

FOUNDATIONS

Unit Topics and Lessons in the Foundations Course

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- Does God really love me?
- How can I learn more about God?

Unit 2: Jesus

- Who is Jesus?
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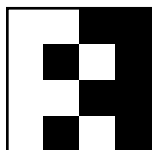
- How can I know God's will for me?
- What about all the problems I'm having?
- How can I share my faith without turning others off?
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- How can I properly manage my sexuality?
- How can I overcome discouragement?
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- How can attending church help me?
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- What about Satan?
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Food for Thought

It's easy as a Christian to get confused about God, especially when your expectations of him don't line up with your experience of him. You might expect for God to make himself real to you in a very dramatic way. You might expect that each time you pick up the Bible you're going to find some profound answer to a problem or question you have. You might expect that each time you pray God's answers will be immediate and clear. You might expect this of God but not experience this with God. Then it's easy to get confused about God and your Christian walk.

To successfully maintain your Christian walk, you must learn right from the start that regardless of your confusion and circumstances God doesn't change. He remains all-powerful and all-loving all the time. A stanza from an old gospel hymn best sums it up: *Great is Thy Faithfulness, O God my Father, There is no shadow of turning with Thee; Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not; As Thou hast been Thou for ever wilt be.* God is faithful.

You may not always understand why God works the way he does in your life, but you can count on his faithfulness, power and love.

Prayer Guide

Thank God for his great faithfulness. Thank him for his awesome power at work in your life. Thank him for his immense and endless love for you. Pray that you will understand him better as you continue in your walk with him and study of his Word.

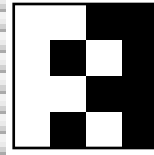
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Unit 1 • Lesson 1

What Is God Really Like?

In the Old Testament book of Psalms, we find this passage: *One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving* (Psalm 62:11,12). When we try to comprehend what God is really like, our minds begin to reel. He is infinite; our thoughts are finite. It's challenging to think about one God who is three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet two truths about him remain clear: He is powerful, and he is loving.

Usually when we think of God's power our thoughts immediately turn to creation. The opening verse of the Bible proclaims: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth* (Genesis 1:1). Later we read: *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth, and For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm* (Psalm 33:6,9). By simply giving the order, God brought everything that is into existence. He spoke, and it came to be. He creates immediately, perfectly, and effortlessly. He is all-powerful—omnipotent.

God's power, however, is not only seen in creation. It's demonstrated in redemption, when he forgave us and reconciled us to himself. As Jesus, God came to earth as a man, while remaining completely God. He lived here sinlessly and died on the cross. There in all his holiness, God not only vented his anger against our sin but paid the penalty we deserve. He used his power to be just in punishing every sin and the justifier of all sinners. He then proved he accomplished all this by raising Jesus from the dead. That same

power, according to Ephesians 1:18-20, is at work within every believer.

While God's power is awe-inspiring, it's God's incredible love for us that attracts and binds us to him. That love is what prompted him to come to earth in the first place (John 3:16). That love is why we have spiritual life (Ephesians 2:4,5). That love is what we'll enjoy for all eternity. The same powerful God who hung every star in heaven and died for our sins is the same God who knows us individually and calls us each by name. Yes, God is powerful, and God is love.

1. What about God do you find easier to understand—his power or his love?

2. According to Isaiah 46:10, in what ways does God show his power?

3. Read Daniel 2:20-22. What examples of God's power does Daniel mention in his prayer?

4. In what ways might the Bible itself be an example of God's power?

5. How does Paul describe the gospel in Romans 1:16? Read verse 17. What is it about the gospel that makes it unique?

6. According to 1 Corinthians 1:18, how do Christians and non-Christians differ over the message of the cross? Why do you think they see this message differently?

7. In what ways is Christ's death on the cross an example of God's power and love?

8. What can God's power do for us according to Ephesians 3:20?

9. Read 2 Peter 1:3. What does God's power give us?

10. What do people typically look for as signs of God's power?

How do you think God normally shows his power in the lives of Christians?

11. In what ways have you experienced God's power in your life?

Memory Verse

Jesus replied: "‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.”
—*Matthew 22:37,38*

Food for Thought

Often in our world love is conditional, manipulative, and fleeting. We may feel loving toward someone only if they love us back. We may love someone if we get something out of it. True love, according to the Bible, is not that way. True love is not self-centered, fickle, or fleeting.

True love is found in God. His love is unconditional. No matter our appearance, abilities, level of intelligence, or past, God loves us. He offers everyone the opportunity to have a relationship with him. Romans 3:22 reads: *This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference.* All who believe. There is no difference. What a comfort it is to know that you cannot be excluded from God's love. God loves you.

A love like that should awaken a love for God within us. John says, *We love because he first loved us.* Despite his great love for us, love for God doesn't come easy or natural because of our fallen nature. We must nurture it through prayer and study. We must protect it through repentance of sin and resistance to temptation. We must grow in it through obedience. *This is love for God,* says John, *To obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome* (1 John 5:3).

Prayer Guide

Thank God for loving you just the way you are. Ask him to help you believe his Word when it says that God loves you. Pray that you'll more deeply feel his love in your life. Pray that you'll better understand what unconditional love is and how to show it to others, particularly your friends and family.

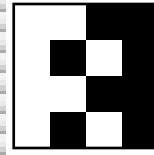
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Unit 1 • Lesson 2

Does God Really Love Me?

Sometimes it may be hard to believe that God loves you in particular. You know John 3:16: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* Still it's easy to feel lost in the crowd. You may have no problem with believing that God takes an interest in the world. But when it comes to you personally, you may wonder, "Does he really notice me? Does he really care about what's going on in my life? Does God really love me?"

Two big obstacles often prevent us from truly believing that God loves us—the difficulties we face and the deficiencies we have. "How can God really love me when so many things go wrong for me?" you may wonder. Yet David reminds us that God is close to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18). That's true even when he doesn't jump in and make everything better right away.

Still there is the problem of your deficiencies—the weaknesses you have and the things you're ashamed of. In a world of conditional love, it's hard to believe that anyone who knows everything about you can still love you. But the Bible is clear about it. God loves you, not because you're so lovable but because he's so loving. Despite your shortcomings and inadequacies, despite your weaknesses and failures, despite your wrongdoing and sin, God loves you. He has proven that already in Jesus. Paul writes: *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). He didn't wait for us to change. He didn't wait for us to make the first move. No, he took the initiative,

as John notes: *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins* (1 John 4:10). God's love is so certain that John goes on to say: *And so we know and rely on the love God has for us* (verse 16). God's love is reliable. You can bet your life and future on it. Nothing is as certain as God's love for you personally.

1. When do you tend to most question God's love for you—when you're struggling with difficulties or are aware of your deficiencies?

2. How is God's love described in Psalm 13:5?

How might this truth comfort us when we face trouble?

3. Read Psalm 13:1-4. How was David feeling about the difficulties he was facing?

4. How does a keen awareness of God's great love for us help us to remain faithful to him in times of trouble?

5. Read Psalm 63:3,4. In the midst of another difficult time in his life, David says that God's love is better than life. What is it about God's love that makes it better than life itself?

What was David's response in light of this truth?

6. God's love plays an important role in how he responds to our sin. According to Lamentations 3:22, what advantage does God's love provide us?

7. According to Romans 2:4, what effect should God's kindness have on us when we sin?

8. While Romans 5:8 reveals the measures God took to reconcile us to himself while we were still sinners, what conclusion does Paul draw in verses 9,10 concerning the efforts God now shows on behalf of Christians?

9. What assurances about God's love can Christians claim according to Romans 8:35-39?

10. According to Ephesians 6:24, what type of love should we have for the Lord?

How does reflecting on God's love for you affect your love for him?

Memory Verse

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment."
—**Matthew 22:37,38**

Food for Thought

God honors those who diligently seek him. Your desire to know more about God will be satisfied. Be patient. Keep focused. Don't lose sight of your goal.

Study God's Word to discover who He is and what He offers you. Take notes. Ask questions. If you don't understand what you hear in a sermon or Bible study, seek clarification. Read books that explain the Bible, and pray for understanding. It takes time to learn more about God, but you'll grow if you don't quit.

Increase your knowledge of God by regularly attending church services that emphasize worship and instruction. Attend Sunday school classes and other Bible study groups. Make friends with other believers who are serious about learning more about God. Talk with them. Share your thoughts, questions and insights about God. Pray for one another.

Don't forget that one of the best ways of learning about God is by experiencing him for yourself. Psalm 34:8 says, *Taste and see that the Lord is good.* It is not enough to read and memorize Scriptures, you need to taste and see. Your biblically-based experiences of God will help you gain a greater understanding of, trust in, and love for Him.

Prayer Guide

Pray that you will discipline yourself to set aside time to study the Bible. Ask God to make himself more understandable to you. Ask Him to deepen your relationship with Jesus through your study of the Word. And pray that you will be a doer of the Word, not merely a listener.

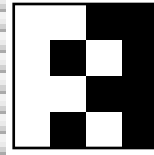
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Unit 1 • Lesson 3

How Can I Learn More About God?

Regardless of how much we grow as Christians, we can always learn more about God. He is infinite, so there is plenty to learn. Though we'll never know all there is to know about God, we must continue to grow in our knowledge of him. Fortunately, God has given us reliable ways to learn more about him. Nature, the Scriptures, and His Son Jesus Christ all contribute to our understanding of God.

Nature tells us God is the Creator. In the Old Testament, the first portion of the Bible, David writes: *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands* (Psalm 19:1). Over a thousand years later, Paul writes in the New Testament: *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse* (Romans 1:20). Nature reveals God as a powerful Creator and intricate Designer.

The Scriptures tell us of God's work in human history and in the hearts and lives of people. From the time God calls Abraham to leave his home and move to the Promised Land to the time of Paul's journeys to spread Christianity throughout the Mediterranean world, we find God guiding his people with his words. That same Word recorded in the 66 books of the Bible provides insight for our lives today. Psalm 119:105 says, *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* God's Word reveals to us what God is really like.

God's supreme revelation of himself is found in Jesus Christ. Christ himself said that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father (John 14:10). The Son does nothing but what he

sees the Father doing (John 5:19). In the book of Hebrews we read: *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being* (Hebrews 1:3). So to learn about God, we need to get better acquainted with Jesus.

By listening carefully to the testimony of nature, the Scriptures and Jesus Christ, we grow in our understanding of God. Making wonderful discoveries about God takes a lifetime. Such discoveries start now and can last for all eternity.

1. What one or two characteristics of God impresses you most from what you see of him in nature, Scripture, and Jesus Christ?

Nature—

Scripture—

Jesus Christ—

2. What are some things about God that you find to be confusing?

3. Read Deuteronomy 29:29. Some things God has left unexplained. Based on this passage, why has God revealed what he has?

4. We gain many benefits from learning and following God's Word. Psalm 119 lists some of those benefits. Read the following verses and list each benefit God's Word brings to the life of the believer.

119:11—

119:18—

119:24—

119:50—

119:52—

119:98,99—

119:104,105—

119:165—

5. What according to Romans 10:17 is another benefit that comes from familiarity with God's Word?

6. According to Jesus, in John 5:39,40, what mistake can religious people make when studying the Bible?

6. Read James 1:22. What other mistake do people make with the Scriptures?

7. Read Isaiah 55:6. What must we do in order to learn more about God? What are some practical ways you can apply this verse to your life?

Memory Verse

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment."
—*Matthew 22:37,38*

Food for Thought

People often have a hard time with the doctrine of the Trinity. Does this mean there are three Gods or just one? The Bible is clear about it. There is only one God. Both the Old and New Testaments attest to this fact (Deuteronomy 6:4,5 and 1 Corinthians 8:5,6). Yet three persons share in the essence, power, and glory of being God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20).

How can this be? Though we may have a hard time comprehending such matters doesn't mean they're not true. Once an astronaut appeared on a late night TV talk show. As he talked about some of the characteristics of the universe, the host commented that a lot of these scientific matters are simply mind-boggling. The astronaut then added that we may never understand some facts about the universe simply because our brains may lack the structure to comprehend them. He illustrated his point by saying that just because a dog doesn't understand quantum mechanics doesn't mean it's not true.

When we talk about the Trinity, we're talking about a characteristic of the God who created the universe. If what he has made is so mind-boggling, is it so surprising that he is, too? Yes, God wants us to understand what we can of him, but ultimately he seeks our love, obedience, and trust. And he is trustworthy.

Prayer Guide

Father, you are a great and mighty God with a great and mighty love. Thank you for revealing yourself to us through your Son. I am grateful that the Creator entered his creation when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Help me to grow in my understanding of and gratitude towards you.

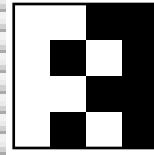
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Unit 2 • Lesson 1

Who Is Jesus?

Once Jesus asked his followers who people said he was. After his disciples told him what people were saying, he asked them what they thought. The Scriptures say that *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (Matthew 16:16). That confession is the bedrock upon which the Christian faith rests.

Jesus is the Christ. The word *Christ* describes the title or office that Jesus holds, just as the word *Cæsar* designates the title for the Roman emperors Julius, Augustus and the like. Neither is a last name.

Christ (Greek) or *Messiah* (Hebrew) means *the anointed one*. In the Jewish culture of Jesus' day and in Old Testament times, certain ones were anointed with oil when they began serving as prophets, priests, or kings.

While comparisons to these three offices can be drawn with Jesus' work. He is more. He is the special leader that the Jewish Scriptures predicted would come and usher in a whole new era—God's Kingdom and salvation for both Jew and Gentile. His appearance remains the greatest event in history and was eagerly awaited by the Jews.

When Jesus arrived on the scene, however, he didn't fulfill the messianic expectations of the Jews or even his early disciples. It wasn't until after his death and resurrection that his followers began to see more clearly God's plan for Christ—that he would serve as the sacrifice for the world's sins and save those who put their faith in him. Then they boldly proclaimed that God had made this Jesus, whom the Jews crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Jesus is not just the Christ; he is also the Son of the living God. While every Christian could be said to be God's child, Jesus alone is his only begotten Son.

We don't use the words *begat* or *begotten* much in our everyday conversation. But the term *only begotten* provides us with some important clues about Jesus' identity and his relationship with the Father. That relationship is unique, for as God's Son Jesus shares completely in his Father's nature. Just as the children that an earthly father begets share in his humanity, so God's only begotten Son shares in his Father's deity. Colossians 2:9 says: *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.* Jesus is God!

Where we tend to get confused is that human sons always come to exist after their fathers, because human life always has a beginning. God, however, neither begins nor ends, so both the Father and his only begotten Son are from everlasting to everlasting. Jesus is God, just as his Father is God. Jesus is *Immanuel*, God with us.

Whether at the time Peter made his confession he understood its implications is debatable. His confession, however, lays the foundation for the twin truths upon which the church rests—that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

1. What is it about who Jesus is that impresses you?

2. What clues do we find in the following Scriptures that Jesus is God?

John 1:1,3—

John 5:22,23—

John 8:58—

John 17:5—

Colossians 1:15-19—

Hebrews 1:3-9—

3. What do these verses teach about Jesus' humanity?

John 1:14—

Philippians 2:5-7—

4. According to Hebrews 10:5-10, why did Jesus take on a human body?

5. What else did Jesus accomplish by sharing in our humanity?

Hebrews 2:14-18—

Hebrews 4:15,16—

6. What additional insights do the following passages offer about who Jesus is?

John 1:29—

John 5:22—

Colossians 1:18—

1 Timothy 2:5—

7. How has your appreciation of who Jesus is been deepened by this study?

Memory Verse

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

—*Hebrews 13:8*

Food for Thought

In the book of Hebrews, we read: *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being...* (Hebrews 1:3). Once when Jesus was asked by one of his disciples if they could be shown the Father, Jesus replied that *anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*" (John 14:9).

Jesus wasn't claiming to be the Father. Nor was he saying that the Father could be reduced to a driver's license description of hair color, eye color, height and weight. What he was claiming was to be the exact representation of God's being.

When you see Jesus touching and healing the leper, you're seeing God's compassion for hurting people. When you see Jesus calming the storm at sea, you're seeing God's control of life's fearful circumstances. When you see Jesus befriending tax-collectors and sinners, you're seeing God's concern for social and moral outcasts. When you see Jesus weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, you're seeing God weeping with those who weep. When you see Jesus forgiving the thief the cross, you're seeing God's grace for people most think wouldn't have a chance. And when you see Jesus breathing his last, you're seeing God giving all he has to reconcile us to himself. Yes, it is enough to for us to see Jesus, for to see Jesus is to see God!

Prayer Guide

Father, thank you for sending us your Son who not only brought us salvation but showed us exactly what you're like. Help us to grow in our understanding of Jesus, so we can grow in our understanding of you.

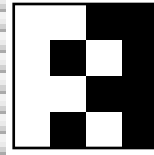
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Unit 2 • Lesson 2

What Did Jesus Do?

When you consider what Jesus did, you should examine two separate yet related aspects of his life and ministry. First, you should acquaint yourself with what he did in Palestine some two thousand years ago. Second, you should understand what he did for you.

The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—report a number of events from Jesus' life and ministry. While they provide various details concerning his birth, childhood, baptism, and temptation, they primarily focus on his person and three-year ministry, including his teachings and miracles. Each of the Gospels closes with an account of Jesus' death and resurrection.

From the virgin birth to Jesus' resurrection from the dead, the Gospels portray Christ as being both unique and controversial, leaving readers to ponder with his early disciples, *What kind of man is this?*

When John the Baptist first sees Jesus, he answers this question by saying, "*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29). And in the midst of his ministry as he went about doing good and healing people, Jesus himself never loses sight of his mission: "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:45). Jesus came to die. The cross casts a long shadow across the pages of the Gospels.

The Gospels report quite matter-of-factly on Jesus' death. He was betrayed by Judas, deserted by his disciples, tried by the Jews, denied by Peter, condemned by the Romans, and cruci-

fied at Golgotha between two thieves. Elsewhere in the New Testament the significance of Jesus' death is explained in detail: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God* (2 Corinthians 5:21). No wonder on the cross Jesus cried out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Mark 15:34). He died that we might live.

When it comes to sin, God has only one response to it—wrath. Sin must be punished. A holy God could never and will never excuse sin, any sin. Yet God is motivated by another response towards sinners—love. On the cross God's holiness and love meet in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus experienced God's full wrath against all the sins of the entire world while lovingly offering his righteousness to those who put their trust in him for their salvation. That's what Jesus did for you.

At the close of his Gospel, John writes: *Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written* (John 21:25). Jesus did a lot while he was on earth, and among the most remarkable is that he provided salvation for you.

1. Besides the crucifixion and resurrection, what one event from Jesus' life do you think best illustrates his character?

2. According to the following verses, what did Jesus say were the reasons for his coming?

Luke 5:31,32—

Luke 19:10—

John 6:38—

John 10:10—

John 12:47—

3. According to John 10:24,25, what evidence did Jesus offer to prove he was who he claimed to be?

4. Read the following verses. How did Jesus live while he was on earth?

John 5:19—

John 8:29—

John 8:46—

5. At the end of his life, what did Jesus say concerning his work (John 17:4)?

6. Read John 19:30. What did Jesus say moments before he died?

What do you think is the significance of those words?

7. Besides saving you from your sins, what are some of the other great things the Lord has done in your life?

Memory Verse

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

—*Hebrews 13:8*

Food for Thought

Some wonder that if in our modern times people can respectably believe in Christ's resurrection. Yet a moment's reflection upon the times in which we live reveals that belief in Christ's resurrection is as desperately needed now as it ever has been. The real question remains: *Did it really happen?*

Skeptics have offered plenty of alternative theories as to what happened on that first Easter morn, some of these as old as the Gospels themselves. The Jews said the disciples stole the body (Matthew 28:12-15). Maybe the Romans removed it? Or maybe he wasn't really dead to begin with? Or maybe Jesus had an evil twin who assumed his identity after his death and deceived his disciples into thinking he resurrected? Anything is possible.

Anything is possible; but when you seriously investigate the historical facts surrounding Jesus' death, you'll discover that only one explanation is truly plausible. Paul himself testifies: *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead...* (1 Corinthians 15:20). The writer George Hanson notes: "The difficulties of belief may be great; but the absurdities of unbelief are greater." The tomb is empty for just one reason—Jesus lives. He is risen!

Prayer Guide

Father, your power is awesome. Thank you that the victory and finality of death is an illusion that your power has swept away. You have given testimony to this by raising your Son and promising us life in him, for which we truly are eternally grateful.

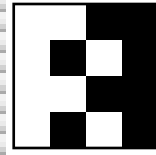
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Unit 2 • Lesson 3

What About Christ's Resurrection?

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul lists a number of logical consequences for Christians if Christ's resurrection is fantasy rather than fact:

- Both Christian preaching and Christian faith would be useless (14)
- Christian ministers would be false teachers (15)
- Christians would be unforgiven of their sins (17)
- Those who have died as Christians would have perished (18)

Paul then adds: *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men* (19). Christ's resurrection is the foundation upon which Christianity rests. It's the bedrock of the Christian's hope.

When the Bible says that Christ rose from the dead, it means that Jesus came back to life in the same physical body in which he died. His resurrected body possessed immortality along with other spiritual qualities. After his resurrection, Jesus gave his disciples many convincing proofs that he was actually alive, then he ascended into heaven.

Christianity, more than any other world religion, rises or falls on the truthfulness of its historical claims. Christianity is not a religion based on rules and regulations but a faith based on certain realities about Jesus. The most important of these being that Christ has risen from the dead.

Anyone can say that he is God's Son and the world's Savior. Anyone can say that unless he dies people can't be saved. Anyone can say that the Father has entrusted all judgment to him. But it becomes an entirely different matter when the one

making those claims rises from the dead. Jesus did just that. Christ's resurrection verifies his identity, validates his work, and vindicates his claims.

Christ's resurrection carries certain far-reaching implications for Christians, too. According to the Scriptures, we were dead in our transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1). When we put our faith in Christ and were baptized into his death, we were united with him in his resurrection (Romans 6:4,5). Eternal life was given to us (1 John 5:11). God's power saved us and began our spiritual transformation (Ephesians 1:18-20). Furthermore, we find Christ is a prototype of what one day will happen to us. We're told in Philippians 3:21 that Jesus *will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body*. One day the perishable will put on the imperishable, and the mortal immortality. Death will be swallowed up in victory, just as it was on the day Jesus resurrected!

After Paul points out the consequences if the resurrection is fantasy, he adds: *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead...* (1 Corinthians 15:20). To which we might add: And life has never been the same since!

1. What are some ways belief in Christ's resurrection might change a person's outlook on life?

2. In 1 Corinthians 15:32, Paul says that if the dead are not raised we should eat and drink for tomorrow we die. Why would this be a sensible way to live if there is no resurrection?

What are some examples that show our culture has lost its hope in the resurrection?

3. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. What facts does Paul identify as being the foundation upon which Christianity rests?

4. According to the following Scriptures, what facts does the resurrection prove about Christ?

Acts 17:31—

Romans 1:3,4—

Romans 14:9—

5. Read the following verses. What benefits does Jesus' resurrection provide to believers?

Romans 10:9—

Ephesians 2:4,5—

6. According to 1 Peter 1:3,4, what living hope does Christ's resurrection offer Christians?

7. In what ways has your life been changed because of Christ's resurrection?

Memory Verse

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

—*Hebrews 13:8*

Food for Thought

Sometimes when Christians hear the word *judgment*, they react fearfully. They know that God responds to sin with condemnation, and they are painfully aware of the shortcomings that still plague their lives. But they have forgotten one important truth: *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1). No condemnation means exactly that. None. Because of the grace in which you now stand as a Christian, you have peace with God through your Lord Jesus Christ. That's why you can anticipate his coming.

Still it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, for those who have spurned God's grace. Hell is a frightening reality. And it should be. But hell is no threat to those who abide in the Lord.

So why are Christians judged? Read carefully what Paul says: *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God* (1 Corinthians 4:5). At judgment, Christians receive their praise from God. They receive the rewards beyond salvation. Judgment day is a glorious day for every Christian.

Prayer Guide

Father, it is a wonderful thing that through Christ's grace you have replaced the dread of judgment with the hope of salvation and glory. Thank you that my life and human history have purpose. Grant me the ability to set my hope fully on the grace to be given me when Jesus Christ is revealed.

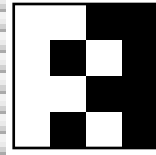
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Unit 2 • Lesson 4

What About the Second Coming?

What's this world coming to? You may wonder. For some, history is just a collection of random events meandering to an unknown future. The Bible, however, takes an entirely different outlook. History is deliberately progressing to its crowning event when Jesus returns to earth.

Christ's second coming is assumed as a fact throughout the entire New Testament, from Matthew to Revelation. Jesus himself proclaims: *When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory* (Matthew 25:31). And in the book of Revelation he says: *Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done* (Revelation 22:12). Christ's second coming is the goal which our sovereign God has chosen for history. Paul says: *For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead* (Acts 17:31). You can be sure that one day all this will actually happen. Christ will return.

Yet some have their doubts, as Peter observes: *First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation"* (2 Peter 3:3,4). God's gracious delay, however, is intended to benefit us, for Peter adds: *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9). Make no mistake about it.

Christians, however, do sometimes make their own mistakes when they talk about Christ's second coming. Some develop elaborate scenarios and speculate endlessly about the details concerning Jesus' return, even predicting precisely when it will happen. But Jesus himself says, *No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father* (Matthew 24:36). Avoid careless and dogmatic speculation about his return.

Furthermore, every Christian who knows God and his grace should anticipate, not dread, Christ's return. That's when God will restore everything and fulfill all he has promised (Acts 3:20,21). It's a glorious day to eagerly await and long for.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, the angels announced to those standing by that *this same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven* (Acts 1:11). But this time *every eye will see him* (Revelation 1:7). Then we will certainly know what this world is coming to. *Maranatha!**

1. Why do you think Christians sometimes have a hard time with being eager about Christ's return?

2. According to Matthew 24:36-39, what will life be like before Jesus returns?

3. Read Matthew 24:42-44. What facts did Jesus stress about his coming?

4. In the parable of the wise and foolish servants, what points does Jesus make concerning how we should be living to be ready for his return (Matthew 24:45-51)?

5. What reward can the faithful servant anticipate?

6. Read Matthew 25:31-33. What will happen when Christ returns?

7. What will happen to those on his right (verse 34)?

What about those on his left (verse 41)?

8. According to what Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, what does he say will happen when Christ returns?

9. Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-53. What does this passage teach about those who die before Christ returns and those who are alive to witness that event?

10. Titus 2:13 refers to Christ's return as the *blessed hope* of Christians. How is the expectation of Christ's return a blessing to your life?

Memory Verse

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

—*Hebrews 13:8*

* *Maranatha* is an expression that the early church used which means *Come, O Lord*.

Food for Thought

The whole concept of being fully forgiven and accepted by God as possessing all his righteous is a hard one for Christians to grasp. It's not because these ideas are so complex, but it's because this gift is so mind-boggling, especially since we know what we've done in the past and how inadequate we are as Christians. Our love is faulty; our moral attainment is flawed. Our zeal flags; our faith falters. Often our prayer life is bland, and God's Word bores rather than blesses us. We don't feel worthy of God's great gift of love even after we're saved.

The fact is, we aren't. We never will be, no matter how great our faith or strong our devotion. Still, we have been given *fullness in Christ* (Colossians 2:10). That fullness includes total forgiveness and complete holiness in God's sight. It's a gift from a loving God—a gift of his grace.

An old gospel hymn, *The Solid Rock*, reminds us where to place our hope: *My hope is built on nothing less/ Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;/ I dare not trust the sweetest frame,/ But wholly lean on Jesus' name./ On Christ the solid Rock, I stand—/ All other ground is sinking sand,/ All other ground is sinking sand.* Our hope isn't in our faith or devotion. Our hope is the Solid Rock—Christ.

Prayer Guide

Thank God for his incredible gift of salvation. Ask him to deepen your understanding and appreciation of what Christ has done for you. Believe that in Christ you are fully forgiven and accepted by God, and pray that gratitude to God will spill over into your life through praise, obedience, and Christian service.

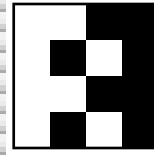
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Unit 3 • Lesson 1

What Is Salvation?

Salvation means finding peace with God. It is when God forgives your sin so you can live in fellowship with him now on earth and in heaven forever.

People are confused about how to find peace with God and what it takes to go to heaven. Many think that when they die they will go to heaven because they've been good on earth. Nothing could be further from the truth. People don't go to heaven because they've been good. They go to heaven because they've been forgiven. They go to heaven because they no longer fall under God's judgment. They go to heaven because they're saved from God's wrath against their sin.

The Bible tells us that God is love, yet in the same book that informs us God is love we read: *God is light; in him there is no darkness at all* (1 John 1:5). God is perfect in goodness and truth. The problem is that we aren't, so we can't have fellowship with him. Paul writes that *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). We all are sinners and fall short of what it takes to have peace with God and to go to heaven.

Because God is light, he can never excuse our sin. To do so, he would have to compromise himself. He can't do that. To God, sin is always wrong, never OK, and never excusable. His only response is to condemn sin and punish it.

But because God is love, he devised a way to express his justice against sin while justifying the sinners he longs to spare. God gave us a Savior—himself.

When Jesus Christ, who being in very nature God, came to earth, he also took on a human nature for the expressed purpose of bringing us peace with God. His mission was to reconcile man to God. He accomplished that by living a life of perfect obedience before his Father and offering himself on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. There on the cross, he experienced God's full wrath against sin. He tasted death for everyone. He paid our penalty completely.

But that's only half the story. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, we read: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* The punishment he endured brought us peace (Isaiah 53:5). And the peace that we have comes from the right standing Jesus gives us before God. In Christ, we now stand before God *holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation* (Colossians 1:22). By trusting in Christ and all that he did for us that we couldn't do for ourselves, we are totally forgiven of sin and made completely righteous before God. Now that's salvation!

1. What do you think is easier for people to understand—God's condemnation of sin or his love for sinners?

2. In Romans 7:12, Paul says that the moral standards God gave us are holy, righteous and good. What then is man's problem in obeying God's law, according to Romans 7:14?

3. If God's law cannot save us, what good is it?

Romans 3:20 and 7:7—

Galatians 3:24—

4. What observations does Paul make in Galatians 3:21,22 that underscore the fact that we cannot save ourselves?

5. Read Romans 5:8. What motivated God to send Christ to die for us?

6. What did Jesus accomplish by dying on the cross?

Galatians 3:13—

Ephesians 1:7—

Colossians 1:19,20—

1 Timothy 2:5,6—

7. What results when we trust Christ for our salvation?

Romans 5:1—

Colossians 1:21, 22—

Colossians 2:13—

Romans 8:1—

8. What insights from this lesson help you to better appreciate your salvation?

Memory Verse

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

—*John 3:16*

Food for Thought

“If I’m saved and have been given the power to live the way God wants me to live, then why don’t I feel saved? Why do I still struggle with living a holy life?” A lot of Christians get frustrated with their ability to take off down the road of their faith. They feel wobbly in their faith, as wobbly as a child learning to ride a bike. But that’s normal.

As a matter of fact, the struggling against sin is a good sign, as Peter notes: *Christ suffered here on earth. Now you must be ready to suffer as he did, because suffering shows that you have stopped sinning. It means you have turned from your own desires and want to obey God for the rest of your life* (1 Peter 4:1,2, Contemporary English Version). Only fish swimming upstream feel the current’s force against them.

Still there’s that matter of feeling saved. Feelings come and go. Base your sense of salvation on what God has promised you in his word, not your feelings. He can be trusted, because he is trustworthy. Remember Paul’s words: *I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day* (2 Timothy 1:12). God delivers on all his promises.

Prayer Guide

Thank God for what he did in your life when he saved you. Thank him that he cancelled your debt of sin and freed you from its penalty. Thank him that he has given you spiritual life and the power to live for him. Pray that you will mature in your faith and bring God glory through your life.

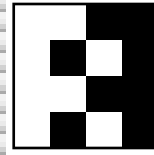
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Unit 3 • Lesson 2

What Happens To Me When I’m Saved?

To understand what happens to you when you’re saved, you must first understand what happened to you when you sinned. Sin’s destructive power in your life should not be underestimated.

First, sin made you completely guilty before an infinitely holy God and deserving only of his wrath. Regardless of how good you were before your conversion, you did evil, broke God’s law, and fell under his judgment. As a result, you were destined for hell, to live apart from God and his blessings forever. Sin left you condemned before God with no way to remedy your guilt for yourself.

Besides destroying your relationship with God, sin damaged something within your spirit. In one respect, sin is like an insidious disease that attacked and corrupted every aspect of your spirit. In Ephesians 4:17-19, Paul talks about life apart from God and describes it as spiritual ignorance, hardness of heart, insensitivity, and an insatiable appetite for impurity. To one degree or another that’s the way everyone lives before conversion to Christ. Sin infects the spirit and robs it of health.

Furthermore, sin brings death. We’re told that *the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23). Death means separation. Your sin separated you from God and spiritual life. Sin left you completely powerless to recover what you lost.

Paul writes, *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly* (Romans 5:6). Elsewhere, he says, *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive*

with Christ. He forgave us all our sins (Colossians 2:13). He also says, *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation* (Colossians 1:21,22). All the problems you brought upon yourself by sinning Christ remedies.

When you were saved, you were forgiven of all your sins (Colossians 2:13). You were pardoned from your guilt before God. Christ paid your penalty and gave you his righteousness so that you can be free from accusation (Colossians 1:22). Paul says, *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1). In Christ you are not just 100% forgiven but are considered 100% righteous before God.

That's not all. You were given spiritual life. Paul says, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* (2 Corinthians 5:17). You now have all the spiritual resources and power you need to live life the way God wants you to live and to grow spiritually.

Christ's remedy for sin is a double cure, giving you a new relationship with God and the power to live for him. Astounding things happened to you when you were saved.

1. How has your life changed since you were saved?

2. In John 3:3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born again. In what ways is salvation from sin like being born again?

3. According to Titus 3:5, how did God save us?

4. What assurance is given to Christians in Romans 5:9,10?

5. Read Ephesians 2:1-5. How does Paul describe our spiritual condition before we are saved?

6. According to verses 4,5, what qualities of God made our salvation possible?

7. In Romans 6, Paul talks about the spiritual renewal that salvation brings. What changes, according to verse 6, have taken place in the Christian?

8. Read verse 13. Since we have been saved, how should we live?

9. According to verse 22, what benefit comes to our lives following salvation?

10. What are some of the benefits you have already experienced in your life since you have been saved?

Memory Verse

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

—*John 3:16*

Food for Thought

In Romans 1:16, Paul writes: *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.* He then adds: *For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last...* (17). Despite what people think, religion really isn't terribly confusing. When all the variations of beliefs and practices are distilled to their essence, there remains two basic types of religion. In one, people seek to attain the goal through steps of enlightenment or practicing certain disciplines. Meditation. Chanting. Acts of charity. Self-denial. Personal goodness. Whatever. All these depend on people's attempts to secure salvation or righteousness for themselves. In the gospel, the good news, we find an entirely different way.

In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed. It's a righteousness from God, not ourselves. It's God's power for salvation. His power is offered to us in Christ. It's his gift to us. Our responsibility is to receive his gift through faith.

So religion really isn't terribly complicated. We either seek a way to attain righteous on our own, or we submit to the righteousness God offers us. With God, we find true spiritual power.

Prayer Guide

Thank God for the righteousness that comes from him. Thank him for the power of salvation in the gospel. Ask him to increase your ability to trust what Christ did for you as being completely sufficient for your salvation. Pray that your life will overflow with gratitude and good works in response to God's gift.

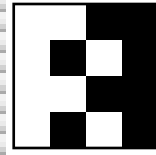
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Unit 3 • Lesson 3

How Can I Be Sure That I'm Saved?

God never intended for you to flounder in uncertainty about your salvation. You can be sure that you're saved. You can be sure that you've been forgiven. A simple way to be sure is to find out what the Bible says it takes to be saved and forgiven, then see if you've personally met those conditions. If you have, then you can be sure that you're saved. You have God's Word on it.

It should go without saying: To be saved and forgiven, you first must be lost and condemned. The problem with the obvious is that it's often overlooked. The Scriptures say that *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). Everyone needs salvation and forgiveness, including you.

Not everyone, however, realizes that need. Before converting to Christ, the apostle Paul needed salvation. He opposed the faith and persecuted Christians, yet he thought he was doing exactly what God wanted him to do. He needed to see just how urgent his need for salvation really was.

Through hearing the gospel, you not only become aware of your need for salvation, but you also learn some basic facts about being saved. First, you learn that you can't save yourself by being good or obeying God's law (Romans 3:20). Second, you learn that it is because of his great love and mercy that we are saved by God's grace (Ephesians 2:4,5). And third, you learn that God's grace was given to you in Christ Jesus when he died on the cross and resurrected, as the Scriptures say, *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace* (Ephesians 1:7).

Salvation and forgiveness, then, are free gifts of God's grace found only in Jesus Christ. To be saved and forgiven you must not trust anyone or anything else other than Jesus for your salvation. *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved* (Acts 4:12). This salvation or righteousness that God offers to you becomes yours through faith and in baptism, as Paul says: *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ* (Galatians 3:27,28).

Faith means you take God at his word when he says that you cannot save yourself and that you must rely completely on what Christ did for you when he shed his blood to forgive your sins. Faith drives you to Jesus and away from your sins. It leads you to repent and to confess Jesus is Lord. And it leads you to baptism and to trust what God accomplishes for you there. It's true: *For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith"* (Romans 1:17).

Just like the apostle Paul who wrote those words, you can be sure that you're saved and forgiven of your sins by putting your faith in Christ Jesus.

1. How easy is it for you to trust Jesus alone for your salvation?

2. How, according to Romans 10:17, do we come to faith?

3. Why, according to Ephesians 2:8,9, is salvation a gift of God's grace through faith?

4. Read verse 10. What does God call us to do once we're saved?

5. According to Romans 10:9, what are we to believe in our hearts in order to be saved?

6. What does that passage say we must confess with our mouth to be saved?

7. In Mark 16:16, what did Jesus say people must do to be saved?

8. Read Acts 2:37,38. When, for the first time, Peter and the other apostles preached the gospel and the people asked what they should do, what did Peter tell them to do to have their sins forgiven?

9. In Acts 22:16, what did Ananias tell Paul to do to have his sins forgiven?

10. God has promised us that we are saved and forgiven when we turn to Christ and put our faith in him. How can Christians feel a greater assurance of their salvation?

Memory Verse

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

—*John 3:16*

Food for Thought

Sometimes when you mention that people receive forgiveness of sins through calling on the Lord Jesus in baptism, you'll hear people respond: *But what about the thief on the cross? He wasn't baptized, and his sins were forgiven.* That's true. He wasn't baptized. And his sins were forgiven! But remember what the gospel is and how people accept it.

The gospel is the good news that we are reconciled to God through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus hadn't even died when he told the thief that his sins were forgiven. As a matter of fact while Jesus was here on earth, he sometimes told people that they were forgiven even though they never asked for forgiveness. That's just the way he is. However, when Jesus died and resurrected, he commanded his followers to make disciples of all nations by baptizing people and teaching them to obey everything that he commands.

Though the thief on the cross had faith in Christ, he never heard the gospel as we know it. So in his case, baptism was irrelevant. But when we learn of Christ's death, burial and resurrection and put our faith in him, baptism unites us with Christ's death (Romans 6:3). Then we rise to a new life, just as Christ did (verse 4). Don't let the thief on the cross rob you of that blessing!

Prayer Guide

Father, thank you for cleansing me of sin through Jesus' death. And I thank you that you made it possible to be united with Christ's death in baptism. Help me to see the truth about baptism in light of your Word.

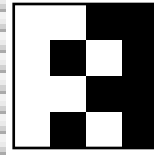
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Unit 3 • Lesson 4

What About Baptism?

Christians disagree about baptism. They disagree over how it should be done. They disagree when it should be done. And they disagree about why it should be done. But just because Christians disagree about baptism doesn't mean that you shouldn't study what the Bible says about it. As a matter of fact, if you concentrate more on what the Bible says about baptism and less on what Christians say about it, you'll find that this topic really isn't so confusing.

One fact is undeniable. Baptism is an important Bible practice and teaching. Both Jesus and his followers commanded people to be baptized. Both Jesus and his followers were baptized themselves. Jesus himself sets the example.

On many of the greatest occasions in the New Testament, baptism is either commanded or observed. When Jesus gives his followers the Great Commission, he commands them to make disciples of all nations by baptizing people (Matthew 28:19,20). When the church begins on the day of Pentecost, Peter commands people to be baptized (Acts 2:38). When the first Gentiles, non-Jews, become Christians, they are commanded to be baptized (Acts 10:48). Paul himself was baptized when he became a Christian (Acts 22:16). In Galatians 3 where Paul defends justification by faith, not works, he sees baptism as being completely compatible with justification by faith. And in Ephesians 4, baptism is listed as one of the seven fundamental truths around which Christian unity is built. Baptism is important, and no person who wants to be Christ's disciple should neglect being baptized.

Read the book of Acts—the history of the start and spread of

the church. That book details people's response to the gospel and conversion to Christ. Note how often they were told about baptism when they turned to the Lord. And observe how soon they were baptized once they learned about Jesus.

When Christians disagree over a Bible topic, the best thing you can do is to patiently and carefully study the Bible for yourself. Look up the passages that talk about the subject. Read them carefully. Pray for insight, and think for yourself about what these passages mean. Let God and his Word convince you of the truth about baptism.

1. What led to your decision to get baptized?

2. Read each verse. How common and widespread was it in Paul's day for Christians to have been baptized?

Romans 6:3—

Galatians 3:26,27—

3. According to the following scriptures, how should people approach baptism?

Mark 16:16—

Acts 2:38—

4. What might these preconditions of baptism suggest about the age of the people who are being baptized?

5. Read each of the following scriptures and list what happens when a person is baptized.

Mark 16:16—

Acts 2:38—

Acts 22:16—

Romans 6:3,4—

Galatians 3:27—

1 Peter 3:21—

6. What evidence might these verses provide about how people were baptized in Bible times?

John 3:23—

Acts 8:36-39—

Romans 6:4—

7. Some people mistakenly think that Christians who tell people coming to Christ to be baptized are teaching a salvation by works. According to Paul in Colossians 2:12, whose power is at work when people are baptized?

8. What truths about baptism do you see in a new light?

Memory Verse

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

—*John 3:16*

Food for Thought

Christianity is meant to be a religion of the head, heart and hands. The Holy Spirit involves himself in every dimension of Christian life.

The Holy Spirit cares about the truth of our religion. After all, Jesus himself refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth (John 14:17). It was the Holy Spirit who carried men along to ensure that our Scriptures did not originate by some prophet's own interpretation (2 Peter 1:20,21). The Holy Spirit works to reveal, communicate and protect the facts upon which our faith rests. A biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit does not downplay this.

However, this same Spirit of truth is the same Spirit that indwells every believer. He is the one, according to Romans 5:5, by whom *God has poured out his love into our hearts*. He is the one, according to Romans 8:16, who *testifies with our spirit that we are God's children*. This same Spirit who ministers to our heads by revealing truth ministers to our hearts as well. He is not just to a Spirit to be believed but a person to be experienced.

According to 1 Corinthians 12:7, the gifts the Spirit gives are given for the common good. They are gifts to be used in service. The Holy Spirit touches every dimension of the Christian life—the head, heart and hands.

Prayer Guide

Father, thank you for your Holy Spirit who has given us your Word and helps us to understand it. Thank you that you have given us a Helper for every aspect of Christian living. Help me to allow him to have a greater influence in my life.

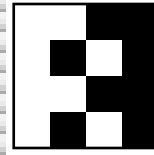
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Unit 4 • Lesson 1

What About The Holy Spirit?

When you think of the Holy Spirit, remember that he is a person, not an *it*. He is the third person of the Trinity, as Matthew 28 indicates: *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 28:19). The Holy Spirit is not some impersonal force. He is God, along with the Father and the Son.

Read the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-4. When Peter rebukes Ananias for lying to the Holy Spirit, he adds: *You have not lied to men but to God* (Acts 5:4). To lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to God. Observe what David says in the Old Testament. He wonders: *Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?* (Psalm 139:7). The Holy Spirit is present everywhere, which is one of the defining characteristics of God. The Holy Spirit is God.

Not only do the Scriptures make it clear that the Holy Spirit is God, but they supply abundant evidence of his personality. When Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to his disciples, he repeatedly refers to him by the personal pronoun **he**: *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come* (John 16:13). Elsewhere, the Bible attributes other characteristics of personality to the Holy Spirit when it says that he **knows** the mind of God (1 Corinthians 2:11), **feels** grief (Ephesians 4:30), and **wills** gifts to members of Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:11). The Holy Spirit is as personal as the Father and the Son.

Besides revealing the identity of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures indicate his work. He participated in creation, as Genesis 1:3 suggests. And according to Job 33:4 he gives human beings life. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Bible, as 2 Peter 1:21 notes: *For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* Furthermore, it is the Holy Spirit who illuminates the minds of Christians to understand God's Word. Paul says: *We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us* (1 Corinthians 2:12). The Holy Spirit creates, inspires and illuminates.

Consider also the Spirit's work in the life of Christ. According to Luke 1:35, Jesus' miraculous conception in Mary's womb was by the Holy Spirit. At Jesus' baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon him (Luke 3:22). The Holy Spirit led Christ into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Luke 4:1,2). And according to Matthew 12:28, the Holy Spirit empowered Christ to perform miracles. Throughout Christ's life and ministry the Holy Spirit is present and active. He works to bring glory to Christ, so that we may too.

1. How might Christians be helped by getting a better understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit?

2. Read John 14:16,17. What names or titles does Jesus use to describe the Holy Spirit?

Why do you think those are significant?

3. Different Bible versions have translated the word *Counselor* (NIV) as *Comforter* (KJV) or *Helper* (NASB). How might these descriptions of the Holy Spirit help us to better understand his work?

4. When Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to his disciples, he said: *But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away* (John 16:7). Read the following verses and note why it was good that the Holy Spirit came.

John 14:16,17—

John 14:26—

John 16:13-15—

5. According to John 16:8-11, how does the Holy Spirit work in the lives of unbelievers?

How should the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of unbelievers encourage us as we seek to influence them for Christ?

6. In John 16:13, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit would guide his followers into all truth. Elsewhere, Peter says that the Scriptures were produced by men who were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). Based on these verses, what confidence should we have in the Bible?

7. The Holy Spirit is our Helper. Review what you've learned. What are some ways you've discovered that the Holy Spirit helps Christians?

Memory Verse

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

—2 Timothy 3:16,17

Food for Thought

When Paul talks about living in accordance to the sinful nature or in accordance with the Spirit, he does not mention some alternative between the two. Your life will be characterized by one of these two approaches to living. Period. There is no alternative.

Because you live by the Spirit, you must keep in step with the Spirit. You must sow to the Spirit, as Paul says: *The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life* (Galatians 6:8). It's true: A man reaps what he sows. Cultivate the habit of pursuing spiritual things, and you'll reap spiritual growth.

Spiritual growth shouldn't be drudgery. The Christian life is meant to be a life of joy. Sure, there are aspects of Christian living that are difficult—struggling against sin, resisting temptation, and disciplining yourself to pray, study and be obedient. But as your love for God increases, your heart's desire becomes pleasing him. The psalmist put it this way: *Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart* (Psalm 37:4). Make God your delight. That's the secret to a truly satisfying Christian life.

Prayer Guide

Father, thank you for your Holy Spirit and the work that he does within me. I am thankful that he has brought me new life and that he helps me to will and do what pleases you. May I allow him to transform me into the person that you want me to be.

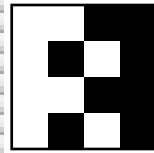
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Unit 4 • Lesson 2

How Does the Holy Spirit Help Me?

Before you became a Christian the Holy Spirit worked *on* your life. He convicted you of sin, righteousness and judgment. But after you become a Christian, the Holy Spirit works *in* your life.

This indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is what Jesus promised when he said that the Spirit of truth will live with you and be in you (John 16:16,17). The indwelling Holy Spirit is a gift every believer receives at conversion. Recall Peter's reply to those coming to Christ on the day of Pentecost: *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38)*. Paul says: *And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ* (Romans 8:9). The indwelling Holy Spirit is essential to genuine Christian living.

Just what does the Holy Spirit do for you? According to Titus 3:5, the Holy Spirit renews your spirit. Through his direct work on your life, you are born again. That's when you are baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, as 1 Corinthians 12:13 states: *For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink*. The Holy Spirit is responsible for your conversion and incorporation into the church, Christ's body. But his work doesn't end there.

The Holy Spirit works in you to produce spiritual fruit in your life and transform your character to become more like Christ's. Paul says: *And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his like-*

ness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18). In Galatians 5:22,23, Paul writes: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.* As you allow the Holy Spirit more influence in your life, you will grow spiritually.

Additionally, the Holy Spirit gives every member in the church at least one spiritual gift to build up the church. Paul says: *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good* (1 Corinthians 12:7). While Christians may disagree about the exact number and nature of these gifts, most agree that every Christian possesses some gift to be used to serve others.

Besides renewing your spirit, helping you to grow, and giving you gifts for service, the Holy Spirit helps you in other ways, too. He gives you assurance of your standing with God, as Paul says: *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children* (Romans 8:16). He helps you in your weaknesses and intercedes for you when you don't know how or for what to pray (Romans 8:26). And according to Ephesians 1:12, he is the deposit that guarantees your redemption. He is proof God will do all he has promised to do for you. The Holy Spirit does a lot for you!

1. How has the Holy Spirit helped change your life?

2. In Galatians 5, Paul talks about living by the Spirit. According to verse 16, what results when you live by the Spirit?

3. Read verse 17. What does Paul say about the compatibility of the two approaches to living that he mentions?

4. Read verses 19-21. What does Paul warn about living according to the sinful nature?

5. Read Romans 8:5,6. What are some of the contrasts that Paul makes between a life lived according to the sinful nature and a life lived according to the Spirit?

6. Read Roman 8:7. What does Paul say about the sinful mind?

Based on what he says about the sinful mind, what conclusions might you draw concerning the mind of the person who is controlled by God's Spirit?

7. According to Romans 8:12, what obligation does the Christian have?

8. Read verses 13,14. What are the consequences of living according the sinful nature? the Spirit?

9. How does having God's Spirit within you encourage you in your struggle against sin?

Memory Verse

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

—2 Timothy 3:16,17

Food for Thought

God has made himself known in the Bible. The Bible reveals that God is the author of human life, has been working in human history, and has reconciled man to himself through Jesus Christ. The Bible records God's greatest works.

The Bible is the only book that you can completely trust for spiritual answers. Over a period of 1500 years, God, working through the Holy Spirit, inspired the 40 different writers of the Bible to compose this book of 66 books that neither contradicts itself or the truths of history and science.

This one book contains two major sections, the Old and New Testaments. The 39 books of the Old Testament, written mostly in Hebrew, tell the story of the Jews and the law that God gave them. It covers a period from Creation to about 400 years before Christ's birth. From mankind's Fall in Eden to struggles of a divided Jewish nation, the Old Testament clearly reveals the truth that people need a Savior.

The 27 books of the New Testament, written in Greek, tell about this Savior and his church. The New Testament reveals how God's promises were fulfilled in Jesus and are experienced by those who trust him. The Bible is not just a book of ancient history but a handbook for daily living. The Bible is the word of life.

Prayer Guide

Father, you have clearly revealed yourself to us in your Word. Thank you for giving us spiritual truth to guide our lives. Help me to make it my goal to better understand, communicate and obey the truth you have revealed.

My Thoughts & Questions

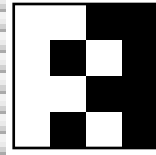
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Unit 4 • Lesson 3

How Can I Know Religious Truth?

Before Jesus died, he prayed to his Father for the spiritual progress, protection and unity of his followers. In his prayer, he says this about God's Word: *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth* (John 17:17). God's Word is truth. By knowing God's Word, you can know religious truth.

God's Word—the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments—is the truth that equips believers for every good work. Paul says: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work* (2 Timothy 3:16,17). The truth that you find in God's Word is useful. It promotes your spiritual growth and well-being.

Not only does this truth promote your spiritual growth, but it protects you from spiritual harm. When describing the armor of God that Christians use to stand against Satan's schemes, Paul says that the sword of the Spirit is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17). Among the spiritual defenses available to you is a weapon of offense—the Word of God. Its truth is what keeps you from sin and false teaching.

Furthermore, the truth in the Bible serves as the foundation for Christian unity. When discussing Christian unity, Paul says: *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all* (Ephesians 4:4-6). Though the Bible itself allows Christians room to differ on particular reli-

gious matters, it does identify certain non-negotiables upon which our faith rests. Christian unity must be based upon the Bible, as John notes: *Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son* (2 John 9). Truth matters. And truth is discovered when the Bible is properly understood.

A proper understanding of the Bible comes through careful study. Paul advises Timothy: *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth* (2 Timothy 2:15). By correctly handling the word of truth, you can present yourself as one approved to God. That should be a goal of every believer.

Read just a little bit further in 2 Timothy. Paul tells Timothy that *a time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear* (2 Timothy 4:3). Though religious truth and sound doctrine may not be fashionable with some, it never goes out of style with God. Search the Scriptures to find truth. Your life will be blessed as a result.

1. Why do you think people might lose hope of ever finding spiritual truth?

2. Read John 8:32. What does Jesus say happens when you know the truth?

In what ways have you found this to be true in your life?

3. According to Acts 17:11, what did the Bereans do when they heard Paul's preaching?

What might we learn from their example?

4. Read 1 Peter 1:23-25. What blessing comes to us through God's Word?

How is God's Word described in this passage?

5. According to James 1:22-25, how should we respond to God's Word?

6. Read Jude 3. What does Jude urge us to do?

7. According to 1 Peter 3:15,16, what practical advice does Peter offer that might help us to contend for the faith?

8. What steps are you currently taking to better acquaint yourself with the truths in God's Word?

Memory Verse

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

—2 Timothy 3:16,17

Food for Thought

From its beginning, the Old Testament contains clear predictions and dramatic symbols which help identify Jesus as the Messiah. These show us what the Bible is really about.

Over seven hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophet Micah mentions Christ's birthplace as Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), exactly where Jesus was born. Isaiah, Micah's contemporary, predicts the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14) and reveals astounding details surrounding Christ's death, including its sacrificial nature (53:5,6), the quiet acceptance with which Jesus faced it (7), his suffering with the wicked (crucified with thieves) and his burial among the rich (buried in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb) (9), and his resurrection from the dead (10,11). Nearly a thousand years before Jesus' birth, David records the very words Jesus would speak from the cross (Psalm 22:1) and the fact that people would gamble for possession of his clothing (18), which the Roman soldiers did.

Throughout the Old Testament from the Passover lamb to David's descendant who would reign on his throne, we find symbols and predictions about the Messiah that Jesus fulfilled. So in one sense, when we answer the question of what the Bible is all about, we are correct in giving a one-word answer—Jesus.

Prayer Guide

Father, you have been involved in human history since its beginning. You raised up a nation to whom you revealed your laws and through whom you brought us our Savior. Help me to learn your Word and to learn to trust that you are involved in my life, even when it's difficult.

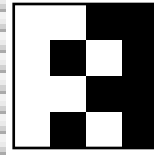
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Unit 4 • Lesson 4

What's The Bible All About?

The Bible tells the story of how man's fellowship with God was broken by sin and eventually restored by God himself through our Lord Jesus Christ. This story starts in Genesis with the creation of the heavens and the earth, which became the home of sin and death, and ends in Revelation with a description of the new heaven and earth that one day will be the home of righteousness and eternal life.

The Old Testament tells how God created a perfect world without sin. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, sin entered the world and its corruption became a part of life. It didn't take long after the first sin for wickedness to spread. Genesis 6:5 says: *The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.* God destroyed that world with a flood in Noah's time.

Many years later, God made a promise to Abraham that through him all nations would be blessed. Abraham believed God and from his descendants our Redeemer came.

After Abraham moved to the Promised Land, his son, grandsons, and 12 great-grandsons were born, forming the nucleus of the Jewish nation. One of Abraham's great-grandsons, Joseph, went to Egypt, where all of his relatives later moved.

As this family grew into a nation, they were enslaved by the Egyptians. Over 400 years later, Moses freed them from Egypt and led them back to Canaan, the Promised Land.

In Canaan, the Jews experienced periods of greatness, particularly during the reigns of David and his son Solomon. After

Solomon, the nation divided, its morality declined, and the northern tribes (Israel) were captured and enslaved by the Assyrians, never to return. The southern tribes (Judah) were spared for a time, but eventually they spent 70 years as captives in Babylon.

When the Jews returned to their homeland, they rebuilt their temple and nation. The Old Testament closes with the anticipation that God would one day send the Messiah.

Some 400 years later, John the Baptist came preaching that the kingdom of heaven was near. The New Testament opens with the account of Jesus' miraculous birth by the virgin Mary. After growing up in Nazareth and being baptized by John in the Jordan River, Jesus begins his ministry and performs many mighty works by the power of God, including rising from the dead after his crucifixion.

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus instructed his followers to make disciples of all nations. Peter and the apostles helped establish the church in Jerusalem, while Paul, an enemy of the church who converted to Christ, helped start churches throughout the Roman Empire. Paul wrote much of the New Testament.

God has made himself known through the Bible. It records how He has worked in human history and brought about our salvation. It is the greatest story ever told.

1. When you think about how God has worked in the past, what assurances does that give you about his involvement in the world today?

2. Read Genesis 2:16,17. What did God warn would happen if Adam ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

3. According to Romans 5:12, how did Adam's sin effect the whole world?

4. Read Genesis 15:5,6. When God promised Abram (Abraham) that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, what was Abram's response?

5. According to Romans 4:18-25, how does Abraham's response parallel the way we are declared righteous before God?

6. Read Leviticus 18:4,5. When Moses gave God's law to the people, what was their hope based on?

7. According to Roman 7:10-14, how effective did Paul find the law to be for making him right before God? What was his problem?

8. Read John 1:17. How does John contrast the ministries of Moses and Jesus?

9. According to Romans 8:1-4, how can people fully meet the righteous requirements of God's law?

10. Our right standing before God depends not on ourselves but Christ so our boast is in the Lord. In what ways might your life bring greater glory to God?

Memory Verse

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

—2 Timothy 3:16,17

Food for Thought

Runners who successfully run marathons don't start by waking up one day, rushing down to enter the race, and begin running, having never trained a day before the day of the race. It takes days, months, even years of preparation. It takes consistent discipline. It takes regular training and conditioning to successfully finish the 26.2 miles of a marathon. Even then, marathon runners have to finish the race. They have to take every step and make every stride that's necessary to go the distance. That's what it takes to successfully run a marathon.

To go the distance as a Christian, you must understand that the Christian life is more a marathon than it is a sprint. It takes training, discipline, and preparation to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus. We must, as the scriptures say, throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and run with perseverance the race marked out for us (Hebrews 12:1). That's what it means to be holy.

Our prize is not some crown nor glory that will fade, rather it is a crown that will last forever. So heed Paul's advice: *Run in such a way as to get the prize* (1 Corinthians 9:24).

Prayer Guide

Ask God for the strength to do right and to keep his interests above your personal interests. Ask him for greater purity of heart and that you will maintain a sensitive conscience towards sin. Thank God for the resources he provides you for your personal spiritual growth and holiness.

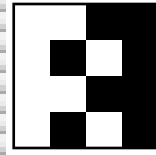
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Unit 5 • Lesson 1

What Does God Expect of Us?

Holiness is what God expects of us. In 1 Peter 1:15,16, we read: *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."* That's a tall order. And part of the problem we have with our calling to holiness is that we don't understand what it means or how to develop it in our lives.

Holiness does not mean that you live a life of drab self-denial filled with all sorts of religious rules. In Colossians 2:20-23, Paul exposes such a misguided approach to holiness as being desperately ineffective in producing true holiness. Too many Christians incorrectly think that this is true holiness.

True holiness results from an inner transformation of your mind and character to reflect that of Christ's. Paul says: *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers* (Romans 8:29). True holiness is to be like Christ. It manifests itself in the way you talk; the choices you make; the way you act; how you treat others, especially your family; the goals you embrace; the desires of your heart; and the person you are. It touches every aspect of your life. Developing true holiness is a lifelong and step-by-step process. It's the process of genuine spiritual growth and sanctification.

As a Christian you are already equipped with all the resources you need to live a life pleasing to God. Peter writes in 2 Peter 1:3: *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.* Since this is the case, then developing a holy life is not so much a matter of personal will power but of submitting to the transformation process that

God seeks to work in you. This begins with an awareness of the changes you need to make. Don't deny your shortcomings or protect them from exposure to and transformation by God. Forsake the sins and character traits that impede your spiritual progress. Like David, welcome God's work in your life: *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting* (Psalm 139:23,24). Be willing to grow. And submit to the process of change.

Change is a process. Christian growth and personal holiness doesn't happen all at once. It takes time, but it comes if you are patient, obedient, and confident that *he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus* (Philippians 1:6).

1. People resist change. Why is it that sometimes it is so hard to make the changes that are necessary to live as a Christian?

2. In Galatians 5:19-23, Paul talks about the acts of the sinful nature and the fruit of the Spirit. What does he say results when we live according to the sinful nature?

3. According to Romans 8:13, what help do Christians have in putting to death the misdeeds of the sinful nature?

4. What are we promised in 2 Peter 1:3?

5. What, according to 2 Peter 1:4, is the reason we have been given this promise?

6. God has given us everything we need to live the way he wants us to live. According to verse 5, what is our responsibility?

7. What are some practical ways that people can make more of an effort to grow as Christians?

8. In verses 5-7, what qualities of Christian living does Peter mention?

9. In what measure, according to verse 8, are Christians to possess these qualities?

10. What results when you possess these qualities in increasing measure?

11. Read verse 9. What is true of anyone who lacks these qualities?

12. What practical steps can you take this week to promote your own spiritual growth?

Memory Verse

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

—1 Peter 1:15,16

Food for Thought

Growth comes, but usually it's not as fast as we would like. The wise gardener knows that he has to wait until the right season before the buds bloom. It takes time. He must be patient. Until then, he weeds and feeds, waters and prunes, and works his garden to keep his plants healthy and destructive pests in check. He knows that he can't let his love for flowers compel him to peel back the buds, thinking that he can rush things along. That only spoils everything.

It isn't easy to wait for God to work in your life. It's easy to become frustrated with how slow it seems he acts and how slow it seems spiritual growth comes. It's easy to get discouraged and grow impatient. You, however, must trust that God is at work in you and your circumstances. Be confident that *he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus* (Philippians 1:6). Growth will come.

To experience spiritual growth, you must wait on the Lord. Realize that such waiting is more like the fellow in his garden than a man at a bus stop. To wait on the Lord means that you busy yourself with your responsibilities to promote growth without forcing it. When you plant and water, God makes things grow.

Prayer Guide

Ask God to help you have a passion for spiritual growth and personal development. Ask him for wisdom to cultivate a productive Christian life. Thank him for all the resources that he has given you to help you to grow. And pray that you will learn to wait on him by being faithfully obedient.

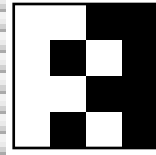
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Unit 5 • Lesson 2

What Can I Do To Grow Spiritually?

Christian growth is mandatory, not optional. Peter reminds us of this at the end of his second letter when he writes: *But grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (2 Peter 3:18). It is interesting that he commands us to grow both in the *grace* and *knowledge* of the Lord.

To grow in the knowledge of the Lord, you must read and study the Bible regularly and consistently. Attend a church that offers solid Bible preaching and features an array of learning opportunities, including Sunday school classes and other Bible study groups. Read good Christian literature. Use these and other resources available to you to grow in your knowledge of the Lord.

Realize that to grow in your knowledge of the Lord requires more than just a study of God, you must walk with him in a life of faith, too. Follow the Good Shepherd through whatever green pastures and dark valleys he leads you, and experience for yourself his countless mercies and great faithfulness. Knowledge of God must be based on his Word and experienced personally.

Yet knowledge isn't all that you're to grow in. You must grow in God's grace, too. God's saving grace is given to all believers in full measure when they become Christians. We are saved by God's grace, and his grace alone. Nothing we can do adds to that. Every true Christian is one-hundred percent forgiven. *Therefore, there is now no condemnation*, Paul writes, *for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1). But not every true Christian is spiritually mature.

Spiritual maturity takes time; it takes effort on your part; but most importantly, it takes God's transforming grace working in your life. Spiritual maturity isn't manufactured or programmed. Rather it's the natural result of a life that's led by God's Spirit.

To grow in God's grace, yield to his work in your life. Pray. Pray for insight into his leading and a heart that's eager to follow. Pray for endurance in hardships and suffering; for, according to James, *the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything* (James 1:3,4). Also, surround yourself with godly men and women who'll encourage you when you're weary, and who will challenge you to grow.

Growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord is the lifelong calling of every Christian.

1. What experiences or persons have most helped you to grow in the Lord?

2. Why is the testing of our faith, hardship, or suffering effective in helping us to grow spiritually?

3. According to Romans 5:3,4, what good can come from the problems we face?

4. Why according to Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 is it important to have a spiritual support network?

5. When have you found help from a spiritual support network yourself?

6. Read Proverbs 13:20. How can our spiritual growth be affected by the people we choose to associate with?

7. What, according to Romans 8:5, is the difference between those who live according to the sinful nature and those who are Spirit led?

8. Read Romans 8:13. How are the outcomes different between these two contrasting lifestyles?

9. What resource, according to Romans 8:13, helps us put to death the misdeeds of the body?

10. What commands concerning God's Spirit does Paul give us in Galatians 5:25 and Ephesians 5:18?

11. What one or two points from this lesson can you apply to your life to help you to grow spiritually?

Memory Verse

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

—1 Peter 1:15,16

Food for Thought

How can I love my enemies when I don't even like them? It's tough, but not impossible.

Remember that love comes from God. His Holy Spirit empowers you to do what you cannot otherwise do on your own.

This does not mean that all of a sudden you'll find obnoxious and belligerent people to be charming, critical and vindictive people to be endearing, and hostile and vile people to be attractive. Love isn't like that. Love isn't some spell that afflicts your soul causing you to see the spiritually ugly as beautiful and the repugnant as desirable. Christian love doesn't rob you of discernment or sound judgment. Unlikable people remain unlikable even when you love them.

Consider Jesus. It wasn't because he found an irresistible appeal in sinners that he came to save. It is because God is love. Love is so entwined with Jesus' nature that he loves even the unlikable and unlovely.

He is your example. As you grow in him, you'll find a greater capacity to love. *God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him* (1 John 4:13). That's the secret to loving the unlikable. That's the secret to loving your enemies.

Prayer Guide

Father, I want to reflect your character in my life. I realize that to do that I not only must love those who love me, but I even must love the unlovable—my enemies. I need your help to do that. Work in my life to transform me into the person you want me to be—a person of love.

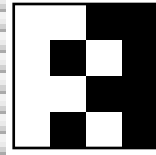
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Unit 5 • Lesson 3

How Can I Live a Life of Love?

Jesus reveals how important it is to live a life of love when he says: *By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another* (John 13:35). Next to loving God, Jesus says that no commandment is greater than loving your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-39). Your life as a Christian must be characterized by love.

Love is essential to Christianity. John says that *we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death* (1 John 3:14). He adds: *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God* (1 John 4:7). Love is a key piece of evidence indicating true spiritual rebirth.

This type of love, according to John, comes from God. It is not a love that's manufactured by sheer human willpower. It's a fruit of God's Holy Spirit working in your life, according to Galatians 5:22,23: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. As you grow in Christ, you'll grow in your capacity to show others genuine Christian love.

Genuine Christian love is best understood by looking at Christ's own life and example. Not one of the words he spoke, not one of the deeds he did ever fell outside the scope of love. Yet not all of the words he spoke were nice, nor all the deeds he did were pleasant. Sometimes he rebuked the religious authorities of his day and even his own disciples, too! And on at least one occasion, he overturned the tables of the temple money changers and used a whip to drive out their

animals. Still, everything Christ did and said was motivated by love for God and love for people. His example shows that others may not always understand or even agree with your loving choices and actions. Still, you must love them, even when they remain your enemies, as Christ says: *But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven* (Matthew 5:44,45). Now that's love.

This type of love requires a commitment to seek the welfare of others, even when they don't understand, appreciate, or welcome your decision to do so. This type of love spurs you to take action. This type of love characterizes Christ and is the hallmark of his disciples. Your life should reflect this type of love.

1. Who in your life has been an example of Christian love? Why?

2. Read the following passages. What do we learn about love from how God shows it to us?

Romans 5:8—

1 John 4:9,10—

3. According to 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, how important is it to have your religion characterized by love?

4. What qualities does Paul list as characteristics of love?

5. Why do you think it's more important to describe love in terms of attitudes and actions than in terms of emotion?

6. According to 1 John 3:18, how should love be expressed?

7. Read the following passages. What are some ways to show love for others?

Galatians 5:13—

Ephesians 4:2,15—

James 2:8,9—

1 John 3:16-17—

8. According to 1 John 4:20,21, what does John say to those who claim to love God while failing to show love to others?

9. Reread 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. What are one or two characteristics of love that you need to better demonstrate in your life?

Memory Verse

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

—1 Peter 1:15,16

Food for Thought

Think what a privilege it is to be able to come into the presence of Almighty God at any time, anywhere. It's mind-boggling. Imagine him welcoming you, acknowledging you by name, and inviting you to share all your thoughts and heart with him. He already knows all of that anyway, but he wants you to learn that you can trust him with your deepest desires and most private struggles.

Make it a habit of praying to God on a regular basis, not just special occasions or when it's an emergency. God wants for prayer to be something that's not only important to you but something you cherish. Spend time alone with God every day.

Remember the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:17,18. *The Phillips translation reads: Never stop praying. Be thankful, whatever the circumstances may be. If you follow this advice you will be working out the will of God expressed to you in Christ Jesus.* Sadly, too many Christians don't follow this advice. Make up your mind that you aren't going to be one of them. Never give up on prayer.

Prayer Guide

Tell God you desire to commune with him. Humbly enter into his presence. Offer him praise, worship and thanksgiving. Confess your sins and ask forgiveness. Now with a right heart, present your requests with the full assurance that God hears you.

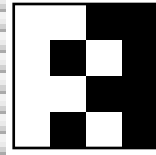
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Unit 6 • Lesson 1

What Is Prayer?

Prayer is your direct link with God. It's your way of communicating with the Almighty Lord of Heaven and Earth. To pray to God is to commune with him.

When you begin your prayers with *Dear Lord*, or *Our Father*—or whatever reverent terms you choose—you are asking for God's undivided attention in your life at that very moment. And he gives it.

Prayer is a privilege God gives you because he wants to fellowship with you any time day or night—whatever your circumstances, wherever you're at, whether you are brief or lengthy, and whatever style of speech you're comfortable using. God is interested in your life. Nothing is too trivial for him to hear. He cares a lot about you.

Just as styles of praying vary, so there are many types of prayers too. A prayer of **confession** would be admitting to God any thought or behavior you committed outside of his will for you. With confession, you realize your sin and ask for God's forgiveness.

You worship God with prayers of **adoration**. By praying this way, you acknowledge God for who you have found him to be according to his Word and work in your life.

With prayers of **thanksgiving** you express your gratitude to God for loving you, forgiving you, answering your prayers, and for your own personal miracle of salvation. Get into the habit of thanking God regardless of the circumstances you're facing.

Prayers of **supplication** are your personal requests of God. Often they include requests for physical needs, financial and material needs, or spiritual needs, like receiving more wisdom or guidance.

Use prayers of **intercession** to selflessly ask for benefits for others.

These are just a sampling of the types of prayer you can pray. Remember that there is no one style, vocabulary, nor a particular formula for praying. God hears you no matter how timid or inexperienced you are when it comes to praying.

Keep this lifeline of communication open. Pray every day. Don't get discouraged when you have to wait for God to answer. Give him permission to say *no* to you. He knows what's best for you and everyone you care about. Learn to trust him.

1. When do you find it easy to pray?

2. When is it hard for you to pray?

3. Read the following Scriptures and note the proper ways to approach God in prayer.

2 Chronicles 7:14—

Psalms 66:18—

James 5:16—

1 John 5:14,15—

4. Christians often get confused about if what they are asking is within God's will. What are some ways we can better understand God's will for our lives?

5. In Ephesians 6:18, we're told to pray at all times with all kinds of prayers and requests. Reflect on the different types of prayer that this study mentioned. Think about your current life and circumstances. Note something you could pray about in each of the following categories:

Adoration—

Confession—

Thanksgiving—

Supplication—

Intercession—

6. Read Psalm 116:2. What did the writer of this psalm resolve to do? Let his example challenge you to do the same.

7. Some Christians have found it helps to keep a prayer journal to record their prayer requests and God's answers. Try that for a month yourself and see how it affects your prayer life.

8. Take some time out right now and pray for your responses to question 5.

Memory Verse

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, with prayer and petition, and with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

—*Philippians 4:6*

Food for Thought

As with any good habit, it takes effort on your part to make prayer a regular part of your daily living. At times it may seem awkward. At times you may get discouraged and feel like giving up on prayer. At times you may doubt if God is really listening. But if you persist in praying, you'll discover the rich rewards that come from a prayer life.

God will grow more real to you. Your relationship with him will deepen. You'll be able to express to him whatever is on your heart, not just your victories and praises but your defeats and struggles, too. You'll witness the joy of surprising answers. And you'll learn to wait on the Lord and respect his wisdom and timing. The rewards in prayer far surpass the difficulties of cultivating a meaningful prayer life.

A rewarding prayer life, however, isn't cultivated quickly. It takes time. It takes effort. There are no shortcuts. It takes persistence. Many people don't consider it worth the effort. And many abandon the goal too soon, assuming spiritual goals should somehow be easier to attain than other goals in life. A rich and rewarding prayer life, however, requires work. But the dividends it brings surpass any effort spent to attain it.

Prayer Guide

Be like Christ's first disciples, and ask him to teach you to pray. Ask him to reveal to you the many facets of a rich and deep prayer life. Ask him to supply you with the resolve and persistence to make prayer all that he wants it to be in your life.

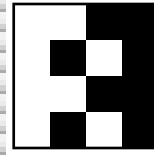
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Unit 6 • Lesson 2

How Do You Pray?

When Jesus was on earth, his followers came to him one day and asked him to teach them to pray. Being religious Jews, they already knew how to pray; they, however, had seen Jesus praying and knew what prayer meant to him. So they asked him to teach them about prayer.

Jesus obliged. What he taught them has been called the *Lord's Prayer*. Many people can recite it from memory. The longer and more familiar version of it is found in Matthew 6, but a shorter version is found in Luke 11:2-4 and reads:

Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who
sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation.

This short prayer of 34 words provides us with rich instruction on how to pray.

Address your prayers to God. He is your Father. You share a special relationship with him as his child. Cherish the love he has for you. Yet approach him with respect and reverence. That's what it means to *hallow* God's name. Take time in your prayers to worship God and reflect on the wonderful relationship that you share with him.

When Jesus teaches his disciples to pray *your kingdom come*, he is teaching them to pray that God's work and influence

would be extended throughout the world. When you pray, make specific requests on behalf of Christians, ministers and ministries that are working to advance God's kingdom. Pray that God will show you ways that you can help promote his kingdom, too.

Most people don't need to be reminded to use prayer to express their concerns and needs to God. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus mentions the wide range of requests that can be brought to God. From the ordinary aspects of everyday living to the most private matters touching the soul, from daily bread to personal sins, you can talk to the Lord about every aspect of your life. You don't have to hold back anything.

Prayer isn't complicated. You don't need special words to say or have to follow a set pattern to pray. All you do is talk to God. Worship him. Pray for his work on earth. And share with him whatever is on your heart or mind.

1. How easy is it for you to believe that God is actually listening to you when you pray?

2. What command is found in 1 Peter 5:7?

What reason is given for this command?

3. What feelings do you have knowing that God is interested in your life and the things that concern you?

4. What promises about prayer do you find in the following passages?

Psalm 145:18,19—

Proverbs 15:29—

1 John 5:14,15—

5. What conditions for praying do you find in the following passages?

Psalm 145:18,19—

Proverbs 15:29—

1 John 5:14,15—

6. According to Hebrews 4:16 with what attitude can we approach God during our times of need?

What does this passage promise that we receive from God in such times?

7. What does Ephesians 6:18 teach about prayer?

8. What are some practical ways that you can make prayer a more important part of your life?

Memory Verse

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, with prayer and petition, and with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

—*Philippians 4:6*

Food for Thought

Christians are often confused about temptation. Sometimes they are disturbed by the thoughts and feelings they have. They feel ashamed, alone, isolated and different. They forget that no temptation can seize them except what is common to man. Other Christians have known the same temptations, too. And other Christians have found God's grace and power in facing them.

Christians not only misunderstand that others share the same temptations, but they often react incorrectly to their temptations. Even when temptation shocks us, even when we're appalled at what we're feeling or thinking, we don't need to repent of or even feel ashamed about our temptations. Temptations are not sin. Even Jesus was tempted with some terribly ugly sins, yet he remained innocent before his Father, despite these powerful temptations. Only when the invitation to sin is met with a *yes* in our hearts do we need to repent. The fact that temptation bothers us can be a good sign of genuine spiritual sensitivity.

With a better understanding of God's Word and a better understanding of what living the Christian life is really like, you'll be better equipped to deal with the temptations you face.

Prayer Guide

Ask God to help you to recognize temptation. Ask him for strength to resist it, courage to flee from it, and wisdom in dealing with it in your life. Pray that your delight in the Lord and in the things that delight him will continue to grow.

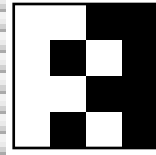
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Unit 7 • Lesson 1

What Is Temptation?

No matter how long you live as a Christian, no matter how much you grow in Christ, no matter how devoted you are to prayer and Bible study, you will always face temptation. Temptation is a fact of life, even the Christian life.

What is temptation? Where does it come from? The dictionary defines *tempt* as *to entice to do wrong by promise of pleasure or gain*. The Bible mentions a number of sources of temptation.

One source of temptation is Satan. He tempted Jesus. When Jesus went into the desert following his baptism, he was tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1). And at other opportune times and in many different ways throughout Jesus' life Satan tempted him but to no avail, as the Scripture says:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Satan tempted Jesus, and he tempts us. He knows our weaknesses, and he preys upon them. He waits for opportune times to strike and entice us to do wrong.

Satan, however, is just one source of temptation. Another is our own evil desires, as James says:

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed (James 1:13,14).

Different Christians find different sins tempting, because evil desires vary from person to person. We all have them. So don't feel alone or inferior. Even the best Christians struggle with temptations that come from their evil desires. Just because someone knows the Lord doesn't mean sin automatically loses its appeal. You still will be tempted because you still have evil desires.

Furthermore, temptation may come from the people around you. Your friends and family may encourage you to do wrong. Sometimes their counsel runs contrary to God's will. Even the world itself seeks you to conform to its way of thinking and living. There are plenty of sources of temptation.

Temptation is inescapable. Temptation is a lifelong experience of every child of God, just as it was with Jesus. Temptation is powerful. But the power available to every Christian is greater than any temptation. That's good news!

1. What types of temptations did you face before you became a Christian?

Have any of the temptations that you've had before you came to know the Lord ceased or lessened?

2. Who, according to James 1:13-15, is never the source of our temptations?

3. When does this passage say that temptation becomes sin?

4. Read Hebrews 4:15. Is it ever wrong to be tempted to sin? Should we feel guilty about our temptations? Explain.

5. According to 1 Corinthians 10:13, what things are true about every temptation that we face?

6. Although God does not isolate us from temptation, what does this passage teach that He does for us concerning temptation?

7. According to 1 Peter 5:8, what is Satan's ultimate goal in tempting us?

8. Anybody who has been born again, according to 1 John 5:18, will not persist in living a life of sin. What assurances are given to those who abide in Christ?

How might these promises help Christians who fear that Satan will eventually destroy their faith?

9. What insights from this lesson help you to better understand the temptations that you face?

Memory Verse

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

—1 Corinthians 10:13

Food for Thought

God has taken away all of our excuses. That's right. When it comes to resisting temptation and avoiding sin, we cannot plead that we were overpowered. We can't say that we had no other option. The Scripture says: *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it* (1 Corinthians 10:13). Yes, God is faithful. None of the temptations that we face are beyond what we can bear. Not one. Sin is not inevitable. It is avoidable. God himself ensures we're offered a way of escape. The real question is: Will we take it?

Hesitation. That's the real enemy in our battle against temptation. With just a few short moments of hesitation the fight against temptation is lost. We linger too long at the tree in the garden. We entertain the serpent's offer. We imagine the sweet taste of the forbidden fruit. Our resistance weakens. Our hearts yield. Our hands take some, then we eat. It all starts with a moment's hesitation.

Be quick to respond to temptation with fight or flight. Don't make the mistake of hesitation. Use the resources God has given you. And take the way of escape.

Prayer Guide

Ask God to give you discipline where you lack it. Pray that he will give you His strength when you feel it's impossible to resist temptation on your own. Thank Him that he has not left you defenseless in your battle against temptation.

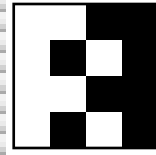
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Unit 7 • Lesson 2

How Can I Fight Temptation?

Oscar Wilde, the famous nineteenth century Irish playwright, once said, "I can resist everything but temptation." That may be an amusing quote, but it's a deadly philosophy if you want to please God and grow spiritually. To develop your relationship with God, you must learn how to successfully fight temptation.

The Bible offers plenty of insight on how to do just that. Jesus himself said, *Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation* (Mark 14:38). He knew that to successfully fight against temptation requires vigilance and prayer. You can't afford to be caught with your defenses down. You must watch. And you must pray. Prayer is essential.

Prayer helps attune your spirit to God. It keeps you connected with him and his power flowing through your life. Prayer helps you identify temptation when it comes. Recognizing temptation for what it truly is—a threat to your spiritual well-being, a negative and not a positive—helps you avoid being deceived and taken in by it. Through prayer you will find strength to fight against temptation.

Besides using prayer to fight against temptation, you need to follow the Bible's counsel when it says: *Avoid every kind of evil* (1 Thessalonians 5:22). Keep away from the people, places and things that are a bad influence on you. Don't even flirt with temptation. Remember the warning found in Proverbs 6:27: *Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?* Do what Paul advises Timothy: *But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness* (1 Timothy 6:11). Seek only positive influences for your life.

Finally, learn, memorize and meditate on God's Word. With every temptation Satan offers Christ in the wilderness, Jesus responds by quoting Scripture, even when Satan attempts to use Scripture himself to entice Jesus to yield. Don't underestimate the power of God's Word in helping you fight against temptation. The psalmist observes: *How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.* Then he adds: *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you* (Psalm 119:9,11). Let God's Word keep you from sin by giving you the strength and wisdom that you need when you face temptation.

God has supplied you with a whole arsenal of powerful weapons in your fight against temptation. But even the most powerful weapons won't do you any good unless they are used. Use every resource God has given you in your fight against temptation.

1. Considering that the consequences of sin are greater than the pleasures promised by temptation, why do you think we are so often and easily deceived by temptation?

2. Read about the temptations that Jesus faced during his 40 days in the wilderness. With what was he tempted, and how did he respond?

Matthew 4:1-4—

Matthew 4:5-7—

Matthew 4:8-11—

3. What according to Matthew 4:11 and Luke 4:13 happened after Jesus had resisted these temptations?

Matthew 4:11—

Luke 4:13—

4. How might what happened to Jesus be an encouragement and warning for us?

5. What practical advice does James 4:7 offer us in our battle against temptation?

6. People don't often consider the consequences of sin when facing the appeal of temptation. What appeals to and consequences of sin are mentioned in the following passages?

Proverbs 1:10-19—

Proverbs 5:1-14—

7. Reexamine these two passages. What advice does the writer give that would help a person avoid these consequences?

8. List the methods of fighting temptation discussed in this lesson. What practical steps could you take to make each work better for you?

Memory Verse

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

—1 Corinthians 10:13

Food for Thought

It's easy for Christians to get confused about confession. One common mistake we make is waiting for the right sorrowful mood to hit before confessing our sin. Confession is a decision, not an emotion. Don't wait until the right mood hits before dealing with the sins you've committed. Be prompt. Keep short lists of sins needing confession.

Another common mistake we make is confessing over and over some sin that we have already confessed to God. Certainly we need to confess our sins to God, even when they involve some recurring temptation. But that's different from confessing over and over a single instance of yielding to a particular sin. All that does is reinforce a sense of not being forgiven. When you have a nagging sense of guilt after you have confessed your sins, ask God for his peace. Ask him for greater faith to accept what his Word promises about forgiveness rather than listening to what your feelings are saying.

Don't make the mistake of letting your failures prevent you from continuing on in your Christian life. God's grace is greater than your sin. Accept the grace that he has for you.

Prayer Guide

Thank God for his grace and mercy. Thank him that he has given you confession as a way to remove the barriers that sin builds in your relationship with him. Ask God to help you realize that he is willing and eager to forgive you. Ask him to give you more of the right heart and attitude towards sin.

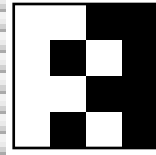
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Unit 7 • Lesson 3

What Do I Do When I've Given In To Temptation?

Probably nothing discourages sincere Christians quicker than feeling like they've failed God and let down their fellow believers by giving in to temptation. But feeling discouraged when you sin doesn't resolve the problem. It just leaves you feeling miserable and doubting your faith and wondering if your fellowship with God can ever be restored. There must be a better way to respond once you've given in to temptation.

There is. The Bible calls it confession, and it's taught in the book of First John: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9). Confession is the only effective solution when you give in to temptation.

Don't be confused and think that confession means that you have to tell some other Christian or even a church leader about your sins before you can be forgiven. That's not what the Bible means by confession. You, like every other Christian, can go straight to God and unburden your heart with confession.

Be clear about this. Confession is not just admitting that you've sinned. It is agreeing with God that what you did was wrong to do. It implies that you're ready to forsake whatever sin you've done. It requires honesty with yourself and with God. When you confess, don't make excuses, rationalize, or hold anything back. Be transparent with God. Admit your guilt, and accept your responsibility for the wrong you've done.

Remember the promise that attends confession. God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. When you confess your sins to God, he forgives you immediately and completely, removing every barrier between you and him. Sometimes, however, a nagging sense of guilt persists. When that happens, remember that your feelings are less reliable than God's promises for gauging your forgiveness and the restoration of your fellowship with him. God forgives, even when we don't feel forgiven. You can depend on his promises.

When you confess your sin, thank God for his mercy and grace which he extends to you in your time of need, then continue on with living your Christian life, even if you still have to face the consequences of your sin. Deal with those consequences in a way that would honor God. Be mature, and remain faithful. God will bless you. There is hope for you even when you've given in to temptation. God offers us hope through Jesus Christ.

1. What do you feel like when you've given in to temptation and sinned?

2. How might your feelings help lead you to confessing your sins?

How might your feelings prevent you from confessing your sins?

3. In verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 32, David writes that the man whose sins are forgiven is blessed or happy. How does being forgiven bring a person happiness?

4. What was David's experience when he avoided confessing his sins to God? How did that impact his relationship with God?

5. According to verse 5, what did David do to restore his fellowship with God?

6. What counsel does David offer others in verse 6?

7. Read 1 John 1:9. How should we respond when we sin?

8. What two things can we be sure of when we respond to our sins this way?

9. Upon what, according to this passage, are these promises based?

10. Read 1 John 2:1. What does John say are the reasons he writes this teaching about sin?

11. Why do you think it is important to bear in mind John's reasons?

Memory Verse

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

—1 John 1:9

Food for Thought

Once when Gideon prepared for battle, he sought a sign from God to determine if he would be the man that God would use to deliver Israel. He set out a wool fleece and asked the Lord to make the fleece wet with dew and the ground around it dry. That, he decided, would be the sign that God had chosen him. It happened just as Gideon prayed. The fleece was wet, and the ground was dry. But Gideon was still unsure, so he asked God for additional confirmation. This time he wanted the ground to be wet and the fleece to be dry. God obliged. Gideon then went to war and was victorious.

Wouldn't it be easy if every time you faced a big decision that all you had to do was put out some "fleece" and God would reveal his will? "Lord, if you want me to marry Karen, let my fried eggs come this morning with double yolks." It would be nice if big decisions were this simple: Just pray for the sign. If it comes, act; if not, don't.

You may end up with egg on your face, if you mistake Gideon's experience as a formula that God wants you to use in decision-making. God sometimes will guide your life in dramatic ways, but usually he reveals his will through his Word and wise counsel. Trust God to guide you. He will, even without a fleece.

Prayer Guide

Father, thank you for taking an interest in the decisions that I face. I'm glad for all the resources you have given me to better recognize and understand your will for my life. Help me to trust in your goodness wherever you lead me.

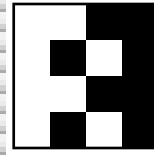
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Unit 8 • Lesson 1

How Can I Know God's Will for Me?

Life is filled with choices. Should I attend college? Which school? Should I get married? Who? What career should I choose? Which job should I accept? Where should I live? And on and on. As a Christian, you want to please God and follow his will for your life.

Some decisions for Christians are clear. God does not want you to sin. And his Word spells out exactly what sin is. It's up to you to learn his Word, so you can avoid making sinful choices in your life. Study God's Word. Certain choices will become a lot clearer for you.

Other decisions aren't usually that easy to discern. These aren't the choices between the good and the bad but among the good, better, and best. What should you do then?

Begin your search for God's guidance by remembering what he is like. God wants only what's good for you. He is not a Father who gives his children stones when they ask for bread. He doesn't give you a snake when you ask for a fish. He is neither sadistic nor cruel. He knows only how to give good gifts to those who ask him. Trust that God wants what's best for you. And remember that sometimes he even gives you a variety of "best" options from which to choose. His grace is that abundant.

Don't forget to be patient. Sometimes it takes time to discern God's leading. Don't rush things. Trust God's guidance throughout the decision-making process, even when the breakthroughs don't come as quickly as you would like. Resist the urge to run ahead of God. Wait on the Lord.

Let wisdom be your guide. The best choice is always the wisest choice. And the wisest choice always conforms to God's Word. Consult godly and wise counsel. Pray. Look for open doors of opportunity. And trust God to lead you.

With wisdom as your guide, you'll often find that the best choice becomes evident. But if it doesn't. Don't worry. Thank God that he has given you the freedom to choose from a number of good paths that would equally please him.

Christian decision-making does not have to be fraught with the fear that somehow you're going miss out on God's plan for your life if you don't make all the right turns. God is Sovereign. And he will use your life for his glory. He honors those who honor him. Live faithfully following each decision you make, and you will be blessed.

Life is filled with decisions. And God is full of grace. He says: "*For I know the plans I have for you,*" declares the Lord, "*plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future*" (Jeremiah 29:11). Any future you have with God in it will be bright. Guaranteed. So honor God with your decisions.

1. When in your life did you face a decision that you had to wait for God's leading? How did it work out?

2. What does Romans 12:2 say you should do in order to determine God's will?

3. Read Proverbs 3:5,6. What must you do to have straight paths for your life?

4. What does Proverbs 16:3 say you need to do for your plans to succeed?

5. According to the following passages, how can God's Word help you with the decisions you face?

2 Timothy 3:15,16—

Psalms 119:105—

6. Read the following scriptures. What are some of the benefits of seeking wise counsel?

Proverbs 13:20—

Proverbs 15:22—

Proverbs 24:5,6—

7. In Matthew 7:7,8, Jesus tells us to ask, seek, and knock. Then we will receive, find, and have doors opened for us. If asking corresponds with prayer, what might seeking and knocking correspond to?

8. What decisions are you currently facing in your life that you are seeking God to guide you in?

What might be the next step that you need to take in order to better determine his will?

Memory Verse

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

—*Philippians 4:13*

Food for Thought

At first blush it almost seems perverse to think that you should consider trials pure joy, as James says in James 1:2. You might be tempted to ignore that passage or explain it away if its theme were not repeated elsewhere. Paul says: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* (Philippians 4:4). Always means always, even when your life is unraveling.

Understand what this means. It does not mean that you walk around with a pasted on smile on your face while hoping that saying *Praise the Lord, anyhow* will be a spiritual *abracadabra* that makes all your sorrows vanish. Even Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus. And in Gethsemane, he says, “*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*” (Mark 14:34). Still Jesus was a man who could face even the cross with joy, despite its shame and his sorrow, because joy for him was not so much an emotion he felt but a perspective he held. He knew that God was in control and at work even in life’s darkest nights.

With the proper perspective, you can rejoice in your difficult times because you know that behind the dark clouds of your sorrows and sufferings is the bright light of God’s presence. In his time, he will break through and turn your darkest moments to day. You can count on that. Now that’s pure joy.

Prayer Guide

Father, thank you that when life overwhelms me and the mighty waters rage that you are my rock and hiding place. Help me to have the confidence that you will rescue me from every evil attack and bring me safely to your heavenly kingdom.

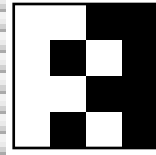
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Unit 8 • Lesson 2

What About All The Problems I’m Having?

In the book of Job, we find the saying that *man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward* (Job 5:7). Life is filled with trouble, even for Christians. You’re not exempt. You will experience problems as you live your Christian life. The Bible shows you how to view your problems and reveals the resources that are available to you to help you deal with them.

When it comes to problems, the most common mistake Christians make is thinking that their problems are due to God being upset with them. But remember: Job suffered, even though he was a righteous man. Furthermore, our Lord Jesus himself was known as a man of sorrows who was acquainted with grief. Problems are not necessarily an indication that something is wrong with you spiritually. Problems are a fact of life, even the Christian life.

Sure. God sometimes uses problems to prod us to get our lives back on track or to deepen our spirituality, but problems usually come to our lives for two reasons. They are either the consequences of sinful or foolish decisions that we’ve made, or they are the circumstances that attend living in a fallen world. Regardless of *why* you are facing a problem, *what* you do with your problems remains the same.

First, if there is some unconfessed sin in your life, repent. The psalmist says, *Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word* (Psalm 119:67). Let your fiery trials purge whatever dross there is in your life, so you may have a genuine and pure faith.

Trust God throughout your difficulties. Remember that even though your circumstances have changed, God hasn't. He still is in control even when your life is out of control. Remember that he never stops loving you and that he always is working for your good.

Don't quit praying, as 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says. Prayer is the lifeline that keeps you connected to God throughout your trials. Do what Philippians 4:6 counsels: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* Then you'll experience what verse 7 promises: *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Though God may not change your circumstances, he still can change you. Through prayer you can find the strength and the peace to face what you must.

Finally, surround yourself with faithful Christians and accept whatever grace God gives you. On three different occasions, Paul pleaded with God to remove a terribly difficult problem he was struggling with only to be told by the Lord that *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness* (2 Corinthians 12:9). Christ's grace is sufficient. Paul found that out for himself, and so can you.

1. When in your life you have found it difficult to trust God?

2. Read Psalm 32:3-5. When your affliction is directly related to some secret sin in your life, what is the worst thing that you could do?

What assurance can you have once you acknowledge your sin and no longer cover up your iniquity?

3. According to Hebrews 12:10, what is God's motivation and purpose when he disciplines us?

4. Read verse 11. What benefits come to your life through discipline?

5. In Romans 5:3, Paul lists some of the benefits that come through suffering. What are the various links in the chain of benefits that Paul mentions?

6. Like Paul, James lists in James 1:3,4 some of the benefits that come through suffering. According to James 1:2, what attitude does James tell us to have towards our trials?

7. In 1 Peter 5:7, what does Peter tell us to do with each of our anxieties?

8. Though God may seem distant and uncaring in times of trouble, what assurances can we draw from Psalm 46:1-3?

9. How might you better manage the problems that you face?

Memory Verse

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

—*Philippians 4:13*

Food for Thought

Paul used a variety of strategies to share the gospel. But one of his favorites was his personal testimony. On a number of occasions throughout the book of Acts, we find him telling people how he came to know Jesus as his Lord and Savior. Your personal testimony can be a powerful tool that God uses, too.

A personal testimony doesn't have to be dramatic to be effective. People who have grown up in the church, accepted Christ at a young age, and have consistently lived a Christian life can be just as effective, and in some cases more so, than those who've lived a more wayward life. Your personal testimony is effective, because it's yours. It's the one God has given you. It's your account of your encounter with the living God and how he has worked in your life.

Think through how to share your story. Talk about your life before you came to Jesus. Tell about how you met the Lord and what life has been like since then. Keep it brief. Usually, short testimonies are best. Try organizing your thoughts by writing them out, if that helps. Avoid words that non-Christians aren't familiar with. And always speak from your heart. People may disagree with Christianity, but they can't deny that something wonderful has happened to you. Share the gospel by telling your story.

Prayer Guide

Father, you have given me your love, your grace, and your forgiveness. You have given me your Son. Thank you for giving me something to tell others about. Let faith always be the answer to whatever fears I have about sharing the gospel. Use me to help others find you. May I always be a faithful witness.

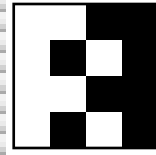
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Unit 8 • Lesson 3

How Can I Share My Faith Without Turning People Off?

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter writes: *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect* (1 Peter 3:15). This command is for every Christian. God wants you to share your faith. And you can learn how to do that without turning people off.

Peter mentions three factors that will help you to become a more effective witness for Christ—sound preparation, solid answers, and spiritual attitudes.

Sound preparation. The best way to prepare to be an effective witness for Christ is to know Jesus as your personal Savior and live as a Christian should. Jesus says: *In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven* (Matthew 5:16). Your light has to shine if people are going to praise your Father in heaven. That means that they must not only see your good deeds but know you are a Christian, too. One of the best arguments for the gospel is an authentic Christian.

Solid answers. To be an effective witness for Christ also means that you learn some solid answers. Here's where most Christians panic. What if someone asks me something I don't know? What if I can't recall the right scriptures? What if I don't know what to say? What then? Don't panic. You don't have to know all the answers before you begin witnessing. Furthermore, the best way to learn more of the answers is to do more sharing. Get in a little bit over your head sometimes. Let people ask you questions that you don't have ready

answers for. Then tell them that you don't know but will find out. Do your homework. Find some solid answers. There are a lot of them to be found if you'll just take time to look. Not having a ready answer isn't the biggest mistake Christians make in witnessing. The biggest mistake is not witnessing.

Besides, if you know enough to be a Christian, you know enough to tell others how to become one, too. Share your story. Tell about your life before you came to Jesus. Tell about how you came to Christ. And tell about what life has been like since then. Be honest. And watch God bless your witness.

Spiritual attitudes. The final component of an effective witness requires you to show spiritual attitudes. Peter says that you should share your faith with gentleness and respect. Always treat everybody with dignity. Jesus did. Respect their right to reject the gospel. God does. Don't tug at green fruit. Pray for people who are unresponsive, and wait for God to open their hearts. Be gentle. Don't get exasperated, defensive, or quarrelsome. It destroys your effectiveness. Pay attention to both what you say and how you say it. With sound preparation, solid answers, and spiritual attitudes you will be an effective witness.

1. Why do you think so many Christians never grow in this dimension of their faith?

2. According to Matthew 28:19,20, what is the mission of the church?

3. People's personalities and abilities vary. Some are more outgoing and talkative than others. Read 2 Timothy 1:7. What's true of every Christian regardless of his or her individual temperament?

4. What exhortation does Paul offer Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:8?

5. Read Colossians 4:3-6. What specific advice does Paul offer in this passage that would help advance the gospel?

6. What are some practical ways you could apply what Paul says to your life?

7. Paul was a tremendously effective witness for Christ. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, he reveals his strategy in sharing the gospel. What are some principles we might learn from him?

8. Read 2 Timothy 2:24-26. How would following Paul's instruction help a Christian become a more effective witness?

9. Think of someone you would like to influence for Christ. What are some practical steps you could take this week to be a more effective witness to that person?

Memory Verse

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

—*Philippians 4:13*

Food for Thought

Misconceptions abound concerning forgiveness. People say, *Forgive and forget*. But is that possible? How could you do that when even God doesn't forget what he has forgiven? He is all-knowing. All knowing. Though he no longer remembers our sins against us, he still knows every sin we have ever done. When he forgives, his wrath goes, not his memory.

Another misconception about forgiveness is expecting that once you've genuinely forgiven someone you'll no longer struggle with feelings of hurt, bitterness or resentment towards him or her. That's not necessarily so. The forgiveness you offer others is an event of your will that often takes time for your emotions to process. Though you choose to forgive, that choice may be protested by your heart. Realize that it may take time to work through your feelings of hurt even after you have forgiven another.

Finally, don't confuse forgiveness with approval. It is never right for people to wrong to you. Never. Forgiveness does not change that fact. Forgiveness simply paves the way for the possibility of reconciliation, and it spares you from becoming a victim of the poison of bitterness. Forgiveness is medicine for your soul, even when it's a tough pill to swallow.

Prayer Guide

Father, it sometimes overwhelms me to think of the incredible forgiveness that you've shown me. My sins have offended you beyond any offense I've felt from others. Help me to have both the courage and character to forgive. Help me to become more like you.

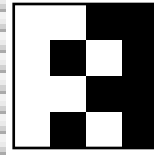
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Unit 8 • Lesson 4

How Can I Forgive Others?

Probably one of the toughest things you'll do as a Christian is to forgive others when they sin against you and hurt you. Forgiving others is tough. It doesn't come easy.

Though it may be tough to forgive others, it is important to do that as a Christian. Jesus himself said: *For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins* (Matthew 6:14,15). Sounds pretty serious, doesn't it. It is. You must forgive. The big question is *How?*

One of the best ways to understand how to forgive others is to consider how God forgives you. Long before you ever sought forgiveness from God, he provided it for you through Jesus Christ, as Romans 5:8 says: *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. God extends his forgiveness to us long before we seek it.

To forgive others, then, you must be willing to extend forgiveness to them even before they seek it from you. Don't wait for them to make the first move. Don't wait until they realize what they did was wrong. Don't wait until they say, *Sorry*. Forgive. That's what God did for you.

Understand what forgiveness means. It does not mean that things will magically get better between you and those who have sinned against you. Sometimes wrongdoers don't want forgiveness or reconciliation. It does not mean that those

who've hurt you should never have to suffer the consequences for their wrongdoing. God doesn't always spare us the consequences of our sins. It doesn't mean that you become a doormat for others to walk on. You should protect yourself from unhealthy relationships and unrepentant people. But forgiveness does mean that you surrender both your desire to get even and your expectation that people must make up to you the wrong they've done. Romans 12:19 says: *Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord* (Romans 12:19). Instead of repaying the evil that you experience with the evil of revenge, you must overcome evil with the good of love and forgiveness. That's the only good option when you've been hurt by sin.

How can you do that when you've been deeply hurt? Sometimes you can't. Sometimes people's sin exhaust your moral reserves to forgive. When that happens, you'll face this choice: You can either allow God to supply you with the will and the power to forgive, or you will nurse your grudge and feed your bitterness until it consumes you. There is no middle ground. You must forgive, and you can if you rely on him who gives you the strength to do so.

1. Why do you think it is often difficult to forgive?

2. Read Matthew 18:21-35. What question did Peter ask that prompted Jesus to tell this parable?

3. In verse 22 when Jesus tells Peter that we are to forgive seventy-seven or seventy times seven times, what point do you think Jesus is making?

4. According to verse 24, how much did the servant owe his master?

Read verse 28. How much did the debtor servant owe his fellow servant?

5. When it came to the debts that were owed him, how did the master's response differ from that of the servant?

6. How does the forgiveness we've been given by God differ from the forgiveness that we often show others?

7. Why do you think that we tend to put limits on what and how much we will forgive?

8. When in your relationships do you think it is wise to protect yourself emotionally, spiritually, or even physically from others even though you may have forgiven them of their wrongdoing?

9. What are some of the struggles that you face when it comes to forgiving others from the heart?

Memory Verse

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

—*Philippians 4:13*

Food for Thought

Sex is neither a demon to torment us nor a god to serve. Sex is a gift from God. James says: *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows* (James 1:18). Sex is one of God's good and perfect gifts.

Trouble comes, however, whenever devotion shifts from the Giver of gifts to the gifts He gives. Then sex gets distorted. Perversion and dysfunction result. Some use sex as a route to love, others as a shortcut to intimacy, and still others as a quest for fulfillment. But heartbreak and frustration follow when the gifts God gives are misused. Whenever sex is misused, sin results. And sin ruins our relationship with God and ravages our spirits, too.

When we become victims of our own passions, an insidious deception besets us: The more sex frustrates the greater our devotion to it grows. Like rats in a cage, we'll exhaust ourselves racing on the wheel of sex, while never closing in on the satisfaction we pursue.

Augustine says: *You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.* Only the Giver of gifts satisfies the soul. There you'll find rest.

Prayer Guide

Father, thank you for the precious and beautiful gift of sex. And thank you for the resources you have provided me to properly manage my own sexuality. Help me not to excuse or rationalize my sexual weakness. Instead, may I experience the grace you give, so I can honor you with my body.

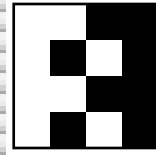
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Unit 8 • Lesson 5

How Can I Properly Manage My Sexuality?

The first step to properly managing your sexuality is to transform your thinking about this subject, as Paul notes: *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will* (Romans 12:2). Learning to see human sexuality from a biblical perspective is the first step to developing a healthy and holy outlook on sex.

One of the first truths the Scriptures reveal about sex is that it is God's creation, not the devil's. It was God who created male and female. It was God who issued the command to *Be fruitful and increase in number* (Genesis 1:28). It was God who gave humanity the gift of sex.

Furthermore, God not only gave us the gift of sex, but he intended it for our pleasure, as the book of Proverbs notes: *May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love* (Proverbs 5:18,19). Whatever restrictions God places on sex are not to frustrate us or to deny us pleasure. His restrictions are designed to protect this precious and beautiful gift from being cheapened and becoming ugly. God's commands about sex are for your benefit.

Christians who see sex from a biblical perspective still struggle with whatever sexual urges they face—whether heterosexual or homosexual desires, whether acceptable or forbidden practices. Struggles rage in the soul. And discouragement follows sin, whether sin committed in the mind or with the body.

Again, adopting a biblical perspective about such problems helps. God's Word says: *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it* (1 Corinthians 10:13). Sin is not inevitable, regardless of the temptations that you face. God always provides a way of escape, but it's up to you to take it.

Furthermore, God has the resources to help you with whatever struggles you face. Occasionally, he completely removes troubling temptations. But usually, he provides the resources to cope, as he tells Paul: *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness* (2 Corinthians 12:9). In Christ, you have everything you need for life and godliness, including God's mercy and grace when you fail. John says, *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One* (1 John 2:1). Flee from sexual immorality. Don't indulge your sinful nature. Honor God with your body. You can properly manage your sexuality.

1. How easy is it for you to believe that God supplies Christians with all the resources that they need to properly manage their sexuality?

2. According to Hebrews 13:4, within what context does God permit sex?

What is God's response to pre-marital and extra-marital sex?

3. How is sexual immorality classified in Galatians 5:19-21?

What warning does Paul give about living like this?

4. In Romans 8:5-9, how does Paul compare and contrast those who live according to the sinful nature and those who are controlled by the Spirit?

5. According to Romans 8:12,13, how can we put to death the misdeeds of the body?

6. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9,10. What deception did Paul warn the Corinthians about?

7. According to verse 11, what type of past did the Corinthian Christians have?

How were they changed?

8. Read verses 19 and 20. What fact does Paul remind them of, and what does he urge them to do?

9. What are some positive steps Christians can take to gain victory over the sexual temptations they face?

Memory Verse

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

—*Philippians 4:13*

Food for Thought

People sometimes say that God won't let you face anything beyond what you're able to bear. That's true if you're talking about temptation. God always protects us from crushing temptation. Paul says: *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear* (1 Corinthians 10:13). But with trials, it's another story.

To the same group of Christians, Paul writes: *We do not want you to be uniformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure...* (2 Corinthians 1:8). Paul knew trouble that was beyond his ability to endure. Paul's statements aren't contradictory but complementary.

With the promise that temptation will never be more than what you can bear, you can count on God's protection from sin. Sin is never inevitable. But with trials, you may face circumstances that stretch you beyond your limits. There in your weakness, you may discover what Paul says: *But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead* (2 Corinthians 1:9). God offers protection from sin and power for living. What more do you need?

Prayer Guide

Father, sometimes I feel overwhelmed. Sometimes I'm fearful of what the future holds. Sometimes I panic. And sometimes I get discouraged. Help me to trust that you're in control even when life seems out of control. Help me not to rely on myself, but on you, the One who raises the dead.

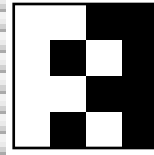
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Unit 8 • Lesson 6

How Can I Overcome Discouragement?

Sometimes the fires of your spiritual passion die down. Sometimes God feels distant. Sometimes you get discouraged. What then? What can you do when you don't feel like you're much of a Christian, if a Christian at all? How can you overcome discouragement? These six practical steps may help you to rekindle your spiritual fire.

Take inventory. Sometimes you don't feel close to God because you aren't close to God. Walk in the light, as he is in the light. That's the best way to ward off spiritual discouragement. And when you stumble along the way, take John's advice: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9). Believe in God's promise of cleansing, and you'll keep your emotions from getting the best of your faith.

Know that it's going to happen to you. Some of the best of God's people suffered bouts of discouragement, so it's not surprising that it happens to the rest of God's people, too. David, Elijah and Paul all knew discouragement. Paul even says in 2 Corinthians that the hardships he suffered while in Asia caused him to despair even of life (1:8). Just because you're having a difficult time with trying circumstances doesn't mean you're a bad Christian. As a Christian, expect showers of blessing and occasions of drought, too.

Keep connected. Here's where too many Christians go wrong. Instead of staying in touch with God and his people, they often pull back in times of discouragement. Big mistake. The writer of Ecclesiastes says, *Two are better than one...If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man*

who falls and has no one to help him up! (Ecclesiastes 4:9,10). Stay connected with God and the people who can help you back up.

Talk it out. Talk out your discouragement with God. That's what Paul means when he says, *Pray continually* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Never give up on prayer. Tell God how you really feel. Pray that he will lighten your load or give you a stronger back. And talk out your discouragement with God's people. Paul says, *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ* (Galatians 6:2). You'll find that a burden shared is a burden lightened.

Let yourself be accountable to others. Give some mature Christians permission to keep tabs on how you're doing. In your battles with discouragement, make allies of people who won't settle for your excuses.

Wait it out. It's true: This too will pass. Decide that your commitment to God is going to last longer than your periods of drought. Then your spiritual fires will be rekindled.

Follow these six practical steps and learn to overcome discouragement.

1. When are you most prone to spiritual discouragement?

2. Read Psalm 139:23,24. David invites God to search his life. How might maintaining an open and transparent relationship with the Lord help ward off discouragement?

3. Having suffered hardships in Asia and despairing of life itself, Paul, according to 2 Corinthians 1:9, made a significant discovery. What was it?

4. Read 2 Corinthians 1:10. What confidence did going through this experience produce in Paul?

5. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17. The Contemporary English Version reads: *And never stop praying*. Why do some people stop praying when they're discouraged?

What are some good reasons to keep praying when you're discouraged?

6. Paul says, *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ* (Galatians 6:2). What are some practical things you could do to help other Christians with their burdens?

7. Read James 5:10,11. What lessons about overcoming discouragement are found in this passage?

8. What are some practical steps you can take to overcome discouragement in your life or to help someone who currently is discouraged?

Memory Verse

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

—*Philippians 4:13*

Food for Thought

The favorite saying of people who want to avoid conflict is: *Judge not lest you be judged*. But are Christians really not to judge others at all?

In more than one place the Bible actually commands us to make judgments about people who are doing wrong or teaching falsely. That's right. God expects us to judge. In 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, Paul tells the Christians at Corinth to not tolerate people within the church who insist on living the way Christians shouldn't. He then says, *Expel the wicked man from among you* (verse 13). Just as schools may have to expel troublemakers who jeopardize their classmates' learning or welfare, so the church must not sacrifice its spiritual progress for any member who resists sound teaching or moral living. Christians are to judge and, when circumstances warrant, expel from membership those who fail to embrace Bible teaching and Christian living.

Informed judgment is not just an inescapable part of daily living, but it is an indispensable part of religious and moral training. Don't be misled. According to the Bible, Christians can and must judge.

Prayer Guide

Father, in your Word I find out not only how to live in peace with you but how I can live in peace with those around me. Help me to know the blessedness of being a peacemaker. Give me the wisdom and courage that I need to manage my conflicts with others in a way that would please you.

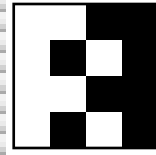
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Unit 8 • Lesson 7

How Can I Best Manage My Conflicts With Others?

Conflict is a fact of life, even the Christian life. The Bible recognizes this. And the Bible offers indispensable insight on how to successfully manage the conflicts you will experience with others.

To successfully manage conflict, make sure that you arm yourself with a Christ-like attitude. Be humble, and protect the unity of the church. Paul says, *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace* (Ephesians 4:2,3). Christian unity is far too important to destroy over personal differences or disagreements. Concerning division, Paul warns: *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple* (1 Corinthians 3:16,17). Guard against the temptation to escalate your personal conflicts into a church war.

Here's an important principle worth remembering: Not every religious disagreement—even if it's a matter of conscience—is a matter of right versus wrong. That's hard for many Christians to believe. But read Romans 14. There Paul describes believers who passionately hold completely opposite viewpoints on certain spiritual issues. He urges these Christians who see these religious matters differently to accept one another without passing judgment on or condemning each other. Sure. Sometimes you have to draw the line, but take care when you do. Make sure it's a line God would want drawn.

When it comes to resolving your differences with others, remember Jesus teaches that regardless of who's at fault, you have the responsibility to initiate reconciliation. That's not always easy to do, but doing what's right isn't always easy. Take the first steps towards reconciliation. Be a peacemaker.

Don't, however, skirt the truth. Speak it. When you've been hurt, talk about your hurt. When you've been wronged, talk about the wrong. Call sin, sin. But remember that when you speak the truth, do what Paul says and speak it in love. Probably no advice is more important than this if you want to successfully manage conflict.

In Matthew 18, Jesus outlines the steps to take when you've been sinned against. First, deal with the matter directly and privately. *Go and show him his fault*, says the Lord (15). If that doesn't work. *Take one or two others along*. (16). And if you're still unsuccessful in working things out, enlist the help of the church.

Yes, conflict is a fact of life, even the Christian life. But armed with Christ-like attitudes and the wise counsel found in God's Word, you can successfully manage conflict when it comes your way.

1. When conflict exists between Christians, why do you think they often deny there's a problem or avoid dealing with it?

2. Conflict arises for a number of reasons. Sometimes it's the inevitable consequence of the incompatibility between good and evil. Sometimes it occurs when good people simply see things differently. According to James 4:1-3, what is another reason that conflict exists between people?

3. In this passage, James mentions how the wrong type of prayer only serves to increase conflict. What type of prayer might work to minimize conflict?

4. Read James 3:16. What attitudes does James say produce disorder and every evil practice?

How might these attitudes contribute to a climate of conflict between persons?

5. In Romans 12:18, Paul qualifies the command to live at peace with all men with the phrase *as far as it depends on you*. Why do you think Paul added this qualification?

6. How might the qualities mentioned in Colossians 3:12-14 help minimize interpersonal conflicts?

7. The book of Proverbs contains a wealth of wisdom for managing conflict. What principles are found in following verses?

Proverbs 12:16—

Proverbs 15:1—

Proverbs 26:20—

Proverbs 29:11—

8. In what ways might you better manage the conflicts that you face?

Memory Verse

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

—*Philippians 4:13*

Food for Thought

The fact that Jesus died for the church proves that the church is people, not a building. Yet the writers of Scripture often use the building metaphor to describe the church.

Peter says we are living stones that are being built into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). And Paul elaborates on this same theme in Ephesians 2:19-22, where he says that God's household is *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone*. Any church that wants to glorify God must rest upon the foundation of what the apostles and prophets wrote in Scripture and align itself with the cornerstone—Christ.

Paul, however, takes the building metaphor a couple steps further. He says that *the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord* (21). The church, God's household, must rise and be joined together. Church growth and unity must characterize the family of believers. And Paul reveals the church's purpose when he says: *And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit* (22). The church is meant to be a dwelling for God. Our lives individually and the church of which we are a part are intended to be a place for God to dwell.

Prayer Guide

Father, thank you for the church of which I'm a part. Help me to see and appreciate its strengths, while doing my part to make it stronger. Thank you for the community of believers from whom I can draw strength and encouragement and to whom I can minister. May I grow to value your church as you do.

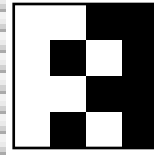
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Unit 9 • Lesson 1

How Can Attending Church Help Me?

A young girl told her Sunday School teacher that going to church wasn't necessary to become a Christian. She was right! Going to church isn't necessary to become a Christian, but it is virtually indispensable for growing as a Christian.

If you want to grow in your Christian life, you need to make church attendance a regular habit. It's one habit that's sure to promote your spiritual well-being.

Church attendance is vital for both novice and veteran Christians. It affords God's people in a given community an opportunity to get together for worship. Strength comes from numbers. Strength comes from worshiping with other believers. Nothing uplifts the soul like standing in God's presence lifting up songs and praises to God together. Christians need to extend to each other the same invitation David offers the Israelites: *Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together* (Psalm 34:3). Let us exalt his name together!

Besides the inspiration you can draw from worshiping with other believers, you will grow in your understanding of God and his Word by attending church. In Proverbs 27:17, Solomon says: *As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another*. Those who have devoted their lives to teaching and preaching God's Word are a great resource for sharpening your knowledge of the Scriptures. Take advantage of this resource by attending church.

Attending church not only affords you an opportunity for inspiration and instruction, but it also gives you a chance to

interact with other Christians. Again, Solomon reminds us that *he who walks with the wise grows wise* (Proverbs 13:20). You will benefit from fellowshiping with other believers. They not only can give you wise counsel concerning the challenges that you face in your spiritual walk, but their lives and examples often are models of what a life of faith is really like.

Solomon reveals another good reason that you need to regularly seek the fellowship of other believers. It's a principle drawn from Ecclesiastes 4:9,10, which explains that the ability to resist threats and recover from difficulties is increased when others are there to help. Your church family is your spiritual lifeline. That's why you need to keep closely connected to them by attending services.

Furthermore, church attendance not only gives you an opportunity to be ministered to, but it provides you an opportunity to minister to others. Peter says that *each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others* (1 Peter 4:10). The unique talents and abilities God has given you must be employed in service to others. By attending church, you might just find a place where you can be a blessing to others.

Don't be misled. Just because church attendance isn't required to be a Christian doesn't mean that it's inconsequential to spiritual growth. Develop good spiritual habits. Regularly attend church.

1. What benefits have you experienced in your own life from attending church?

2. What warning are we given in Hebrews 10:25?

3. Read Psalm 122:1. David says that he rejoiced with the people who invited him to join them for worship. What attitudes can you show to help make a church service more positive and uplifting?

4. According to John 4:23,24, what types of worshipers does the Father seek?

5. Read Acts 2:42. To what four things did the first Christians devote themselves?

6. Read the following verses. How can music help us worship God?

Psalm 69:30—

Colossians 3:16—

7. Much of the Christian life can only be carried out in the context of a community of believers. How should we treat each other according to the following verses?

John 13:35—

Ephesians 4:32—

Galatians 6:2—

Romans 15:7—

8. What are some positive steps you can take to make your church attendance a greater blessing in your life?

Memory Verse

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.
—*John 4:24*

Food for Thought

One of the first questions people ask when they learn what the Bible says about spiritual gifts is: *How do I know what gifts God has given me?* Good question. How do you know that?

In trying to discover your spiritual gifts, don't make the mistake that many people make. You won't all of a sudden realize what talents and abilities God has given you by waiting to be hit by a bolt out of the blue that makes everything crystal clear. It doesn't work that way.

Typically, people learn what spiritual gifts they possess through service. They find areas they're interested in or willing to help with and get involved. They try different ministries and discover what they like and what they're good at.

It's by serving that you'll better understand the gifts God has given you. People will begin to remark how you're helping them. And you'll find either a deeper enthusiasm for a particular service or perhaps a redirecting of your interests. Soon, you'll have no doubts about the gifts God has given you. It all starts, however, with service. Get involved, and make a difference. Get involved, and discover your gifts.

Prayer Guide

Father, I thank you that you've made no dispensable parts in the body of Christ. Help me to assume my responsibility to use the gifts and abilities that you've given me to serve others and to glorify you. Show me how I can use my life to build your kingdom. Empower me to reach my full potential.

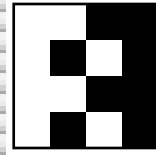
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Unit 9 • Lesson 2

What Can I Do for the Church?

According to the Bible, every Christian is indispensable to Christ's body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:22). That includes you. So there is only one right answer to the question of what you can do for the church—plenty.

You can do a lot for the church by attending its services and participating in its ministries. When people get involved in the life of the church, something electric happens. Nothing compares to a church that's filled with people who are excited about God and eager to learn from his Word. Attend church services and get involved in the various ministries of your church. That's something you can do for your church.

Furthermore, be positive about your church, its mission, and its ministries. Your attitude towards the church contributes a lot to the overall spirit of the congregation. Be prayerfully, emotionally and financially supportive of your church. If your church is worthwhile to attend it's worthy of your support. See yourself as a partner in the success of the ministry of your congregation. That's another way you can help your church.

Finally, find ways to serve. Service to Christ and his church is a great way to both help the church and to grow spiritually yourself. Christian service is not optional, it's mandatory, according to 1 Peter 4:10: *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.* In this passage, Peter discusses the topic of spiritual gifts.

Peter notes that spiritual gifts come in various forms. In verse 11, he mentions a couple general categories of gifts: *If any-*

one speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. Speaking and serving represent two basic types of gifts that God gives to Christians so they can minister to others.

As in the case of the parable of the talents where the master entrusts his resources into his servants' care, so God has invested in you certain talents and abilities which he expects you to use to bring a return to his kingdom. It is up to you, however, to find ways to use whatever gifts he has given you. Step out in faith and try different types of Christian ministry and service. Find what's right for you. Believe that God has already given you all the resources you need to be effective. And trust him for the results. Put your talents and abilities to work for God.

Therefore my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.
—1 Corinthians 15:58

1. Who has been a blessing to your spiritual life? How have they helped you? What spiritual gifts do you think they possess?

2. What are some of the spiritual gifts that Paul mentions in Romans 12:6-8?

3. We must use the gifts we have with the right attitude. According to the following verses, what common mistakes do people make when assessing their personal talents and abilities.

1 Corinthians 12:15,16—

1 Corinthians 12:21—

4. Read the following verses and note how Paul answers both of those mistaken attitudes.

1 Corinthians 12:17—

1 Corinthians 12:22—

5. Read the following passages from 1 Corinthians 12, what facts does Paul point out about the gifts that God gives to Christians?

1 Corinthians 12:4-7—

1 Corinthians 12:11—

1 Corinthians 12:18—

6. Rather than underestimating or overestimating your importance to the body of Christ, what approach should you take according to Romans 12:3?

7. What are some types of Christian service you enjoy doing?

Why do you enjoy serving in these ways?

8. What areas of Christian service do you think you would like to explore further?

Memory Verse

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.
—*John 4:24*

Food for Thought

There is a big difference between busyness and effectiveness. Many people lead busy lives. Few are truly effective.

That's true when it comes to church work and Christian service, too. It's easy to get really busy and involved in church. There are meetings to attend and calls to make. Events, activities, programs, and potlucks fill the calendar. In the church, there are always more jobs to do than volunteers to do them. It's easy to get really busy in a church; it's hard to be truly effective.

The secret to being effective isn't all that complicated. Jesus reveals it to us when he prays before his arrest and crucifixion. He says to the Father: *I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do* (John 17:4). He had a clear understanding of what the Father wanted him to accomplish, and he did it. That's the key to effectiveness.

Like Christ, we need to have a clear understanding of what the Father wants us to do, then do it. Our Father wants every disciple to be a partner in making disciples. At home, on the job, in the church and in the world, you must use whatever ability and influence you have to make disciples. Then you'll be effective.

Prayer Guide

Father, help me to see that the calling to make disciples is not just reserved for religious professionals. Help me to clearly see what part you want me to play in this mission. I trust you to supply whatever resources I need to fulfill my work. I will glorify you with my life. Teach me your standards for measuring effectiveness.

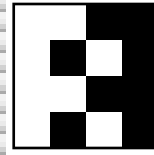
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Unit 9 • Lesson 3

What Should the Church Be Doing?

Jesus took the guesswork out of what the church should be doing. Before he returned to heaven, he told his followers: *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you* (Matthew 28:19,20). We need to make disciples. That's what the church should be doing.

A disciple is someone who is a learner or follower of Christ. So the mission of everyone who is already a disciple of Christ is to make more disciples. Simple as that.

Not only does Jesus tell us what we should be doing, but he tells us how to do it. To make disciples, we need to go, baptize and teach.

We need to go. We just can't wait for people to seek us out or visit our churches before we share the gospel with them. We must take the initiative. We must develop and implement effective strategies for reaching people with the gospel.

We need to baptize. Any church that stops short of making disciples by baptizing people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit would have a hard time claiming that it is obedient to Christ's Great Commission. Water baptism cannot be neglected or relegated to some optional status if we care about making disciples.

Furthermore, we need to teach people to obey everything Christ has commanded. Notice that Jesus didn't just say that we need to teach people, but that we need to teach people to

obey. We haven't been faithful to our disciple-making mandate if we just fill people's minds with scriptural facts while never teaching them with the expressed purpose of seeing their lives change. Christianity is a religion that requires positive change. It's impossible to be a disciple without it.

The church has a clear mandate for making disciples. As the church pursues its mission it nurtures those who are already Christians; it evangelizes those who need to know the Lord; it worships God; and it serves humanity by doing good works. Though a church may busy itself with all kinds of programs and ministries, all of a church's activities must be measured in light of its purpose given by the Lord—to make disciples of all nations.

1. Why is it important for any organization, but particularly the church, to have a clear sense of its purpose or the reason it exists?

2. Read Acts 1:8. When the apostles began ministering after Jesus' resurrection from the dead, what assignment did the Lord give them?

3. What assistance or resource were they given so they could fulfill this responsibility?

4. Besides the Holy Spirit, what resources, according to Ephesians 4:11,12, does God provide the church for its work?

5. Reread Ephesians 4:11,12. According to this passage, what is the work of church leaders?

What is the work of God's people?

6. Read Ephesians 4:16. When, according to this passage, does church growth occur?

7. In Acts 8:1-4, we read about the persecution that the early church suffered before Paul became a Christian. Who stayed with the church in Jerusalem?

8. Read verse 4. What did the people who were scattered do?

9. What are some ways that average Christians can effectively spread the good news about Jesus?

10. How might the teaching of Ephesians 5:15,16 apply to a Christian's calling to make disciples?

11. What are some practical things that you could do to help your church make disciples?

Memory Verse

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.
—*John 4:24*

Food for Thought

Some Christians use Communion as a time to reflect on how well they're doing in serving Christ. For them Communion becomes an occasion to recount their shortcomings and resolve to do better. This approach to Communion actually comes from a mistaken understanding of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:27,28 when he says that taking Communion in an unworthy manner is a sin against the body and blood of the Lord and that people ought to examine themselves before partaking.

The self-examination Paul advocates is not a personal assessment to see how well you're doing as a Christian but an evaluation of the way or manner that you partake Communion. Remember that the Corinthians had lost connection with the true significance of Communion. They turned it into a party. They forgot that Communion is a time to remember Jesus and give thanks for his sacrifice.

Focus on Jesus during Communion. No matter how much you grow as a Christian, you'll always have inadequacies within yourself, but Christ is sufficient for all your spiritual needs. Remember that he's the reason you can now stand before God without blemish and free from accusation. Now that's something to celebrate!

Prayer Guide

Lord, thank you for giving us Communion as a way of remembering you and all you've done for us. Help me to grow in my ability to truly commune with you during Communion and to express my appreciation and love to you.

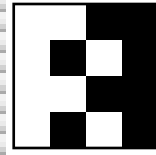
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Unit 9 • Lesson 4

What About Communion?

Before Jesus died, he gave Communion to his disciples. In the Gospel of Luke, we read about this occasion: *And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:19,20).* Jesus gave his followers Communion as a way to remember him.

Now when it comes to Jesus, there is a lot you could remember about him. As a matter of fact, John the Apostle says that the whole world could not contain all the books that could be written about Jesus. So much could be said about him.

Communion, however, narrows your focus to some critically important facts about Christ. One of these is that his body was given for you.

When you sinned, not only did you die spiritually but your relationship with God was totally destroyed. That left you guilty and condemned before God with no way to help yourself.

However, when Christ came into the world, he came with the full intention and complete ability to resolve this predicament. Because the wages of sin is death, somebody had to pay that penalty to satisfy God's holy wrath against sin. And because Jesus was sinless, he offered himself as a sacrifice on your behalf to free you from your guilt, God's judgment, and sin's power. The bread we eat in Communion reminds us that apart from Christ's death on the cross, we have no hope whatsoever of redeeming ourselves. Only by Christ's sacrifice can we

stand before a holy God, as the writer of Hebrews observes, *We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all* (Hebrews 10:10). We need Jesus' body. That's a fact too important to forget.

Communion should also remind you of this related fact: That within Christ's blood is the new covenant which was poured out for the forgiveness of sin.

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah tells about the time when God would make a new covenant with his people. He says that God would forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more. Christ's blood made the forgiveness that's found in the new covenant possible. Paul says: *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins...* (Ephesians 1:7). We need Jesus' blood. That's another fact we can't afford to forget.

When you remember Jesus at Communion, recall what the bread and the cup symbolize—the sacrifice that brought you forgiveness and repaired the damage that sin did to your spirit and relationship with God.

1. Why do you think Jesus thought it was important to give his followers this ceremony?

2. According to 1 Corinthians 11:26, what is it that we proclaim by taking Communion?

3. What evidence do you find in that verse that suggests how long Christ's church will observe Communion?

4. What clues do you find in the following verses that suggest when and how often the first Christians in the early church took Communion?

Acts 20:7—

1 Corinthians 11:20—

5. Typically, Communion is observed by individuals within a group of believers. According to 1 Corinthians 10:17, what does taking Communion with other Christians help us remember?

6. What warning about observing Communion does Paul give in 1 Corinthians 11:27?

7. Read 1 Corinthians 11:20-22. Instead of remembering Jesus and his death during Communion, what were the Corinthian Christians doing?

8. According to verses 27,28, people should examine themselves to make sure they observe Communion in the proper way. Besides the excesses shown by the Corinthians, what are some ways people might observe Communion improperly?

9. Read 1 Corinthians 10:16. Giving thanks is so closely associated with Communion that in this verse Paul calls the cup *the cup of thanksgiving*. Why should Communion be a celebration of thanksgiving?

Memory Verse

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.
—*John 4:24*

Food for Thought

People sometimes wonder, “How can I give anything to God’s work. After all, I’m having a hard enough time making ends meet with all my bills and what I make.” Giving, like so many other aspects of obedience, requires faith. James says: *But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do* (James 2:18). Faith is shown by what you do. Interesting. Faith manifests itself by action, by obedience and by giving.

While people can give without possessing faith, people with faith will give. That was the case with the poor widow. She, according to Jesus, had nothing left to live on except those two small copper coins. And she put both of them in the temple treasury. She could have kept one for herself. She could have kept both for herself and rationalized: *Two copper coins won’t be missed considering all that everyone else is giving.* She needed those coins more than the temple did. She might not have even agreed with some of the policies of the temple’s leadership. Jesus certainly didn’t, yet Jesus commends her for giving.

The poor widow provides a rich lesson on giving. Giving is a way to manifest faith. It’s a tangible way to demonstrate trust that God will meet all your needs.

Prayer Guide

Father, I realize that every good and perfect gift that I have is a gift from you. Thank you for the talents you have given me and the abilities that I possess to earn income. May my eyes never look more to these gifts than their Giver. Help me to become more like you. Help me be a giver, too.

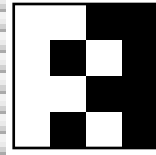
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Unit 9 • Lesson 5

How Should I Financially Support My Church?

Probably no topic fuels more criticism of the church than this matter of giving. People like to say that churches always talk about money. Spiritually healthy churches have more important things to talk about than money, but a spiritually healthy church won’t neglect teaching what the Bible says about giving either.

One thing you’ll find when you survey the Bible is that God’s work has always been supported by God’s people. When Moses delivered the instructions for building the tabernacle, the people gave so enthusiastically and generously that Moses had to restrain them from bringing any more. When David made provision for the building of Solomon’s temple, he gave from his personal resources and invited others to join him in giving to the work. The people responded and the temple was built. When God’s people believe in God’s work, they respond with financial support.

People like to say, “But those are Old Testament examples.” And they’re right. However, Jesus pointed out that he is greater than Solomon. And the work he has called us to do is greater than building a temple. We are to make disciples of all nations. God’s people should enthusiastically and generously give to see that God’s work is done and disciples are made.

Besides illustrating how God’s people have supported God’s work throughout the generations, the scriptures reveal what attitudes towards giving please God.

Jesus commended the poor widow for giving to the temple treasury just two very small copper coins. That wasn’t much.

But it wasn't the amount of her gift that pleased Jesus rather the degree of her sacrifice. God's work was valued by that woman. When Jesus taught about where material gain fits into life's priorities, he said: *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you* (Matthew 6:33). God's work should be valued by you, too. That should be reflected in your giving habits, as Solomon wisely notes: *Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim with new wine* (Proverbs 3:9,10). Give God first consideration in your finances.

Furthermore, learn to be a cheerful giver. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul says: *Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver* (2 Corinthians 9:7). Whenever you give to God's work, be cheerful about it. That's the type of attitude in giving that God loves.

God's work thrives when people enthusiastically and generously support it. God's work flourishes when cheerful givers give. God's work needs people like that. God's work needs people like you.

1. Why do you think some Christians struggle with being cheerful givers?

2. Read Luke 12:15. In this passage Jesus warns that we should guard against all kinds of greed. What practical steps might Christians take to make sure greed does not take root in their lives?

3. According to James 1:17 every good and perfect gift comes from God. That would include all of our material blessings and the talents and abilities we possess to earn income. How might seeing our wealth and possessions as gifts from God help us cultivate a spirit of giving?

4. Read Haggai 1:2-10. In the days of Haggai the prophet, the people had misplaced priorities. They attended to their personal wealth while neglecting God's temple. What were the consequences of their misplaced priorities?

What lessons might we learn from their experience?

5. Read Malachi 1:6-14. How did the Jews dishonor God?

What God-honoring attitudes and practices in giving might we learn from this passage?

6. According to Malachi 3:6-12, the Jews were robbing God by failing to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. What test did God offer them?

7. In a passage on giving, Paul writes: *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work* (2 Corinthians 9:8). How might you abound even further in your giving?

Memory Verse

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.
—*John 4:24*

Food for Thought

Christians typically make two mistakes in thinking about Satan. Some, whose wounds from the ravages of sin are still fresh and smarting, live in fear that Satan is bound to wreak havoc in their lives again. They think it's just a matter of time before they fall prey to him. Others, however, find themselves at the other end of the spectrum. They almost exhibit an overblown confidence towards Satan, acting as if they are exempt from scriptural warnings about him.

Don't misunderstand. Christians should be confident of their protection from and victory over Satan, as 1 John 5:18 states. But they need to remember where this confidence rests. Jude 9 says that *even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"* The archangel Michael knows how to deal with Satan. He relies on God's power. That's the sure route to victory over Satan.

Christians need not fear Satan. They should, however, respect his power. He is very powerful, more so than any of us, but our God is all-powerful. Trust Paul's words: *But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one* (2 Thessalonians 3:3). Now that's real power you can count on.

Prayer Guide

Father, your power is awesome. Thank you for thoroughly defeating Satan and his work through Jesus and his death on the cross. Thank you for making your power available to me in Christ. Help me to trust that you will keep me safe and give me the strength to fight whatever battles I must.

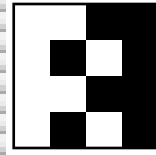
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Unit 10 • Lesson 1

What About Satan?

Any discussion about the spirit world should respect what Moses writes: *The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever...* (Deuteronomy 29:29). God has not revealed certain facts about the spirit world. Respect that. Avoid speculation. Honor the limits set by God's Word.

Christians disagree if the Bible says anything about Satan's fall. Two passages—Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:12-15—may say something about it. If these passages tell about Satan's fall, then at one time he was a glorious creature who sought to be like God.

That doesn't mean that as a created and limited being he thought he could become the self-existent and all-powerful God. He wanted to be *like* God, answering to no higher authority than himself. If that's the case, then pride and the desire for autonomy were Satan's downfall.

Satan was able to persuade a number of other angels to join his rebellion and has spread his influence throughout the earth following Adam and Eve's sin. Though he could have instantaneously put an end to Satan, God still permits him to wield influence despite the fact that Satan is doomed and God's victory over him is sure.

With humanity, Satan uses deception and seeks to tempt people to sin. Jesus says that when Satan lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). Elsewhere in Scripture, he is called *the tempter*. Satan's goal is to destroy you by keeping you from the truth and

caught in sin. Peter warns, *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour* (1 Peter 5:8). Satan's goal is your destruction.

Satan lives up to his name. He is the adversary. He is the enemy of all that is good and of your spiritual welfare, too. He and his allies are not always easy to detect. Paul says, *And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness* (2 Corinthians 11:14,15). Sometimes those who seem good can be used for his evil purposes. He is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

However, in this spiritual war, God has not left you defenseless. According to Ephesians 6:11, God has equipped you with his full armor so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. You also have the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17). And God gives you his promise that *the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one* (2 Thessalonians 3:3). You don't have to be another casualty in this spiritual war.

Satan is real. He is not a caricature with horns, a pointy tail and red suit. He is a powerful spiritual being bent on destruction. But he is no match for the Christian's omnipotent God.

1. What do you think are some common mistakes people make in their beliefs about Satan?

2. Read Genesis 3:1-7, the account of Eve's temptation and humanity's first sin. How did Satan work to cast doubt in Eve's mind about God's goodness and his commands?

3. How might confidence in God's goodness and his commands keep you from falling prey to Satan's deceptions?

4. What insights do the following Scriptures offer on how Satan works?

Matthew 13:19—

Matthew 13:24,25—

2 Corinthians 4:3,4—

5. Satan works to keep people ignorant of or confused about the gospel. Read the following Scriptures. What resources are available to the Christian to counteract Satan's influence?

Ephesians 6:10-18—

2 Corinthians 10:4,5—

6. According to the following passages, what can Christians do to thwart Satan's attempts at influencing them?

1 Peter 5:8,9—

James 4:7—

7. Read 1 John 5:18. What spiritual protection is assured to Christians?

8. How might you make better use of the resources God has given you for your spiritual victory?

Memory Verse

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

—1 Corinthians 15:57

Food for Thought

Sometimes Christians mistakenly think that reincarnation, the belief that after death people are born into another human body, is compatible with Christianity. Nothing could be further from the truth. Belief in reincarnation not only contradicts specific Bible verses but is opposed to the basic teachings of Christianity.

Reincarnation contradicts Bible passages like Hebrews 9:27, which says that *man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment*. According to the Bible, reincarnation doesn't happen. People die only once.

While specific Bible passages rule out the possibility of reincarnation, the biggest problem with this belief is that it is opposed to the basic teachings of Christianity. People who believe in reincarnation think that people have to come back in successive lives to suffer for wrongs they did in past lives and work towards perfection. Reincarnation is based on a do-it-yourself approach to salvation. You pay for your own wrongs. You achieve your own perfection. The Bible tells a completely different story about salvation. It says that Jesus paid for your wrongs and provides for your perfection. He reconciles you to God. Salvation is not a do-it-yourself matter. That's the good news, and there is no other gospel.

Prayer Guide

Father, you have given me the hope of life after death. Thank you that you have made this hope sure for me in Christ. I don't have to fear your holy wrath against my sins, for Christ has dealt thoroughly and finally with them. Now, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. What a blessed hope!

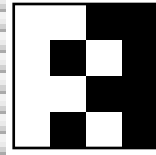
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Unit 10 • Lesson 2

What Really Happens After You Die?

According to the Bible, death is not the end of life. Death occurs when the spirit leaves the body and returns to God for judgment. James says: *As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead* (James 2:26). The body without the spirit is dead. The Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes says that *the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it* (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Life continues after death.

So what happens when the spirit leaves the body and returns to God? Hebrews 9:27 says that *man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment*. You're judged by God after you die. Paul says: *For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad* (2 Corinthians 5:10). This judgment, however, isn't something Christians should fear. Remember Romans 8:1: *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*. Anyone in Christ will not be condemned. God has promised that.

Separation of the body and the spirit is not the final destiny of man, as Christ's resurrection illustrates. When Jesus died on the cross, his spirit left his body, but three days later it reunited with his physical body in the resurrection. Paul says that Jesus is *the firstborn from among the dead* (Colossians 1:18) and writes in Philippians: *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies*

so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20,21). Your body, not just your spirit, will be transformed in glory after Jesus returns. Following the resurrection of the dead, you, along with all the saved, will inhabit the new heaven and earth, the home of righteousness. That new creation will be heaven.

So what happens to those who die before Christ returns? When Paul writes to the Philippians, he says that *for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain* (Philippians 1:21). When he talks about his conflicting desires—to live or to die—he notes: *I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far* (Philippians 1:23). He expected that when he died he would be with the Lord. Every believer has the same hope.

When your spirit separates from your body, before the final resurrection, you enter the Lord's presence to live with him as you await the resurrection from the dead. When that happens, your perishable body will be raised imperishable, and you will be with the Lord forever.

1. What are some concerns or fears that Christians sometimes have when they think about life after death?

2. In 1 Timothy 1:16, Paul says that he is the worst of sinners; and in Romans 7:15, he tells about his own inner spiritual turmoil. Given these facts, why do you think Paul was so confident about going to heaven, as he mentions in 2 Timothy 4:18?

3. Read John 16:1-3. What did Jesus promise his followers?

4. Note John 16:1. What effect should our trust in God and Christ have on our outlook on life and death?

5. It is appropriate for Christians to grieve when they lose a loved one. Even Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus. But read 1 Thessalonians 4:13. How is our grief over those who die in the Lord different?

6. According to Psalm 116:15, how does God regard the death of those who have been faithful to him?

7. Read Revelation 14:13. What does John say about those who die in the Lord?

8. Read 1 Peter 1:3,4. How does Peter describe the inheritance that is kept in heaven for you?

9. God's promises concerning the Christian's destiny are remarkable. Which of the passages that you've studied in this lesson particularly encourage you?

Memory Verse

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

—1 Corinthians 15:57

Food for Thought

People ask: *How can you believe in a God who would send someone to hell? Isn't God more loving than that?* God is love. His love exceeds all others. And our loving God doesn't send people to hell. Never has. People choose hell for themselves when they reject his love and grace.

Maybe a better question to ask is: *How could you believe that God is perfectly holy if he doesn't punish unrepentant sinners?* Should sinners expect to be able to flout God's laws, sin with impunity, and escape the consequences for their sins? Where's the justice in that? God could not be holy and ignore sin.

So what should God do with unrepentant sinners? Should he take them to heaven against their will? Heaven would be hell under those circumstances. Should not God give them exactly what they want and shut them off from him forever? Hell is a place without God and any of his blessings.

We sinners are an odd lot. We don't want God to interfere with our lives but complain when he doesn't bless us. Maybe we should spend less time questioning why the God of love would condemn anyone to hell and more time praising the God of holiness for providing us with the grace for going to heaven.

Prayer Guide

Father, help me to never make the mistake of denying any spiritual reality just because I find it is unpleasant. Help me to remember that your judgments are true and just and the mercy and grace that you've shown me in Christ covers my sin so I can stand in your presence. Thank you for your love and holiness.

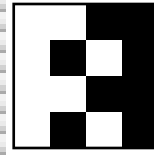
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Unit 10 • Lesson 3

What About Hell?

Just because reality is unpleasant doesn't make it any less real. Hell is an unpleasant reality. But hell is real. Jesus spoke more about hell than anyone else in the New Testament. He knows hell is real and clearly warns about it.

A proper understanding of hell takes into consideration certain realities about God's nature and our condition. Peter says that the Lord *is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9). God wants no one to perish. According to Ezekiel, God says: *Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?* (Ezekiel 18:23). Though God wants to punish no one, the unrepentant seal their doom when they refuse to turn from sin and accept his grace. Hebrews says: *It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* (Hebrews 10:31). Death apart from Christ is terrifying.

Certainly, God is love, and his mercy extends as far as possible. His judgments are always true and just. None are too severe, nor are they ever unwarranted. But because God is holy, he cannot deny himself. He doesn't tolerate or excuse sin—any sin. His only response to it is to punish it either in Christ or the sinner.

Because God is love and sin is so terribly loathsome to him, he sent his Son into the world. Jesus became God's way of punishing sin while redeeming sinners. Christ made it possible for us to know his love while satisfying his wrath against sin through Jesus. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. Jesus is

our only hope for rescue from the coming wrath. John says: *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him* (John 3:36). God has provided a way of escape from his wrath through Jesus. But it's up to us to take it.

Cast against the backdrop of God's nature and our condition, the reality of hell becomes more understandable but no less horrible. Jesus says it is a place of fire and torment, as eternal as the life and joy the righteous will experience. He also says: *"I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him"* (Luke 12:4,5). Fear or respect of God should compel you not to flee *from* him but *to* him for the remedy that he offers in Christ.

In his abundant grace and mercy, God has given warnings about and the means for escaping hell. His love is great, but he will not deny his holiness. Hell remains a terrible reality for those who turn their backs on God's love.

1. Why do you think so many people have a hard time accepting the reality of hell?

2. In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus tells about the judgment of the rich man and Lazarus. Read verses 23,24. What request does the rich man make of Abraham?

3. According to verses 25,26, why does Abraham deny the rich man's request?

4. Read verse 27,28. What is the second request that the rich man makes of Abraham?

5. According to verse 29, how does Abraham reply to that request?

6. Read verse 30. How does the rich man react to Abraham's denial?

7. According to verse 31, how effective at producing repentance is a miracle as compared to the Scriptures?

8. Read Matthew 18:7-9. How serious does Jesus say we should be about avoiding sin and causing others to sin?

9. According to Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, what people fall under God's condemnation?

10. Read Matthew 7:21-23. Who, according to Jesus, will enter the kingdom of heaven?

11. What positive effect does the belief in the reality of hell have on your life?

Memory Verse

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

—1 Corinthians 15:57

Food for Thought

According to the scriptures, man's first encounter with an angel didn't go so well. Amid the glories of Eden, Satan approaches Eve and suggests that God is overly restrictive: *Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?* (Genesis 3:1). Eve corrects Satan's initial subterfuge, but fares poorly when he counters by challenging God's trustworthiness and motives: *"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil"* (Genesis 3:4,5). The tempting fruit beckoned, and she ate.

Commentators like to point out the multi-faceted appeal of the forbidden fruit. It was good for food, pleasing to the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom. But the battle was lost not when Eve's eye lighted upon the fruit, nor when her hands plucked it from the tree, nor when her lips tasted its sweet nectar. The battle was lost when she believed the serpent's lie and doubted God's trustworthiness and motives.

There is a lesson for us here. Any spirit being who diminishes the trustworthiness of God's words and character is not to be trusted, despite claiming to be concerned about your enlightenment. Satan still masquerades as an angel of light.

Prayer Guide

Father, you have made awesome provisions for my salvation. Thank you that your angels do your bidding to promote my salvation. As I take comfort in all that you do for me, may I never lose sight that your desire—and that of the entire host of heaven—is for me to worship and serve you.

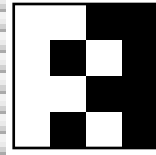
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Unit 10 • Lesson 4

What Does The Bible Say About Angels?

Angels are a vast host of spirit beings with differing ranks who, according to Job 38:4-7, witnessed the creation of the world. They possess superhuman power and intelligence. Angels are aware of our lives and can intervene in and influence human affairs. The angels who did not abandon their glory to join Satan's rebellion continue to worship God and live in perfect harmony with his will.

According to Hebrews 2:7, man was created a little lower than the angels, yet is served by these heavenly beings, as Hebrews 1:14 rhetorically notes: *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?* Imagine. As a Christian, you are served by God's holy angels.

Throughout the Bible, you'll find these messengers of God ministering to people. Sometimes they bring comfort to the afflicted; at other times they execute God's judgment upon the wicked. Sometimes they direct, deliver or defend the people of God; at other times they convey God's word to the prophets of God. Angels perform a variety of ministries that are all directed by God's sovereign will.

Remember that just because the scriptures *report* about how angels have ministered to God's people in the past does not mean that the scriptures *promise* angels will serve God's people the same way in the present. The fact that scripture records a few of God's people being visited by angels does not mean that most of God's people are served this way. These ministering servants usually operate completely undetected, but that does not mean that they are uninvolved in your life. Angels do whatever work God directs them to do, even though you may be completely unaware of their work.

When thinking about angels, remember that their work is to promote your salvation, not to secure your devotion or worship. These glorious beings are merely creatures, not the Creator. Worship and devotion must be directed to God and him alone. John was reminded of this when he fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who guided his visions in the book of Revelation. John reports: *But he said to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!”* (Revelation 22:9). Sound advice. Worship God. Paul warns: *Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize* (Colossians 2:18). A misplaced emphasis on angels is dangerous to your spiritual well-being.

God does work directly in your life. Yet he also works through his people and his angels to accomplish his will. However he chooses to work, his goal remains the same—to promote our salvation and his glory. His angels are his allies in that effort..

1. What do you think are some of the extremes that people embrace in their beliefs about angels?

2. According to Hebrews 1:6, what relationship do the angels have with Jesus?

How might their response to Jesus remind us who he is and what our response to him should be?

3. Read Psalm 91:9-12. How do the angels minister to those who live in the Lord?

4. What does Jesus say about the little ones that he mentions in Matthew 18:10?

5. Read Daniel 10:12-21. What does this passage reveal about some of the things that angels do?

6. Read 2 Kings 6:8-23, which records the account of Elisha’s encounter with the Aramean troops. Note verses 15-17. What should we keep in mind when we feel spiritually overwhelmed and fear that the odds are stacked against us?

7. Read Matthew 25:31. What facts does Jesus note about his Second Coming?

8. After Jesus tells the parable of the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30), he explains it to his disciples in Matthew 13:36-43. What will the angels do when Christ comes again?

9. Read Luke 15:10. What is the reaction of the angels when a sinner repents?

10. How has your study of angels increased your appreciation of God’s power, love and creativity?

Memory Verse

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

—1 Corinthians 15:57
