



# Spiritual Maturity Class

by Pastor Jimmy Inman

## True Life Maturity Class

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# Section 1

## The Need for Spiritual Growth

## Introduction To Spiritual Growth

How do we grow as Christians? Did you even know that Christians are supposed to grow? A lot of people think that salvation is like getting a free ticket to heaven or getting a fire insurance policy and that the experience of trusting Christ as Savior is all there is to it. Well, a genuinely saved person has nothing to worry about in regard to hell and is definitely going to heaven. However, salvation is only the **BEGINNING** of our relationship with God. While becoming a Christian gives us a relationship with God that guarantees eternal life (John 17:3), God also wants to give us an abundant life right here and right now (John 10:10). God left us here after he saved us in order for us to love Him and others (Matthew 22:34-40), to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18), to become more like Jesus (Romans 8:29), to serve God by serving others (Mark 10:42-45), and to proclaim the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20); in order to glorify God by producing fruit (John 15:8).

There are three basic aspects to salvation. They are:

**Justification-It means to be made right with God. At the moment of salvation, we are saved immediately from sin's penalty.**

**Sanctification-It means to be set apart unto God. It happens positionally at the moment of salvation. However, we are being sanctified as we are saved progressively from sin's power. It involves spiritual growth and the matching of our practice with our position.**

**Glorification-This happens when we are perfected in heaven. We are saved permanently from sin's presence.**

The Bible teaches us that a Christian is born again supernaturally by the power of God (John 3). That is our entry point into the kingdom of God. However, just as when a baby is born naturally, she has to grow and develop physically; a person who is born again supernaturally must grow and develop spiritually. 1 Peter 2:2 says, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." How does this happen? Well, it is a combination of the work of God in us and us working out our salvation. Philippians 2:12b and 13 says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." Growing as a Christian, just like being saved, is the work of God in us-not our works. However, we must allow God to do His work and discipline ourselves to do our part. The Christian life is a walk. It is not a talk or some religious ritual that we do on Sunday, but it is a moment by moment relationship with Almighty God. How does all this work itself out? How do we actually grow as Christians? Well, that is what we are going to cover in this material. That is why we will proceed by looking at *a picture of a disciple* so we can know what God wants us to become.

## A Picture Of A Disciple

Biblically speaking, what does a disciple look like? The goal of our church is to make disciples. That is really the goal of this class. Therefore, we must identify the nature and characteristics of a disciple. Here is what Scripture says.

### A disciple:

- 1) Is a Christian (Acts 11:19-26, 6:1, 14:21) [Dallas Willard writes, "The word 'disciple' occurs 269 times in the New testament. 'Christian' is found three times, and was first introduced to refer precisely to the disciples. The disciple of Jesus is not the deluxe or heavy-duty model of the Christian-especially padded, textured, streamlined, and empowered for the fast lane on the straight and narrow way. He stands on the pages of the New Testament as the first level of basic transportation in the kingdom of God."]
- 2) Emulates the Teacher (Matthew 10:24-25, Luke 6:40, Romans 8:29)
- 3) Gives 1<sup>st</sup> Place and total allegiance to Jesus Christ (Luke 14:25-33)
- 4) Prays (Acts 1:14, 2:42, 4:31)
- 5) Is a worshipper (John 4:23, 9:38, Acts 20:7)
- 6) Loves God and others (Matthew 22:34-40, John 13:34-35)
- 7) Is taught the Word of God and abides in the Word (Acts 11:19-26, Matthew 28:18-20, John 8:31)
- 8) Ministers to others (Matthew 10:5-15, Mark 10:45)
- 9) Bears fruit (John 15:8)
- 10) Makes other disciples (Matthew 9:37-38, 28:18-20; Mark 1:17; Acts 14:21)

**What kind of disciple are you?**

# Section 2

## Resources for Spiritual Growth

## “Our Riches In Christ”

### Ephesians 1:3-14

**Introduction:** Let’s think about the blessings we have been given by our heavenly Father. It is wonderful to have a Heavenly Father who loves us unconditionally and has blessed us so richly through His Son, Jesus Christ. We are truly rich in Christ Jesus. Proverbs 10:22 says, “The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.”

Paul begins this wonderful passage of Scripture by blessing God. This is a wonderful doxology, an expression of praise and worship that exudes from Paul because of God’s wonderful blessings. “Blessed” is the Greek word from which we get our word, “eulogy,” and it means to say a good word. Paul has a lot of good words to say about his wonderful Father because of all the good things the Father has done for us. Verses 3 through 14 actually constitute one long sentence in the Greek text.

Let’s examine these blessings that prompted Paul to bless God in this way.

#### (I) The Source Of The Blessings

The Bible teaches us that every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17). The Triune God; the Father, Son, and Spirit, is the source of these blessings. James Montgomery Boice writes, “Paul is saying that the blessings listed come from God the Father, become ours in Jesus Christ, and are applied by the Holy Spirit.” The role of the Father is predestination (v. 3-6), the role of the Son is propitiation (v. 7-12), and the role of the Spirit is preservation (v. 13-14). All of these blessings are through the grace of God. John MacArthur has written, “When we bless God we speak good of Him. When God blesses us, He communicates good to us. We bless Him with words; He blesses us with deeds. All we can do is to speak well of Him because in ourselves we have nothing good to give, and in Himself He lacks no goodness. But when He blesses us the situation is reversed. He cannot bless us for our goodness, because we have none. Rather, He blesses us with goodness. Our heavenly Father lavishes us with every goodness, every gift, every blessing. That is His nature, and that is our need.”

#### (II) The Scope Of The Blessings

We are blessed with “every spiritual blessing.” Psalm 84:11b says, “No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.” 2 Peter 1:3a tells us that “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.”

#### (III) The Sphere Of The Blessings

These blessings are “in the heavenly places in Christ.” They are in the supernatural realm, and they belong to us because we are in union with Christ. Thus, they are not dependant upon earthly circumstances. That is why the Bible admonishes us to set our minds on and seek heavenly things instead of earthly ones. However, the key is to be in union with Jesus Christ because “all that the Lord has, those **in Christ** have” (MacArthur). Apart from knowing Christ, who connects us to God, we do not have these blessings from God, but we stand under the wrath of God (2:3) and without hope (2:12).

#### (IV) The Strategy Of The Blessings

What is God's strategy or purpose in giving us these blessings? In other words, what is He trying to accomplish? His strategy is two-fold:

1. **Our good**-These blessings are for our good. That is the definition of a blessing. God is a good and a loving God who wants the best for His children (Matthew 7:11, Romans 8:31-39). Psalm 68:19 says, "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits, the God of our salvation."
2. **God's glory**-Ultimately, everything that God does (including our salvation) is for His glory. At the end of each of the sections (the one relating to the Father that ends at verse six, the one relating to the Son that ends at verse twelve, and the one relating to the Spirit that ends at verse 14), there is the statement that says "to the praise of the glory of His grace" or "to the praise of His glory."

#### (V) The Slate Of The Blessings

1. **He has chosen us (v. 4).** It is so wonderful to know that God wanted to have a relationship with sinful human beings. He chose us even before He created the world. His love is mind-boggling.
2. **He has adopted us (v. 5).** In the Greek culture of Paul's day, an adopted person lost all the rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a fully legitimate son in his new family (literally got a new father), became an heir and this could not change, and his old life was so completely erased that debts were legally cancelled and was regarded by the law as a new person. Every person who is "in Christ" is a new creation who is truly a child of God.
3. **He has accepted us (v. 6).** We are no longer separated from God but reconciled through Christ.
4. **He has redeemed us (v. 7).** On the cross, Christ paid the price to buy us back from our slavery to sin.
5. **He has forgiven us (v. 7).** Based on Christ's atoning sacrifice, God forgives those who are "in Christ." John Calvin said, "God puts our sins out of his remembrance and drowns them in the depths of the sea, and moreover, receives the payment that was offered him in the person of His only Son."
6. **He has given us wisdom and understanding of His will (v. 8-9).** The Bible tells us that we have "the mind of Christ." He teaches His children how to live their lives.
7. **He has given us an inheritance (v. 11).** We are joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17).
8. **He has given us the Holy Spirit (v. 13-14).**
  - A. The Spirit seals us. In that day and time, a seal guaranteed genuineness, showed ownership, granted protection, and designated an authorized person in the state's service.
  - B. The Spirit is the down payment on God's gift of eternal life. He guarantees that we won't lose our salvation.

#### **Conclusion-Application:**

1. If you are not a Christian, verse 13 tells you what to do. It tells you to believe the gospel. Trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Apart from this, you



are separated from God by your sins and under God's wrath instead of God's blessings. However, God loves you and wants to bless you. He will only do this, however, when you receive Christ and have His righteousness applied to your life. Please do this today. That is God's desire for your life.

2. If you are a Christian, it means that you have these blessings as your possession. What does this mean to our lives?
  - A. This is our identity. We are in Christ and all of these things are true of us. A healthy self-image is seeing ourselves as God sees us.
  - B. God is worthy of praise because of who He is and the way He has blessed us.
  - C. We are always blessed-independent of the circumstances of life.
  - D. We must appropriate these blessings by faith, prayer, and obedience.
  - E. We have everything we need. True riches come from God.
  - F. We should live life from a heavenly, eternal perspective.
  - G. We always have reasons to be thankful.
  - H. Christ is to be the focus and the centerpiece of our lives.
  - I. This passage shows that we cannot lose our salvation.
  - J. These wonderful blessings of God's grace should motivate us to allow Him to live through us in response.

### Our Position In Christ

God made us His child at the moment of salvation. He also made us a saint. We are in Christ and Christ is in us (Colossians 1:27, Galatians 2:20). We are complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10). All of our sins have been washed away. We are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). We have been given a new nature. God is our Father who is on our side. What does this mean to our lives?

#### Because I am in Christ, and He is in me:

1. I don't have to live in guilt because I have been redeemed and forgiven of all sin (Romans 3:24, Ephesians 1:7).
2. I shouldn't condemn myself because there is no condemnation to those in Christ (Romans 8:1).
3. I don't have to fear death because I have been given the gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23, 1 Corinthians 15:22).
4. I don't need to feel like no one is on my side because God says He is for me (Romans 8:31ff.).
5. I don't have to wonder if I am loved or cared for because God loves me permanently and unconditionally (Romans 8:31ff.).
6. I don't have to live in defeat or consider myself a victim because I am more than a conqueror through Christ (Romans 8:37).
7. I don't have to feel alone because Christ lives in me (Colossians 1:26-27).
8. I don't have to feel insecure because He will never leave or forsake me (Hebrews 13:5).
9. I don't have to feel hopeless because He is working all things together for my good (Romans 8:28).
10. I don't have to feel abandoned because I have been adopted as a child of God into the family of God and God is my Father (Galatians 4:1-7, 1 Corinthians 12).
11. I don't have to live based on my past because I have become a new creation and old things have passed away (2 Corinthians 5:17).
12. I don't have to figure out how to get blessed because I have already been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).
13. I don't have to feel rejected because God has chosen and accepted me in Christ (Ephesians 1:4-6).
14. I don't have to wonder where I came from because God created me (Genesis 1:1).
15. I don't have to feel alienated from God because He has brought me near to Him (Ephesians 2:13).
16. I don't have to work to earn God's favor because I am what I am by the grace of God (1 Corinthians 15:10).
17. I don't have to wonder if I really have any friends because I am Christ's friend (John 15:15).
18. I don't have to wonder if I am valuable because I have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20).
19. I don't have to live in fear because I don't have that kind of spirit (2 Timothy 1:7).

20. I don't have to wonder if anyone understands me because Jesus does (Hebrews 4:14-16).
21. I don't have to search for significance because I am God's co-worker (2 Cor. 6:1).
22. I don't have to wonder if there's anything I can't accomplish because I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength (Phil. 4:13).
23. I don't have to worry because all of my needs are met (Phil 4:19).

***In Christ, I have everything I need to be everything that God wants me to be. In Christ, I have everything I need to do everything that God wants me to do.***

**“BECOMING HOLY-LIVING OUT OUR POSITION IN CHRIST**  
**Romans 6:1-14**

**Introduction:** God is holy, and He calls believers to be holy in our minds, spirits, bodies, relationships, and motives. 1 Peter 1:15-16 says, “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” We have seen that God makes us holy positionally at the moment of salvation, but we must live out our faith practically. The question is, “How can we do that?”. Thus, in this section, we are going to answer the question of, “How can we become holy in a practical sense?” How can we live like we are “in Christ.” These verses teach us that we can become holy and our practice match up to our position by taking the following **3 actions**:

**(1) We can become holy by KNOWING our position in Christ (v. 1-10).**

- A. We are dead to sin (v. 2, 6, 10).
- B. We are identified with Christ (v. 3-10). This is what is meant by baptism in these verses. It is pictured and symbolized by water baptism. Christ is our substitute, but He is also our representative. Therefore, when we identify with Him, these things become true of us.
- C. We are raised to walk in the newness of life (v.4-5).
- D. We are freed from sin (v.6-7). Notice that it says “from sin” and not “to sin.” This does not mean we will never commit sins again. However, it does mean that we now live in the sphere of righteousness instead of a sphere of sin and that sin can no longer reign over us.

This knowledge is the first step in becoming holy. It is a crucially important building block but not enough by itself because we must act on it.

**(2) We can become holy by CONSIDERING this to be true of ourselves (v. 11).**

The first step is knowledge, but the second step is faith. We must believe this to be personally true in our lives. “Reckon” means to consider, count, or place it to an account. Therefore, we must consider the truths of verses 1-10 to be true of us. We must count it as a fact that we are dead to sin and alive in Christ, identified with Jesus, and free from sin. Then, we must act based on those truths.

**(3) We can become holy by YIELDING our lives to God (v. 12-14).**

God is calling us to consecrate our lives fully to Him by presenting our bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1). There is a negative and a positive aspect to this. The negative aspect is the refusal to allow ourselves to yield to sin while the positive aspect is yielding to God. What are some practical steps we can take to bring this about in our lives?

- A. Surrender totally to God (Romans 12:1, Luke 9:23)
- B. Resist temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13)
- C. Confess and repent of sin (1 John 1:9, Hebrews 12:1)
- D. Live a life of obedience (1 Samuel 15:22-23)
- E. Be continuously controlled by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16, Ephesians 5:18)
- F. Pray (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

G. Intake Scripture (Psalm 1, 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

**Conclusion:** Those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ are saints who sometimes sin. We are no longer sinners who are controlled and dominated by the things of the world. We should see ourselves as God sees us. God sees us in Christ. Christ lives within us. We are identified with Him. We have died to sin to walk in newness of life. We need to consider this to be true of ourselves and yield ourselves fully to God.

## The Holy Spirit

**Introduction:** All of us need help in living our lives. We face many challenges. Thankfully, God has given His children a helper, the Holy Spirit. However, many of us neglect Him in our lives. We only hurt ourselves when we do that. So we are going to look at who the Holy Spirit is, what His role is in our lives, and *how we can live in His power*.

### Who is the Holy Spirit?

#### **(I) The Holy Spirit is the Person of God in our lives.**

- (1) He is a Person. John demonstrates in this passage by using a masculine pronoun when spirit is a neuter noun.
- (2) He is God.

This is revealed by:

- A) Scripture (Acts 5:1-4; 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19)
- B) Nature (According to our passage, He is another of the “exact same kind” as Jesus because the Greek word “allos” is used)
- C) Characteristics (Eternal-Heb. 9:14, Creator-Gen. 1:2, all-powerful-Luke 1:35-37, omnipresent-Ps. 139:7, omniscient-1 Cor. 2:10-11)
- D) Functions (He speaks-Rev. 2:7, He intercedes-Rom. 8:26, He testifies-Jn. 15:26, He leads-Acts 8:29, He commands-Acts 16:6-7)

Application: He is the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the Trinity. He is not some ghost or influence or “active force.” Thus, we are to relate to Him as God like we do the Father and Son.

#### **(II) The Holy Spirit is the Presence of God in our lives.**

- (1) He is God with us.
- (2) He is God in us.
- (3) He is God living through us.

Application: This takes away our excuses and gives us a responsibility. However, it is also an awesome privilege, and it should be a great encouragement to know that God Himself indwells us. We don’t have to live by our power or might but we can live by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### What is the role of the Holy Spirit?

#### **(III) The Holy Spirit is the Power of God in our lives.**

- (1) In Salvation – The Holy Spirit:
  - A) Convicts (John 16:8-11)
  - B) Regenerates (John 3:5, Titus 3:5)
  - C) Baptizes (1 Corinthians 12:13)
  - D) Indwells (1 Corinthians 6:19)
  - E) Seals (Ephesians 4:30)
- (2) In Suffering – The Holy Spirit:
  - Comforts (John 14:27)

- (3) In Scripture-The Holy Spirit:
  - A) Inspired (2 Peter 1:21)
  - B) Illuminates (John 16:13)
- (4) In Spiritual Growth – The Holy Spirit:
  - A) Bears fruit (Galatians 5:22-23)
  - B) Teaches (1 Corinthians 2)
  - C) Helps us to pray (Romans 8:26)
  - D) Enables us to worship (John 4:24)
- (5) In Service-The Holy Spirit:
  - A) Empowers us to witness (Acts 1:8)
  - B) Gives Spiritual Gifts for Service (1 Corinthians 12)

### **How can we live in the power of the Holy Spirit?**

- (1) Be careful not to quench the Spirit (1Thessalonians 5:19).
- (2) Be careful not to grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).
- (3) Be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). How can we be filled with the Holy Spirit? Essentially, being filled with the Spirit means being controlled by the Holy Spirit. It is not a formula because we are relating to a Person, but here are some steps to take in order to be filled with the Spirit.
  - A. Examine your life, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal all sin, and confess all known sin (1 John 1:9). We have to be clean in order to be filled.
  - B. Repent of sin and make things right with others if needed (2 Corinthians 7:10, Matthew 5:23-24).
  - C. Surrender your will completely to God (Romans 6:11, Luke 9:23). We have to be empty in order to be filled.
  - D. Ask to be controlled by the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13).
- (4) Walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26). How can we walk in the Spirit? Walk refers to a lifestyle. It refers to us continually living under the control and by the direction of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, walking in the Spirit refers to being filled with the Spirit on a consistent basis. How can we do that?
  - A. Be filled with the Spirit.
  - B. Abide in Christ (John 15).
  - C. Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This is living in a consistent awareness of the presence of God.
  - D. Renew our minds (Romans 12:2).
  - E. Spend time in God's Word on a daily basis (Psalm 1).
  - F. Seek to avoid sin (1 Corinthians 10:13).
  - G. When we do sin, repeat the steps given on how to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that we can once again be filled with the Spirit.

**I believe that this is the key to living the Christian life because this is how we allow Christ to live through us (Galatians 2:20). We can't live the Christian life any more than we can save ourselves. Victory is achieved by letting Christ live through us. We must live in the power of the Holy Spirit and not our own strength.**

### Application Exercise

1. Write a brief synopsis regarding the biblical teaching regarding the person of the Holy Spirit.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Write a brief synopsis regarding the biblical teaching regarding the role of the Holy Spirit.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Write a brief description of how to be filled with and walk in the Holy Spirit.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? If your answer is yes, is there fruit demonstrate that you are walking in the Spirit?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Will you submit your life to the Lord and follow the biblical steps so you can be filled with the Spirit?  
Using the back of this page, write down any sins you need to confess to the Lord and anything you need to surrender to Him.



# Section 3

## Spending Time With God

## Having A Quiet Time With God

1. **The Introduction**-Let's examine how we can go about spending time with God. Here are some foundational verses:  
 John 17:3 says, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."  
 Psalm 63:8 says, "My soul follows close behind you; your right hand upholds me."  
 Psalm 84:2 says, "My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God."  
 Psalm 63:1 says, "O God, You are my God; early will I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water."  
 Psalm 42:1 says, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for you, O God."  
 Psalm 46:10a says, "Be still and know that I am God."
  
2. **The Idea**-Essentially, having a quiet time is spending time in communion with God. It is spending time relating to the person of God. We follow the example of Christ when we do this. When he was on the earth, Jesus practiced the custom of getting alone and spending time talking to His Father, which is the real essence of prayer (Mark 1:35). Having a quiet time is getting alone with God, talking to Him through prayer, listening to His Spirit, reading His Word, worshipping Him, and receiving guidance from Him. People use different names to describe this time. Some call it a quiet time. Others call it a devotional time or personal devotions. Some people call it spending time with God. Others call it communion with God. The name we use doesn't really matter. The essential factor is that we spend time with God.
  
3. **The Importance**-Here are some of the spiritual benefits that come from spending time with God:
  - A. **Personal knowledge of God:** Hosea 4:6a says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."
  - B. **Personal Growth:** 2 Peter 3:18 says, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."
  - C. **Protection from God:** Psalm 91:1 says, "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."
  - D. **Personal Peace:** Isaiah 26:3 says, "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because He trusts in You."
  - E. **Proper Perspective on Difficult Times:** Psalm 73:16-17 says, "When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me-until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end."
  - F. **Production of Spiritual Fruit:** John 15:5 says, "I am the vine, you are the branches, he who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

### 3. The Implementation-

**A. The Priority-**If we are going to spend time with God, we must make it a priority. We have busy lives with many things competing for our time. We must set aside the time and make an appointment with God. Ephesians 5:16 tells us to redeem the time. 1 Timothy 4:7 tells us to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness. Do we love God enough to set aside time for Him? Do we want to know and experience Him enough to discipline ourselves to spend time with Him?

**B. The Place-**We should have a private place (wherever it may be) that we can go to spend time alone with God (Matthew 6:5-6).

**C. The Procedure-**Let's look at some practical suggestions regarding how to have a quiet time. Remember that the purpose, more than anything else, is to commune with God.

#### Some Practical Suggestions For Spending Time With God

We each need to be led by the Lord and discover an approach that works for us personally. However, these are suggestions with a biblical basis.

1. **Begin by acknowledging God for who He is and ourselves for who we are in relation to God. We should quote Scripture and confess who we are in Christ. Romans 12:2 tells us to "be transformed by renewing our minds."**
2. **Ask God to reveal any unconfessed sin and confess that sin to the Lord. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."**
3. **Praise and worship God. Psalm 29:1-2 says, "Give unto the Lord, O you mighty ones, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Psalm 34:1 says, "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth."**
4. **Thank God for His blessings. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."**
5. **Commit the day to God, pray for His direction, pray for the activities of the day, pray for God to meet your needs and pray for God to take care of your family. Jesus told us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11).**
6. **Intercede (pray for) for others according to a prayer list that you develop. Ephesians 6:18 says, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." Begin with your family. Pray for people to be saved. Pray for those who are sick and suffering. Pray for your church and its leaders. Pray for our governmental leaders.**
7. **Listen. Ask God some questions and ask Him to give His direction to you. Proverbs 1:33 says, "But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil." Ask questions like:**

- A. What is the next step in my relationship with You?
  - B. What is the next step in the development of my character?
  - C. What is my next step as a husband/wife?
  - D. What is my next step as a mother/father?
  - E. What is the next step in the life of our family?
  - F. What is the next step in my job?
  - G. What is the next step in my ministry?
8. Spend time reading the Bible. Psalm 1 tells us that “blessed is the man”...whose “delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.” Have an organized plan for reading through the Bible. Be flexible, however. Let God lead you to particular Scriptures that He wants to speak to you through at that moment.

#### Application Exercise

Take an opportunity so spend some time with God. Write down thoughts that God gives you through His Holy Spirit. Use the preceding page as a guide.

## How To Pray

1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Pray without ceasing.” Prayer is a vital part of our Christian lives. However, what a real prayer? How do we pray? Do we have to know hundreds of Bible verses, long theological words, and poetic phrases to be able to pray? The answer is an emphatic **NO!** Real prayer is communication with God. It is simply talking to and listening to our heavenly Father. Prayer is not a religious show or a religious ritual, but it is relating to a Person. We have direct access to God through our Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 4:16), and the Holy Spirit helps us as we pray (Romans 8:26).

How do we go about praying? Jesus gave us a model prayer in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:5-15). First, He taught us how not to pray. In verses 5-8 He taught us to not pray to be seen of men or to not use vain repetitions like the heathen do. In fact, we do not have to pray this way, but we can pray with confidence because our Father knows the things we have need of before we ask Him (v. 8). Then, Jesus taught us how to pray (v.9-15). The first part of the prayer focuses on God and the second part focuses on our needs. We are to recognize who we are praying to (“our Father in heaven” – this focuses on our personal relationship with Him); praise God (“hallowed be Your name”); and surrender our wills to Him (“your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” – prayer is about lining ourselves up with God’s will instead of trying to get God to do our will); bring our needs and requests, no matter how big or small, to God (“give us this day our daily bread”); confess our sins (“and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”); and ask for God’s help in facing temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”).

A simple way to remember these truths is the acrostic **FACTS**:

**F**aith – It is essential to trust God when we pray.

**A**doration – This is praising and worshipping God for who He is.

**C**onfession – This is asking forgiveness for our sins.

**T**hanksgiving – This is thanking God for what He does for us.

**S**upplication – This is making our personal requests and praying for others.

## “BIBLICAL KEYS TO A POWERFUL PRAYER LIFE”

**Introduction:** The disciples of Jesus asked Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). Those of us who are disciples of Jesus today also need to learn how to pray. God is a sovereign God who has all power, but He has chosen to work in response to the prayers of His people (Genesis 18).

We learn from the model prayer that prayer involves:

1. **Conversing with God**
2. **Worshipping God**
3. **Aligning ourselves properly with God**
4. **Asking of God** (1 Chronicles 4:9-10, Matthew 7:12, James 4:3, Ephesians 1:3, Philippians 4:19).

In this section, let's focus on the asking aspect of prayer. This is called supplication when praying for ourselves and intercession when praying for others. The following are 13 basic keys that will lead us toward a more powerful prayer life if we practice them:

1. Abide in Christ (John 15:1-8)
2. The Word of God abiding in us (John 15:7)
3. Forgive others (Matthew 6:12, 14-15)
4. Humility (Daniel 9:18)
5. Pray according to God's will (1 John 5:14-15)
6. Pray in faith (Matthew 17:20, Matthew 21:22)
7. Pray with a pure heart (Psalm 66:18)
8. Keep God's commandments [obedience] (1 John 3:21-23)
9. Pray with the proper motivation (James 4:1-3)
10. Pray with consistency (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
11. Pray with persistence (Matthew 7:7-12)
12. Pray in the Name of Jesus (John 14:12-14, 15:16, 16:23)
13. Delight in the Lord (Psalm 37:4)

## Real Worship

Jesus said, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve” (Matthew 4:10). Worship is our response of love, commitment, and adoration to God. In true worship, we recognize who God is, recognize who we are, and respond in confession, praise and thanksgiving. It is something we do and not something that is done to us or for us. Someone has written, “The purpose of worship is to come before the Lord in obedience to praise Him, to hear from Him, to confess to Him, and to commit our lives to Him. Every worship service is to be an encounter with our Lord, transcending our feelings, desires, and even our abilities to perform. A great biblical definition of worship is found in Psalm 29:2, which says, “Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.” With that said in the way of introduction, let’s examine **real worship**.

### 1. The Object Of Our Worship

- A. **The Person Of God Himself**-Worship is not about a place. We are the temple of God if we are born again.
- B. **Through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13:15) by the Holy Spirit**

### 2. The Reasons For Worship

- A. **God Desires It**-We are created to worship and saved to worship. “It is the normal employment of moral beings” (A.W. Tozer).
- B. **God Demands It (Exodus 34:14, Philippians 2:5-11)**
- C. **God Deserves It (Psalm 29:2, Revelation 4-5)**-He alone is worthy because He alone is our Creator and Redeemer. God demands and deserves worship because of who He is and what He has done for us. God is: holy, loving, just, righteous, gracious, merciful, longsuffering, all-knowing, all-powerful, sovereign, and caring. He has made us His children through Jesus Christ. Praise His Holy Name!

### 3. The Process Of Worship

How are we to worship? Jesus said that we are to worship “in spirit and truth.” What does this mean and how do we do it?

- A. **Worship In Truth**-To worship in truth is to worship the right God in the right way. It is to worship according to Scripture and not according to the tradition of men (Matthew 15:1-8). We have looked at the real God, but here are some of the biblical elements of corporate, New Testament worship:
  - a. Prayer (Matthew 6:5-13)
  - b. Praise (Acts 2:46-47, Romans 15:9-11)
  - c. Confession of Sin (James 5:16)
  - d. Confession of faith (Romans 10:9-10) [Testimony]
  - e. Scripture reading and study (Luke 4:16-21, 24:27; Romans 10:17)
  - f. Preaching (2 Timothy 4:2, Acts 2:14)
  - g. Lord’s Supper and Baptism (1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Matthew 3:16-17, Acts 2:41-42)
  - h. Offerings (Lives [Romans 12:1-2], Means [2 Corinthians 8-9])

- i. Music and Singing (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, Psalm 150)
- j. Fellowship (Acts 2:46-47)
- k. Physical Acts of Adoration [such as lifting of hands, clapping of hands, kneeling, bowing] (1 Timothy 2:8, Psalm 28:2, 47:1, 63:4, 134:2, 141:2)

## B. Worship In Spirit

Let's think about how we **ARE NOT** to worship.

1. We are not to worship God with an **impure heart** that is full of hypocrisy (Matthew 15:1-8).
2. We are not to worship God with an **impure faith** that is based on tradition (Matthew 15:1-8)
3. We are not to worship God with an **impure motive** that desires to be seen of men (Luke 14:7-11).
4. We are not to worship God with an **impure attitude** that involves pride instead of humility (Luke 14:7-11).

True worship "in spirit" then is the opposite of these things. Worship is an internal affair of the heart and not an external ritual. It must come from a pure heart. It is according to truth. It must have the right motive and attitude. Romans 12:1 says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service {or more literally translated, "your reasonable act of worship"}". Ultimately, worship involves giving ourselves totally to God. Based on what He has done for us through Jesus Christ, we surrender ourselves to Him.

**\*Note\*** Anything we do in obedience to God with the motive of pleasing and glorifying Him is in a sense an act of worship.



### Definitions And Thoughts About Worship

What is worship? We are going to examine what the Bible has to say about worship, but let's begin by looking at some definitions and thoughts that people have shared about worship.

1. Worship is to attribute worth to an object.
2. Worship denotes the act of bowing or prostrating oneself in submissive lowliness and deep reverence.
3. Dr. Robert Saucy writes, "That which makes worship to be worship is the centrality of God. All activities, whether performed in private or in public meetings, are only worship as they are directed toward God. Although the worshipper will be blessed in his own life through the experience of worship, the primary object of worship is not the subjective experience but the ascription of glory to God." Dr. Danny Akin comments on this by writing, "Evaluating a worship service only in terms of how it affected, moved, or inspired you is missing the major focus of worship."
4. Saucy also writes, "All worship is the acknowledgment in praise and adoration of God for what He has already given. Man has nothing to offer but that which was first bestowed upon him. Worship thus initiates with God and ends upon Him to the praise of His glory.".....Therefore, the overriding concern of worship is a personal meeting with God. On one side the emphasis is on God who has acted; on the other side the emphasis is on humans responding."
5. William Temple says, "For to worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God."
6. Evelyn Underhill has defined worship as the "total adoring response of man to the one Eternal God self-revealed in time."
7. Warren Wiersbe writes, "Worship is the believer's response of all that he is-mind, emotions, will, and body-to all that God is and says and does. This response has its mystical side in subjective experience, and its practical side in objective obedience to God's revealed truth. It is a loving response that is balanced by the fear of the Lord, and it is a deepening response as the believer comes to know God better."
8. Worship is an internal affair of the heart and not an external act of ritual.
9. Worship is our response of love, commitment, and adoration to God. In true worship, we recognize who God is, recognize who we are, and respond in

confession, praise, and thanksgiving. It is something we do and not something that is done to us or for us. God is the One who is the object of our worship, and the One who is leading us to worship.

10. Someone has written, “The purpose of worship is to come before the Lord in obedience to praise Him, to hear from Him, to confess to Him and to commit our lives to Him. Every worship service is to be an encounter with our Lord, transcending our feelings, desires, and even our abilities to perform.”
11. A.W. Tozer defines worship as, first, “to feel in the heart’.....Worship also means to ‘express in some appropriate manner’ what you feel.....And what will be expressed? ‘A humbling but delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder’.”
12. Here is one final thought from R.C. Sproul. He says, “We see throughout the Bible that when someone in antiquity encountered the holy God, the experience was almost uniform. To a person they stood quaking in terror, trembling before the Most High God. They were frightened; they were humbled; they were disintegrated; but they were certainly never bored. How is it possible then that people say church is boring?”

## How To Study The Bible For Yourself

**Introduction:** It is imperative that we know God’s Word. This is how our souls are fed (Matthew 4:4). The foundation of the armor of God is truth (Ephesians 6:14). Truth tells us what is really real. It tells us how to think, what to believe, and how to live. The Bible is “the sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17) that is a weapon in our war with the devil. There are five key ways to take up the sword of the Spirit.

1. by **reading** it (1 Timothy 4:13)
2. by **meditating** on it (Psalm 1)
3. by **memorizing** it (Psalm 119:11)
4. by **studying** it (2 Timothy 2:15)
5. by **using** it [in resisting temptation, in teaching, in witnessing, in decision-making, in setting the direction for our lives] (James 1:22)

We are commanded to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). It is important that we develop the ability to accurately interpret Scripture. Accurately interpreting Scripture is the only way to know the mind of God.

That is what we want to learn in this session. There is an old saying that states, “Give a man a fish-feed him for a day. Teach a man how to fish-feed him for a lifetime.” Once we learn how to rightly divide the Word of Truth, we can feed ourselves spiritually for the rest of our lives. Then, instead of relying on the pastor for one spiritual meal a week (which makes us spiritually anemic), the sermon at church is a supplement to what we are learning in our own study.

How can we do this? How can we rightly divide the word of truth? I want to share some guidelines that will be helpful in interpreting Scripture.

### Theological Understandings Behind Correct Interpretation

1. All Scripture is inspired (literally God-breathed) by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:21).
2. Therefore, all Scripture is God’s Word and must be taken as such which means it is the authority for our lives.
3. Therefore, all Scripture is truth (John 17:7). Orthodox Christians realize and have always affirmed that human beings were involved in the writing of Scripture and their personalities and writing styles are part of the Bible. The writers of Scripture were not robots or mere copyists. However, they were led by God and the work of the Holy Spirit protected them from error (Matthew 5:17-18. Evangelical Christians believe in verbal plenary inspiration. This means that all of the Bible, even the very words are inspired by God. Thus, we believe the Bible is inerrant (free from error or falsehood in the original manuscripts).
4. Therefore, all Scripture is consistent with every other part of Scripture (1 John 2:21). It has a single Mind behind it (a perfect mind, nonetheless) so one part agrees with and does not contradict another part.
5. Interpretation is correctly reading out the God-intended meaning of any text. It is accomplished through the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). There has been no new normative revelation for the Body of Christ

since the completion of the New Testament (with the writing of the book of Revelation around 96 A.D.) [note Revelation 22:18-19], but God still speaks today to us through His Holy Spirit. The way He does this is by giving us understanding of Scripture and how it applies to our lives. Through the Bible, the Holy Spirit teaches, convicts, guides, encourages, and reveals God to us. Please note that God only speaks based on and in agreement with His written Word. That is the test for any supposed leading of the Holy Spirit.

6. There is only one correct interpretation but many different applications. It means what God intended it to mean and what it always has meant.
7. It is spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:9-16).

#### Guidelines For Interpreting Scripture

1. We should interpret the Bible prayerfully under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Our opinions are meaningless.
2. We should interpret a Scripture in its immediate context (read several verses before and several verses after).
3. We should interpret Scripture in its overall biblical context by comparing Scripture with Scripture. (This is called the analogy of faith.) We should begin with the particular book that is being dealt with but should also look at any and every Scripture from every part of the Bible that relates. Texts that are difficult to understand should be interpreted in light of clearer passages.
4. We should interpret Scripture in light of history, grammar, culture, etc. Solid, evangelical Bible dictionaries and commentaries can help us in our studies.
5. When looking at a particular Scripture, here is a ten-step process to use in seeking to correctly understand the passage:
  - A. Accurately identify a unit of Scripture and what type of Scripture that it is (historical, letter, doctrinal, parable, poetry, Law, etc.).
  - B. Identify and define the key words.
  - C. Brainstorm and write down observations that came to you regarding truths given in the text. Remember that we are doing an examination in order to discover the God-given and God-intended meaning.
  - D. Write down questions that you have regarding things you don't understand in the passage.
  - E. Use your resources (books, internet, etc.) in order to do research and answer the questions you have asked.
  - F. Identify key connecting or transition words because they often give insight to a passage.
  - G. Using the work you have done so far, write the main idea or key theme of the passage.
  - H. Then, write down other key ideas and how they relate to the main theme.
  - I. With this as your basis, do a synopsis and/or outline of the passage.
  - J. Write down some personal applications based on the truths of the passage.
6. All interpretation should issue in behavior (James 1:22).

## How To Apply The Bible To Our Lives

The Bible is a wonderful book because it is God's Word. It is: **God's autobiography, the revelation of Himself to us; God's love letter, the record of Jesus Christ coming to save us; God's history book, the story of His world; and God's blueprint, His instruction manual on how to live our lives.** Billy Sunday said, "A Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to a person who isn't."

In the last session, we talked about how to study the Bible. It is necessary that we read, study, memorize, and meditate on the Word of God. However, doing those things are not enough in and of themselves. **We must also use the Bible. We must put it into practice in our lives.** Let's look at the following Scriptures: Matthew 5:17-20, Matthew 7:24-29, Luke 8:19-21, and James 1:21-27.

Let's look at the following six areas that we need to use the Bible.

1. **Resisting Temptation (Psalm 119:11, Matthew 4:1-11, 1 Corinthians 10:13)-**
  
2. **Teaching (Ezra 7:10, Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Ephesians 6:1-4)-**
  
3. **Witnessing (Romans 10:17)-**
  
4. **Setting the direction for our lives (Psalm 119:105)-**
  
5. **The functioning of the church (Acts 15)-**
  
6. **Decision-Making (2 Timothy 3:14-17)-**

### Helpful Bible Study Tools

1. A concordance-This is a tool where you can look up words to see where they are used in the Bible. The standard one is *Strong's*, but it is keyed to the King James Version so you may want to look for one that is keyed to whatever translation you use.
2. A Bible dictionary-The one I use is the *Revell Concise Bible Dictionary*, but there are several good ones on the market.
3. *Vine's Expository Dictionary Of Old and New Testament Words*-This is a tool to help study words and their meaning in Greek and Hebrew. This is a fairly simple, basic tool for this purpose. There are certainly more advanced reference works in this area if you want to dig deeper.

**\*I would say these first three resources are necessities for studying the Bible. This is where I would encourage you to begin when it comes to building a library. I am going to give you some other suggestions for other helpful resources.\***

4. Commentaries-I really like the *Bible Exposition Commentary* (New Testament) by Warren Wiersbe. He is releasing commentaries on individual Old Testament books and sections of the Old Testament that I would recommend as well. The *Believer's Bible Commentary* (there is an Old Testament volume and a New Testament volume) by William MacDonald is, in my opinion, the best available one-volume commentary. The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* (there is also an Old Testament and New Testament volume) is also helpful. A more detailed, technical commentary is the 12-volume set, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Other excellent writers who have produced very useful commentaries on various books of the Bible include John McArthur, John Stott, James Montgomery Boice, and Kent Hughes. I would recommend most of the work of each of these men. There are many other good commentators. Be careful when reading any commentary, however. Remember that it is the work of a human being, and we must test everything against Scripture. However, I would suggest starting with MacDonald and Wiersbe.
5. Maps-These can be helpful in understanding some passages of Scripture. I use the *Oxford Bible Atlas*.
6. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
7. *The Words and Works Of Jesus Christ*-This is a book by Dwight Pentecost that I would highly recommend. It is a commentary on the gospels that illuminates them through providing background material and information.
8. *Encyclopedia Of Bible Difficulties*-This is a book by Gleason Archer where he provides explanations of hard to interpret passages of Scripture. It can be useful in dealing with certain passages.

# Section 4

## Other Spiritual Disciplines

### Trusting God

Hebrews 11:6 says, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him {God}.” Colossians 2:6 says, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.” How did we receive Christ? We received Him by faith. How are we to walk, then? In the same way – by faith! Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” Galatians 2:20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” More than anything else, God wants us to trust Him. Romans 14:23 says, “For whatever is not from faith is sin.” FAITH means Forsaking All I Trust Him. Faith believes God is who He says He is and believes God will do what He says He will do. Ultimately, faith is taking God at His Word and acting on it (James 2). We cannot live the Christian life in our own strength. The only way to effectively and victoriously live the Christian life is to trust Christ and allow Him to live through us.

### Obedience

1 Samuel 15:22 says, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.” Matthew 7:24 says, “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.” Luke 6:46 says, “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” 1 John 2:3-6 says, “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.” Simply put, God wants us to do what He tells us to do. He is much more interested in obedience than in outward things such as religious rituals. Obedience honors God and is what is best for us as well. We can obey God by doing what He tells us in His Word and following the leading of His Spirit. What are the areas of our lives where we need to begin to obey the Lord?



### Fellowship With Other Believers

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” Individual Christians are members of the Body of Christ. We are the family of God, and we need one another. Christianity is designed to be a corporate and not just an individualistic experience. The New Testament emphasizes the local church. Every Christian needs to be a part of a local church so they can be fed, nurtured, cared for, ministered to, have accountability; and so they can use their gifts in serving God by serving others. God wants us to love one another, and He wants His Church to be unified (John 17; Acts 2:40-47; 1 Corinthians 1:10, 12:25; Ephesians 4:1-3, Philippians 2:1-4). Jesus made it a habit to go to the synagogue each week (Luke 4:16), and we should follow his example by attending church each week. We should also be involved in a small group of believers for teaching, encouragement, and mutual ministry. Our fellowship is our “common life” in Christ. We are truly brothers and sisters in Christ who need *one another* and are called to relate to *one another* properly as the following list illustrates.

#### “One Another” List

- 1) “*have peace with one another*” (Mark 9:50b).
- 2) “A new commandment I give unto you, that you *love one another*; as I have loved you, that you also *love one another*” (John 13:34).
- 3) “*Be kindly affectioned to one another* with brotherly love. (Romans 12:10).
- 4) “*Be of the same mind toward one another*. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits” (Romans 12:16).
- 5) “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith *one may edify another*” (Romans 14:19).
- 6) “*Wherefore receive you one another*, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7).
- 7) “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and *admonishing one another* in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16).
- 8) “That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have *the same care for one another* (1 Corinthians 12:25).

- 9) “For, brethren, you have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love *serve one another*” (Galatians 5:13).
- 10) “And be ye *kind to one another*, tenderhearted, *forgiving one another* even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).
- 11) “*Submitting yourselves to one another* in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21).
- 12) “Wherefore *comfort one another* with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).
- 13) “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but *exhorting one another*; and so much the more, as you see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).
- 14) “*Confess your faults to one another*, and *pray for one another*, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).
- 15) “*Use hospitality to one another* without grudging” (1 Peter 4:9).
- 16) “As every man hath received the gift, even so *minister the same to one another*, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

### Small Group Ministry

**Introduction:** The Bible says in Acts 5:42 that “daily in the temple, *and in every house*, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” In Acts 20:20, Paul said that he “kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly *and from house to house*.” The Bible pictures large gatherings of believers and small, intimate gatherings as well. Both are necessary. In fact, we believe that a church should always be growing larger and smaller at the same time. It should be growing larger through evangelism as more and more people come to Christ, but it should be growing smaller as people are plugged into small groups where relationships can be developed. Each of us desperately needs to be connected to others as we journey through what is often a fragmented world. We believe that life change can most easily occur in the context of a small group of believers. All the ministry of a church (evangelism, fellowship, discipleship, worship, and ministry) can take place in a small group. Pastoral care can be done through these groups as believers care for one another. People who are not yet Christians can come and learn about Jesus Christ in a non-threatening environment. **Ultimately, we believe God’s plan is for believers to build a loving and united community within to reach the community without in order to share in an eternal community with Him.**

It is our intent to be “a church of small groups.” This means that small groups are not just another program tacked onto an overcrowded church schedule, but they are really at the heart of what we do as a church. Much of the ministry of the church will be done through small groups. God wants His children to live in community with one another, and small groups are the primary vehicle we are using to pursue community.

**Functions of a small group:** These are some of the basic elements that should be done through a small group:

1. **Small groups are built on authentic relationships.**
2. **Small groups are places where truth meets life through application-oriented Bible study and discussion.**
3. **Small groups are places where people love each other and minister to one another’s needs.**
4. **Small groups are places where spiritual growth takes place through intentional shepherding (which means care and discipleship).**
5. **Small groups are places where people will be introduced to Jesus Christ.**
6. **Small groups are places of prayer and service.**
7. **Small groups are places where leaders are developed.**
8. **Small groups are a key part of the ministry of True Life Church. The ultimate goal is the multiplication of disciples, leaders, groups, and churches so that God’s kingdom will be built to the glory of the Lord.**

**Benefits of being in a small group:** Why should you join a small group? Consider the following benefits:

1. **You will understand the Bible better in a small group.**
2. **You will begin to really feel like a part of God's family.**
3. **Prayer will become more meaningful to you.**
4. **You will be able to handle stress better because others will be helping you bear your burdens.**
5. **You will have a natural way to share Christ with friends, relatives, and work associates.**
6. **You will discover leadership skills you never knew you had.**
7. **You will deepen your understanding of worship.**
8. **You will be functioning like a New Testament Christian.**

**Key elements of a small group strategy:** What are the key elements that must be in place in order for this strategy to work?

1. **A reasonable span of care-**One person must not attempt to care for too many people.
2. **Leadership Development-**Bill Donahue writes, “Your group, and the small group ministry at your church, thrives on the ability to identify and develop qualified leaders to shepherd little flocks of believers and reach out to strays who need Christ.”
3. **Group Multiplication-**We will use the “open chair” concept to focus on adding new people to the groups. Forming new groups is the ultimate goal.
4. **Intentional Shepherding-**Bill Donahue writes, “Turning irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ has always been at the heart of God and his church. Jesus commanded us to speak, love, and serve others as He would, and live lives that are

increasing in love, joy and the other fruit of the Spirit. Disciples are not just people with more answers to Bible questions or who attend more events or listen to more Christian radio. Disciples are people who act like Christ, who are willing to train to be like Him, who practice the disciplines of prayer, solitude, worship, Bible reading and study, community, and ministry. They are lifelong learners and lovers of Christ. Small groups that get intentional about shepherding people toward maturity will see fruit multiplied in people's lives."

**5. Ministry Coordination**-All of the small groups and all of the ministries of the church must function together to accomplish the mission of the church.

## Stewardship

A steward is someone who manages the resources of another. Every Christian is a steward because everything we have is a gift from God (James 1:17). God owns it all. However, we are responsible for the way we use what God gives us. Ultimately, God desires that we be totally surrendered to Him. Romans 12:1 says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." **God wants us to totally commit our lives; time, talents and treasures; to Him.** He wants us to use our time and talents in serving Him by serving other people. He wants us to use our treasures in supporting the work of His kingdom. A good steward invests his resources, monetary and otherwise, in the Lord's work.

Let's focus specifically on monetary giving. People often get upset when this subject is discussed. However, it is a very important subject that the Bible is clear about. It is also an area through which God desires to bless His children. Let's think about the **Amount of our Giving and the Attitude of our Giving.**

### The Amount of our Giving

Malachi 3 is very clear that the biblical basis for giving is the tithe, which is the **first 10% of our income.** God wants our best and not our leftovers. Proverbs 3:9 says, "Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the firstfruits of all your increase." Remember that tithing predates the Law (Genesis 14:20) and that Jesus commended the practice (Matthew 23:23). As New Testament Christians we may be led by the Holy Spirit to give offerings beyond this amount, but this is the basic amount that God requires. In fact, Malachi 3:8 tells us that we are robbing God if we don't give the Lord a tithe. Pastor Mac Brunson says, "For Christians under **grace** to give less than those under the Law is a **disgrace.** He goes on to promise a blessing for obedience and discipline for disobedience so it is very important for us to obey the Lord in this area. The Lordship of Jesus Christ in the life of the believer requires each area, including our wallets, to be surrendered to Him. Giving stimulates spiritual growth while a lack of giving greatly hinders it so I want to encourage you to obey the Lord in this area if you are not. Jesus talked a lot about money and taught us that our handling of money is a test that indicates the condition of our hearts. **Please remember these 9 important facts about tithing:**

1. It is an act of faith that says I can live better on 90% with God's blessing than on a 100% on my own.
2. It is an act of obedience that acknowledges Christ's Lordship over my life.
3. It is an act of stewardship that acknowledges God as the owner and provider of all that I have.
4. It is an act of worship that expresses gratitude for God's gracious provision.
5. It is an act of ministry that enables people's lives to be touched with the power of the gospel.
6. It is an act of sharing that is an antidote to the sin of greed.

7. It is an act of blessing that blesses me in return.
8. Because people's lives are touched, it is really an investment in eternity (Matthew 6:19-21).
9. It is an act of testing that God uses to reveal the condition of our hearts.

### **Our Attitude About Giving**

God is not only interested in what we give, but why we give. He wants us to give willingly and cheerfully from a right heart. 2 Corinthians 8-9 is an extended passage about giving. Here are some of the principles that it teaches:

1. God wants us to give sacrificially (8:1-4). We haven't really given unless it truly costs us.
2. God wants us to first give our lives to Him (8:5).
3. God wants us to excel in this virtue just as in other areas of our lives (8:6-7).
4. Generous giving is evidence of our love for God (8:8).
5. God is the ultimate giver because He gave His Son, and we are only following His example by giving (8:9).
6. Giving is proportionate based on what we have (8:12-15).
7. The church should carefully, wisely, and judiciously use God's money (8:16-21).
8. Generous giving motivates others to give (9:1-2).
9. God wants us to give with the right attitude, which is cheerfully and willingly (9:5-7).
10. God blesses and provides for those who give (9:8-11).
11. Giving glorifies God (9:11-14).
12. Giving is to be an expression of thanksgiving to God (9:15). God gave everything to us. What will we give to Him? Our attitude should be one of wishing we had more to give.