so many years by such a diverse group of authors be so exactly consistent, both internally and externally? One mind – God’s – oversaw the writing of the whole Bible, thereby keeping fallen men from error as they wrote.

A lot of people have questions about other human elements of Scripture, including the canonization of Scripture and the many, variant translations of the Bible. The bottom line is this – if we believe that God was sovereign to inspire men to write His words, we can also trust Him to preserve them through canonization and translation. For more information on canonization and translation, see Appendices B and C at the end of the week.

"Trusting God's Word glorifies God. Why is that true? It is true because trusting a person calls attention to the person's trustworthiness, and only warranted trust glorifies the one trusted."
– John Piper

6

DAY 3 – INERRANCY AND ILLUMINATION

Built on a foundation of God’s divine inspiration of human authors and the external (historic, prophetic, etc.) and internal (thematic) consistency of the Bible, we can now consider the inerrancy of Scripture. To say that Scripture is inerrant means that it is completely absent of any error. While this might be hard to believe, we must remember that Scripture was “breathed out” (2 Tim. 3:16) by God, and, therefore is reflective of His character.

Ultimately, there is an integral connection between the doctrine of God and the doctrine of Scripture. In other words, your view of God should be inextricably connected to your view of the Bible. Because of this, any objections that you have to one are connected to the other. Even further, confidence in one should breed confidence in the other. Therefore, if we believe that God, Himself, is without fault and cannot err, it is reasonable to think of the Bible as being free from error.

It's important to note that the absence of error is ascribed only to the original documents.

11. DESCRIBE WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS TO SAY THAT THE BIBLE IS INERRANT.

"God's words are not only true individually but also viewed together as a whole."

– James Boice

"When the Spirit is illuminating the page and our minds at the same time, the first thing you're conscious of is that the Bible after all is speaking to you."

– Martyn Lloyd-Jones

12. READ MATTHEW 26:34 AND MARK 14:30. WHAT APPARENT CONTRADICTION EXISTS IN THESE TWO ACCOUNTS OF THE SAME STORY?

13. CONFRONTED WITH THIS EXAMPLE, HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND TO SOMEONE WHO SAYS THE BIBLE CANNOT BE INERRANT GIVEN THIS "OBVIOUS CONTRADICTION"?

DIGGING DEEPER

As we approach or are confronted with apparent contradictions in the Bible, it's important that we make a distinction between differences and contradictions. Simply put, just because two passages of Scripture say something different does not necessarily mean that a contradiction exists. Said a different way – something can be considered an error or contradiction only if there is absolutely no way that the two accounts can be reconciled.

Another example of an apparent contradiction is with the fate of Judas. Matthew 27:5 says that he hung himself, while Acts 1:18 says that he fell to the ground, bursting open. But which is true? Ultimately, both are true because they can be reconciled. For example, it may be that Judas hung himself and, after dying, the rope snapped and he fell to the ground from high up, bursting upon impact. There are probably a handful of other plausible explanations, but the point is that for an actual contradiction to exist, one author would have to explicitly refute what the other was saying.

Illumination is a theological term describing the Holy Spirit's role in helping Christians study, understand, and apply God's revelation in Scripture.

14. READ 1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-16. ACCORDING TO THIS TEXT, HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT HELP US AS WE SEEK GOD'S TRUTH?

15. WHAT DOES 1 CORINTHIANS 2:14 MEAN?

DIGGING DEEPER

People today often get confused by thinking that God speaks to them by His Spirit apart from His Word. If this were true, the Holy Spirit would be giving new revelation, and the Canon (rule/standard) of Scripture would not be closed. However, the Holy Spirit's role is not to give revelation but to illuminate the revelation God the Father has already given.

Today's views are very murky on this subject and often fall into something similar to the first-century heresy called Gnosticism, which, among other things, held that the Bible was fine as a base, but that God gave truly spiritual people additional revelation above and beyond Scripture. This view results in a low view of Scripture as people try to find higher – and more subjective – answers to their questions.

As we will see in the coming days, God's revelation in Scripture is both thorough and effective in preparing God's children to live godly and profitable lives that bring God pleasure and glory. By illuminating believers' minds through the work of the Holy Spirit, God enables us to rightly understand the spiritual truth found in Scripture. This illumination by God's Holy Spirit also gives us the humility to apply what we learn in Scripture to our lives.

DAY 4 – THE PURPOSE OF SCRIPTURE

Many people today believe in all that we have talked about so far but deny their belief by their practice. If we believe that God's Word is inspired and inerrant, we should naturally see it as profitable.

16. READ 2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17. HOW DOES SCRIPTURE HELP US TOWARD BEING SAVED (V. 15)?

17. WHAT DOES PAUL TELL TIMOTHY SCRIPTURE IS PROFITABLE FOR (V. 16)?

18. HOW HAS A PRINCIPLE OR TRUTH FROM SCRIPTURE CHANGED YOUR LIFE OR TRANSFORMED YOUR THINKING?

*"The whole counsel of
God – concerning all
things necessary for His
own glory, man's
salvation, faith and life
– is either expressly set
down in Scripture or,
by good and necessary
consequence, may be
deduced from Scripture."
– The Westminster
Confession*

*"Scripture is the chief means which God employs to bring the man of God to maturity."
– John Stott*

What the ESV translates as "spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1) can also be translated as "logical worship." This means that anything less than a total, complete sacrifice of ourselves to God is completely irrational!

19. IN WHAT WAYS ARE CORRECTING AND REPROVING PROFITABLE?

20. HOW DOES SCRIPTURE TRAIN US IN RIGHTEOUSNESS?

DIGGING DEEPER

The Bible addresses us in a variety of ways. It shapes our beliefs as well as our lifestyle. It relates to both doctrine and conduct. As we have seen in 2 Timothy 3:14-17, it rebukes us for ungodly behavior or false beliefs. It corrects us when we stray from Christlikeness. It trains us in righteous living.

Further, Paul says that God's Word equips us for every good work. Even though we can't see it in English, Paul uses two forms of the Greek word for equip – an adjective and a participle – which is abnormal. His point is to intensify the word equip, essentially meaning that God's Word "super-equips" us!

DAY 5 – TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF OUR MINDS

As it equips us for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17), Scripture meets our deepest need by transforming us from the inside out. Connecting it with the concepts we learned about in Week 5, God's Word renews our minds as we are being sanctified. In the end, we need the Bible more than secular observations and practical suggestions because it helps us resist conforming to this world and its influence, in order that we might pursue the Lord and His will more fully.

21. READ ROMANS 12:1-2. WHAT ARE SOME WAYS WE ARE TEMPTED TO CONFORM TO THIS WORLD?

22. HOW CAN WE BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWAL OF OUR MINDS?

23. WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF OUR MINDS BEING TRANSFORMED (V. 2)?

DIGGING DEEPER

A 2015 Nielson Report about television viewing revealed that the average American adult will spend a little over five hours in front of the TV every day. Five hours! Additionally, adults in the United States spend close to five hours per day on “non-voice, mobile activities,” including accessing the internet on phones and tablets. If an average adult is awake for fifteen hours a day, that’s a third of their day spent looking at their phone! A lot of this “screen time” is dedicated to social media, as seventy-eight percent of Americans have some social media presence. In fact, on average people in America check Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media accounts a staggering seventeen times a day, meaning at least once every waking hour.

Regarding Bible reading, a 2015 LifeWay Research Study found only forty-five percent of those who regularly attend church read the Bible more than once a week. Over forty percent of the people attending church read their Bible occasionally, meaning once or twice a month. And, shockingly, almost 1 in 5 churchgoers say they never read the Bible – essentially the same number who said they read it every day.

What consumes your time? What is shaping and molding your character and actions? A survey by *Christianity Today* and the Gallup Poll concludes that no factor is more influential in shaping a person’s moral and social behavior than regular Bible reading.

None of this is to suggest that watching Netflix, listening to podcasts, or checking social media is inherently evil. Indeed, these technologies bring the world much closer to us and can enrich our lives. Nevertheless, if we spend thirty to forty hours a week entertaining ourselves with technology and yet say that we do not have time to read our Bibles, then our priorities must be amiss. There is no way a small group lesson and a thirty-minute sermon can contend with hours upon hours of a contrary message each week. Inevitably, the worldview of Hollywood, Nashville, and Madison Avenue will shape our thinking despite the fact that God has given us the Bible to shape our worldview. One of the goals a Christian should have is to possess the same priorities and passions as Jesus. We can only do this if we view the Bible as our ultimate authority.

*"The faith will totter
if the authority of the
Holy Scripture loses its
hold on men. We must
surrender ourselves to
the authority of Holy
Scripture, for it can
neither mislead nor
be misled."
– Augustine*

24. WHAT OTHER THAN THE WORD OF GOD VIES FOR ULTIMATE AUTHORITY IN YOUR LIFE? HOW DOES THAT PLAY OUT?

25. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STUDYING THE WORD OF GOD AND LIVING UNDER ITS AUTHORITY?

APPENDIX B

THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

The term Canon of Scripture refers to the sixty-six books that comprise the Bible. Canon means “rule” or “standard.” The concept of a canon began with the idea that the people of Israel should preserve a collection of written words from God. The earliest collection of the written words of God was the Ten Commandments. God Himself wrote the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets when He met Moses on Mount Sinai. The collection of authoritative words from God grew throughout the history of Israel, and the content of the Old Testament continued to grow until the writings of the prophet Malachi around 435 B.C.

The New Testament canon begins with the writings of the Apostles and includes the eyewitness accounts of the men who followed closely after Jesus. Though penned by sinful men, the Holy Spirit superintended the writing process, assuring that the finished work would be without defect. Obviously, there were other writings about Jesus during the time of the early church. Often, people will ask how the books of the Bible were chosen to be a part of the canon while others were left out. There were several criteria for canonicity. The first criterion for a book’s being included in the canon was content. Did the content of the book complement and add to the teachings of established Scripture (Old Testament and already affirmed books in the New Testament)? Was there any error within the book’s teaching? Was the teaching of a timeless nature that applied in principle to all churches for all generations? The second criterion was authorship. Was the writer an apostle or did the author write with direct access to an apostle? The third criterion for canonicity was usefulness. Did the book help the churches in the actual work of ministry and teaching?

In A.D. 367, the thirty-ninth Paschal Letter of Athanasius indicated an exact list of the twenty-seven New Testament books that we have today. This list was agreed upon by all the Eastern churches. Thirty years later, in A.D. 397 the Council of Carthage, which represented the churches in the western part of the Mediterranean world, agreed with the Eastern churches on the same list. These are the earliest final lists of our present-day canon (*Systematic Theology*, Grudem, pp.63-64).

Why did the final canon take so long to develop? There are several good reasons. First, most official doctrines or determinations are stated in response to heresy. While most of the New Testament books were being used in the early church, the necessity to define that which was canonical came only when heretics introduced or excluded books to suit their own biases. Second, while partial lists of the canon existed long before Athanasius’ letter, a few books were still contested in a small minority of churches. No books that were widely debated were included in the canon but only those that, through the test of time, were recognized as inspired.

“Every Christian should remember one, basic fact, namely that the New Testament books are distinctive because, generally speaking, they are the earliest Christian writings we possess.

*None are earlier.”
– Michael Kruger*

At GBC, we use the ESV in both our small groups and on Sundays.

"I must let the literal words go and try to learn how the German says that which the Hebrew or Greek expresses. I must concentrate on the sense of the text, asking, 'What do the Germans say in such a situation?'"
– Martin Luther

APPENDIX C

BIBLE TRANSLATION

The Bible was written in three different languages – Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. Biblical scholars have worked diligently for centuries to better understand these languages and to translate them accurately into English. As a result, they have produced many different translations of the Bible. This is a source of confusion to many people, especially when different Bibles seem to translate the same passage in different ways. In order to read and study the Bible, you do not need to know about all the details of translation, but you do need to find a translation that is accurate and readable.

While there are many fine Bible translations, the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the New International Version (NIV-1984), and the English Standard Version (ESV) are the most popular of recent translations. The NASB attempts to translate the Greek and Hebrew word by word. The advantage of this approach is that it offers exact translation without much linguistic interpretation of what the author meant when he wrote the words. The disadvantage of this approach is that it can result in awkward English or a translation that fails to capture the nuances of interpretation. The NIV follows a translation approach called dynamic equivalency. It translates words, concepts, and phrases into their precise equivalents in the English language. Therefore, the NIV is a bit easier to read than the NASB. The NIV also tries to capture more nuances in translation, but sometimes directs interpretation unnecessarily. The ESV is an attempt to bridge the gap between the NASB and the NIV. It reads easier than the NASB, but it is more word for word than the NIV. All of these are excellent translations, and each has great strengths and minor weaknesses. While not always possible, using multiple translations is helpful because it allows the reader to cross-reference translations on difficult passages.

Other popular Bibles are the King James Version (KJV), The Living Bible (LB), and The Message. While the KJV is the most prevalent Bible in the U.S., it is not the most desirable. First, the KJV was translated from Greek to Latin and then from Latin to English. With every translation, there is the potential to lose nuance of the original language, and the KJV is actually two translations. Second, the KJV utilizes sixteenth century English, which is quite different than the English we speak today. Third, the manuscript resources available today are far superior to those available to the sixteenth century translators, which means that the source documents used are much more accurate in the more recent translations. The LB and The Message are not translations of the Bible but paraphrases. Paraphrases seek to express the ideas of the original Greek and Hebrew with less concern for translating the exact words. Therefore, paraphrases are the easiest of all the modern Bibles to read. The Message is a better paraphrase than the LB both in its readability and in its accuracy. Both the LB and The Message are wonderful to read devotionally, but another translation should be used for Bible study.

WEEK 7

THE SINGULAR THREAD OF SCRIPTURE

THE BIBLE'S MAIN THEME

God's redemption of a people unto Himself through Christ Jesus for His glory.

THE SINGULAR THREAD OF SCRIPTURE

DAY 1 – THE TWO TESTAMENTS

Bible study often suffers from focusing on too many details without ever grasping how those details contribute to the larger picture. This week, we will look at the major progressions in the Bible, so that, when we read the details, we will better understand how they fit into the big picture.

All sixty-six books of the Bible play a role in supporting the Bible's singular theme. Whether we look at the book of Romans, which is the Bible's best explanation of salvation, or Song of Solomon, which is God's great articulation of His plan for relational intimacy, we see each book contributing to the picture of what God desires for His redeemed people.

Most people realize there are two testaments in the Bible, but have you ever wondered what a testament is? A testament is a covenant or a promise made to a people. The Old and New Testaments are God's promises made to His people.

1. DESCRIBE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT.

2. READ PSALM 102:25-28. DID GOD CHANGE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT? IF SO, HOW?

3. READ GENESIS 15:6. HOW WERE JEWS SAVED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT? WAS IT BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH OR BY ADHERENCE TO THE LAW? HOW DO YOU KNOW?

*"The covenant of the Lord was 'old' because – veiled by the shadowy and ineffectual observance of ceremonies – it was temporary, held in suspense until it received a firm and substantial confirmation. Then only did it become 'new' and eternal when it was consecrated and established in the blood of Christ."
– John Calvin*

DIGGING DEEPER

There is much confusion regarding how the Old Testament Law applies to Christian lives today. To understand how the Law applies, we must first understand the purpose for the Law in the Old Testament. Put simply, it can be said that the Old Testament Law was given for four primary purposes:

1. To illustrate God's holiness
2. To illustrate mankind's great need for grace
3. To illustrate how God would provide for mankind's need of grace
4. To regulate culture so that it would survive to see Christ

In the Old Testament, God regulated His people externally – He built high walls (rules) so that His people would not wander. However, in the Old Testament, God also promised His people a New Covenant, whereby He would regulate internally by a changed heart and the promised Holy Spirit.

*"For by works of the law
no human being will
be justified in His sight,
since through the law
comes knowledge of
sin." – Romans 3:20*

4. READ EZEKIEL 36:22-27. WHY, ACCORDING TO THIS TEXT, WILL GOD RESTORE HIS PEOPLE?

5. ACCORDING TO EZEKIEL 36, WHAT FOUR THINGS DOES GOD PROMISE TO GIVE HIS PEOPLE IN THE NEW COVENANT?

6. HAS GOD FULFILLED HIS PROMISES? IF SO, HOW?

7. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE GOD'S UNCHANGING CHARACTER TO A NON-CHRISTIAN?

*"God writes with a pen
that never blots, speaks
with a tongue that never
slips, acts with a hand
that never fails."
– Charles Spurgeon*

"The contrast between being and becoming marks the difference between the Creator and the creature. Every creature is continually becoming. It is changeable, constantly striving, finding rest in God alone, for only He is pure being and no becoming."

– Herman Bavinck

DIGGING DEEPER

Sometimes we struggle to understand how the Old and New Testaments fit together. People often say things like, "The God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath and anger, while Jesus' teaching was full of grace, mercy, and peace. God really must have changed in the time between the Old and New Testaments."

The reality is that the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) has never changed and will never change. The God of the Old Testament is exactly the same as the God of the New Testament. Many mistakenly say that God was angrier in the Old Testament than in the New Testament. If you've thought that before, you need to remember that God's two greatest displays of wrath (righteous anger) occur in the New Testament – the cross of Christ and the final judgment of the world (the book of Revelation). These instances are proof that God has not gone soft on sin in the New Testament! Many also claim that God was not loving in the Old Testament. However, in the Old Testament, God constantly restored Israel despite their rebellion, even describing Himself in the book of Hosea as a faithful husband with an unfaithful wife.

While there is great continuity in the Bible, the primary difference between the Old and New Testaments is the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was certainly active but did not indwell the children of God because of their unpunished sin. Because of this unpunished sin, God gave His children many external regulations in an effort to corral their hardened hearts. These external regulations (613 total) were meant to show Israel God's character as well as to protect them until Jesus came to provide payment for sin. When payment for sin was made by Jesus (one death for all believers' sins, according to 1 Peter 3:18), it allowed believers in Christ to receive the indwelling Holy Spirit.

DAY 2 – ANTICIPATION

The Bible has a five-fold progression that culminates in Jesus Christ

Anticipation – The Old Testament

Manifestation – The Gospels

Proclamation – The Book of Acts

Explanation – The Epistles

Consummation – The Book of Revelation

In Day 2, we will look at the Bible's first progression, Anticipation, starting with Genesis 3. In Genesis 1 and 2, we are given an account of creation, including particular emphasis on God's creation of man and woman. Like we saw in Week 2, even though God created everything good, Adam sinned, ultimately breaking his communion and relationship with God. This is what is often referred to as the Fall, as Adam's sin brought about both the fall of humanity and all creation.

8. READ GENESIS 3:14-19. WHAT PROMISE DOES GOD MAKE TO ADAM AND EVE (V. 15)?

9. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE IMPLICATION OF THAT PROMISE IS?

In Genesis 3:15, we get a glimpse of God's mercy and love, despite the rebellion of Adam. What's amazing about this verse is that it is the earliest articulation of the gospel – all the way back in Genesis! In verse 15, God promises that the seed of the woman – literally, a man – would come to crush the head of the serpent. We now know that this promised One is Jesus.

While there are a great variety of authors, genres, and subjects covered, the Old Testament is marked by a singular anticipation of the Messiah whom God would send. In a sense, the whole Old Testament cranes its neck, constantly searching the future's horizon in expectation of God's promised deliverer.

10. READ EXODUS 12:1-13. HOW DOES THE PASSOVER LAMB SERVE AS A FORESHADOWING OF CHRIST?

11. READ PSALM 16. HOW ARE THE PROMISES IN THIS PSALM FULFILLED IN JESUS?

12. READ ISAIAH 52:13-53:12. HOW IS GOD'S SERVANT DESCRIBED? HOW DO THESE DESCRIPTIONS FIT WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT JESUS FROM THE GOSPELS?

Genesis 3:15 is often referred to as the protoevangelium, which means "first gospel."

"As Christians standing within the light of New Testament, Christ Himself acts as a hermeneutical prism."
– Sinclair Ferguson

The New Testament presupposes a knowledge of the Old Testament. One estimate is that there are at least 1,600 direct quotations of the Old Testament in the New!

13. WHAT ARE OTHER STORIES OR IMAGES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT THAT MIGHT BE PICTURES OF JESUS?

DIGGING DEEPER

The term typology refers to the study of the many pictures in the Old Testament that are depicted in the New Testament. When we say that someone or something is a type of Christ, we mean that the person or thing points to Jesus in a specific way.

If we begin to train our eyes to see Him, we'll find that Jesus is actually all over the Old Testament. We've listed out some "types" of Christ below, but there are many more.

- Jesus is the true and better Isaac, being not just offered up by His Father on the mount, but also truly sacrificed for us (Gen. 22).
- Jesus is the true and better Joseph, who sits at the right hand of the King, forgiving those who betrayed Him and using His new power to save them (Gen. 37-50).
- Jesus is the true and better Moses, who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord, mediating a new covenant (Ex. 24).
- Jesus is the true and better David, whose victory becomes His people's victory though they never lifted a stone to accomplish it themselves (1 Sam. 17).

DAY 3 – MANIFESTATION AND PROCLAMATION

The Old Testament's great anticipation of the Messiah helped prepare God's people for Jesus' incarnation. In the New Testament, Jesus arrived on the scene, fulfilling not only the Law, but also the many prophesies and typologies of the Old Testament! The Gospels fit into the overall progression or story of the Bible by detailing the manifestation of God's promised deliverer.

14. READ JOHN 1:15-51. LIST A FEW OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES FROM THIS PASSAGE.

15. WHY DID JOHN THE BAPTIST CALL JESUS THE “LAMB OF GOD” (JN. 1:29)?

16. READ JOHN 5:45-46. WHAT DOES JESUS MEAN WHEN HE SPOKE THESE WORDS?

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He gave His disciples a very important command – make disciples (Matt. 28)! While we studied the meaning and application of these verses in Week 1, the book of Acts displays this command being carried out in the early church, recounting the disciples’ proclamation of the gospel.

17. READ ACTS 2:14-41. WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PETER’S REFERRING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT IN HIS GOSPEL PRESENTATION?

18. WHAT WAS PETER’S CENTRAL MESSAGE IN THIS PASSAGE?

“Jesus addressed numerous problems in His ministry, but the one problem underlying them all was the problem of sin. This is the problem Jesus came to confront. And, in the end, it is the one He triumphantly conquered.”

– Kevin DeYoung

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DIGGING DEEPER

The book of Acts was written to follow up the Gospel of Luke. It is Luke’s historical account of how the early church emerged from a group numbering 120 (Acts 1:15) to a religion with roots throughout the known world.

The book of Acts depicts the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Jews first (Acts 1-12) and then into the Gentile world as well (Acts 13-28). The book of Acts’ primary purpose is to edify Christians by recounting how God’s plan, coming to fulfillment in Jesus, continued to unfold in the history of the early church. Perhaps the most surprising element within the book of Acts is the emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is noted in eight of the first ten chapters and in every sermon preached throughout the book of Acts. In a fledgling church suffering great persecution for its faith, a living Savior was absolutely essential!

"We might wish that Jesus had written a systematic theology. But, in His wisdom, God gave us the letters of the apostles to specific Christians living in very concrete situations. Because of that, we get to see how the Christian life was to be lived out in context." – Karen Jobes

DAY 4 – EXPLANATION

From the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the book of Acts (Anticipation, Manifestation, and Proclamation), we know that Jesus has come and that He is coming again. While that is great news, what do we do in the meantime? Who will answer our questions about the things Jesus said but didn't expound upon? These questions and others are why God, in His grace, gave His words to the Church in the Epistles. The Epistles are God's explanation and instruction for how the Church is to exist in the time between Christ's incarnation and His return.

19. READ JOHN 16:12-13. WHY DIDN'T JESUS TEACH THE DISCIPLES EVERYTHING WHILE HE WAS ON EARTH?

20. READ GALATIANS 3:1-9. HOW COULD THESE VERSES HELP SOMEONE STRUGGLING WITH LEGALISM?

21. READ TITUS 1:5-9. HOW DO THESE VERSES HELP GUIDE THE CHURCH IN CHOOSING ITS LEADERS?

22. READ JAMES 2:1-7. HOW DO THESE VERSES EXPOUND UPON THE WAY WE SHOULD TREAT OTHERS IN THE CHURCH?

DAY 5 – CONSUMMATION

While the book of Revelation is difficult to interpret, it is vital in that it gives us the Consummation, or conclusion, to God's redemptive story. Without the book of Revelation, we would not know how God will ultimately deal with evil and sin and, therefore, have no concrete or certain hope that God will ultimately judge all evil in this world.

23. READ REVELATION 5:1-4. WHY WOULD JOHN, WHILE EXPERIENCING A GLORIOUS VISION OF HEAVEN, BE COMPELLED TO WEEP?

24. WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE TELL US ABOUT THE STATE OF MANKIND FROM HEAVEN'S PERSPECTIVE?

25. WHY IS JESUS THE ONLY BEING IN EXISTENCE WHO COULD RIGHTFULLY TAKE THE SCROLL?

26. READ REVELATION 21:1-4. HOW DOES THIS PASSAGE DESCRIBE HEAVEN FOR US?

27. WHY IS THE PROMISE FOUND IN VERSE 3 SO IMPORTANT? WHAT IS THE IMPLICATION OF THIS PROMISE FOR YOU?

"Christ's achievement is unique, but it also sets the pattern for Christians. We are to fight the spiritual battles with the forces of wickedness, not with human military or political strength but with endurance, purity, and faithfulness to Christ."
– Vern Poythress

In order to understand what's going on in Revelation 5, we need to know that the scroll referenced in Revelation 5:1-4 is essentially a deed or writ of authority to govern the world.

"Sin and death and suffering and war and poverty are not natural – they are the devastating results of our rebellion against God. We long for a return to Paradise – a perfect world, without the corruption of sin, where God walks with us and talks with us in the cool of the day."
– Randy Alcorn

DIGGING DEEPER

In Revelation 21:1-22:5, God creates a new heaven and a new earth, which implies complete renovation and, therefore, total redemption of creation. Some have thought that the new universe will be entirely new, but Isaiah 65:17-25 and Romans 8:21-23 indicate that a transformation of the old world is in view, much like the way in which our new bodies will be renewals of our old ones (1 Cor. 15:35-37). Indeed, everything is new (Rev. 21:5), but the result is the redemption of the old, not its eradication.

At the center of the new creation is the Holy City, which represents God dwelling with His people. God dwelt with human beings in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:7), in the tabernacle (Ex. 25:8), in the temple (1 Kgs. 8), and, above all, in Christ (Jn. 1:14). The new Jerusalem is the consummation of all of those, and the center of the new creation is God Himself. In the end, the curse God gave in Genesis 3:14-19 will be reversed (Rev. 22:3), and man will have perfect communion with God restored forever.

WEEK 8

STUDYING GOD'S WORD

HEBREWS 4:12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

STUDYING GOD'S WORD

DAY 1 – LITERARY CONTEXT

The goal of the next several weeks will be devoted to training you to study God's Word with the help of the Holy Spirit. At the onset, we'll warn you – this week is very detailed and can feel overwhelming. But be encouraged! Our intention is not to overload you with a dozen things to do every time you read your Bible, but rather to give you tools that will help you better understand and, therefore, apply Scripture.

The first step in studying the Bible is to simply read the passage you are trying to understand. This step sounds so basic that it barely seems worth mentioning, but too many people are quick to run off to other people or to books about the Bible before they have taken adequate time to read the passage. Instead of doing that, you should always start by reading the passage you are studying several times.

As you read, seek to understand the context of the passage you are studying. The books of the Bible did not originally contain chapters and verses – these were added hundreds of years later. That said, a verse or even a chapter in a book of the Bible is not a complete, independent unit of thought. Therefore, in order to understand what a verse of the Bible means, you need to understand how it fits into the argument or literary structure of the immediately surrounding context and the context of that entire book of the Bible.

1. READ JOHN 11:17-37. WHY DO YOU THINK JESUS WEPT (V. 35)?

2. READ JOHN 11:1-16 AND 11:38-44. HOW DOES THIS CONTEXT HELP YOU SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE OF WHY JESUS WEPT? EXPLAIN.

"Pray and read, read and pray; for a little from God is better than a great deal from men."
– John Bunyan

3. REREAD JOHN 11:1-4. DOES JESUS SEEM CONCERNED OR SAD? WHY OR WHY NOT?

4. IN WHICH VERSES IN CHAPTER 11 DO YOU SEE EVIDENCE OF PEOPLE RESISTING JESUS IN HIS PLANS?

5. DO YOU THINK JESUS WAS CONFIDENT THAT LAZARUS WOULDN'T END UP DEAD? IF SO, WHICH VERSES LEAD YOU TO YOUR CONCLUSION?

DIGGING DEEPER

Understanding context is a very important, but frequently overlooked, component of biblical interpretation. Detailed observations should always be judged against their consistency with the larger flow and point that the author is making. Remember, if two interpretations seem plausible, always look to the larger context for clues about what the author is really trying to communicate.

Further, once you have understood a verse in the context of the book, it is also important to understand it within the context of the entire Bible. Always let Scripture interpret Scripture. Because the Bible is inerrant (Week 6), we can be confident that no verse in the Bible contradicts any other verse. When we come across apparent contradictions, use the clearest passages to guide your interpretation of more obscure passages.

*"To expound Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view."
– Matt Chandler*

DAY 2 – HISTORICAL / CULTURAL CONTEXT

Someone once said, "The problem with interpreting the Bible is that you are reading other people's mail." This statement describes the great difficulty in the modern interpreter's task.

Fortunately, there are some great resources available to help us understand the culture and historic conditions that influenced how the author wrote and how the recipients received what he wrote. While these resources are valuable – even critical – for accurate interpretation, a great deal of historical and cultural insight is available to the interpreter who has a good study Bible and asks good questions.

"No one believes more strongly than I do that every Christian should be a theologian. In that sense, we all need to work it out. I want all Christians who can read to read their Bibles beyond the Bible – to read the history and theology." – DA Carson

Here are some categories and questions to consider as you read Scripture and try to determine if there is any historical and/or cultural context or background that would be helpful in interpretation.

GEOGRAPHIC FACTORS

While much of the Middle East is similar in its geography, there are some important elements of geography to consider. Do the recipients live in a mountainous or coastal area? Are the recipients isolated or located in a cultural or economic hub? Is it a dry climate or a wet climate?

6. READ 1 SAMUEL 17:1-11. WHAT GEOGRAPHIC FEATURES ARE MENTIONED IN THIS TEXT?

7. HOW DOES KNOWING GOLIATH IS STANDING IN THE VALLEY – IN PLAIN SIGHT OF ISRAEL'S ARMY – AFFECT YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THIS TEXT?

POLITICAL OR RELIGIOUS FACTORS

Are the recipients under oppression either from Israel's governance or from foreign governance? Are the recipients exiled or living in their homeland? Are the recipients prosperous or impoverished? How did people worship?

8. READ DANIEL 3:8-18. WHAT POLITICAL OR RELIGIOUS FACTORS CAN YOU IDENTIFY IN THIS TEXT?

9. HOW DO THESE ELEMENTS SHAPE THE WAY YOU VIEW THE BEHAVIOR OF SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO?

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS

How were deals made? How were debts paid? What did courtship and friendship look like in the culture of the recipients? What was the relationship between rich and poor or men and women? What were their homes like? Were the recipients part of an agrarian-based or a trade-based economy? What kind of clothes did they wear? What kind of weapons did they take to war?

10. READ JOHN 4:1-15; 27. HOW DOES KNOWING THAT MEN DIDN'T USUALLY ADDRESS WOMEN (V. 27) FURTHER YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF VERSES 1-15?

11. READ LUKE 19:1-10. HOW DOES UNDERSTANDING THAT TAX COLLECTORS WERE HELD IN LOW REGARD (V. 7) AFFECT YOUR INTERPRETATION OF THIS TEXT?

DAY 3 – WORDS AND PHRASES

After reading the text, reviewing the literary context, and considering the historical and cultural context, it is often a good idea to specifically study key words from the passage of Scripture.

There are three types of words that might require a bit more study. Theological words are worthy of additional study because they are not part of our everyday vocabulary and can therefore be easily misunderstood. Repeated words in a text are obviously central to the author's point and therefore require additional study. Cultural words often need to be studied and can be used to help us bridge a historical or cultural gap.

12. READ COLOSSIANS 1:15-23. WHICH WORDS IN THIS TEXT DO YOU THINK DESERVE FURTHER STUDY? WHY?

*"Ignorance of the Bible is
ignorance of Jesus."
– Jerome*

*"A Bible that's falling
apart usually belongs to
someone who isn't."
– Charles Spurgeon*

"I exhort and entreat you all, disregard what this man and that man thinks about such things and inquire from the Holy Scriptures all these things."

– John Chrysostom

13. CHOOSE ONE OF THE WORDS YOU LISTED AND CONDUCT FURTHER STUDY ON IT.

FIGURES OF SPEECH

The Old Testament is primarily written in Hebrew, while the New Testament is written in Greek. Like most languages, both Greek and Hebrew utilize idioms and figures of speech in communication. A figure of speech is a word or phrase that is used to communicate something other than its literal, natural meaning.

We use figures of speech so frequently and naturally that we rarely even notice them. If you've ever said, "That argument doesn't hold water," or "That guy is going to drive me to an early grave," then you've used a figure of speech.

While the Bible is full of figures of speech, there are a handful that are most prominent. Metaphor is a figure of speech that directly refers to one thing by mentioning another to suggest a likeness or analogy. Simile is a figure of speech that directly compares two things using connecting words such as "like" or "as." Apostrophe is when a writer directly addresses things or persons absent or imaginary. It is a figure of speech that often adds life and strength to writing. Hyperbole is probably the most misunderstood figure of speech in the Bible. Hyperbole is deliberate exaggeration for emphasis. Euphemism is a figure of speech that substitutes a more agreeable expression for something unpleasant or culturally inappropriate.

14. READ JOHN 6:35. IDENTIFY THE METAPHOR IN THIS PASSAGE. WHAT IS JESUS SUGGESTING WITH THE USE OF THIS METAPHOR?

15. READ JUDGES 6:5. IDENTIFY THE SIMILE IN THIS PASSAGE. HOW DOES THE USE OF SIMILE ENHANCE THE POINT BEING MADE?

16. READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:55. HOW DOES THIS PASSAGE USE APOSTROPHE?

17. READ PSALM 119:136. IDENTIFY THE HYPERBOLE. WHAT EMPHASIS IS THE AUTHOR TRYING TO MAKE IN USING HYPERBOLE?

18. READ ACTS 7:60. WHAT EUPHEMISM IS UTILIZED IN THIS PASSAGE?

DAY 4 – OBSERVATION AND INTERPRETATION

In an attempt to put the previous days together, we want to introduce the Inductive Bible Study Method. Inductive Bible Study is a process that seeks to let the Bible speak its clear and intended message (exegesis) rather than reading into the Bible a message the reader desires (eisegesis). In order to do this, a lot of what we talked about the last couple of days will come into play!

The first step in the observation stage is to read the text and ask questions. The great Bible teacher Howard Hendricks once ended his first class on Bible study (called Hermeneutics) by assigning one verse to his students with the instruction, "Write down every question you can think of regarding this verse." No student came to the next class with more than fifteen questions, while the great teacher came to class with ninety-three questions pertaining to that one verse! The point is that the first step to good interpretation is simply asking great questions.

Here are a few general questions you might ask when you first read a text:

- Why is this text here?
- What would the original recipients of the text have thought when reading?
- How does the text fit the author's larger flow of thought?
- Is there any historical or cultural reference with which I'm not familiar?
- What does this text say about God?
- What is the author's tone or mood in this text?
- How does this text relate with other texts in Scripture on the same subject?
- How does this text contribute to the larger message of Scripture?

"We tend to think of the Bible as a book of answers to our questions, and it is that. However, if we really let the text speak, we may find that God will show us that we are not even asking the right questions." – Tim Keller

19. READ 2 TIMOTHY 1:8-10. TRY TO LIST TWELVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS PASSAGE.

The second step in the observation stage is finding the answers to all those questions. This is where Days 1-3 are helpful!

20. RECORD OBSERVATIONS BASED ON YOUR QUESTIONS ABOVE.

"The truth is, it doesn't matter what a verse means to me, to you, or to anyone else. All that matters is what the verse means!"
– John MacArthur

After making observations, it is then time to make an interpretation of the text. The interpretation is the student's determination of what the original author intended to communicate to the original recipients. The greatest error in personal Bible study – and preaching, for that matter – is that it jumps too quickly to application. In a relevance obsessed culture, we often look first for application without taking the necessary time to fully understand the text. Remember, the job is first to understand what God and the author meant as they wrote the text.

21. BASED ON YOUR QUESTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS FROM QUESTIONS 19 AND 20, WHAT DOES 2 TIMOTHY 1:8-10 MEAN?

DIGGING DEEPER

Study Bibles contain many notes written by biblical scholars that give their interpretation of the passage. Reading these notes after you have followed all the preliminary steps listed above can help you see if your understanding is headed in the right direction. You must be cautious, however, about the use of study Bibles. The notes in study Bibles are not inerrant. Instead, they should be seen simply as the well-informed opinions of another person who could be mistaken.

Commentaries are books about the books of the Bible that are much longer than the books of the Bible they are written about! The author of a commentary presents his or her interpretation of a book of the Bible based on study of the original Greek and Hebrew language and the historical background of the Bible. Commentaries are valuable resources that contain a lot of wisdom and insight. Like study Bibles, however, commentaries are still the fallible products of the minds of sinful men, so they are never as true and trustworthy as the Bible itself.

DAY 5 – APPLICATION

Application is the final stage in the Inductive Bible Study Method. During this stage, we transfer timeless truths from the biblical culture to our culture. Remember, we can understand what the text should mean to us today only after we have a good understanding of what the text meant to the original author and audience. That is why the first two stages of this process are so important!

Our application should never be inconsistent or unrelated to the author's timeless truth. As you'll see, the timeless truth won't always be applied in the same way as it was in biblical culture, but it should always be the basis for our application.

22. WHAT ARE SOME APPLICATIONS BASED ON YOUR INTERPRETATION OF 2 TIMOTHY 1:8-10?

"Don't fall into the trap of studying the Bible without doing what it says."
– Francis Chan

"The Bible was written not to satisfy your curiosity, but to help you conform to Christ's image. Not to make you a smarter sinner, but to make you like the Savior. Not to fill your head with a collection of biblical facts, but to transform your life."

– Howard Hendricks

DIGGING DEEPER

Sometimes, like with 2 Timothy 1:8-10, determining the application of a biblical text is easy. Other times, it is more difficult. In fact, most of the significant debates among biblical scholars revolve not around the interpretation but the application of God's Word in today's culture. Some scholars contend that the Bible is antiquated and, therefore, of no great value for life in today's world. Other scholars claim the Bible applies as directly today as it did the day it was written. Neither view is correct.

Clearly, we hold a high view of Scripture, so we would never say the Bible is antiquated or of limited value. However, the idea that everything applies directly today as it did the day it was written doesn't allow for commands to be given within a unique culture that might not apply today.

Thankfully, there is a systematic way to approach this challenge:

- Take the application or the direct commandment, as it is written in the Bible.
- Try to determine the biblical principle that supports the specific commandment.
- Carry that same principle from the biblical time in which it was written to contemporary times that we live in today.
- Determine how the biblical principle is most appropriately applied today.

If the application is the same as that in the Bible, it is a supra-cultural commandment. If the application today is different, it is a cultural commandment with a timeless, theological principle that is applied differently in our culture.

23. READ MATTHEW 6:1-4. WHAT IS JESUS' SPECIFIC COMMAND REGARDING GIVING TO THOSE IN NEED?

24. WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE THAT PROMPTS THIS SPECIFIC COMMAND?

25. HOW DOES THIS BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE APPLY IN OUR LIVES TODAY?

26. IS THIS A CULTURAL OR SUPRA-CULTURAL COMMANDMENT?

27. READ 1 PETER 3:3. WHAT IS THE SPECIFIC COMMAND REGARDING OUTWARD APPEARANCE?

28. WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE THAT PROMPTS THAT SPECIFIC COMMAND?

29. HOW DOES THAT BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE APPLY IN OUR LIVES TODAY?

30. IS THIS A CULTURAL OR SUPRA-CULTURAL COMMANDMENT?

*"The faith will totter
if the authority of the
Holy Scriptures loses its
hold on men. We must
surrender ourselves to
the authority of Holy
Scripture, for it
can neither mislead
nor be misled."
– Augustine*

WEEK 9

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE DAILY

EPHESIANS 5:1-2

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love,
as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant
offering and sacrifice to God.

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE DAILY

DAY 1 – THE TRIANGLE

In order to be accurate and intentional in our study of God's Word day to day, it is important to learn how to use the resources and skills we explored in Week 8. At the same time, we know that trying to employ all these resources and skills every day is both impractical and tedious.

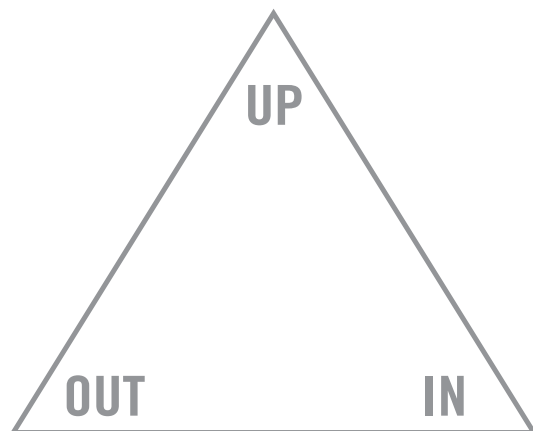
This week, we are going to introduce a new tool that can both simplify and clarify your daily Bible reading. At the onset, we should be careful to say that this is just a way to read your Bible, not the way. Further, it is wise to be varied in your approach to reading the Bible. Sometimes, it's great to study a passage or an entire book of the Bible inductively, as laid out in Week 8. In fact, this is what we do in our Community Groups! It's also equally valid to read through the entire Bible, seldom stopping to ask or answer questions. Often, people will do this in a calendar year, with the hope of getting a feel for the overall story of the Bible.

That said, in this week, and in Weeks 10-11, we will be using a Triangle to guide us as we read Scripture. While it might take some time at first to get familiar with this model, we hope that it is useful to you no matter where you are in your walk with the Lord. If you've never developed the habit of reading your Bible daily, we hope that the Triangle can be a tool that is easy enough to understand and practical enough to be used every day. If you already have your own methodology, it might be a great tool that you can teach to someone that you are discipling.

No matter what, we hope that you leave Weeks 9-11 encouraged and more equipped to read the Bible on your own!

"We fail in our duty to study God's Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy."

– R.C. Sproul



This simple tool reminds us to pursue balance as we read the Bible. At the top of the Triangle, **UP** represents what any given passage is trying to teach us about God. On the right side of the Triangle, **IN** represents what the passage should teach us about ourselves – both as individuals and as a collective community of faith. On the left side of the Triangle, **OUT** reminds us that almost everything we learn about God and ourselves has some type of application in the real world.

Another way to express UP, IN, and OUT is by asking the following questions:

- What does this passage say about God?
- What does this passage say about me/us?
- What can I do to reflect these truths in how I live?

1. WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD BE THE RESULT OF FOCUSING ON THE UP AND IN BUT NEGLECTING THE OUT?

2. WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD BE THE RESULT OF FOCUSING ON THE UP AND OUT BUT NEGLECTING THE IN?

3. AS YOU HAVE READ SCRIPTURE, HAVE YOU GRAVITATED TOWARD UP, IN, OR OUT? HOW MIGHT THAT TENDENCY SHAPE OR LIMIT YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE?

"The Bible is very easy to understand. But we Christians are a bunch of scheming swindlers. We pretend to be unable to understand it because we know very well that the minute we understand, we are obligated to act accordingly."
– Soren Kierkegaard

"There is more of His glory in the Word than there is in the whole creation of heaven and earth."

– Jeremiah Burroughs

"Happy are they who know their adoption — who feel in themselves the spirit of children, and can cry, 'Abba, Father,' as they look up to God. This is in Christ Jesus, for nothing comes to us except by Him."

– Charles Spurgeon

DAY 2 – UP

4. WHY DID GOD GIVE US THE BIBLE?

As we discussed in Week 6, the Bible is God's special revelation of Himself to us. In other words, God, who is infinitely beyond us in every way, has given us the Bible so that we can know Him. This is an incredible truth that we often take for granted! Too often, Christians rush past what the Bible is teaching us about the character of God so that we can get to the application. This leaves the Church with a poorly formed understanding of who God is and a misguided understanding of why we do what we do. In order to properly apply Scripture, we have to first know what Scripture says about God.

With all of this in mind, our first thought when reading Scripture should always be to learn what we can about God's attributes and actions (UP) and then let those thoughts inform the IN and OUT.

5. READ EPHESIANS 1:1-14. WHAT CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT GOD FROM THIS PASSAGE? LIST AS MANY OBSERVATIONS AS YOU CAN. TWO EXAMPLES HAVE BEEN PROVIDED.

God has predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus (v. 4).

The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance (v. 14).

6. DID YOU DISCOVER ANYTHING NEW ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER FROM YOUR REFLECTIONS ON EPHESIANS 1:1-14? IF SO, WHAT WAS NEW TO YOU AND WHY WAS IT SIGNIFICANT?

7. FROM YOUR REFLECTIONS ON GOD’S CHARACTER IN EPHESIANS 1:1-14, WHAT ATTRIBUTE DO YOU THINK YOU MOST OFTEN IGNORE OR TAKE FOR GRANTED? WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE THIS IS THE CASE?

DIGGING DEEPER

Our main question to ask with UP is, “What does this passage say about God?” It might also be helpful to keep the following questions in mind:

- What does this passage show us about God’s character?
- What does it tell us to praise God for?
- Is there any new thought about God Himself?
- What does this show us about God’s attributes (mercy, justice, etc.)?

DAY 3 – IN

In Day 2, we spent time examining the character of God that was revealed in Ephesians 1:1-14. Today, we will shift our focus to the IN. IN reminds us to reflect on what the passage says about us as individuals and as a church community.

It can be easy to jump the gun and move straight to the OUT during this step. However, we are not concerned with what we should do in response to the text – that will come next. Instead, during this step, we are forming and making observations about what Scripture says is true of our character and nature.

8. READ EPHESIANS 2:1-22. WHAT CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF FROM THIS PASSAGE? LIST AS MANY OBSERVATIONS AS YOU CAN.

I was dead in my trespasses and sins (v. 1).

9. WHAT CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY FROM THIS PASSAGE? LIST AS MANY OBSERVATIONS AS YOU CAN.

We were separated from Christ (v. 12).

We had no hope (v. 12).

“The Bible is a whole series of highways, all leading toward God. And when the text has been illuminated and the believer of the text knows that God is the end toward which he is moving, then that man has real faith.”

– AW Tozer

“Our insight into the need of redemption will largely depend upon our knowledge of the terrible nature of the power that has entered our being.”

– Andrew Murray

"The most distinctive feature of the biblical understanding of man is the teaching that man has been created in the image of God."
– Anthony Hockema

10. WHICH OBSERVATION FROM QUESTION 9 DO YOU NEED TO REFLECT ON FURTHER? WHY WAS IT SIGNIFICANT?

DIGGING DEEPER

Christian identity in America is largely shaped by individualism for a variety of fascinating historical and cultural reasons. Because of this, it may be difficult to think in terms of how a particular passage is speaking to our church community. However, we must remember that the books of the Bible, with a few exceptions, were addressed to communities and not to individuals. While this might not be shocking, the significance of this reality is important to consider.

When Scripture was read in the first few Christian generations, it was read aloud to gathered communities, who would respond by thinking, "This is being said to us. We need to..." They did not conceive of being Christian as something that they did on their own when they left the church gathering. Now, of course, that is not to say that the Bible is to be viewed in a strictly corporate, or communal, sense. There are certainly sections of the Bible that illustrate the value and significance of the individual.

In the end, God values both the individual and the gathered community. This is most clearly illustrated in the description of the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12. There, Paul tells us that individual believers are like parts of a body, each playing an incredibly important and vital role to the success of the whole body.

So, as we make and reflect on our IN observations, we need to not only ask what a passage says about me, but also what it says about us. This will balance our conception of Christian identity and give us an opportunity to think of ways to encourage or challenge our brothers and sisters in Christ.

DAY 4 – OUT

Having spent time contemplating the character of God and then reflecting on what God's Word says about us as individuals and as a church community, it is time to think carefully about how to apply the truths we have found in the passage to our daily lives. If the application is rooted first in the character of God and then in what Scripture declares to be true of us, it is less likely to be superficial or legalistic.

Said another way, if we consistently take what we learn in the UP and the IN and prayerfully ask God to give us conviction to live the OUT, we will represent Christ and live consistently with God's will. As we contemplate the OUT, we must remember that our time spent reading and studying the Bible should always have an outward looking aspect – it is not just for gaining knowledge.

11. READ EPHESIANS 4:17-32. WHAT APPLICATIONS OR ACTIONS DOES THIS PASSAGE SAY YOU NEED TO TAKE? LIST AS MANY AS YOU CAN.

No longer walk in the futility of my mind (v. 17).

Put off my old self (v. 22).

*"Since we have been
declared righteous and
we are in Christ seated
in the heavenlies, our
walk down here should
be commensurate with
our position."*

– J. Vernon McGee

12. HOW ARE EACH OF YOUR ANSWERS TO QUESTION 11 RELATED TO THE ATTRIBUTES OR ACTIONS OF GOD?

13. OF THE OBSERVATIONS YOU IDENTIFIED IN QUESTION 11, WHICH DO YOU FEEL THE GREATEST CONVICTION ABOUT APPLYING? WHAT STEPS DO YOU NEED TO TAKE TO APPLY IT?

*"An unforgiving spirit is
the devil's playground
and before long it
becomes the Christian's
battleground."*

– Warren Wiersbe

14. WHAT ABOUT YOUR CHARACTER OR SITUATION WILL MAKE APPLYING A PRINCIPLE YOU LISTED IN QUESTION 13 DIFFICULT?

15. HOW CAN YOU OVERCOME THAT CHALLENGE?

"The Word is both a glass to show us the spots of our soul and a laver to wash them away."

– Thomas Watson

"One can give without loving, but one cannot love without giving."

– Amy Carmichael

DIGGING DEEPER

Our main question to ask with OUT is, "What can I do to reflect these truths in how I live?" However, it might also be helpful to keep the following questions in mind:

- Does this passage point out something that I need to confess?
- Is there a command in this passage that I need to obey?
- Is there a promise for me to claim and live accordingly?
- Is there an example for me to follow?
- How does this passage affect my relationships ?
- How does this passage impact the way I work or think about my career?
- Who in my life can I encourage or challenge with what I've learned?

DAY 5 – THE WHOLE TRIANGLE

Over the last three days, we have chosen to focus on one aspect of the Triangle at the exclusion of the other two. We hope by doing that you have seen how each component is different and, therefore, offers diverse insights into the passage being read. However, the Triangle is created to be a three-dimensional tool. If we do not have all three elements of the Triangle – the UP, the IN, and the OUT – we are not reading our Bibles as comprehensively as we should.

In Day 5, we will read Ephesians 5:1-21 and examine it with our UP, IN, and OUT questions.

16. READ EPHESIANS 5:1-21. WHAT CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT GOD FROM THIS PASSAGE? LIST AS MANY OBSERVATIONS AS YOU CAN.

Christ gave Himself up for us (v. 2).

17. FROM QUESTION 16, DID YOU DISCOVER ANYTHING ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER THAT WAS NEW TO YOU? ARE THERE ANY ATTRIBUTES THAT YOU ARE TEMPTED TO IGNORE OR TAKE FOR GRANTED? IF SO, WHAT ARE THEY AND WHY ARE THEY SIGNIFICANT?

18. WHAT CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF OR OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY FROM THIS PASSAGE? LIST AS MANY OBSERVATIONS AS YOU CAN.

My life is immensely valuable because Christ gave Himself up for me (v. 2).

19. WHICH OBSERVATION FROM QUESTION 18 DO YOU NEED TO REFLECT ON FURTHER? WHY WAS IT SIGNIFICANT?

20. WHAT APPLICATIONS OR ACTIONS DOES THIS PASSAGE SAY YOU NEED TO TAKE? LIST AS MANY AS YOU CAN.

I should live and think of myself and other Christians and immensely valuable (v. 2).

*"Believers have a God more satisfying than sexual sin and greed, a God worthy of endless thanksgiving, a God who has given them a kingdom. Worship the triune God alone, not cheap substitutes."
– Tony Merida*

*"The Holy Spirit is a humble Spirit, and those who are truly filled with him always display the meekness and gentleness of Christ. It is one of their most evident characteristics that they submit to one another."
– John Stott*

21. OF THE OBSERVATIONS YOU IDENTIFIED IN QUESTION 20, WHICH DO YOU FEEL THE GREATEST CONVICTION ABOUT APPLYING? WHAT STEPS DO YOU NEED TO TAKE TO APPLY IT?

DIGGING DEEPER

Different authors of Scripture will likely gravitate toward one aspect of the Triangle over another. This can even be true of different sections of a particular book of the Bible. For example, we didn't have you read Ephesians 6:1-9, but, if you did, you would see that most of the observations from this section would be OUTs. Similarly, had you read Ephesians 1:15-23, most of your observations would have been UPs, particularly starting with verse 18.

When you encounter a section like this, it might be helpful to work backward or forward. In our examples for Day 5, we tried to show what that would look like. In verse 2, Paul says that Christ gave Himself up for us (UP). By implication, even though it's not explicitly mentioned in the text, this means that we are of immense value to Christ (IN) – so much so that He chose to willingly give His life for us. Understanding that we are cherished by God, we should walk with security and confidence and repent of the ways we attempt to accomplish things to justify our worth (OUT).

22. DO YOU THINK EPHESIANS 5:1-21 FOCUSES ON ONE PART OF THE TRIANGLE MORE THAN THE OTHERS? IF SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK PAUL IS EMPHASIZING IN THIS PASSAGE?

WEEK 10

READING THE OLD TESTAMENT

PROVERBS 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths.

READING THE OLD TESTAMENT

INTRODUCTION – WEEKS 10-11

In Weeks 10 and 11, we will be practicing the Triangle we learned in Week 9 by applying it to eight different texts – four from the Old Testament in Week 10 and four from the New Testament in Week 11. In order to help guide your time while you are still learning to use the Triangle, we will provide you with questions in Week 10, but, in Week 11, you are on your own.

As you work through these passages, we will introduce you to different genres of Scripture. Genre is a literary term used to designate the types or categories into which literary works are grouped. They are usually grouped according to form, technique, or, sometimes, subject matter. Interpreting Scripture according to the genre in which it is written is one of the critical keys to handling God's Word accurately.

Many people today oversimplify the interpretation of God's Word by saying either, "I take the Bible literally" or, "I take the Bible figuratively." Just as we must take into account the different cultures and time frames in which the Bible was written (Week 8), we must also account for the specific writing style a biblical author employed. While this detail might seem technical, be assured that you do this naturally with all other reading outside the Bible!

"If one were to sift thoroughly the Law and the Prophets, he would not find a single word which would not draw and bring us to Christ."
– John Calvin

DAY 1 – OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE

Old Testament Narrative recounts the history of God's people from the beginning of creation, through their many high and low points, to their scattering and exile. Old Testament Narrative is not written to give all history on a subject, but to give a historical account as it lines up with the author's purpose for writing. That does not mean the biblical authors were biased, but that they were selective in which events they included based on whether it served their purpose or theme.

A true interpretation of Old Testament Narrative looks not only at the story, but also at the context to determine the overall theme that the passage is supporting. As with all narratives, it's important to identify key characters, major events, and important places. In particular, it can be helpful to pay attention to the development of the key characters and to make note of ways they grow or things they learn.

Old Testament Narrative includes:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

READ GENESIS 1:26-29 AND 2:4-25 AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

- 1. WHAT CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT GOD FROM THIS PASSAGE? LIST AS MANY OBSERVATIONS AS YOU CAN.**
- 2. FROM QUESTION 1, DID YOU DISCOVER ANYTHING ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER THAT WAS NEW TO YOU? ARE THERE ANY ATTRIBUTES THAT YOU ARE TEMPTED TO IGNORE OR TAKE FOR GRANTED? IF SO, WHAT ARE THEY, AND WHY ARE THEY SIGNIFICANT?**
- 3. WHAT CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF OR OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY FROM THIS PASSAGE? LIST AS MANY OBSERVATIONS AS YOU CAN.**

"When reading Old Testament history, ask yourself why the author selected these events and that particular angle on them. It will get you much closer to the message he intended to convey to his original audience."

– David Murray

"From the very first moment, true religion distinguishes itself from all other religions by the fact that it construes the relation between God and the world, including man, as that between the Creator and His creature."

– Herman Bavinck

4. WHICH OBSERVATION FROM QUESTION 3 DO YOU NEED TO REFLECT ON FURTHER? WHY WAS IT SIGNIFICANT?

5. WHAT APPLICATIONS OR ACTIONS DOES THIS PASSAGE SAY YOU NEED TO TAKE? LIST AS MANY AS YOU CAN.

6. OF THE OBSERVATIONS YOU IDENTIFIED IN QUESTION 5, WHICH DO YOU FEEL THE GREATEST CONVICTION ABOUT APPLYING? WHAT STEPS DO YOU NEED TO TAKE TO APPLY IT?

DAY 2 – POETRY

While poetry should be interpreted more figuratively than other genres, its interpretation always has a literal meaning. For example, while a writer of a New Testament epistle might say, “God protects and guides,” a writer of biblical poetry says, “The Lord is my shepherd.” Both have literal meaning and application, but the poetry must be interpreted from a figurative perspective.

Poetry is known for its terse style – often using short phrases – and its rich imagery. Very often, it uses strong contrasts and comparisons in a two-line form. Also, even though we may not always be able to, it can be helpful for us to identify any clues that might inform us of the circumstances in which the passage was written. Other literary devices to pay attention to include: repeated words, images or metaphors, and the overall tone of the passage.

Although many of the books in the Old Testament include sections of Poetry, two books are written entirely in poetic form: Psalms and Song of Solomon.

READ PSALM 23 AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

“Poetry, by definition, is a kind of communication that cannot be fully appreciated on the first reading.”
– John Piper

7. WHAT CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT GOD FROM THIS PASSAGE? LIST AS MANY OBSERVATIONS AS YOU CAN.

8. FROM QUESTION 7, DID YOU DISCOVER ANYTHING ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER THAT WAS NEW TO YOU? ARE THERE ANY ATTRIBUTES THAT YOU ARE TEMPTED TO IGNORE OR TAKE FOR GRANTED? IF SO, WHAT ARE THEY, AND WHY ARE THEY SIGNIFICANT?

9. WHAT CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF OR OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY FROM THIS PASSAGE? LIST AS MANY OBSERVATIONS AS YOU CAN.

10. WHICH OBSERVATION FROM QUESTION 9 DO YOU NEED TO REFLECT ON FURTHER? WHY WAS IT SIGNIFICANT?

11. WHAT APPLICATIONS OR ACTIONS DOES THIS PASSAGE SAY YOU NEED TO TAKE? LIST AS MANY AS YOU CAN.

12. OF THE OBSERVATIONS YOU IDENTIFIED IN QUESTION 11, WHICH DO YOU FEEL THE GREATEST CONVICTION ABOUT APPLYING? WHAT STEPS DO YOU NEED TO TAKE TO APPLY IT?

Psalm 23 shifts from using the third person pronoun (He) in its first half to using the second person pronoun (You) in the latter half. This meaningful change occurs at the center of the poem with the words, "For you are with me." Interestingly, these words are significantly flanked by 26 Hebrew words on either side.

DAY 3 – WISDOM LITERATURE

"Proverbs reveals that God does not make all people's decisions for them, but rather expects them to use His gift of reason to interpret the circumstances and events of life within the framework of revelation that He has given."

– Graeme Goldsworthy

Wisdom Literature explores important questions about life and gives advice for practical living. Sometimes, Wisdom Literature is deliberately puzzling and thought provoking, requiring the reader to meditate on the meaning and think in new ways. Its lessons for us are not always simple commands ("go and do this"). Sometimes, they are observations on the way life works.

Wisdom Literature includes:

Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes

READ PROVERBS 3:1-12 AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

13. WHAT CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT GOD FROM THIS PASSAGE? LIST AS MANY OBSERVATIONS AS YOU CAN.

14. FROM QUESTION 13, DID YOU DISCOVER ANYTHING ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER THAT WAS NEW TO YOU? ARE THERE ANY ATTRIBUTES THAT YOU ARE TEMPTED TO IGNORE OR TAKE FOR GRANTED? IF SO, WHAT ARE THEY, AND WHY ARE THEY SIGNIFICANT?

15. WHAT CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF OR OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY FROM THIS PASSAGE? LIST AS MANY OBSERVATIONS AS YOU CAN.

**16. WHICH OBSERVATION FROM QUESTION 15 DO YOU NEED TO REFLECT ON FURTHER?
WHY WAS IT SIGNIFICANT?**

**17. WHAT APPLICATIONS OR ACTIONS DOES THIS PASSAGE SAY YOU NEED TO TAKE?
LIST AS MANY AS YOU CAN.**

**18. OF THE OBSERVATIONS YOU IDENTIFIED IN QUESTION 17, WHICH DO YOU FEEL
THE GREATEST CONVICTION ABOUT APPLYING? WHAT STEPS DO YOU NEED TO TAKE
TO APPLY IT?**

*"Those that put
themselves under a
divine guidance shall
always have the benefit
of it. God will give them
that wisdom which is
profitable to direct, so
that they shall not turn
aside into the by-paths
of sin."*

– Matthew Henry

DAY 4 – PROPHECY

Predicting the future is very often not the primary concern of the prophets.

The prophetic books are records of God speaking to His people through the voice of a chosen man. Though the prophets foretell the coming of Jesus Christ in significant ways, they often point to the general interplay between God's judgment and mercy on His people with the intent of calling the people to repentance.

When reading the prophets, you may have a sense of expectation about something happening in the near or distant future. It is important to understand what is expected, when it is expected, and how that expectation should motivate action in the present.

Old Testament Prophecy includes:

Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel

Minor Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

READ ISAIAH 6 AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

19. WHAT CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT GOD FROM THIS PASSAGE? LIST AS MANY OBSERVATIONS AS YOU CAN.

"It does not seem proper to speak of one attribute of God as being more central and fundamental than another; but if this were permissible, the Scriptural emphasis on the holiness of God would seem to justify its selection."
– Louis Berkof

20. FROM QUESTION 19, DID YOU DISCOVER ANYTHING ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER THAT WAS NEW TO YOU? ARE THERE ANY ATTRIBUTES THAT YOU ARE TEMPTED TO IGNORE OR TAKE FOR GRANTED? IF SO, WHAT ARE THEY, AND WHY ARE THEY SIGNIFICANT?

21. WHAT CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF OR OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY FROM THIS PASSAGE? LIST AS MANY OBSERVATIONS AS YOU CAN.

22. WHICH OBSERVATION FROM QUESTION 21 DO YOU NEED TO REFLECT ON FURTHER? WHY WAS IT SIGNIFICANT?

23. WHAT APPLICATIONS OR ACTIONS DOES THIS PASSAGE SAY YOU NEED TO TAKE? LIST AS MANY AS YOU CAN.

24. OF THE OBSERVATIONS YOU IDENTIFIED IN QUESTION 23, WHICH DO YOU FEEL THE GREATEST CONVICTION ABOUT APPLYING? WHAT STEPS DO YOU NEED TO TAKE TO APPLY IT?

WEEK 11

READING THE NEW TESTAMENT

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-5

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this in mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

READING THE NEW TESTAMENT

DAY 1 – NEW TESTAMENT NARRATIVE

This week, put into practice what you did last week without the questions prompting you. Remember, think UP, IN, and OUT. Make sure to conclude each study by praying and noting any particular convictions that God has given you.

New Testament Narrative is made up of the Gospels and the book of Acts. The Gospels are the four accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection found in the beginning of the New Testament. They individually cover some of the same parts of Jesus life, but from slightly different perspectives, emphasizing different themes in the story of Jesus. The book of Acts is written as a follow up to the Gospel of Luke and details the growth of the early church in the first-century.

Not surprisingly, New Testament Narrative should be read similarly to Old Testament Narrative, focusing on key characters, major events, and important places. When reading, it is important to pay attention to what each passage is teaching you about Jesus and how you should respond to this revelation of Him.

New Testament Narrative includes: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts

*"The four unique Gospels testify to the one gospel – the good news of salvation available through Jesus the Messiah."
– Mark Strauss*

LUKE 14:25-35

*"If our lives do not reflect
the fruit of following
Jesus, then we are
foolish to think that we
are actually followers of
Jesus in the first place."
– David Platt*

"The Epistles tell us that sound doctrine is not optional but necessary, and that it is our duty as followers of Christ to reject the soul-destroying doctrines of heretics."
– Vern Poythress

"I am persuaded that love and humility are the highest attainments in the school of Christ and the brightest evidences that He is indeed our Master."
– John Newton

DAY 2 – EPISTLES

The Epistles are first-century letters that were written to specific churches or individuals. They are marked by theological explanations and the necessary precepts, or commands, which logically follow. There are two groups of epistles in the New Testament: The Pauline Epistles, written by Paul, and the General Epistles, written by other apostles.

The Epistles often contain detailed, linear arguments. Most often, they begin with a section on the attributes and actions of God and then move into a section of specific application for the Church. Because of this, it's important to understand how any sub-sections of an epistle support the author's main point or theme.

Pauline Epistles include:

Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon

General Epistles include:

Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1-3 John, and Jude

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

DAY 3 – EPISTLES

JAMES 4:1-12

"God is tirelessly on our side. He never falters in respect to our needs, He always has more grace at hand for us. He is never less than sufficient. He always has more and yet more to give."

– J.A. Motyer

DAY 4 – APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

Apocalyptic Literature is related to the broader Prophetic genre but with even more utilization of figurative language, imagery, and hyperbole.

Apocalyptic Literature takes its name from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, which literally means “revelation.” As such, it is a genre that reflects an unveiling or pulling back of the curtain on the unseen world and its role in bringing this present world to an end. While it is appropriate to focus on future action as we study Apocalyptic Literature, we should not forget that the past – particularly the death and resurrection of Jesus – figures heavily in the events described.

The danger in apocalyptic interpretation is trying to interpret it too literally or specifically. As you read, remember that Apocalyptic Literature seeks to paint pictures that point people to the hope and power found in Christ. Interpretation should, therefore, be Christocentric (centered on Christ) and focus on the hope it offers us today.

Several books in the Bible include some amount of Apocalyptic Literature: including all of the book of Revelation, Daniel 7-12, portions of Zechariah, and even parts of the Gospels (Mk. 13) and the Epistles (2 Thess. 2).

REVELATION 22:1-5

“No sanctuary is needed, for the fellowship of believers with their God is direct and immediate. God tabernacles with His people; they are constantly in His immediate and loving and abiding presence.”
– William Hendriksen

WEEKS 12 - 14

PRAYER

WEEK 12

THE MYSTERY AND MANDATE OF PRAYER

ISAIAH 55:8-9

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

THE MYSTERY AND MANDATE OF PRAYER

DAY 1 – THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

*"God, from all eternity
did, by the most wise
and holy counsel of
His own will, freely
and unchangeably
ordain whatsoever
comes to pass."
– The Westminster
Confession*

As we begin to investigate prayer, we must start with one of the most important aspects of God's character – sovereignty. Sovereignty is so fundamental to the nature of God that we wouldn't be able to call Him God without it. A non-sovereign God isn't God at all!

What does it mean that God is sovereign? Essentially, it means that God plans and executes His purpose in His timing and in His way. In other words, God has the power, wisdom, and authority to do anything He chooses to do. As a result, nothing escapes God's notice. Even further, nothing oversteps the boundaries of His power.

Specifically, the Bible tells us that God is sovereign over, among other things, nature (Jer. 10:12-13), suffering (Gen. 50:20), the activities of daily existence (Prov. 20:24), life and death (1 Sam. 12:6), and even random events (Prov. 16:33).

1. DESCRIBE THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

2. WHAT WOULD THE WORLD BE LIKE IF MAN, NOT GOD, WAS SOVEREIGN?

3. WHAT PROBLEMS WOULD EXIST IN A WORLD SIMPLY GOVERNED BY THE LAWS OF NATURE?

4. IN WHAT WAYS SHOULD THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD BE A COMFORT OR SECURITY?

DIGGING DEEPER

We can oversimplify or even overextend the concept of sovereignty by thinking that God *must* do anything that He *can* do. Certainly, God has the ability to do anything He wants – for instance, to take action or intervene in any situation. However, He often chooses to act indirectly, allowing certain things to happen for reasons only known by Him (Rom. 11:34).

If that's confusing, think about it like this. If I were to put an ant in a bowl, you would not doubt my ability to do whatever I wanted to the ant whenever I wanted. Now, let's say the ant tries to crawl out of the bowl, and I don't want this to happen. My being in control – my sovereignty or authority over the ant – does not force me to crush the ant or pick it up just because I can. Instead, for reasons of my own, I may choose to let the ant crawl away. Regardless of what I choose, I'm still in control. You see, there's a big difference between allowing the ant to leave the bowl and helplessly watching as it escapes.

God's sovereignty means that He is absolute in authority and unrestricted in His power. However, this does not mean that He will always act as He could, but simply that He can do whatever He wants, when He wants, for whatever reason He wants. Simply put, that's the prerogative of a Sovereign.

"Nothing in all the vast universe can come to pass other than what God has eternally purposed. Here is a foundation of faith. Here is a resting place for the intellect. Here is an anchor for the soul."
– AW Pink

5. HOW DOES THE VERY ACT OF PRAYING ACKNOWLEDGE THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD?

DAY 2 – WHY SHOULD WE PRAY

In light of God's sovereignty as described in Day 1, our concern today is to understand why we should pray. In other words, what should motivate us to pray, even as we acknowledge that God is ultimately in control of all things?

6. READ PSALM 25:11 AND PSALM 79:9. FOR WHAT REASON DOES THE PSALMIST APPEAL TO GOD TO GRANT HIS REQUESTS?

Theologians tell us that the glory of God is the sum total of all He is – the manifestation of His character. The glory of God, then, is not an attribute of God, but rather an attribute of all His attributes!

7. IN YOUR OWN WORDS, HOW DOES PRAYER GLORIFY GOD?

8. HOW CAN THE GLORY OF GOD CONSTANTLY BE AT THE FOREFRONT OF YOUR MIND AS YOU PRAY?

DIGGING DEEPER

As we go to the Lord in prayer, we need to make sure our prayers center on the glory of God. When we do this, it helps us to see our requests in proper perspective. Often, matters that seemed so important have a tendency to shrink to their proper size when measured by the glory of God. If you’re wondering how to think through this idea practically, ask yourself as you pray, “If God grants this request, will it bring Him glory?” Doing this is a good way to identify requests that are selfish and shortsighted.

If for no other reason, we should pray is because it brings God glory. However, we can go beyond saying that we pray only because it glorifies God, even though that would be enough.

First, we should pray because, as The Westminster Shorter Catechism reminds us, the chief end of man – the reason we were created – is to glorify God. Therefore, any activity that we undertake that glorifies God, including prayer, aids in our feeling of identity and purpose as human beings! When we pray, we are literally doing what we were created to do.

Also, as we pray, we are provided with mercy, help, wisdom, comfort, and so much more from the gracious hands of God. As we saw in Psalm 25:11 and 79:9, when we ask God for help, we know that He gives it to us for His name’s sake. In other words, God glorifies Himself by giving us the help we need. John Piper puts it this way, “The principle is this: we get the help. He gets the glory.”

Finally, as we pray, we are communing with Almighty God. Where there should be separation, there is communion. Even more, because of the work of Jesus, we can confidently draw near to God, assured that He will also draw near to us (Jas. 4:7-8). Prayer, then, is a way to live in enjoyment of the relationship we have with God.

9. WHICH OF THE REASONS ABOVE MOST RESONATE WITH YOU? WHY?

DIGGING DEEPER

Like everything else in the Christian life, prayer can be said to be for God's glory and for our benefit, in that order. Everything that God does – everything that God allows and ordains – is in the supreme sense for His glory. It's also true that while God seeks His own glory supremely, man benefits when God is glorified.

DAY 3 – GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND PRAYER

Understanding that we should pray because it brings God glory and benefits us, we now can turn to ask the question of whether or not prayer can actually accomplish anything. It's nice to talk about the religious, spiritual, and psychological benefits (and whatever else we might derive from prayer), but what about the real question: "Does prayer make any difference? Does it really change anything?"

Ultimately, as we question the effectiveness of prayer, what we're really trying to do is reconcile prayer with the sovereignty of God. We can wrongly think, "If God is all-powerful and all-knowing, then He already knows what He's going to do. Why bother to pray if whatever is going to happen is going to happen anyway?"

C. S. Lewis helps us answer this question by placing prayer within the wider context of God using certain means to achieve desired ends. He says:

Can we believe that God really modifies His action in response to the suggestions of men? For infinite wisdom does not need telling what is best, and infinite goodness needs no urging to do it. But neither does God need any of those things that are done by finite agents, whether living or inanimate. He could, if He chose, repair our bodies miraculously without food; or give us food without the aid of farmers, bakers, and butchers; or knowledge without the aid of learned men; or convert the heathen without missionaries. Instead, He allows soils and weather and animals and the muscles, minds, and wills of men to co-operate in the execution of His will.

What Lewis is articulating is that God has the power and wisdom to accomplish anything He wants to without anyone else's help. However, Lewis also points out that God graciously uses all sorts of secondary means to accomplish His will. Among those secondary means, of course, is prayer.

*"You are coming to your King; Large petitions with you bring; For His grace and power are such; None can ever ask too much."
– John Newton*

*"We must never presume God will grant us apart from prayer what He has ordained to grant us only by means of prayer."
– Sam Storms*

See Appendix D to examine the question of whether or not prayer changes the mind of God.

"God has devised prayer as a means of enlisting us as participants in the work He has ordained, as part of the outworking of His sovereign rulership over all."
– Bruce Ware

So, do our prayers actually matter? Absolutely! Your prayer might be what God uses to bring about His will.

10. HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN HOW A SOVEREIGN GOD USES PRAYER TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES?

DIGGING DEEPER

Even as we try to reconcile the sovereignty of God and prayer, we must first confess together what we read in Isaiah 55:8-9 – God’s judgment and ways are higher than ours. Even though the Lord has amply supplied us with revelation to know Him, the mysteries of God are still great! How He accomplishes His purposes is often hidden from human sight. Therefore, we must approach this subject with a sober awareness that we won’t figure it all out. We are the finite approaching the infinite and can only fully understand that which He has shown us in His Word. The rest comes down to trust.

To understand this concept more fully, we’ll take a look at a question that is frequently asked: Why pray for the lost if God has already determined whom He will save?

11. READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21. WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN’S ROLE IN PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL?

12. READ ACTS 13:44-52. HOW DO WE RECONCILE GOD APPOINTING PEOPLE UNTO SALVATION (V. 48) AND PAUL AND BARNABAS’ PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WORLD?

DIGGING DEEPER

There is no tension or inconsistency between God's sovereignty and our prayer to God for the lost. At the same time, God's claim of responsibility for salvation does not take away our responsibility to participate in the process of His salvation. Just as God has ordained the ends – who will be saved – He has also ordained the means – how those people will come to salvation. More specifically, the means by which God draws people to salvation is the proclamation of the gospel (Rom. 10:14-15) and the prayers of the redeemed (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

God has given us the great privilege of participating in His plans to redeem lost souls! Though He isn't dependent on our prayers – a sovereign God is by definition free from dependence – He has chosen to use our prayers to prepare us and the lost. Since God has commanded our prayers for the lost, they are fully in accord with God's eternal council.

All in all, divine sovereignty does not contradict our responsibility to pray and act in regard to evangelism, but rather affirms it. Further, this principle can be applied to any other thing for which we might pray.

*"Divine providence
should not hinder prayer.
Instead it should make
us eager to intercede
for ourselves and
others, because we
know God makes use of
our prayers to
accomplish His will."
– RC Sproul*

DAY 4 – WHAT MAKES PRAYER EFFECTIVE?

If prayer is actually able to accomplish something, how do we ensure that we are praying for the right things? How do we know that God is concerned about the things for which we pray? How can we feel confident that God will respond to our prayers? The next two days will provide us with an overarching principle and a handful of guidelines to help answer these questions.

13. WHY DO YOU THINK GOD SEEMS TO ANSWER SOME PRAYERS AND NOT OTHERS?

*"When I pray,
coincidences happen.
When I don't, they don't"
– William Temple*

14. READ 1 JOHN 5:14-15. WHAT DOES THIS TEXT TELL US ABOUT THE CONDITION FOR GOD ANSWERING OUR PRAYERS?

15. READ LUKE 11:9-10. HOW DO YOU THINK THE CONTEXT (LK. 11:1-8) SHAPES THE INTERPRETATION OF THIS TEXT?

DIGGING DEEPER

Both Luke 11:9-10 and 1 John 5:14-15 are predicated on knowing and living the will of God. From these two passages, we can say that the primary determinate in effective prayer is praying according to the will of God.

How can we determine the will of God? Certainly, there is plenty of mystery to account for in the specifics of God's will, but God has revealed much about His will in Scripture. Because of this, the effective prayer will be informed by knowledge of God's will derived from Scripture.

16. ARE YOUR PRAYERS AND YOUR BIBLE STUDY INTERLINKED SUCH THAT YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF SCRIPTURE INFORMS YOUR PRAYER LIFE? EXPLAIN.

17. DO YOU FEEL LIKE GOD'S PRIORITIES CURRENTLY SHAPE YOUR PRAYERS, OR ARE YOUR PRAYERS SHAPED BY OTHER PRIORITIES?

18. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PRIORITIES OF GOD THAT WE CAN KNOW WITH CERTAINTY FROM SCRIPTURE AND HOW CAN THEY MAKE OUR PRAYERS MORE EFFECTIVE?

19. READ PSALM 37:4 AND PSALM 86:12. HOW ARE THESE VERSES RELATED?

*"There is a direct connection between the degree to which our minds are shaped by Scripture and the degree to which our prayers are answered."
— John Piper*

"Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?" — Corrie Ten Boom

DIGGING DEEPER

At first glance, the two verses above in question 19 appear quite different. One seems to be about getting what we want, while the other is about God getting what He wants.

However, studied in greater detail, these passages promote the same goal from different perspectives. A superficial reading of Psalm 37:4 could lead to the conclusion that God is a doting Father who plays favorites with those who pamper Him. But that is not what this promise says. If we delight in the Lord and seek to please Him in everything, then something is going to happen to our own desires. Namely, His desires become our desires. We start to say with our Lord, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work" (Jn. 4:34). Our praying, then, is simply a reflection of God's desires in our own heart.

DAY 5 – GUIDELINES FOR PRAYER

Beyond revealing what His priorities are for us in prayer, God has also graciously given us some guidelines that are trustworthy whenever we come before Him.

GUIDELINE #1 – WE MUST YIELD OURSELVES TO THE FATHER'S WILL

In daily choosing to follow God, Christians must yield their desires to the will of the Father. To yield means to surrender or to submit. Perhaps more clearly, it's a military term used to describe when an opposing army is defeated. When one side yields, it lays down its arms and relinquishes its rights to the conqueror, allowing them to take control. Yielding to God works the same way. God has a plan for our lives and yielding to Him means we set aside our own plans and eagerly seek His.

This should be reflected in our prayers. Like Jesus, we should be able to pray "not my will, but yours, be done" (Lk. 22:42). At times, this can be scary! There is often a price to pay when we sincerely pray for the will of God. When Jesus prayed that God's will be done, He was about to receive the cup of wrath from the Father's hand (Jn. 18:10-11). However, we see that Jesus was not afraid of the Father's will being done, as He later rebuked Peter for trying to keep Him from taking the cup. Jesus said, "Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (Jn. 18:11). We never need to fear the will of God and, if we are in the will of God, we never need to fear the answers He gives to our prayers.

"There are really only two ways to respond to Jesus. You can deny yourself and follow Him, or you can deny Him and follow yourself."
– Trip Lee

20. WHAT AREAS IN YOUR LIFE DO YOU NEED TO YIELD IN SUBMISSION TO THE FATHER?

"Unless we are profoundly certain that God is our Father, we will never be able to say, 'Thy will be done.'"
– Tim Keller

The High Priestly Prayer in John 17 occurs right before Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane, where He would be eventually betrayed and arrested.

21. WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE TO PRAY "YOUR WILL BE DONE" IN THOSE AREAS?

22. IS THERE ANYTHING IN YOUR LIFE THAT YOU ARE SCARED TO PRAY ABOUT? IF SO, WHAT? WHAT ABOUT THAT TOPIC SCARES YOU?

GUIDELINE #2 – WE MUST PRAY IN FAITH

If Jesus had looked back on His years of ministry and evaluated them from a human point of view, it would've looked like failure. He had very few followers, and His own nation had rejected Him. Humanly speaking, His work had failed. Yet, He prayed, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do" (Jn. 17:4). By faith, He would be the "grain of wheat" planted in the ground, and He would produce much fruit (Jn. 12:24).

At the same time, if Jesus had looked ahead, He would've seen arrest, conviction, and death on a cross. Again, humanly speaking, it was defeat. However, by faith, He saw it as it really was – victory! He said to Andrew and Philip, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (Jn. 12:23). Glorified! We would've said, crucified, but Jesus looked beyond the cross to the glory that would come. Hebrews 12:2 says, "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

When we pray by faith, we develop a divine perspective rather than a human one. Faith treats as present and accomplished that which God will do in the future.

23. WHAT DO YOU THINK IT LOOKS LIKE TO PRAY IN FAITH?

24. HOW CAN YOU TELL WHEN YOUR PRAYERS LACK FAITH?

GUIDELINE #3 – WE MUST PRAY AT ALL TIMES

25. READ EPHESIANS 6:18-20. WHAT DOES THIS TEXT SAY ABOUT THE FREQUENCY OF PRAYER?

26. HOW CAN A PERSON LIVING IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PRAY FAITHFULLY AS PAUL COMMANDS IN EPHESIANS 6?

"A praying life isn't simply a morning prayer time. It is about slipping into prayer at odd hours of the day, not because we are disciplined but because we are in touch with our own poverty of spirit." – Paul Miller

DIGGING DEEPER

"At all times" (Eph. 6:18) can be translated or understood as "at every opportunity." John MacArthur helps explain:

"To obey this exhortation means that, when we are tempted, we hold the temptation before God and ask for His help. When we experience something good and beautiful, we immediately thank the Lord for it. When we see evil around us, we pray that God will make it right and be willing to be used of Him to that end. When we meet someone who does not know Christ, we pray for God to draw that person to Himself and to use us to be a faithful witness. When we encounter trouble, we turn to God as our Deliverer. In other words, our life becomes a continually ascending prayer, a perpetual communing with our heavenly Father."

GUIDELINE #4 – WE MUST PRAY PERSISTENTLY

27. READ LUKE 18:1-7. WHAT DO THESE VERSES SAY ABOUT PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER?

28. DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER? WHY OR WHY NOT?

"At times, God wants us to persist in prayer in order to strengthen our faith in Him. Faith would never grow if all prayers were answered immediately." – Donald Whitney

God desires that we constantly return to these fundamentals. It is easy to get distracted by external things so our Father has to remind us that effective prayer must come from the heart. We must repeatedly examine our relationship with the Father to make sure we are in His will and want to be in His will. We must examine our motives, asking, "Am I praying so that the Father will be glorified or so that I might have my own comfortable way? Am I praying by faith and basing my requests on His Word?"

While these principles might make prayer seem complex, the reality is that prayer in its most pure form is our response in love and hope to God. True prayer is the by-product of our personal relationship with the Father. "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (Jn. 14:21).

APPENDIX D

DOES PRAYER CHANGE GOD'S MIND?

In a word, no. Prayer does not change God's mind. Numbers 23:19 affirms this, saying, "God is not a man, that He should lie, or a son of man, that He should change His mind."

How can we reconcile this answer with the fact that the Old Testament seems to indicate that on at least one occasion God's mind did seem to change? In the King James Version of Jonah 3:10, God "repented of" the evil He had planned for the people of Nineveh. In using the concept of repentance here, the Bible is describing God, who is Spirit, in what theologians call "anthropomorphic" language. That is, it is describing God by way of human attributes. Obviously, the Bible does not mean that God repented in the way we would repent. Otherwise, we could rightly assume that God had sinned and, therefore, would need a savior Himself. Instead, what it clearly means is that God removed the threat of judgment from the people. The Hebrew word *nacham*, translated "repent" in the King James Version, means "comforted" or "eased" in this case. Here, it entails that God revoked the sentence of judgment He had previously imposed.

The mind of God doesn't change principally because God is not a thing. Things change, and they change according to God's sovereign will, which He exercises through secondary means and activities. As we discussed in Day 3, the prayers of His people are one of the means He uses to bring things to pass in this world.

So then, does prayer change God's mind? No! However, does prayer change things? Yes, of course!

*"A changeable God
would be a terror to the
righteous. They would
have no sure anchorage,
and amid a changing
world, they would be
driven to and fro in
perpetual fear of
shipwreck."
— Charles Spurgeon*

WEEK 13

THE PATTERN FOR PRAYER: THE LORD'S PRAYER

MATTHEW 6:9-13

Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

THE PATTERN FOR PRAYER: THE LORD'S PRAYER

DAY 1 – OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

Because many of us are familiar with the Lord's Prayer, it may have lost some of its intended wonder. As you enter into this week, you might consider praying for new eyes to see old truths.

During His ministry, Jesus performed many miracles. He walked on water, turned water into wine, healed the sick, and raised the dead. As John said, "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written... the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (Jn. 21:25).

Given that they were witnesses to most of these miracles, isn't it amazing that the disciples didn't ask Jesus how to do any of His miracles? They did, however, ask Jesus to teach them about prayer. In fact, they did not simply ask Jesus to teach them how to pray – they begged, "Teach us to pray" (Lk. 11:1). This was likely because the disciples clearly saw the inseparable relationship between the power Jesus manifested and the hours He spent in solitude, conversing with His Father.

This week will be spent studying the Lord's Prayer as a pattern for prayer. It's important to note as we start that Jesus introduced the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 by saying, "Pray... like this," not "Pray this prayer" or "Pray these words." While there is tremendous value in praying the Lord's Prayer verbatim, Jesus was not so much giving us a prayer to recite as much as He was showing us a pattern in which to pray. In doing so, Jesus provided His disciples and us with an outline of priorities that should be reflected in our prayers.

OUR FATHER

Even though we might not realize it, the first two words of the Lord's Prayer are radical. The word "Father" was not the normal form of address for God found in the Old Testament. In fact, God was not typically addressed with any degree of intimacy. However, in the New Testament, Jesus takes prayer and makes it a personal discourse with God.

The word "Father," spoken by Jesus in Aramaic, was *Abba*, which is best translated as "Dad" or "Papa." If you try to picture the scene, you can almost hear the cry of alarm from the disciples and see the looks of astonishment on their faces. "You don't mean it, Jesus. You can't be serious! We're not even allowed to speak the name of God out loud. We don't call Him Father, much less Dad!"

Martin Luther once said that if he could just understand the first two words of the Lord's Prayer, he would never be the same again.

1. READ MATTHEW 7:7-11. HOW DO THESE VERSES SPEAK OF GOD AS OUR FATHER?

2. READ JOHN 1:12-13. WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS TO BE GIVEN THE RIGHT TO BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD?

3. READ GALATIANS 4:6-7. WHAT DOES THIS VERSE SAY IS TRUE ABOUT US AND WHY IS THAT SIGNIFICANT?

4. READ HEBREWS 12:7-11. WHAT DO THESE VERSES CONTRIBUTE TO OUR CONCEPTION OF GOD AS FATHER?

5. WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT THE WORDS “OUR FATHER”?

“The child asks of the Father whom He knows.

Thus, the essence of Christian prayer is not general adoration, but definite, concrete petition. The right way to approach God is to stretch out our hands and ask of One who we

know has the heart of a Father.”

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer

DIGGING DEEPER

John 1:12 says, “But to all who did receive Him, He gave the right to become children of God.” The Greek word *exousia*, translated “right to become,” implies the freedom and authority to act in light of a particular status. For us, we have the privilege of addressing God as our Father and approaching Him as His child. This is incredibly instructive in informing the posture with which we approach God. We do not come to Him as a slave or stranger. Instead, we approach as a child of the King!

IN HEAVEN

"We must remember that we serve an awesome, all-powerful heavenly Father, the Creator of the universe. Familiarity must never give way to disrespect."
– Tony Evans

In saying that God is in heaven, Jesus is reminding His disciples of the fact that God is not a part of this world. Adding this with "Our Father," we are presented with a dynamic tension. Although we are to come before the Lord in an attitude of intimacy, there is still an element of separation. In other words, the "Our Father" speaks of the immanence of God, but the "in heaven" points to His transcendence.

When we pray, we must remember who we are and whom we are addressing. No matter how close God invites us to come, there is still an infinite gulf between our sinfulness and His holiness.

6. IN WHAT WAYS IS GOD TRANSCENDENT OR BEYOND US?

7. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT GOD IS TRANSCENDENT AS WE ADDRESS HIM IN PRAYER?

DAY 2 – PETITIONS 1, 2, AND 3

PETITION 1: HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME

"The most spiritual and sanctified minds, when they fully perceive the holiness of God, are so greatly conscious of the great disproportion between themselves and the Lord, that they are humbled and filled with awe."
– Charles Spurgeon

After identifying who He was praying to, Jesus' initial petition was that the name of God be hallowed. Hallowed comes from the Greek word *hagios*, and the verb form used here means "to be made holy." This petition reflects the top priority of every Christian should be that God's name be kept holy. In other words, we should pray that God's name be honored and exalted above all things.

Can you imagine if this really was the first request we made when we went to God in prayer? Everything – our families, work, ministry, and all aspects of our life – would be affected. God's honor must increasingly become the obsession of the Christian community today because, in the end, our names, our organizations, and our efforts are all meaningless unless we honor God's name first.

8. HOW CAN YOU “HALLOW” GOD’S NAME? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO HONOR AND EXALT GOD’S NAME ABOVE ALL OTHER NAMES?

PETITION 2: YOUR KINGDOM COME

One key idea in Scripture is the kingdom of God. In fact, it was the main focus of Jesus’ teaching and preaching. Throughout the Gospels, we’re told over and over that the King has come and that the kingdom is at hand.

However, not everyone recognizes God as king. In fact, this denial of reality is the reason behind all of the world’s cultural, spiritual, material, and psychological problems. So, asking for God’s kingdom to come is not necessarily praying for an end to all things, but rather petitioning that the kingdom of God would become increasingly more visible on the earth. In it, we are expressing our desire for the total reign of God – for the end to all death, evil, injustice, and suffering.

9. WHAT ARE SOME OBSTACLES THAT THE CHURCH MUST OVERCOME TO MANIFEST THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN A TANGIBLE WAY?

10. HOW CAN YOU BE A PART OF MAKING GOD’S KINGDOM MORE VISIBLE?

PETITION 3: YOUR WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

Christians are to pray for the manifestation of the reign of Christ and the emergence of His kingdom. If that is our prayer, it is our responsibility to show allegiance to the King.

This petition is not asking that God’s will simply come to pass. Rather, we are praying for obedience to the revealed, preceptive will of God – what He has made plain to us by way of His commandments. This third petition is a prayer for obedience on the part of God’s people. That those who are the people of God will obey the mandates of God just as the angels in God’s court do.

*Anglican theologian
Graeme Goldsworthy
simply defines the
Kingdom of God as
“God’s people in God’s
place under God’s rule.”*

*“It is the true duty of
every man to promote
the happiness of his
fellow creatures to the
utmost of his power.”
– William Wilberforce*

11. WHAT WOULD THE CHURCH LOOK LIKE IF WE TOOK THIS PART OF THE LORD'S PRAYER MORE SERIOUSLY?

"God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will which would not let us hallow His name nor let His kingdom come."
– Martin Luther

12. WHAT WOULD YOUR PERSONAL LIFE LOOK LIKE IF YOU TOOK THIS PART OF THE LORD'S PRAYER MORE SERIOUSLY?

DIGGING DEEPER

There is a sense in which the first three petitions are all saying the same thing. The honoring (hallowing) of God's name, the visibility of His kingdom, and the obedience to His will are virtually the same concept repeated three different ways. God is honored by our obedience. His kingdom is made visible by our obedience, and quite obviously, His will is done when we are obedient to that will. These are the priorities Jesus has given.

We do not come rushing into God's presence arrogantly, assaulting Him with our petty requests, forgetting whom we are addressing. Instead, we are to make certain that we have properly exalted the God of creation. Only after God has been rightly honored, adored, and exalted, do the subsequent petitions of God's people assume their proper place.

DAY 3 – PETITIONS 4 AND 5

PETITION 4: GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

In instructing His disciples to make this petition, Jesus is showing that they should ask God to sustain them physically and provide all that they need. More than likely, Jesus was alluding to God's provision of manna to the Israelites in the desert after they fled Egypt (Ex. 16:4-12). If God had not made provision for the Israelites in this way, they would not have had food to eat in order to survive.

In praying for our daily bread, we recognize God as our provider and rely on Him to meet our daily needs. One of the things that can prevent us from praying this petition is thinking that we are our own source of provision. If you are prone to think this way, you must repent and remember the words of James 1:17, "Every good and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights."

"This petition of the Lord's Prayer teaches us to come to God in a spirit of humble dependence, asking Him to provide what we need and to sustain us from day to day." – RC Sproul

13. HOW CAN WE PRAY FOR GOD'S DAILY PROVISION EVEN THOUGH WE LIVE IN RELATIVE COMFORT?

14. WHAT THINGS ARE YOU TEMPTED TO TAKE CREDIT FOR IN YOUR LIFE? HOW CAN YOU BE MORE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S PROVISION OF THESE THINGS?

PETITION 5: FORGIVE OUR DEBTS, AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS

This is an extremely dangerous prayer to pray, but it contains a principle that the New Testament takes very seriously. The supreme warning from Jesus is that God will judge us according to how we have judged other people (Matt. 7:2). Since man is saved by grace, what better evidence could there be of a man's salvation than that he offers to others the grace he himself has so generously received? If that grace is not conspicuous in our lives, we may question the genuineness of our own alleged conversion. Jesus illustrates this principle perfectly in Matthew 18:21-35 by telling the story of two men who owed money.

15. READ MATTHEW 18:21-35. WHAT DOES THE BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN PETER AND JESUS IN VERSES 21-22 SUGGEST ABOUT FORGIVENESS?

16. WHAT POINT DO YOU THINK JESUS IS DRIVING HOME BY TELLING THE PARABLE IN VERSES 23-35?

"Refusing to forgive is the highest form of arrogance. We act as though the sins of others are too significant to forgive while simultaneously believing that ours are not significant enough to matter."

– Voddie Baucham

"To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable in others because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you."
– CS Lewis

"Unresolved bitterness is a sign that we are not right with God."
– Tim Keller

DIGGING DEEPER

By today's standards, one man owed roughly \$10 million, and the other owed about \$18.00. The one who owed the large sum had his debt forgiven, but he would not forgive the man who owed him the paltry sum of \$18.00. Interestingly enough, both men asked for the same thing – more time to pay the debt – not a total release from the debt. It was comical for the man with the exorbitantly large debt to ask for more time, since even by today's wage standards, the amount owed was an astronomical figure. On the other hand, the man with the small debt could have paid his debt in about three months. His request for more time was not unreasonable, but his creditor, rather than expressing the forgiveness he had received, began to harass him.

The point should be clear. Our offenses to others are like an \$18.00 debt, while the innumerable offenses we have committed against the Lord are like the \$10 million debt. If we've been forgiven of our outlandish debt against God, we should be willing to forgive every offense someone might commit against us. In the end, it's an insult to God for us to withhold forgiveness and grace, while claiming to be forgiven and saved by grace ourselves.

17. IS THERE ANYONE YOU NEED TO FORGIVE? HOW WILL YOU DO IT?

18. WHAT IS THE MOST DIFFICULT SIN IN OTHERS FOR YOU TO FORGIVE? HOW DO YOU PERSEVERE IN FORGIVING THAT SIN?

The mandate to forgive others as we have been forgiven applies also to the matter of walking in the forgiveness God has given us. When we confess our sins to God, we have His promise that He will forgive us. Unfortunately, we don't always believe that promise. You see, confession requires humility on two levels. The first is the actual admission of guilt, and the second is the humble acceptance of pardon.

When God promises us He will forgive us, we insult His integrity when we refuse to accept it. To walk in the forgiveness God has given us is both a duty and a privilege.

19. DO YOU STRUGGLE WALKING IN FORGIVENESS OVER ANY PARTICULAR SIN? WHY?

DAY 4 – PETITION 6

PETITION 6: LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL

At first glance this section of the Lord's Prayer seems to be two separate petitions. However, that is not the case. It follows the literary form of parallelism used in the Old Testament. In other words, it represents two different ways of saying the same thing. Jesus is not suggesting that God will tempt us to evil if we do not petition Him otherwise. In fact, James 1:13 specifically says that God tempts no one.

Instead, the plea to avoid temptation and the petition for deliverance from evil are one and the same. The King James Version – likely the version you have memorized – is not the best translation of this text. The reason is because the evil Jesus is referencing is not just evil in a general sense. You see, in Greek, the word for evil is neuter in gender. But, in this section of the Lord's Prayer, the word is masculine in gender. Putting those two things together, Jesus is saying that we should ask the Father to deliver us from the evil one – from onslaughts Martin Luther called the “unbridled assaults of Satan.” Jesus is telling us to ask the Father to build a hedge around us. Even more, the petition is not designed to avoid the trials of this world, but to protect us from naked exposure to the attacks of Satan.

However, we shouldn't think that all temptation is from Satan – the evil inherent within our own hearts is capable of tempting us without Satan's help. So, as we pray for protection against the evil one, we should be mindful of our tendencies to sin, and pray that the Spirit would empower our fighting against our flesh.

20. HOW DO YOUR PRAYERS ACKNOWLEDGE THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE BEING WAGED IN YOUR LIFE?

21. DESCRIBE A TIME YOU'VE SEEN GOD ANSWER A PRAYER FOR PROTECTION FROM THE EVIL ONE IN YOUR LIFE.

In His High Priestly Prayer, Jesus asks the Father not to take His disciples out of the world, but rather to “keep them from the evil one” (Jn. 17:15).

22. READ JAMES 1:14-15. WHAT DO THESE VERSES SAY ABOUT TEMPTATION?

23. IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU FEEL CONSISTENTLY TEMPTED?

24. HOW MIGHT PRAYING THE LORD'S PROTECTION OVER YOU HELP YOU FIGHT THE TEMPTATIONS YOU LISTED ABOVE?

DIGGING DEEPER

In six petitions, Jesus has outlined the pattern and priorities for our prayers. The close of the Lord's Prayer – "for Thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory forever. Amen." – is not in the best and earliest manuscripts of the New Testament. In all probability, it was not in the original text but was a common conclusion for prayers in the early church. Regardless, it is a fitting and truthful ending. It hearkens back to the prayer's opening, raising a doxology to the one who hears our petitions.

DAY 5 – PRAYING THE LORD'S PRAYER

As we mentioned at the beginning of this week, the Lord's Prayer was not meant to be something we thoughtlessly memorize and recite. Instead, Jesus meant to provide His disciples and us with a pattern for our own prayers.

Today, we'll take time to put this pattern to practice. Below, you'll see each of the phrases we've spent the last four days studying. From what is, hopefully, a better understanding of each one, write out a prayer of your own underneath each phrase, making sure what you write reflects the ideas that Jesus was conveying when He first taught His disciples to pray in this way.

"Pray often, for prayer is a shield to the soul and a scourge for Satan."
– John Bunyan

"Jesus specifically designed The Lord's Prayer to be used by the people of God to enrich our prayers."
– Albert Mohler

OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME

*For a note on what our
physical posture should
be in prayer, see
Appendix E.*

YOUR KINGDOM COME

YOUR WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

FORGIVE OUR DEBTS, AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL

APPENDIX E

IS THERE A CORRECT POSTURE WE SHOULD TAKE AS WE PRAY?

Several different prayer postures are recorded in the Bible. For instance, some people knelt when they prayed (Gen. 24:52; Eph. 3:14). Jesus did this as He prayed in Gethsemane (Lk. 22:41), before falling on His face as He talked to the Father (Matt. 26:39). Others in the Old Testament were accustomed to lifting their hands open to God, expecting to receive something (1 Kgs. 8:22; Neh. 8:6; Ps. 28:2; 1 Tim. 2:8.). Further, it was Daniel's practice to get down on both knees when he prayed (Dan. 6:10), and King David sat when he talked to God about the promised kingdom (2 Sam. 7:18). Abraham stood when he interceded for Sodom (Gen. 18:22). Further, in John 11:41, Jesus prays not by closing His eyes and looking down, but by opening His eyes and looking toward heaven. So, there are many postures for prayer.

While outward posture can be evidence of the inward spiritual attitude, it is not always so. It is much easier to bow the knees than to bow the heart in submission to God. As we go to God in prayer, we need to make sure that our focus is first on the posture of our heart. After we do this, we are free to posture ourselves in any way that is appropriate.

WEEK 14

THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER: A.C.T.S.

EPHESIANS 6:18

Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER: A.C.T.S.

DAY 1 – ADORATION: PRAISING GOD FOR HIS ATTRIBUTES

Having thought through some of the theology of prayer in Week 12 as well as looking at the pattern of prayer in Week 13, we'll move on to examine a methodology of prayer that will hopefully teach us what praying can look like in day-to-day practice.

A methodology of prayer can serve a variety of functions, such as reminding us to focus on what is important or preventing our prayers from rambling and repetition. One particular methodology for prayer that many Christians have found helpful is expressed by the acronym A.C.T.S. This acronym represents:

ADORATION
CONFESSION
THANKSGIVING
SUPPLICATION

Just like the Triangle from Weeks 9-11, we hope that learning this tool will equip you no matter where you are in your walk with the Lord. If you've never developed the habit of praying, we hope that this methodology can be a tool that helps you maintain balance and focus in prayer. If you have a rich prayer life, it could be something that you teach to someone you are discipling. Either way, we hope this week is helpful and instructive.

As John Piper frequently notes, God has designed us so that He is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. We cannot commend what we do not cherish, nor can we forsake the pleasures of sin if we do not delight in God more than we rejoice in our flesh. Beginning your time alone with God adoring and praising Him for who He is prepares your heart for a wonderful time of prayer.

1. WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT TO CONSTANTLY ADORE GOD IN PRAYER?

"Why should we adore Him? Because that is our duty as human beings. We have been called to fill the earth with the glory of God."
– RC Sproul

DIGGING DEEPER

The Grand Canyon is one of the most majestic sights in all of the earth. It immediately arrests the attention of all who visit so that nobody is able to forget. That said, no one goes to the Grand Canyon to stand at its edge and then turn their back on it, only to dig a one-foot deep trench in the ground and say, "Wow, this trench I dug is really amazing!"

Yet, this is exactly what we do with God. God is majestic, immensely powerful, and beautiful beyond our wildest imagination. However, instead of focusing on Him, we so often turn our backs on Him and focus on what we have done ourselves. Romans 1:21 tells us that "Although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

What a great shame when Christians fail to bask in the immense grandeur of God! Far too often, talk of self-esteem, self-image, self-confidence, self-this, and self-that has replaced talk of God's attributes. Ironically, it has created the opposite of its intention. The more time we spend contemplating our own greatness, the more clearly we are bound to see our flaws and shortcomings. Without the knowledge of God in whose image we have been created and the grace that has made us children of God, narcissism (self-love) quickly devolves into depression (self-hatred). Our souls will only find deep and lasting satisfaction when we devote ourselves to glorifying and praising God.

*"We would worry less
if we praised more.
Thanksgiving is the
enemy of discontent
and dissatisfaction."
– Harry Ironside*

2. DESCRIBE HOW THE FOLLOWING VERSES SHOW ADORATION OF GOD:

- PSALM 27:4

- PSALM 63:1-8

3. WRITE OUT A PRAYER OF ADORATION USING THE FOLLOWING SCRIPTURE PASSAGES:

- ROMANS 11:33-36

- 1 TIMOTHY 1:17; 6:15-16

*"Satan so hates the
genuine praise of Christ
that his fiery darts of
discouragement are
not effective against us
when we respond
in praise."
– William Thrasher*

DAY 2 – CONFESSION: ACKNOWLEDGING OUR FAILURE IN SIN

Because our obedience to God is never perfect in this life, we continually depend on His forgiveness of our sins. Confession of sins for a Christian is essential to our daily intimacy with God. While God's love remains and while our sins past, present, and future are ultimately forgiven based on Jesus' work on the cross, relational intimacy is restored when we confess our sins.

When we confess our sins, we are not enlightening the Lord about our latest transgressions, nor are we "resaving" ourselves by our acts of contrition. Instead, we are simply agreeing with what He has already pointed out through the conviction of the Holy Spirit and reestablishing relational intimacy with the Father.

Ultimately, the evidence of indwelling truth is the exposure of error. Because of this, we never get beyond the need to be aware of our sin. Therefore, one of the great signs of Christian maturity is a deep and abiding brokenness for sin. The closer we get to God, the darker we realize our sin to be. This shouldn't lead to self-hatred, but rather a deeper appreciation for the extensive and exhaustive nature of the grace by which we are saved!

4. TO WHOM ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO CONFESS YOUR SINS?

5. WHAT ROLE DOES CONFESSION PLAY IN YOUR DAILY WALK WITH GOD?

6. WHAT DO THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES SAY ABOUT THE CONFESSION OF SIN?

- **PSALM 32:1-6**

- **PSALM 66:17-20**

The mark of the saint is not sinlessness but sin-consciousness.

*"The cleansing we receive in confession is not like the expunging of a guilty record – that's already been accomplished. This cleansing is more like the scraping of barnacles off the hull of a ship so it can move freely again."
– Kevin DeYoung*

7. WRITE OUT A PRAYER CONFESSING SIN USING PSALM 51 AS A MODEL.

"There is mercy for a sinner, but there is no mercy for the man who will not own himself a sinner."
– Charles Spurgeon

DAY 3 – THANKSGIVING: PRAISING GOD FOR HIS ACTIONS

Thanksgiving is an essential part of prayer. At the center of human rebellion against God is ingratitude (Rom. 1:21). Conversely, heart-felt, joyful thanksgiving pulses through the heart of every mature believer.

Thanksgiving, like every aspect of prayer, shouldn't be a mechanical mouthing of a "thank you" to God, but the expression of words that reflect the thankfulness of our hearts. The kind of thanksgiving that appropriately accompanies prayer must express thankfulness to God in all circumstances. If we trust that God is sovereign, we can also know that the difficult circumstances He allows us to endure will be used in His hands to refine us to be more like our Lord.

8. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING IN PRAYER?

9. READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:18. WHY SHOULD YOU GIVE THANKS TO GOD IN THE BAD TIMES AS WELL AS IN THE GOOD?

"The deepest things that I have learned in my own life have come from the deepest suffering. And out of the deepest waters and the hottest fires have come the deepest things I know about God."
– Elisabeth Elliott

10. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT THANKSGIVING IN THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES?

- PSALM 100

- PHILIPPIANS 1:3-6

"When we were children, we were grateful to those who filled our stockings at Christmas time. Why are we not grateful to God for filling our stockings with legs?"
– GK Chesterton

"It is not theological hubris to ask – and ask specifically – great things of God."
– Thabiti Anyabwile

11. LIST SOME THINGS IN YOUR LIFE FOR WHICH YOU ARE THANKFUL.

12. READ EPHESIANS 1:3-16. WRITE OUT A PRAYER THANKING GOD FOR EVERYTHING THAT HE HAS DONE IN YOUR SALVATION.

DAY 4 – SUPPLICATION: MAKING SPECIFIC REQUESTS OF GOD

Supplication, or petition, is the act of making specific requests earnestly and humbly. We looked at six petitions last week in the Lord's Prayer.

A prayer of petition asks for God to bless us and others because the heart of God is one that loves to give good gifts (Jas. 1:17). God is a generous God who supplies all of our needs according to His glorious riches in Jesus (Phil. 4:19). Therefore, when we pray, we ought to come boldly into the presence of God and pray for whatever is on our heart as we strive wholeheartedly to live the will of God. We can have total confidence that God not only hears us but will give us anything we ask for that aligns with His will (1 Jn. 3:22).

13. IS IT WRONG TO PRAY FOR YOURSELF? WHY OR WHY NOT?

14. WHAT ARE YOU MOST FREQUENTLY ASKING FOR FROM GOD IN PRAYER? WHY DO YOU BELIEVE THAT REQUEST IS ONE THAT GOD WILL HONOR?

15. READ PHILIPPIANS 4:6. HOW SHOULD PRAYER AFFECT ANXIETY IN YOUR LIFE?

16. WHAT DOES THE LEVEL OF ANXIETY IN OUR LIVES TELL US ABOUT OUR BELIEF IN GOD’S POWER AS WE PRAY TO HIM?

17. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT SUPPLICATION IN THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES:

- **MARK 11:22-26**

- **JAMES 1:5-8**

- **1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4**

DIGGING DEEPER

1 Timothy 2:1-4 says that God desires supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings to be made for all people. As part of this, we should be reminded to pray for those in authority over us, especially in the church. Surprisingly, there are more commandments in Scripture to pray for those doing the work of ministry than there are commandments to pray for the lost. However, if we’re honest, we likely don’t pray that often or at all for the church or its staff and elders.

Leaders carry a degree of responsibility to their followers. They are often the targets of criticism and the go-to people in a crisis. If they are leading well, they are living their lives in service. We should remember to pray for them because we recognize the weight of their task and because we are grateful for their willingness to lead.

What can you pray for the staff and elders at GBC? To start: boldness (Eph. 6:19), wisdom (Eph. 1:17), gentleness (2 Tim. 2:24-25), sincerity (2 Cor. 2:17), steadfastness (Titus 1:19), purity (1 Thess. 2:4), and unity (John 17:21).

18. WRITE OUT A SHORT PRAYER FOR NEEDS IN YOUR OWN LIFE AND THEN A SHORT PRAYER FOR THE NEEDS OF SOMEONE ELSE.

"We tend to use prayer as a last resort, but God wants it to be our first line of defense. We pray where there's nothing else we can do, but God wants us to pray before we do anything at all."
– Oswald Chambers

"What we actually do reflects our highest priorities. That means that we can proclaim our commitment to prayer until the cows come home, but unless we actually pray, our actions disown our words."
– DA Carson

Unfortunately, if we were to analyze our prayers using A.C.T.S., most of us would likely spell out the acrostic S.C.A.T. because we start with supplication and spend very little time, if any, on adoration, confession, and thanksgiving. In some ways, A.C.T.S. is not only a helpful acrostic for remembering elements of prayer, but it is also a reminder of the priorities of prayer.

Practically speaking, starting with adoration helps us to keep the other aspects of prayer in balance. Praising God for who He is helps us realize our sin (confession), thank God for His omnipotence and mercy (thanksgiving), and make requests of God based on His goodness and providence (supplication).

DAY 5 – A.C.T.S.

Now that we've looked at each aspect of A.C.T.S., we'll spend time today putting it all together. Use the space provided to write out a prayer, following the guidelines that you've learned this week.

ADORATION: PRAISING GOD FOR HIS ATTRIBUTES

CONFESSION: ACKNOWLEDGING OUR FAILURE IN SIN

THANKSGIVING: PRAISING GOD FOR HIS ACTIONS

SUPPLICATION: MAKING SPECIFIC REQUESTS OF GOD

If A.C.T.S. seems somewhat familiar, it's because it is loosely based on what we saw in the Lord's Prayer. Adoration is stated in praying to our Father, as well as in the petition for God's name to be hallowed. Confession is seen in the pleading for the forgiveness of sins. Thanksgiving is implied – although not specifically mentioned – in asking God to give us daily bread. This is because we are not only meant to be alert to the fact that we need God to provide, but also to the reality of God's daily provision of our needs. Lastly, supplication is made throughout the prayer.

"The power of our prayers lies not primarily in our effort and striving, or in any technique, but rather in our knowledge of God." – Tim Keller

WEEKS 15 - 16

OUR WORSHIP TOGETHER

WEEK 15

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

EPHESIANS 3:10-11

So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

This was according to the eternal purpose that He has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

DAY 1 – MEETING TOGETHER: PART 1

"Our love to God is measured by our everyday fellowship with others and the love it displays."

– Andrew Murray

The last few weeks, we have largely focused on our vertical relationship with God. The next couple of weeks, we are going to shift our focus horizontally, examining our relationship with other people. We'll start by examining Christian fellowship.

The book of Hebrews was written to a group of converted Jews who were in the midst of being persecuted and, as a result, were on the verge of going back to their former way of life. To convince them to not waver, the author methodically expounds the Old Testament, seeking to prove that in every way, Jesus is superior to the old way. Based on this argument, he charges them to hold fast to their confession (Heb. 10:23) and to not neglect to meet together (Heb. 10:25).

1. READ HEBREWS 10:19-25. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE AUTHOR'S POINT IS IN THIS TEXT? HOW DOES HE GO ABOUT MAKING THAT POINT?

2. WHY, ACCORDING TO THESE VERSES, CAN CHRISTIANS BOLDLY ENTER GOD'S PRESENCE?

3. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE AUTHOR MEANS WHEN HE SAYS, "LET US HOLD FAST THE CONFESSION OF OUR HOPE" (V. 23)?

4. HOW DO YOU THINK VERSE 23 RELATES TO VERSES 24-25?

"All the godly ought by all means possible exert themselves in the work of gathering together."
– John Calvin

DIGGING DEEPER

It is no accident that the exhortation that immediately follows the author's encouragement to hold fast to the confession of hope is to not neglect meeting together. Gathering marked this community as followers of Jesus, which led to their being targeted. Property was seized, prison terms were handed out, and jobs were lost. Therefore, for this group of converted Jews, "showing up to church" was no small thing.

We, of course, do not live in a situation like that. Generally speaking, we live in relative affluence and freedom and are able to gather and meet with other Christians whenever we want. So, the question we must ask is this – considering the context, is there any value to this command to not neglect to meet together for us? The answer, of course, is yes.

One of the most important expressions of love for God and the Body of Christ is in faithful church attendance. So many times, we let worldly affections, distractions, laziness, and travel plans pull us away from the week's most important activity – weekly worshiping with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Ultimately, the purpose of our lives on earth is to glorify God. The way we best do that is to become like Jesus. Along with our personal study of the Bible and prayer, the most significant tool that God uses to shape our character toward Christ-likeness is His Church. Most of us believe that this is true but do not demonstrate that we actually believe it in our lives.

5. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF ATTENDING WORSHIP ON SUNDAYS?

Commentator Simon Kistemaker notes that one of the first indications of a lack of love toward God and neighbor is for a Christian to stay away from worship services.

6. WHAT CHANGES CAN YOU MAKE SO THAT YOU CAN BETTER REFLECT THE BIBLICAL PRIORITY OF COMMUNITY IN THE CHURCH?

DAY 2 – MEETING TOGETHER: PART 2

"If you have no interest in actually committing yourself to an actual group of gospel-believing, Bible-teaching Christians, you might question whether you belong to the body of Christ at all!"

– Mark Dever

"Each believer must feel himself bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the advantage and welfare of other members."

– The Heidelberg Catechism

"There is no such thing as an independent Christian."

– Rosaria Butterfield

7. LOOK AGAIN AT HEBREWS 10:19-25. WHAT ARE WE TO CONSIDER IN VERSE 24?

8. HOW ARE YOU ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TOWARD LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS BY YOUR SERVICE AT GBC?

9. IF YOU ARE NOT SERVING GOD FAITHFULLY AT GBC, WHAT IS PREVENTING YOU FROM DOING SO?

DIGGING DEEPER

In a Christian culture that is increasingly consumer oriented, it is easy to forget that one of the principle ways we glorify God is by giving sacrificially of ourselves within community. While it is easy to see ourselves as the receivers of GBC's ministries, God's paradigm is quite different! He sees all of us in the vital role of ministers, who not only reach out to a dying world, but also who minister within the walls of the church in order to build each other up.

10. DO YOU THINK HEBREWS 10:24-25 CAN BE FULLY REALIZED IN THE CONTEXT OF A SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE? WHY, OR WHY NOT?

11. IN ADDITION TO A SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE, WHEN AND WHERE DO YOU MEET WITH GOD'S PEOPLE?

DAY 3 – CELEBRATING DIVERSITY AND UNITY

As we have seen, God has given us great opportunity to encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ. In fact, God is so serious about each individual Christian's role in this endeavor that He has given us spiritual gifts to edify, or build up, the Church. According to Ephesians 4:11-15, it is imperative that we go to church and participate in a small group not to receive, but so that we might be equipped to give ourselves to the ministry of serving others.

12. READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-26. WHY ARE SPIRITUAL GIFTS GIVEN (V. 7)?

13. WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE PAUL CONTINUED TO REPEAT THE PHRASE, "AND TO ANOTHER" IN VERSES 8-10?

14. ARE THERE CERTAIN SPIRITUAL GIFTS OR INDIVIDUALS THAT ARE MORE IMPORTANT OR MORE NEEDED WITHIN THE BODY OF CHRIST? WHY, OR WHY NOT?

15. HOW ARE YOU USING THE GIFTS GOD HAS GIVEN YOU TO BUILD UP THE CHURCH?

"The Spirit doesn't give us gifts in order that each of us gets our self-important moment in the spotlight. He gives us gifts so that, for the greater glory of Christ, we are able to pursue love through serving one another." – John Piper

We will explore the concept of Spiritual Gifts more in Week 20.

"Let us not be solitary pilgrims along the road to heaven but join that glorious host of God's elect who march beneath the guidance of our great Master."
– Charles Spurgeon

"We desperately need the church for love, for maturity and preparedness, for spiritual care. It is arrogant, rebellious, self-reliant, God-indicting pride to conclude that the church is an optional extra to the Christian life."
– Thabiti Anyabwili

DIGGING DEEPER

God has given the people of Grace Bible Church a diversity of spiritual gifts needed to complete the work God has given the church to do. When people faithfully exercise their different spiritual gifts, the church runs efficiently and moves toward our unified purpose, to glorify God. We all bring different gifts and have different ministries, but we all work for one cause!

For instance, people with the gift of administration keep the church organized. People with the gift of mercy keep the church nurtured. People with the gift of leadership keep the church looking forward. People with the gift of teaching keep the church growing in their knowledge of God's priorities and purposes.

Do you get the picture? In order for God's perfect purposes to be fulfilled at GBC, every member of the church must faithfully contribute their time, talent, and treasure.

16. WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE THAT WE MOST FULLY REFLECT JESUS WHEN WE CONGREGATE?

17. WHY DO YOU THINK THAT AN INDIVIDUAL CANNOT GLORIFY GOD AS FULLY AS THE GATHERED COMMUNITY OF FAITH?

DAY 4 – GOD'S MANIFOLD WISDOM

While the Church operating the way God intended it to is exciting, there is an even greater reason to participate in the ministry of the Church.

18. READ EPHESIANS 3:7-12. THOUGH VIEWING HIMSELF AS "THE VERY LEAST OF ALL THE SAINTS," (V. 8) WHAT TASK WAS GIVEN TO PAUL?

19. WHAT IS THE STATED REASON THIS TASK HAS BEEN GIVEN TO PAUL AND HOW WILL THE TASK BE ACCOMPLISHED?

The Greek word translated "manifold" was often used in the first century to describe the intricately embroidered patterns found on cloaks worn by the wealthy.

DIGGING DEEPER

In Ephesians 3:10, Paul makes abundantly clear that our redemption is ultimately for the purpose of making the manifold wisdom of God known to His creation. God's wisdom is called manifold because it is multifaceted. In it, the cross and the resurrection are brought together. This is truly a divine paradox – one that Paul calls a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:23).

As the Church, we have the responsibility to demonstrate both the cross and the resurrection to the powers that be. God wants His wisdom revealed and made known, and He has chosen the Church to carry the torch. What a privilege that is!

20. WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF GOD'S MANIFOLD WISDOM DISPLAYED THROUGH THE CHURCH?

21. IF THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD IS DISPLAYED THROUGH THE CHURCH, WHY ARE CHRISTIANS SO CAVALIER ABOUT PARTICIPATING IN THE CHURCH?

22. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO A CHRISTIAN WHO IS OUT OF FELLOWSHIP WITH THE CHURCH OR WHO DOESN'T SEE THE NEED TO BE CONNECTED TO THE CHURCH?

"Discipleship is not about individual followers of Jesus, on their own – lone rangers – making disciples. It's about being a part of a body and together making disciples."
– David Platt

DIGGING DEEPER

Especially during a hard or trying time, we can be tempted to take a break from community, leading to sporadic or rare church attendance. In these seasons, we can think that we are too much of a mess or that no one will want to wade into our issues. However, retreating from relationship is the worst thing you can do when you're struggling. In fact, it is precisely in these times that the church can do part of its job!

To help make this point, we'll remind you of where we started. The writer of Hebrews commanded his readers to not neglect in meeting together primarily because, in gathering, they would be able to remind each other of the surpassing value of the gospel and to encourage each other to persevere, even in the midst of persecution. That cannot happen in isolation!

This same idea is true of us. Even if you don't feel like you have much to offer, your willingness to be vulnerable and to engage with others will allow the church to care for and support you. Frequently, your commitment can also help redirect your focus from yourself to the work of ministry!

In conclusion, we have looked at a couple of texts that have outlined the unique purposes God has created the Church to fulfill. In doing so, we hope that you have seen how God's glory is reflected more fully by the Church than by the individual.

In response to this, our prayer is that you'll see that church attendance and small group involvement are not optional, extracurricular events on the periphery of your religious experience. Rather, being an active contributor in the local church is essential to growth and integral to living God's plan for you and the community. Ultimately, we are pointing this out not to pad our stats on Sundays – we don't even measure attendance – but because we firmly believe that you cannot glorify God as He wishes to be glorified unless you are a committed participant in the Church.

WEEK 16

WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

PSALM 29:2

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; worship the
Lord in the splendor of holiness.

"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."
– Revelation 4:11

"Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship."
– Tim Keller

WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

DAY 1 – WORSHIP

"Tradition is the living faith of those now dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of those now living." This statement serves as a reminder to guide our practice in the local church. Last week, we studied some of the theological reasons for being an active part of the Church – the Body of Christ. The purpose of this week's study is to explore the purpose of some of the activities you engage in as a regular participant in the life of the local church.

If you've been a Christian for any length of time, you've probably heard a lot of discussion about worship. Some churches have contemporary worship. Some have traditional worship. This church has great worship. That one doesn't have great worship. With all the talk about worship, it's an odd thing that it is quite rare to find someone who can articulate what the word "worship" really means!

1. HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE THE WORD WORSHIP?

DIGGING DEEPER

One of the mistakes people make regarding worship is assuming that it pertains only to music. In reality, while there are several Greek words in the New Testament that are translated "worship," most of them have to do with service or a godly lifestyle, not music. Now, does that mean our music is not worship? Absolutely not! We are commanded to speak to one another with songs, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19). The point is simply that there is much more to worship than just singing – worship pertains to all we do.

2. HOW WOULD YOUR LIFE CHANGE IF YOU VIEWED EVERYTHING YOU DO AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP?

3. WITH A BROADER APPRECIATION FOR THE WORD WORSHIP IN HAND, HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS VIEW MUSICAL WORSHIP?

4. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CRITERIA FOR GOOD MUSICAL WORSHIP?

DIGGING DEEPER

At GBC, we want our gatherings on Sunday to be pleasing to God. With that goal in mind, we hold to a number of values when it comes to corporate worship:

Congregational Participation: Congregational worship should be just that – congregational! This stems from our belief that God deserves our congregation's worshiping with all of their hearts and minds to His glory. Without your heartfelt and vigorous participation, we can't worship as God desires us to worship.

Theologically Rich Lyrical Content: The songs we sing on Sunday are part of how we remind and teach each other the truths of God. As we evaluate song choice, we ask the question – if people learned their theology from the lyrics they hear on Sunday, what would they learn about the fundamental doctrines of Christianity?

Simplicity over Production: In corporate worship, our focus should be on pleasing God, not entertaining or putting on a show. Because of this, we aim to be simple in our style and not overly produced, desiring to "do worship" with undistracting excellence.

Celebration in Worship: Our corporate worship is meant, in some ways, to be an anticipation of the heavenly worship that we will experience one day. Because of that, our music should have a celebratory tone that leads people into joyful participation.

"Singing is a real and tangible expression of loving the Lord with our whole hearts and our whole selves and loving our neighbor as ourselves."
– Keith Getty

5. WHAT CAN MOTIVATE YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN MUSICAL WORSHIP EVEN IF THE SONG OR STYLE DOES NOT MATCH YOUR PREFERENCE?

DAY 2 – BELIEVER’S BAPTISM

While GBC doesn’t celebrate baptism each Sunday, we believe it is a rich and commanded ordinance that God has given the Church. We hold the position that baptism is something God commands as an act of obedience in response to salvation. For this reason, we believe in Believer’s Baptism.

We obviously have sincere brothers and sisters in Christ who have different views on baptism. In their view, baptism is something God has commanded as a New Testament continuation of Old Testament circumcision. While our Growth Group curriculum isn’t the place to dive into the nuance of this debate, there are two verses that give clarity to the position of Believer’s Baptism that we hold.

Regardless of which position you take, we all have to acknowledge that there are authentic Christians who have come down on both sides of this issue. Also, if your view on baptism deviates from ours, we do not believe that this is a doctrine over which we would break fellowship.

Circumcision literally means to cut around. It's a combination of two words – "circum," where we get the word "circumference" and -cision, where we get the words "incision" and "scissor."

6. READ GENESIS 17:10-14. FOR WHAT REASON DOES GOD COMMAND ABRAHAM TO BE CIRCUMCISED?

7. READ DEUTERONOMY 10:12-16. BASED ON THE CONTEXT, WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS TO HAVE A CIRCUMCISED HEART (V. 16)?

8. HOW DO YOU THINK THE CONCEPT IN DEUTERONOMY IS DIFFERENT THAN WHAT IS PRESENTED IN GENESIS? HOW IS IT SIMILAR?

9. READ COLOSSIANS 2:6-12. WHICH TYPE OF CIRCUMCISION DO YOU THINK COLOSSIANS 2:6-12 IS TALKING ABOUT?

*"Whatever there was of blessing and privilege in the covenant mark in the flesh of those whom God made to be His people in the olden time, you have handed on to you by the death of Christ."
– Charles Spurgeon*

Having briefly examined where Believer's Baptism comes from, we can now turn to examining what exactly Believer's Baptism represents. The answer is best explained in Romans 6:1-14.

Just before Romans 6, Paul makes the case that our salvation is certain and secure based on the finished work of Jesus. Anticipating a potential response to this point, Paul raises a great question in Romans 6:1, asking "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" In other words, if there's nothing we can do to lose our salvation, why don't we just continue to live the way we want? Paul's answer to this question uses and explains the picture of baptism.

10. READ ROMANS 6:1-14. HOW DOES THIS PASSAGE ANSWER THE QUESTION PAUL RAISES IN VERSE 1?

11. SPECIFICALLY, HOW DOES PAUL USE THE CONCEPT OF BAPTISM TO HELP ANSWER THE QUESTION?

*"We are for this end justified—that we may afterwards serve God in holiness of life."
— John Calvin*

DIGGING DEEPER

The Greek word *baptizo* means "to immerse," or more figuratively, to totally identify with something. So, every time Paul uses the word baptize he is saying that we have been immersed into Christ or totally identified with Christ. Ultimately, it is this identification with Christ that enables our lives to transform.

Physical baptism is an external picture of the internal reality of our salvation. By going under the water, God depicts our crucifixion with Christ – our old nature that was enslaved to sin has been killed. By coming up out of the water, God depicts our resurrection with Christ – our new nature, which is no longer enslaved to sin but free to serve and follow God. The Greek term for "new" used in Romans 6:4 is *kainos*, which is a term used for qualitative newness, not chronological newness. In other words, we are given a qualitatively new life by our identification with Christ, which is the answer to the question Paul originally posed.

DAY 3 – THE LORD’S SUPPER

The picture God intends to paint through the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (also called communion) is similar to the picture He paints in baptism. Since baptism and communion are the two ordinances God gives the Church to celebrate – and since they reflect upon the same message – it’s safe to assume that the message is of vital importance! So, what is communion, and why is it important?

*"The whole Christian world is a passover company gathered around the paschal lamb, and by their participation in it exhibiting their essential unity."
– BB Warfield*

12. READ EXODUS 12:1-13 AND MARK 14:12-25. WHAT ARE THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN PASSOVER AND COMMUNION?

13. WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF WHAT JESUS SAYS IN MARK 14:22?

14. WHEN JESUS EXTENDS THE CUP IN MARK 14:23-24, WHAT IS HE COMMUNICATING TO HIS DISCIPLES?

DIGGING DEEPER

Jesus borrows the imagery of a wedding proposal for the second part of the first communion. In Jesus’ time, when a groom asked for a bride’s hand in marriage, he didn’t just ask. Instead, the groom would take a cup of red wine, which represented his blood, and extend it to his prospective bride. If the bride took the wine and ingested it, she was agreeing to vital union with the groom. His blood would be her blood, figuratively speaking.

Just as a bride and groom become “one,” Jesus also offers a new vital union to His Church. In this way, communion is a wedding proposal, and our receiving the cup is both an acknowledgment and celebration of our life-giving union with our Savior!

15. WHAT PROVISION ENABLES A HOLY GOD TO EXTEND A COVENANT OF VITAL UNION TO A SINFUL CHURCH?

The first communion between Jesus and His disciples took place at a feast. Thus, while our participation in communion is an occasion to confess sin, it is also a celebration of what God has done for us in Christ. In fact, in many traditions, communion is called the Eucharist, which comes from the Greek word *eucharistia*, meaning “thanksgiving.”

16. READ 1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-33. WHAT DO YOU THINK JESUS MEANS WHEN HE SAYS, “THIS CUP IS THE NEW COVENANT IN MY BLOOD” (V. 25)?

17. HOW SHOULD WE APPLY 1 CORINTHIANS 11:27-29?

18. WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE GOD GAVE SUCH A STRONG WARNING ABOUT TAKING COMMUNION IN AN UNWORTHY MANNER?

DAY 4 – WORSHIP IN GIVING

If there is one subject that is most sensitive and most misunderstood in the Church, it is the subject of giving. More than one-fourth of Jesus’ teaching was on money and giving, and, yet, it is often ignored or misrepresented in today’s Church. The truth is, sermons on money are often considered manipulative, and most Christians have no desire to pursue the topic of stewardship.

So, why does the Church try so hard to ignore the topics of stewardship and giving when God clearly thinks these topics are of critical importance? Let’s approach this touchy topic by allowing Scripture to clarify our position.

“God did not wait for a change of heart on our part. He made the first move. Indeed, He did more than that. He did all that was necessary to secure our reconciliation, including our change of heart.”
– Jerry Bridges

“The new covenant is God’s pledge to forgive the sins of His people and to put His laws within us and to write them on our hearts, and to be our God and to make us His people.”
– John Piper

"What you do with your resources in this life is your autobiography."
– Randy Alcorn

19. READ PROVERBS 3:9-10. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HONOR GOD WITH OUR WEALTH?

20. WHAT ARE "FIRSTFRUITS" (V. 9)?

Much has been made of the Old Testament tithe. Leviticus 27:30 says that a tithe (literally, ten percent) was the Lord's for the sake of the Temple and the Priests. What many don't realize is that another ten percent was required to fund the various festivals that occurred throughout the year. (Wouldn't it be great if ten percent of the church budget went to feasts and parties!) In addition to these offerings, another ten percent was required every third year to help the poor. In all, it is estimated that between twenty-five and thirty percent of an Israelite's income was given back to God's purposes each year.

While the Old Testament tithe serves as an interesting benchmark, the New Testament teaching on giving is more concerned with a barometer. In other words, the New Testament does not focus on the percentage of what is given, but rather on the heart of the giver.

21. READ MATTHEW 23:23. WHAT DOES JESUS SAY ABOUT THE TITHE IN THIS TEXT?

22. WHY DO YOU THINK THE NEW TESTAMENT IGNORES THE TITHE?

23. READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-8 AND 9:6-15. LIST SOME OF THE PRINCIPLES OF GIVING YOU FIND IN THESE PASSAGES.

"Perhaps the tithe can be a beginning way to acknowledge God as the owner of all things, but it is only a beginning and not an ending."
– Richard Foster

24. HOW ARE YOU DOING IN THE APPLICATION OF THESE NEW TESTAMENT PRINCIPLES OF GIVING?

25. READ LUKE 12:22-34. IF GOD HAS NO NEED FOR OUR MONEY, WHY DO YOU THINK HE COMMANDS US TO GIVE TO HIS KINGDOM PURPOSES?

Ultimately, giving is for our benefit, not God's. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34). The important thing to realize in this passage is that we don't merely give to causes that we already value. Rather, we will begin to value those causes to which we give.

WEEKS 17 - 19

A FAITH WORTH SHARING

WEEK 17

THE FOUNDATION OF FELLOWSHIP

PHILEMON 6

And I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.

"Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us. This is true not merely at the beginning, as though in the course of time something else were to be added; it remains so for all the future and to all eternity."

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer

THE FOUNDATION OF FELLOWSHIP

DAY 1 – THE BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP

The foundation of true Christian fellowship is the sharing of our faith in Jesus. While we are certainly called to share our faith with non-Christians – we will study this topic in the following weeks – remembering who Jesus is and all that God has done for us through Him both nourishes our faith and serves as the foundation of our fellowship together.

1. WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS TO SHARE YOUR FAITH WITH OTHER BELIEVERS? WHAT BENEFIT IS THERE IN SHARING OUR FAITH AMONG BELIEVERS?

2. HOW DO YOU STRUGGLE TO SHARE YOUR FAITH WITH YOUR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS? WHAT STEPS COULD YOU TAKE TO OVERCOME THOSE STRUGGLES?

DIGGING DEEPER

The idea we're trying to communicate is not that we try to convert the converted! It is that we speak openly about the goodness of God and what He is doing in our lives. If this happens, we see more of what God is doing in community, rather than just what He is doing in our individual lives.

Sharing our faith is really a result of living transparently as a Christ-centered person. We share our faith because it determines so much of who we are, and we don't want to withhold parts of who we are from any of our friends, Christian or non-Christian. Speaking honestly about who God is and what He has done in our lives is how others will see how great He is! This applies to the saved and unsaved alike! Therefore, if our faith matters and if we live authentically, our faith will be shared!

DAY 2 – BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

17

At the time that Paul wrote Philemon, there were many cultural barriers that divided people over various categories. Roman, Greek, and Jewish cultures were filled with walls that limited people to classes and demanded that they stay in their place – men and women, slave and free, rich and poor, Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, pious and pagan. This appeal from Paul to Philemon was to tear down those walls and to embrace Onesimus as a fellow member of the family of God – a family where there is no distinction.

Verse 6 of this book unleashes a revolutionary principle that describes what can happen when Christians look over and past the walls that separate each other and truly share their lives together. Paul expresses a desire that “the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.”

In this context, it appears that Paul’s statements apply to those within the Church. While Christians would normally speak of sharing their faith with those who don’t yet know Jesus as their Lord and Savior, this text says that our full understanding of every good thing is contingent on our sharing faith among believers.

3. READ THE BOOK OF PHILEMON. HOW DOES PAUL DESCRIBE ONESIMUS (VV. 10-11)?

4. WHAT IS PAUL ASKING OF PHILEMON AND WHAT RESPONSE DOES PAUL ANTICIPATE?

5. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE MAIN LESSON IS FOR US FROM THE BOOK OF PHILEMON?

“We can't read the Scriptures without sensing God's heart and commitment for compassion and injustice!”

– Eugene Cho

“Our lack of unity and oneness is a direct contradiction of our missiological goal – to make disciples of all nations.” – Kevin Smith

*"God is not asking
blacks to be white or
whites to be black, but
for both to be biblical."*

– Tony Evans

*"It is a good and
beautiful thing when
Christians of different
ethnic origins –
not just black and white,
but all of them –
live and work and
worship and relax and
eat together in joyful,
Christ-exalting peace."*

– John Piper

DIGGING DEEPER

One of the core values that Grace Bible Church was planted with was to be a racially and ethnically diverse community. While we still have a long way to go in this value being manifest, we have made huge strides in the past several years by God's grace. Our desire for a diverse community is not because it will make us trendy or appeal to a certain demographic. Instead, our desire for diversity is one that we pray reflects God's heavenly priority of being worshiped by "every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Rev. 7:9).

In order for this to become a more apparent reality in our church, we believe that you play a huge role! While there are certainly strategic things leadership can do to grow in this area, we believe the best way for us to progress in becoming more diverse is by your intentionally developing relationships with people that don't look like you. As we commit to doing this, we will certainly be "sharing our faith" with one another. However, even further – as we pursue unity in diversity amidst a society that is increasingly fractured and insular – we will be witnesses to the world of the power of the gospel.

6. WHAT BARRIERS OR DIVIDES EXIST BETWEEN CHRISTIANS TODAY?

7. HOW DO YOU THINK THE GOSPEL CAN HELP CHRISTIANS OVERCOME THOSE BARRIERS?

8. HOW CAN YOU BE A PART OF OVERCOMING THOSE BARRIERS?

DAY 3 – PRAY WELL, LIVE WELL, SPEAK WELL

Not only are we supposed to share our faith with fellow believers, we are also supposed to be lights shining in the darkness. If we have been redeemed by Jesus, then we have been given something that is not our own. Without God's grace, we would be lost for all eternity. Because of this, it should be our joy to share our faith with those around us!

9. READ COLOSSIANS 4:2-6. WHY WOULD PAUL, WHO IS IN PRISON BECAUSE OF THE GOSPEL, STILL PRAY FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE ABOUT JESUS?

*"Every Christian is either
a missionary or
an imposter."
– Charles Spurgeon*

10. IN REFERENCE TO SHARING OUR FAITH WITH NON-CHRISTIANS, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PRINCIPLES YOU CAN GLEAN FROM THIS TEXT?

11. WHY DO YOU THINK PAUL EMPHASIZED PRAYER SO MUCH IN REFERENCE TO SHARING THE GOSPEL (VV. 2-4)?

12. WHO ARE YOU CURRENTLY PRAYING FOR SO THAT YOU HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE THE GOSPEL?

*"Either my Christian
friends do not really
believe what they say
they believe, or they
are content to
watch me burn."
– Steven Weinberg*

13. IN YOUR OWN WORDS, PARAPHRASE COLOSSIANS 4:5-6.

DIGGING DEEPER

In an age of political correctness, it might strike you as odd that Paul would call a non-Christian an outsider (Col. 2:5). However, in the early church, only Christians were allowed to attend worship services, which were normally conducted in secret due to severe persecution. At that time, church services focused on equipping the saints, who then went out from the church to engage in the work of evangelism.

Surprisingly, this model yielded an evangelistic church that experienced an exponential growth rate that has never been equaled since. In this model, a person could only participate in worship with other believers after making a costly profession of faith in Christ. Because of this, Paul's term "outsiders," isn't so much a slight against non-Christians as it is a statement of fact that non-Christians were outside of the worship service.

*"We are all missionaries.
Wherever we go, we
either bring people
nearer to Christ or we
repel them from Christ."
– Eric Liddell*

14. WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS THAT ARE "SEASONED WITH SALT"(V. 6)?

15. CAN YOU THINK OF A TIME THAT YOUR GOOD DEEDS OR CHARACTER OPENED A WAY TO SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH SOMEONE? PLEASE EXPLAIN.

16. WHAT THINGS DO YOU NEED TO ELIMINATE FROM YOUR LIFESTYLE OR SPEECH SO THAT YOU CAN LIVE AND SPEAK ABOUT GOD AND HIS GLORIOUS SALVATION?

DAY 4 – A MESSAGE WORTHY OF TRIALS

An attitude of heartfelt gratitude is one of the many things that marks a true believer in Jesus. We should live thankful lives, giving God credit for what He has done for us. One of the best ways we can do this is persevering whatever trials come as a result of our following Him. 1 Peter 3:8-18 is intriguing because it isn't specifically about evangelism. Instead, this text is about the Christian life in general. In it, Peter makes clear that our profession of faith is an integral part of our Christian life.

17. READ 1 PETER 3:8-18. WHAT DOES THIS TEXT SAY ABOUT THE LIKELIHOOD OF SUFFERING FOR SPEAKING ABOUT JESUS?

18. WHAT DOES THIS TEXT SAY ABOUT OUR FEAR OF SUFFERING FOR THE GOSPEL'S SAKE?

19. WHAT DO VERSES 14-17 SAY ABOUT OUR ATTITUDE IN SPEAKING ABOUT CHRIST?

20. HOW SHOULD THE ASSURANCES IN VERSE 12 HELP US AS WE PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL TO THE WORLD?

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." – Jim Elliott

*"Jesus was shut out so we could get access. He was bound and nailed, so that we could be free. He was cast out so we could approach. Jesus took away the only kind of suffering that can really destroy you – that is, being cast away from God."
– CS Lewis*

The word translated power (Rom. 1:16) is the Greek word dynamis, which means "power, strength, or might," "the inherent capability of someone to carry something out."

*"We have not been promised a smooth voyage, but God does promise us a safe landing."
— Gardner Taylor*

DAY 5 – THE MESSAGE IS SO IMPORTANT

21. READ ROMANS 1:1-17. WHAT COULD BE PAUL'S REASON FOR PERSISTING IN THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL EVEN AMIDST PERSECUTION?

22. LIST SOME PRINCIPLES OF MINISTRY THAT PAUL ILLUSTRATES IN ROMANS 1:8-15.

23. IN YOUR OWN WORDS, WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

24. HOW IS A "RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD" THAT IS "BY FAITH" (V. 17) REVEALED IN THE GOSPEL?

25. ARE YOU ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL? IN WHAT WAYS? WHY?

DIGGING DEEPER

When Paul says the gospel is the power of salvation for everyone who believes, he speaks of a salvation that is unlimited in its potential for those it can save. Jews, Greeks, men, women, moralists, and the depraved can come to faith and be saved from their sins! In Paul's mind, as well as in the minds of the other biblical authors, there was and is only one way for sinful mankind to approach a holy God. The gospel is the message that God has granted sinners access to Him through the shed blood of the Father's one and only Son, Jesus.

If there was a terminal disease from which all of mankind suffers, who could be ashamed to share the one and only antidote? Jesus is God's antidote for mankind's sin. By faith, we receive His righteousness because He received the consequence for our sins.

During the next two weeks, we will break from our usual format. We will continue to study, but our studies will prepare us to share the gospel in a clear and relational way. You will memorize six verses and understand the gospel from the perspective of Biblical Theology (from the perspective of redemptive history). The goal is not to equip you with a canned presentation or a "one size fits all" message. The goal is to help you understand redemptive history such that you can articulate the message of salvation in a relational context from a variety of entry points into a conversation.

*"The gospel is powerful
because it does
what no other power on
earth can do — it can
reconcile us to God."
— Tim Keller*

26. DO YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE AND EQUIPPED TO SHARE WITH PEOPLE ABOUT JESUS? WHY OR WHY NOT?

WEEK 18

TWO WAYS TO LIVE PART 1

REVELATION 4:11

Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

ROMANS 3:10-12

None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good, not even one.

HEBREWS 9:27

And just as it is appointed for man to die once,
and after that comes judgment.

TWO WAYS TO LIVE: PART 1

INTRODUCTION – WEEKS 18-19

The focus of these next two weeks is to equip you to share your faith with people who aren't yet Christians.

If we're honest, sharing our faith with non-Christians is often a scary prospect for two reasons. One, we associate evangelism with people preaching hell-fire and brimstone on college campuses and street corners. Two, we don't feel equipped to share the truth of the gospel in a compelling way. In other words, we feel like people will have questions that we can't answer, so we end up not sharing our faith at all.

Two Ways to Live is an explanation of the gospel through an examination of biblical history. The goal of Weeks 18 and 19 is to understand and memorize six key passages so that we can give a concise explanation of God's purposes in redemption.

If you can memorize the verses and retain the primary meaning of each one, you will be able to answer most spiritual questions in the context of a clear and relational gospel presentation. Through the Holy Spirit, God is pleased to use you to share the good news of Jesus Christ with your friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Therefore, be encouraged to study and memorize these passages.

"I've seen far too many Christians who are more than willing to travel halfway around the world to volunteer for a week in an orphanage, but who cannot bring themselves to take the personal risk of sharing Jesus with the co-worker who sits day after day in the cubicle right next to them."
– Lee Strobel

DAY 1 – GOD IS KING

LESSON 1

God is the loving ruler of the world. He made the world, and He made us the rulers of the world under His authority. As our Creator, He deserves our worship and love.

1. READ REVELATION 4:1-11. WHAT SCENE IS DEPICTED IN THESE VERSES?

DIGGING DEEPER

There are two groups in this text that are busy ascribing glory to God. The first group consists of living creatures – really, angels – whose sole goal is to proclaim God's glory. As they proclaim God's glory, another group of twenty-four elders join the chorus as they fall down before God.

Who are the twenty-four elders? The book of Revelation doesn't specifically identify them, and theologians have varying theories on their identity. Instead of focusing on identifying the elders, we are better served concentrating on what they do. Singling out God's action of creation, the elders bow down and pledge submission. Their crowns, which should be understood as wreaths given to the victor of a game, are thrown at God's feet, indicating it is God – not them – who deserves all honor. This action depicts what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:7, "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?"

2. WHAT IS TRUE OF GOD BECAUSE HE IS THE CREATOR OF ALL THINGS?

3. WHY SHOULD GOD BEING CREATOR CAUSE US TO WORSHIP?

4. WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THAT WE CAN INTENTIONALLY REMEMBER TO WORSHIP GOD?

18

"In creation, every speck, every atom, every detail of pattern – the very being of everything – is derived from the hand of God." – Vern Poythress

"If God made us, then we belong to Him as a testament to His creative glory. The fact is that you and I were never meant to live for our own success and glory. Every day we're meant to live like our lives belonged to another." – Paul Tripp

"The beginning of man's rebellion against God was, and is, the lack of a thankful heart."

– Francis Schaeffer

"To seek God means to desire God above everything and everybody, to seek His glory, and to be anxious to promote His glory. To seek God in the biblical sense means that God is the center of our thinking."

– Martyn Lloyd-Jones

5. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE DISTRACTIONS WE CONSISTENTLY FACE IN WORSHIPING GOD? HOW CAN WE OVERCOME THESE DISTRACTIONS?

DAY 2 – MAN, THE REBEL

LESSON 2

We all reject God's authority over our lives and instead try to rule ourselves without Him. Apart from God, we fail to rule ourselves, our society, and our world.

In Day 1, we saw that God is worthy to receive all glory, honor, and power from His creation. He not only created everything, but He also sustains everything. However, the world has rebelled against their Creator, rejecting God as ruler. In doing so, we have tried to run our lives without Him. This rebellion is the ultimate exercise in futility, as we have failed to rule ourselves, our society, and the world! Furthermore, this rebellion is not partial, but uniform throughout all mankind!

6. READ ROMANS 3:9-20. WHAT DOES ALL MEN ARE "UNDER SIN" (V. 9) MEAN?

7. DESCRIBE THE ESTATE OF MANKIND AS A RESULT OF BEING UNDER SIN (VV. 10-18).

8. WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS THAT NO ONE SEEKS AFTER GOD (V. 11)?

9. HOW DOES THE TEACHING OF ROMANS 3:9-20 CHALLENGE THE NOTION THAT ALL PEOPLE ARE BASICALLY GOOD?

DIGGING DEEPER

Romans 3:9-20 is one of the most comprehensive passages in the Bible about the condition and effects of sin. When Paul says that we are all under sin, he is referring to a legal position that we all share, even if some of us are more or less sinful in relation to each other. Paul's point is that, in the end, there are not varying degrees of lostness, just like there are not varying degrees of being dead.

As a result of this shared legal condition, Paul boldly states that no one seeks after God on their own. Seeking after God, as Paul is referring to here, is a desire to know God for who He is. Adding to this point, Jonathan Edwards points out in *The Religious Affections* that people do seek the things that God can give but never God Himself. Only a heart regenerated and purified by the Spirit can seek God for who He is in Himself. Ultimately, if our pursuit of God is not for Him and Him alone, Paul says our search is worthless, meaning it is completely useless.

Lastly, as you read Romans 3:12, you might think to yourself, "Paul has gone too far! I know tons of people who aren't Christians who do a lot of good for society and to the people around them." While this reasoning sounds good at first, it misses the focus of Paul's message. The emphasis is on whether or not we can do anything to rectify our relationship with God. What Paul is saying is that our works, even our good deeds, cannot save us.

10. IF YOU WERE GOD, HOW WOULD YOU TREAT THE WORLD IF IT CONSISTENTLY SINNED AND VIOLATED THE INTENT FOR WHICH YOU CREATED IT?

"If I was God and the world treated me the way the world has treated Him, I'd kick the vile thing to pieces!"
– Martin Luther

DAY 3 – GOD, THE JUST JUDGE

LESSON 3

God won't let us rebel forever. God's punishment for rebellion is death and judgment.

11. READ HEBREWS 9:11-28. LIST FOUR REASONS WHY JESUS' SACRIFICE WAS SUPERIOR TO THE TEMPLE SACRIFICE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

*"When we commit even the smallest sin we are committing what one great theologian calls 'cosmic treason.' Anything less than eternal punishment would not be just, given the depth of our depravity in rebelling against our Maker."
– RC Sproul*

12. WHAT DOES HEBREWS 9:22 SAY IS THE BASIS FOR FORGIVENESS OF SIN?

13. WHAT DOES THE SHEDDING OF BLOOD REPRESENT?

14. IS SHED BLOOD TOO HARSH A PENALTY FOR SIN? WHY OR WHY NOT?

15. WOULD IT BE FAIR OR JUST IF GOD SENT EVERYONE TO HELL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

DAY 4 – USING LESSONS 1-3

One of the reasons we think Two Ways to Live is a great way to teach you to share your faith is because it doesn't just pull random verses out of context, but rather is based on seeing particular verses in the context of redemptive history.

To put what we've learned to practice, we're going to ask a handful of common questions that non-Christians ask and have you use the points from Lessons 1-3 in response. With some of the questions, you might just use and explain one point, but, with others, you might have to use a combination. An example is provided!

16. HOW CAN YOU BELIEVE IN CHRISTIANITY WHEN THE GOD OF THE BIBLE SEEMS SO JUDGMENTAL?

It is right to think that God is judgmental. However, unlike when we are judgmental, God is actually just in His judgment (Lesson 3). You see, God created the world and everything in it. Because of this, the whole thing – including us – exists for His glory (Lesson 1). Despite this, even though man was created and sustained by God, we have consistently rebelled against God, rejecting His right as Creator to rule over us (Lesson 2). God, because He is just, won't suffer mankind's rebellion forever (Lesson 3).

17. BASED ON THE ANSWER TO QUESTION 16, WHAT QUESTIONS OR OBJECTIONS SHOULD YOU EXPECT?

18. WHY DO CHRISTIANS THINK THAT FAITH IN THEIR GOD IS THE ONLY WAY TO HEAVEN?

19. BASED ON YOUR ANSWER TO QUESTION 18, WHAT QUESTIONS OR OBJECTIONS SHOULD YOU EXPECT?

"Both Christians and non-Christians wrestle with doubt and suspicion. A biblical apologetic targets unbelief wherever it may be found, strengthening the faith of Christians and calling unbelievers to repentance and faith in Christ." – John Frame

DAY 5 – USING LESSONS 1-3

20. IF GOD IS SO GOOD, WHY IS THERE SO MUCH EVIL IN THE WORLD?

*"The gospel is the answer to our individual pains, to the world's sufferings, and to life's mysteries."
– Nabeel Quereshi*

21. BASED ON YOUR ANSWER TO QUESTION 20, WHAT QUESTIONS OR OBJECTIONS SHOULD YOU EXPECT?

22. IF GOD IS LOVING, WHY DOESN'T EVERYONE GET TO GO TO HEAVEN?

23. BASED ON YOUR ANSWER TO QUESTION 22, WHAT QUESTIONS OR OBJECTIONS SHOULD YOU EXPECT?

DIGGING DEEPER

Day 4 and Day 5 are using Two Ways to Live in an apologetic sense. Christian apologetics is the science of giving a defense of the Christian faith. Often, while presenting the gospel to someone, we encounter various questions that challenge belief in the God of the Bible and the Christian worldview. It's important to have thought about what some of those challenges might be!

The key verse for Christian apologetics is 1 Peter 3:15, "In your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you." In this verse, Peter is commanding every Christian to honor Jesus by being ready to give a reasonable defense of the gospel. This does not mean that you need to be an expert in apologetics, but it does imply that every Christian should know what we believe, why we believe it, how to share it with others, and how to defend it against reasonable objections.

If you're interested in learning more about apologetics, check out the following books: *The Reason for God* by Tim Keller; *What's Your Worldview?* by James Anderson; *Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel; *Reasonable Faith* by William Lane Craig.

WEEK 19

TWO WAYS TO LIVE PART 2

1 PETER 3:18

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.

1 PETER 1:3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

JOHN 3:36

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on Him.

TWO WAYS TO LIVE: PART 2

DAY 1 – GOD, THE PROVIDER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

As we saw last week, Two Ways to Live is not necessarily a handful of independent thoughts, but rather a sequence of ideas that are dependent on each other. Each point leads to the next. Before we look at Lessons 4-6, we'll review Lessons 1-3.

In Lesson 1 we learned that God is King. God is the loving ruler of the world. He made the world, and He made us the rulers of the world under His authority. As our Creator, He deserves our worship and love (Rev. 4:11), but that is not the way it is now. Thus, in Lesson 2, we learned that man is a rebel. We all reject God's authority over our lives and instead try to rule ourselves without Him. Apart from God, we fail to rule ourselves, our society, and our world. In Lesson 3, we discovered that God is a just judge who will not let us rebel forever but will, instead, punish sin by judgment and death.

LESSON 4

Because of God's great love, He sent His Son, Jesus, into the world. Jesus lived perfectly under God's rule. When He died on the cross, He took the punishment we deserved.

1. READ 1 PETER 3:18. WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS THAT WE WERE UNRIGHTEOUS?

2. HOW IS IT POSSIBLE JESUS' DEATH COULD COVER THE SINS OF THE ENTIRE WORLD?

3. WHAT COULD POSSIBLY MOTIVATE A HOLY AND PERFECT GOD TO DIE FOR SINNERS?

"God does not find us worthy but makes us worthy."

– Thomas Watson

4. HOW DOES THIS EXPRESSION OF MERCY, LOVE, AND FORGIVENESS RELATE WITH THE JUDGMENT OF LESSON 3?

DIGGING DEEPER

Christianity is unique in that God's mercy is shown through His justice. In every other world religion that holds to the idea of deity, this is not true. For instance, in Islam, Allah can only grant mercy to an individual by overlooking the penalties of whatever law has been broken. Payment is never made for the offense. Instead, it is simply brushed aside.

However, God doesn't have to set aside justice for the sake of mercy. The Christian doctrine of substitutionary atonement states that sin was justly punished in Jesus' death. In offering Himself as a sacrifice, Jesus satisfies God's wrath and enables God to extend mercy to undeserving sinners. Put simply – as Christ died for sinners, He demonstrated God's justice. At the same time, as Christ died for sinners, He demonstrated God's mercy.

Therefore, how do you reconcile God's justice with His mercy? The answer lies in the cross, where these two attributes of God's character perfectly meet.

"The themes of God's love and wrath barrel along through redemptive history, unresolved, until they come to a resounding climax in the cross."

– DA Carson

19

DAY 2 – JESUS, THE RESURRECTED KING

LESSON 5

God raised Jesus to life again as the ruler of the world. Jesus conquered death and now gives new life to those who believe. He will return one day to judge the world.

Lesson 4 gave mankind a perfect escape from God's judgment because Jesus took upon Himself the consequence of our rebellion. God's blessing doesn't stop with payment for our sin, but continues to resurrection from the dead!

5. READ 1 PETER 1:1-16. HOW DOES PETER DESCRIBE CHRISTIAN IDENTITY (VV. 1-2)?

"If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that He said. If He didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what He said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like His teaching but whether or not He rose from the dead." – Tim Keller

"For if Christ were not risen, it would be evidence that God was not yet satisfied for sin. Now, the resurrection is God declaring His satisfaction."

– Jonathan Edwards

6. WHAT DOES PETER MEAN WHEN HE SAYS WE ARE GIVEN "BORN AGAIN TO A LIVING HOPE" (V. 3)?

7. COMPARE 1 PETER 1:7 TO JAMES 1:2-4. GIVE TWO REASONS WHY GOD PERMITS CHRISTIANS TO FACE TRIALS.

8. IN LIGHT OF THIS, WHY CAN A CHRISTIAN BE JOYFUL IN ADVERSITY (VV. 6-9)?

9. WHAT DOES THE RESURRECTION DO THAT THE CRUCIFIXION DID NOT (VV. 3-10)?

DIGGING DEEPER

Jesus died to make payment for our sins, but He was resurrected to give us the hope of a resurrected King! If He stayed in the grave, we would have no assurance that His death really applied to our sin. Furthermore, if He stayed in the grave, there would be no living King to follow and worship, meaning no hope of transformation.

Remember our study of Romans 6:1-4 from Week 16 – we are totally identified with Christ in salvation. As He died, so we died. Also, as Jesus was resurrected from the dead to reign in heaven and in our hearts, so God gave us a resurrected life. We are new creations with new hearts who have been given a new purpose for which to live – God's glory. God is the Servant King whom we serve!

10. WHAT CHANGES WHEN GOD GIVES US NEW LIFE IN CHRIST (VV. 13-16)?

DAY 3 – TWO THRONES

LESSON 6

Our Way: Reject God as our ruler, trying to run life our own way, which results in spiritual death and condemnation by God.

God's Way: Submit to Jesus as our ruler, relying on His death and resurrection, which results in forgiveness by God and eternal life.

In John 3:27-36, John the Baptist is explaining to his disciples the difference between himself and Jesus. Throughout the passage, it's clear John the Baptist believes that Jesus is not only qualitatively different than any created man, but that He is also the absolute standard by which all of mankind will be judged.

11. READ JOHN 3:27-36. WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN THE SON HAS ETERNAL LIFE” (V. 36)?

12. WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT “WHOEVER DOES NOT OBEY THE SON SHALL NOT SEE LIFE, BUT THE WRATH OF GOD REMAINS ON HIM” (V. 36)?

13. ARE THERE ANY OTHER OPTIONS THAT JOHN GIVES FOR MANKIND?

“We're either accepting or rejecting Jesus. We're either for or against. We're either saved or condemned. There are only two choices we can make – only two alternatives – in responding to the gospel.”
– Mark Dever

A summary of each lesson is given in Appendix F.

DIGGING DEEPER

In the end, there are really only two ways to live. We can live in the futility of our own self-rule, or we can surrender to the blessed reign of the God who created us for His purposes. Ultimately, the question of salvation is most accurately answered by crowns. Either we wear a small impotent crown, hoping to govern ourselves and to earn a self-righteous salvation, or Jesus wears a crown and serves not only as our Savior, but also our Lord.

You can see why this section of our curriculum is called Two Ways to Live. We've seen the creator God who is good and worthy of our worship (Rev. 4:11). We've seen mankind's rebellion against this good and worthy God (Rom. 3:10-12), and God's righteous judgment against sinful mankind (Heb. 9:27). As God is wholly just, so He is also wholly loving. Therefore, He sent His only Son to provide payment by shedding His blood for our sins (1 Pet. 3:18). Furthermore, Jesus was resurrected from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3), giving us a risen King to follow and the joy and hope of new life and the transformation that goes with it!

DAY 4 – USING LESSONS 1-6

Just like in Week 18, we'll provide some common questions that non-believers ask of Christians. Combining your knowledge of all six lessons, try to come up with coherent answers, focusing on how each specific point helps to cohesively paint a big picture of the story of redemption.

14. HOW CAN A LOVING GOD SEND ANYONE TO HELL?

15. BASED ON YOUR ANSWER TO QUESTION 14, WHAT QUESTIONS OR OBJECTIONS SHOULD YOU EXPECT?

16. WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO DIE? WHY COULDN'T GOD JUST FORGIVE EVERYONE?

17. BASED ON YOUR ANSWER TO QUESTION 16, WHAT QUESTIONS OR OBJECTIONS SHOULD YOU EXPECT?

DAY 5 – USING LESSONS 1-6

18. IF CHRISTIANS ARE NEW CREATIONS, WHY DO THEY STILL SIN?

19. BASED ON YOUR ANSWER TO QUESTION 18, WHAT QUESTIONS OR OBJECTIONS SHOULD YOU EXPECT?

20. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND OTHER PEOPLE?

21. BASED ON YOUR ANSWER TO QUESTION 20, WHAT QUESTIONS OR OBJECTIONS SHOULD YOU EXPECT?

"All Christians should be able to articulate reasons why they believe what they believe – not just for the sake of our spiritually confused friends, but also so that we ourselves will have a deeper and more confident faith."

– Lee Strobel

APPENDIX F

LESSON 1 – GOD IS KING

God is the loving ruler of the world. He made the world, and He made us the rulers of the world under His authority. As our Creator, He deserves our worship and love (Rev. 4:11).

But is that the way it is now?

LESSON 2 – MAN, THE REBEL

We all reject God's authority over our lives and instead try to rule ourselves without Him. Apart from God, we fail to rule ourselves, our society, and our world (Rom. 3:10-12).

What will God do about this rebellion?

LESSON 3 – GOD, THE JUST JUDGE

God won't let us rebel forever. God's punishment for rebellion is death and judgment (Heb. 9:27).

God's justice sounds hard, but...

LESSON 4 – GOD, THE PROVIDER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Because of God's great love, He sent His Son, Jesus, into the world. Jesus lived perfectly under God's rule. When He died on the cross, He took the punishment we deserved (1 Pet. 3:18).

But that's not all...

LESSON 5 – JESUS, THE RESURRECTED KING

God raised Jesus to life again as the ruler of the world. Jesus conquered death and now gives new life to those who believe. He will return one day to judge the world (1 Pet. 1:3).

Where does that leave us?

LESSON 6 – TWO THRONES – TWO WAYS TO LIVE

Our Way: Reject God as our ruler, trying to run life our own way, which results in spiritual death and condemnation by God.

God's Way: Submit to Jesus as our ruler, relying on His death and resurrection, which results in forgiveness by God and eternal life.

WEEK 20

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

WEEK 20

SPIRITUAL GIFTS EXPLAINED

1 CORINTHIANS 12:7

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS EXPLAINED

DAY 1 – UNITY IN THE MIDST OF DIVERSITY

One of the great keys to effectively serving God is to determine your spiritual gifts. A spiritual gift is a special ability given by God to a believer in Jesus through the indwelling Holy Spirit. A spiritual gift enables believers to minister to others and, thereby, edify the Body of Christ.

While many Christians talk about spiritual gifts, very little is done within the community of believers to determine each person's spiritual gifts. Before we dive into the specifics of spiritual gifts, it will be beneficial to look at a big picture text on how the Church is supposed to function. Ephesians 4 sets a great stage for why spiritual gifts are so important within the Church.

1. READ EPHESIANS 4:1-16. WHAT DO ALL BELIEVERS HAVE IN COMMON (VV. 1-6)?

After saying in verses 7-10 that Jesus is the giver of all gifts, Paul then says in verse 11 that Jesus gave the Church special offices (positions) designed to bless the Church by equipping the Body to serve according to those gifts.

2. WHAT ARE THE FIVE OFFICES THAT GOD HAS GIVEN THE CHURCH (VV. 11-16)?

3. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN OFFICE AND A GIFT? EXPLAIN.

20

"Spiritual gifts are divine enablements for ministry."

– John MacArthur

"The reason that God gives the offices to the church is so that the church will be built up to maturity and will be equipped to serve."

– J. Ligon Duncan

DIGGING DEEPER

Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5 say that the offices of apostle and prophet were foundational and revelatory to the early church. While the gifts of apostleship and prophecy still exist today, the offices through which new revelation was given have ceased to be necessary because the canon of Scripture has been closed.

4. BASED ON EPHESIANS 4:11-13, WHAT MUST TAKE PLACE FOR US TO ATTAIN “MATURE MANHOOD, TO THE MEASURE OF THE STATURE OF THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST...”?

5. ACCORDING TO EPHESIANS 4:14-16, WHAT HAPPENS TO THE CHURCH WHEN WE DON'T EXERCISE OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN THE SERVICE OF GOD'S KINGDOM?

6. WHY DO YOU THINK THAT A CHURCH ABSTAINING FROM SERVING GOD IS “TOSSED TO AND FRO BY THE WAVES AND CARRIED ABOUT BY EVERY WIND OF DOCTRINE, BY HUMAN CUNNING, BY CRAFTINESS IN DECEITFUL SCHEMES” (VV. 14-16)?

7. WHAT DOES EPHESIANS 4:11-16 TELL US ABOUT THE CHURCH'S PURPOSE AND STRATEGY?

“Every Christian is in ministry through the church. No one is merely a consumer of services – everyone is a distributor.” – Tim Keller

"No increase is of use which does not correspond to the whole body. That man is mistaken who desires his own separate growth."

– John Calvin

DAY 2 – SPIRITUAL GIFTS DEFINED

The most frequent Greek word used for the concept of spiritual gifts is *charisma*, or plural, *charismata* (grace, favor). This word is where the word charismatic comes from. The concept of spiritual gifts includes a variety of free gifts given by God, ranging from spiritual salvation (Rom. 6:23) and temporal rescue (2 Cor. 1:11), to celibacy and marriage (1 Cor. 7:7). In all circumstances, these gifts are totally undeserved and are imparted by grace through faith in Jesus. In the special or technical usage, spiritual gifts are the particular endowments given by the Spirit to all believers that enable them to serve others. Since all believers receive spiritual gifts, we are all, in the most biblical sense, charismatic!

8. READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-7 AND 1 PETER 4:10. WHAT IS THE PRIMARY REASON SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE GIVEN?

9. READ ROMANS 12:1-8. WHAT ARE SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES THAT PAUL GIVES US TO PREPARE US TO EXERCISE OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

10. LIST THE GIFTS THAT PAUL MENTIONS IN ROMANS 12:3-8.

11. DO YOU THINK THAT THIS LIST IS A THOROUGH LISTING OF ALL THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS GOD GIVES? WHY OR WHY NOT?

DIGGING DEEPER

Often, people will ask what the difference is between a spiritual gift and a natural talent. First, a talent is the result of genetics and/or training, while a spiritual gift is the result of the power of the Holy Spirit. Second, a talent can be possessed by anyone, Christian or non-Christian, while spiritual gifts are only possessed by Christians. Last, while both talents and spiritual gifts should be used for God's glory and to minister to others, spiritual gifts are focused on these tasks, while talents can be used entirely for non-spiritual purposes.

20

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul begins to address the issue of spiritual gifts. From what we read later in chapter 14, it appears that jealousy manifested itself in the Corinthian church over the use of certain spiritual gifts.

Expressing his concern that they not be ignorant about these matters, Paul first emphasizes that spiritual gifts, though diverse, come from the same Spirit and are to be used for the benefit of all (vv. 1-11). To demonstrate that every person – and spiritual gift – is important, he compares the church to a body with many different yet essential members (vv. 12-27). The chapter closes with Paul pointing out that not all serve the same function and have the same gifts, encouraging the church to earnestly desire the best gifts and preparing to show them a more excellent way in the next chapter (vv. 28-31).

12. READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-31. DO THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS GOD HAS GIVEN YOU REALLY MATTER? WHY?

13. WHAT DO YOU THINK IS PAUL'S PRIMARY POINT IN VERSES 4-11?

14. BASED ON THIS TEXT, DOES ANYONE RECEIVE ALL THE GIFTS? WHY OR WHY NOT?

"We are different in our gifts and ministries and effectiveness, but those differences are not owing to many Spirits, or to bad faith, or to poor obedience. They are owing to 'one and the same Spirit.' Variety is owing to unity."
– John Piper

"We must never compare ourselves among ourselves and wish to be somebody else. You are bad enough as you are, dear friend, but you would probably be much worse if you were somebody else."

– Charles Spurgeon

15. DOES EVERYONE RECEIVE AT LEAST ONE SPIRITUAL GIFT (VV. 7, 11, AND 18)?

16. ARE ANY OF THE GIFTS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE OTHERS? WHY OR WHY NOT?

DIGGING DEEPER

While Paul does instruct us to desire the greater gifts (1 Cor. 12:31), he also goes into great detail about all Christians serving as members (parts) of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-26). 1 Corinthians 14 is about the superiority of prophecy over tongues, but these words are couched in a context in which the Corinthian church had become very sinful and arrogant due to the over emphasis on the gift of tongues. Paul's larger point is not that some gifts are not important, but that one gift should not be exalted at the expense of others. The illustration of the Body and its various members exists to emphasize the importance of all the gifts and their contributions to the overall health of the Body. While some gifts might be less glamorous than others, every person's contributions to the church in his/her area of giftedness is vitally important for a healthy congregation.

17. WHO DETERMINES WHO GETS WHAT GIFTS? WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR THAT DETERMINATION?

18. WHAT DOES 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-31 TELL US ABOUT THE NECESSITY OF EACH GIFT?

DIGGING DEEPER

While spiritual gifts are discussed in several different places in the Bible, they are sometimes misunderstood and misapplied. One such misunderstanding occurs when people believe that one spiritual gift is offered to all through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This so-called baptism of the Holy Spirit takes place at some time subsequent to salvation. Some, but not all, charismatics hold this position.

This erroneous thought process goes as follows: A person professes faith in Christ, but then struggles in their sin for some time. A second work of grace or a second baptism occurs that frees the person from their slavery to sin so they can live the victorious Christian life. This second work of grace is evidenced by the believer's receiving the gift of tongues.

The reality is that Scripture speaks of the baptism of the Holy Spirit as taking place at the point of conversion (see Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 6:1-4; and Eph. 1:3, 13-14) and giving us our identity in Christ. If the baptism of the Holy Spirit took place subsequent to conversion, there would be professing Christians who are not part of the Body of Christ, who are not heirs of God, and who are not guaranteed salvation. In other words, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not an additive to faith – it is the engine of faith! Salvation doesn't come without the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

For an answer to the question of whether spiritual gifts are occasional or permanent, see Appendix G.

DAY 3 – SERVICE GIFTS

For the sake of study, the spiritual gifts have been separated into categories: service gifts, speaking gifts, and situational gifts. In addition to a description, we have also included the great rewards associated with each gift, as well as how these gifts can lead us into sin if we don't rely on God as we exercise them.

MERCY – ROMANS 12:8

Description: The person with the gift of mercy demonstrates genuine sensitivity when others are suffering. The gift of mercy prompts a person to try to help reduce pain, or at least to empathize with the sufferer in his or her time of pain. It is a gift that focuses on the person and the pain, rather than the details and the solution.

Danger: Emotional stability is often difficult to attain for the young believer with a strong gift of mercy. The tendency is to be swayed to every hurting person, bearing his burdens as if the burdens were their own. That can become overwhelming!

Reward: The great reward for the person gifted with mercy is in knowing that they helped a person in a critical time. The opportunity also exists to lead the church toward greater compassion ministries, especially as they partner with someone gifted in administration.

People with the gift of mercy also must beware of making others dependent on them and focus on pointing people to depend on God.

WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO CONSISTENTLY EVIDENCES THIS GIFT?

God seems to give people with the gift of service a special grace in exercising humility.

SERVICE – ROMANS 12:7; 1 CORINTHIANS 12:28

Description: The person with the gift of service delights in serving God by addressing the physical needs of others. It is usually illustrated when the strong give aid to the weak, and there seems to be a special biblical precedent for this gift when it is manifested among the sick and needy.

Danger: The great dangers in this gift are burn-out and self-righteousness. If other people in the church don't share the burden for a particular ministry, the person gifted in service can take on too great a load and/or become resentful of the other people unwilling to serve.

Reward: People with the gift of service are the motor under the hood of any church. They set up, tear down, make coffee, etc. There is great satisfaction in knowing that your contributions are essential to the church and to the needy!

WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO CONSISTENTLY EVIDENCES THIS GIFT?

Givers often like to stay out of the limelight, giving anonymously in order to avoid recognition.

GIVING – ROMANS 12:8

Description: The person with the gift of giving has the divine enablement and ability to give money and material resources to the work of the Lord with great cheerfulness and liberality. The key to this gift is not the amount a person is able to give, but rather the heart condition when giving sacrificially. If you feel like you are truly and passionately worshiping God when you give sacrificially, you probably have this gift.

Danger: The danger in this gift, like many of the other gifts, is found in projecting your paradigms onto other believers. The deception often associated with this gift is manifested when a giver angrily asks, "Why doesn't everyone else give sacrificially like I do?"

Reward: The reward from this gift is in knowing that you have made a difference in the advancement of ministry for God's kingdom by your sacrificial giving. It is a gift empowered by the recognition of the true nature of stewardship – we are merely stewards of God's money to be given for God's purposes!

WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO CONSISTENTLY EVIDENCES THIS GIFT?

LEADERSHIP – ROMANS 12:8

Description: The person with the gift of leadership delights in casting biblical vision and bringing a team of people together to move toward realizing that vision. This is a big picture gift that is always driven by the purposes and pleasure of God. The person who is gifted in leadership will most likely depend on some administrators to help with implementation.

Danger: The primary danger in the gift of leadership is found in adopting a worldly view of what leadership entails. The spiritual gift of leadership can certainly have creative expression but is defined primarily by a consistent resolve to move toward the purposes of God. The leader can also become frustrated when the followers don't move as quickly as the leader would desire.

Reward: The person gifted in leadership has the satisfaction of knowing that God's purposes were accomplished through a group of people moving together to accomplish a vision. The leader has a wonderful view of all that God is doing in people's lives to prepare them for His ministry.

WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO CONSISTENTLY EVIDENCES THIS GIFT?

ADMINISTRATION – 1 CORINTHIANS 12:28

Description: The person with the gift of administration has the divine enablement to understand what makes an organization function. The administrator can plan and implement procedure and structure that increases the church's ability to minister effectively.

Danger: The person gifted in administration can burn out or get overwhelmed if unwilling to delegate certain assignments to other people. The administrator is often a perfectionist who hesitates to delegate because others might not accomplish a task in an organized or excellent manner.

Reward: The administrator has the satisfaction of knowing that he/she is the critical cog in the implementation of vision. If the leader is the architect, designing a picture of what a structure will look like, the administrator is the general contractor who comes in and takes the steps necessary to develop the structure. The administrator takes responsibility for the nuts and bolts of ministry.

WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO CONSISTENTLY EVIDENCES THIS GIFT?

While this person is able to cast vision, the Bible also sees this person as a servant.

The Greek word for administration is kubernes. It is a unique term that refers to a shipmaster or captain. The literal meaning is "to steer."

The complex issues of life for others seem simpler for people with the gift of faith. They ask, "Is God for this?" and respond accordingly.

The gift of apostleship should not be confused with the Office of Apostleship. Apostle means "sent out one." The twelve disciples were called the Apostles because Jesus sent them out. The twelve disciples (and Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles) had special roles in the establishment of the Church and the giving of God's special revelation (the Bible). This giving of revelation was foundational to the Church but doesn't exist today.

FAITH – 1 CORINTHIANS 12:9

Description: This gift does not refer to salvation (all Christians have that spiritual gift!), but rather to the divine enablement to see the Lord's will and act on it with an unwavering belief in God's ability.

Danger: Living with an unwavering belief in God's ability is a wonderful thing, but we must understand God's will in order to do this well. The danger associated with this gift is found in stepping boldly out on an unsupported limb due to a misguided interpretation of Scripture. The other danger related to the gift of faith is disillusionment with Christians who don't see things as being black and white.

Reward: The person who has this gift is able to boldly move forward in obedience to God without great anxiety. They also accomplish great tasks for God's glory that others would never venture to attempt.

WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO CONSISTENTLY EVIDENCES THIS GIFT?

APOSTLESHIP – 1 CORINTHIANS 12:28

Description: The person with the gift of apostleship is one whom God sends out as a missionary or church planter. The gift of apostleship is manifested in a divine ability to extend the work of the Church by serving in the mission field or by planting churches, often crossing cultural or language barriers to do so. Today's apostles are still "sent out," but they do not give new revelation.

Danger: The first danger of someone with the gift of apostleship is not exercising that gift. Staying home when God has gifted you to travel is both unfaithful and unfulfilling! The second danger is experienced in going and then becoming bitter that so many other people won't come with you. It is a special gift not granted to all!

Reward: The reward received in the exercise of this gift is the experience of ministry in front line dependence on God. The person with the gift of apostleship forsakes much and depends on God for much more than the average person. Because of this dependence, the person gifted with apostleship also sees the abundant provision of God in all of life's circumstances!

WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO CONSISTENTLY EVIDENCES THIS GIFT?

DAY 4 – SPEAKING GIFTS

PROPHECY – ROMANS 12:6; 1 CORINTHIANS 12:10, 28; 14:1–6, 22–25

Description: The person with the gift of prophecy has a divine enablement to proclaim God's truth with power and clarity in a timely and culturally sensitive fashion for correction, repentance, or edification. While prophecy in the Bible is sometimes associated with the giving of new revelation, it is primarily related to applying Scripture to current circumstances. Today, the person gifted with prophecy speaks with clarity and strength about how God's Word addresses a person's or persons' circumstances.

Danger: People with the gift of prophecy view truth as the ultimate (and sometimes only) factor in communication. Prophets have a zeal for truth, which is good, but their zeal for truth can bowl people over, often offending a person unnecessarily. Prophets should not water down their words, but they should think about how their words will be received with the greatest effect.

Reward: The great reward for using the gift of prophecy is being allowed to speak God's truth into people's lives, fully expecting that the Holy Spirit will give conviction and clarity leading to life change. The role of prophet can be lonely, but it can also be instrumental in a person or church's turn toward God and righteousness.

WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO CONSISTENTLY EVIDENCES THIS GIFT?

TEACHING – ROMANS 12:7; 1 CORINTHIANS 12:28

Description: The person with the gift of teaching has a divine enablement to understand, clearly explain, and properly apply the Word of God to people's lives.

Danger: The danger in the gift of teaching comes when we confuse the spiritual gift with the ability merely to communicate. Powerful communication is a dangerous thing when it isn't tethered to the Word of God. The temptations of manipulation and arrogance always accompany the gifted teacher.

Reward: The great reward for faithfully exercising the gift of teaching is the opportunity to watch God's Spirit produce change in people's lives through the unadulterated teaching of God's Word! To see people "get it" and to watch their lives transform as a result is indescribable!

WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO CONSISTENTLY EVIDENCES THIS GIFT?

The gift of prophecy includes both exhortation and encouragement (1 Cor. 14:3).

"Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness." – James 3:1

It is important not to confuse knowledge with wisdom.

A good working definition of wisdom is "knowledge applied," and a good working definition of the gift of wisdom is "the ability, given by God, to apply biblical knowledge to daily life."

Discernment is seeing how things look in God's eyes and thinking God's thoughts after Him.

WORD OF KNOWLEDGE – 1 CORINTHIANS 12:8

Description: The person with the gift of knowledge has the divine enablement to accumulate and analyze biblical information effectively. Scholarship and depth are marks of this gift, which is given by God to help the rest of us catch up!

Danger: The danger associated with the gift of knowledge is intellectual arrogance. Instead of giving glory to God for the truth that possesses us, the danger is found in believing that we possess the truth.

Reward: The reward associated with this gift is the privilege of spending countless hours in the study of God's Word. These people are on the cutting edge of biblical study and pave the way for the church's growing understanding.

WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO CONSISTENTLY EVIDENCES THIS GIFT?

WORD OF WISDOM – 1 CORINTHIANS 12:8

Description: The person with the gift of wisdom has the divine enablement to apply biblical knowledge to daily life. This gift is wonderful because it is very practical and valuable to most people (even non-Christians).

Danger: Arrogance is the dangerous dark side of this gift. If we forget that it is God's wisdom given to us as stewards, then we can become self-impressed with this gift. People will seek out others gifted with wisdom, this can be intoxicating.

Reward: The beauty of exercising this gift is that the person gets to help others see the relevance of biblical truth, and in doing so, shows how vital Scripture.

WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO CONSISTENTLY EVIDENCES THIS GIFT?

DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS – 1 CORINTHIANS 12:10

Description: The person with the gift of discernment of spirits is charged with the protection of doctrine in an age of increasing heresy. The basic meaning of discernment has to do with separating out for examination and judging in order to determine what is genuine and what is spurious. The person with this gift stands guard over that which is true and alerts people to false teaching.

Danger: This gift can run amuck when we become intolerant of non-essentials. This gift can and should be exercised graciously while also promoting truth.

Reward: The reward for the person who exercises this gift is the knowledge that in doing so, he has called the church away from wolves or false teaching. It is a gift given to one with a shepherd's heart, and it gives satisfaction to the shepherd who brings sheep into the fold.

WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO CONSISTENTLY EVIDENCES THIS GIFT?

DAY 5 – MIRACULOUS GIFTS

Before we take time to look at the miraculous gifts, we should pause to make a couple of points. First, it is important to recognize that God still performs miracles. It would be foolish and unbiblical to claim otherwise. However, the question remains whether the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, described primarily in 1 Corinthians 12–14, are still active in the church today.

In the book of Acts, the vast majority of miracles are performed by the apostles and their close associates. We're told plainly in Acts 14:3, that God enabled them to do these miraculous works in order to confirm the message of the gospel. As the apostles came in power, people were compelled to listen. Further, Paul tells us that signs, wonders, and miracles were things that marked an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12) – it was a way that people identified them as messengers of God. If every believer in Christ was equipped with these abilities, then it would be hard to determine who was an actual apostle. Lastly, it is also important to realize that now that God's revelation is complete in the Bible, the revelatory gifts are no longer needed.

In the end, God certainly still does amazing miracles, signs, and wonders and sometimes performs those miracles through a Christian. However, as these things happen, they are not necessarily evidence of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit.

Finally, while the Bible does not say outright that the miraculous gifts have ceased, it does lay the foundation for why they might no longer occur to the same extent at which they did in the New Testament.

TONGUES – 1 CORINTHIANS 12:10, 30; 13:1; 14:2–40

Description: A person enabled by God to speak in tongues speaks a known language for the purpose of articulating the gospel (Acts 2). The mandate of Scripture is that this gift would be exercised in an orderly manner and only in the presence of an interpreter (1 Cor. 14:27-28). These instructions are given in order to ensure that this gift would continue to strengthen the Church, rather than to draw attention to individuals, while confusing the Church (1 Cor. 14:26).

Danger: The danger of the gift of tongues is misinterpretation that leads to mindless self-promotion which does not edify the Body of Christ. A popular notion that tongues is available to anyone who has been baptized by the Holy Spirit results in spiritual manipulation and an emphasis on one gift over all others.

Reward: There are two rewards for the proper exercise of the gift of tongues. The first is the proclamation of the gospel among non-believers who do not speak your language. The second reward comes when someone in the congregation can interpret, and the net effect is a prophetic utterance proclaiming an existing Scripture's application to the life of the Church.

INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES – 1 CORINTHIANS 12:10, 30; 14:26–28

Description: The person who God enables, on occasion, to interpret tongues, translates a known language that another person has been miraculously enabled to speak. The net effect is prophecy that declares known Scripture in application to a person or church's circumstances.

Danger: Making something up and thereby leading others astray!

Reward: Being used miraculously to remind God's people of God's directives.

WORKING OF MIRACLES – 1 CORINTHIANS 12:10

Description: A person enabled by God to call upon Him such that the governing laws of nature might be superseded, thereby producing what we call a miracle. It appears from Scripture that the working of miracles was reserved for the apostles who worked to establish and authenticate God's New Covenant. "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works" (2 Cor. 12:12). Miraculous signs were a mark of apostleship, authenticating the apostles' message and work as being of the Lord. Hebrews 2:3-4 says, "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

Danger: The danger in this gift (if it still exists) is to believe that the individual does the miracle, rather than God doing the miracle through our faithfulness.

Reward: God, as the sovereign creator of all things, has the right and capability to supersede the laws of nature when He wishes to illustrate His glorious power. By believing that God can do miracles, we are more likely to see God do miracles!

HAVE YOU EVER KNOWN OR MET ANYONE WHO HAS EVIDENCED ANY OF THESE GIFTS?

APPENDIX G

ARE SPIRITUAL GIFTS OCCASIONAL OR PERMANENT?

There is a fairly large debate in Christendom as to whether all spiritual gifts are permanent or occasional. Some people contend that all spiritual gifts have ceased – God doesn't give them anymore. The other end of the spectrum believes that God gives all spiritual gifts permanently.

It is our opinion that some spiritual gifts are permanently given to individuals, while other gifts are given by God on an occasional or situational basis. Please remember that while this is our position, it is also one that is derived by logical inference rather than by exegesis, or scriptural study. Our thinking goes like this – if someone was endowed with the gift of healing on a permanent basis, their time would be well spent in a hospital, and the medical profession would cease to exist. It also seems like nobody would die if that was the case. Despite the best claims of some television faith healers – who are frauds – we just don't believe miracles on demand (especially for profit) is God's intent. That being said, we do believe that God still works miracles today, and we also believe that He uses His faithful servants in the process.