

A TRANSFORMED LIFE

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Available on www.godlymatters.com

Introduction

I designed this study to help Christians learn to be “fully equipped for every good work.” It will be impossible for the teacher to discuss every point brought up in the material. Therefore, it is very important that the student reads the lesson before class and answers the questions. This will enable you to better understand and take part in class.

I designed each lesson to provide practical instruction for spiritual growth. By following the daily Bible reading suggestions, you can meditate on the lesson throughout the week. Through His word, God can transform your life and mind.

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Notes

- All Bible quotes are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.
- Word meanings were researched using Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, W.E.Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Tyndale’s Word Study Concordance, and The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.
- Other reference works are cited within the text.

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The Transformation of the Christian

Read and Meditate

Thursday:	Romans 12:1-2
Friday:	2 Corinthians 3:18
Saturday:	2 Corinthians 4:7-18
Sunday:	1 John 1:3-6
Monday:	Ephesians 6:10-20
Tuesday:	Colossians 3:1-17

Romans 12:1-2 *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*

The Christian life is a changed life. Becoming a Christian is not an action that occurs in the past but is a process that begins at baptism and continues until death.

The Greek word used for *transformation* in Romans 12:2 means “to change into another form” (*Vine’s*). The Greek word has the same form as our word *metamorphosis*, which we use to describe a process such as the radical change of a caterpillar into a butterfly. This same word described Jesus’ *transfiguration* where *“He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light,”* Matthew 17:2.

Transformation Begins in the Mind

Paul encouraged the Romans to be made in the image of Christ not in the mold, or form, of the world. The transformation of a Christian begins in his mind. Consider these verses:

 **2 Corinthians 10:5** – We must bring every thought under control.

 **Mark 7:20-23** – The heart of a man is the source of his actions.

 **Romans 1:21-22** – Terrible abominations are rooted in evil and futile thoughts.

 **Colossians 3:1-3** – Set your mind on things above.

The mind of the world dwells on carnal and futile thoughts. These thoughts have led ungodly men to introduce abominations, such as idolatry, homosexuality, evil inventions and the like. The worldly mind focuses on the present world and indulging desires aroused through evil presented in television, movies, songs, books, online, and through popular opinion. Media is not wrong, but we must not allow the flood of worldly information to change us for the worse.

Our principles and focus must come from the word of God. In Colossians 3:2, Paul urges us to *set* our minds on things above. Strong’s Concordance defines *set* as “*exercising the mind towards, being mentally disposed to, and to set affection toward.*” This transcends mere thought of heavenly things. We decide to think like Christ so that the natural state of the changed mind dwells on godly things and making judgments considering Christ’s doctrine.

The Philippians were urged to focus their thoughts on holy and good things, Philippians 4:8.

Whatever things are...		
	Definition	Opposite
True	Manifest, fact, conforming to reality	False
Noble	Honest, grave, venerable, serious	Foolish
Just	Right way, right conduct; state of being right judged by a divine standard	Unjust
Pure	Clean, free of impurities	Polluted
Lovely	Pleasing, agreeable	Unpleasant
Good Report	Well-spoken of, reputable	Worthless
Think On These Things!		

Consider popular movies, TV shows, books, and songs. Can we say that all that we watch, read, and hear is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, or of good report? We must not be deceived; these things affect our thoughts.

Transformation Continues in our Actions

After we transform our minds, our actions must change. Jesus taught that a man's heart dictates his actions. If our heart is right, right actions will follow. A godly life is the natural result of a mind cleansed by God and consecrated to Him.

When we set our minds on things above our actions will change. Colossians 3:5-17 describes this transformation:

Put to death/put off	Put on
Fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, lying	Holiness, tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, bearing with one another, forgiving, love
<i>This is the old man, made in the image of the world.</i>	<i>This is the new man, made in the image of the Creator.</i>

As Paul illustrates, the new man acts differently towards his fellow man. He wants to build other people up, not destroy them. He speaks good, not evil. He is long-suffering, not impatient. Our actions towards other people change because our attitude towards them has changed. God commands us to serve others as part of our service to Him. We must transform from a self-seeking, self-centered being into a selfless servant, like Jesus, who, though a king, wanted to serve rather than be served.

The Goal of Transformation

What is the goal of the transformation of mind and actions? Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:18: *“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”* We are looking into a mirror, and we see ourselves transforming into Christ. As we look, more of our old man, our old life, fades away and the image of Jesus reflected to us becomes clearer. We are becoming more like Jesus so that when we see ourselves, we truly see Jesus in thought and action in our lives.

In the next chapter, 2 Corinthians 4:11, Paul continued this thought: *“For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”* Paul clearly stated this goal: the life of Jesus must be manifested in our lives. Earlier, he compared it to treasure, like gold or jewels, in earthen pottery because *“the power may be of God and not of us.”* We are constantly trying to live like Jesus, but we realize that we will not have complete perfection on this earth.

Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* We crucify the old man of sin, bury him at baptism (Romans 6:4-6) and are raised to live a new life—Christ living in us. It is a life of faith, founded on the word of God (Romans 10:17). This demands that we study what Christ did and emulate Him.

According to John in 1 John 2:5-6, we must keep the commandments of God and live as Jesus lived. Some who promote the WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) merchandise are really telling people to do what *they think* Jesus would do. The Christian, however, must study what Jesus *did* and emulate them. We must ask, “What *did* Jesus do?” Our decisions must never be based on our own suppositions and guesses but on the knowledge revealed by God (Jeremiah 10:23).

People often think of Christian morality as a kind of bargain in which God says, “If you keep a lot of rules, I’ll reward you, and if you don’t I’ll do the other thing.” I do not think that is the best way of looking at it.

I would much rather say that every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing into a Heaven creature or a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow creatures, and with itself.

To be the one kind of creature is Heaven: that is, joy, peace, knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other.

-C. S. Lewis

Questions for Lesson 1

1. What is the meaning of transformation?
2. Describe God's work and your work in your life transformation.
3. What are some practical ways we can transform our minds daily?
4. How do you think a person who claims to be a Christian, but has not transformed his life, will act?
5. What does it mean to have Christ living in us?

Priorities and Principles

Read and Meditate

Thursday:	Matthew 22:34-40
Friday:	Romans 13:11-14
Saturday:	1 Peter 1:13-25
Sunday:	Matthew 7:24-29
Monday:	Colossians 4:2-6
Tuesday:	1 Thessalonians 2:11-14

1 Peter 2:11-12: *“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*

Establishing Priorities

When we become Christians, our priorities must change. We must no longer be like those who have no direction, no goal, and no hope. We must place a single goal above all others: serving God. In earthly goal setting, we establish a goal and chart a path to reach that goal.

Consider the example on the right. If we set a goal to get a particular type of job, we would chart a path that might include several supporting goals. We must reach the supporting goals to reach our primary goal. In the astronaut example, when we have met the physical and educational requirements, we are ready to pursue the job.

I doubt if anyone approaches their goal of serving God in this way and it would be exceedingly difficult to do in all areas of life. However, if we identify characteristics that must define our lives as Christians, we can also decide specific actions that would develop these characteristics.

For example, as a Christian I realize that considering Hebrews 5:12-14 and 1 Peter 2:2, I must grow in the knowledge of God. I can set goals from generic supporting goals to specific actions to lead me to those goals:

1. I will read the Bible daily according to the daily Bible reading schedule in my Bible.
2. I will study a particular New Testament book in detail each month (general goal).
 - 2.1. I will study the book of John in January (specific goal).
 - 2.1.1. I will outline the book of John.
 - 2.1.2. I will define difficult words.
 - 2.1.3. ...

Goal: Become an Astronaut

Tasks/Subtasks:

1. Talk to NASA to determine the physical requirements.
 - 1.1. If I do not fit into those requirements, determine if there are any exceptions.
 - 1.1.1. If no exceptions, must make career change (END).
2. Determine the educational requirements.
 - 2.1. Find a school that will provide the proper training.
 - 2.1.1. Apply for school.
 - 2.1.2. Register for class.
 - 2.1.3. Take classes

<each class will have goals in order to finish with a passing grade.>

The list would continue until all requirements are met and would include job search and interviewing goals.

We could add many tasks to the above example. However, we must not be so grandiose in our plans that we create unrealistic expectations. We have many things in both the spiritual and physical worlds that need our attention, although the spiritual must take priority. We must “redeem the time” to be good stewards of each passing day. With forethought, we can make simple daily changes that will help us grow in Christ. To build a great life, we simply need to add to our work each day.

Guiding Principles

The New Testament does not give many specific “do” and “don’ts” as in the Old Testament. There are many specific commands, but we must make most of our decisions using principles established in the word of God. We do not have a specific command: “Thou shalt not cheat on your federal income tax form.” Nevertheless, we do have the principles of honesty, fairness, and “paying taxes to whom taxes are due” in the scriptures. The Bible does not outline specifics on our apparel (how long, how tight or loose, etc.) but does command us to be modest, able to blush, not to incite others to lust, and wear clothing that reflects godliness, not worldliness. Through an honest application of these principles, we can determine what is proper attire.

Some will say, “But the Bible doesn’t say not to” when trying to defend something that may have no specific restriction but is against the very principles of Christianity. Does the defendant believe in a loophole that will allow his behavior to pass on the Day of Judgment? There are things that might be good that are forbidden in certain circumstances such as eating meat in 1 Corinthians 8:13. Eating meat offered to an idol is not wrong *unless* it causes my brother to stumble.

As Christians, we must grow to maturity so we can use the word of God to make decisions in our lives. We must pursue or avoid some things based on general principles of godliness and holiness. The Bible does not tell us what specific movies to watch, books to read, music to listen to, or TV programs to watch. We are given principles that must guide our thoughts: *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things,”* Philippians 4:8.

Some may be frustrated since there are not many “*thou shalt*” and “*thou shalt not’s*” in the New Testament (note: The Old Testament had guiding principles as well: Matthew 22:34-40). However, God is trying to make us better people, not just individuals who can read a checklist and do what is commanded. God did not create us to check off a list of commands but to transform us into Christ-like creatures that want to be godly, holy, and useful for every good work. We must guide our mind by principles in addition to following specific commands.

You will find no book of the New Testament that lists all of these principles. The principles are spread throughout the Bible, are seen in the life of Christ, and are the very fabric from which the Christian life is made. By daily study and practice, we can learn the principles and the thought processes that must guide our daily decisions.

Questions for Lesson 2

1. Describe the general and specific goals that would accomplish the following:
Show my love and concern for my sick brethren

Strengthen my prayer life

Be the type of (husband/wife/child) that God wants me to be

2. What are some sacrifices that might be necessary to have more time to accomplish these goals?
3. How do we learn the principles that must guide our lives? How long will it take?

Personal Transformation: Influence

Read and Meditate

Thursday:	2 Chronicles 33:1-23
Friday:	Proverbs 1:10-19
Saturday:	Proverbs 2:10-22
Sunday:	Psalms 1:1-6
Monday:	Hebrews 10:22-25
Tuesday:	1 John 2:15-17

2 Corinthians 6:14-16: *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.*

We influence others, but other people also influence us. Influence can be as overt as being persuaded to do something right or wrong or as subtle as developing one's self-image based on Hollywood stars. We must filter outside influences, but we must be mindful that our actions will influence others.

Influence of Friends

One of our strongest influences is our friends. The friends we choose will help us draw closer to God or go farther away from Him. There are good examples like Cornelius in Acts 10 who invited his friends to hear the gospel. There are bad examples like the friends of Rehoboam, in 2 Chronicles 10, who gave Rehoboam bad advice which cost him most of the kingdom.

Proverbs 12:26 and 22:24-25 warn us to choose our friends carefully since the wicked can lead us astray. Most people are familiar with 1 Corinthians 15:33: *"Evil company corrupts good habits."* When our closest friends are people who do not share our faith, priorities, and principles, we create the potential for many conflicts and unnecessary tests of our faith. We should not abandon friendships with non-Christians but should make our closest companions (who are in greater positions of influence) those who share our values and priorities. Some have lost their faith by associating with very worldly people thinking, "I will change them." However, it is often the child of God who is changed, and usually for the worse. Paul prefaces his "evil companions" warning of 1 Corinthians 15:33 with *"Do not be deceived."* It is easy for us to deceive ourselves and think that others cannot corrupt us.

Good friends can greatly strengthen us. Proverbs 27:17 teaches that good friends can improve one another as iron sharpening iron. We should choose our closest friends from the children of God. They understand the trials that we face, the importance of service to God, and the principles that guide our lives. By our mutual associations, we can encourage one another to do what is right, Hebrews 10:24-25. We will discuss this in detail in a later chapter.

Influence of a Spouse

The influence of a spouse is one of the strongest influences. The Bible tells of married couples like Aquila and Pricilla who were co-workers in the Lord. We can also read of people like Jezebel and Solomon's wives who led their spouses away from God. If you are unmarried, you need to choose carefully the person you will marry because the decision will have eternal consequences. Paul urged the widows to marry *"in the Lord,"* 1 Corinthians 7:39. I believe that *"in the Lord"* means more than one who is simply baptized but describes someone truly

dedicated to God. A faithful companion can encourage us to do what is right if we are struggling, can provide godly advice when we are making decisions, and will share godly goals for the family. One who does not share all these goals can challenge our decisions on a regular basis and may prevent one from serving God properly. Many Christians have been lost because they married someone “they thought they could change” only to give up the fight for what is right in order to have peace in the home.

Influence of Parents

The influence of parents is also very strong. Godly parents can direct a child into a right path from which he will not stray. However, parents who only profess Christ but do not truly live according to His principles can turn their children from the Lord. We can study about godly men like David whose sinful actions caused rebellion among his children. There were men like Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33) who lived wickedly then repented but lost their children due to their wickedness. Parents influence their children’s view of the world, work, other family members, and the church.

Some children become unfaithful to the dismay of the parents. The parents however were sporadic in their attendance, allowed the children to miss church for social and sporting events, allowed them to watch inappropriate things on T.V. and movies, and talked down the preacher, the elders, and the other members on the way home from church services. Is it any wonder that the children had no desire to become Christians?

In a Truth Magazine the following survey results appeared:

The Boulevard church of Christ, in Baton Rouge, La., engaged in a thorough study of the problem in their congregation: They were losing many of their young people. In fact, they had been losing 38% of their young people and in one year, the figure was as high as 73%. Why?

- ◆ They found that when both parents were faithful and active 93% of their children remained faithful.
- ◆ Where only one parent was active and faithful, 74% continued the Christian life.
- ◆ Where parents were reasonably faithful but inactive in the Lord’s work, 53% continued their relationship with the Lord.
- ◆ Where the parents only attended Bible classes occasionally only 6% of the children remained faithful.

We must be alert to the many conscious and unconscious things we do that influence our children. We show them priorities and principles and their proper use. If we do not teach them how to make proper decisions and how to discern right from wrong, who will?

Godly parents must teach their children according to the principles of Deuteronomy 6:6-9: *“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”* Deuteronomy 4:9 also stresses this responsibility to the grandparents. We can see the grandparent’s role when they are the primary caregiver, but it is great when godly grandparents reinforce the teaching of godly parents. It is wonderful to see several generations of a family worshipping together. Sometimes godly advice shunned when

given by a parent is soberly accepted when a godly grandparent, from years of experience and knowledge of the word of God, teaches the child.

Parents must take time to teach Bible stories, the message of salvation, and share their own faith with their children. Children should see genuine love and dedication between the parents. Parents must live daily sermons on honesty, righteousness, forgiveness, humbleness, love, purity, and good works. Verbal lessons will be worthless if the children cannot see the lessons live in the parents' lives.

Influence of Entertainment

Although we may not realize it, the things that entertain us can greatly influence us. Their influence is more subtle, like the gradual erosion of a rock by rain, wind, and heat. Yet, gradually the entertainment industry can shape our minds. Many women have poor self-esteem because they cannot look like T.V. stars or models. However, the stars and models do not look perfect either! We see the final product, filtered by editing rooms and touch up artists. There are no perfect looking people and, as the Bible teaches, these transitory features must not be our focus anyway, Proverbs 31:30.

The media culture will try to convince us that we do not have enough. It teaches that unless we have certain labels on our clothes, certain jobs, elite neighborhoods, and the like, that we will be miserable. Therefore, we must continue to shop and continue to buy. Proverbs 27:20 warns us: *"Hell and Destruction are never full; So, the eyes of man are never satisfied."* We must be content, 1 Timothy 6:6.

The entertainment industry often teaches values that are not in harmony with the Scriptures. The popular culture approves of homosexuality, divorce for any cause, premarital sexual relations, drunkenness, and other things contrary to sound doctrine. We can desensitize ourselves to the abhorrent nature of these sins by exposing ourselves to it a little at a time. The gradual assault on our minds can erode our good morals and godly principles. Sadly, we have opened the door for these influences, sat them down in our houses, and even placed them before our children.

Positive entertainment, when shared by godly friends, can draw people closer together. We can do many activities as Christians. Our joy is enhanced when we can do those activities with our fellow brethren and families. There are some movies and TV shows, though rare, that provide positive lessons and exemplify good principles. Some songs extol the marriage relationship, the parent-child relationship, and doing the right thing. We can properly use what is good but must shun evil.

Questions for Lesson 3

1. What are the Bible principles for choosing friends?
2. What are the dangers of choosing close friends who are worldly?
3. How can a spouse influence the other spouse for good? For evil?
4. What is some evidence of the dangerous influence of entertainment in our lives?
5. How can popular entertainment influence the church?

Personal Transformation: Christian Speech

Read and Meditate

Thursday:	James 3:1-12
Friday:	Ephesians 5:1-7
Saturday:	Ephesians 4:29-32
Sunday:	Proverbs 8:5-9
Monday:	Proverbs 10:18-21
Tuesday:	Colossians 4:5-6

James 3:8-11: *But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?*

The greatest challenge to transformation is controlling the tongue. The Christian must be careful how he speaks. He must guard his tongue from speaking wicked and perverse things. He must also be willing to bless and comfort others with his words. He must be ready to speak the truth. We must control our tongues.

Consider James' description of the tongue:

A little member	Although the tongue is small, because it forms every word that we speak, it reveals our heart and truly reveals what is within.
Fire	Like a small flame carelessly left burning, can start a great forest fire, the tongue can with a few words cause great problems and dissension.
World of iniquity	This little member can commit so many sins. It can lead to sins that will involve the whole body.
Unruly evil	It is evil and cannot be restrained.
Full of deadly poison	We can destroy ourselves and others with the poison that is in the tongue. There is always a ready supply of poison that can damage others.

Filthy Language

Christians must put away sinful speech that characterizes the world. A distinguishing characteristic that may identify us as Christians is pure speech. The Bible condemns bad language that is not fitting for saints in Ephesians 5:4.

Filthiness: Vine's describes it as obscenity, opposed to purity. Strong's defines it as that which is shameful and dirty.

Foolish talking: Literally, silly talking. Vine's defines it as dull, foolish and stupid talking. Trench describes it as the "talk of fools." McKnight describes it as language in which one's neighbor is rendered ridiculous and contemptible, buffoonery.

Filthy language (KJV -coarse jesting): Obscene or dirty jokes and filthy innuendo. It is language that is twisted to mean filthy things.

Paul wrote that filthy language is not proper for Christians. Some make the life of Christ appear foolish by their humor and their speech. Imagine one who uses filthy language most days then invites someone to a gospel meeting or condemns some false practice using the scriptures. Filthy language so pollutes the reputation of a person so that even his good speech is tainted.

Peter provides us with a clear example of the worldly example of filthy language. During Jesus' trial, Peter was in a courtyard with the crowd that arrested Jesus. Several people recognized Peter and knew that he had been with Jesus. Peter denied the charge vehemently. After further accusations, he began to curse and swear to prove that he had not been with Jesus, Matthew 26:73-74. If we curse and swear, what does it say about our relationship to Jesus?

Wrathful Language

We must watch our language when we are angry. James wrote, *"the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God."* Many people have damaged or destroyed their reputation because they would restrain their tempers. Anger acts like an intoxicant that can cause one to lose control and do or say things he typically would not. Christians must have their tempers under our control, to *"be angry and sin not."* Paul condemned the following types of wrathful language in Colossians 3:8:

Anger: An excitement of the mind and violent passion. Vine's suggests that this is a settled or abiding condition of the mind that often has a view towards revenge.

Wrath: The outburst resulting from anger inside.

Malice: "A disposition or intent to injure others for gratification of anger" (Lipscomb).

Blasphemy (KJV – railing): Scornful and derisive language directed at man or God. "To blame with bitterness" (Lipscomb).

Add to this list gossiping and backbiting that 2 Corinthians 12:20 condemns. Gossip pushes another person down to exalt the speaker.

No one speaks wrathful language in love, and it destroys. It tears at a person, as a wild animal would devour his helpless prey. When we talk with our spouses, parents, children, and friends, we must be especially careful not to allow our familiarity to be a license for such shameful speech. Consider Proverbs 15:1-2: *"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness."* The prudent man controls his anger, Proverbs 12:16.

Blasphemous Language

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray in Matthew 6:9, He taught them to hallow the name of God—to consider the name of God sacred and holy. God has never allowed a casual use of His name. In the Ten Commandments, God decreed, *"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."* Many people, even some Christians, will say, "Oh, my God," "Oh, my gosh," or "Jesus Christ" as an expletive. This abuse does not "hallow" the name of God but treats it as a common thing. Some scribes who copied the Bible texts would wash their hands (and sometimes their whole bodies) and take a new pen that had never been used, to write the name of God. They would not even mumble the name of God to themselves as they wrote, lest they speak His name in vain. We must always reverence the name of our God.

Euphemisms

Euphemisms are an improper use of the tongue. A euphemism is a word used in the place of another. Some will use the word “gosh” instead of “God” in expletives. Some will say “darn,” “dang,” “heck,” “freaking,” and other words instead of their more obscene counterparts. It is noble to be conscientious to avoid saying profane words, but it is better for Christians to avoid such words and phrases altogether. Our language must be pure with no hint of evil.

Lying

Lying is a sin that must never characterize the life of a Christian. God is truth, the devil is the father of lies. We show our allegiance to God by putting away all lying and speaking only the truth, Ephesians 4:25. We must not speak outright lies nor are we to deceive others by leaving a false conclusion. Deceit literally means “bait” and “decoy.” When we deceive others we give them a decoy, a false assumption to pursue and do not correct them. In the family, business, and the church there must only be truth and righteousness on our lips. We must speak the truth no matter what the consequences are and live responsibly, so we are not tempted to lie.

Godly Language

The Christian’s language must be godly and reflect a heart consecrated for God. Paul commanded the Ephesians to let no corrupt communication proceed from their mouths but rather words of edification and grace, Ephesians 4:29. He wrote the Colossians to walk wisely around worldly people and to speak gracefully and thoughtfully, Colossians 4:6. He told Titus to encourage the young men to have sound speech that could not be condemned, Titus 2:8.

Our words must encourage and edify all men, especially our brethren. Our speech must be graceful, or beautiful. We must speak words of kindness. When we must speak tough words, such as words of rebuke, we must still speak with grace and love, Ephesians 4:15.

Our words can comfort the downhearted, 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Too many brethren suffer without a word of exhortation from loving brethren. We pray for these individuals, but we should also call or send a card to show our concern. Since we have been comforted by God, we should comfort others, 2 Corinthians 1:4.

Christians must always be ready always to give a defense of our faith, with a meek and fearful spirit, 1 Peter 3:15. Proverbs 15:28: *“The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.”* Christians must study the word to prepare a scriptural defense of his belief. A foolish person, on the other hand, will answer “my church believes...,” or “my preacher says...,” or “I think...” We cannot answer the world in its folly. We must know why we believe what we believe and be able to defend it with scripture. When we do this, we will take our tongue, that unruly evil, and use it for good.

Questions for Lesson 4

1. Why is it so difficult to control the tongue?
2. We know that coarse jesting is inappropriate for Christians. Is it ok to listen to it? Why or why not?
3. How can we avoid using wrathful language?
4. How is blasphemous language insulting to God?
5. Describe the language that must characterize the Christian.
6. Think about some of the words that you use when you are angry or other interjections. Look them up in the dictionary to make sure that you are not using a euphemism that could send a wrong message to the hearer. I heard a preacher use a common slang word from the pulpit to describe a stupid person. I asked him later if he knew what that really meant. I then showed him in the dictionary that it was a slang word for something lewd. We must make sure that we do not pick up words from the world or even other brethren and use them without knowing what they really mean.

Loving my Brethren as Christ Loved

Read and Meditate

Thursday:	Colossians 3:12-17
Friday:	Ephesians 4:1-6
Saturday:	Romans 14:19-23
Sunday:	Matthew 5:43-48
Monday:	1 Corinthians 8:1-13
Tuesday:	1 Corinthians 6:1-11

1 John 4:20-5:1 *“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.”*

The transformation of a Christian is seen in his changed mind and his changed actions. A notable change in the life of the Christian is his treatment of his brothers and sisters. As John wrote above this should be a natural progression of our transformation: as we love God, we love those begotten of Him. Can we claim to be like Christ when we hate those whom God loves?

Love is Commanded

God commands us to love our brethren. Loving my brother is not an option, nor is it a command that I can follow selectively. Although we realize that some brethren’s personalities clash with ours, or they have habits or idiosyncrasies that bother us, we must work harder to overcome these minor things to be brethren.

Some have the attitude, “I have to love him but that doesn’t mean that I have to like him.” Perhaps they wish to reconcile the command to love our brethren and the reality that some brethren can be obnoxious, overbearing, insensitive, and annoying. How can we truly have love for our brethren if we do not make significant attempts to overcome the natural reaction to avoid these people? Will we show true hospitality, help, love, and concern for someone we *love* but whom we make conscious efforts to avoid? A better approach is to look past character traits to the soul within. Perhaps the gentle rebuke made in sincere love could chisel away some undesirable characteristics to make the brother lovable to others. Certainly, there are people who grate on our nerves, but we probably grate on the nerves of others as well.

Paul addresses the need to make a special effort to love the unlovable in Colossians 3:13: *“bear with one another.”* The word “bear” here is used elsewhere of God suffering or bearing with us (Matthew 17:17, Mark 9:19). In 2 Corinthians 11:1,19, the same word is used in a sense that we might translate as *put up with*. There is a great need for us to *suffer with, forbear, put up with, and bear with* one another. We come from different backgrounds, geographical areas, financial situations, educational levels, etc. We are a dissimilar people unified into one body under one head. It is essential that we bear with one another and not willfully withhold our full love for some brethren because we do not “like” them. “What do you do more than others? Even the tax collectors love those who love them,” Matthew 5:46 (paraphrased)

Colossians 3:12-17

Note Paul's lessons of brotherly love in Colossians:

"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved" *Therefore* connects the previous verses: you have put on the new man and put off the old man, you were raised with Christ, and you are setting your mind on things above. You are the chosen of God (elect) according to your response to His calling through the word of the gospel, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14. You are holy (sanctified) as God is holy, 1 Peter 1:15-16, and loved by the Father.

"put on..."

<i>Tender mercies</i>	"Bowels of mercy"(KJV); "heart of compassion" (NASB). It is translated from two Greek words that indicate the mercy and compassion that comes from deep within oneself, not just a show of mercy that is expected but not really felt.
<i>Kindness</i>	"Grace in action. It is a sweetness of disposition, a desire for the good of others." –Robert Gromacki
<i>Humbleness of mind</i>	True humility before God and others. This, like tender mercies, is not an outward show for others but a genuine, humble spirit.
<i>Meekness</i>	Literally, strength under control. "Gentle and forbearing under ill-treatment and provocation, but firm and unyielding in devotion to right." –David Lipscomb
<i>Longsuffering</i>	Bearing up under suffering, patient. Not easily angered.
<i>Bearing with one another</i>	(Discussed above). A toleration for others. It overlooks mannerisms, idiosyncrasies, and similar things which bother us.
<i>Forgiving one another as Christ forgave us</i>	We must live to the high standard of forgiveness that Christ has shown towards us. If we were forgiven much, we must forgive much. "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," Mt. 6:12.
<i>Love, the bond of perfection</i>	This love is to bind the Christians to Christ and one another, Colossians 2:2. It motivates us to change.

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful." The peace of God is to "umpire" our hearts and direct our lives. When we have peace with God, it is easier to have peace with our brethren, especially those who require more longsuffering. We are unified in one body when we all are ruled by the peace of God and seek the things which make for peace, Romans 14:19.

An example of seeking peace is in 1 Corinthians 6:1-11. I should not take my brother who has wronged me to court but rather accept the wrong rather than disgrace the name of the Savior and the church before the world. Sometimes we have to "accept the wrong" to make for peace. It is not wrong to confront a brother for an expense resulting from his negligence, but if he will not hear you, or the church, it is better to accept the wrong and let the great Judge, our God, administer justice.

Loving my Brother's Conscience

When I love my brethren as Christ loved me, I will not do anything that might cause them to stumble and be lost. To accomplish this, we must have true love for our brethren, forbearance, long-suffering, and patience developed in our lives. Though it is difficult, I may have to refrain from doing something that I know is not condemned in the presence of a brother who, because he does not have knowledge, would be offended. Consider the issue of eating meat offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. The issue was not whether it was right to eat meat offered to idols or not; eating meat was not condemned. The real issue was that if I have a brother in Christ who does think it is wrong to eat meat offered to idols and I, knowing this, eat meat that is offered to idols (since I know that it is not condemned), that I may encourage my brother to eat in violation of his conscience. I have used my liberty to cause my brother to stumble.

It is not wrong for me to eat meat that has been offered to idols, but my brother who does not have this knowledge, if he eats, will be condemned because he has violated what he believes to be commanded by God. I must not put my brethren into that situation. Note the strong language of Paul in verse 12: *"But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ."* When doing something that is not wrong, but doing it in the wrong circumstance, I sin against my brethren and Christ. My brother and I may be lost through my knowledge!

Paul's solution to the problem is if an action causes my weak brother to stumble, I will not do it. My brother's conscience is more important than food or anything else that would make him stumble. This sacrifice is a practical application of bearing with one another.

Conclusion

As I transform my life, I must change my attitude towards and treatment of my brethren. I am to look out for their soul's salvation as well as my own. I am to bear their burdens, edify them, and dwell with them in peace. For some people this may be relatively easy but for most it will be constant work to maintain the proper attitude towards the brethren, particularly the unlovable and weak. If I want to be like Christ, and love brethren as Christ loves them, I will make it my goal to unite with them in peace in genuine love, mercy, and humility.

Questions for Lesson 5

1. Since we are commanded to love our brethren, what would constitute disobedience?

2. What practical things can we do to develop love for the unlovely brother/sister?

3. What is the distinction between showing mercy and having tender mercies?

4. If my brother has wronged me, what steps should I take before “accepting the wrong?”

5. How is it possible to sin by doing something that is not forbidden?

Loving my Brethren in Service

Read and Meditate

Thursday:	Matthew 25:31-46
Friday:	Galatians 6:1-10
Saturday:	1 Timothy 6:17-19
Sunday:	1 Thessalonians 4:9-12
Monday:	James 1:21-27
Tuesday:	1 Peter 3:8-12

1 John 3:16-18: *“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”*

True love between brethren is expressed in actions. Our love is not to be in what we say but what we do. Love only expressed in words is of little value. How can we love in word only? Is our only interaction with our brethren at the worship service? Perhaps we say we love our brethren because we know that we are supposed to but, if our hearts were truly examined, we would only find affection, not true love. Love that is in word requires no sacrifice of self, time, or money, demands no action, has no risk of being hurt, and needs no deep involvement with others.

Love that is in deed and truth, true love for our brethren, is on a higher level. It requires action on our part, a show of love. Christ showed His love, not by shouting His love from heaven, but by dying on the cross. We show our love by our willingness to die for our brethren. We may say that we have this love but we must demonstrate it. Consider John’s example: If you say that you would lay your life down for your brethren but you will not give of your possessions to help your needy brother, how does the love of God abide in you? What a profound question! When we think we love our brethren as Christ loved us, we must immediately ask how the love of God abides in us. We must prove it.

John pictures a brother in need and a fellow Christian locking up his possessions by first locking up his heart. If his heart is not with his brother, the resources he has to fill his needs will not be given. Let us not be narrow regarding the needs of the brother. Perhaps the brother has emotional needs; do we lock up friendship, a word of comfort, or a sympathetic ear? If our brother has spiritual needs, do we lock up a gentle rebuke, exhortation from Gods’ word, or a prayer? Maybe the brother does need our worldly goods: a car ride to church or to the doctor, a meal in a time of sickness or bereavement, or financial help. We must unlock our possessions, time, and even ourselves and help our brethren. According to Paul, that is why we work: *“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, **that he may have something to give him who has need**,”* Ephesians 4:28 (emphasis mine-rfd).

We Were Created to be Workers

In Ephesians 2:10 Paul wrote that we are the workmanship of God created for good works. God made us to be His workers and to do His work. We are the recipients of God’s grace and we, in turn, are agents of His grace to others so that others will see the love, grace, and kindness of God through us. We are God’s grace in action for the world. We must demonstrate a love that transcends words. We pray (words) for God to bless others, but we are expected to be a blessing to them by acting for them. When we pray, “Bless Sister so-and-so who is sick” how do we

expect God to bless her? Surely we expect Him to watch over the doctors and, if it is His will, restore her health. How do we expect God to provide comfort, meals, encouragement, and other needs? We must be a blessing, workers with God, to provide blessing to our brethren.

If we are God's workers, it follows that God has work for us. As Christians, we must look for needs to meet. Generally, others will not tell us what to do.. It is our responsibility to be involved with our brethren and listen to announcements in order to find ways to be of service. We need to plan our work and do it diligently. The work is for all Christians.

Visiting Brethren in Need

Visiting the sick, shut-in, and bereaved often come to the top of the list when we think of serving our brethren. It is a noble work to visit brethren in times of need, but it is a work often neglected. The word "visit" as it is used in the scriptures, is not a social call. Consider this illustration:

Two good sisters make a call on the afternoon that another sister has returned home from the hospital following surgery. She is confined pretty closely to her bed for several days. She cannot clean the house, cook the meals, wash the dishes, and is having difficulty even watching after the children. These two "visiting" sisters wade through the mussed up living room, past the kitchen where they observe dishes stacked in the sink, and into the bedroom where the weakened post-operative patient is forced to sit through thirty minutes of delightful conversation ranging anywhere from the size of kidney stones to a discussion of the people they know who never recovered from the same type of operation the sick sister has just had. Then they arise, bid a fond farewell with these gracious words, "If there is anything we can do just let us know." Upon that they pivot and proceed once again past the dirty dishes, the empty TV dinner cartons, the dirty living room to their car where they drive home full of the satisfaction of having visited as the Lord commanded.

From Let's Go Visiting by Wayne Emmons

The word "visit" means to have oversight, inspect, to care for (Young's, Vine's). It does not describe a social visit, as is the term's common use in English. When we *visit* the sick, we must provide for their needs, see what can be done to ease their burden, and would include a social visit if it were needed.

If we ask, "Is there anything we can do?" the socially acceptable answer is "No, thank you." I must make a point here about being a recipient of godly service. If you are sick or cannot meet certain needs, do not hesitate to tell your brethren what they can do to serve you. Part of good works is allowing others to do good works for us. In our country we are so prideful and self-sustaining (we think) that we will not allow others to do things for us. In Christ this should not be. How can I be a worker for God when you will not allow me to serve you? Be gracious and thankful, then repay the deed by serving someone else.

Here are some things to consider when visiting others to serve them:

1. **Listen actively and patiently.** Give the person your full, undivided attention, allowing them to express their fears, frustrations, or spiritual doubts without interruption or trying to fix their problem.
2. **Read Scripture selectively and prayerfully.** Choose a comforting text such as Psalm 23, Psalm 46, or Romans 8.
3. **Pray with them.** Ask for their exact prayer requests and pray with them, asking God for physical healing, peace of mind, and sustaining grace.
4. **Help with practical, everyday burdens.** Lighten their load by helping with household tasks like mowing the lawn, picking up groceries, taking out the trash, or running a quick errand.
5. **Bring a simple, thoughtful comfort item.** Provide a small but needed gift such as a warm blanket, a favorite book, or a fresh meal that respects any dietary restrictions.
6. **Keep visits brief and be mindful of their energy.** Respect their physical limitations by monitoring body language and leaving before they become fatigued, ensuring your presence is still a blessing rather than a strain.
7. **Maintain strict confidentiality.** Guard their privacy by keeping any medical diagnoses, personal struggles, or private fears strictly confidential, preserving their dignity within the community. You can encourage them to share the information with the preacher or elders or someone who may can help but let it be their news to tell unless they ask you to do this on their behalf.
8. **Just be with them.** Sit quietly in the room holding their hand, sharing comfort without feeling pressured to fill every silence with words.
9. **Follow up with them.** Extend the care beyond the visit by mailing a handwritten card, leaving a brief text message or voice mail, or calling them to let them you are thinking and praying for them.
10. **Offer transportation help.** Drive or go with them to essential medical appointments, therapy sessions, or regular treatments to ease this stress and that of other caregivers.
11. **Speak words of steadfast hope.** Remind them of the enduring promises of God, His loving grace, and eternal redemption.
12. **Assist with their relationship with the church.** Offer to coordinate meals from fellow believers, help them connect to the livestream of worship services and Bible classes, or arrange for others to visit them, perhaps bringing them yourself.

Visiting the Sick

“Miserable comforters are you all,” said Job to his friends, and sometimes we are too. When visiting the sick we must guard our tongues. Many patients have had to endure well meaning visitors describing horrible tragedies of people who have had the same procedure as the patient, died after undergoing the same treatment, or died through neglect of the hospital. We should not compare medical war stories. We may make a patient fearful and even impede their recovery by our “comforting words.”

When we visit the sick, we should make our visits brief and speak softly. We should not overwhelm the patient with many visitors at once but wait if there are several others already in the room. If there are other sick people in the room, we should be considerate of them. We should listen to the patient and offer words of comfort. We must not depress them

One doctor noted that we “should not reveal negative emotional reactions through voice, countenance or manner. The patient may want to show his wound or a bottle of gallstones. Sometimes the patient may be in a pitiful condition, or the odor in the room may be so disagreeable as to make the visit an unpleasant task. Remember that the patient, if conscious, is humiliated about his own condition and aware of the burden he is placing on others” (Wayne Emmons).

Visiting the Bereaved

Most of us have great difficulty when visiting the bereaved at their home or the funeral home. After all, so great a tragedy has taken place, what can we do? We feel helpless when trying to comfort the bereaved.

We must first remember to help the living. We should show our brethren that we are concerned about them. We can show our concern by visiting them, but also taking food to the family, washing clothes, preparing the clothes for the family to wear to the funeral, helping with children, and other needful things.

We must also be mindful of our words. We must remember that no word or phrase will completely calm the mourner. Note some phrases intended for comfort that can sometimes hurt:

- ❑ **“Time heals all wounds.”** Who wants to forget their loved one who has died? Of course, things will get easier in time, but now it is not comforting.
- ❑ **“After a while you will forget.”** Again, who wants to forget their loved ones?
- ❑ **“He/She would have wanted you to...”** No one knows what a person would have truly wanted at such a time. It is an empty and speculative phrase.
- ❑ **“What a great loss you have suffered.”** Pretty obvious statement.
- ❑ **(Unborn child) “At least it happened before the baby was born.”** (Someone really said to a friend of mine.) The parents build a bond with a child even before the child is born. It is no easier to lose a child in the first few months than it is after the child is born.
- ❑ **“God wanted another angel (or wanted Him more)”** We do not become angels; they are specially created beings. This can make people angry with God since they wanted the loved one also. Again, it’s a completely unbiblical concept.

Perhaps the best thing that we can do during the time of grief is to say nothing. A warm hug and a sympathetic ear are often the best comfort we can provide. It is good to recall the deeds and the personal memories of the deceased. It can comfort the living to know that their loved one meant so much to others.

“Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” –Matthew 25:44-46

Questions for Lesson 6

1. How can we love our brethren in word but not in deed?
2. What do you think keeps some Christians from being more involved with their brethren, especially in a time of need?
3. What is the true meaning of the word “visit” as used in the New Testament?
4. What can we do to help us be more diligent in visiting the sick and others in need?
5. What is the magic phrase of comfort that will instantly comfort all bereaved people? If there is no magic phrase, what can we do to comfort the bereaved?

Loving my Brethren in Fellowship

Read and Meditate

Thursday:	Luke 14:12-14
Friday:	Hebrews 13:1-3
Saturday:	Romans 12:9-13
Sunday:	Luke 10:25-37
Monday:	2 Thessalonians 3:5-15
Tuesday:	1 Corinthians 5:1-12

1 Peter 4:8-9 *“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’ Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.”*

Galatians 6:9-10 *“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”*

Of the terms used to describe the church, one of the most endearing is “family.” We are *brothers* and *sisters* under our *Father*. We are not a dysfunctional family where there is no harmony among family members but rather, we must be “knit together” as an interwoven fabric united on all sides.

Loving as Christ in Hospitality

The early church had such love and togetherness. In Acts 2, we read that the brethren willingly shared their possessions with those in need and ate food together with gladness and simplicity of heart. Nowhere did God command the church to provide a meal for brethren to use for fellowship. In fact, Paul rebukes the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 11:22 by saying, *“What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?”* The New Testament does not authorize a “fellowship hall” as is used by so many denominations. Brethren shared social fellowship on an individual basis.

The New Testament writers urged brethren to show hospitality towards one another. The word “hospitality” literally means a “love of strangers.” In the Old Testament there were laws regulating the treatment of strangers. For example, Deuteronomy 10:18-19 commands: *“He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore, love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”* Before the Law, Abraham and Lot fed and sheltered strangers (Genesis 18, 19). These men entertained angels unknowingly, Hebrews 13:2. From the beginning, hospitality has been a virtue desired by God.

The New Testament urges us to be “given to hospitality,” Romans 12:13. The word translated “*given*” literally means to pursue. We must pursue opportunities to show hospitality. We must also recognize that many of our brethren, whom we see week after week, are still in many ways strangers to us. We may not know where they live, what their hobbies are, their likes and dislikes. When we enter their homes and they enter ours, they see what is important to us by our collections, our pictures, and our possessions. Sometimes I have learned that a brother and I have similar interests and hobbies when visiting with them. When we open our houses and our lives to our brethren, we will develop deeper friendships and brotherly love.

When we share together, we learn some needs that our brethren have. Going “house to house” is one of the best ways to develop a close relationship with his brethren.

Hospitality should extend beyond a close circle of friends. It is easy to have people in our homes on a regular basis whose company we already enjoy, and we should not neglect this. However, the transformed life extends hospitality beyond those friends. Consider Jesus' admonition in Luke 14:12-14 to not invite those who can repay us back with a meal but invite those who most need it. Their primary need might not be food but companionship. Consider also this sober lesson from our Lord:

Matthew 5:46-47: *"For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?"*

Christians must be willing to receive hospitality. When a brother invites us into his home, we should be thankful and, if possible, accept that invitation. Some people have a hard time accepting hospitality, but we help other Christians fulfill their duty by allowing them to show their love towards us. Just as we should graciously accept when they want to wash our clothes, mow our lawn, bring us food and other types of service when we are sick or otherwise in need, we must willingly receive hospitality. Some have such pride that would refuse the offers of kind brethren. We need to humble ourselves and allow them to fulfill their duty. We will have a chance to repay hospitality and service shown to us by serving others.

Loving as Christ in Discipline

In 2 Thessalonians 3:5 Paul wrote, *"Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ."* In the very next verse, he commands them to withdraw from the disorderly. Many consider withdrawing fellowship from a disorderly brother the most unloving and divisive things that we can do. However, Paul preceded this command with the exhortation to let love direct their hearts (v.5) and ended it with the prayer that God would give them peace in every way (v.16). Our love for brethren must be so strong that if it were necessary to withdraw fellowship from a brother to save his soul, we would be willing to do it.

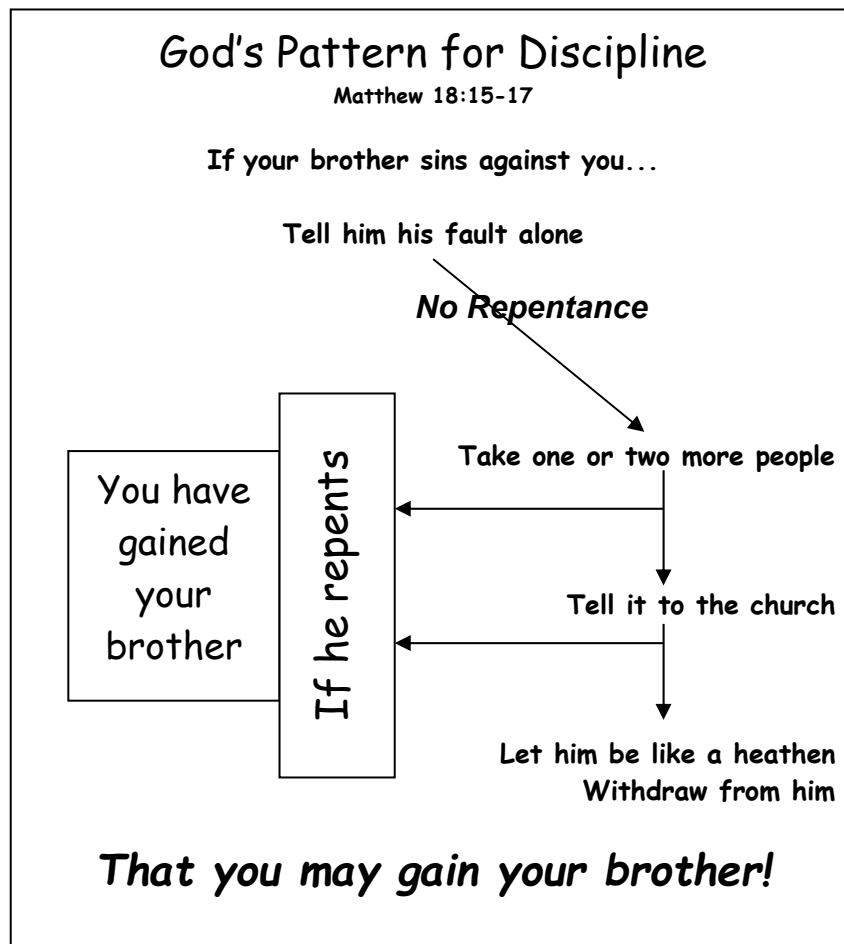
Some churches have problems with fulfilling this command. There have been cases of abuse where a member or members used this command to get rid of unwanted members; Diotrophes was like this, 3 John 9-10. In some cases, a church may withdraw fellowship from individuals without making many attempts to bring them back to the Lord. Sometimes we may be fearful of fulfilling God's command. Cowardice is condemned and must not stand in the way of obedience, Revelation 21:8.

In the preceding section, we were encouraged to be rich in hospitality and fellowship. In many cases, church discipline has not been effective because there was really no fellowship to withhold from an erring brother. What does it matter to a person who is shunned by the congregation or is not part of the right group, who has not shared hospitality with brethren, if the church withdraws fellowship from him? What has he lost? However, if we are truly knit together in love among all members, one would feel great loss at the removal of fellowship. It would teach him that he not only suffers separation from his brethren but also from his God. When real fellowship exists, the lesson is learned and there is opportunity to reclaim that soul.

In 1 Corinthians 5:4-8, Paul commanded the church to withdraw from a brother committing sexual immorality. They were to “deliver such a one to Satan” with the hope that he could be saved. What was the result? A man, claiming to be a Christian, living in sexual immorality (and therefore lost), repented and obeyed God. When he returned to God, Paul urged them to forgive, comfort, and receive him back, 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. They reaffirmed their love for him. By disciplining him, they showed great love for his soul. By receiving him back into the fold and strengthening him, they showed great love again. Consider the reason for this:

2 Corinthians 2:9 *“For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.”*

When we must show this love by discipline, we must strive to do so with a pure heart and genuine concern. Discipline must never be handled carelessly and thoughtlessly. The intent to discipline a brother or sister must have as the goal of bringing them to their senses so that they would return to God. We must be obedient in all things and not, as Paul would say, fail this test. We must be faithful to all of God’s command, for His commandments are for our good. They are not always comfortable to obey and may cause great distress at times, but they lead to everlasting life.



Questions for Lesson 7

1. Since hospitality means “lover of strangers” does it apply to our brethren? Why or why not?
2. How does hospitality strengthen our lives as Christians?
3. What things keep us from allowing others to show us hospitality?
4. Why do you think some churches do not discipline, as they should?
5. What are the proper steps in loving, fair, and effective church discipline?

Growing in Christ: Leaving the Past

Read and Meditate

Thursday:	Philippians 3:12-14
Friday:	Romans 13:11-14
Saturday:	Joshua 24:14-25
Sunday:	Mark 10:29-31
Monday:	2 Corinthians 6:14-18
Tuesday:	Matthew 12:46-50

Philippians 3:12-14 *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

It would be great if the Christian were complete and fully perfected when he came out of the waters of baptism. As we have studied, baptism marks only the beginning of the journey. Since it is a new birth, we start out as babes in Christ. As grow on the milk of the word and mature, we are perfected. Although we will not attain perfection in this life, every day we become more like Jesus and less like the old man of sin.

Leaving our Baggage Behind

We must often come to terms with sins of the past before we can grow. Some who have come to God for forgiveness still have difficulty forgiving themselves of things they have done or said before becoming Christians.

We must realize that when God forgives us of a sin, He will no longer hold that sin against us. Our sins are washed away, remitted, and blotted out. There is no more remembrance of them with God. If we obey His word, in which He promises to wash away our sins when we obey, and we still think that God has not forgiven us, we are showing a lack of trust in Him. God who cannot lie has promised to forgive our sins when we repent.

Therefore, we must forgive ourselves. We must acknowledge the wrong that has been done and determine not to do it again. Then, since God has forgiven us, we must forgive ourselves. We cannot take back words and actions, so it is foolish to spend a lot of time dwelling on past mistakes. Paul was a murderer of Christians and a leading persecutor of the church, yet he realized that God forgave him and did not dwell on his past. He became useful in the growth and strength of the church. Lessons learned from mistakes can keep us from future sin and help us warn others.

Consider Peter's example in Luke 22:31-34. Satan had asked to sift Peter like wheat. Jesus assured Peter that He was praying for him. Jesus did not pray for Satan to leave him alone, but that Peter's faith would not fail. He then exhorted Peter to encourage his brethren when he returned. We know the story of Peter's denial of Jesus. Despite this overt denial of our Lord, Peter became one of the most influential and active members of the church. He learned his lesson and was able to teach others to be humble and to be wary of the devil, 2 Peter 3:17-18. We must learn that Jesus has forgiven us and arise and encourage our brethren.

Leaving the World Behind

Paul stressed to the Romans, in Romans 13:11-14, the importance of casting off the works of darkness and walking in the light. We have spent enough of our life sinning and now we are closer to our salvation than when we first believed. Since there is much to do and little time in which to do it, we must be diligent to put away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light and get to work for the Lord.

Some Christians are ineffective in the service of God because they are not totally dedicated themselves to God. They are keeping some things of the world with them: lust, evil speaking, covetousness, worldliness, etc. These things are weighing them down and they cannot grow properly in the Lord and are useless in his service. The Hebrew writer urges us to “*lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us*” so we can run with endurance, unencumbered by the world, Hebrews 12:1.

We must either grasp God completely or the world completely. We will fail if we try to serve both, Matthew 6:24; 1 Kings 18:21. We can deceive ourselves into thinking that we are serving God while our hearts are devoted to the world. We must examine our thoughts and our actions to see if we are bearing fruit to the world or to the Lord.

Joshua urged the people to decide whom they would serve, Joshua 24:14-25. They needed to decide that day and stick with it. When they answered that they would serve the Lord, Joshua rebuked them, telling them that they could not serve the Lord because they were too fickle. A brief study of history would confirm Joshua’s assessment. They frequently declared their dedication to God only to murmur against Him and His chosen leaders soon afterward. Like that audience, we must choose today whom we will serve and then follow wholeheartedly.

Leaving Our Family Behind

It is truly a blessing when one can serve God with his family. A faithful family can have a great impact on a church and a community through its love, dedication, and service. Even if they are faithful to God, our family must come behind our love for God. Jesus taught that our love for Him is to be so strong that our family relationships are considered hate when compared to it, Luke 14:26. There are some who will not become disciples of Jesus for fear of alienating their families. Some fear that their obedience will prove that a loved one was wrong in his or her beliefs.

We must follow God because it is the right thing to do. It is great if our families will join with us in service but sometimes, we may have to remain faithful and obey God without them. An unfaithful person may be won by the faithfulness of a family member, 1 Corinthians 7:16. Some may have to struggle their whole life against one who is trying to turn them from the Lord. We have responsibilities to our families as spouses, parents, and children but our greater responsibility is to God. Children must obey their parents *in the Lord*, Ephesians 6:1. Wives must obey their husbands and may win an unfaithful spouse to the Lord in so doing, 1 Peter 3:1. However, all of our relationships must be in subjection to our relationship to Christ. We must first do what is right, without compromise, that we may follow Jesus and provide an example of godliness to our family. Those who live in such situations are held to a higher standard by the unfaithful family members and must endure many trials. Yet, we have a family on this earth, the church—on which we can rely and receive strength.

Questions for Lesson 8

1. If a Christian cannot forgive himself of his past, what effect can it have on him?
2. How can we forgive ourselves?
3. What things can encumber us and slow us down as we run the Christian race?
4. How can an unfaithful spouse be won to Christ “without a word?”
5. Jesus had a strained relationship with His brothers while on the earth and His mother had to see Him die on the cross. What does this prove about Jesus’s command to love Him even more than one’s family?

Growing In Christ: Prayer and Trust

Read and Meditate

Thursday:	1 Chronicles 29:10-18
Friday:	Matthew 6:5-15
Saturday:	Matthew 21:18-22
Sunday:	James 1:2-8
Monday:	Matthew 6:25-34
Tuesday:	Luke 18:9-14

Philippians 4:6-7: *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

One of the greatest blessings given to the child of God is prayer. We can talk with the Creator of all things, our great and merciful God, and He hears us. Many non-Christians believe themselves to be self-sufficient. Yet with this belief is the feeling that the entire world is on their shoulders. To many, prayer becomes an “emergency only” means of last resort because they are trying to take everything on themselves. Christians realize the failure of this pursuit. We realize that there are so many things out of our control and that self-sufficiency is only an illusion. We need other people and, especially, God.

As we grow, we understand that God is in control of everything and that we depend upon Him for everything. He takes care of our physical needs—giving life, rain, sun, and all the things necessary for food, breath, and daily existence. Even though we work for our food, we need God’s help in our work. God is the source of all spiritual blessings. He gives us all things for our protection and growth. We have knowledge and understanding through His word. He forgives us when we repent. He hears us when we pray.

Prayer is our acknowledgement of this dependence. Prayer must characterize the Christian life. We must pray without ceasing, 1 Thessalonians 5:17. However, some Christians spend little time in prayer every day. Maybe they pray for food, in a time of need, or pray some standard prayer in the morning or evening. Jesus, our example, was very active in prayer. He often went to pray alone for great lengths of time. As the Son of God, He demonstrated the prayer life that we should have with the Father. If the Son of God felt that so much time and attention should be given to prayer, we should feel that need so much more!

Guidelines for Prayer

Should we strut in boldly when we come into the presence of Almighty God? We must think before we pray and soberly enter His presence. We must remove all distractions from our mind. We must not be idle in our words for we are speaking to God, Ecclesiastes 5:1-2. We must be humble when approaching God, Luke 18:10-14. We must be serious and watchful when we pray, 1 Peter 4:7.

We must be living righteously when we approach God. Certainly, we will ask for forgiveness for sins we have committed, but we cannot be willfully disobedient and then pray to God expecting Him to hear us, 1 Peter 3:10-12. Husbands must dwell with their wives in a godly manner if they want their prayers heard, 1 Peter 3:7. We cannot be hypocritical when we pray, Matthew 6:5-6. God knows our hearts and will see through outward displays meant to impress others.

We must pray without doubting, James 1:6 and 1 Timothy 2:8. A double-minded and unstable man prays but does not expect God to hear him. We must be confident that God hears us and will answer us. He may not give us what we asked for but He will give us what we need.

We have several New Testament admonitions to pray continually: Acts 6:4, Romans 12:12, Ephesians 6:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:17. This is extremely important. Each prayer can be about a few things or many things, but much time should be spent in prayer every day. Not only should it be continual but also it should be the effectual fervent prayer as described in James 5:16. When we spend much time in prayer, we must not use vain repetition of meaningless words or phrases that we understand but do not really mean. Our prayers must come from the heart. The literal meaning of “effectual fervent” is active and efficient. We must be mindful of our words, that God is hearing us, and thus labor effectively in prayer.

We must pray in Jesus’ name (by His authority), Ephesians 5:20, Colossians 3:17. By saying “in Jesus’ name,” we are not uttering some incantation that will validate the prayer. Whether we close our prayer with these words or not, we must realize that it is by Jesus’s authority and with His intercession that we approach the Father.

When we pray, we must ask for things that are according to His will, 1 John 5:14-16. We must not ask for things that are illicit or harmful to others. We must pray for things that are in harmony with His doctrine.

Jesus urged believers to ask and He would give, Matthew 7:7. Prayer is powerful and can accomplish much, Matthew 21:21. God wants to give us all things, and He knows what we need, but we need to ask Him. In James 4:1-4, James condemns them because they do not ask and when they do ask they intend to abuse their blessings. We must ask with a proper motive and thank Him when He answers us.

Postures in Prayer

There is no one “right” prayer posture in the scriptures. Notice these postures in the New Testament:

- ◆ Standing, Mark 11:25.
- ◆ Bowed head, Luke 18:13.
- ◆ Kneeling, Luke 22:41, Acts 9:40, 20:36, 21:5.
- ◆ Face on the ground, Matthew 26:39.
- ◆ Lifting holy hands, 1 Timothy 2:8. The hands are held up as a child desiring to be picked up or someone begging for mercy.

Posture in prayer must never be for show, nor must it be routine or meaningless. Our prayer posture must reflect our attitude within. We are going before our King and must be humble and not bring attention to ourselves. Our prayer must be for our God; He is the only one that we need to impress. He will be impressed with a humble and meek heart, not a showy act meant to impress men, Matthew 6:5-8.

What Should We Pray For?

Those who treat us spitefully	Matthew 5:44
Harvesters for souls	Matthew 9:38
Not to enter temptation	Matthew 26:41; 6:13
Worthy to escape the vanities of life	Luke 21:34-36
Religious decisions	Acts 1:24-25
Forgiveness	Acts 8:22, 24
Brethren in distress	Acts 12:5, 12; Romans 15:30; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Philippians 1:19
Preachers	Acts 13:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; Hebrews 13:18
Elders	Acts 14:23
Journey	Acts 21:5; Philippians 1:22
Sick	Acts 28:8
Churches	Romans 1:9; 2 Corinthians 9:14
Salvation for people	Romans 10:1
For others not to sin	2 Corinthians 13:7
That love may abound	Philippians 1:9
Opportunities to teach	Colossians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 3:1
Health	3 John 1:2
Spiritually sick	James 5:15-16
Suffering	James 5:13
That God would count us worthy	2 Thessalonians 1:11
All men	1 Timothy 2:1
Kings and authorities	1 Timothy 2:2
Food	1 Timothy 4:5
Friends	2 Timothy 1:3; Philemon 1:4
Wisdom	James 1:5
Praise God	Hebrews 13:15

This list is just a sample of the many things that we can and for whom we should pray. Most prayers should have elements of:

- ◆ *Praise and Adoration* – Perhaps the most neglected part of prayer. Sometimes we need to pray with no demands for ourselves but only selfless praise to God. The Psalms are great examples for us.
- ◆ *Thanksgiving* – Giving thanks to God for what He has done for us in His love, mercy, and care. We must not be unthankful, Romans 1:21; Luke 17:11-17.
- ◆ *Confession of Sin*
- ◆ *Petition/Request* – We rely on God for everything. We must humbly ask.
- ◆ *Intercession* – We must pray on the behalf of others. We show our love and concern for them by talking to God about their needs. We should then try to help with their needs.

Questions for Lesson 9

1. Why do you think Christians are sometimes lacking in their prayer life?
2. How can we make our prayer lives more meaningful and rich?
3. What are some things that we should not pray for?
4. How is Jesus an example for prayer?
5. What is the meaning of Matthew 21:21-22. In what ways is it limited? In what ways have we limited it?

Growing in Christ: Study

Read and Meditate

Thursday:	James 1:2-8
Friday:	2 Timothy 2:14-19
Saturday:	Hebrews 5:12-6:3
Sunday:	1 Peter 1:22-2:2
Monday:	2 Timothy 3:10-17
Tuesday:	Romans 10:8-21

2 Timothy 3:15-17: *“and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

Prayer and study are two important ways we grow closer to God and become more like Jesus. In prayer, we humbly come before God and bring our praise and supplications to Him. In study, we humbly receive His word that was revealed by His Son and the writers inspired by the Holy Spirit. We learn principles for living by reading and meditating on God’s word.

Paul gave Timothy some advice that we should heed: give time to reading, exhortation and doctrine, 1 Timothy 4:13.

- ◆ Reading is simply reading the word of God to know what it teaches. We read and reread the Bible to plant the word of God in our hearts. We may not always remember what we read, but our mind is better for having the pure thoughts of God going through it instead of the base things of the world.
- ◆ Exhortation is the comfort and consolation taught by the word of God and motivation to do God’s commands. We must meditate on what we read to determine how to bring our thoughts and actions under God’s rule. We should be encouraged by what we read and endure all things for the heavenly reward.
- ◆ Doctrine is the instruction and teaching about what we believe. We must be able to defend our beliefs and refute false teaching. We can only do this if we know what is commanded. We must study doctrine to know what we must practice.

No one can study for us. We will be accountable before God for our preparation while on earth. We must not hide from this privilege and responsibility. The more we study the more we will appreciate the wonderful book and will want its company often.

Preparing to Study

Before we open God’s word, we must first prepare to study. The following principles will enhance our study:

- ◆ **Make time to study.** Study time will not “just happen.” There are too many things that can help us waste time. We must set aside time every day to focus on God’s word.
- ◆ **Have a place to study.** An ideal place will have adequate lighting, minimal interruptions, and study resources available (discussed later).
- ◆ **Have a plan for study.** The plan should be realistic and flexible. It may be the study of an issue or a section of scripture. This will help us focus your study.

- ◆ **Get help when needed.** Don't be afraid to ask someone for help in understanding a passage. Check the answer with other scriptures to make sure that it is true.
- ◆ **Pray to God for wisdom, James 1:2-8.** We are told to pray to God for wisdom for He gives liberally and without reproach. Knowledge comes from study, wisdom is the ability to use what is studied. We cannot hope for wisdom if we do not study. When we study we should not neglect to ask our benevolent God for wisdom.
- ◆ **Study with an open mind.** We must be willing to do what God commands. We must have a "speak Lord, Thy servant hears" attitude. James likens it to a man looking in a mirror, examining what is pleasing and what must be changed.
- ◆ **Use common sense.** The Bible is written in logical language and was written to the common man. We can understand it.

Approaching the Text

- ◆ **Rightly divide the word.** Realize the difference between the Old and New Testaments, the physical and the spiritual, etc. The context will help determine the difference.
- ◆ **Read, re-read, ponder, and read again.** Take time to just read the scriptures and absorb the ideas. Think about what is being said. Some passages will become clearer later in the day, in a sermon or class where the text is discussed, or much later through increased knowledge.
- ◆ **Be patient.** Some passages are difficult to understand the first couple of times they are read. Be patient with yourself. As you know more you will understand more.
- ◆ **Look at the context of the passage.** Examine the previous paragraphs and sentences to get the gist of the message. Ask the probing questions: Who, to whom, what, where, why, how. Some things are not applicable to us today (i.e., build an ark) but teach important principles.
- ◆ **Notice the "little" words and connecting words.** Little words like "*if (then),*" "*so,*" "*for,*" "*and,*" "*but,*" etc. are significant for understanding a passage. Some words like "*except,*" "*therefore,*" and "*because*" link thoughts and arguments. The omission of these words can drastically affect the meaning. This part of study cannot be overemphasized. It is critical to understanding the word of God.

Study Helps

You can purchase many study helps for the Bible. However, use study helps carefully since they are the product of man's effort and wisdom. Any interpretation of a scripture using outside helps must be in harmony with the totality of scripture.

- ◆ **A good version of the Bible.** You must start with a reliable and readable translation of the Bible, one translated by a group of scholars who were true to the ancient texts. My personal preference is the English Standard Bible. Other reliable translations include King James Version (though not as readable), the New King James, the Holman Christian Standard, the American Standard Version, and the New American Standard Version. The New International Version is readable and is basically accurate. There are some places, most notably in the book of Romans, where some passages are interpreted instead of translated. If you use the NIV, compare it to a more reliable translation during your study. Avoid one-man translations such as The Living Bible and Today's English Version or poorer translations like the Revised Standard Version. I access these electronically using the Olive Tree Bible App.
- ◆ **Bible Dictionary.** A Bible dictionary can help us understand what a word meant in the original language. We are not concerned with the modern usage of the word. We need to

know what it meant in the mind of the writer and the original audience. You may want a few of these on hand. Be mindful that some definitions can include some interpretation that might be wrong.

- ◆ **Concordance.** Lists each occurrence of a word in Scripture. Some concordances, like Strong's, will also list the original meaning of the word.
- ◆ **Bible Atlas.** Shows the places where Bible events took place.
- ◆ **Bible Customs Book.** These can help us understand how people lived in Bible times. They can also help us understand certain Bible passages.
- ◆ **Commentaries.** Be especially careful with these. They are the men's interpretations of the scriptures. There can be false teaching by well meaning individuals. We must remember that we are accountable for what we have studied and what we teach.

Example of Study Help usage: Baptism

If you wanted to know about baptism, a regular dictionary would define it as immersion, sprinkling or pouring.

A Bible dictionary would properly define it as immersion, submersion, and dipping. It did not mean, in Bible times, to sprinkle or pour.

Go to a concordance and find every use of "baptism" and discover:

- John the Baptist baptized in Salim because there was much water there, John 3:23.
- When Philip baptized the eunuch, they stopped when they came to water, they both went into the water and Philip baptized him, Acts 8:36.
- You would find that baptism saves us, 1 Peter 3:10.
- You would find that it was for remission of sins, Acts 2:38, 22:16.
- You would find that one must be baptized for salvation, Mark 16:16.
- And so on.

You would get a Bible definition that is not like the modern definition.

- ◆ **Make use of the Bible teaching in the church.** We do not usually think of this as a study help but taking notes on sermons and Bible classes can provide resources for studying and reexamining issues and passages. We can build on sermons that we have heard to gain greater knowledge of a subject or scripture. We can buy Bible study class books and study them on our own. Ask the elders or the preacher to study a particular topic or question with you. Study on your own and write down questions to ask the elders, the preacher, or someone who is knowledgeable

Your dedication to study must be a long-term commitment—a life-long dedication. In Scripture, you will find warning, comfort, exhortation, and rebuke. All of it will benefit you in this life and the life to come. It is worth the effort and its rewards are great. Teach others what you have learned, especially your family. As you teach, you will learn more.

Questions for Lesson 10

1. Why do you think some Christians do not study as they should?

2. What can we do to improve our study habits and the time spent in study?

3. How can we have prejudice when approaching the scriptures?

4. What is the danger in using commentaries?

5. How does teaching others help our study?

Growing in Christ: Teaching

Read and Meditate

Thursday:	Hebrews 5:12-6:2
Friday:	2 Timothy 4:1-8
Saturday:	Romans 2:17-24
Sunday:	Deuteronomy 4:5-10
Monday:	2 Timothy 2:1-6, 23-26
Tuesday:	Psalms 25:1-22

2 Timothy 2:1-2 *“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”*

A natural outgrowth of our knowledge of the truth should be a desire to teach others. We who have left darkness must desire to lead others out with the light of Christ. We must not be selfish with the word but willingly share it with others.

Becoming Teachers

There must be a point in our lives that we can teach others, whether one-on-one or in a more formal capacity, such as a Bible class. The Hebrew writer rebuked his readers because by the time he wrote them, they should have been teachers, but instead, they needed to be taught, Hebrews 5:12. They did not know enough to be teachers although they had plenty of time. We should not teach before we are ready for those who teach will incur a stricter judgment, James 3:1. We will be held accountable for what we teach. If we do not know the word of God correctly, we could lead many others astray. Teaching is a sober responsibility.

Although teachers will incur stricter judgment, they also receive great rewards. A person who is teaching always learns so much more than they have time to teach. They also can meditate on certain ideas and think about them in different ways to determine how best to explain it to their students. This allows the material to be better established in the mind of the teacher and makes him better equipped to teach that material in the future. Every teacher that I know has said that he learned more than his students did.

Bible Class Teachers Needed

The Bible classes at church always need teachers. Our classes need someone who is a good example and has the willingness to prepare useful lessons for the students. Godly Bible teachers who can explain the word of God clearly have won many students for Christ. Sadly, many Christians, even knowledgeable Christians, must be pushed, prodded, and harangued to teach a class. Some teachers have taught the same class for many months (even years!) and certainly need a break. However, others have not offered to take the burden away from them and spend time teaching a class. Some will say, “I’m too busy to teach a class.” However, most Bible teachers have full-time jobs, kids in school to take care of and help with homework, kids to coach in sports, infants and toddlers to rear, hobbies, and recreation. They have these things to do but realize that the Bible classes are of great importance. Many also realize that if they do not do it, it will not be done. If we have the ability, we should teach.

Characteristics Needed for Teachers

A teacher of the word, whether to individuals or to a Bible class, needs to have certain characteristics:

- ◆ **Love for God and His truth.** The teacher's love for God and His word motivates him to teach others. We cannot teach love that we do not have.
- ◆ **Love for souls.** A person who loves the student's souls will be diligent to prepare beneficial lessons for them and help them go to heaven. A person who is simply a scholar, but has no love for souls, may be able to impart some knowledge, but will lack enthusiasm to teach the book that pleads to men's souls.
- ◆ **Sincere Christian life.** The Bible teacher must exemplify what he is teaching. There is no greater impediment to evangelism than hypocritical living. I have known individuals who used filthy language and made crude jokes who would be quick to step into a discussion about some spiritual matter. The individual might be right on what the scripture says, but his life polluted the message. A Bible class teacher who is guilty of some misconduct, especially if it becomes widely known, can have a terrible impact on the faith of his students. If you are not living it, don't try to teach. Get your life right with God so that you will be saved, then teach others so that they may be saved too.
- ◆ **Knowledge of God's word.** If we do not know, we cannot teach. We are going to be judged for what we have taught so we must be more diligent to know the word of God. Bible students can see through an unprepared teacher who does not have a grasp of God's word. We must know the Bible story and the place that a lesson fits into the overall salvation story. The teacher must be continually growing in the knowledge of God. As we learn more, we can teach more.
- ◆ **Enthusiasm.** The teacher must be genuinely excited about the gospel's saving message and the great lessons from the word of God. We have an extraordinary message to teach. We must work diligently to transfer that enthusiasm to the student.
- ◆ **Diligent preparation.** A teacher is entrusted with great responsibility. He or she must diligently prepare his lessons, the student activities, any crafts or illustrations that will help teach the student. A teacher cannot get up on Sunday morning, look over the lesson thirty minutes before class, and expect to make an impact on his class. Some consider preparation filling out the blanks in the workbook. A greater example is one who spends much time reading the lesson and texts, finds other texts that may help further explain the lesson, find illustrations that can help explain the lesson, and develop a plan for teaching the lesson to the class. The first teacher has fulfilled a responsibility (barely), but the second teacher has grown spiritually and perhaps has molded the mind of a student. All preparation must be done with much prayer: for yourself, your students and for wisdom.
- ◆ **Dependability.** A Bible class teacher will teach his class much by habitual late attendance or unexplained absences. Teachers must have a substitute ready if they will not be able to teach. There are many last-minute things that cannot be avoided, but some will not notify a substitute teacher that they must teach until the day of the class, even when they knew for a while that they would be absent. A teacher should *not* be at class on time *he should be early*. Early arrival will allow the teacher to settle down, get his resources and room in order, meet and talk with class visitors, and be ready to start on time.

Teaching the Bible Story

Whether we are teaching a Bible class or an individual study, we must impress on our students the message of God's word. Our goal is not to teach our students to parrot certain responses to certain questions but to lead them to their own knowledge of God's great word. A student may be able to tell someone that instrumental music in worship is wrong, but can he take his Bible and prove it? If he does use the Bible, does he simply quote some proof texts without knowing the context of the passages or the meaning of the quoted text? We must teach our students to reason with the scriptures.

We must help our students see the application of the Biblical principle in their lives. As we study about great Bible characters, we can see the plan of God unfold on a large scale and learn important lessons that develop our own principles. We must use Scripture to create change in our students. We must not neglect the story to teach the application, nor should we neglect the application to teach the story. Both are necessary and need to be united when teaching the Bible.

Bob Waldron described the need for effectual teaching very well in his book *A Generation That Knows Not God*. He makes the point that the generation that arose after Joshua—the generation that did not know God—was probably taught but not effectively. We must share our faith, spend time developing love for, and awe of God. If they have their lessons completed, and they have knowledge of God, but they do not realize His great power, His existence, and live in awe of Him, we have failed in our teaching. We do not want the students simply to know about God; we want them to know God.

Teaching One-on-One

The principles described in this lesson are applicable to classroom settings and evangelistic teaching. We must know the Bible story and determine the best way to impress on lost souls their terrible condition and the salvation brought by Jesus. When we know enough to become a Christian, we know enough to teach others. When the early church was persecuted, the members went everywhere preaching the word, but the apostles stayed in Jerusalem. The church grew by members teaching lost people how to be saved. We are not to rely on the preacher, the elders, or just a few members who “seem to be good at it.” The work of evangelism is for all.

If we want to be like Christ, we must have a love for men's souls and seek those who are lost. This was Jesus' mission on the earth, Luke 19:10. Evangelism is not an option for us, it is commanded. When we have Christ living in us, we will seek lost souls and teach them of His way. Many will reject the message, but some will recognize its truth and will be saved from eternal damnation.

*Lead me to some soul today, O teach me, Lord, just what to say.
Friends of mine are lost in sin, and cannot find their way.
Few there are who seem to care, and few there are who pray.
Melt my heart and fill my life. Give me one soul today
-Will H. Houghton and Wendell P. Loveless.*

Questions for Lesson 11

1. Why is there such a great need for Bible class teachers in the church?
2. Why do you think it is hard to find willing Bible class teachers?
3. Why is the character of the Bible class teacher as important as his knowledge?
4. What effect does an unprepared, late teacher have on the class? What effect on the student?
5. Who is to do the work of evangelism? Give verses to support your answer.

Growing in Christ: Worship

Read and Meditate

Thursday:	Leviticus 10:1-11
Friday:	1 Samuel 15:1-25
Saturday:	Malachi 1:6-14
Sunday:	Hebrews 10:19-27
Monday:	Colossians 3:12-17
Tuesday:	Mark 7:1-13

John 4:23-24 *“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

A natural result of a transformed life is the desire to worship God. God, Himself, desires our worship. In the passage quoted above, God is *seeking* true worshipers to worship Him. When we worship God we are the greatest beneficiary because we are reminded that there is a being greater than us who loves us and to whom we are accountable.

What is Worship?

Worship is the means of showing reverence, awe, and adoration to God. W.E. Vine notes, “[It] is not confined to praise; broadly it may be regarded as the direct acknowledgement to God, of His nature, attributes, ways and claims, whether by the outgoing of the heart in praise and thanksgiving or by deed done in such acknowledgement.” We assemble to offer praise to God in the way that He commanded. He not only commanded us to worship Him but told us how to worship Him.

Our worship must focus on God. In many places today, worship is focused on the worshiper. We must not violate God’s commands for worship and add things that are pleasing to us but for which we have no authority. One argument made for introducing instrumental music in worship was that it was pleasing to the ear. Yet we do not assemble to please ourselves, but to please God. In such situations, the worship becomes a “show” meant to bring in the masses and entertain them. The focus is on individual pleasure and not worshipping to God. Though God may be the theme of the music, plays, and other entertainment forms, He is not the focus of the worship. Our worship must be authorized by the word of God. We should never introduce any practice just because it pleases us.

Proper Worship

We worship God because He commands it. However, we must also worship because we want to show our adoration of Him. God has never been pleased with just the actions of worship; He has always desired our hearts and minds, Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Some think they can go through the rituals of worship and be pleasing to God. In Malachi 1, God desired that someone would have the decency to shut and lock the doors of the temple so that the people would not enter. They were going through the forms of worship, but their hearts were far from God. Jesus applied the condemnation of Isaiah to the Pharisees of His day who “*draw near to me with their lips, but their heart is far from me,*” Matthew 15:8-9.

Proper worship is God-centered. It allows the believer to show his love and devotion to His Creator. There are so many things that God does for us, many things that we take for granted, for

which we should praise God. The greatest reason for praise is that He is God. There is no being like our God. That reason alone should warrant our adoration. The Psalms are filled with praise to God, not for what He has done, but for who He is. His wisdom, knowledge, power, and being is above all comprehension. He is exalted far above all things and *“His name alone is high.”* We must worship God for He is God.

Some wrongly introduce other religious beings into worship. There is great emphasis on angels in our culture. Many people believe they see or experience angels in their daily life. Although angels are ministers of God serving us, their work has not been revealed to us, and they are spiritual so we cannot see them work. God only knows what work they perform for us, so it is foolish for us to speculate or give them glory. We must not worship angels. When John fell before an angel, he was rebuked and told, *“Worship God,”* Revelation 19:10.

We are not to worship the apostles or any religious person whether alive or dead. When Cornelius fell before Peter, Peter rebuked him and said, *“Stand up, for I am also a man,”* Acts 10:25-26. Some will receive the adoration of men and will even expect men to bow to them in the name of God, who do not deserve this worship. If the most prominent of the apostles could not accept worship, certainly no other man must. Nowhere does God command or permit us to pray through these men or Jesus’ mother. We pray to the Father through Jesus with the Holy Spirit also making intercession. Worship God!

When we worship, we show submission to God’s will. He has commanded us to worship Him. When we willfully neglect His worship, we are showing disdain for Him and His people, Hebrews 10:25-26. We show His preeminence in our lives when we plan our life around worship to Him. Our public worship services and private worship must be the concrete items on our calendars around which we plan other activities. Some people put an emphasis on their extra work and recreational plans—they will worship “if at all possible.” If someone misses a worship service because of _____, he may say, “Well, it’s just one night/day. Besides, what is one service going to hurt?” This is an acknowledgement that the worship service has become common to them, that it is not sanctified in their heart. We must willingly sacrifice to worship, 2 Samuel 24:24.

Although our worship is God-centered, proper worship will edify the worshipers. When we sing, we exhort and admonish one another with the words, Colossians 3:16. By our attendance, we set an example to one another. We hear a sermon from God’s word, and we are encouraged to strive harder to live more like Jesus. We pray together about our mutual needs and congregational hopes. Through contributions, we share financially in the work of the gospel in our community. The Lord’s Supper is a communion with God and with one another as we contemplate the great sacrifice made for us. When we gather for worship, we must consider one another so that we can stir one another in love and good works, Hebrews 10:24-25. We must also encourage and edify one another by not being disruptive or discouraging. We must not be talking or passing notes, which would disturb other worshipers and take our minds from proper worship. We must not sleep or act uninterested, which will discourage those who see us. We must work to worship properly.

What is Commanded

We look to the New Testament for authorization of worship practices. The Old Testament was for the Jews and has been removed, Colossians 2:14. We are not to add worship practices according to the commandments of men, Matthew 15:8-9. All that we do must be according to the authority of Jesus, Colossians 3:17.

When we study the New Testament church, we find the following things practiced:

1. Prayer: 1 Corinthians 14:15, 1 Timothy 2:8.
2. Vocal Singing: Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16
3. Lord's Supper: Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11:23-27.
4. Financial contribution: 1 Corinthians 16:2.
5. Preaching the gospel: Acts 20:7.

We do not have the authority to remove any of these things or add other things.

Changes in Worship

There has been a tendency in recent years to change the activities and methods of worship to please men. The practices that are prevalent in the denominations are creeping into the church. We must be on guard against false practices and abide only in the doctrine of Christ, 2 John 9. In his book *Piloting the Strait*, Dave Miller addresses this tendency towards change in worship:

Some churches of Christ are operating on the basis of inappropriate, unbiblical objectives and goals in worship. Some churches have "worship committees" or "praise teams" who apparently have no clue as to what their real responsibility is: to plan and structure worship so that the focus is on God—not the worshipper. In keeping with the tone and tenor of our entertainment crazed culture, some in the church feel that worship ought to be entertaining—though they may not come out and describe their sentiments in this way. They go to great lengths to stimulate the tastes and desires of the audience—which is a tacit admission that the focus is on the people. Can you imagine the first century Christians going to such lengths to stimulate the crowd? Can you imagine them manipulating the lighting in the catacomb? Or perhaps placing a choir group behind a rock so that their singing could echo through the death chamber in an eerie (sic), chilling fashion?

Folks, can't we see that entertaining ourselves, satisfying our own needs, reviving our interest to escape our own boredom, and attempting to attract others with these manmade lures—are all simply unbiblical, cheap, inferior, substitutes for simple, unpretentious, meaningful, spiritual worship? ...Instead of attempting to renovate worship for our own benefit, what we need to do is cultivate our appetites for pure, New Testament worship.

If worship has become boring and unmeaningful to a member, so much that he feels the need to change churches or liven up the worship assembly with theatrics, he has a spiritual, internal problem—a heart problem. His restless discontent is more of a reflection of his own spiritual condition than the status of the worship assembly. ...If we really want our needs met, if we really want to achieve personal contentment and satisfaction, the only bonafide, surefire way to do so is to conform to God's will.

Questions for Lesson 12

1. How would you define worship in your own words?

2. Why do you think worship sometimes does not get the priority it should have in the lives of Christians?

3. How can we keep our minds focused on worship in the assembly?

4. What messages does talking, playing with other people's children, sleeping, etc. tell the visitors and the children about our worship?

5. Do you think the answer to question 4 has anything to do with the trend towards making worship services more entertaining? Explain.

Completeness in Christ

Read and Meditate

Thursday:	Colossians 1:21-29
Friday:	Ephesians 4:11-16
Saturday:	Matthew 5:43-48
Sunday:	1 Peter 5:5-11
Monday:	Philippians 3:12-21
Tuesday:	2 Corinthians 13:7-11

Colossians 1:27-28 *“To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”*

The goal of our transformed life is completion, or perfection, in Christ. By perfect, we do not mean sinless, although sin must not characterize our life. Perfection, as the goal of the Christian, is a description of maturity. Completeness and perfection are often interchanged when describing the fully transformed child of God. Perfection literally means “completely equipped.” We are like soldiers who are completely outfitted for battle or sojourners completely outfitted for our journey. God has given us all things that we need for this life and for engaging our foe. We grow into that completeness.

Our goal is to have Christ living in us. Our desire is for the mind of Christ to rule our mind, so that we would walk as He walked, and that we would find our complete existence in Him. When we allow the wickedness of the world to have a place in our life, we cannot become complete. We can only become complete when we throw off the weights and the sin that easily ensnares us, Hebrews 12:1.

Attaining Perfection

Several things in the New Testament carry us to perfection. The first of these is Jesus. Jesus is the means and the motivation towards perfection. He came to earth and gave us a perfect example of how we must live. He died and gave His blood so we could have our sins washed away and become complete, Hebrews 9:9-15. When we are baptized, His blood removes our sin and we make a covenant with Him, the goal of which is our perfection. He works with us and in us to perfect us.

The message of God leads us to perfection. God gave the church many teachers to lead Christians to perfection, Ephesians 4:11-15. The early church had apostles and prophets in person; we have their message recorded in the scriptures. The church today has preachers, pastors (elders), teachers, evangelists, and the message of the apostles to build it up and to equip it fully for work. The goal of growth is for the church to be fully mature, up to the measure of the fullness of Christ. In our lives and in the church, we must be filled with Christ, living as He lived, not tossed around by every strange doctrine and fad that comes along. The church members must be knit together into the body of Christ and serve under Him, who is the head of all things.

God revealed His word to equip us thoroughly, 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The word of God is self-sufficient. We do not need a creed or modern prophecy to equip us. The Bible is complete to make us complete. It reveals all things that pertain to life on this earth and godliness, 2 Peter 1:3.

It will make us wise about salvation, 2 Timothy 3:15. It provides proof for faith, pattern for changing behavior, instruction in what is right, and encouragement for living, 2 Timothy 3:16.

To become complete, we must spend much time with the word. James compared the perfect law of liberty to a mirror, James 1:22-25. When we look into the mirror of God's law and we change what needs to be changed, we become perfect, or complete. A rich young ruler came to Jesus, he wanting to be complete. Jesus, the author of the perfect law of liberty, told him that if he wanted to be perfect, he would have to sell his possessions, Matthew 19:16-22. He would not change so that he could be perfect. If we have covetousness, lust, hatred, laziness, or any other impediment to growth, we cannot be perfect unless it is removed.

Patience will also lead us to perfection. James urges us to be patient in suffering so that we can be complete, lacking nothing, James 1:2-4. Suffering allows us to focus on the spiritual and eternal things. When Paul asked that his suffering, a "thorn in the flesh" be removed, Jesus declined saying, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."* 2 Corinthians 12:9. In the Parable of the Sower the sun is compared to suffering and persecution. It makes the seed on the rocky soil wither away but causes the seed on the good soil to thrive. Suffering perfects our faith and makes it grow 1 Peter 3:6-7. When we suffer, we must cast our care and our trust on God completely. As we do this, we draw closer to Him and farther from the world. We become like Jesus who became perfect in suffering because He depended on His Father, Hebrews 2:10-11.

When we show love towards those who cannot repay us or who might be considered inferior to us, we are perfected. Jesus taught, in Matthew 5:43-48, that we must bless our enemies and pray for those who spitefully use us. God shows His love and mercy to His children and His enemies. He expects the same from us. It is easy for us to love those who love us. We become perfect, or complete, when we love our enemies.

Presented Perfect in Christ

True perfection will only come when this life is over. We are thoroughly equipped while on this earth to do every good work. However, we must be constantly growing in the word since we will never be finished with our study of God's word. Until our last breath we will never be finished with persecution and suffering and so the perfecting work of suffering will not be complete until we have died. We will spend our lives removing the obstacles to perfection from our lives and loving as God loved. We must not be discouraged, however, because every day that we are studying, enduring temptation and suffering, loving as Christ loved, and transforming our lives, we are becoming what God intended: Christ in you, the hope of glory, Colossians 1:27-28. We are being transformed from glory into glory, day by day, becoming more like Jesus, 2 Corinthians 3:18. As Paul urged, we must press on to perfection, leaving the things of the past and any impediment that would restrain us, Philippians 3:7-16.

"Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you." **2 Corinthians 13:11**

Questions for Lesson 13

1. What does it mean to be perfect or complete?
2. What means has God given us to bring us to perfection?
3. What things can prevent us from being complete? Whose responsibility is it to remove those impediments?
4. How are we made perfect through suffering?
5. When will we become fully perfected?