Spiritual Growth Study Series

Minneapolis-St. Paul Church of Christ

Inner Action Ministries
Spiritual Growth Study Series

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Introduction

In Matthew 28:18-19, Jesus called his disciples to go and make disciples of people of all nations. Part of that call to discipleship is for disciples to teach other disciples to obey everything that Jesus commanded. This call commits us to an ongoing lifestyle of both learning and teaching. There is never a time when we will have “arrived” and no longer need to learn, but only need to teach others. Of course, as Jesus’ disciples, we should always be teaching others in one way or another, but to follow Jesus is to commit to a lifelong ethic of learning as well.

We start that journey when others sit with us and begin to teach us what it means to follow Jesus as his disciple and to enter into his life. But that journey doesn’t end when we enter the water to be immersed into Christ. Through the pages of this Bible study series we continue that lifelong journey of learning to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

How Should We Approach These Studies?
- These studies are intended to be flexible and user friendly and to be used in a group or individual setting
- There is no one way to approach these studies
  - You might want to sit down and go through these studies in a discipling partnership and mentor a new disciple through the series
  - You might want to start each study or do a quick overview and encourage the new disciple to work through the remainder of the study on their own and then come back and discuss the highlights of what you learned during your next time of meeting

Which Studies Should We Do?
- Again, there is no one way to go through this study series
- The studies are written to follow a certain logical progression and you are encouraged to consider going through every study
- But you may find that it meets your needs to only go through some of the studies
  - There is a logical progression but each study stands alone as well and the studies of this series are suitable for flexibility of doing them in a different order or only choosing some
- You may find that some of the studies are longer than what you have time for in one sitting and discover that it takes you two or even three times to really dig into and discuss through just one study
  - Don’t worry about that
  - This isn’t a race
  - In fact, you have your whole life to learn to be Jesus’ disciple
  - Building well is far more important than building fast
- You will find a check box next to each study so that you can “check it off” after completing a study

Didn’t We See That Already?
- As you go through the studies, you might begin to notice certain passages of Scripture or certain concepts popping up several times throughout the series
  - That is no accident
  - We believe that human beings learn best through subtle repetition
  - This means that important concepts and passages that are vital for the new disciple to know and live by are repeated liberally so as to help us really absorb the full meaning of that particular concept or passage
What is Faith?

There are different meanings to the word faith. In our culture we often times use “faith” to mean something more like “hope,” such as “I have faith that they will show up on time this week.” In the Bible there are two primary meanings to the word faith. One is a noun, as in they became believers in “the faith” or they were urged to stay strong in “the faith.” The other usage, the one that we will focus on today, is the action of living based on what we know to be true about God’s word. Faith is a fundamental and vital element to the believer because, among other reasons, Hebrews 11:6 reminds us sternly that without faith it is impossible to please God.

What is Faith?
Hebrews 11:1-2
- Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see
- Do you think that faith then applies to anything we want that we cannot see?
  - Read Hebrews 11:35
  - What is the “hope” being referred to in this passage?
- The context of this passage is very important
  - This passage, in larger context, has to do with living by and for the reality of the resurrection age, which is the great Christian hope
  - We are called to be certain of that reality and live according to the values of that age now even though we do not yet see it
  - By reading this in context, does this give a fuller understanding to your previous understanding of faith?

Romans 4:18-22
- What is faith according to this passage?
- Abraham was credited as righteous because he had faith that what God promised was true and worth living by
- There is an important principle here that we should not overlook
  - We can only right have biblical faith in the things that God promises us and those things that God tells us we can have faith in
    - Can I rightly have faith in being resurrected?
    - Can I rightly have faith in the Spirit to guide me through difficult times?
    - Can I rightly have faith in God providing for my basic needs as long as I seek his kingdom first?
    - Can I rightly have faith that God will help me get the exact job or house that I want?
  - Which of the above four statements were something in which we cannot rightly have biblical faith?
- How does understanding this help adjust your previous understanding of faith?

2 Corinthians 5:7
- What does it meant to walk by faith and not by sight?
- This is another passage where, in context, Paul was referring directly to the hope of resurrection
- What does it mean to be a people that walk by faith in the truth of resurrection rather than sight?

James 2:14-24
- Faith is nor just mentally agreeing with something
- According to this passage, what is faith?
  - To have true faith, we must also “do”
• Faith is action induced by belief and gratitude
  • How does this differ from what most people in our world today might say that faith is?
• Genuine faith does not involve thinking that I earn my status in Christ based on what I do because faith is completely reliant upon God

Do I Need Faith?
Hebrews 11:6
• Why is faith absolutely necessary according to this passage?
• What is the result if we don’t have biblical faith?
• What two elements of faith are discussed here?
  • Most people would agree with the first element of faith here
  • But why is it necessary to believe that God will reward those who seek him?
  • In the context of this passage, what is the reward to which the author refers?

Things to Ponder
• Why is it so important for us to understand that, biblically speaking, faith is not just a mental agreement with something but includes the corresponding action that confirms that we really do believe it?
• Are there any examples from your past where you can see that you “believed” or “agreed” with something but did not really demonstrate faith in it?
• How would you respond to the following thought:
  • “Anyone can believe that a man could have the ability to walk blindfolded across a tightrope stretched over the Grand Canyon while pushing a wheelbarrow with 200 pounds in it... Faith is getting into the wheelbarrow yourself.”
• What dangers are posed spiritually by reducing faith to mere mental agreement and not understanding that action is part of genuine faith?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Understanding Faith

One of the big differences between religion and a genuine relationship with God is understanding. Religion tends to thrive when people follow along with certain rules, regulations, or restrictions rather than thinking their way through a genuine relationship with God. Religion conforms while a true relationship with God transforms. It is important, then, to begin to understand as much about topics like faith as we can and continue to study and learn what they are biblically and the impact that they have on our lives.

From Where Does Our Faith Come?
Romans 10:17
- From what does faith come according to this verse?
- Why is it important to know that faith comes from God’s word
- The fact that faith comes from God’s word enforces the fact that we can only have faith in the things that God has promised through his word
- We can take all of our troubles and concerns to God, but we must be careful to root our faith in the things that come from God’s word alone

Romans 12:3
- God has distributed faith to each person
- Our faith comes directly as a result of the grace of God
- Why is it vital to understand that God makes faith available to everyone who obeys his word?

1 Corinthians 2:4-5
- Our faith must rest on God’s power and God’s word
- What are some of the things other than God’s word that you have put faith in during your lifetime?
- What things other than God’s word can we be tempted to use to generate faith?

Matthew 9:1-2
- What does this verse teach us about faith?
- Notice that it says that Jesus “saw” their faith? What does this teach us about faith?
- They believed in Jesus but they also took action on that belief?

What Can Lack of Faith do?
Matthew 13:53-58
- What kept the people from experiencing the fullness of God’s power?
- If we don’t believe in God’s word or don’t act on that belief then we can keep the power of God from working in our life?
- Why is it important to understand that lack of faith can inhibit God’s power in our lives?
- What are ways that you are tempted to struggle in faith or ways that you have shown a lack of faith at times?

Ongoing Faith
Ephesians 3:10-12
- We develop our relationship with God and continue in the community of Christ, the church, through faith in what God said rather than what we see or feel
- What does this mean in practical terms as it relates to being part of a family of believers?
• Why is being part of the body integral to continuing in a life of faith (see Hebrews 3:12-14)?

**Hebrews 10:38-39**
• What does it mean that “the righteous will live by faith”?
• We are called to live by faith and not shrink back, regardless of what our sight or feelings might be telling us.
• As we continue on our journey of discipleship, it will demand us to walk by faith in God and believe the things that the Word of God says to be true, oftentimes despite appearances.

**Things to Ponder**
• What is the role of God when it comes to our faith? What is our role when it comes to faith?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Are We Saved by Faith?

One of the more controversial questions in today’s religious world is whether people are saved by faith or through other means. The Bible confirms that we are indeed saved through our faith, but not by our faith. We are saved by grace through faith. But what exactly is faith? That is the key. Many in the religious world will define faith as little more than a mental agreement with certain ideas. Anything more than that, they would claim is not faith but works. But if we let the Bible define faith for us we see that faith comes to life in action. Faith that is not accompanied by corresponding action is no faith at all. In this study we will seek to find harmony between the action of being baptized into Christ and having faith.

Saved by Grace through Faith
Ephesians 2:1-10
- In what state are we before entering into Christ?
- Why does God allow us to enter into Christ?
- Paul describes entering into Christ as “being made” what?
- We are saved “by” what according to this passage?
- We are saved “through” what?
- By what are we not saved?
- For what purpose are we saved?

Saved by Mercy through Baptism into Christ
Titus 3:3-8
- In what state are we before entering into Christ according to this passage?
- We are saved because of God’s what?
- We are saved “through” what?
- What is the result of our being saved?
- Does it seem that God’s “grace” and “mercy” are presented as parallel ideas in the Ephesians passage and this one?
- Does it seem that “faith” and “baptism” are presented as parallel ideas in the Ephesians passage and this one?
- According to verse 5, this baptism or “washing of rebirth” is not salvation by our own what?
- What parallels do you see between verse 5 and Acts 2:38?

Faith and Baptism
Colossians 2:6-14
- What does Paul mean when he refers to “continue to live your lives in him”?
- Of what does Paul warn his readers in verses 8-9?
- What is the result of being “circumcised by Christ”?
- When do enter into Christ according to verse 12?
- We are buried in what and raised in what?
- Why do you think Paul connected those two items inextricably within the same event?
- What is the result of this baptism according to verse 13?
- Optional: Continue reading chapter 3. What further truths does this tell us about being baptized into Christ?
Romans 6:1-7
- Why, according to verse 2, should we be done with a life of sin?
- When, according to verse 3, did that death to sin take place?
- Into what are we baptized?
- Baptism buries us into what?
- To what, through faith, are we raised?
- What is the promise for those that have been united with him in death at baptism?
- Does this verse ever indicate that any of this is symbolic, or does it seem to indicate that this a real event that brings real death to sin and the real hope of resurrection and life?

1 Peter 3:17-22
- What did the water of Noah’s flood do to everything that had become evil?
- What saved Noah and his family through the water?
- The water of Noah’s flood symbolizes what?
- Is the water of Noah a symbol or is baptism called a symbol?
- How are we saved through this water that puts to death sin?
- How then is Jesus like the Ark?
- What happens at baptism according to this passage?
- Thinking of Romans 6, what does it mean that we are saved by the resurrection of Jesus Christ rather than this being some mere ceremonial cleansing?

Romans 10:9-13
- What did Paul discuss in chapter 6 that is still part of the larger context in this passage?
- Why is it necessary to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead (don’t forget the context going back to chapter 6)?
- Do you know when the early Christians “confessed” that Jesus was Lord?
- Based on the continuing context of chapter 6 through this passage, do you have any thoughts?
- What does it mean in verse 13 to “call on the name of the Lord”?
  - Read Acts 22:12-16
    - How is “calling on his name” defined here
    - What happens at baptism according to this passage?
  - What happens when one “calls on the name of the Lord”
  - Does it help to know that the way the first century people used “name” it was a virtually synonymous term with the “life” of someone?

Things to Ponder
- Take some time to consider the Scriptural connections between faith and baptism into Christ. How would you explain the connection between the two concepts in your own words. Talk to someone else and make sure that you have a clear understanding of this and can explain it in your own words.
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
The Balance of Faith & Works

What is more important in the life of disciple? To live by faith or to live by works of righteousness? Which one saves us? Which one keeps us saved? Which is more important? Sometimes we can begin to think that these are two opposing forces as though we must either rely on faith and God’s grace or on our own works. This can be especially tricky for new Christians, because older Christians often pass along the mindset of giving lip-service to God’s grace but then in reality live by a mentality that lives and dies on their own performance and works. The key is to find a healthy and biblical common ground between a mentality that chalks even the most lukewarm and disobedient behavior up the warm embrace of God’s grace and the mentality that believes that one must constantly be working and succeeding spiritually to earn and keep God’s favor. A biblical balance must be found.

What is the Role of Faith?
James 1:22-27; 2:16-24
- True faith results in genuine action
- That is why Jesus followed the call to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength with the command to love one another
  - How we love others is the demonstration and action point of our love for God
- What is the inter-relationship between faith and obedience according to this passage?

John 8:31-32
- Can you have true faith without obedience?
- Why did Jesus challenge the Jews who had “believed” or agreed with him up to that point to abide in or hold firmly to his teachings?

What is the Role of Works?
Ephesians 2:8-10
- By what are we saved according to this passage?
- Why is it important to know that we are not saved by our own works and efforts?
- What should our salvation result in our part, though?
- Our obedience and works are the verifier or evidence of the genuineness of our faith

2 Kings 5:1-15
- In what ways does this incident serve as a wonderful picture of the role of God’s grace in our salvation and the necessity of our obedience?
- Namaan’s healing was by the grace of God but he still needed to be obedient in his efforts
- If he was not obedient, he would have kept himself from receiving God’s unmerited favor

What is the Role of Grace?
Ephesians 2:8-9
- What does it mean to be saved by grace?
- What does Romans 8:1 tell us about those that have entered into Christ and been saved by God’s grace?

Romans 6:1-4; Jude 1:4
- Grace can be abused; the grace of God is not a license to continue in sin
- Why do you think it can be so dangerous to misunderstand God’s grace and take advantage of it?
2 Corinthians 12:6-10
• We certainly should not choose to continue in sin so as to bring about God’s grace but what does this passage demonstrate about the importance of understanding God’s grace?
• When we find weakness and inability in our lives, why is it vital to remember God’s grace?

Titus 2:11-14
• What does God’s grace call us to do in response?

Action Points
• Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about faith, works, grace and the balance between those three things that you didn’t previously know
• What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

Things to Ponder
• Why do you think that God saved us by grace for the purpose of good works? What does it mean to be saved for good works?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
God’s Word tells us that we are saved by grace. That is incredible and encouraging an brings hope to all, yet many of us don’t actually have a solid concept of what grace is exactly. Grace is sometimes referred to as “unmerited pardon” or “being given something we don’t deserve.” Perhaps the best definition of grace, though, is that it is God’s unending and loving favor. What may shock us is that God does not give his grace without merit, technically speaking. Is that different from what you’ve heard before? As we will see, God has poured out his grace on his Son, who is worthy of his grace. It is only by entering into the life of Christ that we come into contact with God’s grace and coming into contact with God’s grace for our own lives. For us it is entering into the life of Christ that is the unmerited and amazing gift. Only in the life of Christ will we find God’s unending, loving favor. That seems like a small distinction but it is the difference between one specific restaurant in you town giving away free meals and all of them doing it. If the free food is found in only one place, then you must know where that is in order to go there and receive the food. So it is with understanding the God’s grace is given to Jesus the Messiah and only in his life will we find God’s incredible grace, forgiveness, and salvation.

Saved by Grace
Ephesians 2:4-8
- According to this passage we are saved by what?
- If we are saved by grace, then it is important to have a good understanding of what that grace is
- Where does this passage seem to indicate that we come into contact with God’s grace?

God’s Favor
Psalm 84:11
- To whom does God give his favor (a word that can also be translated as “grace”)?
- Who has walked a completely blameless life before God (see Romans 3:23)?
- Who then, would be worthy of God’s favor?

Grace on the Messiah
Luke 2:40; John 1:14
- Jesus was full of what?
- If we understand that “grace” is primarily God’s favor, then what does it mean that Jesus was full of “grace”?

Grace in the Life of Christ
John 1:16; Romans 3:24; Romans 5:1-2; 1 Timothy 1:14; 2 Timothy 1:9
- Out of what do we receive grace (John 1)?
- We are justified by God’s grace through what (Romans 3)?
- Through whom and by what have gained access to God’s grace (Romans 5)?
- Where is the grace of God poured out on us (1 Timothy)?
- Where do we find the grace that God wants to give to us (2 Timothy)?

2 Corinthians 8:9
- What did it cost Jesus in order for us to receive the grace that was due to him?
- Why is it so important to know that God’s grace is available only in the life of Christ?
Colossians 2:11-15; 3:1-4

- When do we enter into the life of Christ?
- We are buried in what and raised in what?
  - Interestingly, the early church (1st, 2nd, 3rd centuries) referred to baptism interchangeably with the term “grace”
- What should be the response to dying to our old selves and being raised with Christ?
- We are hidden in Christ, which means we receive everything that is due to Christ.

Things to Ponder

- We must enter into Christ’s life to have access to God’s grace, but that life is something that we can never earn through our own merit. What are the dangers inherent to thinking that we must or can earn God’s grace by entering into the life of Christ through our own merit or worth?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Living by Grace

We are saved by grace as we embrace and accept God’s gift and unmerited favor found in the life of Christ. But it is a an undeserved gift that does demand a response on our part. We must never think that we somehow earn God’s favor but when we truly understand it, we will respond in the way that God’s Word calls us to.

Grace and our Response

Romans 5:20-6:2
- What does Paul mean when he says that “where sin increased, grace increased all the more”?
- How does grace reign?
- What should be our attitude towards sin (or the response towards sin) based on grace?
- Why do you think grace should result in us being dead to sin?
- When we embrace the life of Christ, we grow in God’s favor, and our ongoing appreciation for his grace results in our desire to continue to die to self.

Titus 2:11-14
- To what does Paul refer when he says that “the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people”?
- What does grace teach us?
- For what do we wait while the grace of God (the life of Christ) continues to teach us?
- What kind of a people does Jesus Christ want?

Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 15:10
- Ephesians 2:10 says that we are saved so that we can engage in good works (for the will of God). How do these verses connect grace to that thought?

Galatians 1:6; (See also Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 12:15; Jude 1:4)
- Grace is certainly unmerited, but why would this passage assert that one can desert the grace of Christ and imply that we must continue to live in the grace of the life of Christ?
- We must be on guard because we can abandon it and walk away from it?

No Condemnation

Romans 8:1
- This verse helps us understand the balance in understanding how grace can be free and unmerited and yet how the Scriptures can call us to lives of holiness and warn us not to abandon the life of grace.
- God does call us to the high standard of the life of Christ (Matt. 5-7) and living as Jesus did (1 John 2:6) but we must never forget that we are saved by grace and not the standard of the law or being perfect.
  - The life of grace enables us to grow in Christ and calls us ever higher
  - But there is no condemnation for those in Christ
- What does it mean that there is no condemnation?
- Read Ephesians 4:1
  - Grace calls us to the perfection of Christ but reminds us that we are saved by his life and not our effort
  - That means that we should remember that we should always be growing in the life of Christ, always know that we will fall short, and never forget that as long as we remain in the grace of Christ’s life we will not be condemned
Grow in Grace
2 Peter 3:18
- What do you think it means to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”?
  - What are some of the ways that we can do that?

Things to Ponder
- Take some time to reflect on the amazing nature of God’s grace. What does it mean to you personally?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
God’s Part, Our Part: The Mission

The clear commission that Jesus gave to all that would be his disciple is to go and make disciples of people of all nations. Some that would claim to be Christian largely ignore that call while others take it so seriously that make themselves miserable with the pressure they put on themselves if they’re not constantly making disciples and being evangelistically fruitful. As part of this great mission, however, it is vital to understand the balance between what the Scriptures say is our part in bringing salvation to others and what is God’s part. This helps us to keep things in proper perspective and to not put undue pressure on ourselves. In addition, it is helpful to know what the role of the non-believer is as well. When we put all these things together we will be able to see the proper role of all involved in bringing someone to Christ.

God’s Part

Go through each of the passages below and describe God’s role in conversion

- 1 Corinthians 3:5-9
- Acts 17:26-27
- Acts 16:14
- John 16:8-10
- 2 Timothy 2:25
- Acts 8:26-40
- 1 Timothy 2:3-4

My Part

Go through each of the passages below and describe our role in conversion

- 1 Corinthians 3:5-9
- Acts 18:24-26
- Mark 16:15
- Mark 12:31
- Acts 8:26-40
- 1 Peter 3:16
- Ezekiel 2:3-8
- Romans 10:14-15
- Ephesians 2:10
- Matthew 28:18-20

Their Part

Go through each of the passages below and describe the role of the non-believer in conversion

- Acts 17:26-27
- Acts 2:38, 41
- Acts 19:18
- Matthew 6:33
- Acts 8:26-40
- Matthew 13:44-46
- Ephesians 4:22-24
- Romans 6:1-4
**Things to Ponder**

- Why is it important to have a firm understanding of the role of ourselves, God, and others in the process of helping others to enter into the Kingdom of God? What can go wrong if we put any of the responsibility of God’s role onto ourselves?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
God’s Part, Our Part: Spiritual Growth

Just as we need to have a clear understanding of God’s part and our part when it comes to conversion, we need to do the same when it comes to the ongoing process of spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is not something that comes solely by God changing us. Nor does spiritual growth happen as a complete result of our own actions. What we find is a partnership between God, primarily the Holy Spirit, and us as we work together to grow up into the life of Christ. There is also a role for others in the body of Christ when it comes to our spiritual growth that is important to understand.

God’s Part

*Go through each of the passages below and describe God’s role in spiritual growth*

- 1 Corinthians 10:13
- 1 Corinthians 1:7
- 1 Corinthians 1:8
- Romans 8:38-39
- John 16:13
- 1 Peter 4:10
- 2 Peter 1:3-4

My Part

*Go through each of the passages below and describe our role in spiritual growth*

- 1 John 3:16
- Ephesians 4:22-24
- Ephesians 4:31
- 2 Peter 1:5-8
- James 4:10
- 2 Thessalonians 2:15
- James 5:16
- Ephesians 4:1-3
- Philippians 2:3-5
- James 4:4
- 1 Timothy 4:7
- Hebrews 5:13-14

Our Part

*Go through each of the passages below and describe the role of the body in spiritual growth*

- Acts 2:42-47
- Ephesians 4:11-13
- Hebrews 3:13-14
- Colossians 1:28-29
- Colossians 3:16
- 1 Thessalonians 5:14
- 2 Timothy 4:2
Things to Ponder

- Why is it important to have a firm understanding of the role of ourselves, God, and others in the process of helping spiritual growth?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Knowing God: Knowing Him

The last thing that God wants from his people is for us to muddle around in blind obedience to his word without knowing why we obey and without having a relationship with him. Obeying rules without knowing why is really the essence of what religion is. Christianity is most certainly not a religion. At least true Christianity is not. God wants us to know him and have a relationship with him. That is his desire and that should be our desire as well.

What Does God Want From His People?

Jeremiah 9:23-24

- A “boast” in the ancient world was something in which you trusted and relied on to bring you status and identity. How does this help you understand what these verses are saying?
- Why does God not want his people to rely on some of the things listed in these verses?
- Why does God want our “boast” to be in him?

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Hebrews 8:11)

- God promised that a New Covenant would come with an identifying characteristic that his people would know him intimately because they had chosen to be in relationship with him
- This doesn’t mean that we don’t need to be taught things about following Jesus or having a relationship with God but that at his people we don’t need to be taught about who he is
- God wants us to go beyond just following rules and being religious
- He wants us to be in relationship with him and his people
- Why do you think this is a desire of God’s?

How Can We Know God?

Through His Word

Matthew 4:4

- We can know God through his word by completely relying on it as a the source of our thoughts, beliefs, actions, and direction in life
- What are some of the things in our world that compete for our attention as the source of our thoughts, beliefs, actions, and direction in life?

Romans 16:25-26

- We can come to an intimate knowledge of God through his word which enables us to obey him
- How does obeying God help us to grow in our intimate knowledge of him?
- Why is it important that our relationship with God is the source of our obedience?
- What do you think the following sentence means: “Rules without relationship leads to rebellion”
- We want to move past just obeying God without knowing why or without knowing him; that is religion
- God want us to have a relationship with him and his people not religion

Through Jesus

John 10:2-5, 14

- If a stranger walked in and claimed to be your best friend and gave the name of your best friend as his own name, you would know better because you know your friend
If a stranger walked in and introduced himself but used some other fake name that you had never heard, then you probably wouldn’t know the difference because you don’t that stranger.

In the same way, we should know Jesus so well that we immediately know his voice whether it comes through his word, the godly advice of another person, or anything else; we should also know when hear things that claim to be from Jesus but are not.

**John 14:7**
- As we come to know Jesus through our relationship with him, we will also know the Father.
- What are some of the things that we learn about the Father by looking carefully at the life and ministry of Jesus?

**Things to Ponder**
- What are some of the things you have learned about your relationship with God through his word already?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Knowing God: Knowing His People

We have already looked at the important concept of knowing God and having a relationship with him through his word. But there are other important ways that we develop our relationship with God like prayer. Beyond that, we must understand that it is popular in the religious world today to make a distinction between having a relationship with God and having a relationship with God’s people. We fine, however, no such distinction in the Scriptures themselves. We grow in our relationship with God as we learn that God manifests himself in relationship with us most directly through not just his word and prayer but also the family of God.

Through Prayer
Philiplains 4:6-7
- What sorts of things can we take to God in prayer?
- How can we get to know God better through prayer?
- As we pray we will get to know God better and he will reveal himself and his nature to us
- We should not be discouraged that this is a process that takes time, just like any relationship
- We can know God immediately as our Father but it does take time to truly know him and be known at the deepest intimate levels

Matthew 6:9-13
- What are the things that we can learn about our relationship with God by praying like this (Jesus did not mean for us to just recite this prayer word-for-word but to pray in this manner)
  - Our relationship with God as our Father (v. 9)
  - How holy he is and how much we should appreciate and revere that (v. 9)
  - To value his kingship and desire to know and carry out his will rather than our own (v. 10)
  - That we need to rely on him for our daily needs (v. 11)
  - That we need to become like him and take on his nature and character in every part of our lives (v. 12)
  - That we need to rely on him to keep us secure in the life of Christ (v. 13)
- When we get to know God on all of those levels then we can truly have a deep relationship with him
- When we walk with God and remain in Christ’s life and live by his will then we will get to a point where whatever we ask will be given to us because our will is in lock-step with his will
- Do you feel that there are still areas in which God’s will and your will are completely aligned? What are those areas?
- Being in lock-step with God’s will is to have true relationship with him

Through His People
1 John 4:20-21
- What does this passage tell us about the connection between our relationship with God and our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ?
- Why do you think that God feels so strongly about the way we treat our fellow Christians that he lays out such an inseparable connection between the way we feel about them and the way we feel about him?

John 21:15-17
- Why does Jesus call on Peter to feed, love, and care for his people?
- How does having a relationship with God’s people demonstrate our true feelings about God?
• When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus indicated that it was loving God but immediately connected that to the second greatest which is to love one another. Why does God demand that we love others to show that we truly love him?

Matthew 25:34-46
• Being in a restored relationship with God means that what is true for God is true of his people
• We love God mostly clearly by the way we love other Christians and we will most tangibly experience God’s love through the love of other Christians
• Why is it so vital to understand that our relationship with God is the clearest indicator of our relationship with the Father?

Colossians 1:24-29
• Paul says that we complete the afflictions of Christ by laying down our lives for others—in that way others can truly encounter the sacrifice of Christ as they experience the tangible act of our sacrifices for them for the sake of Christ
• In other words, as we lay down our lives for one another in response to God’s love for us and as a manifestation of our love for him, others will feel and experience the love of God
• What are some ways that you can lay down your life for others right now and help them experience the love of God?

By Stepping out in Faith
• One way that we can truly know God that is often overlooked is to experience him directly by trusting him. Great athletes come to be known as great because someone trusted them to perform and they have come through time and time again. This develops trust and the knowledge that they can be relied on again in the future. In the same way, we can get to know God at a certain level only when we step out in faith and give him the opportunity to provide for us and show himself to be faithful
• When we see God work in answer to our faith we learn to trust him and know him intimately
• The Bible is full of example of people stepping out in faith in response to God and learning to know God
• Take time this week to study out these examples of this principle:
  • Genesis 22:10
  • Exodus 18:10-11
  • 1 Kings 17:7-24
  • 2 Kings 5:1-15
  • Acts 12:5-11
  • Romans 4:17-21
  • 2 Timothy 1:12

Things to Ponder
• Why does God absolutely demand that we must love his family if we are going to claim to have love for him?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Talking With God

One of the most important aspects of a relationship with anyone is communication. It is no different in our relationship with God. Speaking with God, prayer, is vital to both our spiritual growth and our ongoing depth and understanding of our relationship with God.

The Importance of Prayer

Mark 1:35
- Jesus was extremely busy but even he found time to pray because he knew he needed it to strengthen his flesh (Luke 6:12; Hebrews 5:7)
- He consistently found times and places that were free from distraction and focused on his time with the Father
- Do you find prayer to be an important daily activity?
- What are some of the things that could potentially hinder you from consistent prayer?

Psalm 63:1
- Do you have this kind of earnestness for your time to speak with God each day?
- Do you truly rely on him through prayer?

We Need to Learn

- Jesus’ disciples had to be taught much about prayer
- Learning to pray is a process
- What important truths about prayer and how to go about it do we learn from this passage?
- What are some ways that you could go about learning to pray effectively and consistently?

Matthew 6:8
- One extremely important element of learning to pray is knowing why we pray
- Why pray if our Father already knows what we need?
- Think of a parent and a child
  - Would you give a child absolutely everything that they want before they even ask?
    - You wouldn’t because then they would never learn gratitude for you meeting their needs after asking
    - They would never learn recognition of the parent as their provider
    - They would never learn to appropriately rely on their parents
    - They would never learn the boundaries of what they should and should not ask for
    - They would never learn to not be selfish as they see how much they actually ask for things and the cost of meeting those needs
    - They would never have the opportunity to learn what they can do on their own without needing the parent to do it for them

Luke 18:9-14
- What attitude does God want us to learn to have as we pray?
- What happens to those who exalt themselves?
- What happens to those who humble themselves?
- What does this teach us about prayer?
- Which of these two examples are closer to the way you approach prayer?
1 Corinthians 14:15
- What are two things that we are called to pray with?
- What does it mean to pray with our spirit?
- What does it mean to pray with our mind?

Things to Ponder
- What do you like the most about prayer?
- Is there anything about prayer or praying consistently that is a struggle for you?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Talking With God, part 2

One of the most important aspects of a relationship with anyone is communication. It is no different in our relationship with God. Speaking with God, prayer, is vital to both our spiritual growth and our ongoing depth and understanding of our relationship with God. Today’s study will look at obstacles that we face in being faithful and consistent in our prayers as well as some specific biblical teaching on how to pray.

Obstacles to Prayer

1 Peter 4:7
- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here?
- What can you do to overcome a lack of alertness or concentration when you pray?

Psalm 66:18
- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here? How do you think this can hinder our prayers?
- What can we do to overcome cherishing sin in our heart?

Mark 11:24
- What potential obstacle to prayer is alluded to here?
- What can be done to overcome a lack of faith?

Mark 11:25
- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here?
- How can a lack of forgiveness for others hinder our prayers?

1 Peter 3:7
- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here?
- How do you think that unresolved sin and problems within a marriage (or close relationship) can hinder our prayer?

Luke 18:1-8
- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here?
- How can a lack of faith and/or perseverance be a hindrance to prayer? What can we do about it?

1 John 5:14
- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here?
- How can praying contrary to God’s will be such a potential hindrance?

What God Wants

Philippians 4:6-7
- What can we pray about?
- God wants us to cast our anxieties and worries upon him (1 Peter 5:7). What does this mean for you?
- What anxieties and worries do you need to turn over to God?

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18
- What do you think it means to pray continually or “without ceasing”?
• Why does God want us to give thanks to him in all circumstances?

Psalm 5:3
• Why is it a good idea to pray in the morning (not that this is the only time we can pray)?
• Why is it important to have a specific time of prayer each day (Matthew 6:11)

Practical Points for Praying
Matthew 6:9-13
• What is commonly called the Lord’s prayer was given by Jesus to his disciples, not as a prayer that should necessarily just be blindly repeated over and over again but it was a model for them how to pray
  - “Our Father in heaven, your name honored as holy”
  - Praise and Honor:
    - Jesus opened the model prayer by recognizing the greatness of God as our Father and praising him
    - When we pray we can spend a few minutes at the beginning showing our gratitude for all that God has done and praising him for his greatness
    - What are some of the things that you can praise God and thank him for?
  - “Your kingdom come, you will be done on earth as it is in heaven”
  - Kingdom Living
    - For us, the kingdom has come in many ways, although we still wait its final consummation, thus we can pray that it continues to come and that more and more people would submit to the reign and authority of God’s kingship
    - This is the time to pray for God’s will to be done by us and others
    - We want to make a list of the people, things, and events that we would like to pray for regularly just so that we don’t forget
    - Don’t forget as well to keep a journal of some kind of answered prayers; this will encourage you as go along in your kingdom living
    - Prayer is when we align ourselves with Gods’ will and ask that he continue his work of expanding his kingdom more and more
    - What are some of the areas about which you most need to pray to bring your own will into alignment with God’s kingdom?
  - “Give us today our daily bread”
  - Needs
    - We are told that we can take everything to God as our Father; this is the time to do that
    - We should be certain, however, that we are praying for things in such a way so as to align with God’s will and not ask for things for selfish benefit
    - We can also ask that God provide for others whether it be through us or various other methods
    - What are some of the things that are most on your heart to pray about for the needs of others?
    - What is one or two things that you most need to pray about for yourself?
  - “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”
  - Confession and Forgiveness
    - It is important to confess our sin to God and seek to remain in his forgiveness in Christ
    - This is also a good time to ask God to show us if we need to confess to others, ask their forgiveness, or make amends for something that we have done
    - We should continue to pray that God continues to help us grow in our mercy, patience and forgiveness of others
    - What areas of confession and needed reconciliation with others do you need to pray about?
• “Do not bring us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one”
  • Deliverance and Purity
    ➢ Ask God to keep us from harm and temptation
    ➢ We should know that God will keep us from much temptation but that he will allow us to go through other times of testing
    ➢ When that happens we should ask that he deliver us, show us how to remain in him, and remain faithful to his will
    ➢ Are there any areas of temptation that you need to pray about?

**Things to Ponder**

• In what areas of prayer do you feel that you have the most to learn?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
In 1 Corinthians 5:15 we are told that one of the primary reasons that Jesus died on the Cross for his people was so that we could be part of a community of people that no longer live for themselves but for one another. To do so takes a radical change of mind and of way of life (Romans 12:1-2) to which you have already committed yourself. It means becoming part of a people who live not for our own selfish interests but for the interests of our new family in Christ (Philippians 2:1-5). This is not an automatic process, however. It takes constant thought and study so that we can re-train ourselves out of selfish mindsets, individual personal spiritual mindsets, or even religious traditional mindsets. Church is not a building or something we go to once or twice a week. It is the collection of God’s called out people, called to live a different way from the world around us. This study will look at some of the key aspects of being God’s family.

Living Like Family
Acts 2:42-27
• This is not a picture of a typical religious group in the first century; this was a group that was living like a family did with one another
• What important elements do you see being embraced by this community that we can apply to our own time? Can you find at least five?

Family Identity
Luke 14:25-27
• In certain contexts, such as this one, “love” and “hate” were used in Jesus’ day as part of inheritance language
  • They took on the meaning of “embrace” as part of one’s covenant family markers or “reject”
• Thus, Jesus was saying that we must reject all the things of the world whether they be family, wealth, worldly inheritance, or even our own merits as markers of our relationship with God
• The family of God found in Christ is the marker of our spiritual identity and status as God’s people
• This means that we find our security, comfort, identity, and source of honor from being part of God’s family and nothing else
• Is this still a challenge for you or something that find exciting and encouraging?

Loving Like Family
John 13:34-35
• Jesus calls his people to love (which according to 1 John 3:16 means that we lay our lives down for one another) each other
• This will be the mark of who Jesus’ true family is
• In what ways can you love other disciples right now?

Caring for One Another
Acts 4:34
• Families in New Testament times expected to care for another by sharing possessions with each other as each had need
• This is the way that the early church lived and it is the expectation for God’s people to provide for one another
James 2:15-17

- What does James say about one who calls other Christians “brother and sister” but is unwilling to care for their physical and material needs?
- Of course, this should be a relationship of mutual love and those who attempt to manipulate or abuse the situation should be lovingly dealt with (see 2 Thessalonians 3:10-13)
- Does this still seem challenging for you? Why?

Making Decisions as Family
Philippians 1:23-26

- Paul was torn between what he wanted to do for his own benefit and what would benefit the Christian family
- He made his decision based on what was best for the entire family
- When we truly embrace that God has given us a new family and that we belong to one another (Romans 12:5) we will desire to make decisions based on the benefit of the whole family and God’s will (James 4:13-17) and not just what seems best for us
- What does this mean practically as it applies to you?

Things to Ponder

- What are some of the big differences as it plays out in our attitudes and daily living of living as members of a mutual family as opposed to Christianity being a mere personal spiritual experience that often appeals to our own selfish natures?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Jesus came to create a family that would enter into his life and become transformed into his image (Romans 8:28-29). Christianity is not a solo sport but is, rather, a team sport. We are called to live together as a loving family that demonstrates to the world, as best we can in this present age, what it will look like to live in the age to come and to live by God’s values of that age. This is the underlying ethic of the one another relationships that we seek to develop.

The Nature of Our Relationships

John 13:34-35
- As members of God’s family we are called to love one another
- The defining characteristic of God’s people is that we have sacrificial love (1 John 3:16) for one another
- Why is this such an important passage for a Christian community to constantly remind ourselves of?

Romans 12:1-16
- What are we called to be in view of Gods’ incredible mercy that he has shown us?
- Why do you think that Paul connects being a living sacrifice with the concept of belonging to one another and being devoted to one another?
- What do you think that Paul meant by saying that we belong to one another?

Galatians 5:13-15
- What type of behavior are we called to here rather than indulging our own selfish interests?
- We don’t have to worry about a bunch of rules or laws if we simply love one another
- Why is the simple call to love one another more demanding than following a bunch of religious rules?

1 Corinthians 12:25-26
- A true family is connected and shares both honor and identity with one another
- What we do within the body, even if that includes not coming to a gathering, effects everyone else in the body
- What sort of characteristics and values must we have in ourselves in order to embrace this kind of life?
- What sort of characteristics and values must we rid ourselves of so as to not stand in the way of living like this?

Our Debt to One Another

Romans 13:8
- What debt do we have in our relationships with one another?
- To whom do we owe this debt? Who is the recipient of our paying off this debt?
- How do we fulfill the law of Christ?

Romans 14:13-19
- It’s easy to be judgmental towards one another but we are called to avoid that type of attitude
- Freedom in Christ means that we are free from the power of sin but it also means that we are free to work out with God what it means to love him and love others on an ongoing basis
- If our freedoms should come in conflict with the sincere convictions of another brother or sister, which one should take priority?
- Why do you think that God values unity within our relationships above personal freedom?
Romans 15:1-7
- All of our relationships with each other should be with the best interest of one another in mind
- Even the words we speak to one another should be measured carefully to ensure that they are with the interests of one another placed in the highest priority and to build one another up into Christ (Ephesians 4:29)
- When our “rights” clash with the best interests of our brothers and sisters in Christ, what should be our response? What is more important: to love others or protect our individual rights and interests?

Hebrews 3:12-14
- What responsibility do we bear towards one another according to this passage?
- What are some practical ways that we can do this as brothers and sisters in Christ?

Hebrews 10:22-25
- This passage calls us to draw near to God and to hold to our faith unswervingly
- It immediately goes into practical ways of how to do that
- What are we called to do in order to continue to draw near to God and hold firmly to the hope that we profess?
- Why do you think that it is important to not give up meeting together?

Things to Ponder
- What are some of the big differences as it plays out in our attitudes and daily living of living as members of a mutual family as opposed to Christianity being a mere personal spiritual experience that often appeals to our own selfish natures?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Bearing With One Another

A very dangerous problem that seeps into the hearts of many Christians, especially young Christians is the idea that they should always be treated perfectly within the church. We tend to look at the ideal life of Christ to which we are called and think that we will never be hurt within the church. That’s simply a false way of thinking, though. We must pay careful attention to the Scriptural calls to bear with one another through hurts and disappointments because they are promises that we will fail one another. Knowing this helps to defend our hearts against disillusionment which is one of the most powerful and dangerous human emotions.

Every Good Thing
Philemon 1:6
- How do we understand every good thing that we have in the life of Christ?
- Why do you think this would be true?
- Does this mean that everything that we experience within the body of Christ will be pleasant at the time?

Bearing With One Another
Ephesians 4:2-3; 16
- Although we will be like Christ one day, what we will be has not been made entirely known yet and we are still in the process of being transformed (1 John 3:2)
- This means that as imperfect, albeit well-meaning people, we will sin against one another, hurt one another, and disappoint one another—in fact passages like these practically promise that we will be hurt and let down
- What should our response be at those times?

Colossians 3:12-14
- There is an assumption here, and a reality, that we will have opportunities to have grievances towards one another
- Our goal is to be prepared to forgive, love and live in peace with one another as much as is within our control (Hebrews 12:14-15)
- Why is it so hard for us to forgive when others let us down?

1 Peter 2:19-24
- How does this passage help direct our thoughts and attitudes during times when we feel that we have been mistreated, ignored, or let down?

Matthew 7:3-5
- Jesus tells us that we should see other’s sin as little and our sin as big
- Is that the way that we usually do it?
- How would it change things if we truly approached perceived hurts and wrongs at the hands of others as little things and saw our own sin as big and needing to be dealt with swiftly?

Ephesians 3:10
- The church, with all of its flaws and mistakes, is the display of God’s wisdom to the world
- God’s wisdom through the church is not displayed by us all being perfect—even the world can get along with people that treat them perfectly
• God’s wisdom is shown when imperfect people bear with one another and remain loyal to one another because of our love for God

1 Timothy 3:15
• There is much about the church and our family in Christ that we will love and cherish but there will also be tough time—there will be times when we have to work against our emotions and put down our desire to be treated justly and seek unity and love rather than justice
• What is another term used here for the church?
• What do you think it means that the church is referred to as the pillar and foundation of truth?
• Why is it important to remember that?

1 Peter 4:9-10
• We should constantly look for ways to be hospitable towards one another, to give to one another, and to use our gifts to build one another up
• When we use our gifts what does that enable God to pass through us to others?
• If we do not use the gifts that God has given us we are denying that portion of God’s grace to the rest of the body

Things to Ponder
• It is well known that Americans are raised to be consumers and have things just the way that we want. How does this deeply embedded ethos work against us in being the type of people that we are called to be as a biblical church?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Genuine forgiveness is one of the most difficult things for a human being to do. Yet it is an absolutely vital aspect of life for those in Christ. Forgiveness is not only necessary for the Christian community to function as God intends and for us to remain unified in Christ, it is also indispensible because it is one of those things that God says determines how he will act towards us. If we refuse to forgive others then God will show us that same treatment. Forgiveness, then, is not only something that we should understand well but something that we should embrace wholeheartedly and live out lavishly.

A God of Forgiveness
2 Chronicles 7:14
- God has always set an example of forgiveness
- Forgiveness is important because God forgives and calls his people to be likewise forgiving

Micah 7:18
- What does this passage tell us about the nature of God?

Why We Forgive
Matthew 18:21-35
- What important principle about forgiveness and mercy does this parable teach us?
- What is most difficult for you about forgiving others?
- How many times are we to forgive others?
- Why do you think Jesus used such an incredible number?
- It is important to remember that the sins that others perpetrate against us, could never match up to the severity of our debts and sin against God
- What stunning principle does Jesus lay out in verse 35?
- Does it seem that God might take the importance of us forgiving others more seriously than we often do?
- Why do you think God takes so seriously the concept of us forgiving others?

Matthew 6:14-15
- Do you think that Jesus really meant this?
- What are the implications of this passage when it comes to our forgiveness of others?

Mark 11:25-26
- What does Jesus say to do if we need to forgive others?
- Why would forgiveness take precedence over the act of praying in a situation like this?
- We forgive others so that the reality of stepping into God’s presence and connecting with his will through prayer is not interrupted
- If we are not living a life of forgiveness then we step out of God’s reality and his forgiveness
- What are some of the things that stand in the way of you radically forgiving others?

Colossians 3:12-14
- We forgive because it is part of the life of Christ that we have put on when we died to self
- We have a portion of that life because Christ forgave us
- Refusing to forgive others demonstrates that we haven’t really entered into the reality of the life in Christ and fully understood what God has done for us
This doesn’t mean that we just quickly give lip service forgiveness to others
  - It demands that we deal with the depths of our hurt and bitterness and keep working towards true forgiveness from the heart

**Things to Ponder**
- Spend some more time truly contemplating the connection between God’s forgiveness for us and our forgiveness for others
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Actively Forgiving

Genuine forgiveness is not just a concept to be understood but something that we need to actively do in a biblical manner, motivated by God’s forgiveness of us. The previous study looked at our motivation for forgiveness. This study will look into the actual process of forgiving and letting go of the bitterness that actually accompanies it.

It Is Up To Us
Matthew 18:15-17

- This passage is directly addressed to situations in which we are personally sinned against
- First, we are to talk to the other person, which often times means putting their interests ahead of our own because confronting someone can be extremely uncomfortable
- This should always be done with an attitude of love
- If the person does not listen, sit down in love with others, again for the benefit of helping the one who has sinned
- If they still do not repent then the matter should be brought before the church
- At each step the willingness to put their interests first, find reconciliation, and offer genuine forgiveness are to have priority

Ephesians 4:31-32; Luke 17:3-4

- What does it mean that we are told to get rid of anger, rage, and bitterness?
  - We have responsibility in this
  - One of the ways that we really let go of bitterness towards others is to understand that the depth of God’s forgiveness for us
- We can only truly forgive those who repent or acknowledge their guilt because forgiveness is the act of releasing a repentant person from the guilt and punishment of their offense (this is true for both God and us)
  - If someone doesn’t repent, we cannot technically forgive them, but that doesn’t mean that we get to hang onto anger and bitterness
  - We are still called to release that and wait for the time when they do repent so that we can forgive them
- It is important to note that forgiveness doesn’t mean acting like something never happened or removing the consequences of their sin but it means that we don’t continue to judge a person based on past behavior of which they have repented
  - For Example: If someone steals money in a situation where they were trusted but then genuinely repents from that sin, they can and should be forgiven and no longer be judged or looked down upon for their past action or treated as an offender. They might, however, need to serve a punishment such as jail time and should do so without fighting the consequences of their crime. They also should probably not be put in a similar position of trust and access to money for a long time to protect them from temptation. There is no simple answer as to how long such a period of time should last but love and wise discernment should be applied.

Matthew 26:27-28

- When we forgive others we announce to the world the ministry of reconciliation and forgiveness that God has made available to everyone

Mark 2:5-7
• Only God can forgive sins
• We don’t forgive sins because sins are ultimately against God
• We forgive the wrong that has been done to us
• What we do is to offer forgiveness for the hurts done to us; this points to, and is a picture of, the ultimate forgiveness for sin that we have in Christ

Forgiveness in Action

2 Corinthians 2:5-11
• Paul gives a wonderful demonstration of the attitude of forgiveness in action
• He had been wronged but is far more concerned with the good of the Corinthian’s community from which the offender against him came and with the offender himself
• Notice that Paul had embraced a heart of forgiveness so deeply that he wasn’t even sure if had anything to forgive
• What can you learn specifically from Paul’s example here?

Acts 9:26-28
• Less than three years before this Paul had been a persecutor of the church and had Stephen, a beloved brother in this church, killed before their very eyes
• Despite all of that, the Jerusalem church quickly forgave and accepted Paul, allowing him to move around among them as one of them
• This is a picture of God’s loving and forgiving family of which we are called to be a part
• What would it take for you to be willing to embrace that kind of radical forgiveness?

Things to Ponder
• What about forgiveness of others do you think is the most challenging element for you?
• How can you go about turning that potential weakness into a strength?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Friendships in the Body

We are truly baptized into the body of Christ and called to be family with our brothers and sisters in Christ but one of the most important aspects to that that can often be overlooked is the importance of being friends. Yes, we worship together, serve together, glorify God together, and demonstrate God’s wisdom to the world through the church but we must also learn that our brothers and sisters in Christ need to be our best friends and most important relationships that we can ever have. It is they that will help us to become more like Christ and stay faithful until the resurrection.

The Foundation of Our Friendships
Philippians 2:1-4

- What is the foundation and source of the relationships between members of the body of Christ?
- Why is it important to realize that our friendships, our relationships, and the way we deal with one another all radiates from our connection with Jesus?
- What sorts of things do people in the world typically base friendships on?
  - Common interests
  - “Clicking” with one another
  - “Liking” one another
  - What else?
- What should our friendships within the kingdom of God be based on?
- This doesn’t mean that we cannot like one another or have things in common but it does mean constantly reminding ourselves that friendships within the body of Christ are not based on worldly things and so will eventually be deeper but will also take more effort, care, and patience than friendships in the world which tend to come easy because we choose the people we want to befriend and stay away from the rest
- The reality is that, at times, we will find people outside of the church that seem easier to befriend (and as long as we remain focused on bringing all people into reconciliation with God—2 Corinthians 5:14-21—then it is fine to have non-Christian friends)
  - We must, however, remember that those in Christ should receive the best of our time, our loyalty, and our heart

Galatians 6:10

- What is the important principle that is given in this verse?
- What are the practical implications of this principle if we apply it to making and maintaining relationships and friendships within the body of Christ?

Romans 12:5-10

- What does Paul say our relationship to one another is here?
- How is that radically different from the way that most people view relationships within a church or even most of their close friendships?
- What does it mean to “be devoted to one another in love”?
  - Why is it important to note that this is worded as a command?

Hebrews 3:12-14

- We certainly can and should have great fun and build great memories together but what elements of our relationships in Christ do we find here; elements that are usually not found in normal friendships?
- How can this actually help deepen a friendship in the long run?
1 Peter 4:8-10
- What is the result of loving one another deeply?
- Biblically, hospitality referred to sharing everything you had with someone and welcoming them into your home, your life, etc.
- Why are we called to offer hospitality to one another without grumbling?
- If we minister God’s grace to one another when we serve one another and intertwine our lives, what happens if we don’t serve one another, befriend one another, and love one another?

1 Corinthians 15:33
- This important principle is actually referring primarily here to being around and listening to false teaching and doctrines but it is certainly true of all areas?
- Is there any “bad company” that you are tempted to spend large blocks of time with?
- Jesus spent large amounts of time with “sinners” and “bad company” so how can we rightly reach out to and love the lost the way that Jesus did and still wisely apply this principle into our lives?
- We must never overlook the fact that what is true for us is especially true for our children
  - If our best friendships and the best of our time need to be with believers then that is doubly true of our kids
  - This will often take more effort and sacrifice to make sure that their best friends are in the church but take some time to ask older Christians with older kids if it is time well spent

1 Corinthians 11:1
- What should be the primary goal of our relationships within the body of Christ?
- This must always be the ultimate focus and end of our relationships even as we have fun together and share great time and great memories—have fun but let it always be focused on becoming more like Christ

Things to Ponder
- Why do you think it is so important to choose to have your strongest relationships be within the body of Christ?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Proclaiming the Lord’s Death

One curious aspect of Christians is that we tend to be people who will do things on a consistent basis without ever really understanding why we do them. That’s not what God wants us and it isn’t the best scenario for us in order to remain faithful in the things that we do as part of God’s family in the long run. In one aspect, these studies are aimed at helping us understand why we do what we do. This study in particular is aimed at helping us to understand the meaning behind the weekly taking of communion (the Lord’s Supper).

Communion
Exodus 12:1-16; Matthew 26:26-29
- Passover was a meal of commemoration for God’s people to remember and thank God for what he had done in freeing them from slavery and creating them as his people
  - Passover was a meal that was to primarily be eaten and celebrated in families
- Jesus called together his disciples to eat this meal with them to show them that they were his true family, the family of God
- He made some vital changes to the meal to demonstrate for them that Jesus was the true fulfillment of Passover; Passover was merely a shadow and a pointer to the true Passover lamb, Jesus the Messiah
- The Lord’s Supper then was, just as Passover was, a meal to remember and thank God for what he had done through Jesus to free them from the slavery of sin and create them as his family
- The bread signified the sacrifice of Jesus’ body
- The cup signified the sacrifice of Jesus’ blood

1 Corinthians 10:16-17
- Partaking in communion is a participation in the sacrifice that Christ made to create us as one body
- Taking communion together proclaims that we are one body, one family, taking this meal of participation together
- It is a meal that the family of God takes together to remember and thank God for what he has done to free us from the slavery of sin and create us as his family
- Although Passover and the Lord’s Supper were taken as full meals, there is no biblical command that it must be taken this way
  - A small amount to represent the action of a meal is fully appropriate as the important part is the meaning of the meal and not the amount of the meal

1 Corinthians 11:18-34
- The Corinthian church was taking communion whenever they came together as the central element of their gatherings on the Lord’s Day (Acts 20:7)
- Paul, however, had harsh criticism for them because the rich among them were bringing their own bread and drink and partaking in it quickly, not waiting for the poorer members who worked long days and were late arriving, nor sharing with those who did not have their own supplies
- He makes it clear that they were to take this as a meal that demonstrated their unity in Christ
  - Not considering one another meant that they were not really considering what this meal was all about at all
  - They were pretending to be God’s family but not really living that way
  - They were taking communion without really discerning what it meant to be the body of Christ and were thus taking on themselves the judgment of hypocrisy
When we partake in the Lord’s Supper it is important for us to consider whether we are really living as part of God’s family and declaring that truly through this action, or if we have just been play-acting and taking the body of Christ lightly.

**Things to Ponder**

- In your own words, why do we take communion together, what does it mean, and why is it so important?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. — 2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Contributing to the Community

One curious aspect of Christians is that we tend to be people who will do things on a consistent basis without ever really understanding why we do them. That’s not what God wants us and it isn’t the best scenario for us in order to remain faithful in the things that we do as part of God’s family in the long run. In one aspect, these studies are aimed at helping us understand why we do what we do. This study in particular is aimed at helping us to understand another important element of our weekly worship and the life of the community: contributing financially to the common fund of the church family.

Contribution to the Common Fund

Matthew 6:21, 24, 33
- What is significant about the fact that Jesus says that our hearts will follow wherever we put our treasure?
- Why do you think that it is impossible to serve both God and money, wealth, and possessions (which is the full meaning of the word that is often translated as just “money”)?
- What does it mean to seek first the kingdom as it relates to the topic of finances and possessions?

Proverbs 3:9
- Are you honoring God with your wealth?
- Do you give him the firstfruits or the leftovers?
- This calls for us to be responsible in our giving
- If we are gone, the needs of the church still exist
  - Make plans to contribute even if you are gone for a week

1 Corinthians 16:1-2
- We are called to take up a collection to meet the needs of the Lord’s people
- But how much should each person give?

2 Corinthians 9:6-8
- According to this passage, how much are we to contribute to the needs of the church? What is our standard?
- Many Christians just assume that we are required to give a tenth (a tithe) but that was an Old Testament standard
- The standard of giving here is not what you have decided in your heart
- The standard is to give generously, even sacrificially (2 Corinthians 8:1-2,) and then to do that willingly and with a glad heart
  - We should not give under compulsion or pressure
  - But if we’re not giving it is a clear sign of a problem in our heart that needs to be worked out with God

2 Corinthians 8:1-15
- Regular collections to meet the needs of the church are appropriate but so are special collections to assist with the special needs of brothers in sisters in spreading the gospel around the world and assisting those in less fortunate situations to meet the needs within their church family
- Planning ahead for this is wise
• In God’s family we are to live to a standard of sufficiency for all (not necessarily equality but sufficiency for everyone) rather than surplus and lack

1 Timothy 6:5-10; 17
• What important warnings are we given here?

Things to Ponder
• What is the connection between the importance we place in the kingdom of God in our lives and the way that we sacrifice financially for the sake of the body?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
A Lifestyle of Learning

In Matthew 28, Jesus called his disciples to not only go and make disciples but he also commanded them to an ongoing lifestyle of discipleship, which involved both continual learning from and teaching of one another. The Bible offers no specific, detailed plan of how to go about that but simply urges us within our own churches, cultures, and situations to be committed to some form of ongoing discipling or mentoring of one another. “Disciple” is a term that referred to being a learner so discipling is simply a form of ongoing learning.

Sources of Learning

**Hebrews 3:12-13; 2 Timothy 2:2; Colossians 3:16**

- What is the source of learning and ongoing discipleship in these passages?
- What are different ways that we can learn from one another?
- As young Christians a discipling relationship will most likely take on the form of a mentor and mentee relationship
  - As you mature in the faith, discipling relationships take on more of a mutual learning form
- What are your feelings about the process of continually learning from others and preparing to teach and mentor others as you mature in your faith and understanding?
- What are some of the benefits of constantly learning from one another within the body of Christ?
- What are some of the personal challenges to continue a lifestyle of learning?

**Hebrews 4:12; 2 timothy 3:16**

- What is the source of learning and ongoing discipleship in these passages?
- What are some of the different ways that we can learn from the Bible and grow in our understanding of it?
- Read 1 Timothy 2:15. What is the important warning here for us as we seek to study and learn from the Bible?
  - What role does other Christians help play in us learning to correctly handle the word of God

**Titus 2:11-12**

- What is the source of learning and ongoing discipleship in this passage?
  - Note: The “grace” referred to is specifically the Holy Spirit working as the transforming power in the lives of believers
- Learning to be led by the Spirit is such a vital aspect of our Christian life and discipleship that we will devote an entire study to that later on in this series

**Hebrews 5:11-14; 1 Timothy 4:7; 1 Timothy 6:11**

- What is the source of learning and ongoing discipleship in these passages?
- What role do we play in our own learning and spiritual growth?
- Although we have many sources for spiritual growth, the ultimate responsibility lies with us
  - We cannot put the blame on others if we fail to grow spiritually

Things to Ponder

- What areas of the Christian life, discipleship, and the word of God do you feel that you most need to learn about and grow in?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
• Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
• Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
• Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
• What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
A Discipling Community

“Disciple” is a term that referred to being a learner so discipling is simply a form of ongoing learning. There are many different ways that we can go about that lifelong learning process in the body of Christ but one of those important ways that should not be overlooked is the process of being mentored or “discipled” by another Christian. “Discipling” and teaching one another is an important part of God’s plan for us to grow spiritually.

The Heart of Being Discipled

Colossians 1:28-2:1
- The goal of discipling is to become fully mature (“perfect”) in the life of Christ
- There will be times of difficult and disagreement in any relationship but we must remain focused on the goal and operate from a motivation of genuine love for one another
- Discipleship is challenging and will never be easy, but it will be rewarding
- What do you most look forward to learning from other disciples?
- What do you think will be some of the challenges or negative temptations in the process of continuing to teach and train one another in the life of Christ?

1 Corinthians 11:1
- We want to follow the example of those that are showing us practically how to follow the example of Christ
- No person is perfect and so we should only imitate them in the areas that they are following Christ
- 2 Timothy 2:2 refers to teaching and discipling one another as a process of passing it on from one person to the next
- We not only want to imitate those who are imitating Christ but we also want to be learning to set an example that others can follow
- Why is it important that each Christian be committed to imitating and learning from others?
- Why is it important that each Christian be committed to being imitate-able and willing to teach others?

Matthew 28:18-20
- We must certainly learn the significance of repentance, baptism, and the full process of entering into the life of Christ, but we must also continue to learn well beyond that
- What are some of the areas of following Christ and living a consistently godly life that you think you most need to grow in yet?

Proverbs 10:17
- What does this verse call us to value?
- What warning does it give us?
- Have you valued a process like mentoring or discipling in your past or have you tended to stay away from such things?
- Why is it so important as a follower of Christ?

Proverbs 11:14
- Why is it important to have advisors?
- Why is it important to have many advisors?
- How often do you seek out advice and ask questions?
- How much of a part does humility play in all of this?
• What types of things do you think would be profitable to get advice on and learn to approach in a godly manner?

**Proverbs 15:12**
• What motivation does this verse give us to go after discipling in our lives and make sure that we get it consistently?

**A Practical Approach**
**Hebrews 10:24-25; 3:12-14**
• We should try to maintain contact with one another in one form or another on a daily basis
  • Why is that important?
• As part of that, we should also have a regular time (even as often as weekly) to meet with a discipling partner

**Things to Ponder**
• What do you think might be the biggest obstacle in your life (time, humility, etc.) in engaging in the community process of discipling one another?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Battling Temptation

We will all face temptation on a daily, if not hourly basis. Temptation is inducement to do something appealing that we know to be wrong or harmful. The reality is that every sin and rebellious action that we take against God starts with temptation of one sort or another. We are constantly at war with temptation but to be successful in that battle we must know what we are fighting and where we need to fight it.

The Battleground
Ephesians 6:10-18

- We are in a spiritual battle whether we like it or not
- We will all fight a spiritual battle and we need to know the truth that knowledge and its proper use wins battles (Hosea 4:6)
- God gives us the tools to defeat Satan but that doesn’t mean that we use them
- Where does Satan most often attack us? In our thinking.
  - Thoughts; Ideas; Conclusions, and Suggestions (T.I.C.S.)
- Every action that you have ever taken is a result of your thoughts
  - Actions result from these T.I.C.S.
- We must know that our spiritual battle will take place in the mind so that we can fight the battle well

1 Peter 5:8

- What does this tell us about Satan?
  - Lions tend to hunt by separating one individual from the pack
  - The quickest way that Satan will do this is through our thought life

Mind Control
2 Corinthians 11:3

- How was Eve led astray?
- Every unfortunate or sinful action that we have taken goes back to T.I.C.S. that we acted on
- There is an old but true saying that says:
  Sow a thought, reap an action; Sow an action, reap a habit; Sow a habit, reap a character; Sow a character, and reap a destiny. . . But it all begins with a thought
- What areas of your thought life can be the most difficult or tempting for you:
  - Anger over circumstances
  - Bitterness towards others
  - Lust
  - Etc.

Ephesians 4:22-24

- Satan deceives us through T.I.C.S.
- Every sin that we take has its genesis with wrong thinking about God, about ourselves, and about the truth of the thing that is tempting us
- To be Christ-like involves controlling our thought life
  - When we don’t do that we become enemies of God (Colossians 1:21)
- Jesus tells us in Matthew 5 that sins of the heart and mind are just as serious as sins of action
2 Corinthians 10:4-5

- What does this passage urge us to do with our thoughts?
- We have to measure every thought against the word of God like a ruler
- We cannot keep thoughts from coming but we can keep from dwelling on them
  - “We can’t keep birds from flying above our head, but we can keep them from nesting in our hair”
- We have to be extremely careful with our thoughts because most of the time they sound rational and appeal to our emotions
- Most of us go to great lengths to protect ourselves from viruses and we lock our doors to protect our belongings and yet we naively assume that we can expose our minds to anything we desire without having any negative effects whatsoever on us
  - What sorts of potentially dangerous things do you expose your mind to (TV, movies, music, friends, books, worldly ways of thinking)?
  - It’s not that these things are wrong in and of themselves but they can be dangerous if they contain things that expose our minds to ungodly ways of thinking and influence
- Taking every thought captive and measuring it can be time consuming but which takes more time:
  - To consider every thought and make sure that it is righteous
  - Or to clean up the mess from not controlling our thoughts

Romans 12:2

- What areas of your thinking do you feel most need to be transformed?

Think on the Right Things

Philippians 4:8

- Before we allow ourselves to dwell on any thoughts they should meet the standards of all eight of these things
  - Something could be “true” (at least in our mind) and not meet the other seven criterion
- Keeping our minds focused is a full-time and difficult job
- Here are seven practical ways to keep our thoughts focused on the right things:
  - Read the Word
    - Our minds will never be more holy than our knowledge of the Scripture will allow
  - Memorize the Word
  - Use the Word and obey it
  - Watch and pray
    - Use prayer as an inoculation (before infection) rather than an antibiotic (used after an infection)
  - Substitute evil thoughts for righteous ones
    - Romans 12:21
  - Be honest
    - Be realistic about your temptations, the truth of them, and the reality of obtaining them
  - Confess to one another
    - James 5:16 – Get in the habit of confessing our sinful thoughts and not just our sinful actions

Things to Ponder

- What areas of your thought life are the most tempting and challenging for you?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Transformed by the Spirit

One of the greatest gifts of being immersed into Christ is the promise of receiving the Holy Spirit within us. That is indeed good news but what does it really mean? How does that help to transform us on a day-by-day basis and be successful in living the life of Christ? In short, what does it mean to be led by the Spirit in this new life in Christ? This study will focus on the concept of being led by the Spirit as we seek after spiritual growth and becoming more like Christ.

The Problem

Isaiah 55:8
- We do not think like God
- Our minds, heart, and emotions, if left to themselves, will work and operate according to the pattern of the world

Jeremiah 17:9
- The “heart” in biblical times was considered to be the seat of emotions and the will, it was the deepest and most inner part of a person
- What does this passage teach us about the normal human “heart”?  
- We cannot trust purely our heart or emotions because they can be deceptive

Romans 1:18-32
- What we allow to influence us (where we place our trust/security) determines the consequences of whether we are led by the Spirit or our flesh
- When we fail to acknowledge and show appreciation to God and then fail to seek him we enter into a pattern of distorted thinking that leads us further and further away from God
- When we are not in Christ we are blinded in our thinking by Satan (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Romans 8:5-8
- How can we walk according to the Spirit and have our mind set on the things of the Spirit if we do not have the mind of God and do typically conform to the patterns of the world?
- What we have our minds set on is important
  - If we have our minds set on things of the world such as happiness, comfort, or security we will not be able to please God or follow the leading of the Spirit
  - We must have our minds set on the things of the Spirit and becoming like Christ

The Solution

Ezekiel 36:26-27
- This passage is part of a prophecy of the coming of the New Covenant
- What does it promise that God will do for those that are part of his New Covenant?

Psalm 37:4
- What promise is given here to the one who commits himself to the Lord?
- People often read this as though it says that God will give us anything we want, but the promise here is that God will give us new desires in our heart; he will transform our hearts so that we want what he wants and can be led by the Spirit
Romans 6:16-18
- Learning to be led by the Spirit involves obeying God’s word and overcoming obstacles through prayer
- This life will run contrary to the desires of our flesh

Romans 8:9-17
- In Christ we are able to be led by the Spirit
- Trying to be led by the Spirit while still clinging to the fundamental desires of the flesh is like running into a brick wall
- We must embrace the new mindset of becoming like Christ in order to be led by the Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:11-16
- What we could do without the Spirit we now can?
- Through the Spirit we have the mind of Christ and are able to be led by the Spirit

Ephesians 4:17-32
- The goal of the life in Christ is to allow the Spirit to direct us in putting off the old life, our life in the flesh, and put on the new life of Christ
- Paul gives us numerous examples of how are led by the Spirit to put off the old behaviors but also to replace them with the new behavior, led by the Spirit in the life of Christ
- What are some of the “old behaviors” that you still need to replace with “new behaviors?”
  - What is your plan to go about partnering with the Spirit to achieve that?

Things to Ponder
- What aspect of your character and nature do you think will make it the most challenging for you to have your mind set on the Spirit as time goes by?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Trained by the Spirit

How does the actual process of growing in the life of Christ work? Do we achieve this transformation in character through our own hard work or through nothing other than the work of the Holy Spirit? One truth that we must embrace in order to truly be able to be transformed by the Spirit is that both are necessary. We must have the transforming work of the Spirit to direct us and do things that we cannot on our own, but he also demands hard work and discipline from us.

The Goal
Colossians 1:28-29
- What is the goal of our faith?
- It’s not just to “make it into the resurrection” but is to become more like Christ
  - How does it change the way we approach our Christian life knowing that one of our primary focuses is to change, to grow, and to become like Christ rather than just avoid problems and “make it”?

Galatians 5:13-26
- We will either be trained in the habits of the flesh or the fruit of the Spirit
- For example, we can be lazy without much effort (like default mode) but as we give into laziness we train ourselves in being lazy and so we stay that way
- The flesh is often the path of least resistance but we still train ourselves to live that way and we grow accustomed to it

2 Peter 2:14
- The word “gymnazo” is translated as “train”
  - It is the word from which we get our word gymnasium and it referred to training as in the kind that an athlete would do to discipline themselves and train themselves in a sport
- These people had trained themselves in the fleshly act of being greedy
- It is important to understand that we will train ourselves to live one way or the other
- This is also where it is vital to understand the goal of our faith
  - If we think that mere salvation is the goal (to avoid punishment) then we will typically become overly focused on just not doing wrong things
  - If we think that the goal of our faith is to get to heaven then we can focus on skirting by, taking the path of least resistance so that we can make it. The idea of changing can seem difficult and unpleasant and be avoided; all we care about is getting to heaven
  - But if we understand that the goal of our faith is to become like Christ then we will embrace transformation
    - But how do we do that?

Spiritual Training
John 14:15-18; 25-26
- The Spirit will act as our counselor, or to put it in a modern vernacular, our personal trainer
- What do personal trainers do?
  - They motivate us
  - They guide us
  - They push us to do new things that we would not have thought of or would not have done on our own
• They teach us how to transform
• But trainers don’t do it for us do they?
  • Trainers guide us but we must partner with them
  • We must do the hard work of listening to the trainer and doing what they tell us to
  • It is a true partnership

1 Timothy 4:7-10
• What are we called to train ourselves in here specifically?
• In general terms this tells us that we can be trained in mindset and attitude

Hebrews 5:13-14
• We can have our minds trained to discern, understand, and perceive
• We can be trained in our actions

Hebrews 12:4-11
• Throughout this passage, the word that is translated as “discipline” doesn’t carry the negative way that we can tend to understand the word “discipline”
  • The word actually refers to the teaching or discipline that might be given to a soldier or student
  • Hebrews is telling us that God “trains” us through difficult situations in life
• All of this “discipline” training leads to us being fully “trained” (v. 12) which is the first and only time in this passage that “gymnazo” is used
• We can be trained in our perseverance

The Gymnazo Principle
• The gymnazo principle of being led by the Spirit simply means this:
  • We follow the guidance of the Spirit and the word of God to correct wrong behavior by practicing godly behavior, with the right attitude and for the right reasons, until the godly behavior becomes habitual
  • Because of the work of the Spirit, however, this isn’t just conforming or training our behavior; the Spirit actually partners with us to transform us into these new people

Ephesians 5:18
• Another way to understand this is “Don’t allow yourself to be animated or influenced by alcohol, which leads to reaping the fruits of the flesh, rather allow yourself to be animated or influenced by the Spirit and so yield the fruit of the Spirit
• When someone is drunk, the whole person is drunk
• In the same way, Christianity is not simply a moral reform system that works on the outside and visible person
  • It is an entire transformational way of living that affects the entire person
• The ability to be transformed is given by the Holy Spirit and affects everything: our behavior, attitude & outlook, worldview, where we place our hope and security, what captures our passions, etc.
• But how are we led by the Spirit?
  • Through God’s Word
  • Through prayer
  • Through godly advice
  • Through the inner prompting of the Spirit (that will never contradict the word of God)
• If any of those areas seems difficult or confusing, like the inner prompting of the Spirit for example, then ask your discipling partner or other mature Christians to explain what they have learned about following this aspect of the Holy Spirit
Things to Ponder

- In what spiritual area of your life do you feel that you need the most Spirit training? What is your plan to begin working with your personal trainer, the Holy Spirit?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
The Fruit of the Spirit

When we go into strict physical training we want to see the fruit of that. We look for things like a change in our body, a loss of weight, or increased stamina and strength. When we go into spiritual training we also want to look for the fruit of our efforts and to make sure that we are truly listening to our trainer, the Holy Spirit. In other words, we want to see the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. To see the evidence of the Spirit in our life, however, we must be familiar with the fruit of the Spirit so that we can recognize it.

Two Opposing Forces
Galatians 5:16-18

- What is the relationship here between the Spirit and the flesh (sinful nature)?
- There are two competing ways of life that we can choose; we either live being influenced by our flesh or by the Holy Spirit within us
- As Christians we want to live according to the Spirit but how can we truly know if we are?
- The symptoms of a life in the flesh are listed next so that we can take stock and see if the works of the flesh are continuing to exhibit themselves as the predominant characteristic in our lives
  - If they are then we can be alerted (like an engine warning light) that we are walking in the flesh

The Works of the Flesh
Galatians 5:19-21

- We studied out these kinds of ongoing behaviors before immersion but they are still lurking out there if we don’t consistently and constantly partner with the Spirit, our personal trainer, to put down the desires of the flesh
- Do you see any of these warning lights still flashing in your life
  - If so, what does 1 John 1:5-10 tell us about this?

The Fruit of the Spirit
Galatians 5:22-26

- Our desire in being trained by the Spirit is to embrace these qualities and see them growing in our lives
- We should be quite familiar with each of these aspects of the fruit of the Spirit so that we can follow the Spirit’s prompting in our lives in each of these areas

Love
- This does not refer to romantic or affectionate love but the perfect and complete love that comes from God himself
- It is the sacrificial love that Jesus demonstrated to the world and that we are to embrace in our own lives
- What does this kind of love look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of love?

Joy
- This is the joy that comes from within based on relationship with God and does not rely on external circumstances
- This is different than worldly happiness which does rely on pleasing external circumstances
- What does this kind of joy look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of joy?
Peace
- This refers to living in a state of harmony and concord with others rather than in constant friction with and annoyance by others
- What does this kind of peace look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of peace?

Patience
- This patience actually refers to patient endurance, steadfastness, and perseverance, often in response to wrongs done against us
- What does this kind of patience look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of patience?

Kindness
- This kindness refers to a moral integrity in every aspect of one’s life
- What does this kind of kindness look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of kindness?

Goodness
- This refers to uprightness of heart and overwhelming good intentions for the benefit of others
- What does this kind of goodness look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of goodness?

Faith
- Faith refers to both the conviction that God’s promises are reliable and worthy of living by as well as having the character of one who lives this way and can be relied upon
- What does this kind of faith look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of faith?

Gentleness
- Gentleness is not being “soft” or “weak” but refers to a powerful force that is kept under control and restrained intentionally
- What does this kind of gentleness look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of gentleness?

Self-Control
- Self-control refers to one who masters his desires and passions according to the will of the Spirit
- What does this kind of self-control look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of self-control?

Things to Ponder
- Which aspects of the fruit of the Spirit have you seen growing in your life? Which areas do you feel that you need the most growth in?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
- Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
- Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
- Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
- What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
When We Get in the Way

Our world constantly sends us the message that the best thing we can do for ourselves is to follow our heart and trust our own feelings. This is certainly a popular sentiment, but is it true? Are our hearts something that we can trust to follow or are can our hearts actually hinder us from following the Spirit if we're not careful?

The Problem of the Heart
Jeremiah 17:9
- The “heart” referred to the seat of will and emotion
- What does this passage tell us about the problem of following our heart or emotions
- I have learned that my emotions are some of the most inaccurate sources of information that exist
- We don’t have to believe everything we think

Proverbs 14:12
- There is a way that can seem right deep down within us but what does that lead to?
- The consequences of following our heart or emotions when they don’t align with God’s word can be disastrous

Proverbs 28:26
- What does this passage tell us about trusting in ourselves and our own emotions?
- Are you ever tempted to trust your own emotions over and against what the word of God tells you?

Mark 7:21
- From where do things like evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, theft, greed, etc., come from
- What does that tell us about the potential problem of trusting our heart and feelings?

Hebrews 3:12-14
- Our hearts can become hard, sinful, and unbelieving, or skeptical and turn from God even after we can received the Holy Spirit
- We must continue to follow God’s word and the Spirit rather than our hearts so that our heart can be transformed
- What is the tool mentioned here that will help to keep us from going astray in our heart?

1 Samuel 16:7
- What goes on in our heart is important because God looks at the heart
- Blindingly following our heart as the world tells us to can be dangerous
- We need to learn to not follow our heart but follow the Spirit so that he can transform our heart
- We need to train our hearts so that it can be transformed to follow the Spirit

The Cure for the Heart
Jeremiah 29:13
- What does this passage tell us about our heart?
- We need to continue to seek God with all of our heart rather than the desires of our flesh

Psalm 51:17
• We need to have hearts that are sensitive to God’s word
• Do you trust your heart and emotions or the word of God?
  • What do you do when your emotions and the word don’t coincide?

**Proverbs 3:5-6**
• What three things do these verses urge us to do?
• What each of those things mean practically?
• What is the truth given for those who do those three things?

**Proverbs 4:23**
• Why do you think we are urged to guard our heart (and feelings and emotions)?

**Matthew 6:19-21**
• What is the treasure principle that Jesus gives in verse 21?
• Jesus says that our heart follows our treasure
  • We tend to think that we put our time, energy, and resources into the areas that we have given our heart
  • But Jesus says to put our efforts, energy, and resources, in other words our treasure, in the right place and our hearts will follow
• What does this mean for you in practical areas of following God?

**Things to Ponder**
• What is the toughest struggle for you in controlling your emotions and teaching them to be obedient to God’s word?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Laziness and Discipline

Training and discipline are an important part of our Christian lives whether it comes to growing in the Spirit or continuing to be a learning disciple. We need to be disciplined and for most people, that is something that we need to learn at one level or another. If discipline is a key then that means we must be on guard against laziness and idleness in our lives in order to fully mature in the life of Christ.

A Reminder for Training
1 Timothy 4:7
- We are called to train ourselves to be godly according to the training plan of the Holy Spirit, our personal trainer
- The Christian life is a life that demands discipline and commitment

Laziness
Proverbs 24:30-34
- What are the dangers of living a lazy lifestyle?
- Are there any areas in your life in which you can tend towards or be tempted to laziness?

1 Thessalonians 5:14
- Why do you think Paul gave such a straightforward warning about allowing laziness within the Christian community?
- What dangers could a group of lazy people within the church community present for the people of God who are attempting to live the kingdom life?

Hebrews 6:11-12
- According to this verse, what is one of the things that can lead to laziness?
  - The point is that if we lose sight of the hope of resurrection and living the resurrected life now, we can become quite lazy
  - If lazy here is used as in the opposite of the resurrected life, then what might the author mean by laziness specifically in this context?
- What are some of the other ways that we can be lazy and what can cause those types of laziness?

Idleness
1 Thessalonians 4:10-12
- We are called to be communities of people that work hard avoid idleness as a way of life
- What ways that people can be idle in our day?
- Are there any areas of idleness, laziness, or even lack of discipline (such as being chronically late or messy) that you struggle with?

Discipline
Hebrews 12:11-12
- What fruit does discipline and training bring into our life?

1 Corinthians 9:24-27
- What does this passage teach us about self-control and discipline?
- Why is discipline necessary in the life of Christ and following the Spirit?
Proverbs 12:24  
- What is the difference in outcome between the diligent person and the lazy person?

2 Timothy 2:15  
- What goes into being “diligent” here?

Things to Ponder  
- Are you one that struggles with laziness or idleness or in the area of personal discipline? If so what is your plan to grow in those areas?  
- Or on the other hand, is discipline a strength of yours? What can you perhaps teach to others about personal discipline (please remember that discipline is a great thing but there is the potential downside of discipline that it masks over many weaknesses like pride and removes our need to rely on God if we’re not careful)?  
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16  
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?  
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?  
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?  
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
A Priesthood of Believers

There are two equal and opposite errors that are often made in the Christian world when it comes to the role of believers and leaders within the body. On one side some people have a tendency to exalt their leaders and treat them differently. It becomes a cult of personality in which people follow the leader and treat them as though they are more holy and more godly than “regular” people. On the other extreme is the idea that we should not have or don’t need leaders within the body of Christ at all, or we certainly don’t need to listen to those that are there. We will look at both sides of this issues in two studies and come to a biblical view on the topic.

God’s People
1 Peter 2:9-10
- What are some of the descriptive terms that are used for God’s people?
- How does each term add to our understanding of who God has called us to be in Christ?
- Specifically, what do you think it means that all of God’s people are referred to as a priesthood?
- What is the significance of saying that we once were not a people but now we are?
- What is the connection between being part of the people of God and receiving mercy?

A Priesthood
Revelation 5:9-10
- Priests were ones who had direct access to God and served to help others draw closer to God
- What does it mean, then, in this light, to say that all of God’s people are priests?
- This is the fulfillment of a promise that goes all the way back to Exodus 19:6 when God promised that he would have a kingdom of priests
- Have you ever been part of a religious group where there was a priest or clergy that was considered to be better, more spiritual, or more holy than anyone else?
- How does this idea work against that?

All Equal
Mark 10:29-30
- Jesus says that no one who has left “home, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, or fields” for the gospel will fail to receive it back a hundred times over in their new family, the family of God
- But note carefully that he says in this new family we will have a hundred “homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields.”
  - What is missing from this list compared to the first list?
- Why would Jesus leave out that item?
- Who is the Father of this family?
- What is the significance that we are all brothers and sisters and even mothers but there is only one Father in this family (in the family group of the time, the Father was the undisputed leader of the household in distinction from the mother or any other role)?

Matthew 23:5-12
- What are some of the temptations of leadership or visible positions mentioned here?
- Jesus was not forbidding the use of mere terms like “teacher” when it came to role but he was referring to the practice of exalting some people as though they were greater than others
- The other side of this, however, is that we should also not have higher standards for our leaders and ministers than we have for ourselves
• Do you hold yourself to the same standard of commitment, service, loyalty, attendance at church events, reliability, evangelism, etc., as you hold for your leaders
• Some people, for instance, would not think twice about not coming to a worship gathering because they are “tired” and just need a night to relax so they don’t go, but they would be upset if their minister did the same thing
• We are all equal in the body of Christ and none should be exalted but none should be held to a higher standard either
• This does not mean, of course, that we don’t have different roles and even important roles of leadership within the body of Christ (see the next study for more on that)

1 Corinthians 1:10-17
• We must avoid the temptation to develop favorite leaders or preachers and begin to give them more respect and attention than anyone else
• Why is favoring some over others so potentially damaging to the body of Christ?

James 2:1-7
• Why is favoritism of any kind so contrary to who the body of Christ is to be?
• What are some of the ways that churches can subtly show favoritism without realizing it?
• We must also be careful that we don’t call every single thing “favoritism” either
• What are some of the ways that you personally can show favoritism if you’re not careful?

Things to Ponder
• How can we respond in a patient, loving, and wise way if we do see aspects of favoritism in our own life or the lives of others within the body of Christ?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Obey Your Leaders

There are two equal and opposite errors that are often made in the Christian world when it comes to the role of believers and leaders within the body. On one side some people have a tendency to exalt their leaders and treat them differently. It becomes a cult of personality in which people follow the leader and treat them as though they are more holy and more godly than “regular” people. On the other extreme is the idea that we should not have or don’t need leaders within the body of Christ at all, or we certainly don’t need to listen to those that are there. We will look at both sides of this issues in two studies and come to a biblical view on the topic.

God Gave us Leaders
Ephesians 4:11-15
- Christ not only gave us the body of Christ, the church, of which we are called to be a sacrificial part, but he also gave the church leaders
- In the church, leadership is a role and a service rather than a position of prestige
- For what purposes did God give the role of leadership within the church?
- Why would one of the primary roles of leadership be to build up the body for works of service?
- Why would one of the primary roles of leadership be to bring the body to unity?
- What does a mature body look like?

Obey Your Leaders
Hebrews 13:7
- Why would the author urge Christians to consider the outcome of the way of life of leaders?
- How does this connect with the idea of 1 Corinthians 11:1?
- What are some of the things in the life of other Christians, leaders included, that you would like to consider and learn from?

Hebrews 13:17
- How popular of an idea is submitting to the authority of spiritual leadership in our world today?
- What do you think it means to “submit” to the authority of leaders? (or as other translations word it “obey” your leaders)
- Are you a joy to be led?
  - What do you think it entails to make the work of leaders a joy and not a burden?

Ephesians 5:21
- What is the motivation for our submission to one another, including our submission to the leaders of the church?
- Submission and obedience to others boils down to a trust in Jesus
  - God calls us to respect and submit to leadership, even imperfect leadership, as a show of our ultimate trust in him
  - We trust God to be more powerful than our leaders are flawed
  - God is pleased with our trust in other humans when we do it as a reflection of our trust in him

1 Thessalonians 5:12
- Why would Paul call on believers to acknowledge the leaders among them?
Godly Leadership
Mark 10:42-45
- How does leadership and authority within the body differ from that in the world?
- How does this help us balance between being a community of equals but still one that has leadership?

1 Timothy 5:17-21
- “Double Honor” means to ensure that leaders are supported (primarily financially) by the church
- In light of that, what does verse 18 mean?
- Why should there be two or three witnesses against a leader if he is in sin?
- Why should a leader’s sin be brought before the church?
- Verse 21 reminds us that leaders should not be treated with favoritism but neither should they be treated more harshly than any other believer.

Things to Ponder
- How can you be a joy to lead? Are there any ways that you cannot be a joy to lead?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
The Life of a Servant

The idea of being a servant doesn’t exactly have the greatest connotations in our culture and time. When we think of servants we tend to think of a rather lowly position in life. That’s okay, though, the same is true of Bible times. Jesus called his followers to be servants but that has never been a call that would be impressive to the world. Yet, he did call us to exactly that, the life of a servant. We need to study this out because it is not a concept that comes naturally to any of us.

Our Model for Being a Servant

Matthew 20:25-28
- What did Jesus come to earth to be?
- To enter into the life of Christ is to enter into the life of a servant
- In what ways do the Christian attitude towards authority, status and service differ from the world around us?

Philippians 2:1-8
- The world tells us to do whatever it takes to meet our own needs and to think of ourselves first
- What does this call us to do?
- How does this challenge you?
- What is our motivation for taking on the nature of a servant?
- When we humble ourselves and consider others, and realize that a servant is something we are to become (as opposed to being something that we do) then we will be able to see and find ways to serve others

John 13:1-7; 14-15
- Jesus had all power and authority and was in his very nature God (John 1:1-4) and yet he was a servant
- What does that tell us about the nature of God as revealed in the life of Jesus Christ?
- Why do you think that Jesus called his disciples to emulate his nature of being a servant?

Our Life as Servants

Luke 17:7-10
- When we have served others our attitude should be that we have but done our duty with no expectation of reward or recognition
  - How do you usually feel if you do something and receive no special notice for it?
- Being a servant can be difficult if we don’t embrace it as something we become rather than something we do
  - If it is merely something we do, then we will be much more likely to expect praise or get prideful about the things that we do
- A true servant is a servant in nature and has no expectations for praise, and doesn’t get prideful about simply doing their duty

Romans 12:1-8
- In worship to God, we offer ourselves as living sacrifices, putting off our old ways of thinking that include self-seeking, pleasure-seeking, independence, self-importance, etc.
  - Instead we are to put on Christ’s thoughts such as “how can I use the gifts that God has given me to serve the Church and others?”
- Part of our spiritual act of worship is that we serve and belong to one another as the body of Christ
Ephesians 6:7-8
- When we serve others, who are we really serving?
- Why is this helpful motivation?

2 Corinthians 9:12-14
- Our service not only meets the needs of others but show God our gratitude of all that he has done for us
- Serving is a way that our faith is put into action
  - Our faith-in-action will point others to God
  - Being a servant is another way to share our faith with others

Galatians 6:10
- We should seek to serve everyone that we can but be realistic that our resources and time are limited
- What important principle do we find here?

Things to Ponder
- What are some ways that you can serve others in the body right now?
- What are some things that might keep you from being more of a servant in the body of Christ?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
A Life of Confession

One of the most important ongoing actions that we can take as Christians is regularly confessing our sin both before God and other Christians. The problem is that this action, especially to other Christians, is one of the most unnatural things that we can do. Human instinct tends toward self-preservation and rationalization not humility and confession. Yet, God tells us that if we regularly confess our sin, he will forgive us. Confession is vitally important to understand and to engage in as a regular discipline.

Luke 11:1-4
- When Jesus taught us how to pray, it included confessing our sins to God. Confession is a part of our life in Christ.
- Confessing our sins to God shows that we recognize our own sin and our constant need for him

Why Confess Our Sin?
Proverbs 28:13
- When we confess our sins honestly, we renounce them and show that we want to get rid of them
- We find mercy and are able to grow in our relationship with God

Psalm 32:1-5
- We remain in God’s forgiveness when we confess
- When we don’t confess our sins we show that we are still clinging to them (and some aspect of our old lives outside of Christ) and put ourselves in danger of moving outside of the life of Christ where we have forgiveness

1 John 1:5-10
- When we have fellowship with one another, the blood of Jesus cleanses us and the word comes to life
- If we do not confess, it is the same as saying that we are without sin. Our lives in Christ should be transparent – there is no hiding (darkness) in God
- Confession should be a part of our daily life – in our prayers and in our conversations with one another

James 5:16
- Confess to one another so we can pray for each other and find healing
- It is God’s plan for us to confess to each other
- Outside of Christ there is fear of being transparent and talking about sin for fear people will hold it against us or feel differently about us. In Christ, we help each other with our struggles and sin through prayer, the word and relationship
- A refusal to confess our sins to other believers often demonstrates that we fear what man thinks of us over what God knows of us

Acts 19:18-20
- A community of believers that engages regularly in confession shows that they value God’s will over the perceptions of man
- A community that confesses will put itself into position to be used powerfully by God

Ecclesiastes 12:13
- Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10)
• When we are afraid or ashamed to confess sins to other humans, it demonstrates that we fear their opinions more than God’s
  • We have repeated that thought several times throughout the study but that is because it is such a vital thought that is so difficult to truly embrace

Psalm 44:20-21
• God knows the secrets of our hearts?
• He knows what we do and the motives behind them.
• We cannot hide our sins from God and God is whom we should be concerned about, so there is no benefit to hiding them from other Christians

Philippians 2:1-8
• It takes humility to confess our sins to God and one another
• If we imitate Christ and consider ourselves nothing, we will have nothing to hide
• We won’t concern ourselves with reputation or what people think, but we’ll have the same concern that Jesus did...doing God’s will (John 17:4)

Action Points
• Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about confession of God that you didn’t previously know
• What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

Things to Ponder
• What is the most difficult aspect to you about confessing sin consistently to one another?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Who wants to go through trials, or suffer, or undergo persecution? Not many people would choose such things in life, primarily because we typically see things like that as meaningless. Jesus told his followers, though, that we would likely have all of those things at various times in our lives, many of them precisely because we chose to follow him. Can we find meaning behind these things, though, or are they just something to endure? This is what we will look at in this study.

The Nature of Suffering in the Old Testament
- The primary view of suffering in the Old Testament was that obedience would bring blessing and disobedience to God would result in suffering
  - This was not always the case, but was the normal view and order of things under the Old Covenant
- We can see many examples of this in the Old Testament:
  - Numbers 14:31-35
  - Deuteronomy 28 (blessings for obedience, suffering for disobedience)
  - Psalm 107:17
  - Proverbs 13:20

He Must Suffer Many Things
- The picture of the promised Messiah was quite different from that
- The Messiah would perfectly obey God’s will but yet he would still suffer greatly
  - Psalm 22:22-24
    - How could the Messiah praise God but still suffer and be scorned by God?
  - Isaiah 53:3
  - Luke 17:25
    - Jesus said that he must suffer many things and be rejected
- Up until that time, suffering was always seen as a result of being disobedient to God but Christ changed that
  - Suffering for the Messiah and his people took on a new meaning
  - Suffering and sacrifice, because of the Messiah, was no longer a sign of disobedience but now it was for the benefit of others

Our Participation
Acts 5:41; 9:16
- Saul (Paul) would follow Jesus but doing so meant that he would suffer a great deal

1 Peter 2:19-23
- We suffer because he suffered
- Jesus’ suffering was not a result of his wrongdoing
  - Quite the opposite, in fact
- What is accomplished when we are willing to sacrifice for others to demonstrate the kingdom of God?

1 John 3:16
- What does it mean on a practical level to lay down your life for others?
- What most challenges you about the idea of laying down your life for others?
Things to Ponder

- What are some ways that you are most resistant to sacrificing for others? What is the most difficult aspects of sacrifice for you?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Sacrifice, part 2

Who wants to go through trials, or suffer, or undergo persecution? Not many people would choose such things in life, primarily because we typically see things like that as meaningless. Jesus told his followers, though, that we would likely have all of those things at various times in our lives, many of them precisely because we chose to follow him. Can we find meaning behind these things, though, or are they just something to endure? This is what we will look at in this study.

Sacrifice for Others
Philippians 1:29-30

- Following Christ means laying down our lives for others and suffering

The New Nature of Suffering
Hebrews 2:10

- Jesus was made complete through suffering. What do you think that means?
- Jesus came to accomplish certain things that could only be brought to completion as he sacrificed for the sake of others. He has called his people to do the same.

Hebrews 5:7-10

- Jesus learned obedience in the sense that he became fully familiar with what it meant to do God’s will through suffering and persecution
- We also are made more mature and complete in Christ when we learn to be obedient during the hard times
- What is challenging about being obedient to God when it comes to opportunities to lay down our lives for others?

The Purpose of Suffering, Trials, and Persecution
2 Timothy 2:3-12

- Christ suffered for the benefit of others and that is our calling as well
- We will have hard times and get hurt (emotionally or otherwise) following Christ
  - We shouldn’t expect life to be fair to us as followers of Christ
- Everyone gets hurt or goes through trials; the question is what are we going to do with those times
- We will get scars from following Christ but don’t be ashamed of those scars (Jesus wasn’t)
- Scars are evidence that:
  - You got hurt
  - You overcame it
  - You have empathy for others

Colossians 1:24-29

- What do you think Paul means when he says that there is something lacking in Christ’s sufferings that he must fill in his own life?
- It’s rather simple really
  - Most people will not directly feel the benefits of Jesus’ suffering on the Cross for them
  - Of course his suffering does bring benefit to us all but most people will not be aware of or recognize that just by itself
Paul says that it is only when we willingly take on the life of suffering for the benefit of others that the people in our lives will directly feel and come into conscience contact with the suffering of Christ for them.

How does it make you feel to know that when we sacrifice for the sake of others that we become the hands of Christ in their life so that they can truly feel the touch of what Jesus did for all of us?

**1 Peter 4:12-19**

- There is no shame in suffering for Christ
- It is a sign of our obedience rather than disobedience
- This does not include bad situations that we get ourselves into because we are not being like Christ

**The Result of Suffering In Our Lives**

**Romans 5:1-5**

- We are often willing to serve or follow Christ as long as it doesn’t cause us discomfort but as soon as hard times hit that can change quickly
- We tend to want to end the trial immediately rather than consider what God might be teaching us through that time

**James 1:2-3**

- What do trials produce in us?
- In what, do you think, do trials and perseverance make us complete?

**Things to Ponder**

- What are some of the specific ways that you can sacrifice for others when it comes to your time, finances, energy, gifts, heart, etc.?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Stewardship

We live in a world where the pursuit of wealth and possession is considered to be among the highest pursuits possible. With all of that focus on wealth and possessions, though, we generally tend to make one very vital mistake. Nothing in the world belongs to us. None of our possessions is really our own. We are nothing more than stewards of what God has made available to us. It is a huge problem to think that resources belong to us when we are nothing more than stewards. Recognizing our role as God’s stewards, then, is vital.

The Vocation of Humans

*Genesis 1:26-30*
- The vocation of humans that are in right relationship with God is to serve as stewards over God’s creation
- A sure sign of being in rebellion against God is the need to provide for ourselves (Genesis 3:17-19) rather than acting on his behalf as a steward and allowing him to provide for us (Matthew 6:19-33)
- Psalm 8:4-9 demonstrates what humans, made in the image of God, were intended to be, but failed to live up to because of sin

*Genesis 4:3-5; Genesis 14:17-20*
- Offering a portion of our resources to God as a recognition of his provision goes back beyond the law given in Exodus
- Giving part of our resources to God is part of our stewardship because it is a recognition that we are but stewards, someone that is managing someone else’s resources, rather than our own

*Luke 19:11-27*
- The context of this passage has to do with Jesus’ criticism of Israel for being poor stewards of God’s gifts to them
- The principle of stewardship, however, applies to the stewardship that is expected of all of God’s people now
- Being a good steward means to manage someone else’s resources well as if they were your own
- We are called to be stewards of everything that God has given us
- We are to live as ones who recognize that nothing we have is ours; it all comes from God

Stewardship in the Christian Life

*Matthew 28:18-20*
- Part of Adam and Eve’s original call to stewardship was to be fruitful and multiply and to subdue the whole earth, managing it well as God’s stewards
- Jesus calls his disciples to take on that original role that was designated for all humans as God’s stewards
- We are to be stewards of his creation and expand his kingdom and rule
- To do this properly we must remember that we need to seek his kingdom first; anything less would be to be poor stewards

*Luke 12:35-46*
- All Christians have been called to be stewards (servants) of God’s resources
- Good stewards are always ready and always living in view of the reality to which we belong in Christ
- When we are selfish, self-focused, or not good managers we demonstrate a lack of belief in the reality of God’s ownership and rule over all creation and our role as mere stewards of all to which he has entrusted us
• Do you recognize your role as a steward?
• What does it mean to recognize that everything you have belongs to God and you are just a steward?

1 Peter 4:10
• We are called to be stewards of the grace that God has given us
• It may be gifts, talents, abilities, time, knowledge, resources, etc.
• What are the things that God has given you and called you to be a good steward of?
• What does it mean for you to be a good steward of:
  • Gifts, talents, abilities
  • Time
  • The word of God
  • The Gospel of Jesus Christ
  • Resources and possessions

Malachi 3:7-12
• This passage was written to the Old Covenant people of God but the principles of giving and stewardship came before the Old Covenant Law and continue to apply to God’s people in the New Covenant
• They had demonstrated that they had drifted from God by being poor stewards and by refusing to give to God what was his in the first place
• God asked them for a mere tenth of all that he had given them as a reminder to them that everything had come from him and that they were simple stewards (“tithe” literally means “tenth”)
• The difference in covenant means that our blessings come in the life of Christ rather than in physical and material blessings but we are still called to be stewards in every area of our lives, including our finances
• Being a good steward means more than just giving ten percent to God, though, it means managing all of our resources well and being good stewards so that we can give generously and lavishly to God and those in need

Luke 17:18-30
• The problem for this young man was not that he was wealthy?
• The problem was that he was a poor steward because he wasn’t willing to recognize that everything he had came from God
• God doesn’t call everyone to give up everything we have, but as stewards we should be willing to if that is what he calls us to
• Are you a good steward with everything that God has given you?

Luke 21:1-4
• Being a good steward is more about giving all that we have than it is just having a lot or even giving a lot
• It is being willing to recognize that everything we have (whether it be a lot or a little) comes from God
• What convictions about being a steward in all areas of your life have you gained from this study?

Things to Ponder
• In what areas are you or have you been a good steward? Are there any areas in your own stewardship of resources, time, energy, gifts, etc., in which you need to grow?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Announcing the Kingdom

Once we entered into Christ we received a life of salvation, the life of the kingdom of God. But we didn’t just receive that life to lounge around in it and enjoy it. We are called to announce the kingdom of God to others, through our words and our lives and call them to be disciples of Jesus as well.

**Genesis 1:26-30**
- Part of God’s design for humans was that we would represent him by working for him
- We are made to be in an intimate relationship with God and represent by spreading his rule

**Genesis 3:17-19**
- Sin not only stripped man of the full image of God, it left men and women incapable of ruling over God’s creation and expanding his rule

**Exodus 19:3-6**
- God chose Israel, the descendants of Abraham, to be the restored humanity – the people that would do his will and rule with him in his kingdom
- A priest was someone who could go directly into the presence of God and represent others
- The Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God within us
- Israel, in the Old Testament, pointed to God’s Kingdom but was never the realization of it
- The words “Kingdom of God” never occur in the Old Testament
- The few times that God says “My Kingdom” are references to the coming of the Messiah

**Isaiah 11:1-9**
- God begins to promise the coming of this kingdom that would be brought about by the Messiah
- It would be characterized by concern for the spiritually poor, and by righteousness
- It was also intended for all people of all nations
- Why is it important to remember that God’s kingdom would be good news for the poor and for people of all nations, tribes, and languages?
  - Are there any past prejudices that you have had or still struggle with that you need to learn to release in order to truly embrace that kind of Kingdom heart?

**Mark 1:14-18**
- What was Jesus announcing that was now becoming available?
- Jesus came to usher the Kingdom of God into the present age in a new way through his ministry, and more fully through his death and resurrection
- God is transforming this present age through his Kingdom, preparing it for the age to come

**Matthew 28:18-20**
- Following Jesus’ resurrection he offers this charge to his disciples – words that clearly parallel the original instructions to Adam and Eve to be fruitful, fill the earth, and take charge of it
- In Christ, the Kingdom of God is restored
- What is one of the primary activities, according to this passage, of the Kingdom of God?
- Of whom are we to make disciples?
  - It’s not just the people like us but all people
Luke 9:23-26
- In order to truly announce the Kingdom of God, we have to leave our old lives fully behind (see Galatians 2:20)
- Why is this important as it relates to announcing the Kingdom to others? What is challenging about it for you?

2 Corinthians 5:15-21
- We are called to be ambassadors of the Kingdom of God
- This involves evangelism and sharing our testimony, but it also embraces all aspects of our life
- The Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God in every area of life
- Spreading that Kingdom is important but simply announcing it is not the sole area in which we engage in spreading the Kingdom
- We should live the Kingdom daily and let others see what it looks like
- We anticipate God’s age to come by living it in the present
  - What does this mean for you on a daily basis?

Romans 10:14-15
- We don’t reduce God’s Kingdom to just the way we live
- We must also announce it
- People cannot come to faith in the life of Christ and enter into the Kingdom of God without hearing the Gospel preached to them from another person – that is the way that God has set up his plan

Acts 8:4; 13:31
- The role of the early church was to act as witnesses of the Gospel, the resurrection of Christ, and to preach that wherever they went
- Who was sharing their faith here?
  - It wasn’t just the leaders who were sharing their faith
- What is most challenging for you about sharing your faith with others?
- We, in a similar way, are called to be witnesses of what the Gospel is and what it has done in our lives
- We, too, should do this wherever we go
- This probably sounds a little scary which is normal, but if it sounds like a burden that we don’t want to participate in, then we have to ask if we really understand what we have in the life of Christ

Things to Ponder
- What is the most challenging or difficult aspect for you about announcing the Kingdom of God to others?
- What Scriptures most motivate you to share your faith with others even when you might not completely feel like it?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Practical Aspects of Kingdom Announcing

There is classic scene in the movie Amistad where John Quincy Adams chides another character for the folly of being such a persuasive speaker without a balancing amount of grace. The same can be said of us sharing the kingdom of God with others. Evangelism needs a mixture of boldness and grace. We need to pay careful attention so as to avoid going to one extreme or the other. We need to be both bold and kind and full of grace and tact. This study will focus on some of the nuts and bolts of how to go about sharing our faith—of course it must be remembered that the only true way to learn and become proficient at this vocation is to do it.

Kingdom Announcing
2 Corinthians 5:10-21
- What compels us to share the kingdom with others?
- We have been given the ministry of reconciliation
  - That means we seek to demonstrate reconciliation in every area of our lives
  - This ministry of reconciliation is not a choice, it has been given to us; it is our life
- What is the role of an ambassador?
- What does it mean that we are ambassadors in God’s kingdom?

Being Bold
Romans 1:16-17
- We are not ashamed of the gospel (Romans 1:1-4), but why not?
- What power does the gospel have?
- Why is it important to remember that?

Luke 9:23-26
- What stern warning is given for those that are ashamed of Jesus and his words?
- What are ways that we can act ashamed of Jesus and his words?

Acts 4:29-31
- If we pray for boldness and act in faith, God will answer those prayers
- Why is boldness important in announcing the kingdom to others?

Pitfalls
Proverbs 12:18
- We have to be careful with our words when announcing the kingdom to others
- We want to be honest and direct but not unnecessarily hurtful or foolish

Proverbs 25:17
- We want to be persistent in reaching out to others, understanding that they likely do not understand the urgency of submitting to the gospel that we do
- But we also want to be wise and not overdo it and annoy people or “creep” them out

Proverbs 27:14
- Announcing the kingdom to others involves a combination of being bold and confident, even wisely assertive on one hand but not coming on too strong on the other
- It is all about finding a balance
Seasoned with Grace
1 Corinthians 9:20-23
- Paul wasn’t saying that he was being fake or insincere
- He found common ground with those that he was sharing his faith with
- He put their interests first and tried to connect with them so that they could hear the gospel that he was preaching in a way that they could understand and not be unnecessarily offended
- What can you learn from Paul’s example in your own life?

Colossians 4:5
- We need to be careful in what we say and how we present the kingdom of God to outsiders
- What does it mean to you to make the most of every opportunity?

1 Thessalonians 4:10-12
- We want to be visible in our kingdom lives but full of respect and grace
- We don’t want to be unnecessarily offensive

1 Peter 3:15-16
- Why are gentleness and respect important in announcing the kingdom?
- What are some scenarios in which you could imagine maintaining gentleness and respect while sharing your faith could be challenging?
  - What should you do in those difficult situations?

2 Timothy 2:23-26
- What does this warn us to avoid?

Things to Ponder
- Why do you think that God’s plan is to expand his kingdom through our evangelism?
- Take some time to meditate on the connection between our genuine gratitude to Christ for saving us and our devotion in announcing the Kingdom to others.
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Being Single, Dating, and Marriage

One of the largest pressures that single Christians ever face comes in the questions of whether they should date or not, seek to get married or not, and who they should date or get married to. This study begins to look at these questions through biblical eyes. This is not just a study for single people, however. Singles and married people alike are all members of God’s family together and it is important that we have and understand the same convictions on such important and core beliefs and practices.

Single or Married
1 Corinthians 7:8-9; 17-24
- Paul’s words here might seem rather ordinary to us but they were quite revolutionary in his time
  - Marriage was expected, so to say that it was unnecessary and perhaps being single was something to even be considered as preferable in the kingdom of God was shocking and new
- Christians might prefer to get married but are not required
- Getting married is preferred to giving into sin
- We are, however, called to put God’s kingdom first and seek that with all of our energy, if God brings us a spouse then we should accept that with gratitude
- We should be content in whatever situation God has called us to
  - A single person might desire to be married, which is not necessarily wrong, but becomes a problem if they being to see only value in being married, turn their desires to being married, and being to seek that even above God’s kingdom

1 Corinthians 7:32-35
- Paul wasn’t against marriage, in fact he had a high view of it (Ephesians 5:21-32) but he did see advantages in remaining unmarried
  - It is quite probable (although we can never know for sure) that Paul was a widower and so knew what it meant to be married and to be single
- Why do you think that Paul might have seen certain advantages in a Christian being unmarried?

What About Dating?
1 Corinthians 7:39-40
- There are no biblical directives for dating because it was not a practice in the first century
- Dating, however, should be done in a godly manner, keeping with the principles of the kingdom of God
- What principle is given here about a Christian marrying that can rightly be applied to a Christian dating?

Matthew 7:21-23
- It is important to remember that Jesus said that many would claim to be followers of his but would not be
  - It is important to remember that when we are considering dating someone and not get sentimental or driven by our emotions
  - If we are considering dating someone, is it reasonable to think that they should be a true disciple of Jesus Christ and not merely religious or someone who says that they are a Christian?

The Old Testament Principles
Deuteronomy 7:3-4
- God took a dim view of his people marrying outside of their own (Malachi 2:11; Ezra 9:1-2; etc.)
- For Israel, God wanted them to remain within the people of Israel for marriage
- For the people of God today, we are in Christ; that is our people
  - Is it reasonable to think that we should only date or marry people that are also in Christ?
1 Kings 11:3-4
- What turned Solomon’s heart away from God?
- It wasn’t just the number of wives that was the problem, it was that they were not devoted to God
- Solomon didn’t influence them; they influenced him
- How do the principles here relate to dating the right person?

New Testament Principles
2 Corinthians 6:14
- The direct context here is urging Christians not to tie themselves together with those who maintain false beliefs and doctrines
- This principle can also be applied to relationships like dating and marriage
- Is it reasonable to insist that if we should not be tied together with false teachers and false doctrines that we should not engage in intimate relationships with non-believers?

1 Corinthians 15:33
- The principle here is clear: Bad company is more likely to influence the Christian than vice-versa
- Do you agree with this biblical principle? How does this relate to dating?

What About Those Already Married?
1 Corinthians 7:12-13
- Christians should not bind themselves willingly into dating relationships and marriages with non-Christians, but this is not an excuse for those that are already married and become a Christian (or their spouse refuses to remain in Christ) to leave their spouse; They are to stay and glorify God in their marriage as best they possibly can

3 Important Principles
1 Corinthians 10:23-24, 31
- Paul was responding to a group of Christians who were confusing their freedom in Christ
- They argued that they had the right, in Christ, to do anything that they wanted
- In response, Paul gave them three universal principles to apply to any situation
- These principles can be applied universally, including dating and marrying
- We will put them in the form of three questions
  1. Is this beneficial?
     - Is what I want to do beneficial to my life in Christ and will it draw me closer to God?
  2. Is this constructive
     - Will my actions benefit the body of Christ?
     - Does it seek the good of the whole body rather than just myself (v. 24)
  3. Does this glorify God?
     - How does what I’m considering bring glory to God and demonstrate his kingdom and the principles of his kingdom to the world?

Things to Ponder
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Kingdom People and Dating

Dating is one of the most enjoyable and important activities that Christian single people engage in but it can also be full of potential spiritual hazards if it is not approached with firm biblical principles in mind. This study is not a list of rules for dating in God’s kingdom but is a series of principles that can be applied by those seeking to bring glory to God in everything they do.

Five Absolute Standards

1) Do Not Let Marriage or Your Desire to Be Married Become an Idol
   - 1 Corinthians 7:17-35
   - 1 Timothy 5:11-15

2) Do Not Marry a Non-Christian
   - 1 Corinthians 7:39
   - 2 Corinthians 6:14-16
   - If Scripture is clear about not marrying non-Christians, would there be any biblical justification for dating non-Christians?

3) There Must Not Be Even a Hint of Sexual Immorality
   - Ephesians 5:3
   - 1 Timothy 5:2
   - 1 Corinthians 6:18-20

4) Do Not Bring Worldly Standards into God’s Family
   - Romans 12:2
   - 2 Corinthians 4:14-17
   - Luke 16:15

5) Marriage is for Life (with only two exceptions)
   - Matthew 19:1-10
   - 1 Corinthians 7:12-16

Three Overriding Principles

1) Always Take the Safest Path
   - Proverbs 4:23-27; 5:8
   - 2 Timothy 2:22

2) Freedom is Limited by Love
   - 1 Corinthians 10:23-24
   - 2 Corinthians 8:21
   - Romans 14

3) Look For the Right Stuff
   - Men, Look for Inner Beauty: Proverbs 31:30
   - Women, Look for Godly Character: Proverbs 1:1-31:9

Ten Nuggets of Sound, Practical Wisdom

1) Seek guidance/advice from the right people
2) Dating Non-Christians is Foolish – Be wise about being around non-Christians of the opposite sex
3) Date around have fun; don’t be in a hurry
4) Consider it a great privilege to go on a date with one of God’s disciples – be joyful, thankful, and giving on your dates
5) When in the “dating around phase,” Go out regularly and often
6) Double dating and group dating is typically the best way to have fun and avoid tempting situations – 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Timothy 5:2
7) Figure out the Safest dating boundaries for (remember that there should not be a hint . . . )
8) If you are attracted to someone:
   • That’s a good thing
   • Get some advice
   • Ask yourself “why” you are attracted to them
   • Is your relationship based on a spiritual foundation?
   • Take it slow
     • It take a while to really know someone else’s true character
     • Infatuation can often impair judgment
     • It’s a lot more difficult to stop a speeding car than a slowly moving one
9) If someone is attracted to you but the feelings are not mutual:
   • Try going out a few times; you never know . . .
   • Be gentle and sensitively honest with them
   • Check and make sure that your attractions are focused on godly and not worldly things
10) The best way to find someone special is through surrendered contentment:
    • Seek the Kingdom first
    • Concentrate on your inner beauty and godly character
    • The most righteous way to deal with loneliness is to draw near to our Father in heaven (1 Timothy 5:5)

**Things to Ponder**

- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
- Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
- Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
- Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
- What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Kingdom Marriage

Marriage was God’s idea from the first place and so it should not surprise that his word gives us a great deal of guidance and support in building a marriage that will last if we build our marriage around his word and keep God as the foundation of our home. It is virtually impossible to be doing well spiritually if our marriage is not going well because the two are so inter-related. This is not to say that marriages within the kingdom of God will be perfect, but they should be much stronger and look much different from the average marriage in the world.

God’s Plan for Marriage

Genesis 2:24

- Marriage was given to us by God to meet the needs of one another
- But only God can meet our deepest needs
- Each spouse should put no other human (including their kids) ahead of their affection for their spouse, but if they don’t each love God the most, the marriage will suffer
- Have you and your spouse discussed the idea of loving God even more than each other and the implications of putting him at the center of your relationship?
- Note:
  - Jesus defined marriage in Matthew 19:4-6 as a union between a man and a woman; he did so quoting the Old Testament passage in Genesis 2:24 so both the Old and New Testaments confirm this truth

Matthew 19:8-9

- In contrast to a word that increasingly takes marriage lightly and as an arrangement of convenience, God expects marriage to be for life
- If we have divorced, God can forgive us as he does for any other ungodly behavior before entering into Christ but as Christians we are not to take marriage lightly
- What does it demand of us to truly commit to a marriage covenant for life?

Ephesians 5:28-33

- The ultimate purpose for marriage lies even beyond just a companionship between a man and a woman
- This tells us that the reason a man and woman become one flesh is to teach us about the ultimate marriage and relationship between Christ and his people, the church
- Our marriage teaches us about and points to the relationship between God and his people
- This is a vastly different purpose from marriages in the world which often have the concept of “making one another happy” as the core purpose
- In a godly marriage, our purpose is to learn to be holy with another human being so as to learn about and grow in my relationship with God—we can certainly have joy in our marriages but being happy is not the core purpose; being godly is
- How does that radically change how we approach marriages as a whole and specific situations within our marriages?

Ephesians 5:21-28

- A Christian marriage should be marked by mutual respect, love, and submission
- This works out practically in important things such as:
  - Husbands and wives should respect one another and submit to one another but the husband is the spiritual head of the family
    - The husband should set the pace in having quiet times together
    - Praying together
    - Having regular family devotionals
• Being an active part of the church family
• Mutually edifying communication (Ephesians 4:29)
• Spending quality time together
• Getting rid of bitterness and pent-up feelings in a godly way (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:31)
• Working together as a team by coordinating your schedules and checking with each other often
• Laying down your lives, feelings, and emotions for the benefit of one another (Philippians 2:1-5)

Loving Husbands
Colossians 3:19; (For Further Study: 1 Pet. 3:7)
• Husbands are to lead the family spiritually but should be loving and considerate of their wives
• Husbands should do their share of the load and be willing to help around the house and raising the kids
• A husband should, in most normal situations, be equally comfortable caring for the children if the wife is out of town, for instance, as the wife is
• In what areas do you as a husband need to grow? What areas are a strength of yours?

Submissive Wives
Colossians 3:18; (For Further Study: 1 Pet. 3:5-6; Prov. 21:19; 25:24; 27:15)
• Submission doesn’t mean to be trampled on
• It means to be respectful and willing to choose to respect the authority and role of the other person
• Wives should encourage their husbands to lead but not be nagging in their efforts
• In what areas do you as a wife need to grow? What areas are a strength of yours?

Three Elements of a Christian Home
1) A Welcoming Home
1 Peter 4:9
• Having a home that is open to others consistently is important
• We don’t want to create private little havens but an open door where the ministry of reconciliation is constantly on display
  • Have both Christians and non-Christians over for dinner, dessert, or almost any other reason often

2) A Spiritual Home
1 Corinthians 10:31
• Your household should seek to bring God glory in everything you do
• Don’t save spiritual things for church gatherings
• Have spiritual conversations together, encourage one another spiritually, and seek to help each other grow
• Don’t try to protect one another if there is ungodly behavior present (Acts 5:1-11)
• Help one another stay righteous before God (Hebrews 3:12)
• Every marriage needs counseling, mentoring, and input; seek it
  • Agree with one another on the importance of discipling and input within your marriage and give each other “permission” to bring in your discipling partners to help if there are unresolved issues
• How do you feel about getting ongoing mentoring and discipling in your marriage?

3) A Loving Home
1 Corinthians 7:5
• Do not deprive one another, but act out of the interest of one another (this is a two-way street)
• Just because you’re married doesn’t mean romantic things like cards, flowers, presents, creativity, gifts, surprises, etc., cannot be constant parts of your relationship
• Why is ongoing love and romance important in a marriage and for the entire household?
Things to Ponder

- If you didn’t go through this study with your spouse, then take some time to discuss what you learned, areas you would like to grow in, and your thoughts on what you need to change in your marriage (Notice the focus of what you are sharing is on you and not your spouse).
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Kingdom Parenting

The center of God’s plan to restore the world is family, both his family in Christ and individual family units made up of husband, wife, and usually children. A quick glance around our world, sadly, will show us what trouble the basic building block of the family is in. Marriages regularly struggle and fall apart and many people feel quite lost when it comes to parenting. The Christ-centered family will serve as a very different example of what a family can be and be quite attractive and offer great hope to those around you. The more our families learn to be centered on Christ, the more they will stand out from the typical families around them. This should not put pressure on anyone as though the Christian family must be perfect, because none of them are. We are not perfect but we do have a sharp focus and a goal of where we are going and what we can continue to transform into rather than just surviving to the next day the way that many families do.

The Goal – A Christ-Centered Home

Proverbs 22:6

- We are called to teach and train our children about the way that they should go
- This is a full-time job
- Children need to have the standard of the Bible applied to every area of their life and be taught to do so themselves as well; this should be done in an encouraging and not heavy or oppressive way
- The primary way that we teach children the way of Christ is through constant, little conversations with them where we help to direct their worldview
- We have to teach them that everything has a worldview that it is trying to teach them
  - They have to be very careful about the influences that they are allowing into their minds (1 Corinthians 15:33); this includes
    - Music
    - Friends
    - Movies
    - TV
    - Books
    - Etc.,
- We also need to teach them the important elements of a Christian life such as being giving and loving, hospitality, flexibility, self-sacrifice, etc.
- The general truth that if we train our children in the way that they should go that they will not part from it is generally true but not an absolute promise because children do have their own free will

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

- Teaching our children God’s word is vitally important
- This passage, using a lot of powerful symbolic imagery, teaches us the importance of constantly inundating our children with the word of God
- We need to make sure that this is not crushing and takes on a negative tone of constant correction but an encouraging goal that the whole family works towards
- This should include:
  - Regular family devotionals or Bible learning time
  - Regular quiet times with children at a level that is realistic for them
  - Praying regularly with children
  - Have a regular and encouraging discipling time with each child
Encouraging Environment
Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21
- Training children in the way of the Lord needs to be deliberate, firm, and consistent but you must take care not to make it discouraging and leave them feeling as though they can’t ever do anything right
- There is a spiritual chain-of-command: Christ—husband—wife—children
  - The father must be the spiritual director of the home
  - But the husband and wife need to work together
  - If you are a single parent, it will be more difficult but not impossible
    - Take advantage of the rest of the body of Christ to help you
- Your family atmosphere should be encouraging, fun, and inviting for all
  - Spend special time with your kids (together and separately)
  - Have special traditions and make memories
  - Give them lots of affection, encouragement and affirmation
    - Your affirmations should far outweigh your corrections

Discipline
- Discipline is the act of lovingly training your children
- God commands that we discipline our children
- Any time of disciplining should be God-focused, loving, firm, and never harsh
  - If you cannot be controlled and calm then do not discipline at that moment
  - Discipline of any kind should never be done in anger
  - Children should always be taught and explained to why they are receiving discipline or correction and what they could have done rather than the undesired behavior
  - Any discipline time should end with loving and reassurance
- It is vitally important, though, that we are ultimately shepherding the heart of our children (and their motivations and desires) rather than just focusing on right behavior
- Remember we are not trying to raise good little boys and girls that blindly obey; we are trying to craft godly young men and women who follow God from their heart

Salt and Light
Mark 9:50; Matthew 5:14-16
- We are to have salt among or in ourselves
  - This gives a visual image of a container that needs to be filled with salt
  - Our children are like salt shakers
    - If we don’t fill them up with the salt of a godly mindset then the world will be more than happy to fill them up
    - Be constantly aware what their influences are and what is going into their mind
- The family of God seeks to be a light to the world, showing the world how to live as the people of God
  - As families within that larger family we are also to be a light to those around us
  - Work together as a family to be a light in your neighborhood, your schools, etc.
  - Teach your kids to think evangelistically and work together as a family to bring friends, relations, and neighbors to the family of Christ as well
  - Be hospitable regularly and teach your entire family how to take part in that

Setting the Bar
Matthew 10:24
- Your children will be very unlikely to be more spiritually and focused on God than you are
- Model consistency
- Model humility
  - You cannot do this on your own
• Be humble and get lots of advice, input, and discipling
• Be open with your struggles so that other Christian parents can encourage and help you

**Things to Ponder**

- In what areas as a parent do you feel that you most need to grow?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
- Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
- Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
- Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
- What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Politics and the Kingdom

One of the most contentious aspects of life today can be the relationship between the individual and politics. Emotions quickly get heated over political issues and many people put an incredible amount of hope and personal investment into politics. Many Christians engage in the world of politics based on their own backgrounds and beliefs without really considering the biblical mindset that Christians are to have when it comes to the political world. We’re not talking about specific issues like who to vote for or support but this study will look at the larger worldview that Christians should have when it comes to politics.

1. The New Humanity
   Galatians 3:26-29; Philippians 3:20
   - Early Christians truly believed themselves to be part of God’s restored humanity as citizens of the Kingdom of God
   - They believed themselves to be citizens of a Kingdom that did not have physical borders but was every bit as real and demanding of our loyalty as any earthly-based kingdom, nation, or state
   - They put their identity, hope, and loyalty in the Kingdom of God rather than their home country
   - This mindset led them to taking advantage of the citizenship of their home country if it furthered the cause of the Kingdom but they never lost sight of the fact that the Kingdom had become the true object of their allegiance
   - How is this different or challenging for you?

2. Bringing Individuals into the New Creation
   2 Corinthians 5:15-17
   - The early Christians understood that when someone entered into Christ they entered into the realm of the New Creation, the Kingdom of God
   - This calls us to view everyone and everything through the eyes of the Kingdom rather than the “normal” way
   - Our world is divided over politics and it is important to value the Kingdom over earthly politics
   - It is sad and often sinful when Christians engage in political rhetoric or side-taking at the expense of the Kingdom of God—you might express your opinions freely but then don’t realize or care that you may have just severely damaged your ability to share your faith with the other half of people who believe differently about politics than you do
   - The first step for Christians is to realize how important it can be to keep your political opinions to yourself
   - The second step is to work towards taking on an entirely different mindset about what will really help solve problems—is it politics or the Kingdom of God?

3. Changing the World Through Different Means
   2 Corinthians 10:4-5
   - What sort of weapons does the world use when it comes to changing things?
     - Weapons of war
     - Weapons of harsh rhetoric
     - Putting hope in governments and ideologies
   - What sort of weapons does the Kingdom of God use when it comes to changing things?
   - Why is it important that Christians look very different from the political world around us?
   - It is a sad commentary that most non-Christians view Christians as nastier and more political than the average person—this was definitely not the reputation of the early church
4. The Kingdom Was Their Realm of Authority
1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 6:1-5

- The realm of identity, loyalty, and authority for the early Christians was that of the church, not the world.
- They understood that they could not force their opinions, beliefs, or values on the world at large nor should they appeal to the systems of the world to settle matters that could be settled within the Kingdom of God.
- Do you truly embrace the concept that the Kingdom of God is more deserving of your loyalty and allegiance than the country of your birth?
  - What does that mean in practical terms?

5. Seek First the Kingdom
Matthew 6:33

- Early Christians believed that they had no role in earthly politics or the public square because it was a total conflict of interests.
- They valiantly and tirelessly defended the cause of those that could not help or defend themselves and destroyed the evil of the world within their mists (such as slavery and the killing of infants known as exposure) but they never tried to change society from the outside or even through being engaged in the political square.
- For the first 3 centuries of Christianity, they refused to take part in the politics, public arena, or military of their home countries.
- They understood that to engage in any of those things tied them to all of the non-Kingdom of God values and practices of the country, politician, or movement that they showed support to.
- Consider the following two quotes from the early Christian church:
  - “In us, all ardor in the pursuit of glory and honor is dead. So we have no pressing inducement to take part in your politics. Nor is there anything more entirely foreign to us than affairs of state.”—Tertullian c. 195 AD
  - Celsus [a pagan] also urges us to “take office in the government of the country, if that is necessary for the maintenance of the laws and the support of religion.” However, we recognize in each state the existence of another national organization that was founded by the Word of God. And we exhort those who are mighty in word and of blameless life to rule over churches. . . It is not for the purpose of escaping public duties that Christians decline public offices. Rather, it is so they may reserve themselves for a more divine and necessary service in the church of God—for the salvation of men.”—Origen c. 248 AD
- What is your response to the two quotes above?

Things to Ponder

- How has this study changed, challenged, or confirmed your previous beliefs on the role of Christians in earthly politics?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Maturing in Christ

The Christian life is not about being stagnant or staying the same. It is a life of growing and transforming into the image of Christ. When we understand that we will understand that we are constantly on a quest to become more mature in our life as disciples. Although there are countless ways that we can continue to grow, this study will focus on some of the primary ways that we can go after constant spiritual growth in our lives.

**Anchored in Christ**

**Hebrews 2:1**

- To grow spiritually and mature in Christ we need to be anchored in Christ
- If we don’t anchor our thoughts, ideas, words, worldview, actions, etc., in Christ we will eventually be like a boat that is not anchored and slowly drifts out with the current—drifting out gradually is easy and happens quicker than we think; and it is much easier to drift out than it is to paddle back in
- Revelation 2:4-5 warns about drifting from the convictions and love that we had at first for God and his people?
  - Have you already noticed any drifting in your commitment or loyalty to God and his people?

**Walking in Christ**

**1 John 2:6**

- What does this passage call us to be and do?
- Many of us like to celebrate how Jesus walked but do we really want to walk how he walked and live how he lived?
- Do you really want to be as humble, sacrificial, loving, and serving as Jesus?
- Are you truly committed in your heart to living the life to which Jesus called us to live?

**Fixated on Christ**

**Hebrews 3:1; 12:1-3**

- Why is it so important to fix our thoughts and eyes on Jesus?
- What does that mean on a daily basis in the real world?
- When Peter was walking on the water and he took his eyes off of Jesus, what happened to Peter?
  - How does this serve as a picture of what happens to us when we take our eyes off of Christ and worry on the winds and waves of life around us?

**Grounded in Christ**

**Hebrews 5:11-14**

- What do the mature do according to this passage?
- In Mark 4:24-25, Jesus says that the measure we use to dig into his word will be the measure that we receive in spiritual growth
  - Imagine you could go to a sea of gold coins and were allowed to take out one scoop of any size you wished
  - Would you take a small shot glass or the biggest container you could find?
  - The answer is obvious but how often do we approach God’s word with a shot glass?
- God wants us to dig into his word and obey it radically. That is how we will grow spiritually
Bonded in Christ

Hebrews 10:22-25 (For Further Study: Hebrews 3:12-14)
- We all want to draw near to God without wavering but one of the clearest ways that we do this is to draw near to one another and to not give up meeting together
- Scripture is clear that the way we feel about and treat others is the clearest measure of how loyal we are to God
  - Why do you think that is the case?
- How does loyalty and commitment to one another in the body of Christ help us to grow in spiritual maturity?

Sacrificing in Christ

Colossians 1:24-29 (For Further Study: James 1:2-4; 1 John 3:16)
- Our natural tendency is to not go through trials or willingly sacrifice
- Paul says that sacrificing for others is necessary because it is the only tangible way that they will directly connect with the sacrifice for Christ
- We are called to sacrifice for the benefit of others in the same way that someone else sacrificed for our benefit which all eventually leads back to the sacrifice of Christ for us all
- How does living a sacrificial life lead to spiritual maturity?

Led in Christ

Hebrews 13:7, 17
- What does humbly imitating the way of life of godly leaders and obeying their authority have to do with maturing in Christ?
- How does God’s plan of living in spiritual community with one another and submitting to our leaders help facilitate spiritual maturity and growth more than if we were all just “lone ranger” Christians?

Things to Ponder
- In which of these areas do you think you have already grown the most? In what areas do you still need the most growth?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Examining God’s Word

One of the most important disciplines that a Christian needs to become consistent in is examining and studying the word of God. This needs to become a top priority of any Christian whether you are a book learner naturally or not. Each Christian should be consistently engaged in examining and learning the word of God both independently and in community with other Christians.

The Importance of God’s Word

Mark 4:1-20
- We can have different initial responses to God’s word, but the principles of this passage continue to apply to our lives throughout our walk in Christ
- We must have our hearts always open to God’s word

Mark 4:24-25
- What truth does this passage teach us about digging in to God’s word?
- Why is it important to dig deeply into learning and obeying God’s word?

Psalm 119:105
- What does this verse tell us that the word of God is for us?
- What does it imply about our lives if we do not consistently have the word of God?

Luke 16:19-31
- Jesus believed that the word of god (Moses and the prophets) was the most powerful tool available to convert people to obedience to God
- He believed that the word was more effective and powerful than someone coming back from the dead
- Faith comes from hearing the word of god and nothing else (Romans 10:17)

Hebrews 4:12-13
- The word is active and pertinent to our everyday lives which means it is important to dig into it everyday
- What is your plan for learning from the word each day?

It Takes Work

Acts 17:10-12
- Why were this group of people commended?
- Digging into the word of God is vital
- It is never a good idea to get so comfortable with any teacher that we don’t measure their words against the word of God
- In order to be aware of poor, shallow, or incorrect teaching, each disciple must have their own knowledge of the word of God and constantly seek to dig deeper

1 Thessalonians 2:13
- They accepted the word of god as just that rather than a human word; What is the difference?
- What did Paul mean by saying that the word was at work in them?

2 Peter 3:15-16
- We must be careful in how we handle the word of God so that we do not twist the Scriptures
• The Scriptures can be difficult to understand (even Peter had trouble with Paul at time, evidently) but that doesn’t mean that we quit trying to understand
  • There are many resources within the body of Christ to help you understand and go deeper – use them

**2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17**
• Reading is something that we do to a magazine or a good mystery novel
• The word of God is to be studied, examined, learned, and embraced
• Become a student and a lifelong learner
  • How do you do that?

**Don’t Just Hear It, Do It**
**James 1:22-25**
• Simply reading the word of God and agreeing with it but not putting it into obedient action is as silly as looking at yourself in the mirror and forgetting what you look like
• Examine the word carefully with an eye towards obeying it and putting it into practice
• Are there times where you have been tempted to hear the word and know what it says but not really obey it wholeheartedly?

**Things to Ponder**
• What are some of the things (if any) that have kept you from studying God’s word consistently and deeply?
  • How can you go about overcoming those obstacles?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Studying God’s Word

It’s one thing to know that we need to do something. It is another matter entirely to actually know how to do it. It is certainly important to have a conviction that you need to study, examine, and know God’s word on a ever-increasing deeper level. But it is quite possible to have that conviction without knowing how to actually go about going deeper into God’s word and beginning a system of study. There are certainly many different ways to do that and they simply cannot even begin to be covered in this study but we will look at some simple steps to help you get started.

Step 1 – Choose a book to study
- It is never the most productive method to just wake up in the morning, crack open the Bible to whatever page it opens to and begin reading for awhile to see what guidance and wisdom that particular section happens to offer today
  - To do that is to read the Bible more like a horoscope than the word of God that deserves to be studied and examined deeply
- Choose a book of the Bible that you would like to study
  - It may be a book that interests you, one that someone else suggested, one that was preached from recently, or one that you think covers some specific material that might help you in the areas in which you currently need growth and direction

Step 2 – Read Through the Book
- It is best if you read all the way through your book to start
- Do this in one sitting if possible (that will be much more difficult with some longer books so you may have to break it up over a couple of days)
- You may even want to read it through in its entirety in several different translations (HCSB, NIV, ESV, NASB, NRSV, NLT, just to name a few)

Step 3 – Principles to Understand the Book at a deeper level
- It is important to remember that the Bible is God’s word for his people
  - The Bible was written for us but not directly to us
  - Before we can understand what it is saying to God’s people today we have to understand what it said to the original audience to whom it was written; what was it calling them to do or know
- To understand the Bible properly, there are a few simple guidelines that will help us if we follow:
  1. Their Side of the River
     - Consider what the text would have been telling the original audience (their side of the river)
     - It cannot mean for us something that it never meant for them (even if they didn’t fully understand everything at the time that it was written)
  2. How Wide is the River
     - Remember that there are things that put a greater distance between us and the original audience:
       - Culture
       - Historical setting
       - Language (figures of speech, etc.)
       - Status as God’s people (nation of Israel vs. the church)
       - Covenant (Old or New)
       - Etc.
• We have to at least be aware of those things as we consider what it will take to cross the river to bring the text from their time into ours.

3. Cross the River in our Boat Named “Principle”
• The Bible is a book of timeless principles written to specific people at specific times.
• Our job as readers is to not get bogged down in the cultural specifics of each situation but to understand those things a bit so that we can properly extract the principle from each situation.
• Determine the principle of a verse, passage, or paragraph.

4. Arrive on Our Side of the River
• How would we apply this principle to the people of God today?
• What is your part and responsibility in that principle as it is applied to God’s family?

• Example:
  • Let’s go back through those four guidelines and apply them to a passage that would, on its surface, seem to have no application for us today – Exodus 21:28-29

  1. Their Side of the River
  • They were being told quite clearly that an animal that injured another human must be put to death and its meat not eaten so that no benefit might come from such a tragedy. This would have been an economic blow for the owner so it was not as though they were getting off free and clear. If, however, this was a repeated offense, then the owner was negligent and it should not be treated as an accident; the owner would pay the price for the crime with their own life.

  2. How Wide is the River
  • Remember that there are things that put a greater distance between us and the original audience:
    • This was written to the people of Israel before they had a king and any kind of ruling government other than God’s word.
    • The Law was the model by which they judged every aspect of life and it told them what kind of people they should be.
    • They were an agrarian people that would come in contact with animals often.
    • This took place under the Old Covenant and the Law.

  3. Cross the River in our Boat Named “Principle”
  • The principle here is something like this: God does not want us to punish people unduly for accidents nor does he want us to become negligent. God’s people should show grace where appropriate but also be responsible for their actions (or lack thereof) and make restitution if they or something that is in their care (child, pet, etc.) causes harm.

  4. Arrive on Our Side of the River
  • This is a principle that can easily be applied to many appropriate situations.
  • Reading the Bible this way makes all of God’s word living and active.

**Step 4 – Read and Observe**
• Once we have read a book all the way through we now want to go back carefully and be detectives.
  • What does each sentence say?
  • What is the main point of each paragraph?
  • Are there any wordplays, repetitions of words or ideas, figures of speech, lists, commands, etc., of which we need to take note?
  • Are there any parts that you don’t understand?
    • Get in the habit of taking notes while you study, including writing down questions that you cannot answer on your own.
  • If you need to look up a specific word to see what it might have meant in the original language you can use a source like www.blueletterbible.org (type in a verse, several small icons will appear.
to the left of that verse, choose the “c” icon, then click on the Strong’s number for the word you would like to look up)

- You may also find it helpful to get a concordance and a good Bible dictionary

**Step 5 – Work Your Way Through the Book**
- Go through a little bit of the book each day
- You’re not in a race so it doesn’t matter how long you take to go through a book

**Step 6 – Come to Some Convictions**
- At the end of each daily study session you will want to write down the answers to some simple questions:
  - What did I learn about the nature of God today and/or how he relates to his people?
  - What principles did I encounter in God’s Word Today?
  - What do these principles mean for the people of God?
  - How do these principles teach, rebuke, correct, and train me in righteousness today?
  - What am I going to do in response to God’s word today?

**Things to Ponder**
- You might not fully grasp all of the points above but keep going through them and working through books until they make sense
- If you need help from an older disciple, then by all means get some
- Which book of the Bible would you like to start studying (if you plan to try to use the above method)?
The central aspect of Jesus’ ministry on earth and teaching was the kingdom of God. In actuality, the kingdom of God is the skin of the entire word of God; it is the thing that keeps everything together and ties in all of the other themes, truths, and aspects of the Bible. Being that it is such an important element of God’s will for his people and is the destiny of his entire creation, it is important that we begin to have a good understanding of what the kingdom of God is.

The Kingdom of God on Earth
Genesis 1:31; 2:8-9; 2:16-17
- God’s creation was just as God wanted it; the Garden was, in effect, God’s kingdom
- God created humans to live in concert with him, being his representatives and caring for his creation
- God’s kingdom has to do with realizing the rule, reign, and kingship of God in the realm of earth
- Humans were made to be in God’s kingdom by doing his will

Losing the Kingdom
Genesis 3:6-7; 17-19; 23-24
- Humans chose to do their own will rather than God’s which kept us from representing God, from being part of his kingdom and rule, and separated us from God
- Ever since this moment, God has been at work to restore us to his kingdom

Hints of the Kingdom
Exodus 19:3-8
- God entered into covenant with the descendants of Abraham, the Israelites
- God rescued them, brought them out of Egypt
- God was their king, they were to be his people
  - He called them to be obedient
  - He called them to be priests (people who could enter into God’s presence and help others to do so as well)
  - Israel agreed to be God’s people
- This would not be the kingdom in its fullness but would show people what the kingdom would be like
- Sadly, the remainder of the Old Testament chronicles the face that Israel broke covenant with God and refused to be the people that God wanted them to be

Isaiah 2:2-4
- Israel, the covenant with them, and the Law were always temporary measures for God to bring about his kingdom through the Messiah
- The mountain of the Lord was another way of talking about the kingdom of God
- The Messiah would bring about a new wave of the kingdom and allow it to break into the present realm
- Notice that it prophesies that the kingdom would consist of people from all nations who would live in peace and harmony with one another within God’s kingdom (this means that the fulfillment of the kingdom could not be Israel if the promise was to consist of all nations)
- Why is it important for us today to understand that part of the kingdom has always been that it would consist of all people of all nations and “races”?

Jeremiah 31:31-34
- God promised a New Covenant that would surpass the Old Covenant with Israel
• This New Covenant would not be by birth but by choice as each individual had the choice to enter into relationship with God and to be part of his kingdom

Daniel 2:44
• God promised to establish his kingdom on earth during the times of the “great” kingdoms of the earth

Daniel 7:13-14
• The Messiah, the son of man, would establish the everlasting kingdom that would never end

2 Chronicles 36:23
• In the Hebrew Bible that Jesus used during his lifetime, this was the last verse of what we call the Old Testament (the texts were the same, they just used a somewhat different order for the books)
• This verse was a prophecy that pointed to the fact that the kingdoms of the earth were lacking
  • Someone needed to return to Jerusalem to build God a proper Temple
  • This would not be another physical Temple
• The term translated “go up” was a specific term in the Hebrew language
  • It referred to one going into holy war for the cause of God and his people
• The basic question that the Hebrew Old Testament left off with was who would go to battle for God’s people in Jerusalem and finally bring about the promised Kingdom and Temple that Israel had been waiting for?
  • In other words, who would establish God’s kingdom on earth?

Things to Ponder
• If we consider that the Kingdom of God is “God’s will being done on earth as it is in heaven,” then how does that help us to understand the Old Testament prophecies of God’s kingdom?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
The Kingdom of God, Part 2

The central aspect of Jesus’ ministry on earth and teaching was the kingdom of God. In actuality, the kingdom of God is the skin of the entire word of God; it is the thing that keeps everything together and ties in all of the other themes, truths, and aspects of the Bible. Being that it is such an important element of God’s will for his people and is the destiny of his entire creation, it is important that we begin to have a good understanding of what the kingdom of God is.

The Kingdom Coming in Waves

Matthew 6:10
- One of the key things that Jesus taught his disciples to pray for was that the kingdom would continue to come and that God’s will would be done—that is the kingdom in essence, the place where God’s will is done.
- It would make little sense for Jesus to ask his disciples to pray for something that was largely irrelevant in their time.
  - Jesus asked them to pray for the kingdom to come because it was breaking in all around them through Jesus’ ministry and would come in a special, new way soon.

Matthew 4:17
- Jesus was preaching from the very onset of his ministry that the kingdom of God had come near.
- The kingdom would be the central aspect of Jesus’ teaching throughout his ministry.

Matthew 12:28
- Through Jesus’ actions and ministry the kingdom of God was breaking into the world just as the prophets had foretold.
- The Messiah was ushering in the kingdom of God.

Mark 9:1
- Jesus told his disciples that some would be alive and, by implication, some would be dead, at the coming of the kingdom.
  - This would seem to indicate that the kingdom, although was breaking in through Jesus’ ministry, would come in a very strong wave, in power, during the lifetimes of at least some of the disciples.
  - As we will see, when the kingdom did come in power, Judas Iscariot (who was present here) would be dead while the others would be alive, thus Jesus’ words were quite accurate.
  - The kingdom came in waves and it seems that this coming in power would come in a series of waves as well through the death and resurrection of Christ as well as the events of Pentecost described in Acts 2 (we’ll look at that in the next study).

Luke 24:44-49
- This takes place after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
- He tells them:
  - All prophecies in the Old Testament must be fulfilled.
  - Forgiveness of sin would be proclaimed to all nation beginning at Jerusalem.
  - The Spirit would come upon them in power as a means to this.

Acts 1:3-5
- Jesus resurrected after 3 days, then spent 40 days teaching his disciples about the kingdom of God.
• He then ascended to heaven and 7 days later Pentecost took place in Jerusalem
• We will turn to the events of Pentecost and following as it relates to the Kingdom of God in the next study

**Things to Ponder**

• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
The Kingdom of God, Part 3

The central aspect of Jesus’ ministry on earth and teaching was the kingdom of God. In actuality, the kingdom of God is the skin of the entire word of God; it is the thing that keeps everything together and ties in all of the other themes, truths, and aspects of the Bible. Being that it is such an important element of God’s will for his people and is the destiny of his entire creation, it is important that we begin to have a good understanding of what the kingdom of God is.

The Spirit Opens the Door to the Kingdom for the Jews
Acts 2:1-12
- The festival of Pentecost took place 50 days after Jesus’ death (Passover)
- Jews from all nations were present in Jerusalem to celebrate
- The Holy Spirit came in power (v. 4)
- The miraculous sign that the family of God, the kingdom of all nations, had come was that each person heard the proclamation in their own language

Acts 2:22-24
- Jesus was killed but God raised him from the dead showing him to be the true Messiah, the one who would be king of the kingdom

Acts 2:36-39
- God demonstrated that Jesus was both Lord and Christ
  - He was the king of the kingdom and a large wave of the kingdom had come
- Those who recognized Jesus as their Lord and king where prepared to follow and wanted to know what to do
- They were told to enter into the life of Christ, the life of the kingdom, by being baptized and receiving the forgiveness of sin and the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit
- The door to the kingdom had been opened for the Jews

The Spirit Opens the Door to the Kingdom for the Gentiles
Acts 10:44-49; 11:15-17
- It seems like no large controversy to us that Gentiles would be welcomed into the kingdom of God but it was a topic of great concern in the first century
- Even the earliest Christians would have assumed that Gentiles would not just be allowed into God’s New Covenant family; surely they must become Jews first and follow the Law of Moses
- The entirety of chapters 10-11 make clear that the Holy Spirit was making it clear that this was not the case
  - The work of Christ had changed their assumptions
  - God’s family and kingdom really would include people of all nations through nothing more than entering into Christ
  - The Spirit came upon them just as he had come upon people in the Old Testament (this was different than the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit)
- The Spirit came upon them in power just as he had come upon the disciples to open the door of the kingdom at Pentecost
- Through the baptism of the Holy Spirit the door to the kingdom had been opened in these events that were once-for-all and need-not-be-repeated events
The People of the Kingdom
1 Peter 2:9-10

- The people of God are the people of the kingdom
- We are the kingdom of priests that God had always desired
- Some have mistakenly assumed that this means that the kingdom of God is the same thing as the church
- The church is to be the clearest example of the kingdom but the kingdom is the rule of God
  - The kingdom should be made manifest through the life and activities of the church

Still Waiting
1 Peter 1:3-5

- We have access to the kingdom, but it has still not come in all its fullness
- It is waiting in heaven until it comes in fullness with Christ when he returns at the resurrection of all believers

Revelation 21:1-7

- One day the kingdom will come in all of its fullness and God will restore the heavens and earth and he will dwell with his people forever

Things to Ponder

- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
In the Image of the King

There are so many religions and philosophies in our world today other than true Christianity that offer alternate ways and theories of saving people. Sometimes that can be confusing and they can begin to sound rather attractive. But we must always remember what the real problems are. The real problem for humans is not that our lives are miserable or that we just need to go to paradise or heaven or become one with the universe. Our problem is that because of sin we have corrupted the image of God for which we were intended. This is an important topic because Jesus Christ is the only solution to that problem.

The Purpose of Man

Genesis 1:26-27
- For what stated purpose did God make humans?
- God made humans in his image, a word that referred representing God
  - Humans, made in God’s image, had the ability to perfectly represent God and do his will as they cared for his creation

Psalm 8:4-9
- This is a picture of man in his perfect created state, representing God’s image
- But does this sound like the average human being today?
  - Do human beings rule over creation and flawlessly represent God?
- Clearly we do not so what happened?

Image Corrupted

Genesis 5:2-3
- Humans were made in God’s image, to represent him but something has changed since the Fall of humans due to sin (Genesis 3)
- Rather than being God’s image bearers, humans have corrupted the image of God
  - Adam’s son is born in his own image
- Humans who sin by doing their own will can no longer fully bear God’s image

The Perfect Image-Bearer

Colossians 1:15; 2 Corinthians 4:4
- Jesus came to do God’s will (John 6:38) which made him God’s image-bearer
- Jesus represented God perfectly, did his will, and was the very image of God

Restored to God’s Image

Colossians 3:9-10; Ephesians 4:21-24; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Corinthians 15:49; Romans 8:29
- In Christ we are being restored to the image of God
- This process comes through knowing the life of Christ and doing it more and more
- We are not immediately restored in God’s image the moment we are baptized into Christ
  - When we enter into Christ it begins a process of being able to do God’s will through the power of the Spirit
  - We grow into the image of God
- Romans 8:29 tells us that this was God’s plan from the very beginning
• God’s plan from before the foundations of the earth were laid was that we would be restored to his image by entering into the life of his son
• His plan was always to have a Messiah-shaped family
• In Christ is the only way that we can be restored to the image of God
  • No other religion, spiritual leader, prophet, or guru can restore humans to God’s image
  • That is why Jesus said that he was the way, the truth, and the life
  • Restoration to God’s image is found in Christ alone—Never forget that

**Give to God’s**

**Matthew 22:15-22**

• The Pharisees thought that they could trap Jesus by asking him whether Jews should pay taxes to the much-hated Roman Empire
  • If he answered “yes” then he would be quickly rejected as a traitor by his Jewish listeners
  • If answered “no” then he would be quickly arrested by Rome for inciting people to rebel against paying taxes
• Jesus’ answer was shockingly amazing to those that were listening to him
• He asked for a coin with Caesar’s image on it
  • The Jews shouldn’t have had one on them because with Caesar’s image it would have been a violation of the ten commandments
• When they did produce it Jesus asked whose image was on it
  • The clear answer was “Caesar”
• His response was incredible
  • “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s”
  • His point was that the coin had Caesar’s image on it and if he wanted it back, then fine, give it to him
  • But humans had been made with God’s image, and God wanted what was his
  • They should all be giving themselves entirely to God, because they had his image imprinted on them

**Things to Ponder**

• What have you learned from this study that might have been new biblical information for you?
• All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  • Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  • Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  • Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  • What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
The Will of the King

One of the most important themes of the Bible and the kingdom of God is the issue of doing God’s will. Sin, simply put, is doing our own will rather than God’s. Thus being restored to doing God’s will is of vital importance for our walk in the family of God as kingdom people.

Made for God’s Will, but . . .

**Genesis 3:1-6**

- Adam and Eve decided to do their own will and what seemed best rather than following God’s will
- Man’s heart, or the seat of their will, had become totally focused on doing their own will rather than God’s
- As beings made in God’s image to do his will, not doing his will makes us less than fully human

**A New Plan**

**Ezekiel 36:26-27**

- God had a plan to renew the hearts of humans so that we could become fully human, doing his will once again
- This plan would come through Jesus

**God’s Will on Earth**

**Matthew 6:10**

- Being part of God’s kingdom means to do God’s will here on earth as it is done perfectly in heaven

**John 4:34**

- In the Jewish culture, food was symbolic for the substance that sustained your life
- Can you say that doing God’s will is the most important thing in your life?

**John 6:38**

- For what purpose did Jesus say he came?

**Matthew 7:21-23**

- Not everyone who thinks of themselves as religious or as knowing Jesus will be known by Jesus
- Jesus says that only those who do God’s will are those that he will know
- When considering your own judgment before Christ, are you confident that you have given your life to doing God’s will?

**Romans 12:1-2**

- A sacrifice was something that was offered up and given completely to God
- On a personal and practical level, what does it mean to offer you as a sacrifice to God?
- What does it take to begin to do God’s will rather than your own?

**Matthew 26:36-46**

- Jesus serves as the ultimate model of doing the Father’s will rather than submitting to the will of his human flesh
- Jesus turned to the Father in prayer to align himself with the Father’s will
- Humans first disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden by refusing to do his will and doing their own will instead
Jesus reversed that by going into another garden and doing the Father’s will rather than his own will.

Jesus was completely surrendered to God’s will—are you?

**Things to Ponder**

- What have you learned from this study that might have been new biblical information for you?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
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  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Resurrection: The Great Hope

It is perhaps unfortunate that so many people, including Christians have little understanding about what happens after we die. Very few Christians have a solid understanding of the Resurrection which is particularly curious considering the fact that the writer of Hebrews lists the Resurrection of the dead among the elementary teachings of the faith that everyone should know before even moving on to spiritual maturity (Hebrews 6:2). With that in mind, we undertake to at least study out some of the basics of the resurrection. Much of this might seem difficult to understand or new but it is not at all. These concepts of the resurrection were the bread and butter of the early church. Resurrection, as understood below, was the great hope of the early church. It was what continued to motivate them in the face of death and was the promise that kept them from fearing persecution and even death. It makes sense that it should be as important to us as it was to the early Christians.

The Message of the Gospel
2 Timothy 2:8-11
• What does Paul say, in shorthand, is his gospel message
• The gospel is the declaration that Jesus was the Davidic Messiah that had defeated death and made that victory available to those who would have faith in his life

1 Corinthians 15:1-21
• Again Paul says that his gospel is the declaration of Jesus’ victory over death
• He also says that Jesus’ resurrection is the guarantee (or the firstfruits) of the rest of the “crop” which is our resurrection
• What does Paul say, in verses 12-19, is the negative ramifications if there is no resurrection from the dead

What is the Resurrection?
1 Corinthians 15:42-49
• For Paul the problem was not with the body itself but with sin and death which had taken up residence producing corruption, dishonor and weakness
• Being human is good, being an embodied human in good, being a rebellious human, a decaying human, a human dishonored through bodily sin and bodily death is bad
• What needs replacing is not the body but the animating force that controls the will
• The words translated “natural” and “spiritual” have to do with what animates the body not the substance of which it is made
• Paul is saying that at the resurrection of those in Christ, our natures that are currently animated by our own human souls will be transformed by the Spirit to be animated by God’s own Spirit – Our tendency to sin will be gone and dealt with
• Paul says in Romans 8:9-11 that the process of choosing to walk according to the Spirit rather than our own fleshly desires in the present age trains us for and anticipates that time when we will be transformed fully

2 Corinthians 5:1-8
• Paul describes a three stage process which includes:
• Our present unredeemed bodies (He refers to this as our earthly tents)
The intermediate stage when we will have passed through physical death and into the presence of the Lord awaiting resurrection (He calls this “being naked”)

The resurrection body (He calls this our heavenly dwelling because saying something was heavenly meant it was aligned with the will of God and because the Scriptures promise that the resurrection bodies and the new creation are being kept in heaven until God comes and restores all things including our bodies. See Matthew 19:28; Acts 3:19-21; Romans 8:20-24; Colossians 3:1-5; 1 Peter 1:3-5

What the Resurrection Means in the Present
Romans 6:1-14
- Our baptism into Christ is not only the entrance into the death, life, and resurrection of Christ, it is also a present participation in that life
- The life and resurrection of Christ is not just a future hope
- We don’t just enter into a future resurrection but that we begin to lives the reality of that future in the present

1 Corinthians 15:58
- Paul writes this verse in summary of his long exposition on resurrection
- Dying to self, undergoing the persecution and trials of the Christian faith, and the work that we do in the Lord are not in vain because they will matter in the resurrection, in the age to come
- What we do now is an anticipation of the age to come, it is learning to live by the values of that time and is not simply doing things for the sake of being blindly obedient

Things to Ponder
- Why is it so significant to understand the resurrection of believers as the inheritance and great hope of God’s people?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?
Resurrection: What and When?

A great deal of money passes hands each year as people speculate about when the “end of the world” will happen and what it will be like. As Christians we are told by Scripture to be discerning and check out every manner of spiritual teaching to see if it truly matches with the word of God. When we do that, it appears that much of what passes today as biblical teaching about the return of Christ is not in line with what Scripture actually says about the coming of Christ and the resurrection, nor does it match up with what the earliest Christians believed about the resurrection and the return of the Messiah. This study will focus on the return of Christ and the resurrection of those in Christ.

Matthew 19:28
- What does Jesus promise will happen to “all things” one day?
- The word that is often translated “renewal” means “restored” or “brought back to the pristine or original condition.”
- Many people tend to think of the age to come as though God’s people will go off to heaven while the earth is destroyed
  - Is that what this passage implies, however?
  - We’ll continue on to see if that is what the Scriptures teach about the resurrection age?

Ephesians 1:10
- The great promise here is that one day all things in heaven and earth will be brought together as one
- To understand that idea it helps to understand that the early Christians (and the Old Covenant Jews) believed that heaven and earth were created as different aspects of God’s good creation but they were separated as a result of human sin
- The separation of the heavenly realms and the earthly realms would be repaired when Christ brought them back together at the resurrection and renewal of all things

1 Peter 1:3-5
- For what do we wait according to this passage?
- Notice that the resurrection age is spoken of as being stored in heaven (the realm of God’s presence) but it says that this final salvation is coming to us into our realm when Christ returns
- This is not to say that we will have “heaven on earth” as though God is just making earth really nice
  - It refers to the great day when Christ brings everything into submission and unites the heavenly and earthly realms

Philippians 3:20
- What do we eagerly await?
- From where is he coming?
- What will happen when he does return?
  - The early Christians believed that Jesus’ resurrection was the prototype for ours
  - He was apparently equally comfortable in the physical earthly realm (he could be touched, was material, could eat, etc.) and the spiritual realm (he could go through walls, etc.)
  - In a similar manner our resurrection bodies will be transformed in nature so that we will no longer have the desire to sin and we will be capable of operating in the unified spiritual and earthly realms
2 Peter 3:3-15

- Peter is answering those who were already mocking the belief in the resurrection of those in Christ and the onset of the new creation
- Many people think that Peter is saying that the whole world will be burned up and destroyed but that cannot be the case based on both an understanding of the language he uses and two important pieces of internal logic:
  - First, Peter says that what he is describing is similar to the destruction that came upon the world during Noah's flood. The word he used throughout this passage that is translated "destroy" means to "purge," "dissolve," "unloose," or "overthrow." Peter says that what he is talking about will be of a similar nature of cleansing destruction as the flood. The flood was certainly not an annihilation of the physical universe and neither is what Peter is describing.
  - Second, Peter says in verses 14-15, that he is writing of the same things that Paul writes of, but nowhere do we see Paul describing the annihilation of the world. Paul speaks of resurrection and restoration of the universe (see Romans 8:18-25 for example)
- When Peter refers to the elements being destroyed, he uses a word which can mean elements as we might think of as atoms, etc., but more frequently the word was used as a figure of speech referring to the a, b, c's of the world (especially in a negative sense). Peter is then saying that in the resurrection, the basic principles of the world opposed to God will be unloosed and judged for what they are
- Peter's use of "laid bare" was a figure of speech that referred to being revealed in judgment
- When he speaks of fire, he is using a common Jewish reference to God's presence as the consuming fire (Ex. 24:17; Deut. 4:24; 2 Sam. 22:9; Ps. 18:8; Isa. 30:27, 30; Heb. 12:29)
- The new heavens and new earth refers to God's restored universe after the resurrection (Rev. 21:1-5)
- When you consider all of these elements (which might sound difficult but was using very common Jewish language and figures of speech at the time) what is this passage telling us about the return of Christ?

When Will This Take Place?
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

- The early Christians were so confident that Jesus' physical resurrection guaranteed theirs as the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20) that they were prepared for it to happen at any time. They simply didn't know when it would take place so they spoke of its coming as being near and imminent, which it always is. Simply because it has yet to take place does not mean that it won't or that we have to come up with crazy theories to explain that resurrection has already happened as a spiritual event or something that happens when we die (2 Timothy 2:15-18)
- Because of this eager expectation, there was much talk of those who were alive at the resurrection being transformed. This led some to wonder what happened to those who had already died. Did they miss out?
- Paul says, first that no one knows when the resurrection will come but when it does it will not be a secret coming or something that could be missed.
- It will include the dead in Christ that he will raise and will also include the transformation of those still alive
- Paul says that they will be caught up together in the clouds to meet in the air
  - This is clear allusion to Moses entering into the glory cloud of the presence of God (Ex. 24:15-18)
  - The word translated "meet" was actually a very specific word that denoted meeting and escorting someone important back into town (For examples see Matt. 25:1, 6; Acts 28:15)
  - The Greek word translated "air" was a specific word that returned to the atmosphere around us as opposed to the sky (For examples see : Acts 22:23; 1 Cor. 9:26; 14:9; Eph. 2:2)
  - The clear point, then, of this passage is that when Christ returns to his creation, his people will come into his presence to meet him and escort him into the earthly realm as it is flooded with the heavenly realm, to live in the presence of our God forever
Revelation 21:1-7

- From which direction is the New Jerusalem (symbolic of the heavenly realm) coming and to where is it going?
- Where will God dwell with his people forever?

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

- What does this passage tell us about the effectiveness of trying to determine the time and dates when Christ will return?
- What does this tell us about our response to the resurrection and how it should affect our lives here and now?

Things to Ponder

- What have you learned from this study that might have been new biblical information for you?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?