

# Christianity Arising

Marc Carrier



Christianity Arising was born from a conference that is designed to lift Christians from bondage on to victorious and abundant living, for Christ. The over-arching theme is out with the old and in with the new, leading to activation in fruitful ministry. Designed to be read with a group, each chapter includes practical exercises for processing, discussion, and prayer. The sessions include: knowing God, surrender, repentance, deliverance, emotional healing, personal identity, the gift of the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, prayer, Scripture, discipleship, front-line ministry, and intentional living.

The journey is not just informational, but transformational. In the end, readers are equipped to take others on a journey to freedom that includes repentance, emotional healing, renewing of the mind, and more.



Marc Carrier is a former missionary to Kenya, where for nine years he focused on making disciples (not just converts), and lived out the content of Christianity Arising. His goal is not just to equip believers to live victorious and abundant lives, but to mobilize them to help others do the same.

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# Christianity *ARISING*

Marc Carrier

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## **Session One: Introduction**

*Blessed!* If I had to describe my life with one word, that would be it. Without any doubt, I believe I am living the most blessed life on the planet. Whether it's true, or only my personal delusion, matters not. It's how I feel. And that makes it real to me.

Does that mean everything is perfect all the time? Not a chance! It simply means that I find my fulfillment and contentment in something that is not subject to theft or loss: my life in Christ.

My material blessings are numerous: my wife and marriage, my amazing family, my home and business, my call and ministry. However, these tangibles are only temporary. No one likes to think about it, but everything on that list is here today and can vanish at any time. If one's fulfillment rests in such things, one can easily fall from most blessed to most cursed in a moment. Such was the example of Job in Scripture.

However, if one's identity is resting in Christ and in relationship with God, the blessing is secure. This is because no one has the right, authority, or power to take away our identity in Christ. Only *we* have the ability to squander, relinquish, or abandon it. And if we resolve not to do so, we can rest in it. No one can steal our peace. No one can steal our joy. No one can steal our worth. No one can touch us. No power in the heavens or on earth can compromise us. Life abundant and victorious is ours!

How do we reconcile the all-too-typical Christian experience with the ideal described above? Anxiety, fear, confusion, and disappointment are a reality for many, leaving the victorious abundant life elusive. Even those who seem to have it all together suffer setbacks. If the answer were simple, more of us would live the life in Christ that we desire.

I have made it my mission in life, and with this book, to assist people not only to discover the blessed life, but also to help other people to attain to it. Together, we can rise above the things that deceive, confuse, entangle, and entrap the saints who genuinely want a deeper experience with God. Victorious and abundant living is our destiny. Let's get a hold of it now!

*Christianity Arising* is not just a book for you to read. This book was born from a conference that I offer: an interactive, participatory workshop that permits the Holy Spirit to minister to personal needs through teachings, worship, introspection, and group processing. Therefore, the content will ideally facilitate transformation rather than simply providing information. For you to rise above the things that are holding you back, God must do a work. It is almost universally true that when we are in a rut, we seldom see clearly enough to get ourselves out. That's why the group, participatory element is so vital to success. Don't just read, but join others and make time for reflection, processing, and prayer.

*Christianity Arising* is not a theological treatise. The content has been developed through years of experience in front-line ministry and personal discipleship. What I hope to offer is a simple and practical framework to help participants journey from one place to the next in their walk with the Lord. Although some of the practices, teachings, and suggestions offered here may differ from those of other ministers, I urge you to remain open-minded and permit God to do a work in your life.

### ***Pressing on Toward the Goal***

Everybody's life experiences and circumstances are unique, and unfortunately there are no "silver bullet," quick fixes. Years of traumatic emotional experiences and other harms are seldom erased in an instant. Therefore, this book (and the accompanying small group component) is not the end-all solution to years of negative emotional and spiritual impacts. Instead, this should be a launch pad that provides a framework for lasting changes that *will* come, be it fast or slow. The goal is to win the long game: lasting victory.

What will this look like? Most likely, breakthroughs followed by setbacks: two steps forward, one step back. When setbacks come, we expect them so as not to become discouraged. We regroup, revisit the

fundamentals, and process the root causes one by one to experience a new breakthrough, the next one a bit deeper and more thorough than the one before. We emerge from each “cycle” a bit wiser and stronger.

Our destination is complete and total victory (although we will never fully arrive there in this body). Just as the layers of harm and hurt accumulate over a lifetime, your victory happens in steps as well. With the removal of each layer, your walk is straighter and your mind clearer, so that peeling back successive layers is easier. Ultimately, we rise above our past circumstances and rest in our identity more and more in Christ.

As you progress through these chapters (and corresponding group sessions), do not be discouraged if you don't achieve breakthrough in any one session. Content in each chapter may not be presented in the order of significance that addresses your personal circumstances. One person's challenge may be their understanding of who God is; another, personal identity, or emotional trauma; for others: sin, curses, strongholds, and so on. Not only that, but the impacts and effects of each of these factors are interrelated and intertwined, which can make a sudden breakthrough difficult to attain.

I like to view “breakthrough” in this way: the enemy's effects that keep us in bondage are like a log jam in a river. When breaking a log jam, one log at a time is removed, until that one log that is preventing the remaining logs from breaking free is dislodged. Many logs can be removed, but the jam remains until that crucial log gets out of the way. It's the same with the entanglements that keep us in bondage. We can address one area of life at a time, yet not experience the breakthrough we're looking for. However, when we address that one area that is holding everything back, *then* the floodgates are permitted to open. At that time, we should revisit the areas in which there was limited-to-no relief, to ensure they were given their due attention. This is because it is only then that we may see more clearly to thoroughly address other impacts of the enemy.

My hope is that this book (and corresponding group exercises) will provide you with both the tools and the process to put you on the path to victory. Victory is most assured, but not without your commitment. As you make progress, the enemy will counter your efforts. Stand firm and regroup! You will take back lost ground and force the enemy to abandon that front. Then expect him to try another angle of attack. Once your defenses are established and his efforts prove fruitless, he will give you respite. But not forever; be ready!

### ***Your Part***

In order to *arise*—to live free from the entanglements of the enemy—we need to do *our* part and allow God to do *His* part. Breakthrough comes through the power of God; however, we need to cooperate with His efforts. Since we are complex beings with interrelated factors affecting and influencing us, defining what “breakthrough” is, is challenging. For some, the needs are readily apparent. Those suffering from emotional or physical trauma from abuse need to break through those impediments. People struggling with sin and addictions need to tear down strongholds and repent. But you might not fall into these more obvious categories.

Maybe you are emotionally secure and spiritually stable. My question for you is, are you living out your full potential as an ambassador and soldier for God's kingdom? Are you ministering to and discipling others into the freedom you enjoy? Are you pressing in to become more like Christ, moment-by-moment? Are you the spouse and parent God called you to be? It doesn't matter who you are, how long you have been saved, or what you have accomplished for Christ. We all have to be humble enough to admit that we have a long way to go. We all have areas in our lives where we need to overcome and break out into the call God has for our lives. Any kind of spiritual pride merely keeps us in prolonged bondage.

Our goal is Christlikeness, which is never attained in this lifetime. Yet, we should all remain on the journey and persevere toward that goal. The reality is, we can always improve and it's OK. We're works in progress.



Much of our victory comes down, quite simply, to the desire for personal improvement. Our part is, then, never to be satisfied with our present state; instead, advancement should always be our goal and our expectation. The abundant and victorious life in Christ has been freely given to us. Let's not fail to grasp it or settle for mediocrity. We can grow so accustomed to our present reality that we lose hope and faith that something better is possible.

For some, this is a defeatist way of thinking. (*Great, I am not good enough and I never will be!*) However, the opposite is true: in Christ, you are already great, and you simply need to live out and experience that greatness in your life. Fear, anxiety, and discouragement deter you from that goal. These are the effects of the enemy that must be addressed for you to achieve breakthrough.

Honesty and transparency are key elements when it comes to doing "your part" in achieving breakthrough. To permit the Holy Spirit to expose both entrapments and solutions, we need to be honest with ourselves and with whomever God is using to minister to us. A major part of the emotional healing process is simply "letting it out." Sharing our experiences with others is a prerequisite to escaping the emotional bondage that trauma creates. Likewise, our secret sins provide fodder for the enemy to keep us living in shame, defeat, self-loathing, and personal condemnation. Shedding light on our secret struggles neuters the enemy, stripping him of his power to keep us on the defensive. That's why it is vital that we be honest and open with our struggles to break free from the bondage.

Make the commitment: resolve towards personal improvement, humility, honesty, and transparency. Absent that, reading this book will amount to nothing more than a pointless information exchange. Transformation will only occur with your cooperation in these things. God *can* and *will* change your life if you do your part. He wants the abundant victorious life for you! But you must want it, too. But not only want it, you must commit to doing something about it. *Now* is your time!

### ***Let's Get Started***

We are complex, specially created relational beings comprised of body, soul, and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Our body is a material entity made of atoms forming cells, together forming complex systems that are designed to sustain life and reproduce. These attributes are common to all life forms. This is a direct reference to the material, physical aspect of all of humanity: our natures, and our bodies. That is the *what* of us.

Additionally, we have a soul, which is the center of the mind, will, and emotions. It best describes the *who* of us: our hearts, our personal identities, our thoughts, desires, and feelings. The soul is source of relationship; even some animals (known as the *nephesh*, or "soulish," animals) can have relationships with man.

The "spirit" of man is the supernatural, eternal component of our being. Our spiritual nature differentiates us substantially from other animals. Animals are concerned with life itself and the needs and pains of the moment. Only we humans have an eternal awareness in our hearts and concern ourselves with what will happen after we die. Also unique to humans is our awareness of God. We intrinsically know that we were created. Though many agnostics and atheists verbally deny such an awareness, everyone (deep down inside) *knows*. Additionally, since the Fall of Man (recorded in Genesis chapter two), man has been aware of good and evil. Every person has a conscience that recognizes right and wrong. Only those with a seared conscience (a silencing of the spirit) can ignore this inner witness. Animals, on the other hand, simply respond to instincts and impulses, unless socialized by humans (leveraging their "soulish" characteristics.)

The natural result of these unique characteristics given by God to man is the fear of judgment. We know we do wrong, will live forever, and will ultimately be judged by our Creator.

Why is any of this important? Because we are created beings with a complex triune nature, each aspect subject to harmful impacts from the enemy. Healing and breakthrough require an understanding of our nature so that we can properly diagnose and remedy the various harms inflicted upon us.

### ***Understanding Our Enemy***

God's creation (of both men and angels) is important to our understanding of how the enemy is allowed to influence us. Man was the culmination of God's creation and was given dominion over the earth. Angels, on the other hand, are spiritual beings who were created before the cosmos and were present with God in the heavenlies.

The historic understanding is that angels were tasked with watching over the earth. Satan, a leading cherub, rebelled against God and fell from glory, and many of the angels followed him. A number of these angels transgressed by having relations with women. This produced offspring known as the Nephilim, mortal beings with supernatural characteristics. The angels who committed this sin were condemned to Tartarus (the pit).

Satan, cast down to earth after his transgression, sabotaged God's creation by corrupting humanity. Man fell into sin and was likewise separated from God—condemned to death and Hades (the place of the dead), and ultimately Gehenna (the place of everlasting fire post judgment). While God had a plan to redeem humanity (the culmination of His creation), the angels and the Nephilim were given no such option. Humans are sent to Hades to await the judgment upon death, but the spirits of the Nephilim were condemned to roam the earth until the judgment.

The historic understanding is that the spirits of the Nephilim are what we call "demons." Demons are not angels, but rather lesser beings (progeny of the fallen angels). Thus, Satan (also known as the Devil, or Lucifer) is the leader of a cabal of evil that includes the other fallen angels, the demons, and fallen (unredeemed) humans. They all work together (many humans unwittingly) in their attempt to overpower God, the angels still loyal to Him, and the saints (redeemed humans). These are the "two kingdoms" that are still doing battle on the earth to this day: the kingdom of Satan, and the kingdom of God.

All of redemptive history is leading up to the day when God's kingdom will reign uncontested. A day will come when God's sovereignty will be undisputed, and all inhabitants will be His loyal subjects. However, God isn't interested in robots. He desires authentic relationship with those who serve Him. Authentic love for God is not possible without the capacity for hate. Subjects of God in His kingdom cannot be deemed loyal unless jealousy and self-serving exist. There can be no good without the opportunity for evil.

Thus, God's ultimate plan is that His kingdom will overcome the kingdom of this world. He will reign with only love and righteousness—no evil whatsoever—and His kingdom will be inhabited by those who choose love and good, those who *want* to live there and desire love and fellowship with others of like mind. God the Father, with Christ and the Holy Spirit, are working with the loyal angels and the saints to redeem as many humans as possible to be a part of God's perfect kingdom.

Of course, God has all power and authority and could immediately subdue His enemies. Yet, because human will is involved and He wants none to perish, He is very patient with us, because He loves us so much. God, in His mercy, offers humanity every possible opportunity to repent. This repentance, in essence, involves a change of allegiance: turning away from Satan, sin, and this fallen world, and towards God, His abiding love and righteousness, and His everlasting kingdom. His plan is to populate His kingdom with loyal subjects who are His foot soldiers: empowered, equipped, and mobilized towards His service to reach more people and usher in the culmination of His kingdom, on earth as it is in Heaven.

Ever the enemy of God, Satan works with his minions to thwart God's plan. His goal is to keep his subjects (fallen, sinful men) from changing allegiance to God. If they will only remain ensnared in debauchery and squander their lives, they will be condemned rather than redeemed for God's service.

If men do repent and become God’s servants, Satan’s tactics change. He then disturbs the saints to render them ineffective and unproductive in God’s kingdom. He will use any means necessary to accomplish this goal. Some will be deceived through bad theology and will believe that ungodly living is the Christian “norm.” Others will be emotionally paralyzed, encumbered by their own bondage and unable to consider the plights of others. Some will believe they have mastered holy living and because of their pride, will look down on those who have not achieved their standard, regarding others as unworthy of attention. Satan also uses success, wealth, and material blessing to distract men from God’s service. Some are so enamored with the world’s entertainment and enjoyments that they lack time or interest to serve God or others. The list of Satan’s tactics is almost endless: health problems, financial difficulties, relationship problems—he will do anything in his power to stop people from first, being saved, or if saved, from ministering to others.

### ***Preparing for Victory***

The content of this book, and the accompanying exercises, are designed to help you identify the many possible areas in which the enemy is attacking you, and to show you how to mitigate those effects. It’s about *out with the old*, yes. But it doesn’t stop there—it’s also about *in with the new*. The “new” involves equipping you for God’s service. Thus, we will look at your talents and spiritual gifts, and you will learn how to best utilize them by applying some ministry “best practices.” The bonus (in fact, the *not-so-hidden* ultimate objective) is not only to take *you* on this journey, but also to equip you to encourage others toward freedom and mobilization.

Here are the most common areas of attack, how we are kept in bondage, and how we can break free of these entrapments:

<b>Area of Attack</b>	<b>Resulting Bondage</b>	<b>Potential Solution</b>
Wrong view of God	Ideological enslavement	Know God
Sin	Willful enslavement	Confess and repent
Strongholds	Compulsive enslavement	Renounce/Deliverance
Trauma	Emotional enslavement	Process/release/healing
Wrong view of Self	Ideological enslavement	Know yourself (as a child of God)

In the next several chapters, we will look at these various areas of bondage in greater detail so that you can identify your personal encumbrances and process through their effects. Ideally, you will not only read this book but will engage with a small group for interactive discussion and prayer.

### ***Small Groups***

As committed as you are, reading this book alone (apart from a small group setting, or at least an accountability partner), will not bring about the desired transformation. Ideally, a local group from your fellowship can go through the material and sessions together. Four or five people is the optimal number for maximum benefit. That is enough people to leverage some wisdom and spiritual insight, while not so many that there is insufficient opportunity to share and have personal needs met.

Ideally, one person in the group will have attended a live conference or will have been through this book and accompanying group sessions before. He or she can serve as a facilitator and keep things flowing in a healthy and fruitful manner. When I say *facilitator*, I mean a gentle guide, equipped to keep things on track, and not an overbearing and dominant leader. The Holy Spirit must be invited and permitted to lead the group interactions. The facilitator simply keeps the group on-topic, curtails fruitless chatter, and reigns in those who may be dominating the conversation.

## *Christianity Arising*

If a live group of your own making is not possible, we may be able to organize an online group session of like-minded saints. We invite you to visit [KingdomDriven.org/Christianity-Arising](http://KingdomDriven.org/Christianity-Arising) to request participation in an upcoming group, or to volunteer to facilitate such a group. Ideally, groups will meet either weekly or bi-weekly via digital means. They can be gender-specific or open. I encourage anyone who has experienced any sexual abuse or who is struggling with explicit sexual matters to participate in a gender-specific group.

### **Session One Exercise**

1. Since this session is introductory in nature, an initial group meeting will include introductions and getting to know one another a bit, if you are not already familiar.
2. Take some time to go over the Group Participation Agreement. Each member should print out a copy as a reminder of the guidelines whenever the group meets.
3. Feel free to share thoughts or questions regarding the introductory content in this chapter.
4. In the intervening time between group meetings, each participant should read the content for the next session and look over the session activity so as to be prepared for group interaction. Pray for the group and expect God to do His work!

### ***Group Participation Agreement***

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to seek an accountability partner or participate in a group to discuss what we are reading and go through the suggested exercises. I will abide by the following rules of engagement:

1. I come expecting to be ministered to by God Himself, and I understand that other participants come with the same expectation.
2. I agree to keep all discussions in the group confidential.
3. I will be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit and be honest in all my interactions with others.
4. I will permit others to speak influence into my life without being offended (even if interactions are imperfect).
5. All of my comments toward others will be delivered in love, with grace, and for the benefit of the listener.
6. I will limit my interactions to those which I have confidence are from the Holy Spirit and will not dominate conversation.
7. I will participate in group breakout sessions as assigned and will work with the facilitator of our group's choosing.
8. I will attend each session on time and will give each session my full attention (distractions will be minimized during sessions).
9. I will be open, honest, and transparent during group discussions.
10. As a group, we nominate \_\_\_\_\_ to be our group facilitator for this series.



## Session Two: Who is your Daddy?

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*. (Romans 8:14-17)

*Abba!* That's "Daddy" to us. Are you a son of God? If so, you are an heir with Christ.

Depending on your experiences and your relationship with your earthly father or other authority figures in your life, God being "Dad" can either bring peace and security, or the opposite. This is because most of us form understandings about the nature of God based on relationships with our fathers or other authority figures in our lives. Those with absent fathers may imagine God as far away or disinterested in their lives. People with harsh and overbearing fathers can view God as a "cosmic cop" who is just waiting to punish them. However, that's not at all fair, because God is not defined by the behaviors of imperfect humans. He is, in fact, our *perfect* heavenly Father, and He is defined by His very nature as set forth in Scripture. For breakthrough to occur in our lives, we must come to an accurate understanding of the true nature of God. We can't properly relate to and respond to God unless we truly know who He is: His nature, His heart, His desires, His ways, and most importantly, His love for us.

The only way to truly know someone is to develop relationship with them. We learn people by spending time with them, speaking with them, and watching them: how they work, how they interact with others, how they respond to situations. As we seek to know God, we have the amazing benefit of seeing His interactions with humanity from beginning to end in the Bible. From creation to the prophetic reports of the end of time, God's story (and the plight of humanity) is fully documented. And it's not just historical narrative. We get direct insight into much about His character.

Additionally, the very nature of the immutable God is made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ. So, in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, we further learn the perfect heart and will of our heavenly Father.

There is no way to do justice in describing our amazing God in a brief chapter; the Scriptures offer so much. I would encourage you to read the Bible for yourself with a desire to know God more, and you will discover Him in the Word. Here I will simply highlight key attributes of God and aspects of His relationship with humanity that will help us to worship Him and know Him as He truly is. Take some time to read and meditate on the passages cited below.

God is our Maker and deserves our reverence (Psalms 100:3). He is wise beyond our comprehension (Romans 11:33, Isaiah 55:8-9). He won't lie and His promises are unchangeable (Hebrews 6:17-19). He is steadfast (James 1:17). He is loving and merciful, and promises inheritance and eternal life through Christ (Titus 3:4-6). He loved us so much, He sent His only begotten Son to die for us (1 John 3:16, 4:9-11, Romans 5:6-8). He is patient with us, desiring all to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9, Romans 2:4).

God is approachable and sympathizes with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:14-16). He is full of compassion and mercy (Isaiah 55:6-7, James 5:11). God is our helper, never forsakes us, and is trustworthy in our times of need (Hebrews 13:5-6). He knows our needs before we ask (Matthew 6:8), hears our prayers (1 John 5:14), and answers all our prayers according to His will (1 John 5:15). In fact, Christ intercedes with the Father on our behalf (Hebrews 7:25).

Rather than permitting my relationship with my earthly father to influence my understanding of God (although I had a good father), I like to reflect on this passage and the concept of God being my Daddy: "God is compassionate on those who fear Him as a father has compassion on his children" (Psalm 103:13). I also consider how much I care for my own children, and I must acknowledge how inadequate that love is compared to God's love for me.

I know how I feel towards my children. I love them and want good things for them. I don't let them get everything they want, because in their immaturity or ignorance, some things that they want aren't good for them. Therefore, I restrict certain things or set healthy boundary conditions. For example, sweets make a nice (occasional) treat, but not a good meal. Left to their own devices, many children would love to eat nothing but sweets. But as a loving parent with more experience and wisdom, I restrict sweets to a proper frequency.

The same applies to things that are destructive or simply dangerous. As a loving parent, I work to protect my children from harm. When they are very young, I expect them to obey and train/condition them towards obedience for their good through rewards and punishments. As they grow in intellect and can communicate, I explain to them the reasoning behind my decisions and get their buy-in, so that they see the benefit of compliance. Their buy-in ensures their compliance when no one is watching, rather than simply obeying to avoid punishment.

The transition from *law* to *grace* with children is only possible with relationship. Without relationship, parents will never earn the right to speak influence into their children's lives. As children form their personal identities and exert their will (particularly during adolescence), parents lose the opportunity to simply *command* obedience. If a relationship has not been well-established, children often simply rebel (either openly or in secret). Authority alone is insufficient to gain lasting compliance because eventually, emancipation places children outside of those authority structures. At that time, they will do what they believe is right, and may reject even the good that they have been taught because of hurt or perceived hypocrisy.

Under the Law of Moses, the Israelites were given rules and promised blessings or curses based on their compliance or rebellion. In the New Covenant, there are still rules; however, God has given us a new spirit and a new heart. This births in us a *desire* to comply, knowing that our Daddy knows best and wants to protect us from harm. The *dos* and *don'ts* of Scripture are not designed to restrict our enjoyment. Rather, they are there to maximize our joy and blessing and protect us from the enemy's schemes.

Under Law, God said *do* and *don't do* with corresponding blessings and curses. However, in Christ we were permitted to see the heart of the Father, to approach Him, and to have a relationship with Him. We see His perfect nature and will in Christ. We love because He first loved us. We can receive His good counsel because we understand the extent of His love for us. Therefore, ideally we abide in His good counsel because we recognize that it has been given to us out of His love for us, and His desire for us to have a good life and an even better eternity. Daddy knows best and loves us so much He does what's necessary to keep us on the right track. How awesome is that?

As I have already alluded to, the perfect law-to-grace, loving parent/child relationship still must include discipline. Yes, even our heavenly Father disciplines His children (Hebrews 12:4-11). This is not divine punishment out of anger or wrath. This is correction for training in righteousness. Don't confuse the wrath of God (which is reserved for those who reject His love, mercy, grace, and offer for redemption) with the discipline of a loving Father who wants to restore us to the right path when we have wandered from it.

Romans 8:28 is one of my favorite verses: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose." Because I know that I love God and am called according to His purposes, this is a big promise that God will cause all things to work together for my good. However, that verse doesn't say that "all things *are* good." Nope, many challenges we face in life are not *good*. How is it that our loving and perfect God permits terrible things to happen? It is because God, in His desire for authentic relationship, has also granted free will. Free will permits man to choose evil. Evil men can bring evil things, and sin itself has resulted in a fallen world that includes sickness, death, and destruction. So, all kinds of bad things happen that are not desirable. What does God do with the bad things that come our way? He redeems them and "causes all things to work together for good!"



Trials and challenges lead to our strengthening (see James 1:2-4, 12 and 1 Peter 2:19-21, 4:1-2, and 5:8-10, for example). You see, God cares more about our character than our comfort. He takes all the bad stuff that comes our way and works something out of it that is to our benefit. Perhaps the highest “good” is conforming our character to that of Christ. Another “good” comes in the form of opportunities to minister to others. God never wastes a hurt, and the greatest ministries are birthed when we have overcome a trial and are able to empathize with and help others in similar situations. Another “good” outcome is victory for the glory of God. I recall Jesus being asked why a man had been born blind: “who sinned?” Jesus answered: to display God’s works in his life (see John 9:2-3). The man’s condition wasn’t punishment. It wasn’t good. But the situation was worked out for his good and God’s glory.

I write all this to say that God is not the purveyor of the bad things that come into your life (James 1:17). They are because of evil spirits, sinful man, and a fallen world. God, on the other hand, works to redeem those trials in our lives into something good. He uses the challenges in life to build us up, equip us to minister to others, and display His glory. Perhaps only He knows why a particular trial is allowed into our lives, or what “good” He has worked or will work from it. Many of us will have questions for Him when we meet face to face, questions that may remain unanswered in this lifetime. But when we behold His glory and bask in the love of His radiance on that amazing day, all of our challenges will certainly fade into insignificance.

As we look to God’s nature and are assured of His love and His goodness toward us, we are better able to withstand the enemy’s attacks and exchange his lies for the Truth.

**Session Two Exercise**

As a group, review and discuss the teaching from this session about who God is. List some true statements about who God is.

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Group session goal: Participants will identify areas where they have misperceptions about God. They will renounce those untruths and affirm what is true about God in those areas.

Answer the following questions INDIVIDUALLY. Consider the questions as they may reveal areas where you, yourself, have misperceptions about who God is.

1. What do you love the most about God?

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2. What do you hate the most about God?

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3. Where did your perception of God come from?

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4. Have your experiences with authorities (parents, spouse, church leaders, etc.) in your life affected your understanding of God? (How?)

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5. Did/does your perception of God come from something positive or negative in your life? Explain.

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6. Have any negative or traumatic events occurred in your life for which you resent, hate, or blame God?

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7. Do you know God is not the purveyor of evil, and His desire for authentic love and relationship necessitates free will, which permits evil to occur?

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8. Since He did not do evil to you, have you “forgiven” or released God for the bad events in your life?

9. How has your initial perception of God impacted your relationship with Him?

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10. Identify areas where your perceptions about God were false and write down the truth of the matter.

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11. Identify areas where you had misperceptions about God and verbally renounce those untruths and affirm what is true about God in those areas. See below for guidance.

In the group session, volunteers may briefly share some of their answers to the personal questions or ask for help in processing areas of concern or uncertainty. The group session should be a place of discussion if you have a hard time with seeing the lies you have believed or knowing the truth about God.

At the end of the processing (group discussion), everyone should fill in the following:

Here are my own misperceptions about God:

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This is the truth about God that I need to embrace:

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In the group (either out loud or quietly/personally), each participant should renounce the lies they have believed about God and affirm the truth. Ask God to forgive you for believing any lies about Him.

Sample affirmation and prayer:

I renounce the lie that (example: God doesn't care about my personal circumstances). I affirm that (example: God is intimately aware and involved in my life and is working all things towards my good). Lord, forgive me for believing that (example: you do not care about me).

Do you sense an improvement in your relationship or acknowledge a change in your understanding of God?



## Session Three: Surrender

A surrendered life is a prerequisite to living a victorious life. We covered the subject of *knowing God* first because the idea of surrendering to God is very intimidating if we don't know God's good nature and beneficial plans for us. Surrender demands complete trust in God. Trust is earned and not granted flippantly. But with complete trust comes complete peace.

How do we know God is good and on our side? He started it—He made us! We rebelled. And He sent Christ to save us and show us how to live. Imagine that, sending your only son to suffer and die a gruesome death to redeem people who willingly put themselves in a big mess. We didn't deserve it, but He did it anyway. Then He sent us the Holy Spirit as a pledge for our redemption, a helper to lead us in holiness, and source of power to serve Him and others. Christ overcame death and Hades to demonstrate the benefits that will be ours: inheritance in His kingdom, resurrection from death, and eternal life. All I can say is, *wow!* I can't overstate what an incredible thing God did for us. God is so very good, indeed.

Our surrender and service, therefore, are simply reciprocating the favor God has already shown us. It was His good intention for us to live for Him (2 Corinthians 5:15). It's not to get more from Him; we already got it all. Instead, all that we do for God should emanate from a heart of gratitude (Hebrews 12:28-29).

It started at the cross, but doesn't end with *His* death, or even *His* resurrection. Our transformation comes through *our* death, and *our* new life. At the waters of baptism, at the time of our rebirth, we die and are buried in the likeness of Christ (Romans 6:3-11). The old man (our unrepentant, sinful self) is crucified with Christ and buried in the waters of baptism, then we rise to new life: a new creation, born not of the womb, but of the Spirit. This is an amazing miracle! We are alive, but not in the old way of the flesh, which leads to death. We walk in the new way of the Spirit, which leads to eternal life (Romans 8:2-11). We are living sacrifices, not dead (Romans 12:1).

“Living sacrifice” sounds like an oxymoron. How can a sacrifice be alive? I believe that actually being “sacrificed,” or dying for Christ, is eminently easier than living for Him. Imagine if a terrorist entered the room and demanded that you deny Christ, or they would shoot you dead. It's easy to say that we'd be willing to die, but I would guess that a good number of people, when actually faced with the option, would love this life more than their Savior. To me, taking the bullet (and momentary fear and pain) and then being ushered into eternity with corresponding rewards is fleeting trouble for lasting bliss. Sacrifice leading to death is, therefore, “easy.”

Compare that to becoming a “living sacrifice:” living moment by moment, day by day, year by year sacrificially for the Lord's service; abiding in everything He instructed and modeled, through good times and bad, through anything and everything life and the powers of darkness can send your way; submitting your own hopes, dreams, and desires to the perfect will of God. Being a living sacrifice demands commitment and perseverance. It's not easy. But it yields amazing benefits. I would say that to most, this ongoing death to self is more difficult than the martyr's physical death.

As we become more and more surrendered to God by increasingly dying to self and living for Him, we experience deeper levels of God's peace. We learn to trust Him more as we become more intimate with the God who loves us and has our best in mind. My wife, Cindy, was once asked by a more progressive woman what she thought about me being the leader of our home. Cindy quickly responded that it gave her peace. (I doubt that was the expected answer!) Cindy focused on her responsibilities of childcare, homeschooling, home management, and so on, and didn't need to concern herself with the matters that were my responsibility. She rested in the knowledge that I took care of those things and had her and the family's best interests in mind when making decisions for the household. She didn't need to stress over any of it. This is the same peace we can experience if we permit God to be God and simply surrender to His perfect will. We can attend to matters for which we are responsible and entrust Him with everything else.

The art is knowing the difference between God's responsibilities and ours. The passage that assists me in knowing where to draw the line is Philippians 4:6-7:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This says don't worry about *anything*, but instead, give it to God, thankfully—or with eager expectation—and He will grant you supernatural peace. That peace is our guide to knowing what belongs to God and what is ours to “do.” Living in an intimate relationship with God gives us confidence that we are hearing from Him and can trust in His guidance moment by moment. That is what Cindy meant when she explained that her submission to my leadership gave her peace. She did her part and trusted me to do mine. We do our part and trust God to do His.

What, then, do we surrender in order to attain to this peace? Everything!

Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ... So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.” (Luke 14:25-30, 33)

This is Jesus doing a *crusade* or open-air evangelistic meeting. He has a crowd. He turns towards them and tells them that He loves them and has a wonderful plan for their lives. If they just raise their hands and welcome Him into their hearts, they will be saved. Is that what He said? Nope! Instead, He says that to be His disciples they need to surrender everything they hold dear: their families, their possessions, and even their own lives. Those who do not count the cost will become a laughingstock.

This is a very serious, and very uncomfortable, passage. However, it's quite telling of Jesus's true objectives. He was not chasing numbers. He was seeking the committed—those who will surrender completely and overcome unto salvation.

Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was:

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. (Matthew 22:36-38)

Complete surrender, and the cost of discipleship, is to love God fully. Anything that we put between us and God becomes a hindrance and a distraction, even an idol. These things invite attacks from the enemy, as we have an “open door” through our lusts or divided interests. On the other hand, if our desire and focus is on our relationship with God, then all else is secondary. Our peace and joy firmly rest in our walk with God, and we can be confident that nothing can separate us from God's love.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, “FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.” But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

Remaining in Christ's love and being a conqueror is eminently desirable. However, the promise of our victory only holds if we do not allow any “created thing” to come between us and God. If we are firm in our relationship with God and erect an impenetrable hedge around that sacred space, we can extinguish all of the flaming arrows of the enemy. Our connection to God is the pinnacle of joy, peace, sense of worth, love, belonging, and personal identity.

This is not to say that there aren't other things in life that we value. Of course, we love our spouses and our children, value our other relationships, and appreciate our many material blessings. However, with God placed firmly and undisputedly on the top of the value scale, all else is simply bonus. Our loving Father grants all those earthly and temporal blessings in our lives because He can, and because He loves to bless. Remember, He is Daddy. Being a dad myself, I know what it's like to give my children the little things: a sweet, a good meal, fishing, a game, or some fun. These are small things, but I do them because I know they make my children happy, and it's the little things that keep us connected in relationship. I like to think it's the same for us in our relationship to God.

Yet even if those earthly blessings should never manifest, or should be withdrawn (and they will, because they are all temporary), we can rest in the goodness of our relationship with our Father. That's not to say that we won't experience negative emotions during loss; it's to say that we overcome the negative emotions by resting in God's ability to overshadow the loss with His sufficiency. That is the hallmark of a surrendered life.

One challenge with surrender is the American mindset of what we consider "inalienable rights." You know: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We consider it injustice for anyone (even God?) to infringe upon those perceived "rights." Yet God never promised a life of ease. In fact, we are assured that we will experience much tribulation (Acts 14:22), and that we should not consider it strange (1 Peter 4:12). Persecution is promised (2 Timothy 3:12). The kingdom paradigm is to learn to suffer with grace and permit the various trials and tribulations to have their benefit in our lives. Then we can consider it all joy (James 1:2).

When I was first introduced to the concept of completely surrendering to God, I was handed a blank piece of paper. Instead of being asked to list all the things in my life that I would be willing to give up, I was asked to simply sign the bottom and permit Him to list what He needed when the time came. The idea was that I was literally giving my life as a blank check, a living sacrifice, with no exceptions.

When I was presented that blank piece of paper, I signed it without hesitation, not knowing what it would be that I was agreeing to. An early casualty was my career and the income it provided. God wanted me to devote my best efforts towards His service, not making money for large corporations. Then it was my interests: TV and muscle cars were a waste of time and money, a huge distraction from serving Him. Then it was my dream home. Then it was my country, with all the safety and security it offered me and my family. With the African call came relinquishing creature comforts such as electricity, appliances, indoor plumbing, and our familiar diet. Likewise, it added many threats and risks for me and my family, such as thugs, sickness, and road hazards. However, I couldn't say no. I had signed. Everything I had belonged to Him. I entrusted my life and everything in it to Him. Ultimately, surrender gave me peace and joy.

We often think that we're giving up so much when we surrender fully to God. It can be a painful process. However, I want to paint you another picture. Imagine you are walking down a path to a friend's house. On the side of the path, you see a glimmer of shining light. Upon inspection, you discover a gold coin. Bending to pick it up, you see more coins. You uncover some leaves and find a whole box of pure gold coins! You hear the neighbor's dog bark and quickly cover it up.

You are now determined to get that buried treasure, but you see it's impossible to take it by stealth. You need a better plan. When you arrive at your friend's house you ask him who owns that property. He says an old widow owns it. You tell your friend you like the area and are considering moving there. Your friend insists it wouldn't do for you, since the property only has a run-down, single-wide manufactured home and a couple overgrown acres. But you insist upon looking into it, regardless of the appearance.

Later you meet the old widow and offer a fair sum for the parcel; she insists that she intends to die there and leave it to her son. You persist and double your offer, a truly ridiculous amount. She still resists, not liking change at her old age. You then triple the offer, and she returns a perplexed look, not knowing what

has overcome your reason. She returns a four-times counteroffer, and you quickly accept. She is shocked, and now visions of a nice new double-wide with the pantry she always wanted flashes in her head behind an uncontrollable grin.

But you have one challenge: you don't have the money. But you *do* have a nice house on some acreage, free-and-clear cars, a tractor, and some livestock. You tell her to give you two weeks to raise the cash. You proceed to find cash buyers and liquidate everything you have at cutthroat prices. Your family and friends think you have gone mad.

After two weeks you clear the deal, owning nothing but the clothes on your back. And that night you go to the field where you found the treasure and exhume the spoil. It's there, and much, much more than you had ever dreamed! You are rich beyond comprehension.

My question is: were you crazy for giving up everything you had to acquire that property? Of course not! With the spoil, you could purchase hundreds of equivalent properties. You were the sanest person in the story. It's everyone else who was ignorant.

This is not a new story. It's simply my version of a parable Jesus told: "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matthew 13:44). Our total surrender to God is as rewarding as this in the end, even if it comes with some challenges and some stripping away before we receive what has been promised.

When Jesus faced the cross, He begged God for a reprieve. He was stressed to the point of sweating blood. But when He surrendered to the Father's will, He was granted supernatural peace. It certainly wasn't the most pleasant path, but it was the path of peace.

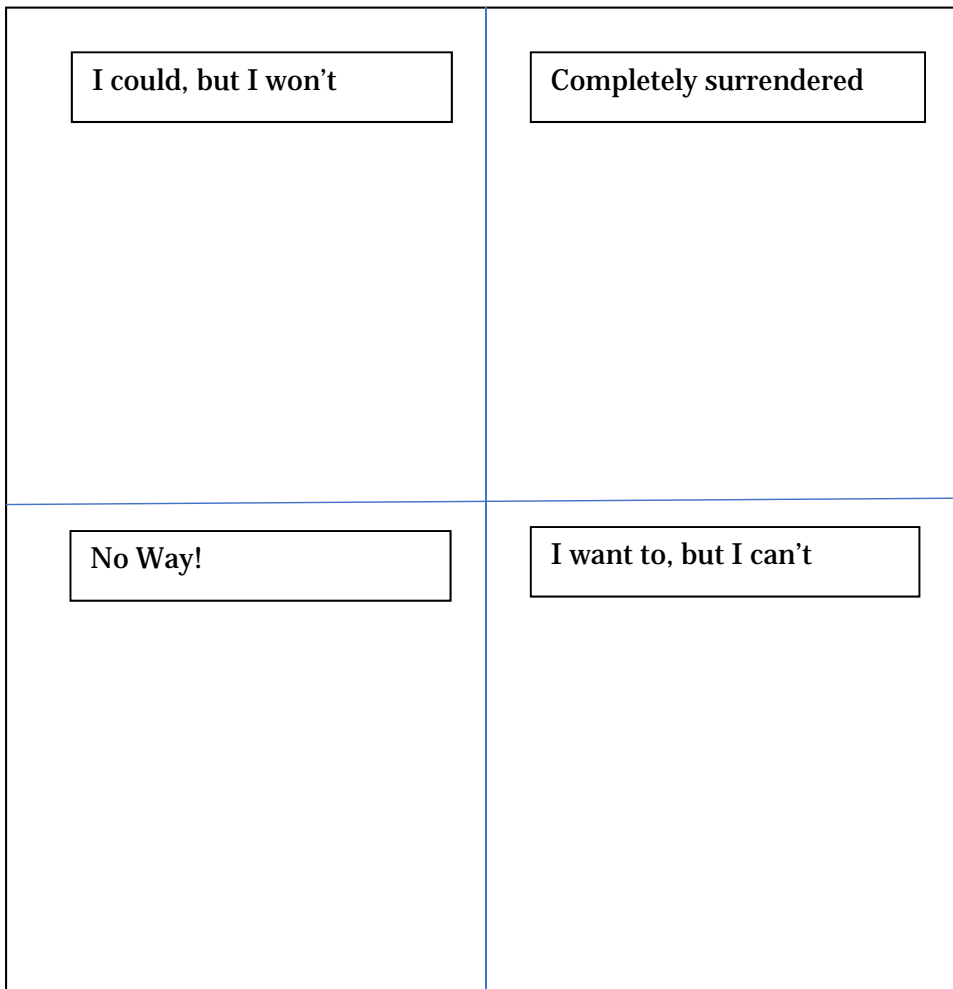
The late missionary Jim Elliot, who ultimately gave his life for the Lord and for those he sought to reach with the gospel, said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose." How true. A fulfilled life, a life of joy, peace, and victory, is attained through complete surrender, and the benefits thereof will not be experienced in any other way.



**Session Three Exercise**

Consider how surrendered you are in each of the following areas and write each word where you feel it belongs in the diagram below.

- |                       |                     |                      |
|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Spouse                | Comfort             | Companionship        |
| Children              | Personal Health     | Possessions          |
| Friendships           | Personal Safety     | Family Relationships |
| Personal Time         | Safety of Family    | Personal Rights      |
| Internet/Social Media | Personal Plans      | Appetites/Lusts      |
| Aspirations/Dreams    | Identity/self-image | Finances             |
| Pets                  | Personal security   | Reputation           |
| Conveniences          | Security of Family  | Hobbies              |
| Entertainment         | Life/Mortality      | Career               |



*Christianity Arising*

Process/discuss personal items on the list as needed. Publicly confess lack of surrender in specific areas as needed/desired. The group should take time to pray through each area of the quadrant (personally, quietly). Sample prayers are below.

1. "I could, but I won't." Lord, I confess that even though I trust you in many things, I have let selfishness get in the way of complete surrender. I want to give you control and release my personal ownership in the following areas:

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2. "Complete surrender." Lord, I have given you complete control in these areas of my life and I thank you for caring for me and leading me. I ask that you help me continually hold these things before You with an open hand.

3. "I want to, but I can't." Lord, forgive me where I have been fearful or lacked in self-control to completely surrender to You in the following areas:

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\_\_\_\_\_ I surrender these things to You now and ask you to help me to trust in You more fully.

4. "No Way." Lord, forgive me for having hardness of heart in certain areas where I have failed to surrender fully to you. I give you the following areas:

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and I ask You to give me a will that agrees with Your will, desires for things that please You, and a more complete surrender in areas where I have held on to my personal opinions or desires.

5. Would you sign the blank piece of paper now, a blank check, your life offered to Him? If yes, physically do it.

## Session Four: Repentance

God created us to do good (Ephesians 2:10). We rebelled against Him and sinned and were corrupted. He set out to redeem us from darkness and transfer us to His kingdom through the forgiveness of our sins (Colossians 1:13-14) and renew our nature through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. His offer for our redemption was freely given by His grace and is accessed simply by our faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). The only thing of value we have to offer is our faith and devotion.

His great offer is not for nothing; His grace has a purpose. Grace empowers us to become what we were initially created to be and do what we were created to do (Titus 2:11-14). If we remain who we were after regeneration, then we must believe that the blood of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit are powerless to redeem our nature. That gospel is not very “good news” at all, because if that is the case, we still are slaves to sin, which leads to death (Romans 6:16).

So how do we break free? Since God offers the gift of redemption through His grace, and all we have to offer is faith and devotion, we simply need to commit. We must renounce our old ways and embrace our new identity. This change of mind is called *repentance*. This commitment is a prerequisite to redemption.

When the Jews who had petitioned Pilate to crucify Christ realized that they had killed their Messiah, they asked Peter what they should do. He answered, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Let me paint a word picture of what this means.

If you are given a bottle of poison, what happens if you drink it? You die. So, what if you wash the outside of the bottle and drink it? Still death. What if you pour out the contents and fill it with water, without cleaning the inside of the bottle? Still death. What if you clean the inside of the bottle with soap without first pouring out the contents? Still death. So how can that bottle be redeemed for usefulness?

There are several steps necessary. First, pour out the contents of the bottle. Second, rinse the outside of the bottle with water. Third, wash the inside of the bottle using soap. Lastly, fill the bottle with clean water, and *now* it is safe to drink. This is a perfect illustration of our condition with sin.

Scripture says we all sin. Sin leads to death. In order for God to redeem us, we must deal with the sin issue. If we simply get baptized, we will still have sin that leads to death, because water alone doesn’t change our inward condition. Baptism without repentance is simply taking a bath. To deal with our inward condition, we must make that commitment, or change our minds about sin, renouncing our former ways and embracing our new life. This is called *repentance*. In response to this change of mind, we are cleansed on the inside by the heavenly soap, the only substance with the power to clean us, the blood of Jesus Christ. Once cleansed, we can receive the Holy Spirit and be filled with His presence and power.

Without repentance (complete change of mind and full commitment) the cleansing is not possible, because you can’t clean a full bottle. It must be emptied first, *then* it can be cleaned. If we remain in our sin, we can’t expect the blood of Christ to offer efficacy. The blood of Jesus washes us from the corruption of our past sins (2 Peter 1:9); we are redeemed that we may go and “sin no more” (John 8:11).

That is not to say we instantly become perfect and never err again. It is to say that we make the commitment to live righteously (with a heart toward God) and ask the Lord for forgiveness for mistakes going forward. Christ went to the cross once, yes. The blood of Christ was shed once, yes. But we confess and repent for our sins and appropriate the power of the blood each time it is needed. This happens at conversion for our prior sins, and primarily at the Lord’s table, or communion, for current sins:

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth

is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:6-10)

The word *fellowship* in this passage is the same word translated *communion*. Communion is referred to throughout the New Testament as the “breaking of bread,” in reference to the Last Supper discourse of Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:23-24).

I know that modern churches disregard or minimize the importance of regularly taking communion. However, in the early church, communion was the primary reason for the weekly Lord’s Day (Sunday) gathering of the saints (see 1 Corinthians 11:20 and 33). Jesus emphasized the spiritual importance of partaking in His body and blood (John 6:53-58). Public confession of sins was also an early church practice (James 5:16), the importance of which I can’t understate.

Jesus didn’t die to simply take away the penalty of sin. He came to take away sin’s power (1 John 3:8). Sin is willful enslavement. We are slaves to the one we obey (Romans 6:16). Jesus was sent to release the captives and free those who are oppressed (Luke 4:18). One way the enemy keeps us easily entangled in sin is through living in secrecy. The chains of bondage remain when we keep our struggles and weaknesses in darkness, permitting enemy attacks. (We will discuss in the next chapter how demons leverage willful sin as permission to attack.) However, it isn’t just the sin that empowers the enemy. The secrecy often results in shame, self-condemnation, and defeat, all of which permit demons to have a field day. That is why communion with public confession completely destroys the work of the enemy.

Public confession eliminates the shame, self-condemnation, and defeat. The enemy can’t keep whispering in your ear: *you will never stop this behavior; you will never be good enough; you are a fraud and a hypocrite; if they knew what you were doing, they would reject you; God knows you are a fraud*, and so on. Through confession, we stand firm and face the enemy and tell him: *I know I messed up, and I am forgiven! God knows my weaknesses and will help me to overcome them. You shut up and leave me alone!* When we confess and then partake in the bread and wine (the body and blood of Christ), our sins are forgiven. Our sins are removed as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12).

I have a lot of experience performing deliverance. Occasionally I have encountered stubborn demons who refused to relent. Sometimes they speak and explain why they won’t go, and other times the Holy Spirit informs us. On numerous occasions, a demon refused to go because of unrepented sin. When this occurs, we tell the victim to simply confess the sin and ask God to forgive them through Christ. When we pray again, the demon relents and is defeated. Upon confession and repentance, forgiveness is immediate and absolute; the enemy has no more authority over that victim. That’s the power of the blood!

This is why self-condemnation (living under the power of sin, believing it can’t be forgiven) is the devil’s playground. The Holy Spirit convicts; the enemy condemns. If you self-condemn, you are complicit in the work of the enemy and believe contrary to will of the Lord. When convicted, we must simply confess and repent, and then we are free. There is no condemnation in Christ, only freedom. Not some fake, theological freedom that allows us to live in rampant sin without experiencing any consequences. No, we have *real* freedom. By coming to the fellowship in humility and confessing our weaknesses, we neuter the enemy, and receive cleansing and forgiveness by the blood of Christ. By shedding light in the darkness, we allow the Holy Spirit to reign and lead us into holiness and conviction. Our struggles lose grip over time. We track towards complete and total victory and a clear conscience. I suggest that if your church does not practice regular communion with public confession and mutual accountability, gather a small group for a regular meeting like the early church did (Acts 2:42 and 46). This practice is too vital to neglect.

The reason why I emphasize commitment when defining repentance is because learning God’s expectations for His children is a process. *Commitment* best describes our change of mind when being saved. It can still take some time to become familiar with some of the nuances of God’s perfect will for our lives. Sin is any action or thought contrary to God’s will. There is some sin that is doing the wrong things (acts of commission). Then, there are things we fail to do that we should (acts of omission).

The standard is set forth in Scripture. We are expected to be “doers” of the written Word (James 1:22). We are also expected to listen to the Holy Spirit (see James 4:17 and 1 John 2:27). The standards are high. And anyone who tells you that obedience is optional, and that we will not undergo a judgment, is doing violence to the Word of God. Though it is true that we are saved by grace through faith, we will indeed be judged by our deeds (Matthew 16:27, 25:31-46, Romans 2:5-11, Revelation 20:12-13). And for clarity, Jesus told us by what standard we will be judged: His words (John 12:47-50, see also Matthew 7:24-27). Not only are the standards high, but they are also indisputable for anyone humble enough to accept Scripture at face value. It takes a lot of theological gymnastics to overcome what is clearly laid out in the New Testament and substantiated by the early church witness.

Though God’s standards are very high, His expectations are reasonable. He is patient and permits us time to receive and adapt to His will. God is in the long game. He cares more about how we finish than how we start. I know we Christians demand immediate conformance in new converts to whatever standard we have achieved, though it may have taken decades for us to arrive there. But God sees beginning, middle, and end at once. He can offer the same reward to the eleventh-hour worker as the full-day worker because of His great mercy (Matthew 20:1-16). We may view this as a travesty and an injustice, not realizing how much we desire God’s mercy for ourselves and yet fail to offer it to others. God judges on a sliding scale, and that just doesn’t sit well with most of us. He extends mercy to those who are merciful (Matthew 5:7, 7:1-2). He holds the willful sinner to a higher standard than the ignorant (John 19:11, Hebrews 10:26-31). Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to commit to abiding in God’s will, according to His word, to the best of our abilities, seeking His forgiveness, guidance, and assistance when we fall short. As long as we are committed, and doing our part, God will continually help us to overcome our weaknesses.

**Session Four Exercise**

Read through the following list of examples of areas of sin. (This list is not exhaustive, so consider other personal sins also). On a piece of paper, write down sins in your life that are RECENT, ONGOING, or are of SIGNIFICANCE in your PAST (especially where there is ongoing doubt, guilt, or condemnation). Be honest with yourself. This exercise is for your benefit, so be transparent.

- Sexual sins: fornication, masturbation, adultery, pornography, fantasizing (impure thoughts)
- Behavioral sins: substance abuse, gambling, anger, stealing, violence, occult
- Communication sins: lying, gossip, slander, arguing, exaggeration, hurtful words, cursing, complaining
- Attitude sins: pride, greed, judging, self-righteousness, laziness, worldliness, selfishness, rebellion, idolatry, bitterness, unforgiveness
- Things you know God wants you to change (commission and omission): Not loving spouse, being easily offended, not taking personal responsibility, not serving God, resisting the leading of the Holy Spirit, wasting time or money on fruitless things (entertainment, hobbies, possessions), overindulgence, lack of self-control in specific areas

**Group Exercise**

Break up into pairs or groups of three. Confess the sins you have written down to at least one person in your group and ask the Lord to forgive you, to cleanse you from all sin by the blood of Jesus. Then thank the Lord for His forgiveness and ask Him to send the Holy Spirit to renew your mind and empower you to resist temptations in these areas in the future.

For use in a future exercise (deliverance), write down the five most prominent and significant items on your list below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Literally burn your list. It is tossed into the depths of the sea.

## Session Five: Spiritual Warfare

Disclaimer: the information and practices in this chapter are gleaned from years of firsthand experience performing countless deliverances and are supported by the early church witness and the Scriptures. While Scripture does not offer detail such as what is provided here, nothing presented contradicts Scripture, and it is proven by experience.

Throughout the Gospels, we see that Jesus didn't go anywhere without encountering demons. These encounters continued in the ministry of His followers, as documented in the Epistles and throughout the Ante-Nicene church era (the first few hundred years after the resurrection of Christ). Yet today, we are to believe that the demons magically disappeared or are somehow rare. Instead of considering their prevalence, we give common demonic afflictions clinical names and medicate them.

I've already shared the early church understanding of demons as disembodied spirits of the Nephilim, cursed to roam the earth. This is alluded to in Genesis 6:1-4 and detailed in the Book of Enoch, which was widely accepted as authentic in original form by the early church, and is even quoted in our New Testament (Jude 14-15). Throughout the Scriptures and early church writings, and in my own experience, the demons are committed to disturbing humanity with all manner of difficulties and ailments. They cause mental, emotional, physical, and relational challenges. Their motives are several.

First, they are jealous of humanity because we were granted the opportunity for redemption, and they were not. I believe they simply want to avenge this perceived injustice. More strategically, they are pawns of Satan serving the kingdom of darkness, which is bent on overthrowing God. They are tasked with maintaining Satan's ranks and work to block humans from repenting and changing allegiance back to God. If their efforts fail, they work to disturb the saints, to render them ineffective and inconsequential for kingdom service. Certainly, they want to see as few people as possible redeemed from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God.

There is a myth that born-again Christians are immune from spiritual attack. That is a lie from the pits of Hell, and it provides free reign for the enemy in people's lives. Churches that espouse this deception are the safest place for demonic activity, as demons can be hidden in plain sight in such an environment. Scripture, on the other hand, warns us that we need to be aware of and resist the enemy. Attacks are anticipated, as you can see in the following passages:

Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. (1 Peter 5:8-9)

Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*. And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, (Ephesians 6:10-18).

These passages do not in any way support the idea that now that we are saved, we are immune to spiritual attack. In fact, they state the opposite. They make it clear that there are spiritual powers of darkness executing the schemes of their leader, Satan, against us. We must be alert towards the attacks, resisting the advance, and praying continually.

Many choose to believe that the bad guys simply go away with all their effects when the Holy Spirit takes over at the new birth. This is because in Christ we have complete authority over demons. The authority part *is* true. However, we must actively appropriate that authority and lay hold of the freedom that is offered. Think of it this way: salvation is freely offered to us, but we must receive and accept it. In the same way we have authority over demons, we have authority over sicknesses; but we must participate in gaining freedom from both afflictions. Do we expect a sick person to come out of the baptismal waters whole? No, not likely. We expect that to receive healing by the same authority that grants us salvation, we must labor in prayer and watch for God to do the work. It's the same with deliverance: the benefit and power are there; however, we still need to strive for it in faith and prayer, and watch God deliver the freedom.

Let me address another elephant in the room: the belief that a born-again Christian with the indwelling Holy Spirit can't be possessed by a demon. This is actually accurate, according to the common definition of "possessed." However, the work of demons upon believers is more what some call "oppression." The truth is, demons can attack anyone, without necessarily taking over their faculties or living within them. And they can have the same impact on someone whether they are in them or simply attack from outside. Therefore, the argument about Christians being "possessed by demons" is only of theological interest; it has little practical relevance.

A single demon can attack several people concurrently. They are spirits and are not spatially limited as we understand things. They are only limited in the amount of work they can accomplish at once. They operate with rank under orders, like a military. They are assigned to particular victims and usually given a work common to all whom they oppress. They claim "permissions" in order for their attack to be successful. They leverage weaknesses or "open doors" as points of entry.

Permissions come in various forms. The first one, which we already discussed, is *sin*. Ephesians 4:26-27 says, "BE ANGRY, AND *yet* DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity." Here we see that unchecked emotions or unrepented sin can give the devil an opportunity, place, or foothold. Anger is a natural emotion. When someone offends us or something goes wrong, we can unintentionally get angry. That's natural and to be expected. The admonition here is that we should not allow our feelings to result in behaviors that are sin: do not retaliate with words or physical harm, harbor evil thoughts, or seek revenge or evil recourse. Instead, turn the other cheek, pray for the other party, count it all joy, and respond in gentleness and love (easier said than done, I know).

We are human, and in spite of our good intentions and consistent efforts, an unforeseen event can lead to unintentional negative emotions which, if we are weak, can result in a sinful response. However, the battle is easier won if we recognize the negative emotions quickly, acknowledge the temptation, and resist it—remembering that the emotions themselves are not sin.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Here we see that if we are tempted, we are urged not to sin. If we do sin, it leads to death (see Romans 6:23). Yet even if we do fail (and we all do, from time to time), we also have already discussed how to deal with that sin: confess and repent (2 Corinthians 7:10, 1 John 1:9). Through confession and repentance, any open door (or "foothold" in the King James version) is shut. However, if we do *not* confess and repent quickly (as the verses above say, "let the sun go down" on our anger), *then* we invite an attack from the enemy.

A hidden insight here is that the open door to demonic attack is nearly always emotional, often trauma leading to unwanted negative emotions. That is the open door, or the beacon inviting an initial attack. The sin that follows gives "permission" for ongoing attack. That sin requires confession and repentance in order for the permission to be withdrawn and for the attack to cease.



The trauma that opened the door also requires emotional healing, as unhealed “soul wounds” from trauma and negative emotions are invitations to ongoing attack in and of themselves. In the spiritual realm, believers appear as beings of light, their faith determining the brightness. Emotional wounds are visible as spots of darkness, which demons recognize as weak spots open for attack. In our experience, the most common emotional trauma gatekeepers, or open doors, are fear, insecurity, and rejection (and to a lesser extent, unforgiveness). A great majority of attacks start because of some emotionally traumatic event or circumstance associated with one of those. We will talk more about closing the door to demonic attack through emotional healing in the next chapter.

A second permission that allows demons to operate is curses, which also are beacons or invitations for attack. Curses come in various forms; one is witchcraft or sorcery (which is simply sending demons to accomplish a task; there is no “good” witchcraft, such as charms). Participating in witchcraft ultimately exposes the “witch” to demonic attack, and the curse sends an attack to the victim.

Generational curses can come from the unrepented sin of deceased relatives. For example, if a man murders someone in cold blood and never repents, he is most certainly afflicted by a demon (such as anger) associated with that event. When he dies, that demon may then attack other members of the family (sons, grandsons, and so on). An alcoholic may have a spirit of intemperance or even defeat, and that can be passed on to his offspring.

Another curse is a curse of words. One need not use sorcery to send a demon. A person in authority can send a demon with careless words, such as a father telling a son he will never accomplish anything in life or telling a daughter that her marriage will never work. Such words can unleash demons of defeat or other attackers that work to accomplish those ends. They become prophetic statements through demonic agency.

The good news about curses is that we are assured victory over them. We have all authority over the demons behind curses (Luke 10:19) and need not fear them at all. They must obey us, though they may be reluctant to and will test the limits. Of course, they really don’t want to leave their victims, and certainly don’t want to be banished to the pit. As such, they will take advantage of any fear or doubt you have. As your faith (which is visible to them) rises, they become more responsive to your commands. When I was new to deliverance, manifesting demons (loud and misbehaving victims) were common, as they hoped I would give up. However, now I very rarely see such manifestations.

Though demons seldom actually indwell their victims, command them to leave them as if they are physically present. At your command, they come (recognizing that they are being attacked and wanting to protect their turf), but also at your command, they will depart. Don’t be surprised if they manifest (and even speak). Just tell them to be quiet and get out, in Jesus’ name. Do not seek information from demons or have fun with the process. The deliverance process can be traumatic on the victim and should be handled maturely and expeditiously. Your own curiosity about the demonic realm could also function as an open door.

Beyond witchcraft and curses, demons have general negative impacts on our lives: health, emotional, mental, and so on. Those effects can linger even if a person is delivered from the affecting demon. Therefore, during deliverance it is helpful to command demons to gather “all effects” when they leave. “Orders” are another element that should not be neglected in deliverance. Demons receive orders to attack. Those orders must be gathered and destroyed to prevent a recurring attack. Further, demons enter through open doors. Those doors, or “gates” must be shut to prevent a recurring attack.

Curses, and any objects associated with curses, act as beacons that must be deactivated. Curses must be canceled to prevent a recurring attack. Angels can be sent to deactivate objects, preventing a recurring attack.

Once a demon is expelled, it roams freely and can attack again. Because of that, we send them into the pit, the place where their angelic fathers dwell (2 Peter 2:4) and their expected final destination (Luke 8:31).

In performing several hundred (maybe thousands) of deliverances, I have personally seen recurring attacks associated with every one of the potential “beacons” or “open doors” mentioned above. As a result, I work to address every one of those issues during deliverance. None of the above is necessary to get rid of the demon. You won’t find any of those matters detailed in Scripture. All it takes is faith in Jesus Christ, by whose authority the demon is forced to comply, to get rid of the demon. However, if the reason the demon had permission to attack in the first place is not addressed, what will prevent another demon (or even the same one) from attacking again? Nothing. That’s why I am sharing these details.

I mentioned that demons operate with a chain of command and receive orders from above. They also typically target a specific challenge area: lust, pride, anger, depression, and so on. Occasionally we encounter an indeterminate demon, or a “jack of all trades.” A demon’s name or specific work(s) can be identified through spiritual gifts. I very rarely receive names, but normally just their particular work (I don’t find names very helpful). Some people call out familiarly named demons (Jezebel, Leviathan, Python, etc.), but that should be done with caution, as there can be a stigma associated with these names or misunderstandings about their particular work. The Holy Spirit provides information for ministry (for the edification of the Body), not for accusation or to satisfy curiosity. In my experience, the Holy Spirit will identify areas of attack so that fruitful ministry can occur.

While I often rely on the use of spiritual gifts in deliverance, it is just as easy and effective to perform what I call a “blind deliverance.” This method does not offer 100% precision, but proves effective at knocking down the most obvious difficulties in someone’s life. This method involves a little more conversation, where you attempt to pinpoint the areas of challenge the victim is facing; these indicate potential spiritual attack. Once those issues are addressed through deliverance, people can see more clearly to address the less significant attacks that may be obscured.

Here is a sample prayer used in blind deliverance:

I bind the spirit with the highest authority causing (issue of concern). I command you to come with all works, effects, and orders. Go into the pit in Jesus’ name. Burn all orders and lock the gate.

If the subject (either you or someone you are ministering to) has any allegiance or involvement in occult activities, renunciation is required. Here is an example of renunciation:

I renounce any allegiance or participation or belief in (issue of concern). Lord, break any ties I have with (issue), in Jesus’ name.

For any area where you suspect a curse, the curse must be broken. Here is a sample prayer:

I break, cancel, and nullify any curse related to (issue of concern) in Jesus’ name. Lord, send angels and burn any objects associated with curses, in Jesus’ name.

Demons are relentless and attack everyone. Being attacked demonically is not unique or special and should not be stigmatized. Identifying demonic activity is as simple as perceiving any unwanted negative emotions, health problems, challenges, issues, and so on, in your life. Sudden, unexplained changes may be an indication that a demonic attack has occurred. Recurring temptations and sin issues are also signs of demonic influence. The path to freedom is simply standing firm against the unwanted effects and praying against any culprits.

Dreams, the gift of discerning of spirits, words of knowledge, visions, and prophetic words may inform you of specific attacks. But absent that, just follow your instincts. When something is wrong, assume there is a spiritual component to it. Stand against it in prayer. If there is no demonic influence, no harm is done, and if there is, you are then free of it.

**Session Five Exercise**

Write down (from the last exercise) the five most prominent and significant items from your list of sins:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Next, let's try to identify any "strongholds" that may be present. Consider areas in your life where you find victory elusive. Also consider family trends (emotional, psychological, physical, behavioral), as well as occult involvement/influence, false religion, allegiances, any idolatry you can identify, degenerative physical conditions, life obstacles that have felt "insurmountable," and emotional weaknesses or bondage. Note below any specific strongholds that you can identify.

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Not all bad things are from demons. However, too many are to not treat them all accordingly. Better to get rid of a demon who is not there than to let one remain who is.

**Group Exercise**

As a group, decide how you want to pray through the strongholds identified above for each person. The facilitator can pray with everyone individually, or groups can separate into pairs to pray together.

Pray through each of the items on your list. Below is a sample prayer.

I bind the spirit with the highest authority concerning (issue of concern from your list). I command you to come with all works, effects, and orders. Go into the pit in Jesus' name. Burn all orders and lock the gate.

If you have any allegiance or involvement in occult activities, renunciation is required. Here is an example of renunciation:

I renounce any allegiance or participation or belief in (issue of concern from your list). Lord, break any ties I have with (issue), in Jesus' name.

For any area where you suspect a curse, the curse must be broken. Here is a sample prayer:

I break, cancel, and nullify any curse related to (issue of concern) in Jesus' name. Lord, send angels and burn any objects associated with curses, in Jesus' name.

Repeat for each of most prominent areas of challenge in your life, including the five prominent sins from the prior exercise.

Ask the Lord to send the Holy Spirit to fortify and heal any area impacted by demonic attack. Ask the Lord to send angels to place a hedge of protection around you. Ask the Lord to renew your mind in each area of weakness or struggle.



## **Session Six: Emotional Healing**

I've already mentioned in brief the role that emotional trauma plays in demonic attack. Emotional trauma can cause an injury to the soul (a "soul wound") which is visible in the spiritual realm. Soul wounds are gatekeepers, or open doors to demonic attack. Trauma and emotional events are the point of attack the enemy nearly always uses. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to identify and facilitate healing of these wounds to prevent recurring spiritual attacks.

Emotional healing is a fundamental work of God. A prophecy about Christ, and the work of the gospel He ushered in, says, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners" (Isaiah 61:1). Clearly, Jesus is concerned with our emotional healing as much as with physical and spiritual healing.

Psalms 34:18 says, "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted. And saves those who are crushed in spirit," and Psalm 147:3 tells us, "He heals the brokenhearted. And binds up their wounds." These verses are an assurance that God is close to us when we are emotionally hurting, and that He desires our wholeness.

Though emotional healing is God's work, like deliverance and physical healing, it's not automatic. It's something in which we need to participate in order to obtain the benefits that God freely offers. We identify, process, and seek God for the healing. God does the healing. It's that simple!

The most common gatekeepers we have seen in ministry are fear, insecurity, rejection, and (to a lesser extent), unforgiveness. These are often the attacks that come after emotional trauma of one kind or another, and because of the lasting impact of traumatic events, they keep the door open for continued demonic influence. In my opinion, these are targeted because they are what I call the "softer sins."

Fornication, adultery, outbursts of anger, drunkenness, stealing, lying, and so on would be readily identified as sin by most people. The "softer sins," on the other hand, are what some would consider mere weaknesses or character flaws, but which nonetheless give the powers of darkness permission for attack. Often a victim remains unaware that they are giving the enemy access, and yet Scriptural commands and admonitions are clear about such things as fear, rejection, and unforgiveness that we can all so easily indulge in.

The Bible says, do not be anxious or worry (Philippians 4:6, 7, 1 Peter 5:7, Psalms 55:22, and Matthew 6:25-34) and do not fear (John 14:27, Isaiah 41:10, Hebrews 13:6; there are many more examples). We're also told that we needn't accept rejection, because God will never leave or forsake us (Hebrew 13:5, Philippians 4:5b).

There are commands not to remain in bitterness and unforgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15, 18:33-35). Matthew 18 implies that we will be subjected to "the torturers" if we harbor unforgiveness. This is exactly what happens when we allow unforgiveness to open the door; the enemy takes advantage of our sin and attacks. And again:

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

These are explicit commands; disobedience is technically sin. The powers of darkness are legalists. They hold us to the letter. Satan is the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). He looks for faults. We need to be proactive and guard against these "softer sins." Identify them, confess, and repent. God's instant forgiveness nullifies the enemy's claims against us.

Anger and hatred are common responses to perpetrators of trauma, and these also can function as open door. We have already discussed not remaining with anger, and so giving the devil a foothold. Elsewhere

Scripture says of hatred: “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” (1 John 3:15) And again: “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20). No doubt the “accuser of the brethren” will be doing some accusing and take full advantage of our sin if we harbor hatred towards others.

Those who have been victimized must forgive the perpetrator in the same way that the Lord has forgiven them, in order to take away any claim the enemy uses against them. This is easier said than done, especially if the perpetrator exhibits no remorse for their actions. Sometimes the actions are ongoing. As I stated earlier, we innately desire for justice for perpetrators, but mercy for ourselves when we sin. The truth is, all mercy is unjust. To be able to forgive others who hurt us, we must acquire a divine perspective on the matter. Remember, our enemy is not flesh and blood, but rather evil spiritual entities (Ephesians 6:12). When a perpetrator sins, he is a victim of Satan and has been deceived into thinking wrongly about his actions. He will eventually be judged for his actions, unless he repents. Though the perpetrator of wrong may be undeserving of mercy, God loves that sinner and desires that he repents and is saved just as much as He loves you and desires your redemption. That is why the Lord commands us to love our enemies, do good to those who do bad to us, show mercy to others, don’t judge, forgive those who wrong us, turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, pray for those who persecute us, and so on. It’s because God loves them and they are simply victims and pawns of God’s true enemy, Satan.

Defeat is another common spiritual attack we mustn’t accept. We are children of God, and nothing can separate us from God’s love. We are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:37). We serve a God attentive to our needs and prayers. Daddy is on our side! The Apostle Paul said it best: “*we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed*” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). We will never be defeated.

Depression can function as a gatekeeper because it often sneaks up on us and we are slow to identify its effects. Depression gives the enemy permission because it is the opposite of being joyful always (see Philippians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:16, 2 Corinthians 13:11). Deliverance, followed by positive replacement, is important to gaining and retaining emotional wellness and freedom. Be proactive in holding on to your joy.

Always praise God and worship Him with thanksgiving. It’s powerful! We always have so much to be thankful for. Count your blessings: life, salvation, provision, and so on. Remember how far God has taken you. Read the Psalms when you are down. Keep praise and worship music playing in the background. Sing to yourself. Pray always. These actions can rewire us emotionally.

I have heard of someone who could not get rid of a demon. Instead of accepting defeat, she simply praised God instead. And the demon literally couldn’t stand it and left. Ha! Love that so much. Read these passages for encouragement: Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2, 1 Timothy 2:1, and Ephesians 5:18-20.

My home life was a mess. My dad was a good man with an honest heart but was abandoned by his wife (my mother) who left him for other men. He struggled to raise two children alone. He loved my mother and always accepted her back, hoping she would be faithful. She always left again. My father was a deeply hurt man who didn’t know how to cope with his pain. He was an alcoholic and verbally abusive to us children when drunk. He drank every night, and the abuse was commonplace. All of this because he was depressed and rejected.

My mother, on the other hand, was adulterous shortly after she married my father. She married young, simply trying to get out of a very bad situation. She was the victim of sexual abuse of the worst kind (raped in her home by caregivers, from the time she was eleven years old). She saw marriage as her way of escape. Her years of trauma completely warped her view of sex and marriage. She reciprocated the hurt that she had experienced, and she became a victim of those who should have been there to help her; her adulterous relationships were with her counselors and the pastor and deacon of the church (both married men),

among others. Instead of bringing her healing and wholeness, they let the enemy's damage progress onward.

Both my parents have died now, having repented of their transgressions. Both remained unmarried to the end following their divorce. I hold no ill will towards them at all. They both loved me but were destructive to themselves and to those around them as the direct work of the enemy. They were certainly accomplices, and their sins were real. But they did not want to be what they had become. They were hurt people who did not know how to cope with their pain. Hurt people hurt people. What they needed was emotional healing and deliverance. No one knew how to help them. Psychiatrists did not help. The cessationist ministers added fuel to the fire. All of them are victims. All of them loved by God. All of them in need of a Savior.

My experiences have permitted me to be gracious towards others. I have seen the enemies of God. I know their schemes. I desire all to be set free and receive salvation. The most heinous monster was still someone's precious baby deserving of love, affection, nurturing, and protection. Satan targeted him at birth to execute his will. That was not God's plan. God sees us adults like we see helpless babies. So, know your enemy. It's not flesh and blood.

As you can see, emotional trauma opens a door that gives the enemy access, which he uses to his advantage. Emotional wounds are often unseen and the effects of such experiences are often difficult to process and heal from. The longer the process takes, the more the enemy takes advantage of our weakness. This is why spiritual warfare is so important.

Consider this passage in light of spiritual warfare:

And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. 'Give us each day our daily bread. 'And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'" (Luke 11:2-4)

And the Matthew parallel:

"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is 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 do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]' For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. (Matthew 6:9-15)

The model prayer (or "the Lord's prayer") is seldom recognized for its significance concerning spiritual warfare; however, it speaks directly of the areas in which the enemy attacks. The opening is a direct salvo against the enemy, a declaration of allegiance and the supremacy of our God, and the authority upon which we rest. It speaks of God's plan, taking dominion away from Satan and firmly establishing His rule and reign undisputed here on earth, the way it is in Heaven. It speaks of our worship of Him, recognizing the greatness of who He is.

Then we pray for our material needs, since the flesh (worries and concerns for sustenance) often becomes the focus of most of our efforts in life, and is an easy target for the enemy to keep us distracted from God.

Then it moves on to our deeper spiritual need: forgiveness of sins. The devil has a foothold whenever we have unrepented sin. We must confess and repent and be set free by the blood of Jesus.

The next area of bondage addressed right here in the Lord's prayer is one we have just discussed: victimization. We must forgive others for God to reciprocate that mercy to us. I know many do not like to read those words, but Jesus is very clear, and I would be remiss to omit it. When we are victimized and experience trauma, the perpetrator may not even know or remember the infraction. Yet the victim with an unforgiving heart relives the crime day after day and remains in perpetual enslavement. The perpetrator

may have even repented and is free before God and man, but the victim remains in bondage. Release and forgive, and the chains will simply fall off.

Then the prayer addresses additional spiritual attacks: keep us from temptation and deliver us from evil [the evil one]. So many churches dispute the entire concept of deliverance. Yet here Jesus commands us to pray for deliverance. To be set free, we renounce and rebuke any and all attackers in the Name of Jesus Christ. Though the enemy prowls around like a lion, we resist him, and he flees from us.

The early church recognized Jesus' teaching on prayer as a literal instruction of *what* to pray, not just *how* to pray. The Ante-Nicene church prayed this exact prayer multiple times daily. They saw the power in it. Looking at the Lord's prayer as a model for spiritual warfare, we can use it as a blueprint for remaining free from enemy attacks through worship of God, prayer for our needs, forgiveness (incoming and outgoing), and deliverance.

In the introduction, I explained that the process of embracing the abundant and victorious life is *out with the old*, and *in with the new*. Up until now, repentance, deliverance, and emotional healing have been in the context of *out with the old*. Since soul wounds are initial injuries that provide open doors to the enemy, it's important to heal those so that we can make forward progress and get to the *in with the new* part.

The easiest way to identify a soul wound is to recognize unwanted negative emotions when recalling a historic traumatic event. If a traumatic event from your past elicits negative emotions, then there is a lingering injury to your soul. To check whether you have a lingering wound or have been healed, close your eyes. Clear your mind of everything but the traumatic event. How do you feel when you think about? Name the emotion; if you have peace, you are whole. If you have unwanted negative emotions, a wound remains.

The second way to identify a soul wound is "triggers." If you hear, see, smell, taste, or recall something or someone that results in uncontrolled negative emotions, you are certain to have an ongoing soul wound associated with a traumatic event.

We start to deal with any unwanted negative emotions in the same way as other demonic attacks. We presume that there are demonic attacks associated with the wounds (remember, it's better to get rid of a demon who is not there than to remain with one who is). Once any demonic attackers are dealt with, move on to healing the wounds that permitted the attacks.

Healing soul wounds happens one step at a time:

**Step 1: Processing:** talking about the trauma is cleansing. Letting it all out, crying through it, and escaping the shame and guilt that might exist by keeping the event secret, does a lot of good in and of itself. Don't underestimate the power of a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on.

**Step 2: Coming to terms,** from a divine perspective, with the victim/perpetrator relationship. The victim must be coached into understanding that unforgiveness hurts them, and that the perpetrator is a victim too. They must see the entire situation from God's perspective to escape the bondage of bitterness and resentment.

**Step 3: Releasing and forgiving.** Forgive the perpetrator, forgive yourself, and forgive God. Release everyone except Satan. Recognize that only he is the enemy here.

**Step 4: Ask the Lord to heal the wound.** Ask Jesus to renew your mind. Ask the Holy Spirit to go into your innermost parts and hidden places and heal any wound associated with [issue]. Ask Him to make you whole, to make you intact.

**Step 5: Ask for the mind of Christ,** to have a heart of forgiveness towards the perpetrator. Ask Him to grant you supernatural love, peace, and joy. Ask Him to restore your hope. Do all this in the Name of Jesus.



Once these steps are completed, again close your eyes, clear your mind, and recall the traumatic event. You should feel release and freedom. If not, revisit the circumstance and identify other related wounds. Repeat the process for the other identified wound(s).

Addressing one wound often unmask additional, smaller wounds that were obscured by the larger wound. Process them one by one in layers until you have complete freedom and peace.

To maintain emotional healing and freedom, stop any bad thoughts in their tracks. All lies of the enemy must be dispelled; state the truth in response immediately. The battlefield starts in the mind. Take every thought captive. Fight back.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

**Session Six Exercise**

Emotional trauma can cause an injury to your soul which is visible in the spiritual realm and used as a target of attack by demons. Soul wounds are open doors to demonic attack. Nearly all gatekeepers are soul wounds caused by emotional trauma. The most common are fear, insecurity, rejection, and unforgiveness. Once access is granted for attack, demons bring teams to disturb other areas of life. Soul wounds can be healed instantaneously through Christ.

In this exercise, you will identify any soul wounds that require emotional healing. Consider:

1. Do you have any traumatic events in your past, that when you deeply think about them, you experience unwanted negative emotions? List them. What are the emotions?

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2. Consider your “triggers” (unwanted, negative emotional responses). Do you have any people, places, or other circumstances that trigger unwanted negative emotions? What emotions? When was the first time you recall experiencing that feeling? Write it down.

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Addressing one wound often unmasks additional smaller wounds that were masked by the larger wound. Process them one by one in layers, repeating the identification steps above after more significant wounds have been healed.

3. Identify some softer sins you struggle with. Some examples are: fear, anxiety, insecurity, bitterness, unforgiveness, depression, defeat, rejection, uneasiness, impatience, and so on. Write them below.

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- a. With a partner, confess and repent for these now as per the Repentance Exercise guidance
- b. With a partner, renounce and defeat these (as demons) per the Spiritual Warfare Exercise sample prayers.

4. With your team guide or another group member, go through the steps below for each of the items in your list above.

- a. Process: talk about the trauma
- b. Come to terms (from a divine perspective) with the victim/perpetrator relationship
- c. Understand who the real enemy is (hint: it is not the perpetrator)
- d. Release and forgive
- e. Ask the Lord to heal your wound(s)
- f. Ask the Holy Spirit to renew your mind and bring peace

## Session Seven: Personal Identity

I greatly appreciate the beauty and marvel of nature. I love landscapes, water bodies, beautiful images of the cosmos, blue skies, storms, star-lit skies, the glowing moon, trees, flowers, and all the amazing animals. Then there is the science behind it: the amazing characteristics and functions of living systems, from the cellular level to organ systems. It's simply amazing how wonderful, beautiful, and incredibly complex it all is. And then all of it seamlessly works together as one integral system. It is all a giant masterpiece on God's canvas.

Yet we humans are the pinnacle of His masterpiece. All that greatness and beauty was simply *good*. Not until God created man did He consider His creation *very good*. We were the final touch on His artwork. God looked on man, the centerpiece of His creation, and said it was *very good*.

You were created by God to be in fellowship with Him. He specially created you, distinct from every other life, in His image. Humanity was made perfect and was granted dominion over the entire earth. However, we know that the enemy deceived man and God's beautiful canvas was forever corrupted. Though the beauty of God's creation is still very evident for all to see, it also has elements and attributes that are tarnished, distorted, and damaged.

You (I mean you, personally) are also God's masterpiece—His beautiful work of art. He meticulously formed and created you to be who He made you to be and has a perfect plan for your life. But like the rest of creation, you were also tarnished, distorted, and damaged. The effects of Satan, sin, and the world have corrupted the beauty of God's perfect masterpiece. There are layers of crud and filth brushed over God's beautiful work.

The self-esteem movement has taught us to embrace the corrupted painting. We are conditioned to accept mediocrity and decadence. Progressives pressure people to have pride in perversion and depravity. We should not be esteemed of self if self is wanton. Rather, we should be esteemed in who God created us to be, the uncorrupted work of art. This book will help you peel off the layers of junk the enemy has secretly (and sometimes not-so-secretly) added to an otherwise masterful canvas. The emotional and spiritual damage must be removed in order to redeem what is beneath it.

The challenge the redeemed often face is learning to embrace and accept the good that God made with intention, because they can't see past the layers of corruption. They hate not only the veneer of filth and crud, but also the masterpiece beneath. This is a travesty. God's beautiful creation can't be disdained or rejected. He made no mistakes when He formed you. When you reject yourself, you reject His fine workmanship.

God sees what He made. He knows you better than you know yourself. He knows your inherent beauty and goodness and can see past the veneer of corruption from Satan, sin, and the world. He thought you so wonderful and beautiful, He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem you and restore you back to perfection. If He thought you so valuable, how can you possibly deny your worth?

God not only made and redeemed you, but thought you worthy of His habitation. God was not pleased to dwell in a house made of wood and stone but chose instead to live inside of you and me. We are His temple.

We oftentimes measure our worth not by what God thinks, but rather how we feel others view us. Oftentimes, it's only our perceptions, and not even reality. Granted, our perceptions are formed through observing actions, yet we can easily misinterpret intentions. We need to begin with the most important truth: what God thinks of us.

Some of this has already been touched upon, but it's worth repeating in the context of personal identity. Don't just gloss over this. I want you to fully grasp how much God loves you and who you are in Jesus Christ. Read and meditate upon the following verses:

You are inseparable from God's love and overwhelmingly conquer (Romans 8:31-39). You are a child of God (1 John 3:1-2, Galatians 4:4-7). You receive eternal sonship and inheritance (Revelations 21:7). You are made new (2 Corinthians 5:17). You are granted all by His divine power, many awesome promises (2 Peter 1:3-4). You are beloved and seated with Him (Ephesians 2:4-7). You are chosen, redeemed, lavished, and promised so much (Ephesians 1:3-23).

In the Old Testament, we read of God establishing a people from among the nations for His very own: first through the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and then with the sons of Jacob (Israel) by the covenant through Moses. Though the record is not all glowing (for the people were obstinate), God used these imperfect people to introduce a new covenant with all who would receive Him, through the person of Jesus Christ. The blessings first given to a particular people at a particular time were expanded to all peoples of all times: all who would receive His great offer of redemption. We Christians today are afforded that special opportunity.

Through this new covenant, we are granted special status as a holy nation, a chosen people, a people of God, a royal priesthood, living stones of God's temple. We are set apart as a people of God's possession. There is no greater honor. We are precious and valuable, of tremendous worth to our God. Never forget who you are in Christ Jesus. Your identity is defined by God. It's not disputable. And your identity is certainly not determined by others' opinions (or even your own, for that matter). Your identity is settled by the One who made you and redeemed you to be who He created you to be.

We can intellectually know these truths. However, it may not match how we feel. That's because we often appropriate our worth based on how others treat us. If others reject us, we feel worthless. Since they didn't want us, we accept that we must not be desirable. Rejection can come in many ways: unloving parents or other family, lack of friends, being picked last for sports or games, no interest from possible suitors, being dumped or divorced, etc. All these can contribute to the lies we believe about our value. However, we must never form opinions about ourselves based on the behaviors or actions of others. Nor can we entertain the lies of the enemy that come from such sources.

We can also make the mistake of basing our personal value on comparing ourselves to others. Culture and society create expectations of beauty, size, shape, intellect, talent, abilities, intelligence, wealth, "coolness" and so on. In response, people set out to embellish themselves by becoming something other than what God intended. God values the inner person, the heart and character, eminently more than the outward. Every person is unique and was never meant to fit a certain society-sanctioned mold of what vogue is, which happens to vary with time and culture. Today's fad can be taboo tomorrow.

Simply find comfort in your own skin, knowing how much God values you and that you are priceless to Him. How your appearance or abilities compare to others is irrelevant compared to your inherent value. You just be content with the beautiful work of art God created: you. You be your best, and do your best, and that's all God expects. And know that any quest for self-improvement (education, learning a skill or trade, exercise, weight loss, etc.) will not change your worth before God. Those are personal goals which you can voluntarily work towards if you want to. But don't let them define you; let your inner qualities define you. And if your inner qualities are not presently where you want them to be, that's a worthy self-improvement goal (and one of the purposes of this book). Permit God to do a work in your life and obtain that elusive abundant and victorious life. It's yours for the taking, but first you have to accept your true identity in Christ and realize how valuable you are to God. Even if the world doesn't recognize your worth, you need to embrace it.

**Session Seven Exercise**

Personal questions:

What do you love the most about yourself?

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What do you hate the most about yourself?

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How do you think others view you?

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How do you define yourself?

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Which has the greatest influence on your self-image: what you think of yourself, what others think of you, or what God says about you?

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What has had the most impact on your perception of self: positive experiences or negative experiences?

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Name an achievement in your life that has contributed to your self-image or self-identity.

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What is one negative experience that has contributed to your self-image or self-identity?

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**Group Exercise**

As a group, discuss some of the self-identity questions previously answered. Each group member should consider how their self-image lines up with how God views them.

Consider and discuss as a group:

- If God has forgiven you, what right do you have to condemn yourself?
- If God is for you, what right do others (or circumstances) have to steal your joy?
- Have you forgiven yourself?
- Have you accepted yourself?
- Do you value yourself as much as God does? If no, do you have that right?

Each group member should be able to answer the following questions:

1. Are my view of self and God's view of me in alignment?

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2. If there is a difference, in what way do I need to renew my mind or change my thinking?

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End the group session with prayer (in pairs or individually). Here is a sample prayer:

*Lord, I confess and repent that I have believed lies about myself and permitted my circumstances and other people's opinions to define me, rather than accepting who You say I am. Lord, please forgive me and renew my mind so that I will embrace my identity in Christ.*

## Session Eight: The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Thus far, we've touched on a theme: *out with the old*, and *in with the new*. God made something great—us; Satan corrupted it. Hopefully you've been able to process and get rid of some of the corruption and have begun the restoration process on the beautiful work of art that God created. However, there is more: the *in with the new!*

Recall that the old self dies so that the new self is formed. We are born again. The old cup is emptied (repentance), rinsed (baptism), washed with soap (forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ), and then we can be filled (receive the promised gift: the Holy Spirit, see Acts 2:38). This gift was not a one-time promise for special people, at a special place, at a special time, but for all generations (Acts 2:39).

The gift of the Holy Spirit has numerous blessings. One is conviction of sin and righteousness (John 16:8). He shows us right from wrong. He is a teacher and helper (John 14:26, 1 John 2:27). He assists us in right living and enlightens our minds with the truth. The Holy Spirit was also given as a pledge and a seal for redemption (2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13 and 4:30).

While those works are mighty and great, many Christians incorrectly conclude that they are the beginning, middle, and end of His work in our lives. However, there is more.

John the Baptist spoke of One greater than him coming, who would baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33). Jesus said it was better that He depart, for He would send the Holy Spirit (John 16:7, see also John 14:26 and 15:26). Jesus said that His followers would do even greater works than Him because He goes to the Father (John 14:12).

Following His resurrection, prior to His final departure, Jesus told his disciples:

“And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:49)

Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” *He said*, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”...but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you... (Acts 1:4 and 1:8a)

This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost (see Acts 2:1-4). A similar event occurred when Peter was ministering to Cornelius and his companions (see Acts 10:44-45). And when Peter was giving an account of the event with Cornelius to the church in Jerusalem, he related it both to the similar event at Pentecost, and to Jesus saying He would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as *He did* upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as *He gave* to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (Acts 11:15-17)

A debate exists within Christendom concerning when the Holy Spirit is imparted, because He does multiple works, and those works are associated with different seasons in our Christian walk. When examining the life of Peter, we see the Holy Spirit’s distinct works occurring throughout his spiritual journey. We see conviction of sin (Luke 5:8), teaching all truth (Matthew 16:15-16), receiving Him as a seal and pledge (John 20:22), and then pouring forth with power (Acts 2:1-4). So that begs the question, *when* did Peter receive the Holy Spirit?

The confusion comes in part from the idea that the Holy Spirit is there or not, like an electrical on/off switch. However, the Holy Spirit is likened to a fluid in Scripture: blowing wind (John 3:8) and flowing water (John 7:38) which comes and goes. We are commanded to be *filled* with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). After all his encounters with the Holy Spirit, Peter and the disciples are later filled with the Holy

Spirit yet again (Acts 4:31). It is not that they never received the Holy Spirit before. It is that the power and presence of God ebbs and flows in accordance with our receptivity and the need of the moment.

By receptivity, I mean availability. When we are encumbered and entangled by sin, demonic disturbances, emotional instability, life's distractions, and the like, we are not available for the Holy Spirit to fill us. We are full of competing influences. That is why I have devoted so many words to the *out with the old* effort.

Everyone wants to be filled with the Holy Spirit, yet they are so full of other stuff, there is no room for Him in their lives. The Holy Spirit is a gentleman; He will not force His way upon anyone. He expects us to prepare the place for Him by eliminating the things that make Him uncomfortable. He is called the Holy Spirit for a reason; *Holy* is His nature. He wants to reside in a clean, comfortable, welcoming place. The more room He is given, the more invited He feels. He does not relent when we ask, seek, and knock for His coming.

A powerful passage on preparing for the filling of the Holy Spirit is James 4:5-10.

Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (James 4:5-10, NKJV)

Here we see that the Holy Spirit who dwells in us jealously yearns for us. That might sound strange. But when you think about it, it makes perfect sense, because we are not our own. We are God's property.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

We operate on the misconception that we are the rightful owners of our persons. But we belong to God. God made us, and then redeemed us for Himself after we had turned from Him. Not freely, but at great expense (the cross and the precious blood of God's only Son, Jesus Christ) were we purchased.

That is why He is jealous for us. He does not just want *some* of us. He wants *all* of us; hence, the jealousy. He should not have to compete with our selfish desires, demonic strongholds, sins, misguided thoughts and emotions, and all the world's distractions. He deserves better. And if our vessel, His home, is cleaned up, He will fill us even more—freely—with no resistance.

We need to humble ourselves and submit to Him, which is why one of the first topics in this book was *surrender*. Then we resist the devil (*deliverance*). Next, wash our hands and purify our hearts (*repentance* and *emotional healing*). Turning our laughter to mourning and joy to gloom is an interesting way of saying we need a rightful understanding of who God is and grant Him sufficient reverence and worship.

John was "the disciple whom Jesus loved," one of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples, and was even asked to care for the mother of our Lord. I would say he was Jesus' best friend. Yet when He met Jesus face to face in His glory, he fell to the ground as a dead man (Revelation 1:17). When the prophet Isaiah beheld the glory of God, he said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." (Isaiah 6:5)

When we draw near to God as James says, when we encounter His presence and even approach the aura of His greatness, the spontaneous response is to turn our laughter to mourning and joy to gloom. Humility is the involuntary response. And it is in that state of mind that we are ready to receive His fullness.



Let's return to our earlier discussion of the Lord's prayer. We covered the *out with the old* aspects of it, and now is the time to focus on the *in with the new*, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. After giving His disciples the Lord's prayer as a model, Jesus said to them,

“Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and from inside he answers and says, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you *anything*.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him *anything* because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or *if* he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” (Luke 11:5-13)

It appears that this passage is a general admonition to be persistent in prayer to get results. However, there is a remarkable plot twist at the end. He says: “how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” Where did that come from? When was He talking about the Holy Spirit? If one recognizes that the Lord's prayer was about spiritual warfare, it makes perfect sense. The prayer addresses the many ways in which the enemy keeps us captive. It is a prayer for freedom. It was the *out with the old*. With what aim? To prepare for the *new*: the gift of the Holy Spirit. If our vessel is prepared, He will grant us our request. And He will not give us a snake or a scorpion (used to describe demons in the prior chapter, Luke 10:17), but the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Once you take care of the *out with the old* stuff covered in the prior chapters, here's some practical advice for receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

- Relax, be vulnerable
- Don't try too hard
- Make yourself free and available
- Don't think too much
- Seek God and His presence rather than His power
- Seek His closeness rather than an experience
- Ask, seek, knock
- Worship Him
- Trust and receive

If it assists your faith, seek other Spirit-filled brothers and sisters to pray with you and for you, laying hands on you in faith. If speaking in tongues is important to you, know that God provides the language, not the speaking. Relax and speak, allowing words to flow and roll out, without giving thought to what those words are. Just go with it. And remember, it's God's gift, in His timing. Don't beat yourself up chasing an experience. Chase God instead. You will never be disappointed if that is your goal.

**Session Eight Exercise**

1. Did you experience a significant or measurable change when you were saved (would you say that you had a “born again” experience?)

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2. If the answer to question #1 is *no*, how do you know you have been born again?

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3. Have you had an experience of the presence of God?

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4. Have you had an experience of the sudden onset of, or manifestation of, supernatural spiritual gifts?

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5. Do you believe that you have received everything God has to offer concerning the fullness of the Holy Spirit?

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6. If not, what experiences are lacking, or what, in particular, are you seeking?

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7. What do you think are your impediments to receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit?

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8. What do you think your next steps are in experiencing the Holy Spirit more deeply in your life?

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## **Group Exercise**

This group session should be a time of worship and prayer for those seeking a deeper experience with the Holy Spirit. Some tips:

- Relax, be vulnerable
- Don't try too hard
- Make yourself free and available
- Don't think too much
- Seek God and His presence rather than His power
- Seek His closeness rather than an experience
- Ask, Seek, Knock
- Worship Him
- Trust and receive



## Session Nine: Spiritual Gifts

It is God who sends His people supernatural gifts, for the accomplishment of a common good and according to His will. Scripture defines the good intention of His will in the letter to the Ephesian church:

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." (Now this *expression*, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:1-16)

Paul here urges the church to remain united in every way. Though they have many things in common, they vary in gifts, but those gifts were distributed for a common purpose: to equip the saints for service, to strengthen the body, and to develop unity of faith, maturity, doctrinal stability, and growth in Christlikeness. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not personal: they are for corporate benefit.

The term "gifts" tells us how they are imparted. They come from God and are not purchased or granted based on our desire, but by God's will: "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills" (1 Corinthians 12:11).

First Corinthians 12 offers further insight into what we commonly refer to as the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)

The more accurate description of *gifts*, *ministries*, and *effects* are collectively referred to as manifestations of the Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit makes His presence and power evident through the agency of men. Those manifestations can be in the form of a ministry, sometimes referred to as a "call" on someone's life. This call can be a specific role in God's kingdom.

The manifestations can also be specific displays of supernatural abilities, or *effects*. These are spiritual, not natural. However, God may impart supernatural power to accomplish an otherwise natural act. For example, I once wrote a book in four hours. While writing is something I would consider a "natural talent," certainly writing a finished work in just hours is supernatural.

Since gifts are freely given by God's will and grace, we should never become prideful, as if they make us special in any way. We can't take credit for what was given by no act of our own.

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his

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exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:3-8)

For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (1 Corinthians 4:7)

Instead, we are admonished to humbly serve in whatever capacity for which God has equipped and empowered us. There are no special people in God's kingdom, just many members of one body serving a very special God.

The apostle Paul emphasized that the greater ministries are sometimes the unseen ones. Though they are not front-and-center, without them the body will cease to function properly or at all (1 Corinthians 12:14-24). We all need to recognize our roles as synergistic and symbiotic, and give God the glory (1 Corinthians 3:5-9). There is no room for self-serving or pride.

If we serve for any reason other than loving others and honoring God, we accomplish nothing of lasting value. Intention and motivation for ministry matter:

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have *the gift of* prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

Physical and emotional healing and deliverance are to improve people's lives, not for showmanship or entertainment. Leadership (the "five-fold" roles) is to equip the saints for service, not for titles or control. The prophetic ministry is for edification and exhortation and consolation (1 Corinthians 14:3) rather than for personal glorification.

Paul names and orders several specific gifts twice (1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11), as if they are presented by virtue of worth or value. This is not the case. Recall that gifts and ministries do not add value or worth to the individual to whom they are given. The gifts and ministries only have value insofar as they impact the church and build up the kingdom of God. Are they edifying the body? Are they expanding the kingdom? Recall, the ministries are to equip the saints for service for the building up of the body in love. The roles that have greater potential to edify the body have greater reach, and therefore, greater impact. That doesn't puff up the servant (the recipient of the gift or call). It simply gives them a greater responsibility and stewardship, and far more accountability to the Lord.

Apostles and prophets are a pioneering role, the foundation on which the church is built (Christ, of course, being the cornerstone and the rock on which the foundation is laid, see Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Corinthians 3:10-11). Evangelists add living stones to that foundation (1 Peter 2:5). Shepherds and teachers shape the stones. (I encourage everyone to read an early church writing entitled, *The Shepherd of Hermas* from the Ante-Nicene Fathers' set. The writing contains an excellent allegory that reminds me of this analogy.)

Though gifts are distributed according to the will of God, we are still commanded to seek the greater gifts (see 1 Corinthians 14:1, 12, 39, and 1 Corinthians 12:31). It is not wrong to desire spiritual gifts. Those "greater gifts" are defined in Scripture as the manifestations that will have the most impact in edifying the body. They are not intended to be for the individual, but rather for the kingdom of God. The only thing wrong with desiring spiritual gifts is if your motivations are selfish.

Everyone has spiritual gifts. We must identify and employ them: "As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10). Utilizing our gifts is our stewardship towards God. They were not given for no reason. I always found the use of the word "talents" in the parable of the talents interesting (Matthew 25:14-30). In the original language a "talent" is

equivalent to a sum of money; however, in English, it means an ability or gift. As a result, I always intuitively linked the parable of talents with spiritual gifts.

In the parable, the servant who squandered his stewardship was stripped of that with which he was entrusted, and it was given to another. And he was rebuked and punished for failing to be a good steward with what he was given:

Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.' "For to everyone who has, *more* shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. (Matthew 25:28-29)

I personally do not believe it is a stretch to conclude that if God rewards (or punishes) His servants in regard to how they use material things, He would operate accordingly with the spiritual things, which are of even greater value. We must exercise our gifts. If we don't, they very well may be stripped from us and given to someone who will exercise them faithfully.

Concerning spiritual gifts, note that the lists and examples in Scripture are not, and were never meant to be, exhaustive. There are numerous gifts that are never listed, yet clearly exist. Some examples are music, song, intercession, arts, discipleship, counseling, and so many more. And God oftentimes gives supernatural abilities to do natural tasks. The onus is upon us to use all of our talents for His glory, edifying the body.

How can we know our gifts? Consider this: I have noted through years in ministry, that God never wastes a hurt. We know He works all things for our good, even the bad things (Romans 8:28). That "good" is often a ministry of assisting others through the same struggles we endured and have overcome. Paul wrote to the Corinthians about this:

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

Authentic empathy is readily received when it is extended by someone who has encountered similar experiences. It is very important that we receive healing ourselves and convert our misfortune into a blessing for others. Our pain can result in healing for others.

Concerning revelatory gifts, I want to offer some wisdom. We are commanded in Scripture not to despise prophecy (1 Thessalonians 5:20). However, that does not mean we accept everything that is said by one who claims to be a prophet. We are told to examine everything carefully, and only hold onto what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Also, Paul exhorts the church to "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment" (1 Corinthians 14:29). Further, the apostle John writes, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

Hear every report in good faith. Then, seek confirmation or an inner witness concerning the report. The same Holy Spirit living in the prophet lives in the subject of the revelation. Therefore, the report should not be a surprise to the intended recipient. It should confirm what the Lord was already revealing to them. No one is obligated to blindly receive a revelation from an outsider. And the prophet should report the matter and leave it. I have seen people use "revelations" to coerce and control people unawares. This is foolhardy. Instead, pray and ask the Lord to give you confirmation. And wait patiently; if it does not materialize, simply file the report in your mental log, and see what becomes of it. No worries.

Personally, I do not feel that prophetic words should be considered in regard to church discipline matters. That was never the intended purpose (see 1 Corinthians 14:3-4). Reports can be used to minister to the subjects, but not to be taken to others for adjudication. I have seen this error made. The church discipline process demands eyewitnesses, not supernatural insight (see Matthew 18:16).

Also, note that bad reports are not foregone conclusions. The prophet Isaiah told Hezekiah he was going to die. Hezekiah beseeched the Lord, and God healed him (2 Kings 20:1-7). Did that make Isaiah a false prophet? No. He reported truthfully, but God responded to Hezekiah's entreaties. Therefore, we need to see revelations for their intended purpose: edification and exhortation and consolation (1 Corinthians 14:3). God often warns His people and wants us to respond. Outcomes that differ from a prophetic word don't necessarily make the messenger a "false prophet."

Here is some warning: pride is the gateway to deception. Be very wary of revelations from the obviously prideful. The prophet who believes he can't be wrong often is. In the same way, the emotionally unstable are given to confusion. Be cautious in accepting spiritual insight from others. Test everything. Hold onto what is good.

If you received a revelation that you were going to be given a gift, or if you are simply seeking but have not yet had anything materialize, go through the process of receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Personally inspect yourself, repent, humble yourself, experience deliverance and emotional healing, draw near to God, quiet yourself, eliminate distractions, ask/seek/knock, relax, and receive.

Then, step out in faith. God will not give you what you don't need. For example, don't ask for the gift of healing if you never pray for others to be healed. God will give you what you need when you need it. If you step out in ministry without the tools you need to succeed, it will only be a matter of time before those gifts unlock for you. When they do, your faith will multiply, and they will operate with far more efficacy.



**Session Nine Exercise**

1. What would you currently identify as your “talents?”

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2. Is your personality people-oriented or individual/personal? Extroverted or introverted? “upfront” or “behind the scenes”?

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3. Have any of the above aspects of your personality changed significantly since you became a Christian?

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4. Is there any area of ministry you feel God is pushing you toward, that you are resisting? (If yes, why?)

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5. Do you sense any gifts or calls coming “someday,” and what do you think is holding them back?

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6. Have you experienced any challenges or difficult life experiences that God may want you to leverage in ministering to others?

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7. Which areas of ministry are attractive to you?

- Evangelism
- Personal discipleship
- Emotional healing
- Deliverance
- Service
- Counseling
- Generosity/Giving
- Healing
- Encouragement
- Intercessory prayer
- Music/Praise
- Prophetic word
- Teaching
- Administration/organization
- Leadership
- Writing
- Trade skills
- Wisdom
- Discerning of spirits
- Word of knowledge
- Crafts/arts

8. What are your greatest hindrances to serving God or becoming more active in ministry? (Too busy? Feel inadequate? Lack the desire to serve God? Uncertain where to step out?) What are some action steps you can take to become more productive in the kingdom of God?

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9. Who are some people that you regularly interact with that might benefit from your gifts, knowledge, or life experiences in the faith?

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10. Does your current level of engagement in ministry reflect an appropriate level of love for God and empathy, love, and compassion for others? Does your love and compassion for others reflect God's love and compassion towards you? If not, what can be done to change that?

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### **Group Exercise**

Discuss the answers to some of your questions as a group. If there are hindrances to being more productive in ministry, try to brainstorm as a group and get to the root of some of those issues. Offer each other suggestions on how to become more active in your personal ministry. Pray for one another, targeting areas where there are hindrances or changes to be made.

Write those suggestions below.

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## Session Ten: Prayer

Prayer is our direct line to the King, the presence of God opened to us through Christ. Most know what the Scriptures say about prayer and have a proper theological understanding. But I would say that many do not really believe in the efficacy of prayer.

When you pray, you are not alone; Daddy is in the room! Imagine that you have a need, and you want an audience with the President of the United States. Can you just drive to the White House, get let in at the gate, and enter the Oval Office? Not a chance. You can only get in if you have an invitation. It's the same with our heavenly Father. We don't have access to the King without the proper invitation and credentials. Those happened to have been granted to us through our advocate and mediator, Christ Jesus (see Ephesians 2:18). Our credential to come near to the Father is the Name of Jesus (John 14:13-14, 16:23-24). We can now approach our Father with boldness and confidence (Ephesians 3:12). How awesome is that?

We are admonished to pray always, never ceasing: "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Imagine that you are married and never speak with your spouse; that would not be much of a relationship. And what does our Father desire but a relationship with us? That includes real, tangible communication. Our Father wants to hear from us, and not just requests. He knows our needs, welcomes requests, and is happy to assist. However, He also desires conversation, adoration, worship, and praise directed towards Him. Requests come in the form of a list, one that can be exhausted quickly. Most people can't pray like that for even two minutes straight. However, if we develop a lifestyle of chatting with our Father, as we go about our business, prayer becomes inexhaustible and links us to Him in our ongoing companionship.

When we do pray for a request, the prayer of faith does its work of granting supernatural peace:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

However, we only experience God's peace if we give the situation to God, releasing the outcome entirely to Him with confident expectation. If the outcome is relinquished to His will, we can trust Him and move on without worry.

To harness the power of prayer, we must understand the mechanics of the process. The fact is, God can do anything at any time. He can make things that are as if they are not and make things that are not as if they are. There are no limitations whatsoever from His end. Thus, we need to understand *our* part.

For starters, we need to have faith: "And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

We must be single minded:

But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8)

There are no special people, but rather an awesome God who responds to prayers of faith:

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit. (James 5:17-18)

I am amazed that James assigns all Christians the same potential as a man like the prophet Elijah. It's a remarkable bit of truth, that God is not a respecter of persons. However, this verse does narrow the field as

far as to whom God is most responsive: “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16b, NKJV). Further,

“FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL.” (1 Peter 3:12)

“and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. (1 John 3:12)

Clearly, God is attentive to the prayers of the righteous.

Another important element of effective prayer is seeking the will of God. If we are selfishly motivated, we can't expect Him to respond (at least not in the way that we might hope).

You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. (James 4:3)

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (1 John 5:14-15)

On the other hand, we can have complete confidence that if we are praying according to His will, He is attentive. And since we know that He hears us, we know we have whatever we asked for. This is an incredible truth. Think about what this passage is saying and believe it! If you believe it, you will see results. *Believing is seeing* (and not the other way around):

For we walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)

“According to your faith let it be to you.” (Matthew 9:29b)

If you don't believe you will receive what you are praying for, you can't expect results. I, personally, am not an intercessor. I don't pray for a long time. My gift is faith. I literally believe that God hears me and will respond to my requests. I don't need many words. In fact, for me, if I keep praying on and on, it just demonstrates that I don't believe that He hears me and will respond. I don't need to see the results. I believe and can wait to see. Faith can move mountains, for the glory of God.

On the other hand, intercessory prayer is tapping the heart of God in order to move Him. It's a deeply emotional appeal to bring about a desired result, perhaps more so if we are not sure of God's will. We can persist, laboring for hours and hours to get the breakthrough. God shares in our pain and yearning and may ultimately relent because of His great mercy and compassion (think of Jesus's parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8). Intercessory prayer operates by a completely different mechanism than simple prayers of faith.

It is important to develop healthy routines and practices if we are to have a regular and effective prayer life. I recommend set aside prayer times (both alone and in a group). Morning and evening are common times, but you will want to choose times that can accommodate your regular work and daily rhythms. Regular family prayer times and corporate (church) prayer meetings are also recommended. Be disciplined about your prayer time; it is often a first casualty when the enemy wants to lower your defenses.

Prayer lists can help maintain focus. The real needs in your life, needs in your fellowship and ministry, needs in your community, and needs on the national and global scale. Praying a list ensures you don't miss anything that you deem important.

The model prayer, or “the Lord's Prayer,” was given by Christ and accepted as an actual prayer to pray quite literally by the early church. It covers a lot of ground, which we have previously discussed. The pattern of opening and closing with worship and adoration of God, with petitions—practical and spiritual—in the middle is also a good general model.

Praying the Scriptures is also a great way to permit the Holy Spirit to guide your prayer time. As you read the Bible, pray whatever the Holy Spirit suggests, if the passages are relevant to any of the prayer needs around you. It's a powerful method that allows you to cover a lot of ground. It has a natural component (reading the Bible) and a supernatural component (the Holy Spirit directing the prayers). Try it.

Communication and conversation are two-way. Prayer was never meant to only be outgoing. God speaks to His people and His people should know His voice:

But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. (1 John 2:27)

God speaks through many means: a timely Word, an inner voice, dreams, visions, and our circumstances. To be attentive to His speaking, it is important to eliminate distractions, consecrate oneself, quiet oneself, and listen for His often-quiet voice. The only way to grow in faith and sharpen discernment is to step out according to what you have heard and see what happens. When the voice of God manifests something in your life, you are better prepared to answer that challenging question: *was it God or was it me?* With increasing discernment, faith, and confidence, the voice becomes louder and louder, until hearing from God becomes an integral part of your prayer life. Prayer then advances from petitions to two-way conversation.

**Session Ten Exercise**

Rate your prayer life in the following categories, on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being weakest and 5 being strongest).

1. How confident are you that God hears you?

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2. How certain are you that you pray according to God's will?

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3. Do you believe that God answers you?

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4. How effective are you at discerning God's voice?

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**Group Exercise**

Of the areas above (rated on a scale of 1 to 5), which was your weakest? As a group, discuss specific action steps that can be taken to increase your faith during prayer. Also discuss impediments to prayer (distractions, busyness, not knowing what to pray for, uncertainty about the effectiveness of prayer). Pray for one another and ask God to help you overcome any areas of weakness.

## Session Eleven: The Word of God

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The Bible is the inspired Word of God. It's not a textbook or a novel. The Holy Spirit inspired men through the ages to be His voice for the generations. Their personalities, styles, and genres are preserved in the texts. But the exact words and their purpose were completely inspired:

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

The Word of God was given so that the "man of God" will be adequate, equipped for every good work. It is the standard provided for defining the *out with the old* and the *in with the new*:

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

The Bible is more than a book. The Word of God is spiritual and targets the soul, rather than intellectual and merely targeting the mind. It is supernatural:

But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:23-24)

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. (1 Corinthians 2:10-13)

It is powerful to accomplish the purpose for which it was sent:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth. And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)

The primary purpose is to reveal salvation to man:

for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you. (1 Peter 1: 23-25)

Now let's get practical and discuss how we approach the Scriptures. The Bible contains numerous books (some written originally as letters) by different authors with varying audiences and purposes. The books can be loosely categorized as historical narrative, wisdom literature, prophetic works, gospels (accounts of the life of Jesus), and epistles (letters to the churches). All the books offer spiritual wisdom and insight for all worshippers of God of all generations. However, some texts had a direct audience with literal application while simultaneously offering a spiritual relevance to future saints.

The Bible is separated into two covenants, or *testaments*. The Old Testament was God's revelation concerning the Hebrews, or the Jewish people of Israel. The covenant was loosely described as the Law of

Moses and details God's interaction with humanity. The focus is the establishment and affairs of a set-apart people, Israel.

The prophetic works of the Old Testament describe a Prophet who would come later, whose teachings would be binding (Deuteronomy 18:15-18), a child who would be born of a virgin and become ruler on David's throne (Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7), an anointed One (Christ/Messiah) who would rule the nations as God's Son from David's throne eternally (Psalms 2:1-12, Daniel 7:13-14), and a suffering Servant who would take away sins (Isaiah 53:1-13). It also reveals the establishment of a new covenant (Testament) where God would forgive His people, put His teachings in their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34), and call the gentiles—non-Jews—to Himself (Amos 9:11-12).

All of these prophecies specifically discuss the person and work of Jesus Christ. This new covenant is relevant to Christians today, for most of us are not Jews. The Law of Moses does not apply to us. This matter was settled once and for all at the Jerusalem Council documented in Acts chapter 15. The only requirements from the Law of Moses handed down to gentiles were itemized in Acts 15:28-29. This is again validated in Acts 21:25. The obsolescence of the first covenant is clearly articulated in Scripture:

For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. "FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. "AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. "FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE." When He said, "A new *covenant*," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. (Hebrews 8:7-13)

The passage above contains a direct quote from the book of Jeremiah, which I had already cited. The replacement of the old covenant with the new covenant was not a new invention. It was predicted. The Ante-Nicene (prior to 325 AD) church understood the Law of Moses to be obsolete to the Church (or, new covenant saints). Commands such as circumcision, Sabbath observance, and the sacrifices were never observed by the gentile Christians. The Law of Moses was understood to be a specific covenant given to a specific people at a specific time with very specific blessings and curses for compliance or rebellion. It was no less inspired; it simply did not apply to Christians. The Law was just a tutor to bring us to Christ. Now that we have Christ, we no longer need a tutor:

Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. (Galatians 3:24-25)

If Christians are not obligated to observe the Law of Moses, what *does* apply? New covenant followers were known as "Christians" for a reason; they followed the teachings of Jesus Christ. The supremacy and authority of the teachings of Jesus were established by Jesus Himself. He made it clear that our obedience was a direct measure of our love:

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments... He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him... Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me.'" (John 14:15, 21, 23-24)

Jesus took it even further and stated that we would be judged by His words:



“If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment *as to* what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.” (John 12:47-50)

Jesus did not speak randomly; He spoke the exact words His Father directed Him to. He neither omitted any, nor added any. And we will be judged by those exact words.

The apostle John was rather blunt in his assessment of a so-called Christian who failed to obey the teachings of Jesus:

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected.” (1 John 2:3-5a)

John’s assessment was that a Christian who did not obey Christ was no Christian at all, and just a liar. Authentic Christians follow Christ.

Note that the Lord does not simply desire that we obey commands. Jesus did give commands; however, He taught more in parables and examples. He meant for us to capture the intent of the stories and apply those teachings to our lives. The deeper message, the hidden spiritual insight, is what has the power to change us from within. It was never meant to be merely intellectual. The transformative nature of the power of Scripture is borne by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus explained His intent with a parable:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.” (Matthew 7:24-27)

The one who overcomes will be the one who acts upon the words of Jesus Christ. This does not describe mechanical obedience, but rather a spiritual application of the deeper intent for which the words were given: hear, understand, and apply.

James put it more succinctly: “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (James 1:22). This is consistent with what John said. However, Paul perfectly emphasizes the spiritual aspect of our obedience, moving beyond mere words and responding to the Spirit of God:

You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all people, revealing yourselves, that you are a letter of Christ, delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

This concept applies to all forms of Scripture, regardless of style or genre. From the wisdom literature to the epistles, the historical narrative to the prophets, it all can edify. Simply capture the heartbeat of God as to why He said what He said and apply that to your life. Then live it out.

We have addressed commands, we discussed teachings, and now the final principle I want to cover is following the example, traditions, and practices of Jesus and His direct followers: “By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 2:5b-6).

Our ultimate goal, the destination in this lifetime as a Christian, is to become more and more like Jesus. Christ's commands and teachings are supreme, yet His life example also serves as a model for our emulation. His direct followers also show us what it means to follow the example of Christ as mere mortals. Paul writes,

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. (1 Corinthians 11:1-2)

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. (Philippians 3:17)

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us. (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you (2 Thessalonians 3:6-7)

So here are some rules to live by: the New Testament supersedes the Old Testament; Christ supersedes the Apostles; biblical commands trump biblical practices/traditions; biblical practices supersede human (extrabiblical) traditions.

Extrabiblical traditions are permitted if they don't conflict with biblical commands. Biblical traditions are always permitted, but not enforceable if they were never explicitly commanded. Extrabiblical commands and traditions are entirely optional and unenforceable. No church or church leadership has a right to force compliance with teachings that are not in Scripture. Jesus stood firmly against such arrogance and hypocrisy. Such behavior can be abusive, and spiritually and emotionally harmful.

Grasping God's intended message often requires humility. Jesus said,

"Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3-4)

Sometimes, to get the real meaning we must read the words and accept them at face value. Ask yourself how a ten-year-old child would understand the passage. It's a good start.

Another principle worth practicing is this: if the passage is not clear, read parallel passages or other Scriptures directly pertinent to the subject at hand to add insight. Never use obscure passages or passages not directly speaking on a particular subject to form your understanding on that subject. Instead, put all the pertinent passages together and see what conclusions can be drawn that don't conflict with any of them. It must all reconcile.

This approach to the Scriptures best describes the early church (Ante-Nicene church) understanding. And this understanding resulted in a very rapidly growing church that turned the world upside down, and ultimately overtook the pagan and heathen Roman Empire. The early church was one in doctrine and practice, spanning many regions and cultures. And they were grounded in holiness and living righteously and obediently. Lastly, using this approach, they were not forced to disregard passages that conflicted with their theology. It all reconciled.

Finally, if you identify what appears to be a conflict in Scripture, refer to the Ante-Nicene witness to see how they approached the subject. I can think of some apparent conflicts that were reconciled by seeking their witness. Without any exceptions that I can think of, they adopted the most literal, straightforward interpretation consistent with the guidelines I've presented here.

Here is a summary:

1. Read the passage
2. Discern the base meaning (like a child)
3. Infer God's intent, and the application
4. Do what He wants you to do (be a doer)
5. *Caveat 1*: If the meaning is not clear, balance with other passages which address the subject
6. *Caveat 2*: If still not clear within Scripture, review the Ante-Nicene witness

**Session Eleven Exercise**

Questions for personal reflection:

1. Do you read the Bible every day?
2. When you read, is for “depth” or “distance?”
3. Do you read the Bible for information, or transformation?
4. When you read the Bible, do you have an expectation for the Holy Spirit to give you insight?

**Group Exercise**

Together do the brief Bible study below using the principles set forth in this chapter.

Read Matthew 13:3-9 and 13:18-23.

1. Have one or two people in the group volunteer to repeat/summarize the parable in their own words.

2. What is the most obvious meaning of this parable?

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3. What do you think Jesus’ purpose was in teaching this parable?

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4. How does this parable apply to you personally? Where do you fit in?

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5. Is the Holy Spirit prompting you to any practical, actionable changes in your life as a result of reading this parable? List any action steps here:

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6. Do it!

## Session Twelve: Discipleship

I may be presumptuous, but I assume everyone will agree with me that Jesus is the best model for the Christian life. I also believe that Jesus is the best role model for ministry. However, I don't think many people today would be very impressed with a ministry such as His. He did not have a named organization. He did not have a building. He did not have programs. He did not earn a salary. And His church only had twelve members! By all standards of ministry success today, Jesus was a failure.

But Jesus knew exactly what He was doing. He knew that if He invested deeply into the lives of His disciples, they would carry the mission forward in His absence. He knew that if He taught them and modeled what He spoke about consistently for a time, they would adopt His example as their own and carry forth His teachings and practices to successive generations.

Ultimately, His disciples would not only carry His message forward, but they would turn the world upside down. Not only did they impact their generation, but their exploits and teachings are preserved for us today in our New Testament—they have reached you and me over 2,000 years into the future! Jesus wasn't messing around; His ministry was very strategic.

Jesus did exactly what He commanded His disciples to do: make disciples:

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

The word *disciple* simply means *pupil*. In historical context, it was an understudy or mentee—a follower. We already discussed the qualifications Jesus set forth for one who wants to be His disciple (Luke 14:25-33). He demanded a commitment, complete and total surrender, and reckless abandon. He set the standard, and for sure we are not permitted to lower it.

We also discussed the objective of gifted ministers: equipping the saints for the work of service and building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12). Most presume that gifted ministers are there to perform the work themselves, rather than to equip *all the saints* to perform the work.

Paul highlighted this concept of multi-generational discipleship in his admonition to his disciple Timothy: "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). Link this verse with Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, and we see the big picture:

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. (1 Corinthians 11:1-2)

Paul followed the teachings and example of Jesus. Paul taught Timothy to do the same. Timothy was told to teach faithful men who would then teach others. This is multi-generational discipleship: impart to others what God has done in you, in such a way that they are equipped to minister to others in the same way. This is a very powerful concept, and it is fruitful beyond what most would imagine. Let me illustrate.

Compare an *evangelist* (defined as someone who leads someone in repeating a prayer after them and then sends them to church) with a *disciple-maker* (defined as someone who preaches the gospel, brings someone to surrender and repentance, baptizes them, and then teaches them to observe all that Jesus commanded). Assume the evangelist leads one person per day to repeat the "sinner's prayer," while the disciple-maker makes one disciple (obedient follower of Christ) per year. At the end of year one, the score is: evangelist, 366; disciple-maker, two. Year two: evangelist, 731; disciple-maker, four (because both disciple-maker and disciple go on to make one disciple the following year). Year three: 1,096 to eight. Year five: 1,826 to 32; Year 10: 3,651 to 1,024. Year 20: 7,301, compared to 1,048,576 obedient followers of Jesus

Christ. The entire world population would be reached in just 33 years, presuming just one disciple per year. Do you see the fruitfulness of this paradigm?

The reason this is so effective is because it is a heavenly pyramid scheme. The growth is cumulative and leverages all saints multiplying disciples, versus a few gifted leaders or an organization with programs adding nominal converts. This is because each new disciple is taught to obey all that Jesus commanded, including the command to make disciples themselves.

Jesus said that the harvest was ready, but the laborers were too few (Luke 10:2). There are actually plenty of laborers. They just haven't been trained and mobilized. Most seem to assume that the purpose of their salvation is to avoid Hell, or even worse, to settle into "church membership." The real purpose was to enlist them as soldiers to minister to others, plundering Hell and building the ranks in the kingdom of God. This goal is accessible to everyone; it doesn't require special gifts, calls, or titles.

The hypothetical *evangelist* in my example would have required unique gifts and a specific personality, as well as a herculean commitment to engage one person per day, every day. Compare that to the hypothetical *disciple-maker* who may have had a full-time, secular job and a family to boot. He did not have time to commit to full-time street evangelism; he had too many other responsibilities. However, he did engage customers and suppliers regularly in his work. He also interacted with his coworkers. He likewise influenced people he met all the time in his daily affairs. He made the point to always live a godly life and was always attentive to the needs around him. He would offer prayers, openly praise God, and testify about the workings of God in his life on a regular basis. He regularly prayed for divine appointments to minister to others. Occasionally, someone would ask him about his faith, and he was at the ready.

When a person was open, he would present the gospel, baptize them, and proceed to teach them, and show them how to become a faithful follower of Christ. In the example, he engaged only one person per year, but he would then train that person to do the same. Every year the number of disciples engaging others would increase, and each disciple would be mentoring others. This continues indefinitely.

The disciple-maker is not a special person with special gifts. He or she is simply an authentic Christian, someone who has made the commitment to honor God with their life and abide in His teachings and leading. Therefore, we don't need to be perfect or know everything in order to disciple others. We instead take people where we have been and point them in the right direction concerning matters with which we are unfamiliar. Those subjects we learn together. We are all still on the journey to Christlikeness. We all have a way to go. However, we are all at different points in the journey and have something to offer to those who are not as far into their journey.

Even if you are a new convert, you have experienced forgiveness of sins and a clear conscience. You know the love of God and the amazing work of His Son Jesus Christ. You know the Bible is the Word of God and a light for your path. That is a lot to a new believer or a nonbeliever. We all have something we can impart to others.

If questions arise concerning deeper theology, or others have complicated temptations and situations with which you are not familiar, you should have mentors in your life to assist you in providing sound, godly wisdom and advice. Perhaps you could suggest a book by a trusted author that would be relevant. We don't need to have answers for everything. But we *should* learn how to find the answers. Responding, "Let me look into that and get back to you," is a perfectly legitimate answer to a tough question. Don't be intimidated. But never speculate, without first stating that you are indeed speculating.

As I stated earlier, God never wastes a hurt (2 Corinthians 1:4). God will always use the trials you have experienced to permit you to minister to others who are going through the same difficulties. People can argue your theology but never your testimony. Experience earns you a right to speak.

After going through this book and the accompanying group exercises, I hope you will understand the path to spiritual health and wholeness, and will desire to assist others on that journey as well: helping people to know their Father, surrender, repent, experience deliverance and emotional healing, know their personal identity, be filled with the Holy Spirit, seek spiritual gifts, pray, read the Bible properly, make disciples, be front-line ministers, and live intentionally. This is a very strong foundation for discipleship.

We can glean some tips on discipleship from Jesus. First, recognize that we are in the long game. Second, know that the standards are very high, but keep expectations reasonable. Third, Never apologize for or shrink back from speaking the truth. However, don't expect newbies to immediately adopt things that took you years to learn and apply. Discipleship takes time. How they start matters little compared to how they finish. So, finally, seek progress and continual improvement, not immediate perfection.

When it comes to discipleship, relationship is the key element. We must earn the right to speak influence into people's lives. Relational equity permits you to be direct. Learn to listen, empathize, and earnestly take interest in the lives of those around you. Don't fall into the trap of just trying to fix people. And don't go heavy on rules without permission. Rules without relationship leads to rebellion. If you seek to win the battle, you may lose the war. Think "long game." Use wisdom. Be patient and approach everything in love with perseverance (Galatians 6:1). Protect new disciples from churches heavy on extrabiblical rules. This will confuse them. Instead point them to the purity and simplicity of abiding by the Scriptures and having fellowship with the Lord in the Holy Spirit, with strategic fellowship and accountability.

Go deep to go far. Go slow to go fast. Invest in the few to reach the many. By making strong disciples, the process can proceed multi-generationally, ultimately reaching far more people.

Before we move on to other subjects, I want to offer an alternative understanding to the command to *make disciples...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you*. I naturally read that passage to mean that there are fundamental teachings (doctrines) that we should impart to new converts. After years of field ministry, however, I have learned that the greater aim is character development and instilling the desire and will for new converts to abide in everything Christ said, out of a sincere love for God and personal relationship with Him. We teach them to *observe everything*, not merely teach them each and every thing they must observe.

Ultimately, you want to help others to experience the abundant and victorious life in Christ. Remember, this entire enterprise is voluntary. Everyone has free will. You can't force anyone to do anything they don't want to. They must buy in. Your job is to adequately demonstrate and illustrate the benefits of a life with Christ. Never forget, *more is caught than taught*. Your life will speak far louder than your words ever will.

**Session Twelve Exercise**

1. Are you saved?

2. Have you made significant progress or attained victory in a particular area of your faith walk?

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3. In what practical areas can you offer advice or encouragement? (Life skills, Bible reading, homemaking/home management, parenting)

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4. Do you feel inadequate to advise others in specific areas of strength because you have other personal weaknesses?

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5. Can you remember a specific time in your life when someone else spoke influence or encouragement into your life in a meaningful way?

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6. Can you recall times in your life when you wanted that helpful/encouraging input, but did not receive any?

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7. Are there people in your life that you influence?

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8. Are you intentional about being a godly influence in people's lives?

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9. Are you receptive to the needs of people around you and desiring to minister something from God to them?

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**Group Exercise**

Each group member should identify up to five people in their regular circle of influence (not just children). Are they unbelievers, seekers, new or young believers, or maturing Christians? Brainstorm about, and discuss, how you can best minister to each of these levels of need.

	People you influence	Ministry plan
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____



## Session Thirteen: Front-Line Ministry

We are not all evangelists, but all are ministers of grace. If we have been saved, we have a testimony. If we have been freed, we have a witness. If we have hope everlasting, we have good news. If we have experienced the love of God, we have love to offer. If we have freely received, we have something to freely give.

Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence. (1 Peter 3:15)

We are a holy priesthood, ambassadors of the King. We do not need a special gift or call to be a witness to the lost around us. We simply need to embrace the truth of the gospel that we claim to believe. ALL people need salvation. And absent forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, there is no hope. If this is true (spoiler alert: IT IS!), then this should automatically prompt us to action.

Once we know the truth of the gospel and accept that it's our job to share it with others, the only matter remaining is for our compassion to exceed our fear. If we have any love or concern for the lost at all, then we would do something. Apathy is the first demon needing to be slain. The second is fear: fear of failure, fear that we aren't equipped and are inadequate for the task, fear of rejection and disappointment, fear of what people will think or say. If our love overwhelms the fear, and our care for what God thinks is greater than our care for what people think, *then* we can act.

When we step out to share the gospel, we must leave the results to God and not take personal ownership of the outcome. The same is true for praying for healing. We simply need to faithfully minister to people and not dwell on what happens. If we consistently try, eventually we will see positive results, and this will increase our faith and our boldness. When our boldness rises, the work becomes fulfilling, and the fruit can be addictive. My hope with this book is to tap the potential God has put in you, so that you will realize that you are more than adequate to have a very real, positive impact on the lives around you.

As I stated earlier, relationship is paramount to the process. Engage prospects wisely, leveraging mutual interests or other connections. Paul employed the angle of being all things to all people (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). People in life transition (experiencing a move, sickness, death, loss of job, relationship difficulty, coming out of addiction, coming out of jail, etc.) are typically the most receptive to the gospel. When they get sick and tired of the miserableness of life, having done it the world's way, they become more open to trying it God's way.

Now for some tips on becoming a beacon of light that attracts people. Always smile! It's free, and it shows that you are a welcoming and inviting person. Share encouraging words of life in passing. Compliments really boost people. Offer to pray when people are experiencing challenges and ask if there is anything they would like to share, or if you can do anything to help. Always speak random praises to the Lord and share testimonies, even of the little things. All of these will let people know that you are someone who knows the Lord. When they have a question or a need, they will know you are the one to approach.

Pray always for divine appointments. If you pray every morning for God to send someone in your path to engage, your Holy Spirit radar will be active. God will not ignore your requests. But be faithful in following through. Ministry opportunities are rarely convenient, yet they are very rewarding when we answer the call.

You have a testimony. Be prepared to share it at any moment: a brief version, and an extended version. Practice your testimony with someone so that when opportunity presents itself, you will be ready and comfortable sharing.

Familiarize yourself with and practice sharing a few-minute presentation of the gospel of the kingdom. Watch my YouTube videos for details. Here are the main points:

- God created us to be good
- We all sinned and were separated from God: serving Satan, sin and the world (Ephesians 2:1-3)
- God sent Jesus to redeem us and transfer us into His kingdom through the forgiveness of our sins (Colossians 1:13-14)
- When we, in faith, repent, and are baptized into Christ's death, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)
- God forgives us and washes us by the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:9)
- Forgiven, we are reconciled back to God (2 Corinthians 5:18)
- We die with Christ to our former ways and are born again in the Holy Spirit so we can be who He created us to be (Romans chapter 6 and Colossians chapter 3)
- Now we are children of God, heirs of eternal promises, and enlisted as soldiers and ambassadors for His service

Jesus did not send His followers out with just words; they went with power. Healing and deliverance are as much a part of front-line ministry as is sharing the gospel. In fact, without those two elements, our message is mere words to most unbelievers. It's the power of the Name of Jesus, demonstrated in real ways, that validates the preaching of the gospel.

Years ago at a conference, I said that ministering to Muslims was no different than ministering to others. A pastor wanted to see if this was true and asked if we could minister to a Muslim during our field component of the conference. Since he knew no Muslims, we went to the mosque. I shared with the Imam and his family. After the presentation, I prayed for his sick daughter, and she was immediately healed (this was unknown to me at the time; I only learned of it a year later). Shortly after, the Imam abandoned his post. He left Islam entirely after three months. He found me a year later and I baptized him. He is a faithful brother and powerful evangelist to this day. When asked what the reason was for his conversion, he said it was the healing of his daughter. He knew not one individual who was healed in the name of Mohammad or Islam, ever. He knew the words I taught had to be true. Our book trumped his book. Our Jesus trumped his Mohammad.

I will again defer to my YouTube videos or prior books if you would like more details on healing (and deliverance). We will only quickly cover the highlights here.

Faith unlocks God's power. Therefore, many healing methods are viable; do whatever releases your faith. You do not need a spiritual gift to heal. We harness the authority of the Name of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit who resides within every believer to heal. You will see more frequent positive results if you command symptoms to leave than if you ask God to make them go away. Speak to the problem like it can hear you and declare to it to go away in the Name of Jesus. This method leverages authority. Typically, I command first and pray after.

Always start with deliverance. Many ailments are spiritual in nature. I can't tell you how many times we saw people come for healing that really needed deliverance. They were healed during the deliverance, without ever praying for the ailment.

Be specific. Name the parts. Name the symptoms. Do one symptom at a time. Ask how the patient feels before, and immediately after, prayer. I repeat a few times if I continue to see progress. And I pray for answers if I don't. After that point, my faith tends to diminish, so I just leave it in God's hands. Remember, the results are up to Him. On numerous occasions I learned later the healing happened in my absence. Accept whatever God wants to do and don't let a seeming lack of results destroy your faith or keep you from stepping out again.

If healing is elusive, explore deliverance and emotional healing, possibly even repentance. If the opportunity presents itself, work with the victim and find the underlying issue causing the log jam. This is possible only if there is a relationship with the person.

Faith is like a muscle. It builds with exercise. Step out in the small things and grow your faith. In time your experiences will permit you to take on bigger challenges. Faith is also cumulative. The more people praying, the better. The practice of letting one person pray while everyone else watches is counterproductive.

We have already discussed deliverance earlier. I will repeat the important elements here. We all have authority in the Name of Jesus and should not fear. Demonic attack is common, and people need not feel singled out if they are under attack. No special methods or formulas are needed to defeat them. You can just authoritatively command them to go in Jesus' Name, if accompanied by faith. However, it's good to address common points of recurrence proactively. Here are some considerations:

- Bind the spirit with the highest authority concerning the issue of interest
- Command him to come with his entire kingdom, with all works, effects, and orders
- Break and cancel all curses concerning the issue of interest
- Send angels to burn any objects associated with curses
- Send the demon into the pit, burning all orders, and lock the gate
- Pray for the victim for the renewal of their mind and for a hedge of protection around that issue
- Coach the victim how to defend themselves from subsequent attacks

**Session Thirteen Exercise**

Write down your personal testimony, briefly:

1. Your life before Christ;
2. How you came to know Christ;
3. How Christ has changed your life;
4. What life in Christ is like now.

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**Group Exercise**

In a group, each participant should do two of the following exercises out loud (so that every example is completed at least twice as a group). Others coach him/her only as necessary. Repeat the simulations until the essential elements are included. Refer to prior chapters as needed (open book exercise).

1. Share your testimony in a few minutes. Make your simulation realistic (as you would normally communicate in a conversation). Confirm with your group that you have included necessary elements.
2. Share a brief gospel presentation. Make your simulation realistic (as you would normally communicate in a conversation). Confirm that you have included necessary elements.
3. Simulate prayer for healing.
4. Simulate prayer for deliverance.
5. Simulate an emotional healing session.

## Session Fourteen: Intentional Living

We belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Everything we have belongs to Him. *EVERYTHING!* We are simply stewards: of our time, talents, and money/possessions. God wants us to dedicate all of our resources and every moment to Him: “Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father” (Colossians 3:17).

We already briefly touched on the parable of the talents, specifically as it relates to spiritual gifts. We are also urged to use our time wisely:

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Ephesians 5:15-17)

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity [literally, *redeeming the time*] (Colossians 4:5, brackets mine).

Our time is short. We are here today and gone tomorrow. It is important that we recognize that we only get this one shot at life. Let’s use our time wisely to have as much impact for God’s kingdom as we can! As I began writing this final chapter, I was pondering how blessed I was that my plans were canceled today so that I had a sudden free day to write. A day off, for me, is never a day to squander just to do some fun thing, but rather a day to accomplish something of value.

That doesn’t mean we don’t rest and recreate. God gave us the pattern of resting one day in seven. It rebuilds us physically and emotionally. We also see the pattern Jesus gave us of regularly seeking alone time with the Lord. Never neglect that time. It has value of fortifying us spiritually. We likewise recognize the value of relationships, and for me, doing fun things with the children is a priority. I only have them for a short time and I know that to win their hearts on the weightier matters, they must know that I genuinely care for them and want to develop a worthy relationship with them. It’s not all go, go, go. But it is all walking in wisdom using every opportunity to accomplish the Lord’s will.

There is always enough time to do everything God wants you to do, when He wants you to do it. The conundrum lies in discerning His will from our own, knowing with confidence both *what* to do and *when* to do it. Train yourself to be at peace when circumstances interfere with your best-laid plans. Go with the flow and just seek wisdom from the Spirit in everything.

We also need to be good stewards with our money. Just as there is always enough *time* to accomplish God’s will, there is always exactly enough *money* to do just what God wants you to do. It’s impossible for me to believe that our Creator, the King of the universe, would leave His dearly beloved children in short supply. We just must be wise in discerning His will and timing. Don’t get ahead of Him (especially concerning debt).

The richest man on earth is the one who is satisfied with what he has. There are many materially wealthy people out there who do nothing but seek more and more because they are never satisfied. *That* is true poverty. Yet there is a wise man who is content with his needs being met, and he dwells in peace. Paul learned this secret:

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11-13)

We can’t keep our material resources, anyway. We came with nothing and will depart with nothing. I have never seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul. Paul speaks to this when he says,

But godliness *actually* is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we

shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Timothy 6:6-10)

Godly wisdom manifests itself not only in how we use our time and money, but also in good decision-making. Live life moment by moment, discerning what the Lord desires for you at each step. Not everything is a right and wrong decision, but rather may be viewed on a spectrum of *good, better, best* (presuming you are not still encumbered with the *bad*). Strive for the *best* in all things. Permit the Holy Spirit to lead you, even in the practical decisions of life. As a rule, the *best* typically is the path of inner peace, and the option that results in the most glory towards our God. Jesus suffered in anguish at Gethsemane when praying for deliverance, but rested in peace when He surrendered to “Your will be done,” which was the cross.

The battle began at the waters of baptism when you decided to die to self and live to God, alive in the Spirit. We need to permit the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us in all things, surrendering our will to His will, no longer enslaved to the flesh and our carnal desires. The battlefield is in the mind.

if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Ephesians 4:21-24)

We need to strive for thought replacement, so that the things of this world will pale in comparison to the things of God:

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)

Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:13)

*we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5b)

Our thoughts are directly related to our sensory input: what we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell, and are directly affected by our emotions. To foster positive thought replacement, we need to abandon ungodly sensory intake and replace it with things that are in accord with godliness. Worship and praise music, Scripture, godly books, fellowship, prayer, and service can all function as positive replacements. If you have been exposed to a lot of unhealthy inputs, your mind may be full of stuff that you want gone. It will take both deliverance and a time of positive replacement to free your mind from all the evil influence. Just make the commitment, and whenever impure thoughts manifest, pray against them and break out in prayer, praise, or reciting memorized Scripture. Always repent, seeking the Lord for cleansing and forgiveness. With consistency, you will achieve victory.

If you have unhealthy thoughts about yourself or others, or even God, they are normally built on lies. Have truth at the ready to battle the unhealthy thoughts. Counter every evil and impure thought with words of reaffirming truth. Renew your mind with confession, repentance, prayer, praise, or reciting memorized Scripture.

Remember that the enemy leverages emotional trauma as access for spiritual attack. Always be vigilant towards his schemes. Don't let him get to you: “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). Expect attacks and stand your ground, armed and ready:

Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love. (1 Corinthians 16:13-14)

Victory is available for anyone who wants it. There is always a path:

“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Recall James 1:13-15, and the progression of evil: lusts, temptation, sin, and death. We have the power to stop this progression at any step. If we struggle with lusts, thought replacement and engineering controls can help. For example, if pornography is the issue, get offline, or use an accountability app and an accountability partner, avoid media that tempts you, and replace with positive sensory inputs. That’s just to keep lust from becoming temptation. If you are tempted, renounce it, call your accountability partner for prayer, pray, speak life and truth, praise, and read the Bible. That is to prevent temptation from becoming sin. If you sin, confess your sins one to another and participate in the Lord’s table, allowing the cleansing by the blood of Jesus. Pray for the Lord to renew your mind. That’s to prevent sin leading to death. We have the power to stop evil in its tracks. No excuses—just do it.

Victory is ahead of us; it is not behind us. Keep pressing forward:

Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained. (Philippians 3:12-16)

The destination is Christlikeness. It’s always ahead. Fix your eyes on the prize:

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Run the race to win.

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Don’t lose heart over setbacks. Two steps forward and one step back is the normal process. Each and every time you overcome a setback, you become that much wiser and stronger, better equipped to resist a similar attack in the future. Persevere and play for the long game. Don’t live from setback to setback, but from victory to victory. Each setback is simply another opportunity for victory. Remember that God works all things for our good. Learn and grow from the challenges and become the better for them.

Don’t let the enemy, other people, or your circumstances steal your peace. What you possess and have already attained is so great a blessing, give nothing the right to steal that from you. Let your relationship with God through Christ be all-sufficient. Surrender everything to God, and then you have nothing to lose.

The pinnacle in this journey is when your heart (your will, desires, and hopes and dreams) is one with the Lord’s—when you want the very same things He wants. When you love and empathize with others the same way He does. When you value the eternal and become disinterested with the carnal. This is the destination we are striving towards.

I end this with just one question for you: can the Lord personally say to you, *I trust you. Do what you think is right?* Regardless of how perfectly you perform moment by moment, and whether or not you occasionally

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make mistakes, the ultimate goal in this walk is for you to confidently know that the answer to this question is a resounding YES! Make that your goal.



**Session Fourteen Exercise**

1. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your intentionality in the following categories? (1-weak, increasing in strength to 5):
  - Time \_\_\_\_\_
  - Money \_\_\_\_\_
  - Use of talents \_\_\_\_\_
  - Decision-making \_\_\_\_\_
  - Thoughts \_\_\_\_\_
  - Speech \_\_\_\_\_
2. Share your area of greatest weakness with the group and brainstorm suggestions on fortifying that area.
3. How big is the gap between *your thoughts* and *God's thoughts*? How would you rate yourself (1-5) on the following?
  - Walking by the Spirit as opposed to walking by the flesh \_\_\_\_\_
  - Having the mind of Christ \_\_\_\_\_
  - Loving others as yourself \_\_\_\_\_
4. If you are seeking improvement in any of the areas mentioned, pray together (either as a group or in pairs).
5. What is your area of greatest weakness (temptation, sin, or emotional), where you want to press forward but victory is elusive? Brainstorm together as a group to develop a strategy to achieve victory.
6. I urge you to pick an accountability partner (possibly from your group) and establish a convenient schedule when you can communicate going forward to identify areas of personal need and become brainstorming and prayer partners for ongoing progress.